ITALIAN DIVISIONISM IN THE 1890s: THE FORGING OF A MODERN IDENTITY

by

VIVIEN GREENE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History
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Abstract

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Vivien Greene

Adviser: Professor Patricia Mainardi

The Divisionists created vibrant paintings distinguished by divided brushstrokes of individual pigment and curvilinear forms. Inspired by color and optical theories and, in many cases, socialist philosophy, these artists consciously aligned themselves with progress and modernity. I consider Divisionism within the larger context of the period in which it was produced and underscore how the Divisionists sought to create a new, distinctively Italian idiom in the wake of the country's recent 1870 unification.

The first generation of Divisionists, all from Northern Italy, were a loosely associated group of artists. They subscribed to a painting technique then becoming popular in Europe (especially among the Neo-Impressionists), and juxtaposed dashes of often complementary colors to fashion the illusion of single, more intense hues. By approaching their art from a background of positivist thought, they correlated the scientific basis of their technique to an expansive notion of progress. Those who were politically committed championed social reform in their paintings. Others pursued a Symbolist vein in their evocative alpine landscapes and metaphorical religious images and used art as an escape from contemporary life. Despite their adoption of a new

painting method, the Divisionists' preference for large-scale compositions, their interest in modeled form and three-dimensional space, and their desire to articulate movement reflects their grounding in the traditions of their own artistic legacy and evidences the paradoxical nature of the movement.

At the time of Divisionism's inception, many Italians, divided by sharp regional differences, struggled to identify what constituted "Italy" as a nation. However, these divisions also prompted the desire for unifying structures. By the 1890s, as Italy began to have an industrial presence in Europe, conceptions of advancement and modernity intertwined with those of nationalism. Yet, this period was rife with contradictions regarding the possible negative effects of progress, the incursion of foreign influences upon Italy's cultural production, and the rupture with historically entrenched visual traditions. These phenomena were manifest within the Divisionist project. My interdisciplinary analysis of Divisionist painting explores these much-debated problematics and seeks to parse how Divisionism was linked to the polyvalenced questions of modernity, cultural definition, and national identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The Divisionists ushered Italian art into the twentieth century with vibrant paintings distinguished by divided brushstrokes of pigment and curvilinear forms. Inspired by scientific color theory and socialist philosophy, in style and content the Divisionists aligned themselves with progress and modernity. Considering Divisionism within the larger context of the period in which it was produced, I argue that these artists created a new, distinctively Italian idiom in the wake of the country's recent 1870 unification. In doing so I hope to underscore that the nascent tenets of Italian modernism were established two decades before Futurism, generally hailed as Italy's first avant-garde.

Divisionism germinated in Italy during the mid-1880s. The first generation of Divisionists subsequently emerged in the north of the country, many attending the Real accademia di belle arti di Brera [The Royal Academy of Arts of Brera], in Milan.[1] These painters were not a consciously affiliated group, but rather loosely associated artists who corresponded and shared ideas, all breaking to varying degrees with the academic norms of the day. Divisionist pockets then appeared later and in other parts of Italy. However, I discuss the artists belonging to initial Divisionist wave: Vittore Grubicy de Dragon (1851-1920), Emilio Longoni (1859-1932), Angelo Morbelli (1853-1919), Plinio

1 Capitalization varies with institutional names. I follow the most frequent usage, whereby only the first word of a name is capitalized. The only exception to this is when a proper name appears within the institution's name, as in the case of "Brera." Likewise, with titles of artworks and publications in Italian—books, journals, and newspapers—I follow the same rule for the sake of consistency.

Nomellini (1866-1943), Giuseppe Pelllizza da Volpedo (1868-1907), Gaetano Previati (1852-1920), Giovanni Segantini (1858-1899), and Giovanni Sottocornola (1855-1917). All ascribed to a highly precise painting technique, rooted in the color theories then becoming popular in European countries such as France, Belgium, and Holland, and juxtaposed dashes of often complementary colors to fashion the optical illusion of single, more intense hues. Approaching their art from a background of positivist thought, the Divisionists correlated the empirical basis of their technique with an expansive notion of progress. Some were politically committed and proposed social reform in their paintings, depicting problems in the urban and agrarian realms. Others pursued a more Symbolist vein, and used art as an escape from the crises of contemporary life, creating evocative alpine landscapes and rural scenes as well as religious images.

I primarily address paintings realized during the 1890s, from the 1891 Triennale di Brera [Brera Triennial], when Divisionism was first introduced to a broad public, through 1901, when Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo completed his benchmark depiction of marching laborers, *The Fourth Estate* (*Il Quarto Stato*, 1898-1901). This ten-year span was the most significant period of Divisionist production as well as being the politically and economically tumultuous era during which Italy entered modern times. In 1901 there was also a shift in Italian politics, as the 1900 assassination of King Umberto brought about the end of a reactionary decade, which was followed by the 1901 inception of a more progressive government led by interior minister Giovanni Giolitti.

This study analyzes the Divisionist movement and demonstrates that these artists articulated a painting style that was both modern and Italian. Central problematics of the newly unified peninsula were its geographic and cultural disparities, reinforced by the

regionalism that prevailed. While the Divisionist artists of the 1890s, located in the north of Italy, represented only one model of Italian artistic production, it was the dominant one in expressing a new modern Italian idiom. To complicate matters further, even among themselves, these painters differed in their objectives and cannot be categorized as a unified entity with one voice. As a result, my study could not encompass all aspects of Divisionist production; instead I address a salient set of themes. Through this select and representative series of examples, I show that Divisionism brought to the fore prevailing desires felt by many Italians: the possibility of representing ideas of nation and of modernity.

Scholarship to date

Although Italian art historians addressed Divisionism during the first half of the twentieth century, groundbreaking scholarship on the subject really did not appear until after the mid-1960s. The most important studies are Fortunato Bellonzi's *Il divisionismo nella pittura italiana* (1967); Teresa Fiori's *Archivi del divisionismo* (1968); and Annie-Paule Quinsac's *La peinture divisionniste italienne; origines et premiers développements, 1880-1895* (1972).[2] Anna Maria Damigella's survey, *La pittura simbolista in Italia, 1885-1900* (1981), encompasses many Divisionist artists.[3] Publications have become more frequent in recent decades, especially following the pivotal exhibition held in

2 Fortunato Bellonzi, *Il divisionismo nella pittura italiana* (Milan: Fratelli Fabbri, 1967); Teresa Fiori, *Archivi del divisionismo*, with an introduction by Fortunato Bellonzi, 2 vols. (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1968); and Annie-Paule Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne; origines et premiers développements, 1880-1895* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972).

3 Anna Maria Damigella, *La pittura Simbolista in Italia, 1885-1900* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981).

Trento in 1990, which was accompanied by a catalogue and a book of essays, *Divisionismo italiano* (1990) and *L'Età del divisionismo* (1990).[4]

Most scholarship on Divisionism has appeared in the substantial number of exhibition catalogues which have been published, although many of these rehearse similar analyses of stylistic development. Significant works include Felix Baumann and Guido Magnaguagno, *Segantini* (1990); Gabriella Belli, *Giovanni Segantini* (1987); Belli and Quinsac, eds., *Segantini: la vita, la natura, la morte: disegni e dipinti* (1999), and their *Carlo Fornara. Un maestro del divisionismo* (1998); Gianfranco Bruno, *Plinio Nomellini* (1985); Luciano Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli* (1982); Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Mostra di Emilio Longoni (1859-1932)* (1982); Giovanna Ginex, *Giovanni Sottocornola. Dal realismo sociale al quotidiano familiare* (1985); Fernando Mazzocca, ed., *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920: un protagonista del simbolismo europeo* (1999); Aurora Scotti Tosini, *Angelo Morbelli: Tra realismo e divisionismo* (2001); *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (1999); and *Angelo Morbelli* (1991).[5]

A few fundamental catalogue raisonnés form an essential base for any research on Divisionism: Ginex, *Emilio Longoni: catalogo ragionato* (1995), and her *Emilio Longoni. Opere scelte e inediti* (2002), which includes works still unlocated at the time of

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4 Gabriella Belli, ed., *Divisionismo italiano* (Milan: Electa and Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 1990), and Gabriella Belli and Franco Rella, eds., *L'Età del divisionismo* (Milan: Electa, 1990).

5 Felix Baumann and Guido Magnaguagno, eds., *Segantini* (Zurich: Kunsthaus, 1990); Gabriella Belli, *Giovanni Segantini* (Milan: Electa, 1987); Gabriella Belli and Annie-Paule Quinsac, eds., *Segantini: la vita, la natura, la morte: disegni e dipinti* (Milano: Skira, 1999); and *Carlo Fornara. Un maestro del divisionismo* (Milan: Skira, 1998); Gianfranco Bruno, *Plinio Nomellini* (Milan: Stringa, 1985); Luciano Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1982); Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Mostra di Emilio Longoni (1859-1932)* (Milan: Società per le belle arti ed esposizione permanente, 1982); Giovanna Ginex, *Giovanni Sottocornola. Dal realismo sociale al quotidiano familiare* (Milan: Edi Artes, 1985); Fernando Mazzocca, ed., *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920: un protagonista del simbolismo europeo* (Milan: Electa, 1999); Aurora Scotti Tosini, *Angelo Morbelli: Tra realismo e divisionismo* (Turin: Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea, 2001); *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 1999); and *Angelo Morbelli* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1991).

the catalogue raisonné; Quinsac, *Segantini: catalogo generale* (1982); Sergio Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon: 1851-1920* (1995); Scotti Tosini, *Pellizza da Volpedo. Catalogo generale* (1986).[6] In addition, several of these scholars have catalogued the writings of key Divisionists, most significantly: Quinsac's *Segantini: Trent'anni di vita artistica europea nei carteggi inediti dell'artista e dei suoi mecenati* (1985); and Scotti Tosini's *Catalogo dei manoscritti di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo provenienti dalla donazione eredi Pellizza* (1974).[7]

Little exists in English. Among recent works is Quinsac, ed., *Giovanni Segantini. Light and Symbol, 1884-1899* (2000).[8] Some more generalized overviews available in English—all of which were published in exhibition catalogues—are Scotti Tosini, "Divisionist Painting in Italy between Modern Chromatics and New Symbols," in *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (1995); Damigella, "Divisionism and Symbolism," in *Italian Art, 1900-1945* (1989); and Sandra Berresford, "Divisionism: Its Aims and Its Relationship to French Post-Impressionist Painting," in *Post-Impressionism: Cross-Currents in European Painting* (1979).[9]

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6 Giovanna Ginex, *Emilio Longoni: catalogo ragionato* (Milan: F. Motta, 1995); Giovanna Ginex, *Emilio Longoni. Opere scelte e inediti* (Milan: Motta, 2002); Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Segantini: catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1982); Sergio Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon: 1851-1920* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 1995); and Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo. Catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1986).

7 Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Segantini: Trent'anni di vita artistica europea nei carteggi inediti dell'artista e dei suoi mecenati* (Oggiono, Lecco: Cattaneo, 1985); and Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Catalogo dei manoscritti di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo provenienti dalla donazione eredi Pellizza* (Tortona: Comune di Tortona**,** 1974).

8 Annie-Paule Quinsac, ed., *Giovanni Segantini. Light and Symbol, 1884-1899* (Milan: Skira, 2000).

9 Aurora Scotti [Tosini], "Divisionist Painting in Italy between Modern Chromatics and New Symbols,"in *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*, ed. Pierre Théberge (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), 274-282; Anna Maria Damigella, "Divisionism and Symbolism," in *Italian Art, 1900-1945*, eds. Pontus Hulten and Germano Celant (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 37-49; and Sandra Berresford, "Divisionism: Its Aims and Its Relationship to French Post-Impressionist Painting," in *Post-Impressionism: Cross-Currents in European Painting*, eds. John House and MaryAnne Stevens (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1979), 218-26.

Some of the most interesting studies available, which go beyond straightforward biographical and stylistic evolution, are the few focused essays in English, such as Judith Ellen Meighan, "In Praise of Motherhood: The Promise and Failure of Painting for Social Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy," an article drawn from a chapter of her doctoral dissertation.[10] Another text—and one that shares some of the theses I develop at much greater length here—is "Blood and Milk: Painting and the State in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy," by literary scholar Kate Flint.[11] Although Flint focuses on only two paintings—one a Divisionist work by Segantini, the other a realist image by Attilio Pusterla—in conjunction with her arguments on gender, the role of women, the female body, and late nineteenth-century theories on degeneration, she remarks in brief upon the larger themes of Italian anxiety about national identity, the development of a national style, and the tensions between realism and idealism in Italian art. Another article which was never expanded further, but which again broaches some of the issues I explore more fully, is Antonella Bestaggini's "The Annunciation of Modernity: Giovanni Segantini and the Transcendence of Fin-de-Siècle Pessimism in Italy."[12] While specifically about Segantini and Nietzschean philosophy, Bestaggini addresses the shift from a positivist

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10 Judith Ellen Meighan, "In Praise of Motherhood: The Promise and Failure of Painting for Social Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2002); url; and Judith Ellen Meighan, "The Stati d'animo Aesthetic: Gaetano Previati, Umberto Boccioni and the Development of Early Futurist Painting in Italy," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1998.

11 Kate Flint, "Blood and Milk: Painting and the State in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy," in *The Body Imaged: the Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 109-123.

12 Antonella Bestaggini, "The Annunciation of Modernity: Giovanni Segantini and the Transcedence of Fin-de-Siècle Pessimism in Italy," in *Cultural and Artistic Upheavals in Modern Europe 1848-1945*, eds. Sally Metzler and Elizabeth Colledge, Cummer Studies 1 (Jacksonville, Florida: Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, 1996), 121-148. This is drawn from her dissertation. See Antonella Bestaggini, "The Theme of Palingenesis in the Italian Fin-de-Siècle. Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche and the Later Works of Giovanni Segantini (1886-1899)," Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford Brookes University, 1997.

model to a modernist one and its underlying dialectic of cultural decadence and rebirth. It is notable that both these articles, which parallel my work in sensibility and framework, are by British scholars of the nineteenth-century working outside the field of art history, and are not bound by traditional art historical methodologies, but rather view Divisionism through an interdisciplinary lens.

As few interdisciplinary examinations exist for Italian Divisionism, I have turned to those dealing with the art of other late-nineteenth-century cultures, for instance, John Hutton's investigation of the radical art and politics of the Neo-Impressionists, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*; Debora Silverman's *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, a decade-specific look at the diverse ways in which Art Nouveau developed and was manifest in France, bracketed between the 1889 and 1900 Paris Expositions Universelles; Michelle Facos' analysis of Swedish art, thought, and nationalism in the last decade of the nineteenth century, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s*; and Kathleen Pyne's exploration of late-nineteenth-century American art and evolutionary theory, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America*.[13] Each of these studies identifies major themes of the period and discusses artists and motifs as they relate to these greater cultural and historical constructs. In studies of a decade often defined by paradox and contradiction this multi-pronged, contextual approach provides a

13 See John Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); Michelle Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

model to better examine the multiple trends of a time distinguished by rapid means of communication and exchange, internationalism, and a proliferation of closely related "isms," and works better than a more traditional linear approach.

While in recent decades the Macchiaioli and the Futurists have garnered attention, the Divisionists remain underexamined. As most Divisionist paintings are in Italy, scholarship has also been limited to that primarily by Italians. Among the majority of these scholars social, cultural, political, and economic references are considered only in passing (Giovanna Ginex and Aurora Scotti Tosini being exceptions). I not only undertake close readings of individual Divisionist paintings in conjunction with an analysis of original archival documents and publications of the day, but also consider their greater historical context and the ideological aims and beliefs of the artists, demonstrating that Divisionism was linked to issues of cultural identity and nationalism. Although this approach has been adopted in studies of French Neo-Impressionism, it has not yet been adopted in the study of the Italian Divisionists.[14] Moreover, with the exception of Segantini, most Divisionist artists have been addressed in only one monograph and have been written about by only one author. Instead, through this interdisciplinary, multi-layered analysis of Divisionist painting I can trace how Divisionism intersected with the polyvalenced questions of modernity, cultural definition, and national identity.

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14 There is a recent compendium of essays that discusses artistic movements at the end of the century in countries often ignored in canonical examinations of late nineteenth-century art which coincides with my own interest in exploring the prevalent juncture of nationalism and culture making in this period. However, it covers only Austria, England, France, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Italy is omitted, which stresses the lack of attention given Italian art from this era. See Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh, eds., *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, *Making Italy/Making Modernity* outlines the historical context—political, economic, and social—within which Divisionism emerged. The fledgling nation's wish to formulate a progressive Italian identity was paralleled in the cultural and artistic worlds. The conflicts generated by the insistence upon modernization, the negative repercussions of industry and urban growth, and the pull and push between desire for progress and longing for continuum with the past all shaped Divisionist production of the 1890s.

Chapter 2, *The* "*ricerca della luce nel colore*:" *the Inception of Divisionism in Italy*, surveys the Italian art movements that preceded Divisionism, and those artists most relevant to the Divisionists, such as the Macchiaioli (*Macchia* meaning patch) and the Scapigliati [the disheveled ones]. It also traces the influence of art from outside Italy; the Divisionists became aware of a number of movements simultaneously, and discovered French Neo-Impressionism almost concurrently with the work of the Victorian painters and Jean-François Millet (1841-1875). Within this discussion, the connections and differences between Divisionism in Italy and Neo-Impressionism in France are explored. I give particular attention to the art criticism of Vittore Grubicy de Dragon, the artist, gallerist, and writer who introduced Divisionism to Italy, and compare his writings with those of the French critic Félix Fénéon (1861-1944), whose work Grubicy knew and read.

Chapter 3, "*Quella specie di morbillo pittorico*:" *Divisionism and the First Brera Triennale of 1891*, looks closely at the four artists who exhibited Divisionist works at this Milanese exhibition—Longoni, Morbelli, Previati, and Segantini—and explores the critical reception they received. This analysis introduces some of the major, largely

interrelated arguments surrounding Divisionism during the early 1890s. The Divisionists and, indeed, those involved in the cultural formation of Italy, were deeply committed to propagating an Italian art presence outside of the peninsula. Fed not only by personal desires, this commitment reflected a nationalist desire that Italian art regain footing in the international realm. Within this framework, conflicting issues arose: the impulse to be modern and politically radical; the perceived break by some with the established artistic tradition; the rise of an anti-realist aesthetic; issues of foreign influence and cultural autonomy; and Italians' anxiety regarding the country's decline and loss of superiority.

Chapter 4, "*Arte per l'umanità*:" *Socialist Engagement*, addresses the profusion of Divisionist paintings dealing with the social problems of the day in images by Longoni, Nomellini, Morbelli, and Pellizza. Each artist was committed to the ideologies of the left—socialist, anarcho-socialist, or anarcho-communist—but each to varying degrees. This chapter investigates the intersection of historical events and situations and the politically inflected images by these artists. Their didactic subject matter and visual commentary on current social problems in Italy make these paintings some of the most straightforward the Divisionists executed, but I note tensions between aesthetic concerns and content, even in these narrative works, particularly Morbelli's. Ultimately, these images embody the progressive political idealism of the early and mid-1890s.

By contrast, Chapter 5, "*Ascensioni umane*:" *Religion, Symbolism, and Divisionism*, investigates Symbolist tendencies and, in some cases, the embrace of anti-materialist philosophies in the face of encroaching urbanism. Under the influence of *arte ideista*, several artists retreated from the stresses of the city and delved into imaginary, internal visions. I consider, in particular, the art of Segantini, Pellizza, Previati, and

Grubicy in terms of Symbolist production that engages religious subjects or formats. Italian Divisionist Symbolism can be distinguished from Symbolist strains elsewhere in Europe through traits particular to Italian artists, including the importance of art from the past. Here, again, the contradictions between modernity and tradition are manifest. The Divisionists employed a modern idiom and sought to revitalize Italian painting, yet they referred to and relied upon the art of the past. They espoused progress and science, but maintained an ongoing interest in religious imagery in a quest for spiritual transcendence. Despite their desire for rupture, the Divisionists used Italy's artistic legacy and its Catholic motifs as signifiers of national identity.

Chapter 6, "*Sintesi universale*:" *Boccioni, the Genesis of Materia, and the Futurist Cooption of Divisionism*, is an epilogue of sorts, which counters the teleological approach usually adopted when considering Divisionism and Futurism. Taking Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916), the first generation of Futurist artists' primary theorist, as a case study, I address the Divisionist legacy and examine the relationship between Divisionism and the nascent Futurist movement. I map Boccioni's significant points of contact with Divisionist artists and explore the succession of works which culminated in one of his most complex Futurist paintings, *Materia*. Through a close reading of Boccioni's 1911 lecture "La pittura futurista" ["Futurist Painting"] and a related manuscript, as well as a focused analysis of dominant strains of thought in his first decade of production (1901-1911), I show how heavily his own theoretical ideas, technical approach, and iconography depended upon Divisionist predecessors. Thus, my study comes full-circle,

and Divisionism emerges as a significant modernist movement in Italy, distinct in its own right, and not simply a precursor to Futurism.[15]

15 Throughout this study, I have cited original documents when possible. If a published version of any of these exists, it has been indicated. If a published translation is available, I have noted this as well. I have also included original language titles for Italian nineteenth-century works in addition to English translations, as no standardized translation exists for most of the art I discuss. However, for non-Italian or historical Italian works—all of which do have standard, published English titles—I only give the English title.

CHAPTER 1

MAKING ITALY/MAKING MODERNITY[16]

It is impossible to consider the emergence of the Divisionist movement without first understanding the historical panorama at the time of its inception.[17] As this chapter will outline, practically all aspects of Italian life in the 1890s, from politics to religion to industry, were laced through with the recurrent—and often conflicted—issues of progress, modernity, and national identity.[18] These were the same thematics which repeatedly came to the forefront in discussions of Italian cultural projects and art-making. Indeed, a unique intersection of liberal politics, society, and culture during the late 1880s and early 1890s was an important springboard for the development of Divisionism. In this time, as Italian leaders labored to define and mold the new country, many artists sought to invent a national visual language. Going from the macrocosm of the Italian Kingdom to the microcosm of Italian Divisionism, this chapter will map the salient issues

16 This title makes reference to the oft-quoted remark following unification by the statesman, writer, and painter, Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866): "Now that Italy has been made, one needs to make Italians." ["*Fatta l'Italia bisogna fare gli italiani*"].

17 Unless otherwise noted, historical references throughout this chapter are taken from Christopher Duggan, "Politics in the era of Depretis and Crispi, 1870-96," in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796-1900*, ed. John A. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154-80, and Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

18 The enthusiasm regarding scientific innovations and progress was fed by the positivist philosophy which was largely dominant in Italy through the 1890s. While there was a turn against positivism in this decade, an optimistic belief in the changes that an empirically-based model could engender in society remained prevalent for many Italians. For a discussion of the fluctuating fortunes of positivism in Italy see, for example, Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo: la cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985).

occurring in the peninsula that gave rise to the concerns and the ambiguities revolving around the desire for an informed, modern painting style reflecting enlightened, progressive philosophies.

Nationhood

Divisionism came into being in an era defined by dashed hopes. By the 1890s the idealistic promises of the *Risorgimento* had fallen flat, leaving a country in crisis. Italy's political situation was shaky, marked by the demise of the post-Unification moderate liberal government, the quicksand of the country's constantly changing Parliament, a depressed economy, a troubled labor force, and the rise of left-wing movements. Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), acknowledged the nation's early failures in his landmark study of Italian history from 1871, when Rome became Italy's capital, to 1915, when Italy entered World War I (*Storia d'Italia dal 1871-1915*). Writing in 1927, Croce recognized that: "after 1870, Italy did not fulfill its plan or its mission, or the actual justification for its rebirth and, thus, the greatness hoped for by her; it was mediocre and not sublime."[19]

On a broader ideological plane, Italians were still striving to define themselves as a united people in the 1890s. This proved a difficult task. One of the key problems stemmed from the fragmented nature of the nation. Prior to unification, the post-Napoleonic Italian peninsula had consisted of seven states and two principalities [map of Italy, fig. 1]. Piedmont, Liguria, and the island of Sardinia were the sole regions under Italian rule, administered by the House of Savoy. Venetia and Lombardy belonged to the

19 "*l'Italia, dopo il 1870, venne meno al proprio programma o alla propria missione, alla giustifcazione stessa del suo risorgere e perciò alla grandezza di lei sperata; e fu mediocre e non sublime*." Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871-1915*, 3rd ed. (Rome-Bari: Edizioni Laterza, 1977), 3.

Austrian Hapsburgs, and various branches of the family ruled the Duchies of Parma and Piacenza, Modena, and Tuscany, along with the city-states of Massa and Carrara. Lucca fell under the auspices of a Bourbon ruler. The Pope dominated much of central Italy, while in the south the Spanish Bourbons claimed the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.[20] Italy as we know it today did not come about until 1870, when the Papacy was forced to relinquish the region of Lazio.[21] At that time, Trieste and the Trentino were still irredentist lands under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and would not be gained until after World War I.[22] Even subsequent to the establishment of a single country, the new realm's identity was fragile.

The unification of most of Italy with the declaration of the Italian Kingdom in 1861 led to a widespread impulse to identify what constituted Italy as a nation. For the next decade, figures, events, and symbols of the Risorgimento were used as emblems of a united country by everyone from politicians to artists. But, as disillusionment grew, the culture and iconography of the Risorgimento no longer stood for an Italy to be celebrated, and Italians continued to grapple with the problems presented by their supposed oneness. The previously divided state of the peninsula, the strong legacy of the foreign powers that had ruled there, the Church, which had for so long wielded great control, and the subsequent absence of a trustworthy political substructure, contributed to what has been defined by historian Ernesto Galli della Loggia as "a geopolitical catastrophe."[23]

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20 David Laven, "The Age of Restoration," in Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796-1900*, 51-52.

21 Duggan, "Politics in the Era of Depretis and Crispi," in Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796-1900*, 154-56.

22 Mack Smith, *Modern Italy*, 278.

23 Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *L'identità italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 59.

Since the time of Croce, much ink has been spilled within diverse disciplines (history, economy, sociology) over the ongoing difficulty of constructing a national identity, a concept that even today remains in flux.[24] Some recent analyses have endeavored to arrive at new definitions of nationhood. The anthropologist Pietro Clemente has suggested: "Maybe the *paese* is our Italian concept of a versatile society, rural and urban, with a weak state and a strong periphery, in which unity is truly reached when—without being shocking—one can say that to be Italian is to belong to a *Paese* essentially made up of *paesi*."[25] Certainly the peninsula was a divided state of *paesi* in the late nineteenth century.

Italy's geographical and political divisions were, in turn, paralleled in the cultural realm, where deeply entrenched regional divisions blocked cultural cohesion. These were problems addressed in the journalism of the day, for example, in the newspaper *La riforma*, which was founded in Rome by the liberal politician Francesco Crispi (1818-1901).[26] When writing for *La riforma* about the presentation of artworks in the 1887

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24 The literature on the conception of nationhood and nationalism in the Western world is vast. For a general examination of constructions of nation and notions of nationalism see, for example, Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For specific explorations of Italian identity and nationalism see Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001); Beverly Allen and Mary J. Russo, eds., *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Mario Isnenghi, ed., *I luoghi della memoria*, 3 vols. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1996-97).

25 "*Forse il paese è concetto nostro, italiano, di una società multiforme, paesana, e cittadina, dallo stato debole e dalla periferia resistente, in cui l'unità è raggiunta davvero quando—senza scandalo—si può dire che essere italiani è appartenere a un Paese fatto essenzialmente di paesi*." Pietro Clemente, "Paese/Paesi," in Isnenghi, *I luoghi della memoria*, 1: 39.

26 Crispi served in several capacities in the Italian government, most importantly, he was prime minister three times, from 1887-1891; 1893-95; and 1895-96. For the most recent and exhaustive work on Crispi see Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi, 1818-1901: From Nation to Nationalism.* (Oxford and New York:

National Exposition in Venice, the critic and soon-to-be Divisionist artist Vittore Grubicy de Dragon expressed concern at Italy's lack of artistic coherence.[27] He feared that the peninsula's artistic fortunes would fare badly at 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris.[28] He wrote quasi-weekly articles proposing reforms that would address this problem. In response to his own rhetorical query: "Now, I ask, where does our country's typical character reside?," Grubicy astutely remarked that Italy's art was consistent only if presented by regions, as this was the way in which the country was able to demonstrate overriding stylistic lucidity.[29] But Grubicy's solution was merely a stopgap measure. Over the next decade, Italians sought unifying structures in a nationalist effort to improve the country's disjointed condition.

Historical Context

Despite the efforts to make "Italy," during the 1890s, political, economic, social, and cultural parameters were still being formulated and much was still predicated upon

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Oxford University Press, 2002). *La riforma* was an important liberal newspaper that reflected Crispi's initial democratic platform and was, also, a significant vehicle for cultural criticism.

27 "in artistic discussions abroad I have heard Italian painters reprimanded for the absence of this homogeneity." ["*nelle discussioni artistiche all'estero, ho udito rimproverare ai pittori italiani la mancanza di questa omogeneità.*"] Vittore, "L'Esposizione di Venezia," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 100, April 10, 1887, 1. Vittore Grubicy de Dragon signed his articles differently depending upon the publication. In *La riforma* he appeared as "Vittore," elsewhere he generally used Vittore Grubicy. In citing his writings, I have kept the name as it appeared in the original publication.

28 See, for example, Vittore, "L'arte italiana a Venezia ed a Parigi," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 74, March 15, 1887, 1; and "L'arte italiana a Venezia ed a Parigi." *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 27, Jan. 27, 1887, 1.

29 "*Ora, io domando, dove risiede il carattere-tipo del nostro paese*?" He answers himself saying: "The answer is obvious: each of these regions of the Italian territory has in its nature certain marked distinguishing accents that absolutely characterize and distinguish it from the others." ["*La risposta è ovvia: ognuna di queste regioni del territorio italiano ha nella sua natura certi accenti speciali marcatissimi che la caraterizza e la distingue in modo assoluto dalle altre*."]. Vittore, "L'Esposizione di Venezia," 1.

circumstances dating back to Italy's unification. The Italian Kingdom, ruled since 1878 by the authoritarian Umberto I (1844-1900), was a weak country within the European continent, but one that tried to assume the role of a major power. At the same time, Italy was attempting to differentiate itself from its neighbors and former rulers. Anti-French sentiment was high, encouraged by statesmen such as Crispi, and spawned by fears that French culture could subsume Italian culture, or worse yet, that there existed the possibility of renewed French dominance. These reasons helped to catalyze Italy's allegiance to Austria-Hungary and Germany in the Triple Alliance in 1882, though Italy remained the picked-upon youngest sibling of the three, benefiting little from its much stronger allies, and diplomatically limited by an arrangement that affected its political mobility in foreign affairs.[30]

Domestically, Italy's government was struggling for stability as well, seesawing between reactionary and more liberal governments. Parliament was ruled by the system of *trasformismo* [transformism], which meant that ministers would break party alliances and support divergent interests within Parliament in exchange for votes. Transformism bred a splintering government made up of individuals from multiple political parties, which invariably led to the frequent disbandment and reformation of governments and parliamentary coalitions.

The fledgling country's economy was also unsound.[31] Financially, Italy was still in the red, the government weighed down by the debts accrued during the unification wars. Moreover, other factors contributed to the shifting fortunes of the peninsula. An

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30 Federico Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy: The Statecraft of the Founders*, trans. William McCuaig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10-12.

31 Economic information relies on Vera Negri Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy, 1860-1990* (New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

1887 protectionist tax instituted on imports (ranging from wheat to steel), rather than aid the country's economy, sent it into a downward spiral. A tariff war with France ensued, which had injurious repercussions for trade. Simultaneously, a series of poor crop seasons provoked an agrarian crisis. In a scandal that implicated political statesmen such as Francesco Crispi and Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928), it was discovered that Italy's banks, overextended by the sustained economic depression, had been involved in multiple types of corruption, from the illegal printing of money to unauthorized loans to politicians and bribery. This banking crisis lasted from the late 1880s to the mid-1890s. Collectively, all these factors fed a fluctuating economy.

Despite these deficits, a substantial percentage of available cash was invested in aggrandizing colonial expansion as Italy ventured to compete with other European nations.[32] Italian forays into Africa in the 1880s were ill-prepared and often imprudent. The colonization of Massawa led to the 1887 massacre of over 500 Italian soldiers at Dogali at the hands of the Ethiopians led by Ras Alula. In 1896, following the establishment of colonies in parts of modern-day Somalia and Eritrea, there was another large-scale conflict with the African neighbors and 6,000 Italians were defeated at Adua by the Ethiopians. Occurring during Crispi's third term as prime minister, this horrific event hastened his demise. Thus, the Italian dreams of territorial growth came to a shocking and abrupt halt (albeit only temporary). Adua was a blow to the Italian nation, not only politically and economically, but psychologically, for the Italians had suffered humiliation at the hands of a supposedly regressive, primitive people. Italy could not

32 For a thorough, straightforward historical account of Italian colonization see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale. Dall' Unità alla marcia su Roma* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1976; Milan: Mondadori, 1992). More recently, Nicola Labanca's *In marcia verso Adua* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), has explored this topic.

even express superiority over the ostensibly inferior races in Africa in its vainglorious efforts at imperialist possession.

In addition to seeking to play catch-up with other nations in the conquest of foreign colonies, Italy also was striving to keep pace with industrial development elsewhere. Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Prussia (later Germany), were far ahead. Once an essentially rural, agrarian-based economy, Italy was making the transition toward a more modern, industrial state by the 1890s. This orchestrated, nationwide advancement was impeded by a shortage of liquid funds and poor governmental planning, which contributed to slow industrial growth.

The industries that did develop and prosper in Italy were located in the north, ranging from the enterprises associated with the textile industry to the production of steel and heavy machinery.[33] The south remained largely outside the circuit of improvement.[34] Farming systems there were rudimentary and outmoded. The existing agrarian means were inefficient and contributed to low-productivity. The entrenched institution of the *latifondi*, quasi-feudal farm estates, essentially remained in place as well, and made it hard for small and medium-sized farms to survive. Current political decisions regarding the agrarian economy also abetted the backward situation to the detriment of the South. This predicament cleaved a deeper financial and—ultimately—cultural division between the *meridione* [south] and the *settentrione* [north].

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33 Unless otherwise cited, data on Italian industry is taken from Valerio Castronovo, *L'Industria italiana dall'Ottocento a oggi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1980).

34 Sicily may have been the exception to this rule at least till the "*Fasci Siciliani*" [Sicilian Fasces] uprisings in 1893-94. Palermo's ideal location on the Mediterranean and its large port gave birth to a flourishing mercantile industry, so that in addition to an agrarian-based economy the island enjoyed financial gains in another sector and boasted a small, but prosperous bourgeois class. See Salvatore Massimo Ganci, "I Fasci siciliani," in *La crisi fine secolo (1880-1900)*, ed. Emilio Agazzi, vol. 19 of *Storia della società italiana*, eds. Giovanni Cherubini, et al. (Milan: Teti, 1980), 197.

The north-south rift was exacerbated by the tensions between the cities of Rome, the "legal capital" and the center of Italy's political body, and Milan "the real capital" and the hub of Italy's financial world.[35] While Francesco Crispi was prime minister, he strove to address this gulf.[36] Crispi, a Sicilian, was a democrat of the moderate Left. He pushed to redistribute power and strengthen the State in a strategy that was viewed by many as autocratic. National monies were invested in a variety of programs formulated to tackle the economic crisis. Agrarian reforms were at the top of Crispi's agenda, and these, for the most part, were focused on aiding the *meridione*. Northern industrialists, who already held a long-standing belief that the north had borne the financial brunt of Italy's unification, saw such reforms as drains on national resources that were destined to impede progress and development as they hindered sustained investment in northern enterprises. Crispi's directive did much to improve—but did not resolve—these problems. Indeed, this tangle of issues has yet to be unraveled. Trenchant differences of opinion dominate today. The massive inequality between the economic fates of Italy's two halves is an ongoing problem that continues to fuel the north-south split.

The Church was another divisive force in Italy during this period.[37] Once Rome was wrenched from the Papacy, the Catholic Church lost much of its power in Italy.

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35 See, for example, "Da capitale di un regno a capitale di un'economia," in *Milano nell'Unità nazionale 1860-1898*, eds. Giorgio Rumi, Adele Carla Buratti, and Alberto Cova (Milan: CARIPLO, 1991), 311-27, and Marco Meriggi, "Lo 'Stato di Milano' nell'Italia unita: miti e strategie politiche di una società civile (1860-1945), in *Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. La Lombardia*, eds. Duccio Bigazzi and Marco Meriggi (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), 7-49.

36 See Fausto Fonzi, *Crispi e lo "Stato di Milano"* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1965), vii-xxxi; Salvatore Massimo Ganci, "Il decennio crispino," in Agazzi, *La crisi fine secolo*,. 139-83; and Gastone Manacorda, *Dalla crisi alla crescita: Crisi economica e lotta politica in Italia 1892-1896* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), especially Chapter 5, "Il programma di Crispi: la riscossa della borghesia," 85-93.

37 For church history, see David I. Kertzer, "Religion and Society, 1789-1892," in Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*, 181-205; and Gregorio Penco, *Dal Concilio di Trento ai nostri giorni*, vol. 2 of *Storia della Chiesa in Italia* (Milan: Jaca, 1978).

Efforts to unify the nation as a country entailed shifting emphasis from being a Catholic to being a citizen, designations that some thought mutually exclusive. The gulf between the Church and the state had been deepened by the strongly anti-clerical Crispi, who in his first term as prime minister had the infamous 1889 monument to Giordano Bruno—burned at the stake in 1600 for his supposedly heretical views—erected at the site of his execution in Rome's Campo dei Fiori. Essentially located in the Pope's backyard, this was regarded (and intended) as a major affront. Crispi also sought to divest papal power in less symbolic and more concrete ways. For example, charitable and educational institutions, which had traditionally fallen under the jurisdiction of the Church, were established and administered by the state.

Despite these antagonisms, the reigning Pope, Leone XIII (1810-1903), was considered a progressive by comparison to his conservative predecessor, Pius IX (1792-1878), who rejected modernity and progress in his 1864 Syllabus of Errors, issued with the *Quanta cura* encyclical. Leone XIII, by contrast, recognized that Church doctrine needed to reconcile itself with a changing world, and called for a Christianity that could better meet the demands of contemporary society. His views are perhaps best represented by his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum novarum* which, while anti-Socialist, was dedicated to Italy's growing social problem, addressed the need for reforms to aid the disenfranchised, and appealed to Catholics to face a newly emerged set of social and economic dilemmas.

Social Upheaval

Social issues, namely stemming from economic inequality and class difference, were rampant once Italy entered the 1890s, ensnared in the economic recession and

agrarian crisis caused by the political and financial mismanagement that had prevailed in the decade prior.[38] This led to a concatenation of problems. Urban centers swelled, fed by industrial development and the shift away from agricultural concerns, which prompted mass migration from rural areas to the cities. Often this migration was from the south to the north. Ill-equipped for this growth spurt, cities lacked sufficient infrastructure and services to sustain the newly acquired, exploding population. Employment was scarce and labor underpaid. Despite the implementation of labor laws, workers were exploited, driven by desperation to accept any wages offered. Expectedly, the poor, working classes suffered most.

Strikes and riots soon resulted from these problems. In 1893-94 the "*Fasci Siciliani*" [Sicilian Fasces] groups encompassing urban laborers, farmers, and miners, took to the streets in the towns of Western Sicily and in 1894 uprisings followed in the marble quarries of Carrara. Across Italy there were conflicts with farmers and workers demanding "*pane e lavoro*" [bread and work]. In perhaps the worst year of unrest, the Bava Beccaris massacre of revolutionary factory laborers occurred in Milan in 1898. The upheaval transpired on a national level, both in urban centers and rural areas, and the protestors ranged from northern left-wing labor groups to Sicilian conservative Catholic farmers.

Seeking to better the situation, concurrently, leftist and radical intellectual circles gained momentum in the late 1880s. Left-wing movements in Italy burgeoned for several pivotal reasons. Groundwork was laid by Italy's "founders:" the Risorgimento luminary

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38 For discussions of the political problems, economic malaise and social unrest see, for example, the collected essays in Agazzi, *La crisi fine secolo*; and Manacorda, *Dalla crisi alla crescita. Crisi economica e lotta politica in Italia*.

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), who held revolutionary, republican views, and the Risorgimento general and hero, Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), who followed Mazzini in his radical republicanism, but also espoused socialist and anarchist politics. Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), lived in exile in Italy from 1864 till 1867, played an early, influential role in the spread of the worker movement and internationalism.[39] By the 1890s, Antonio Labriola (1843-1904), a Marxist philosopher, had become an important figure in nineteenth-century Italian intellectual thought and among the first Italians to propagate theories of Marxist socialism in his country.[40]

By 1891, Socialist leader Filippo Turati (1857-1932), and Russian exile Anna Kuliscioff (1857-1925), had founded the Socialist journal, *Critica sociale,* in Milan.[41] The Partito dei Lavoratori Italiani [Italian Laborers' Party], the precursor to the Partito Socialista Italiano [Italian Socialist Party], was formed at the Congress of Genoa in 1892, when the socialists split officially from the anarchists.[42] Despite this schism, which some believed weakened the Italian anarchist movement, anarchists remained active in the 1890s. They made their presence most overtly felt in violent acts that included the assassination of several European leaders: in 1894, that of French President Sadi Carnot

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39 See Maurizio Antonioli, "Il movimento operaio da Bakunin alla fondazione del partito Socialista," in Agazzi, *La crisi fine secolo*, 89-115.

40 See Mario Spinella, "Antonio Labriola e l'origine del marxismo in Italia," in Ibid., 117-38.

41 For information on the development of socialism in Italy I consulted Gaetano Arfè, *Storia del socialismo italiano (1892-1926)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965). For more on Turati, see Spencer Di Scala, *Dilemmas of Italian Socialism: The Politics of Filippo Turati* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). Kuliscioff was also an early and pivotal figure in the women's rights movement and, in 1890, she held a seminal conference, "Il monopolio dell'uomo," in Milan. For biographies on Kuliscioff see Marina Addis Saba, *Anna Kuliscioff: Vita privata e passione politica* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), and Maria Casalini, *La signora del socialismo italiano* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987).

42 In Italy, anarchism and socialism were essentially two factions of a single leftist movement until the Congress of Genoa. See Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 279-81.

(1837-1894), by Sante Caserio (1873-1894); in 1897, that of Spanish President Antonio Canovas (1828-1897), by Michele Angiolillo (1871-1897); and, in 1898, the brutal stabbing of Empress Elizabeth of Austria (1837-1898), by Luigi Luccheni (1873-1910).[43] The "*epoca degli attentati*" [era of assassinations], as it was known, culminated in 1900 when—to avenge the deaths of the Bava Beccaris massacre—Gaetano Bresci (1869-1901) committed regicide, shooting King Umberto.

Amid financial malaise, working-class revolts, and mushrooming left-wing groups that brought the century to its end, several transformist and reactionary governments arose. That of Agostino Depretis (1813-1887), lasting from 1881-87, set the stage for many of the 1890s' problems. The governments led by Antonio Di Rudinì (1839-1908), from 1891-92 and 1896-98, were oppressive, and the latter of his terms saw the imposition of martial law in Italy in 1898. The initially liberal Francesco Crispi, the last true representative of Risorgimento democratic idealism, scarcely fared better following the general disillusionment caused by his catastrophic colonial endeavors and his later involvement in conservative internal politics. It was only in 1901 that the newly ascended king, Victor Emanuel III (1869-1947), brought about concrete change by charging Giuseppe Zanardelli (1826-1903) with assembling a new government. Zanardelli did so together with the moderate liberal Giolitti, who had served in several previous governments. Giolitti began as minister of the interior, but was appointed prime

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43 Given the prevailing dislike for the French, Caserio became a hero to many Italians and when he died, later in 1894, Roman sculptor Ernesto Biondi dedicated a bronze to him, entitled *Poor Cola* [*Povero Cola*], of a poor *ciociaro* [Roman farmer] crying over the death of his donkey. See Rossana Bossaglia, "Dal realismo sociale al simbolismo populista," in *Arte e socialità in Italia: dal realismo al simbolismo, 1865-1915* (Milan: La Società per le belle arti ed esposizione permanente, 1979), 27. Caserio's anarchist activities are addressed in Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia degli anarchici nell'epoca degli attentati* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1981), 39-40.

minister by 1903. The so-called "Giolittian Era" was one of relative stability and tranquility.

Modernization

In the 1890s, as Italy became something of a presence as a partially industrial power within the European sphere, notions of progress and modernity intertwined more directly with those of national identity.[44] Here again there were ambiguities. Much of what Italy had to define itself stemmed from long-entrenched traditions, and the breaks with these in favor of new, national constructs undercut societal mores and cultural mainstays. Without emphasis on a shared history, save for a history of foreign domination, Italians had a hard time characterizing themselves as a united people. Underlying association between the modern and the foreign—which, on the surface, countered nationalist goals—further compounded the problem.[45] Despite prejudices against modernity and popular misconceptions regarding the danger of assimilating foreign modes, Italians—from intellectuals to northern industrialists—recognized the validity of modernization and saw ways that the undertaking could be made to have an

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44 The idealism surrounding progress and advancement can also be framed in Spencerian terms, as a line of thought that pervaded the 1890s was Herbert Spencer's more gentle interpretation of Darwinian evolutionary philosophy.

45 These issues are addressed, for example, by Galli della Loggia. See Galli della Loggia, *L'identità italiana*, 114-15. He concludes rather pessimistically, highlighting the ever present problematic Italy faces with regard to modernity and specifically the role played by foreign influences upon its modern culture: "In any case, what ends up being underlined is that Italy's relationship with modernity makes it seem like something not ours and not made for us, like something purely imported, which from abroad would impose upon us responsibilities which are too difficult, which we cannot fulfill, or which we would fulfill disproportionately, in a way that was always clumsy and destructive." ["*Comunque, quel che risulta sempre sottolineato è un rapporto dell'Italia con la modernità che fa apparire questa come qualcosa non nostra e non fatta per noi, come qualcosa di puramente importato, che dall'estero c'imporebbe dei doveri troppo difficili, cui non ci riesce di adempiere, o a cui adempiremmo fuori misura, in modo sempre maldestro e distruttivo*."] (140). The problematics of foreign influence on art will be examined at greater length in Chapters 2 and 3.

Italian imprint, even if points of departure may have stemmed from outside the country's borders.

Italy was not a backwater country, nor did everyone resist progress. The industrial advancements in the north, especially, demonstrated the great enthusiasm for technology.[46] Industrial fairs and national expositions were organized in Milan, Turin, and even, in 1891, in Palermo, where there was the short-lived pocket of industry with the large shipping conglomerate dominated by the Florio company. Interest in other industrialized nations, such as Great Britain and the United States, was widespead. Popular magazines such as *L'Illustrazione italiana* and more esoteric journals, such as *Emporium*, often dedicated pages to the wonders of science and industry. Technical schools were established in major northern cities, creating a new, specialized labor force.[47] From its inception, the Italian state had attempted to modernize the Kingdom, and the manifestations that best exemplified this impulse were the railways, the proliferation of electricity, and the advancement of certain industries.

The creation of the railways fostered a means to join the peninsula physically. Until unification, Italy was badly connected and travel between regions was often difficult. In addition, as has already been discussed, the country had been underdeveloped industrially. The institution of the railway system after 1860 was seen as a way to rectify these two separate, but often overlapping problems. Trains also improved communication by facilitating the postal and telegraph systems. Perhaps most importantly, the railways

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46 See Enrico Decleva, Carlo G. Lacaita, and Angelo Ventura, eds., *Innovazione e modernizzazione in Italia fra Otto e Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995).

47 For Milan, see Carlo G. Lacaita, *Sviluppo e cultura alle origini dell'Italia industriale* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1984), 169-87; for Turin, see Alessandra Ferraresi, "Nuove industrie, nuove discipline, nuovi laboratori: la Scuola superiore di elettrotecnica di Torino (1886-1914)," in Decleva, Lacaita, and Ventura, *Innovazione e modernizzazione in Italia*.

signified greater administrative oversight of the country and, thus, better control over the Kingdom.

Cities grew with the development of the railways.[48] Major train stations were erected in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Rome, and Naples.[49] The areas around these imposing constructions quickly transformed into important centers of commerce and urban activity, the stations themselves being cast as epitomes of modernity.[50] The establishment of tracks and the creation of the great Alpine tunnels, as well as the construction of trains, also boosted the economy and facilitated commerce, though this industrial prosperity was, again, restricted to the north. Milan profited most from the opening of the Gottardo tunnel to Switzerland in 1882, which allowed a flourishing trade with German-speaking countries and made Milan the lynchpin between the rest of Italy and Northern European countries.[51] The improvements in transportation and circulation were evidence of social and economic growth. In an era of positivism the railway was seen idealistically by some as a tangible sign of progress representing an employment of technology and a scientific vehicle by which even moral and social issues could be resolved.

The expansion of urban centers also led to the nascent development of greater citywide infrastructures. Electricity became another emblem of scientific and social

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48 Unless otherwise noted, the history of Italian railways is drawn from Stefano Maggi, *Le ferrovie* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

49 Milano Centrale was built in 1864; Napoli Centrale in 1866; Torino Porta Nuova in 1868; Genova Piazza Principe in 1870; Roma Termini in 1870; and Bologna Centrale in 1871. Ibid., 85.

50 For the urban growth of Milan due to railways see, for example, Cecilia De Carli, "L'edilizia residenziale: I quartieri borghesi e popolari," and, for the specific development of railways in Milan, see Bruno Caizzi, "Strade e ferrovie: Al centro della rete di communicazioni," in Rumi, Buratti, and Cova, *Milano nell'Unità nazionale*, 229-55, 369-88. For the general development spawned by the railway in Italian cities, see Maggi, *Le ferrovie,* 81-90.

51 "Da Capitale di un regno a capitale di un'economia," in Rumi, Buratti, and Cova, *Milano nell'Unità nazionale*, 319.

progress. In the 1880s, the Italian state began to explore new modes of energy production and constructed electrical plants, investing in the budding business of utilities. Electricity came early to Milan, where the first hydroelectric power station in Europe opened on March 8, 1883, at the former theater of Santa Radegonda.[52] A year later, the Società Edison was founded, and street lamps soon followed, appearing in Milan in 1885. The first electric trams started to run in 1893, from Milan's Piazza del Duomo to Corso Sempione.[53] The advent of this momentous advance on November 2 was joyfully recorded in the widely read *Illustrazione italiana*: "On the first day, the Società Edison, who is the owner, had the pleasure of seeing 10,216 crowding, curious, and impatient people go on the seven carriages put at the public's disposal."[54] The article went on to communicate—not without a certain degree of awe—that the carriages were illuminated with electric light when they ran at night. As the tone of this piece of popular press suggested, there was general excitement over the introduction of electricity, which brought to Milan two great elements of the modern city: faster modes of public transportation and artificial light.

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52 See Gianfranco Petrillo, "La nascita della grande fabbrica," in *Città, fabbriche e nuove culture alle soglie della società di massa 1850-1920*, ed. Franco Della Peruta (Milan: Electa, 1990), 22; and David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880-1980: Cultural Industries, Politics, and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 30. For the history of electricity in Italy see Bruno Bezza, ed., *Energia e sviluppo: L'industria elettrica italiana e la Società Edison* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986).

53 Milan was the third city to boast an electric tram, preceded only by an 1890 line that connected Florence to Fiesole, and an 1893 line in Genoa. Claudio Pavese, "Le fonti di energia nello sviluppo urbano," in Rumi, Buratti, and Cova, *Milano nell'Unità nazionale*, 363.

54 "*La Società Edison, che ne è l'assuntrice, ebbe il piacere di vedere il primo giorno, salire, sui sette carrozzoni elettrici messi a disposizione del pubblico, la bellezza di 10,216 person affollate, curiose, impazienti.*" The article also celebrated the institution of electric clocks which followed the standard time used by the railways and telegraphs, emphasizing that this was a necessity in "civilized countries." "Gli orologi elettrici e il tramway elettrico a Milano," *L'Illustrazione italiana* 20, no. 50 (December 10, 1893): 382.

The industrial advances in the north of Italy, which began primarily as small-scale undertakings, had burgeoned by the 1890s.[55] Within the landscape of the country's shifting and developing economy the three cities which formed the Industrial Triangle, Turin, Genoa, and Milan, held the greatest sway. The textile industry, dominated by the silk, cotton, and wool trades, was robust. The iron and steel industries and, in a related camp, shipyard production, much of it associated with maritime enterprises, made impressive advancements. Emerging leaders in the world of heavy manufacturing were Ansaldo, the Genoese engineering company begun in 1853, and Breda (formerly Elvetica), founded in 1886 in Milan, an engineering firm involved in the production of locomotives and boilers. In Terni, the Società Altiforni fonderie e acciaierie, a major steel producer, was founded in 1884. Another giant of Italian industry was the Pirelli chemical and rubber company.[56] Established in Milan in 1872 by the engineer, G. Battista Pirelli, the Pirelli factory was an example of Italy's thriving chemical industry. Founded as a producer of simple rubber products, Pirelli rapidly expanded to manufacture cable for the budding electrical industry (inspired to look to the electrical market by the presence of the hydroelectric power station in Milan).[57] By 1891, Milan was a center for several major industries dependent upon a substantial labor force.[58] The top five employers were

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55 Italy did benefit from the presence of foreign businesses and capital from France, Switzerland, England and Germany, but the protectionist tariffs instituted in the late 1880s put an end to much of foreign investments, especially the withdrawal of those of France. This section addressing Italian industry relies upon Castronovo, *L'Industria italiana*, 3-69.

56 For facts on Pirelli and Milanese industry see Piero Bolchini, *La Pirelli: operai e padroni* (Rome: Savona e Savelli, 1967); and *Pirelli 1872-1997: Centoventicinque anni di imprese* (Milan: Libri Scheiwiller, 1997).

57 See Petrillo, "La nascita della grande fabbrica," 22.

58 See Louise A. Tilly, *Politics and Class in Milan 1881-1901* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 44. For more on Milan as the industrial center of Italy see Tilly, 21-50; and Della Peruta, *Milano: lavoro e fabbrica 1884-1915* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1987). For the ramifications manifest in the

the paper manufacturer, Ambrogio Binda; the tabacco company, Regia Manifattura Tabacchi; the garment producers Bocconi Fratelli; Pirelli e C.; and Elevetica/Breda.

While technological developments, modernization, and urban growth occurred in varying degrees in each of the kingdom's major northern cities, Milan was the heart of modern Italy. Along with the change in the north from an agrarian-based economy to a more varied, industry-based one, which entailed new and diversified forms of investments, came the related move away from a dominant landowning class to an emergent bourgeoisie.[59] This new sector of the population was primarily an industrial bourgeoisie, but there was a parallel genesis of a professional middle-class—from doctors to lawyers to government employees—that constituted a support system that met the expanding needs of the cities. This climate, and a new class of educated, moneyed individuals, nourished cultural growth in Milan. By the onset of the 1890s such a confluence of circumstances created a favorable environment for the arts and a conceptual space for the emergence of new movements.

Locating Divisionism

Though the actual genesis of the Divisionist idiom will be treated at length in the next two chapters, it is worthwhile to consider a few representative Divisionist images

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growth of commercial endeavors in the worlds of advertising and publicity, see Dario Cimorelli and Giovanna Ginex, eds., *Storia della communicazione dell'industria lombarda 1881-1945* (Milan: Mediocredito lombardo, 1997).

59 For an examination of the transformation of Italian society in terms of the birth and evolution of the professional classes, see Alberto Maria Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana: L'età liberale* (Rome: Donizelli, 1996). See also Adrian Lyttelton, "The Middle Classes in Liberal Italy," in *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento. Essays in Honour of Denis Mack Smith*, eds. John A. Davis and Paul Ginsborg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 217-50. A lengthy and detailed study of Milan is Tilly, *Politics and Class in Milan*. For an examination of visual culture, one that largely focuses on Milan is Annie-Paul Quinsac, *La borghesia allo specchio: Il culto dell'immagine dal 1860 al 1920* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004).

that address the positive and negative sides of progress, modernity, and national identity. Two sets of paintings—Angelo Morbelli's proto-Divisionist views of Milan's train station, and Giovanni Sottocornola's portrayals of oppressed factory workers—depict opposing scenes of Milan's new urban fabric.

Angelo Morbelli came from Colma, near Casale di Monferrato in the region of Piedmont, and was the child of an affluent family that had a successful agricultural enterprise.[60] He went to Milan to study art at the Real accademia di belle arti di Brera and, although he often returned to his natal home, he was an active member of Milan's artistic circles and resided primarily in this city. There, the grandeur of the railway system and train stations, the emblems of a modern, urban life, were not lost on him and must have inspired his execution of *At the Central Station (Milan)* (*Alla stazione centrale [Milano]*, 1887 [fig. 2]), and *Milan's Central Station in 1889* (*La stazione centrale di Milano nel 1889*, 1889 [fig. 3]).[61]

In subject, composition, and focus on contemporary life, Morbelli must have taken cues from Claude Monet's *Gare St. Lazare* (1877 [fig. 4])—painted a decade earlier—which he would have known through reproductions in journals.[62] Morbelli's

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60 Several sources on Morbelli, all exhibition catalogues, haven proven essential here. See Luciano Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1982); Aurora Scotti Tosini, *Angelo Morbelli: Tra realismo e divisionismo* (Turin: Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea, 2001); and Aurora Scotti [Tosini] *Angelo Morbelli* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1991).

61 Angelo Morbelli, *At the Central Station (Milan)* (*Alla stazione centrale ([Milano])*, 1887, oil on canvas, 86 x 132 cm, Ente autonomo ferrovie dello stato, Rome. Angelo Morbelli, *Milan's Central Station in 1889* (*La stazione centrale di Milano nel 1889*, 1889, oil on canvas, 58 x 100 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan. Morbelli frequently executed alternate versions of his pictures, as these two closely related canvases illustrate. Although the title of the second painting would indicate a time-specific image, in fact, it is a clear reworking of the 1887 composition. This was typical of Morbelli, who returned to the same image—even over a period of decades—and would paint new renditions with minor changes and adjustments vis-a-vis the original painting.

62 Claude Monet's *Gare St-Lazare*, 1877, oil on canvas, 75 x 104 cm, Musèe d'Orsay. It has not been possible to definitively document Morbelli's knowledge of the Monet, but the resemblance of the works

train station scenes, which preceded his first forays into Divisionism in circa 1890, also rely on compositional strategies developed in his own earlier works. In these, the artist often framed his main subject with a curving architectural form inscribed across the upper portion of a usually rectangular, horizontal canvas. He utilized this device as early as 1874 in *Interior of the Chorus of the Maggiore Monastery in Milan* (*Interno del coro del Monastero Maggiore in Milano*), which is painted from a viewpoint behind the main altar and features a chancel arch through which the choir is seen.[63] This scheme eventually evolved into an actual curved frame format, which recurred throughout Morbelli's Divisionist paintings. Another aspect of these representations of Milan's train station that is in keeping with Morbelli's earlier production is its juxtaposition of a back-lit window with a dark interior, an arrangement that permitted the painter to explore the impact of daylight upon an indoor space. In Morbelli's interpretations of the Stazione Centrale, the iron-girded structure is dominated by the arched entry to the tracks—its top half consisting of a grid of windows—amplifying the contrast of the bright light outside with the cavernous, enclosed passageway of the station. Within, the arriving and departing locomotives exude expanding blue-gray puffs of steam into the atmosphere, a further opportunity to experiment with light effects, this time upon the smoke. It was, in part, this preoccupation with the rendering of light that soon led the painter to investigate Divisionism.

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has led several scholars to make this conclusion. See Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli*, 13; and Scotti Tosini, *Angelo Morbelli: Tra realismo e divisionismo*, 62. For Monet and the theme of modern life see T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), especially Chapter 3, "The Environs of Paris," 147-204; and Robert Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), especially 20-28 on the Gare St. Lazare and Chapter 6, "Suburban Leisure," 195-263.

63 Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli*, 165.

Morbelli clearly sought to evoke the modern world in these similar compositions filled with motion. The lines of the tracks that cut diagonally across the ground of the station shoot off the bottom right of the composition's frame—a trope influenced by the photography with which the artist had been engaged since about 1880—in a strategy that fosters the impression of movement and receding perspective.[64] Here, with the moving trains, the clusters of people waiting on the platforms, and the conductors poised alongside the tracks to direct rail traffic, the sense of a bustling urban center is palpable. In the distance to the left, outside the entrance of the hangar, two silvery cylindrical structures are visible, large containers located along the tracks that probably contained the water necessary to power the steam engines, another indicator of the modern urban landscape these locomotive symbols of modernity inhabit.[65] Later, Morbelli would turn to more socially-minded themes (to be discussed in Chapter 4), most frequently the elderly people living in Milan's state-run hospice, the Pio Trivulzio, and the *mondine* [rice weeders], who worked in the rural Po valley. But these proto-Divisionist works and, even, their probable source in Monet's own rendition of contemporary life, already

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64 Morbelli employed a photograph—found among his papers after his death—for the general composition. See Ibid., 162. For more on Morbelli and photography see Marisa Vescovo, "Ombre e luci come grafia e mimesi del reale, in Ibid., 21-32, and Giovanna Ginex, "Fotografia e pittura nel laboratorio divisionista," in *L'Età del divisionismo*, eds. Gabriella Belli and Franco Rella (Milan: Electa, 1990), 244-45. A more recent essay that includes a discussion of Morbelli's photography is Silvia Bordini's "Rêve et réalité. Morbelli, Previati, e Sartorio, sur la photographie," in *Italies: 1880-1910; l'art italien à l'épreuve de la modernité*, eds. Gianna Piantoni and Anne Pingeot (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux; Turin: Allemandi, 2001), 80-82. As this study examines multiple artists' work over the course of a decade, I have only looked at painting. Several Divisionists actively employed photography as a tool in their art making. In addition to Morbelli, as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, both Pellizza and Grubicy did as well. The adoption of photography signaled yet another means by which allegiances to modernity and progress were manifest within the Divisionist project. The recording of subjects and scenes with an instrument technically capable of empirical documentation fits with positivist goals. However, the Divisionists each manipulated the camera to realize images and effects that subverted such mimetic principles, and obtained images that were not only studies for their painting, but in some cases works of art in and of themselves. To date, the photographs taken by the Divisionists are largely located in private hands and, I believe, many are still to be found, identified, and catalogued. The subject of Divisionism and photography is vast and, still, largely untapped and falls beyond the parameters of this dissertation.

65 Joe Ragsdale was kind enough to identify these structures for me.

demonstrated the young artist's interest in portraying current images and issues and his attention to the themes of modernity and progress.

The dark side of industry demands scrutiny as well. The leftist ideological stance many of the Divisionists shared was tied to notions of modernity and progressive ideals. Allegiances not only to progress, but to socialist themes were made manifest in their choices of subject matter. Rather than celebrating an aspect of industry as Morbelli had with his views of Milan's Stazione Centrale, Sottocornola highlighted the urban blight and dehumanization that industry had brought upon the lower classes. The artist's sensitivity to unmistakably socialist concerns may have been sharpened by his own poor beginnings, as he was from working-class origins in Milan.[66] Like many of the Divisionists he attended the Brera, and it was there that he developed friendships with major proponents of the style who would eventually influence him to go beyond the social realism he initially favored and to explore Divisionist techniques.

The artist dedicated one canvas to the laborers of the Pirelli plant, *The Exit of the Women Workers from the Pirelli Establishment* (*L'uscita delle operaie dallo stabilimento Pirelli,* 1891-97).[67] This work is currently unlocated, so that despite an old reproduction and a study, much of the actual scene is left to the imagination. Referring to the large plant Pirelli had built in 1890 outside Porta Nuova on what is now via Fabio Filzi in Milan, it depicted the women who constituted a significant portion of the industrial workers at the factory. Of the 1,350 laborers, half were female.[68] In large plants, such as

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66 Biographical information is drawn from Giovanna Ginex, *Giovanni Sottocornola: Dal realismo sociale al quotidiano familiare* (Milan: Edi. Artes, 1985), 21.

67 This painting cannot be illustrated due to the lack of a legible reproduction.

68 Della Peruta, *Milano: lavoro e fabbrica*. 70.

Pirelli's, women and children typically earned lower wages than men, and constituted an oft-exploited sector of the labor force.[69]

From what is discernible within the earlier, more tonal composition of the Pirelli women, the groups of figures appear to presage those in *The Dawn of the Worker* (*L'alba dell'operaio*, 1897 [fig. 5]).[70] This was Sottocornola's most famous painting and memorialized an anonymous mass of wretched factory laborers: shadowy forms stripped of their identity seen trudging to work. These industrial workers faced abysmal conditions at the plants: sixteen-hour days in cramped spaces with no ventilation, in which they breathed an excess of dust or were overcome with the heat of steam-powered machinery.[71] By their late forties, worn down by unhealthy environments and excessively demanding jobs, most were no longer able to work.[72]

In Sottocornola's *Dawn of the Worker*, the corporeal misery of the hunched-over people is made tangible by the unfriendly, oppressive darkness and cold of the pre-dawn hour in which they walk to the plants.[73] The gloomy atmosphere is accentuated by the artificial light of the street lamps. These provided Sottocornola with the opportunity to capitalize on the use of divided strokes of pigment, which he applied in thick filaments.

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69 In an 1896 report, men were paid 2.8 lire a day and women 1.5 Children 11 and younger earned less than a lira per day. See Tilly, *Politics and Class in Milan*, 85.

70 Giovanni Sottocornola, *The Dawn of the Worker* (*L'alba dell'operaio*), 1897, oil on canvas, 142 x 253 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan.

71 Negri Zamagni, *Economic History of Italy,* 190.

72 The average age of working-class men who were forced by circumstance to enter a publicly subsidized home for the aged was 47, that of women was 48. See Giorgio Cosmacini and Cristina Cenedella, *I vecchi e la cura: Storia del Pio Albergo Trivulzio* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1994), 151.

73 We know that it is dawn and not night from a letter Morbelli writes to Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo on March 18, 1897, in which he notes of this work: "it represents a road at first dawn, with lit lamps." ["*rappresenta una strada alla prima alba con fanali accesi.*"]. Cited in Mirella Poggialini Tominetti, *Angelo Morbelli: il primo divisionismo nella sua opera e nelle lettere a Pellizza da Volpedo*, intro. Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua (Milan: La Rete, 1971), 148; also reproduced in Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli*, 46.

The effect is of radiating, ever widening halos, ranging from amber yellow at the lamp's core to soft pinkish-orange, to a purple-violet that dissolves into the midnight-blue of the nighttime atmosphere. At the center of the streetlights the paint is raised from the surface of the canvas, creating an ember-like effect within the oppressive darkness. Not unlike Morbelli's train tracks, the tram rails create a sweeping visual entry into the picture, emerging from the bottom right of the composition as though from the real space beyond the frame. But here, the presence of the street lights and tram, signposts of the supposedly modern city, do not exalt progress. The tram is a mode of transport the poor cannot afford to take.[74] Nor are the lamps an optimistic metonym for modernity. While light was often a symbol of hope or enlightenment in Divisionist painting, here the weak glow is insufficient to illuminate the way for the clusters of faceless men, women, and children—a symbol of the bleakness of their existence that casts *The Dawn of the Worker* as a synecdochic representation of modernity's ills.

Conclusion

Whether revealing the positive or negative face of modernity's Janus head, these representative Divisionist images reflect their makers' positivist embrace of an empirical style, their socialist philosophies, and their progressive stances. The formation of this movement at a time of national definition also meant that implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) these artists sought to create a style that could be identified as Italian. The Divisionists' production, like that of two major Italian artistic movements that preceded

74 In fact, in Milan, one ramification of the urban development was the construction of housing blocks for workers. Located in the areas near the factories, so laborers would be close to work (and separate from bourgeois neighborhoods), these were conceived with utilitarian, even utopian ideals, but essentially became working-class slums. See De Carli, "L'edilizia residenziale," 229-55.

them, the Macchiaioli and the Scapigliati, was correlated to ideas of nationalism and, more specifically, to a single identity. But, unlike their predecessors—the Macchiaioli who were still very much aligned with the idealism of the Risorgimento, and the Scapigliati who were reacting against the emerging bourgeois values with a relatively vague program of loosely defined bohemian revolt—they adopted an artistic idiom and enlightened mores regarding social and cultural progress that proposed an image of a new, modern, and more cohesive Italy, and one that could perhaps keep pace with other European counterparts.

CHAPTER 2

THE "RICERCA DELLA LUCE NEL COLORE:" THE INCEPTION OF DIVISIONISM IN ITALY[75]

The Italian Divisionists created bejeweled surfaces, achieved by juxtaposing dashes, lines, or even threads of often complementary colors to fashion the optical illusion of single, more vibrant hues when viewed from an appropriate distance. The adoption of this technique began in the late 1880s, and owes its beginnings to French Neo-Impressionism (albeit learned via second-hand sources). Yet, to understand the inception of Divisionism in Italy it is helpful to cast backward and sideways glances upon the dominant artistic movements prevalent after unification and the other outside pictorial currents which flowed into the Italian visual lexicon.

The evolution of the Italian Divisionists owed much to certain later nineteenth-century artists active in Italy, from the Macchiaioli to Realists such as Filippo Carcano, to the Scapigliati. Their works provided models for interpretations of light and color that were not unrelated to the Divisionists' eventual division of chromatic hues. Present within the production of these groups were embryonic themes relating to the creation of a truly Italian art, if not always directly to nationalist ideologies. Moreover, because

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75 This is part of a quote by Giovanni Segantini: "*Se l'arte moderna avrà un carattere, sarà quello della ricerca della luce nel colore*." "If modern art is to have a personality, it will be the search for light in color." Giovanni Segantini to Vittore Grubicy, December 30, 1887, transcript by Benvenuto Benvenuti, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.6.1. Also reproduced in *Scritti e lettere di G. Segantini*, ed. Bianca Segantini (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1910), 172 and Teresa Fiori, ed., *Archivi del divisionismo*, intro. Fortunato Bellonzi, 2 vols. (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1968), 1: 318.

Impressionism and Victorian painting gained currency in roughly the same period as Realism, the Divisionists organically assimilated aspects from all these movements into their own style. Since scientific theories regarding optics and color informed art-making in this period—and Divisionism specifically—this chapter also will trace the Divisionists' familiarity with these theories and as well as their exploration and application.

Finally, the relationship between Italian Divisionism and French Neo-Impressionism will be treated at length. Because these links are difficult to document, scholarship has often been based upon assumptions with a certain amount of speculative conclusions. Analyzing a significant piece of art criticism by Vittore Grubicy and several by Félix Fénéon (Divisionism's and Neo-Impressionism's respective spokesmen), as a point of departure, I will investigate the complex nature of these connections and underscore both the importance of the French for the Italians and the significant differences that set Divisionism apart from Neo-Impressionism. One fundamental distinction emerges, in keeping with one of the many ambiguities that characterized late nineteenth-century Italy and the Divisionists: the Italian painters adhered to visual strategies grounded in the conventions of Renaissance painting, an ubiquitous presence in Italian culture, allowing them to form a pictorial idiom all their own. Paradoxically, as these painters sought ways through which to revitalize Italian art and adapted elements that they saw as innovative, it was their merging of the novel with their own long-standing artistic traditions, ones inculcated in their education and practice, that permitted the development of a modern Italian movement.

The Post-Unification Artistic Climate: A Decentralized Academy

Italian art throughout much of the nineteenth century was characterized by a multiplicity of indigenous and foreign pictorial models, a phenomenon which was abetted by the existence of several fine arts academies. Despite the Italian nation's acquisition of the Roman capital, official cultural institutions functioned independently of each other and the academic system remained decentralized. This situation was comparable to that in Germany, another recently unified country. In contrast, other European nations boasted established and centralized government-funded art institutions that served as a locus for the development and dissemination of a national art. France had a national École des beaux-arts, Académie des beaux-arts, and annual *Salon,* while England had a Royal Academy of Arts with its yearly exhibition. Italy had several important academies in major cities which prior to unification, were the governing seats of power. For example, in Naples, the Reale istituto di belle arti [Royal Institute of Fine Arts]; in Rome, the Capitolina [Capitoline] and the Accademia di San Luca [Academy of San Luca]. Florence had the Accademia di belle arti [Academy of Fine Arts] and Milan, the Real accademia di belle arti di Brera, where many of the Divisionists received their education. Turin was the seat of the Accademia Albertina [Albertine Academy], and Venice, of the Accademia di belle arti. Other larger cities also had art schools, such as Genoa's Accademia Liguistica and Bologna's Accademia di belle arti. But even smaller cities could claim their own academies, including Bergamo, Ferrara, Siena, and Verona. All the academies held annual exhibitions and awarded prizes to the best works. Many cities also had a private art society, called the *Società promotrice di belle arti* [Society for the

Promotion of the Arts].[76] Given the compartmentalized and regional nature of the art system, several stylistic trends developed and coexisted after unification, but none represented the country as a whole.

Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Currents

Nineteenth-century Italian art had its practitioners of traditional academic painting, such as the Neo-Classical exponents Andrea Appiani (1754-1817) and Vincenzo Camuccini (1771-1844).[77] Though Neo-Classicism gave way to Romanticism in the 1820s, the slightly younger generation of painters who embraced Romantic thematics still interpreted these in a classicizing style often dubbed Historical Romanticism. Its practitioners included Giuseppe Bezzuoli (1784-1855) and Francesco Hayez (1791-1882).[78] Their historical subjects and medievalizing pictorial codes were often inspired by significant events from Italy's past, accentuating moments when Italians overthrew foreign rule, such as the Age of the Republics during the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. Implicit in many of these nineteenth-century portrayals of past glory were subversive political statements about foreign domination in modern Italy. Works alluding to the spate of non-Italian rulers ensconced throughout the peninsula were avatars for patriotic painting that would develop at the time of unification.

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76 See Rosanna Maggio Serra, "I sistemi dell'arte nell'Ottocento," in *La pittura in Italia: L'Ottocento*, ed. Enrico Castelnuovo, 2 vols. (Milan: Electa, 1990), 2: 630-45.

77 A helpful overview to the strains in Italian art in the early *Ottocento* is *Il primo Ottocento italiano: La pittura tra passato e futuro* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1992); and *La pittura in Italia*, in particular, Fernando Mazzocca, "La pittura dell'Ottocento in Lombardia," 1: 87-155.

78 To date there is no comprehensive publication on Bezzuoli. For biographical information see Lucia Bassignana, "Giuseppe Bezzuoli," *La pittura in Italia*, 2: 694-95. For Hayez the standard reference is Fernando Mazzocca, *Francesco Hayez: Catalogo ragionato* (Milan: Motta, 1994).

A painting that took on an iconic status and proto-nationalist symbolism for Italians was Hayez's 1844-46 *The Sicilian Vespers* (*I Vespri Siciliani* [fig. 6]), which portrayed a thirteenth-century Sicilian woman being sexually accosted by French soldiers.[79] This incident spurred the defense of Italian national honor in a 1282 uprising against the regime of Charles d'Anjou and the French, who were successfully ejected from the island (only to be supplanted by the Spanish who had come to Sicily's aid).[80] Another well-known image that referenced Italian subjugation by the French was Bezzuoli's 1827 *The Entry of Charles the VIII in Florence* (*L'entrata di Carlo VIII a Firenze* [fig. 7]).[81] While this scene depicts the French king's triumphant entry into Florence in 1494, it represents but one victorious moment on an otherwise catastrophic march in Italy to seize the Kingdom of Naples. Charles VIII (1470-1498) did succeed in his objective in February of 1495, but he was repulsed in July of that same year by a coalition that included the Papacy, Spain, Austria, the Republic of Venice, and Ludovico Sforza of Milan. Although the French did not have a foothold in Italy at that time, the representation of an invading foreign monarch who was rapidly overthrown and expelled from the land still resonated with the anti-foreign sentiment shared by numerous Italians.

Up until unification, however, the nineteenth-century painting style most readily identifiable with Italy was that of the picturesque *veduta* tradition. These small-scale, charming city views and landscapes, largely the offspring of the eighteenth-century

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79 Francesco Hayez, *The Sicilian Vespers* (*I Vespri Siciliani*), 1844-46, oil on canvas, 225 x 300 cm, Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna, Rome. See Mazzocca, *Francesco Hayez*, 150-51.

80 A longstanding and excellent account of this period remains Sir Steven Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers: A History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

81 Giuseppe Bezzuoli, *The Entry of Charles the VIII in Florence* (*L'entrata di Carlo VIII a Firenze*), 1827, oil on canvas, Galleria d'arte moderna, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

veduta painting associated with the Venetian scenes by Canaletto (1697-1768) and Francesco Guardi (1712-1793), typify the nineteenth-century Italian painting that prevailed in Naples and Rome.[82] Undistinguished by strong stylistic attributes, *vedute* were easily transportable canvases intended for affluent travelers on the Grand Tour. Although they represented recognizable historic landmarks, pleasant *campagnas*, and folksy, costumed peasantry of the Roman and Neapolitan regions, they were not marked by a distinctly Italian style. Highly saleable, these paintings were financially successful and popular images dictated almost entirely by the foreign market, and were even promoted in Paris by the French dealer Goupil.[83] It was not until the time of unification that Italian painters began to formulate painting modes that could be said to have an identifiable Italian character, other than a clichéd image of place.

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82 A recent examination of *vedutismo* is *Gaspare Vanvitelli e le origini del vedutismo* (Rome: Viviani, 2002). The v*eduta* did take on a more individualized personality in landscape School of Posillipo, which took root around Naples in the 1820s, after the Spanish Bourbons had regained control of the area following the fall of Napoleon. The Bourbons expressly hired foreign professors to teach at the Reale istituto di belle arti, such as the Dutch landscape painter Anton Sminck van Pitloo (1790-1837), and appointed him landscape professor at the Istituto in 1824. Van Pitloo, in turn, taught Giacinto Gigante (1806-1876), who became the most acclaimed exponent of the Posillipo School. For overviews of the School of Posillipo see, for example, Vincenzo Bindi, *La scuola di Posillipo: Verismo e realismo della scuola meridionale* (Turin: Gruppo Editoriale Forma, 1983) and Luisa Martorelli, "La pittura dell'Ottocento nell'Italia meridionale (1799-1848)," in *La pittura in Italia*, 2:469-93. An older source of merit is Raffaello Causa, *La scuola di Posillipo* (Milan: Fabbri, 1967). For studies on Gigante see Fernanda Capobianco, *Giacinto Gigante* (Soncino (CR): Edizioni dei Soncino, 1994), and Jessica Patrizia Ruggieri, "Giacinto Gigante e le solari vedute del Romanticismo napoletano," in *Dal Romanticismo alla Scapigliatura: Percorsi e figure dell'arte del XIX secolo*, eds. Alfredo de Paz and Giorgio Marcon (Naples: Liguori, 1997), 199-222.

83 For a discussion of the Italian art market see Maria Mimita Lamberti, "1870-1915: I mutamenti del mercato e le ricerche degli artisti," in *Il Novecento* pt. 2, vol. 3 of *Storia dell'arte italiana*, eds. Giulio Bollati e Paolo Fossati (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), 5-31.

Italian Realism, Naturalism, and Impressionism[84]

The advent of Realist and Naturalist trends in Italy essentially coincided with the country's unification, signaling a defining shift in the course of art on the peninsula.[85] This vein of representation was catalyzed, in part, by knowledge of French painting (to be discussed below), but, as with Divisionism later, the Italians merged foreign ideologies and stylistics with long-standing native painterly traditions aligned with indigenous concerns. Italian Realism and Naturalism are also the precursors of Divisionism; Linda Nochlin's description of Realism's social content could just as easily refer to the Divisionist project:

> The Realists placed a positive value on the depiction of the low, the humble and the commonplace, the socially dispossessed or marginal as well as the more prosperous sectors of contemporary life. They turned for inspiration to the worker, the peasant, the laundress, the prostitute, to the middle-class or working-class café or *bal*, to the prosaic realm of the cotton broker or the modiste, to their own or their friends' *foyers* and gardens, viewing them frankly and candidly in all their misery, familiarity or banality.[86]

Despite the affinities between Realism and Divisionism, practitioners of the latter ultimately rejected and criticized fundamental Realist maxims and viewed the commitment to mimetic representation as too programmatic. They did not, however,

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84 Within this discussion the term Realism identifies works that have a strong social content, while Naturalism refers to a wider range of imagery that represents contemporary subjects in a realistic manner.

85 A benchmark examination of the evolution of Realism in Italy remains *Arte e socialità in Italia: dal realismo al simbolismo, 1865-1915* (Milan: La Società per le belle arti ed esposizione permanente, 1979), especially Rossana Bossaglia, "Dal realismo sociale al simbolismo populista," 21-28; and Mirella Poggialini Tominetti, "L'arte figurativa dal 1860 al 1915 nell'Italia settentrionale: realismo e realismo sociale," 29-44. Realism in Italy also had a strong presence in sculpture—exemplified by the works of Lorenzo Bartolini (1777-1850) or Vincenzo Vela (1820-1891)—and was a medium which did not suffer the same vicissitudes as painting during the course of the nineteenth century, anchored in a legacy that extended across the century from Antonio Canova (1757-1822) to Medardo Rosso (1858-1928). See Fred Licht, *Sculpture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1967).

86 Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New York: Penguin, 1971; reprint 1981), 34.

eschew in a wholesale fashion all that could be learned from Realism. They ascribed to the underlying belief in truth to nature and evolved from it an obvious preoccupation with painterly notation.

The Macchiaioli

The first truly Italian movement to emerge following unification was that of the Macchiaioli in Tuscany.[87] Often incorrectly described as Italian Impressionism, this style—more closely aligned with Naturalism—was vaguely akin to the art of the Barbizon, and featured "patch-like" brushwork emphasizing tonal values. This stark contrast of light and dark gave the effect of *plein-air* luminosity. Its leading proponents were Giovanni Fattori (1825-1908), Silvestro Lega (1826-1895), and Telemaco Signorini (1835-1901). The group also included Giuseppe Abbati (1836-1868), Cristiano Banti (1824-1904), Odoardo Borrani (1833-1905), Vincenzo Cabianca (1827-1902), Vito D'Ancona (1825-1884), and Serafino De Tivoli (1826-1892). Their friend and supporter, Diego Martelli (1839-1896), a critic with connections to France, would prove an important advocate for these and future generations of Italian artists.

The Macchiaioli were a close-knit circle, many of whom had studied together at the Accademia in Florence. They frequently painted in the Maremma, the coastal area of the Tuscan region, gravitating to the environs of Castiglioncello. There, Martelli had a

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87 *Macchiaiolismo* has been well documented in English-language scholarship by Norma Broude and Albert Boime. See Norma Broude, *The Macchiaioli: Italian Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), and Albert Boime, *The Art of the* Macchia *and the* Risorgimento*: Representing Culture and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). In Italian, the bibliography on the Macchiaioli is vast. General works inlcude Piero Dini and Alba del Soldato, *Diego Martelli* (Florence: Il Torchio, 1978); Piero Dini, *Dal Caffè Michelangiolo al Caffè Athènes: I macchiaioli tra Firenze e Parigi* (Turin: Allemandi, 1986); and Dario Durbé, *Fattori e la scuola di Castiglioncello*, 2 vols. (Rome: De Luca, 1982-83). The most recent resource is Fernando Mazzocca and Carlo Sisi, eds., *I macchiaioli prima dell'impressionismo* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2003).

country home that they often visited. When in Florence, these painters met regularly in Florence's Caffè Michelangiolo, a locus for liberal thinkers and political radicals, most of them patriots committed to the Risorgimento movement, and the nationalist tendencies promulgated among this group permeated the Macchiaioli's work.

Because the Macchiaioli were supporters of the Risorgimento, some of their best known paintings embraced historical subjects related to the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy.[88] Thus, much of their subject matter in the 1860s and into the 1870s celebrated the newly forged country. These canvases did not always exalt moments of victory, but instead often portrayed patriotism in the guise of quotidian moments, as in Borrani's *The Seamstresses of the Red Shirts* (*Le cucitrici di camicie rosse*, 1863 [fig. 8]).[89] The overtly nationalistic interior—which, were it not for the political message, would be best described as a genre scene—frames a group of women sewing the signature garments for Giuseppe Garibaldi's soldiers, red shirts to be worn during their successful battles to expel the Bourbons from Sicily. Fattori also dedicated a significant number of paintings to nationalist imagery. In addition to a series of large-scale works depicting battle scenes of the Risorgimento, he also made smaller-scale scenes of the soldiers' daily lives, such as *On Patrol* (*In vedetta*), 1872 [fig. 9]).[90] Alternately titled *The White Wall* (*Il muro bianco*), it depicts a moment in the life of three Italian soldiers on the lookout in banal and unidealized setting (down to the piles of horse manure on the ground). Yet, its stripped down narrative and the soldiers' stances suggest tense

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88 However, by the 1890s, when several of the Macchiaioli were still active, their subject matter had moved away from such themes.

89 Odoardo Borrani, *The Seamstresses of the Red Shirts* (*Le cucitrici di camicie rosse*), 1863, oil on canvas, 66 x 54 cm, private collection.

90 Giovanni Fattori, *On Patrol* (*In vedetta*), 1872, oil on canvas, 37 x 56 cm, private collection.

expectation for impending bellic conflict. Most interestingly, this military scene is a vehicle for formal investigations, notably the almost blinding effect of the full sunlight striking the white surfaces of the wall and road, and the rushing perspective these create.

Even when the Macchiaioli executed works unrelated to recent historical events' they took up distinctly Italian landscape and society. Most painted scenes of the rural Maremma: farmers working with oxen in the fields or tilling the land. Bourgeois life also made an active appearance in their work, as in the characteristic representations by Lega of properly turned-out middle-class women engaged in genteel pastimes or social activities, such as *The Visit* (*La visita*, 1868 [fig. 10]).[91] Two almost identically clad young sisters greet a woman in mourning outside her home, exchanging polite kisses as their mother approaches along the path. Lega's fiancée, Virginia Batelli, and other friends were models for such depictions.[92] The house is an unassuming structure of light stone, grass grows amid the paving, and a tile-roofed farm building is visible in the background, along with the Tuscan hills. Such tiny realistic details and the unremarkable nature of the moment are indicative of the Macchiaioli's commitment to accurate and unsentimental portrayals of the appearance and mores of the *piccola borghesia* of post-unification Italian society.

While their brushwork certainly did not consist of divided colors or distinctly separated strokes, the Macchiaioli's focus upon empiricism, tonal effects, and the capturing of light provided an Italian model for the Divisionists. Significantly, the

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91 Silvestro Lega, *The Visit* (*La visita*), 1868, oil on canvas mounted on panel, 31 x 60 cm, Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna, Rome.

92 See Piero Dini, *Silvestro Lega: Gli anni di Piagentina* (Turin: Allemandi, 1984), 22; and Giuseppe Mesirca, *Silvestro Lega* (Florence: Edizioni d'Arte Il Fiorino, 1985), 198.

Divisionist Plinio Nomellini studied at Florence's Accademia di belle arti with Fattori, as did, briefly, in 1888, Giuseppe Pellizza.[93] But the Macchiaioli were the distant relatives of the Divisionists in other ways. They broke with existing artistic trends, introducing Realism into a dominantly classical, often idealized visual tradition. They culled subjects from contemporary life, and depicted actual places, rather than adhering to the academic hierarchy that privileged history painting, and even when treating historical subjects, they tended toward unheroic interpretations than ran counter to academic mores.[94]

Antonio Fontanesi

Antonio Fontanesi (1818-1882) had the Naturalist inclinations of an earlier generation yet was associated for a time with the Macchiaioli.[95] His *oeuvre* became a touchstone for the Divisionists. Born in Reggio Emilia, he lived in exile in Geneva for a time due to his political affiliations prior to unification. He also traveled to Paris, where he saw Barbizon pictures, and to London. In Florence, in 1867, Fontanesi showed with the Macchiaioli. He ultimately moved to Turin, where much of his painting is still to be found. Fontanesi has always fallen outside of a specific artistic rubric. His work oscillated between Naturalist landscapes and atmospheric, moody scenes that presaged Symbolism.[96] Fontanesi's rather eccentric production resembles the later work of Camille

93 Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1986), 10.

94 It could be argued that the Macchiaioli were a true avant-garde movement, as they seemed to privilege style over content, a staple signifier of modernism. However, they did this in works produced not for public exhibition, but in small-scale images painted for private consumption. These are the pictures we know today, but they were not those shown to the public in their own time.

95 See Elisabetta Farioli and Claudio Poppi, *Antonio Fontanesi: e la pittura di paesaggio in Italia 1861-1880* (Milan: Motta, 1999); and Rosanna Maggio Serra, *Antonio Fontanesi, 1818-1882* (Turin: Allemandi, 1997).

Corot (1796-1875)—for instance, the peasant women turned sylphs in the sylvan setting of *Tranquility* (*La quiete*, 1860 [fig. 11])—and also recalls the painting of Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878), and Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Peña (1808–76).

After his death, Fontanesi's work experienced a renaissance of sorts. In 1892 he was honored with a retrospective at Turin's annual exhibition of the Società Promotrice per le belle arti in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. As one critic noted: "a triumph was had and had in full by Fontanesi. Many…had but one exclamation with regard to this exhibition: *what an artist! He is so modern!*"[97] Fontanesi's juxtapositions of color and his handling of contrasting tones caused another critic to remark: "The dominant crudeness of the passages between one hue and another logically made Fontanesi's paintings resemble tapestry."[98] This cutting comparison foreshadowed criticisms of the Divisionists three decades later, which were peppered with analogies between the textured surfaces of their paintings and lace, embroidery, or tapestry.[99] Indeed, Fontanesi was admired by the

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96 Antonio Fontanesi, *Tranquility* (*La quiete*), 1860, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 119 cm, Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea, Turin.

97 "*un trionfo lo ha dato e lo ha dato tutto per il Fontanesi. Quanti…non hanno avuto, a proposito di questa esposizione, che una esclamazione sole:* che artista quel Fontanesi! Quanto è moderno!" Giulio Carotti, "I pittori Fontanesi e Delleani: Ricordi delle due esposizioni di Torino I" *L'Illustrazione italiana* 19, no. 36 (September 4, 1892): 150-51.

98 "*La soverchia crudezza di passaggi da una tinta all'altra fece assomigliare giustamente i quadri del Fontanesi a lavori di tappezzeria*." F. Avinzi Cagnola, "Appendice-Esposizione della Società Promotrice di Belle Arti in Torino (1862)," *Gazzetta di Torino* (Turin) no. 178, June 30, 1862. Cited in Rosanna Maggio Serra, "Il vero e il paesaggio in Piemonte: Vent'anni di polemiche e dibattiti," in Renato Barilli, et al., *Il secondo '800 italiano: Le poetiche del vero* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1988), 99-100.

99 These range from Luigi Chirtani's attack on the works in the 1891 Brera Triennial (which is analyzed at length in Chapter 3), in which he refers to Divisionism as akin to tatting or weaving, to Vittorio Pica, who says of the technique: "[it] demonstrates a certain crude aspect of tapestry or embroidery done with tiny glass beads that is not very pleasing to the eye." ["'*mostra un certo grossolano aspetto di tappezzeria o di ricamo a perline di vetro non molto gradevole all'occhio***.**"] See Luigi Chirtani, "A Brera: Discorsi a ritagli," *Corriere della sera* (Milan) 16, no. 132, May 15-16, 1891, 3; and Vittorio Pica, "Impressionisti, divisionisti e sintetisti." *Il marzocco* 2, no. 2 (February 14, 1897): 3. An interesting parallel to the analogy between weaving and painting is that Debora Silverman identifies in the art of Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1809). However, his emulation of weaving techniques in painting to achieve textile–like surfaces and

younger generation, as Angelo Morbelli's correspondence attests. In 1892 he wrote to Grubicy of a visit to the retrospective in Turin: "I must say that…everyone was in agreement and enthusiastic about Fontanesi, I speak of those friends who came to Turin."[100] The evolution from Fontanesi to the Divisionists was generally recognized by the turn of the century, when a critic reviewing the one-person exhibition dedicated to the deceased artist at the 1901 Venice Biennale [Venice Biennial] wrote: "Now Fontanesi's technique is in fact full of daring and within it is possible to find all the elements of what was invented later, not excluding the segmenting strokes of Giovanni Segantini."[101]

Federico Zandomeneghi

The Venetian-born Federico Zandomeneghi (1841-1917) was another artist with connections to the Macchiaioli circle whose work anticipated aspects of Divisionism.[102] Zandomeneghi became acquainted with the Macchiaioli while living in Florence early in his career, and developed a close friendship with Diego Martelli. He remained in contact with the Florentine group after moving to France in 1874. In Paris he became, along with Giovanni Boldini (1842-1931) and Giuseppe De Nittis (1846-1884), one of the

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textures was intentional. Moreover, for Van Gogh, the association between painting and craft was positive and underscored the honest dimension of manual labor. This theme runs through Silverman's book. See Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000), especially 81, 140-41, 213-14, 258-61, 405-12.

100 "*debbo dire che…tutti furono concordi ed entusiasti del Fontanesi, parlo degli amici venuti a Torino.*" Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, September 20 [?], 1892, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.50.

101 "*Ora la tecnica del Fontanesi è per l'appunto piena di audacie e in essa si potrebbero trovare gli elementi di tutto quello che è stato inventato più tardi non esclusi i tratteggiamenti di Giovanni Segantini.*" Diego Angeli, "L'esposizione di Venezia: Antonio Fontanesi," *Il marzocco* 6, no. 18 (May 5, 1901): 2.

102 For Zandomeneghi see Francesca Dini, *Federico Zandomeneghi: la vita a le opere* (Florence: Il Torchio, 1989); and Raffaele De Grada, et al., *Federico Zandomeneghi: Un veneziano a Parigi* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1988).

internationally recognized Italian expatriates. This trio of talented painters—all of whom left Italy in the late 1860s and early 1870s—became friendly with the French Impressionists. Zandomeneghi met Edgar Degas (1834-1917) through Martelli, and thus entered the French Impressionists' orbit. He showed in several of the Impressionists' exhibitions, including the final one, in 1886, which launched French Neo-Impressionism.[103] In fact, Zandomeneghi was among the artists whom the critic Félix Fénéon treated in his seminal discussion of Neo-Impressionism in his review, "VIII^{e} Exposition Impressionniste."[104] By 1888 Zandomeneghi had perfected a long, thin stroke, by which he applied distinct colors. Influenced by his contact with the Neo-Impressionists, it bore a close relationship to the filigreed, curving brushwork the Italian Divisionists subsequently evolved. Zandomeneghi's painting shares some similarities with that of Georges Seurat. His slender, unselfconscious nudes, such as the one in *Nude Woman Drying her Hair* (*Nudo di donna che si asciuga i capelli*, c. 1890-95 [fig. 12]), are, for instance, visually reminiscent of Seurat's *The Models* (*Les Poseues*), of 1886-88.[105]

Italian artists were interested in the successes of their compratriots abroad and were aware of the activities of those who had gone to Paris, following their careers when possible. Press on the Italians in Paris, such as Fénéon's 1886 review, which signaled Zandomeneghi's presence in this significant exhibition, would have been read in Italy.[106]

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103 For more on the connection between Zandomeneghi and the French Impressionists, see Ann Dumas, *Degas e gli italiani a Parigi* (Ferrara: Ferrara arte, 2003).

104 Félix Fénéon, "VIII^{e} Exposition Impressionniste," *La Vogue* (June 13-20, 1886): 261-75. This piece later appeared in Fénéon's *Les Impressionistes en 1886* (Paris: La Vogue, 1886).

105 Federico Zandomeneghi, *Nude Woman Drying Her Hair* (*Nudo di donna che si asciuga i capelli*), c. 1890-95, pastel on paper; 64 x 36 cm, private collection.

Italians artists who visited the 1889 Exposition Universelle paid special attention to the works in the Italian pavilion, including those of Zandomeneghi.[107] In addition, an especially strong web of connections persisted between Zandomeneghi and Italy, such as his correspondence with Fattori (Nomellini's teacher). Given this set of circumstances, Zandomeneghi likely served as a concrete link between Neo-Impressionism in France and Divisionism in Italy.

Filippo Carcano

While Zandomeneghi followed the route to Impressionism and beyond once in Paris, subsequent to his experience with the painting executed by the Macchiaioli, the larger impulse towards Naturalism, in part inspired by the Tuscan milieu, was embraced by many of his contemporaries in Italy. One of the most representative artists of this trend, to be examined here in closer detail, was Filippo Carcano (1840-1914). As Aurora Scotti Tosini has shown, Carcano advanced the Lombard school of painting by way of Realist scenes of daily life. Although his images could be misconstrued as genre painting, they avoided the anecdotal or sentimental traditionally associated with this subject matter.[108] A Milan-based painter trained at the Brera, Carcano was familiar to the

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106 Grubicy, for example, had a subscription to *L'Art Moderne*. See Annie-Paule Quinsac, "Dibattito teorico intorno al divisionismo: Note sulla fortuna critica del movimento," in *L'Età del divisionismo*, eds. Gabriella Belli and Franco Rella (Milan: Electa, 1990), 101.

107 Grubicy, Morbelli, and Pellizza all went to the 1889 Exposition. For Grubicy's visit see Sergio Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon: 1851-1920* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 1995), 11. Morbelli's visit is documented in a letter to Grubicy. Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, October 21, 1889, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.28. Scotti discusses Pellizza's reactions to the Paris fair. Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*,10-12

108 See Aurora Scotti [Tosini], "Un caposcuola della pittura lombarda: Filippo Carcano," in *Filippo Carcano (1840-1914): Vedute milanesi e panormai lombardi*, ed. Magda Valentini (Milan: Edi Artes, 1987), 8-9. In addition to this catalogue, one of the only other more recent resources on the artist is Guido Cesura, *Filippo Carcano* (Milan: Cavalotti, 1986). A contemporary article which provides insight into

Divisionists, for whom he held particular relevance. Although Carcano was not a supporter of the movement, he was undoubtedly one of the Italian artists who unwittingly shaped intrinsic concepts regarding the juxtaposition of complementary color and the distinct use of separated strokes; his own style was distinguished by short staccato brushmarks, as seen in his small study, *Procession at Valcava* (*Processione in Valcava*, c. 1884 [fig. 13]).[109] Not only did Carcano paint with a technique that served as a prototype for the Divisionists, but his subject matter also laid the groundwork for them, ranging from socially-aware urban images like his 1881 *The Break during Construction Work* (*L'ora del riposo durante i lavori*), of men lingering about during a pause from their manual labor, to often freely realized *plein-air* landscapes executed in the Lombard *campagna*, to more finished mystical religious themes bordering on Symbolism in his later career.

Grubicy, recognizing the importance of Carcano, dedicated much of his early art criticism to the painter's work. Of special interest to the current discussion is the manner in which Grubicy analyzed Carcano's painting around the spring of 1886, the year in which Grubicy also learned of Neo-Impressionism (to be discussed below). In his criticism Grubicy described Carcano's "divided" stroke. While he does not say as much, he may have been seeking to locate an artist in Italy whose painting practices could be

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Carcano's reputation during his life time is Emilio Gussalli, "Artisti contemporanei: Filippo Carcano," *Emporium* 9, no. 54 (June 1899): 403-15.

109 Filippo Carcano, *Procession at Valcava* (*Processione in Valcava*), c. 1884, oil on canvas, 22 x 30 cm. The Gilgore Collection, Naples, Florida. Carcano was among those on the jury for the 1891 Brera Triennale who did not vote in favor of either Emilio Longoni's *The Strike's Spokesperson* nor Gaetano Previati's *Maternity*, both radical Divisionist pictures. Official internal memo generated by the President's office, Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F II 23. Scotti Tosini, among others, has made clear that Carcano was not seeking to paint in a Divisionist technique, but he did have an interest in optics and in the separation of colors, often in complementary combinations, which is evident in his works. Scotti [Tosini], "Un caposcuola della pittura lombarda," 13. In a close study of some of Carcano's landscape studies which I have undertaken I could see quite clearly the separate, dot-like strokes of individual color. This is evident in *Processione in Valcava*.

equated with the most modern innovations occurring in France. In his analyses of Carcano's style, Grubicy's descriptions suggested that the Naturalist painter's brushwork was akin to this modern idiom: "rebelling against his venerated master Hayez, he invented the use of the long paint brush to obtain, with mathematical transposition to the canvas, single marks of color that he saw in the real world, the optical illusion of light which expands in the landscape and creates of it an environment."[110] Later, Grubicy would specifically position Carcano as an unknowing progenitor to the Divisionists, whose use of optical theory anticipated theirs.[111]

Attilio Pusterla

Among the other Italian artists whose work demonstrated Realist tendencies, the younger Attilio Pusterla (1862-1941) warrants a brief mention, as a position of consequence is generally ascribed to his painting in the lineage that led to the Divisionists.[112] Pusterla was from an impoverished Milanese family, but managed to

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110 "*ribellandosi al suo venerato maestro Hayez, inventava l'uso del lungo pennello per ottenere, colla matematica trasposizione su la tela delle singole macchie di colore che vedeva sul vero, l'illusione ottica della luce che si spande nel paesaggio e ne crea l'ambiente.*" Vittore, "L'arte a Milano IV," *La riforma* (Rome) 20, no. 129, May 9, 1886, 3. While Grubicy praised Carcano's brushwork, he criticized his dogmatic commitment to painting "*dal vero,*" which he felt was too clinical and done at the expense of the potential expression of less concrete concepts and feelings. Vittore, "L'arte a Milano V," *La riforma* (Rome) 20, no. 132, May 12, 1886, 3. This demonstrates a certain prescience as this issue of simulacra versus the emergence of non-realist pictorial conventions that evoked abstract sentiments became central to discussions of Divisionist art during the course of the 1891 Brera Triennial to be treated in Chapter 3.

111 Vittore Grubicy, "La Divisione ottica dei colori," in *Prima Esposizione Triennale Brera 1891. Tendenze evolutive nelle arti plastiche*. *Pensiero italiano* 9 (Milan: Tipografia Cooperativa Insubria, 1891), 80.

112 Little is known of Pusterla's painting from before the turn of the century. He emigrated to the United States in 1899 and few of the works executed in Italy seem to have survived. Correspondingly, there is little scholarship on this period of the painter's production with the exception of *Immagini di vita proletaria: Attilio Pusterla e le Cucine economiche* (Milan: Silvano, 1980). The biographical information here is drawn from Giovanna Ginex's essay and biography in that catalogue, "Il dipinto di Attilio Pusterla *Le cucine economiche* e altre immagini della fame nella stampa milanese, 1880-1898," 9-16; and "Biografia," 35-37.

attend courses at the Brera, where he met the older Carcano and befriended the Divisionists enrolled there: Longoni, Morbelli, Previati, and Segantini. While few of Pusterla's paintings have been located, *The Porta Nuova Soup Kitchen* (*Le cucine economiche di Porta Nuova* (c. 1886-87 [fig. 14]) has survived.[113] The *Soup Kitchen* garnered attention when exhibited at the 1887 annual exhibition at the Brera, and earned mention in criticism of the time. The painting also caught the eye of Alberto Grubicy who purchased it and exhibited it in 1888 in a London exhibition he and Vittore organized, along with pre-Divisionist canvases by Segantini and Morbelli.[114] A socially-minded representation of disenfranchised men, women, and children eating a free repast at long tables, *Soup Kitchen* portrays some of these individuals in an up-close fashion that immediately elicits the viewer's sympathy and hearkens to compositional strategies Morbelli would soon take up with his depictions of the elderly in a state home. While not painted with divided strokes, *Soup Kitchen* features striking juxtapositions of bright color that make for a mosaic-like effect. The overtly socialist scene and anomalous handling of strongly contrasting hues are elements which no doubt appealed to the Divisionists.

The Scapigliatura

The Scapigliati, of the same generation as Zandomeneghi and Carcano, were the Divisionists' immediate predecessors in Milan. The Scapigliati originated as a bohemian, Milanese and Turinese literary nucleus who shared a disdain for the provincial values and consumer lifestyle of the Italian bourgeoisie. By the 1870s the appellation was appended

113 Attilio Pusterla, *The Porta Nuova Soup Kitchen* (*Le cucine economiche di Porta Nuova*), c. 1886-87, oil on canvas, 138 x 203 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan.

114 *Illustrated Catalogue of Alberto Grubicy' s Picture Gallery in the Italian Exhibition in London* (Milan: Alberto Grubicy, 1888).

to like-minded artists who depicted contemporary cosmopolitan life.[115] Rejecting the historical or allegorical themes that prevailed in Italian art of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, the Scapigliati focused on portraiture and genre. Albeit anecdotal or sentimental in tenor by today's standards, these works were divergent in style from the conventional trends normally attached to this subject matter and rendered in ways that were seen to express inner emotions or states of mind. The Scapigliati artists were not connected by a specific set of stylistic traits, though their works are consistently marked by atmospheric, blurry environments, loose brushwork, and soft lines. The interpenetration of figure and ground, facilitated by the use of evanescent contours, also was typical, and figure in the paintings by the movement's two best-known proponents, Tranquillo Cremona (1837-1878) and Daniele Ranzoni (1843-1889).[116]

Scapigliato painting fared reasonably well among Milan's newly-minted intellectual class. The artists' professed antagonism toward the bourgeoisie did not inform their subject matter, and their patrons, although limited in number, included members of the affluent industrialist class that had taken root in the Northern cities of the industrial triangle. One of Cremona's most acclaimed paintings, *The Ivy* (*L'edera*, 1878 [fig. 15]), depicts an embracing couple in an operatic tableau. Posed by the musician, Alfredo Catalani, and Cremona's sister-in-law, Lisetta Cagnoli, it was commissioned by composer/musician, Benedetto Junck, and was staged in the artistic salon held at his

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115 The term "Scapigliatura," meaning disheveled, was borrowed from the novel, *La scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio* by Carlo Righetti, written under the alias Cletto Arrighi.

116 Other artists associated with the Scapigliatura included Federico Faruffini (1833-1869) and Luigi Conconi (1852-1917). While a really thorough study of the Scapigliatura has yet to be done, a recent catalogue raisonné exists for Cremona and Ranzoni. See Rossana Bossaglia, *Tranquillo Cremona: Catalogo ragionato* (Milan: Motta, 1994); and Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Daniele Ranzoni: Catalogo ragionato dei dipinti e dei disegni* (Milan: Skira, 1997).

home.[117] Ranzoni's flattering society portraits also reflected the tastes and desires of his patrons, such as *The Troubetzkoy Children* (*I figli Troubetzkoy*, ca. 1873-74 [fig. 16]). This elegant oval depicts the three offspring of the wealthy nobleman and arts supporter, Prince Pietro Troubetzkoy. The boys don lace jabots and the children are shown against a backdrop of exotic palm fronds, elements that highlight the family's affluence even within this purposely casual composition in which the children are posed on the ground around the large dog, who receives equal billing within the painting.[118]

Despite Cremona's premature death, Grubicy recognized the artist's influence on Italian painting and wrote of his legacy in his reviews for *La riforma*. [119] He lauded Cremona's virtuoso style and innovative brushwork, arguing that his "genius" prevented any artists from following directly in his footsteps.[120] Though Grubicy's hyperbolic pronouncement might technically have been true, the Scapigliati's *taches* of subdued pigment, although less regularized in application, and usually overlaid on a ground of a more solid tone, initiated an exploration of color relationships which blazed a trail for the Divisionists in their city of residence. When Cremona's or Ranzoni's work is examined closely, it is, in fact, distinguished by a pronounced stippling in distinct colors, often juxtaposed with other tones, which the Divisionists certainly saw and emulated.[121]

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117 Tranquillo Cremona, *The Ivy* (*L'edera*), 1878, oil on canvas, 133 x 99.5 cm, Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea, Turin. See Paolo San Martino's entry for this work in *L'Ottocento: Catalogo delle opere esposte*, ed. Rosanna Maggio Serra (Turin: Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea; Milan: Fabbri, 1993), 332.

118 Daniele Ranzoni, *The Troubetzkoy Children* (*I figli Troubetzkoy*), ca. 1873-74, oil on canvas, 116 x 138 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan.

119 See Anna Maria Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia 1885-1900*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), 86.

120 See Vittore, "L'arte a Milano V," *La riforma* (Rome) 20, no. 132, May 12, 1886, 3.

121 The best illustration of this relationship is present the early painting of Gaetano Previati, who even shared a studio with the Scapigliato artist Conconi. See Francesco Tedeschi, "Gaetano Previati: formazione

Realism, Naturalism, and Impressionism from Abroad

Barbizon

Foreign movements also provided significant points of departure for the Divisionists. French Realism and Naturalism were of pivotal thematic and stylistic import and the artist Jean-François Millet (1814-1875) was of particular relevance. His ideologies and subject matter were closely aligned with those of some Divisionists, such as the pervasive presence of the peasant, the concentration on rustic subject matter, and the underlying sympathy for a rural world that he purposely depicted untouched by the industrial one.[122] In fact, Millet's name appeared with a certain frequency in the writings and correspondence of the Divisionists. Grubicy dedicated an early article in *La riforma* to the exorbitant price fetched by Millet's *Angelus*.[123] Most of the young soon-to-be Divisionists would have had access to the monograph on Millet by Alfred Sensier.[124] We know Grubicy owned a copy and gave it to Giovanni Segantini, who read it in his turn.[125]

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e attività predivisionista," in *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920: Un protagonista del simbolismo europeo*, ed. Fernando Mazzocca (Milan: Electa, 1999), 32-39.

122 For Millet's portrayals of peasant life see Robert Herbert, "City vs. Country: The Rural Image in French Painting from Millet to Gauguin," chap. 2 in *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). See also T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1973; reprinted Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 72-98.

123 Vittore, "Mezzo milione per un quadro," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 25, January 25, 1887, 1. Rebora notes Grubicy's early interest in the Barbizon painters and, especially, Millet. See Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 3.

124 Alfred Sensier, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Jean-François Millet* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1881).

125 Matthias Frehner, "Un precursore dell'arte moderna. Giovanni Segantini – Vita e opere," in *Giovanni Segantini*, eds. Beat Stutzer and Roland Wäspe (Ostfildern: Hatje 1999), 18.

Among the Divisionists, Segantini was the artist most frequently compared to Millet, a correlation he resented.[126] Nonetheless, he certainly reinterpreted alpine landscape by way of Millet's own approach to rural subject matter. The secularized religious symbolism often seen in his peasant paintings—in which the peasant's bond to the earth and nature's cycles embodied a sort of untainted piety—found parallels in Millet's *oeuvre*.[127] Morbelli's painting also was aligned with that of the French painter, although in a more strictly formal fashion. His bent-over figures of rice weeders in fields closely echo, in their curved forms, those of Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857). Unlike Segantini, Morbelli was more comfortable acknowledging Millet's importance. Indeed, he was taken with the work of the French painter and, after visiting the Paris 1889 Expostion Universelle, expressed admiration for his painting, along with that of Camille Corot (1796-1875), Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884), and Pascal-Adolphe-Jean Dagnan-Bouveret (1852-1929).[128]

Travel abroad was not a prerequisite to see Barbizon and French Realist painting, which were known through French publications replete with illustrations. In addition, Diego Martelli, who was a Parisian correspondent for *La gazzetta d'Italia*, dedicated articles to these artists, which were read in Italy.[129] Actual paintings were available for viewing as well. Near Florence, in San Donato, there was the collection belonging to the

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126 See Giovanni Segantini to Alberto Grubicy, October 22/23?, 1889, and fn. 2 cited in Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Segantini: Trent'anni di vita artistica europea nei carteggi inediti dell'artista e dei suoi mecenati* (Oggiono, Lecco: Cattaneo, 1985), 218.

127 Annie-Paule Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne; origines et premiers développements, 1880-1895* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), 85.

128 Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, October 21, 1889, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.28.

129 Dini, *Diego Martelli*, 181-85.

Prince Anatole Demidoff. The Macchiaioli knew and visited the Prince's gallery and, possibly, the young Divisionist artists studying in Florence could have seen these paintings there too.[130] This collection contained works by Corot, members of the Barbizon school, and the academician Ernest Meissonier (1815-1891), among others.[131]

Impressionism

Impressionism, in turn, became known in Italy by the 1880s. Here, again, an important lynchpin in the dissemination of this movement was Diego Martelli. As early as 1878, Martelli brought two works by Camille Pissarro to exhibit in the Florence Promotrice held that year.[132] These works met with little understanding or success, but they mark the incipient interest in French Impressionism emerging among intellectuals in Italy. Then, in 1879, Martelli gave an important lecture on the Impressionists at the Circolo Filologico in Leghorn, in which he explained the lineage of Impressionism, beginning with its French forerunners from Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), to the Barbizon School, to Gustave Courbet (1819-1877).[133] Through Martelli and, in certain cases, through their own travels, the Macchiaioli also were familiar with Impressionism by this time, although they did not embrace the idiom.

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130 Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 147.

131 Meissonier, an artist grounded largely in genre, was an odd choice. Grubicy appeared to have held him in high esteem, at least until his full conversion to Divisionism. Grubicy goes from calling the older French painter "the illustrious Meissonier" ["*l'illustre Meissonier*"] to panning his art in the exhibition done in memoriam following the artist's death. See Vittore, "L'Esposizione a Venezia," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 100, April 10, 1887, 1; and Vittore Grubicy, "Meissonier e l'arte," *Cronaca d'arte* 1, no. 9 (February 12, 1891): 73.

132 Dini, *Diego Martelli*, 139.

133 Ibid., 146, 173-78.

By contrast, the younger Divisionists were emulating French Impressionists by the 1880s. Nomellini sought to replicate the loose brushwork and fleeting effects of light of Impressionist painting and was chastised for this by his teacher, Fattori.[134] As was discussed in Chapter 1, Morbelli took direct inspiration from Monet's paintings in his experiments with compositional and painterly models appropriate to the depiction of modern life.[135] Finally, while there do not appear to be specific references to prove this, Segantini seems to have looked to the work of Pissarro, whose pastoral subjects would have held special appeal for him. An examination of images depicting analogous subjects reveals commonalities that suggest Segantini had—at the very least—a general familiarity with Pissarro.

Parallels between Pissarro and Segantini are seen, for instance, by comparing the former's *Repose, Young Peasant Lying in the Grass* of 1882 [fig. 17] and Segantini's *Repose in the Shade* (*Riposo all'ombra*, 1892) [fig. 18].[136] As their similar titles indicate, the subjects are quite close. Supine peasant girls are seen in like poses, lying face down on the grass, their bodies at a diagonal within the rectangle of canvas, their feet at odd angles, and the implements of their trades (respectively a rake and a shepherd's staff) beside them to the right. The similarities continue. The variations in the direction and size of the broken brushwork in Pissarro's painting (which serve to differentiate discreet

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134 See Fattori's letter of January or February 1891, addressed to his students, and Giovanni Fattori to Plinio Nomellini, March 12, 1891; cited in Lamberto Vitali, ed., *Lettere dei macchiaioli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 64-67.

135 Morbelli's access to a photographic source for the Monet would suggest that other Divisionists could have also employed such sources. Certainly reproductions of Impressionist paintings were available and in circulation. However, I have not come across any further references to the use of these by other Divisionists.

136 Camille Pissarro, *Repose, Young Peasant Lying in the Grass*, 1882, oil on canvas, 64.5 x 78 cm, Kunsthalle Bremen; Giovanni Segantini, *Repose in the Shade* (*Riposo all'ombra*), 1892, oil on canvas, 44 x 68 cm, private collection, Zurich.

elements within the composition without the utilization of outline), are echoed in Segantini's *Repose*, where the irregular strokes used for grass, executed in broad daubs, differ from the small ciphers employed to portray the girl, as well as from the meticulous vertical lines defining the fence and buildings in the background. But their respective treatments of space set these works apart. Pissarro and his fellow Impressionists and, later, Neo-Impressionists, insisted upon the two-dimensionality of the canvas in their paintings. Here, the tilting lawn and the lack of a horizon line create a plane which calls attention to the physical surface of the composition. The girl lies almost awkwardly atop this plane and, even, seems to be slipping down off it, so radical is the angling of the pictorial surface towards the viewer.[137] Segantini, on the other hand, created the notion of illusory space in his image: the grass is flat, the fence is vertical, and the farm behind is recessed within the imaginary three-dimensional space of the picture. Indeed, this was a factor which distinguished Italian from French painting well into the twentieth-century. The Italians, due perhaps to the less adventurous course painting took in the nineteenth-century on the peninsula, as well as to the hold of Renaissance and even Baroque art over their imaginations by dint of its sheer presence throughout Italy, never fully abandoned spatial illusionism.

Victorian Painting

France was not the only foreign vein of artistic ore mined by the Italians. England proved just as significant. And, while French sources were not always openly recognized,

137 This flattened treatment of space evidences the influence of Japanese prints on French painting. While some Italian artists were familiar with Japanese prints it had less impact on the construction of pictorial space in Divisionist painting. Of the Divisionists, Grubicy was most interested in Japanese prints. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 117-18.

the Divisionists were outspoken in their admiration for the subject matter and hard-edged realism of the British Victorian painters.[138] The Italians looked across the Channel to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, drawn to their paintings with allusive religious, literary, and fairytale themes, as well as to those socially-conscious images of societal problems, and to the Pre-Raphaelites' stippled stroke and precise painting style, which also had a base in color theory.[139] All the major exponents of the PRB—a group formed much earlier in the century, in 1849—were known in Italy, including Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). The Divisionists were equally entranced by the dream-like images, often of the femme fragile or her wicked counterpart, the femme fatale, produced by the work of the next generation: particularly Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833-1898) and John William Waterhouse (1849-1917).[140] In addition, they revered the languid sensibilities of the Victorian Classicists and their canvases depicting mythologized visions of antiquity, gravitating especially to those of Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912).[141] Morbelli

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138 The Pre-Raphaelites' declared purpose to return to Italian Renaissance art also held appeal for the Italian Divisionists who themselves often remained committed to the modeled forms and, in some cases, religious subjects, of their avatars.

139 The literature on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is extensive. For a general reference, see Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). The most recent publication of note is Allen Staley and Christopher Newall, *Pre-Raphaelite Vision: Truth to Nature* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004). For an examination of Pre-Raphaelite color theory, see Helen Glanville, "Contemporary Color Theory," in Joyce H. Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques, 1848-1856* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 29-37.

140 See Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones, Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998); and Peter Trippi, *J. W. Waterhouse* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002).

141 See Stephen Jones, et al. *Frederic, Lord Leighton: Eminent Victorian Artist* (New York: H.N. Abrams; London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1996); and Edwin Becker et al., *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1836-1912* (New York: Rizzoli, 1997).

embraced—and even emulated—the stark depictions and social subjects of Victorian Social Realists such as Sir Hubert Von Herkomer (1849-1914). But the PRB and these other Victorian artists held particular appeal for the Divisionists following a more Symbolist strain, such as Gaetano Previati, who drew upon the beautiful women of Rossetti and the angelic figures of the latter-day Pre-Raphaelite Burne-Jones, or Pellizza, who took cues from Holman Hunt's allusive images of rural scenery. In addition, the PRB may have helped refocus the Divisionists' attention upon the value of the Italian artists of the fifteenth-century, an important resource, in particular, for their Symbolist production (a subject that will be dealt with in Chapter 5).

As with most artistic currents prevalent elsewhere in Europe, Italians seemed to have learned of most these English painters late, in the 1880s, when they already enjoyed well-established careers. The Divisionists read and admired Ruskin's writings, principally *The Elements of Drawing*.[142] We know Grubicy corresponded with Alma-Tadema and Lord Leighton, and spoke highly of them and of Millais and Burne-Jones in his criticism.[143] Angelo Morbelli wrote of being impressed by the work of Alma-Tadema

142 Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 170. John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1857). The Divisionists appear to have gone to great lengths to obtain Ruskin's publications. Morbelli wrote Grubicy of trying to find one of Ruskin's books (he does not specify which), through an acquaintance, the English writer Samuel Butler, noting: "Taking advantage of the fact that he at least is really English, I wrote him there to get news of the book by Ruskin if it is for sale to be found or not." ["*Approffitando che lui almeno è inglese davvero, gli ho scritto ivi[?] dia[?] notizia del libro di Ruskin se è vendibile ricercabile o nò*."] Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, October 4, 1891, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.47.

143 Rebora mentions Grubicy's contacts with Leighton and Alma-Tadema. See Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 10. In Grubicy's correspondence, the friendship with Leighton is evidenced, for example, by the letter written in Italian that the English artist sent him when he was the President of the Royal Academy of Arts, apologizing for his absence at the inauguration of The Italian Exhibition in London in 1888. Frederic Leighton to Vittore Grubicy, [1888], Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.1.1.532. Grubicy praised the work of Alma-Tadema, Burne-Jones, Leighton, and Millais in "Le esposizioni artistiche di Londra," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 164, June 12, 1888, 1.

and the English in general, at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris.[144] By the mid-1890s, articles in three of Italy's most prominent avant-garde journals, *Il convito*, *Emporium*, and *Il marzocco*, paid paeans to Victorian art, and this English art resonated deeply with the Divisionists.[145]

The Science of Color

A final aspect of the cultural topos that catalyzed the Divisionist movement was the ever-expanding attention given to optics and color theory, concerns the Italian Divisionists shared with the French Neo-Impressionists.[146] The Divisionists could not have developed their own version of this system of paint application without knowledge of the ideas that had gained prominence by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Having come of age in an era of positivism, they connected the scientific theories regarding the physical relationships of hues and the physiology of visual perception (espoused in the writings of chemists and physicists among others) to the leitmotifs of progress and modernity. Most were wary of a too-rigorous deployment of a technique

144 Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, October 21, 1889, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.28.

145 *Il convito* emerged in 1895, in Rome; *Emporium*, also in 1895, in Bergamo**;** and *Il marzocco*, in 1896, in Florence. Articles on Victorian painters included, for example, Aristide Sartorio, "Nota su D.G. Rossetti Pittore," *Il convito* 2 (February 1895): 121-50, and 4 (April 1895): 261-86; M., "Artisti Contemporanei: Sir Frederic Leighton, P.R.A.," *Emporium* 1, no. 3 (March 1895): 167-82; G.B., "Artisti Contemporanei: Giorgio Federico Watts, R.A.," *Emporium* 1, no. 6 (June 1895): 411-27; G.B., "Artisti Contemporanei: Sir Edward Burne-Jones," *Emporium* 2, no. 12 (December 1895): 445-52; G.B. "Artisti Contemporanei: Sir Edward Burne-Jones II," *Emporium* 3, no. 1 (January 1896): 36-56; Ulisse Ortensi, "Artisti Contemporanei: Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *Emporium* 4, no. 19 (July 1896): 3-14; Ulisse Ortensi, "Artisti Contemporanei: Dante Gabriel Rossetti II," *Emporium* 4, no. 20 (August 1896): 83-95; "Artisti Contemporanei: Sir John Everett Millais, P.R.A.," *Emporium* 4, no. 21 (September 1896): 164-83; Vittorio Pica, "L'Arte mondiale e Venezia VII. I pittori inglesi," *Il marzocco* 2, no. 22 (July 4, 1897): 2-3; and Angelo Conti, "La religione dell'amore (John Ruskin)," *Il marzocco* 5, no. 4 (January 28, 1900): 2.

146 Quinsac documents the Divisionists sources for color theory in *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 171-77. For a close study of color theory and the French Neo-Impressionists see, especially, William Iness Homer, *Seurat and the Science of Painting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1964).

that might turn their images into formulaic and, consequently, uninspired works. The Neo-Impressionists in France had been accused of doing just that, and the same criticism was leveled at the Divisionists by conservative artists and critics. The Divisionists also believed that the empirical truths implicit in the adoption of color theories countered criticism directed at those among them who turned to Symbolist imagery and composition, developing anti-realist conceptions of space and form. These tropes were viewed by detractors as signposts of a decline in Italian artists' abilities to paint.[147]

The scientific dimension of Divisionist painting was made much of in the face of barbs criticizing the soundness of the style. A renowned defense of Divisionism, citing its scientific roots as proof of its authority, appeared in an 1893 issue *Vita moderna*, a short-lived avant-garde journal edited by Divisionist supporter Gustavo Macchi, which favored both socialist politics and positivist philosophy (and regularly featured articles by, for example, Cesare Lombroso). This article by a sympathetic critic, Alfredo Melani, took as its title a famously negative catch-phrase, "La pittura a puntini" [the dot painting]. In his text, Melani argued that Divisionism be taken seriously because of its grounding in science: "Dot painting, ridiculed even by some artists, can be appealing or not, but it is certain that it rests on a scientific base as resistant and strong as a mass of granite."[148] Melani went on to trace with some detail the processes by which lines of color would produce greater luminosity when juxtaposed, rather than being mixed on the canvas, as they acted differently upon the retina. The precision of Melani's account in a cultural journal that was not directed at scientists (although it did include a short science column

147 This issue is dealt with in Chapter 3.

148 "*La pittura a puntini messa a ridicolo perfino da alcuni artisti può[,] essere o no simpatica ma[,] è certo che riposa sur una base scientifica resistente e forte come una massa di granito*." Alfredo Melani, "La pittura a puntini," *Vita moderna* 2, no. 24 (June 11, 1893): 195.

on subjects of popular interest), revealed not only the weight the scientific argument was given with regard to the movement, but the extent to which the Divisionists had embraced color and optical theories by 1893.

There is evidence that the Divisionists were seeking to acquaint themselves with treatises on pigment and vision. By 1891, Grubicy had dedicated a topical article, "La divisione ottica dei colori," to an overview of optical theory and color in an argument in favor of artists who used such techniques in their search for luminosity.[149] His main sources were *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs* by French chemist Michel-Eugène Chevreul (1786-1889), and *Modern Chromatics* by American physicist Ogden Rood (1831-1902).[150] Italians artists read both books in French, a language many of them knew (by 1881, Rood's book was translated as *Théorie scientifique des couleurs*).[151] In addition, some painters were familiar with Charles Henry's (1856-1926) *Cercle chromatique*, a study of the physical and psychological impact of color, which appeared in 1888.[152] Another font, read in French, was Hermann von Helmholtz's (1821-1894) "*L'Optique et la peinture*," an essay published in Ernst Wilhelm von Brücke, *Principes scientifiques des beaux-arts*.[153] The Divisionists also had Italian sources on color theory,

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149 Vittore Grubicy, "La divisione ottica dei colori," 80-84.

150 Michel-Eugène Chevreul, *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortiment des objets colorés considérés d'après cette loi* (Paris: Léonce Laget, 1969; facsimile of orig. ed. Paris: Pitois-Levrault, 1839). Ogden Rood, *Modern Chromatics, with applications to art and industry* (New York: Appleton, 1879).

151 Rood's touchstone on the perception of color was published in French as *Théorie scientifique des couleurs et leurs applications à l' arts et à l'industrie* (Paris: G. Baillière, 1881).

152 Charles Henry, *Cercle chromatique: Présentant tous les complements et toutes les harmonies des couleurs* (Paris: C. Verdin, 1888).

153 Hermann von Helmholtz, "L'Optique e la peinture," in Ernst Wilhelm von Brücke, *Principes scientifiques des beaux-arts: Essais et fragments de théorie* (Paris: G. Baillière, 1878). Originally "Optisches über Malerei," the essay appeared in Helmholtz's *Populäre wissenschaftliche Vorträge*, vol. 2

although of a secondary and, therefore, less influential nature. Principle among these were Luigi Guaita's *La scienza dei colori e la pittura* and Giulio Bellotti's *Luce e colori*.[154]

In the early phases of their development of Divisionism, most Italians did not study techniques systematically, nor did they read and absorb all of these scientific and theoretical treatises before painting in this style. Initially, they gleaned information on optics and color theory through secondary sources informed by the writings of Chevreul, Rood, and others—such as the summary explanations appearing in French, Belgian, and Italian journals in the mid- to late 1880s (to be discussed below). Diaries and letters evidence individual Divisionists' enthusiastic embrace of and struggles with the newly discovered method. In an 1889 letter to his brother Previati alluded to the "new technique of breaking up color, a technique that gives the impression of a greater intensity of light," which signaled his early experiments.[155] Morbelli excitedly announced his foray into Divisionism in a letter to Grubicy dated July 13, 1890: "I am not unhappy with a dawn that I am making, and I find exactly right the divided theory of colors."[156] On June 17, 1891, again writing to Grubicy, Morbelli revealed his ongoing interest in color and optical theories, remarking that one of the priests at the Pio Trivulzio, a hospice for the

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(Braunschweig: F. Vieweg und Sohn, 1876), and was a more accessible text based on Helmholtz's *Handbuch der physiologischen Optik* (Leipzig: Voss, 1867). This more complex study also appeared in French, as *Optique physiologique*, trans. Emile Javal and N. Th. Klein (Paris: Victor Masson et Fils, 1867).

154 See Luigi Guaita, *La scienza dei colori e la pittura* (Milan: Hoepli, 1893); and Giulio Bellotti, *Luce e colori* (Milan: Hoepli, 1886).

155 "*tecnica nuova delle spezzatura del colore, una tecnica che dà l'impressione di una maggiore intensità di luce*," cited in Nino Barbantini, *Gaetano Previati* (Rome and Milan: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1919), 74.

156 "*Non sono malcontento d'un alba che faccio, e trovo giustissima la teoria div.ne dei colori.*" Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, July 13, 1890, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.32.

elderly where he often painted, had sent him a list of works on optics.[157] Pellizza initially learned of the technique through paintings exhibited in the 1891 Brera Triennale, and the avalanche of press around these, especially in the *Cronaca d'arte* to which he subscribed.[158] In that same year he made mention of Divisionism in a letter to Nomellini: "in practice I believe it absolutely right that colors purely applied on the painting give greater luminosity and brilliance…whether put on as dots or lines etc. I am convinced through trials."[159] Later, he would rely upon Morbelli's guidance when he pointedly undertook a close study of the original treatises. On December 5, 1894, he requested a copy of Rood's book, saying that he had read Guiata and Bellotti.[160] Morbelli also noted Sottocornola's efforts to learn the technique in a letter to Grubicy: "Sottocornola wrote that he could not visit me, and that in his work on division he is convinced he still knows nothing!"[161]

Previati was the artist who took the most active interest in the study of painting techniques involving color theory, translating J.-G. Vibert's *La science de la peinture*

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157 Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, June 17, 1891, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.41.

158 Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*, 24. However, he went on to purchase several of these treatises which are still present in his library which has been preserved to this day. These include the aforementioned 1881 French edition of Rood, and later editions of Ernst Wilhelm Brucke and Hermann von Helmholtz, *Principes scientifiques des beaux-arts* (Paris: Alcan, 1891); and Luigi Guiata, *La scienza dei colori e la pittura* (Milan: Hoepli, 1896). Studio-Museo Pellizza da Volpedo, inv. nos. 77, 13, and 44.

159 "*tengo per norma giustissima che i colori messi puri sul dipinto dan maggior luminosità e brillantezza non noto se messi a puntini o a linette ecc. mi son convinto per prove*." Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Catalogo dei manoscritti di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo provenienti dalla donazione Eredi Pellizza* (Tortona: Comune di Tortona, 1974), 29.

160 Reproduced in Teresa Fiori, *Archivi del divisionismo*, intro. Fortunato Bellonzi, 2 vols. (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1968), 1: 172.

161 "*Sottocornola mi scrisse di non poter venire, e che nel suo lavorare a divisione, si convinse di aver capito di non saperne ancora nulla!*" Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, October 27, 1895, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.83.

(1891), a painting manual by a professor in Paris who was both a chemist and an artist.[162] In the preface, Previati waxed poetically on the book's focus on art's empirical basis and linked it to the legacy of the Old Masters: "With the work of Vibert, at the same time analytic and passionate, patient and revelatory, pictorial practice rises to real science establishing, in the same way as with chemical and physical laws, those bases already divined and conquered by the indefatigable investigations of the old masters."[163] Previati later wrote his own books on painting. The first of these, published in 1905 by Fratelli Bocca—the same Milanese editorial house that issued an Italian translation of Ruskin's *Elementi del disegno e della pittura* in 1898—was *La tecnica della pittura*, a basic primer on painting that had a "scientific" dimension (although not a very developed one), with sections on the molecular and chemical make-up of pigments.[164] With *I principii scientifici del divisionismo (la tecnica della pittura)* (1906), Previati specifically

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162 Jehan-Georges Vibert, *La scienza della pittura*, trans. Gaetano Previati (Milan: Demarchi, 1893). This seems to have been an oft-consulted book. Segantini referred to it in 1896, writing in a letter to Vittore Grubciy that he was reading Vibert regarding the use of colors. See Giovanni Segantini to Vittore Grubicy, June 27, 1896, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.6.3. The book also appears to have been an oblique promotional tool for the use of Lefranc paints, as the appendix includes a "Garanzia Commerciale" [Warranty] stating that all of the new products discussed in the book can be found at Lefranc, Vibert, 299. Lefranc was a French brand of pigment the Divisionists all began to employ by the 1890s, as these colors seem to have maintained a greater intensity when applied. Grubicy published an article on Lefranc paints and noted that Segantini, Morbelli, and Previati all used these. See Vittore Grubicy "Notizie e tecniche pei pittori," *La riforma* (Rome) 27, no. 100, April 10, 1893, 2. Morbelli wrote an endorsement of sorts to be published in the *Cronaca d'arte* upon the request of Grubicy. See Angelo Morbelli draft endorsement, included with a letter to Grubicy, June 25, 1891, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.42. Segantini's letters to the Grubicy brothers often included requests for more Lefranc paints. See, for example an undated letter to Alberto from 1885 cited in Gioconda Laeykauf-Segantini, *Giovanni Segantini 1858-1899: Aus Schriften und Briefen; Da scritti e lettere* (Maloja: Innquell-Verlag, 2002), 30. Pellizza also switched to this brand in 1892. See Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*, 15.

163 "*Coll'opera del Vibert, ad un tempo analitica ed appassionata, paziente e rivelatrice, la pratica pittorica assurge a vera scienza fissando, alla stregua delle leggi chimiche e fisiche quelle basi già divinate e conquistate dalle indefesse ricerche degli antichi maestri*." Gaetano Previati, "Preface," in Vibert, *La scienza della pittura*, p. III. Here, too, we see science—used to connect modern art to that of the Old Masters—as evidence of Divisionism's validity.

164 The chapter entitled *Le sostanze coloranti* [*Pigments*] has the following subheadings: *La costituzione molecolare* [*Molecular constitution*]; *La costituzione chimica* [*Chemical constitution*]; and *La resistenza* [*Resistance*], 149-74.

addressed and codified Divisionism, though by this time the style already had been superseded by new movements in Europe. Nonetheless, his books were read by the Futurists, who borrowed liberally without necessarily crediting the (by then) "old master."[165] Towards the end of his career, Previati authored *Della pittura; tecnica ed arte* (1913), another manual on painting that included a discussion of Divisionism and paid particular attention to the technical aspects of achieving bright color, light, and luminosity.[166] While written years apart, all three of Previati's books underscored the importance of scientific theories to the Divisionists' art.

Having more fully absorbed ideas and theories on the function of color and light as outlined in the readings listed above—as with the Neo-Impressionists—the Italian Divisionists did not use totally undiluted pigment directly on their canvases. Instead, they blended color to a certain degree on their palettes before painting with it. They did not prepare their canvases with traditional dark grounds, or mix their hues upon the canvas to create gradations in tone per se to effect a natural impression or a seamless surface. Even though their color was sometimes layered, it was always applied with distinct, visible strokes in a generally regularized fashion, ranging from short, energized daubs to longer, undulating lines. When viewing a Divisionist work, one is conscious of paint and strokes. Surfaces are ridged and textured rather than smooth. This treatment of surface, combined with the breaking up of pigments into individual strokes, creates a shimmering plane of hues and achieves Segantini's goal of finding light in color.

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165 This will be treated in Chapter 6.

166 Gaetano Previati, *La tecnica della pittura* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1905); *I principii scientifici del divisionismo (la tecnica della pittura)* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1906); and *Della pittura: tecnica ed arte* (Milan: Fratelli Bocca, 1913).

Neo-Impressionism and Divisionism

As this chapter has thus far shown, Divisionism sprang from multiple artistic seeds and found some of its most important roots in the Italian artistic modes that directly preceded it and even coexisted with it for a time. Nonetheless, given the primacy of a French canonical narrative within nineteenth-century art historical discourse, Neo-Impressionism is often assumed to be the primary influence on the Italian style. However, while the Italians knew about the Neo-Impressionists, they would have had little opportunity to see their paintings in person in the late 1880s, when they were first exploring the divided idiom.[167] Instead, they read about the French, Belgian, and Dutch Neo-Impressionist painters and saw their works reproduced in journals. They used some of the same treatises on color, had comparable interests in science, and often believed in similar left-wing doctrines. These factors have, in the past, bolstered the argument that Divisionism was simply an outgrowth of Neo-Impressionism. In fact, this was not the case.

Divisionism's relationship to Neo-Impressionism is a complex one, upon which scholars differ. As Quinsac has documented, emphasis in criticism on the connection between the Divisionists and the Neo-Impressionists can be traced back at least as far as 1897, to the art critic Vittorio Pica.[168] In "Impressionisti, divisionisti e sintetisti," an overview of these three movements, published in *Il marzocco*, Pica attributed the Italian strain to repercussions felt from France.[169] But, over time, scholars' positions have

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167 Quinsac has tracked their movements in the late 1880s without finding such proof. Quinsac, Chapter 4 "De l'académie' aux premiers toiles 'divisées,' *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 91-130.

168 Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne,* 133.

169 Vittorio Pica, "Impressionisti, divisionisti e sintetisti," *Il marzocco* 2, no. 2 (February 14, 1897): 2-3.

oscillated. To cite but a few lines of argument: Bellonzi and Quinsac maintain that Divisionism was not an offshoot of Neo-Impressionism.[170] Quinsac also points out that Italians could not have seen much French Neo-Impressionism.[171] Mascherpa suggests that Grubicy might have seen the work of Seurat and Paul Signac in France.[172] Rebora states that even when attending the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889 Grubicy seemed to have no interest in Impressionism or Neo-Impressionism, focusing his attentions instead on academic art. Yet, he does note that between 1886 and 1889 Grubicy was doing his own variation of Divisionism.[173] Olson, though perhaps less reliable because not specifically a scholar of Divisionism, specifies that the Italian Divisionists could not have emerged without knowledge of the French Neo-Impressionists.[174] Belli is more measured in her opinions and proposes that a certain degree of exchange existed.[175]

Despite this cross-fire of opinions, the full spectrum of actual and likely connections between the Italian Divisionists and the French Neo-Impressionists has not been documented systematically. I do not presume to reconstruct all the possible pathways through which the Italians would have known of the French—a gargantuan

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170 Bellonzi, "*Il divisionismo*," in Fiori, *Archivi del divisionismo*, 13-32, and Quinsac's *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 131-55.

171 See, for example, Quinsac, "Dibattito teorico intorno al divisionismo: Note sulla fortuna critica del movimento," in Belli and Rella, *L'Età del divisionismo*, 101.

172 Giorgio Mascherpa, "Vittore Grubicy, pittore e profeta," in *Divisionismo italiano*, ed. Gabriella Belli (Milan: Electa and Museo d'arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 1990), 28.

173 Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 11, 33-34.

174 Roberta J. M. Olson, *Ottocento: Romanticism and Revolution in 19th-Century Italian Painting* (New York: The American Federation of Arts; Florence: Centro Di in association with the University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 37.

175 Gabriella Belli, "Néo-impressionnisme français et divisionnisme italien: Brève histoire d'une convergence culturelle," *La revue du Musée d'Orsay*, no. 12 (Spring 2001): 90-95.

undertaking perhaps worthy of a dissertation in and of itself—but also one that would give undue importance to the French antecedents. However, it is instructive to address a few key moments and issues to raise questions about the tenuous or not so tenuous nature of the Divisionist/Neo-Impressionist web. Therefore, the last section of this chapter will be dedicated to tracing some of these intersections and exploring the nuanced but important ways in which Divisionism and Neo-Impressionism differ.[176]

No scholar denies that French Neo-Impressionism was undoubtedly a source—at some level—for the basis of Italian Divisionism. The main bone of contention springs from the fact that it is unclear how much Neo-Impressionism the Italians may have actually seen early on. Nonetheless, the Italians learned of Neo-Impressionism through the profusion of literary and artistic journals that circulated in the late nineteenth century. They would have been aware of the wealth of writings by the French critic and anarchist Félix Fénéon in the Belgian review, *L'Art moderne*, as well as the references to the style in the French *La Vie moderne*. Moreover, the French Neo-Impressionists and the Italian Divisionists shared not only a common painting technique, but also analogous political ideals.[177] The 1890s were a time of insurgence in France as in Italy, and the

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176 Quinsac's scholarship constitutes one of the most important secondary bodies of material on Divisionism to date, begun in the late 1960s and still ongoing, and she is one of the primary scholars on Divisionism. Thus, her extensive research and writings have shaped much of the Divisionist canon in Italy and contributed significantly to the formation of the theory regarding Divisionism's independence from Neo-Impressionism. Consequently, it is primarily her scholarship that I will cite in terms of both our differences and concurrences.

177 The literature on the Neo-Impressionists and their anarcho-communist and socialist affiliations is well-established. Of particular note is Robert Herbert and Eugenia W. Herbert's "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac, and Others," *Burlington Magazine* 102 (November 1960): 473-82; and Eugenia Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). More recent publications include Robyn S. Roslak, "The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neo-Impressionism, Science, and Anarchism," *Art Bulletin* 73 (September 1993): 381-90; John Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1994), and Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 83-142.

communication and cross-over between anarchist, socialist, and communist groups in these two countries was commonplace. A forum for shared ideas could be found in left-wing political journals, such as Jean Grave's anarcho-communist *La Révolte* which featured sections on relevant news and political activities in various countries, among them Italy. Anarchists Émile Pouget's *Le Père peinard* and Louis Lormel's *L'Art littéraire* also were available abroad. Importantly, *Le Révolté*, for example, featured illustrations by Neo-Impressionist artists.[178] While these might not have conveyed the coloristic effects of complementary tones, they certainly made evident the system of painted dots.[179] Before launching into an examination of Italian Divisionism versus French Neo-Impressionism, it is helpful to review important moments of the French movement.

French Neo-Impressionism

Neo-Impressionism materialized with French painter Georges Seurat (1859-1891) and his 1884 *Bathers at Asnières*.[180] Seurat, who termed his technique chromo-

178 Grave (1854-1939), began publishing the journal in 1885 as *Le Révolté*, it became *La Révolte* in 1887, *Les temps nouveaux* in 1895, and was published until 1914. In 1891, for example, it included an unsigned article on Neo-Impressionist art and social purpose by Paul Signac. See "Un Impressioniste Camarade," "Impressionistes et révolutionnaires," *La Révolte* 4 (June 13-19, 1891): 3-4.

179 This marks one important example of a visual model Quinsac never discusses.

180 Robert Herbert's publications on Seurat have been indispensable, and are the primary resources which I have utilized for the section on Seurat and the French Neo-Impressionists. See, especially, Robert Herbert, et al., *Georges Seurat, 1859-1891* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991); and Robert Herbert, *Seurat: Drawings and Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Other sources I relied upon were Henri Dorra and John Rewald, *Seurat: L'Oeuvre peint, biographie et catalogue critique* (Paris: Les Beaux-arts, 1959); Michael F. Zimmermann, *Seurat: le sua opera e il dibattito estetico dell'epoca*, trans. Francesca Ricci (Milan: Rizzoli, 1992); Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, et al. *Signac, 1863-1935* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001); Martha Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); John Rewald, *Post-Impressionism: From Van Gogh to Gauguin* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956); and Jean Sutter and Robert Herbert, *The Neo-Impressionists*, trans. Chantal Deliss (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1970).

luminarisme (but also used the word "divisionism" to describe the method) was soon joined by a group of French adherents. The major proponents were: Charles Angrand (1854-1826), Edmond Cross (1856-1910), Albert Dubois-Pillet (1846-1890), Maximilien Luce (1858-1941), Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), Lucien Pissarro (1863-1944), and Paul Signac (1863-1935). The group debuted at the Eighth Impressionist Exhibition in Paris in 1886, where Seurat's epic *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884* (1884-86) was shown. The movement's great supporter, Félix Fénéon, drew attention to the technique in his first article addressing the Neo-Impressionists, "VIII[e] Exposition Impressionnistes," republished later that year in his *Les Impressionnistes en 1886*.[181] The principal excerpt on the Neo-Impressionists was then reprinted in *L'Art moderne* on February 6, 1887.[182]

In this pioneering essay on the novel style, Fénéon provided a veritable recipe for the divided technique. After noting that: "Mister Georges Seurat, Camille and Lucien Pissarro, Dubois-Pillet, and Paul Signac divide the hue in a conscious and scientific manner," he explained: "These colors, isolated on the canvas, recompose themselves on the retina: one thus has not a mix of "matter-colors" (pigments), but a mix of "light-colors."[183] Within his analysis Fénéon even mapped out the ratio and proportions of pigment, as established by Rood, necessary to obtain the desired intense luminosity and optical effects. Despite the detailed account of Neo-Impressionist painting in this article,

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181 Fénéon, "VIII[e] Exposition Impressionnistes," 261-75; and Fénéon, *Les Impressionistes en 1886*. For my analysis of Fénéon and his criticism I have relied heavily on the prodigious research of Joan Ungersma Halperin. See Félix Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que completes*, ed. Joan Ungersma Halperin (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1970), and Joan Ungersma Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Aesthete & Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

182 Félix Fénéon, "La Grande-Jatte," *L'Art moderne* 7, no. 6 (February 6, 1887): 43-44.

183 "*Ces couleurs, isolées sur la toile, se recomposent sur la rétine: on a donc non un mélange de couleurs-matières (pigments), mais un mélange de couleurs-lumières*." Fénéon, "La Grande-Jatte," 43. "*MM. Georges Seurat, Camille et Lucien Pissarro, Dubois-Pillet, Paul Signac, eux, divisent le ton d'une manière consciente et scientifique*." Fénéon, "VIII[e] Exposition Impressionniste," reprinted in Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, ed. Halperin, 35, or Fénéon, "La Grande-Jatte," 43.

it was not until a subsequent review, "L'impressionnisme aux Tuileries," written for *L'Art moderne*, that Fénéon coined the term "neo-impressionism."[184] Then, in 1887, Fénéon penned a historically defining piece, again for *L'Art moderne*, entitled "Le Néo-Impressionnisme," in which he discussed the works in this style in the third exhibition of the Société des artistes indépendants, and provided a point by point description of the application of color according to the "laws of simultaneous contrast."[185]

Fénéon—if the best-known—was not the only writer on the movement. In 1887 *La Vie moderne* published Gustave Kahn's "La Vie artistique," which, importantly, included print images of Neo-Impressionist drawings.[186] Those which most strikingly display the methodical exercise of tiny mark side by side were Dubois-Pillet's *Steamboat at Rouen* (*Vapeur à Rouen*), and a print based on one of Signac's most famous paintings, *The Dining Room* (*La Salle à manger*).[187] One of Seurat's drawings, *At the Eden-Concert* (*À l'Éden concert*), also was illustrated.[188] Though not specifically constituted of dots, it is one of the artist's signature drawings executed in 1883 and associated with his pointillist work. Realized in conté crayon, the black medium is laid on a highly grained paper surface in such a way as to exploit the weave for a textured surface that looks almost stitched. Viewed in conjunction with Fénéon's painstaking descriptions, these

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184 Félix Fénéon, "L'Impressionisme aux Tuileries," *L'Art moderne* 6, no. 38 (September 19, 1886): 300-02. Fénéon had just become the Paris correspondent for *L'Art moderne*. See Halperin, *Félix Fénéon*, 92.

185 Félix Fénéon, "Le Néo-impressionisme à la IV Exposition des Artistes Indépendants," *L'Art moderne* 7, no. 18 (May 1, 1887): 138-40. See also Henri Dorra, "Félix Fénéon: Neo-Impressionism (1887)," in *Symbolist Art Theories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 157-63.

186 Gustave Kahn, "La Vie artistique," *La Vie moderne* 9, no. 15 (April 9, 1887): 229-33. Subsequent issues would continue to reproduce Neo-Impressionist images, as with the works of Paul Signac.

187 The Signac painting is *The Dining Room* (*Salle à manger*), 1886/87, now in the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo.

188 The actual work is entitled *Singer at the Café-Concert* (*Chanteuse au café-concert*), c. 1887.

drawings conveyed something of the appearance of Neo-Impressionist painting, and even those who had not seen the bright images in person could have assembled the optical puzzle.

Grubicy and the Dissemination of "Divided" Color and Brushstroke

The Milanese dealer, artist, and critic, Vittore Grubicy de Dragon, was the figure largely responsible for introducing the concept of the divisionism in Italy, primarily through his art criticism.[189] He also was responsible for popularizing the appellation "Divisionism" in Italy.[190] The son of an Italian woman of aristocratic blood and a Hungarian nobleman who died young, leaving his family in difficult financial straits, Grubicy entered the world of commercial art to earn a living when fairly young, rather than attending the art academy and pursuing a strictly artistic career.[191] A man who thought on a grand scale, he actively called for artistic renewal in Italy as well as the pursuit of modernist axioms and saw Divisionism as a means of achieving both. Grubicy encouraged one of the artists he represented, Giovanni Segantini—perhaps the most famous of the Divisionist painters—in this direction. Segantini's *Mary Crossing the Lake* (*Ave Maria a Trasbordo*, c. 1886), was the first Divisionist work made in Italy.[192] Self-taught, Grubicy, who had begun to paint in 1884, first experimented with Divisionism between 1886 and 1889. Other artists—most in some way supported, patronized, or

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189 For biographical information on Grubicy I have relied upon the major reference on Grubicy, Rebora's *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*.

190 I have not found, to date, any specific reference to the exact source for the term "Divisionism" in Italy, but it stared to be used in the late 1880s and was subsequently codified.

191 Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 3.

192 Grubicy became Segantini's dealer in 1879. See Ibid., 6. Grubicy is the one to recall his influence on the creation of Segantini's first Divisionist work. See Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 86-87.

exhibited by Grubicy—soon followed his lead. Angelo Morbelli, who Grubicy also represented, emerged from Realist beginnings to produce his first "divided" work, *Dawn* (*Alba*), in 1890-91, but was likely reading about the method in *La riforma* in 1887.[193] Previati, previously associated with the Scapigliatura, turned to the new style at about the same time as Morbelli. Emilio Longoni followed in 1891. Plinio Nomellini, coming from a Macchiaiolo and Realist background, began his investigations around 1891-92. Giuseppe Pellizza took up the technique in 1892.[194]

Grubicy's familiarity with French and, most likely, Belgian Neo-Impressionism, came from a variety of fonts. Widely traveled, he spent time in the Netherlands and Belgium in the 1880s. At that time he focused on Hague School landscape by Anton Mauve and Jaap Maris (Grubicy called the latter "the most colossal of the living Dutch painters").[195] Though he does not seem to have visited the seminal exhibitions of Les XX

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193 Morbelli asks Grubicy to send him his latest *Riforma* articles. See Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, postcard, December 12, 1887, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.7.

194 According to Scotti Tosini, this is evidenced by three works *In the Hayloft* (*Sul fienile*), *Procession* (*Processione*), and *Dashed* Hopes (Speranze *deluse*). These date to 1893 and the latter two to 1894, but were begun in 1892. Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo. Catalogo generale*, 24. At this early stage it is tantamount to clarify that, while this was the beginning of the most vital period of Divisionist art-making, it was not necessarily matched in patronage, as the work was too new and different for many collectors, who preferred the more easily digestible Naturalist painting that prevailed in that time. Artists, thus, survived in a variety of ways. Several of the Divisionists had family money they could depend upon, as in the case of Morbelli, while Segantini and, for a period, Longoni were supported with a stipend by the Grubicy brothers. This said, some seminal works were purchased in this decade. Segantini benefited from the entrepreneurial abilities of Alberto Grubicy, who was his gallerist throughout the decade up until his death. The sale of his *Return to the Native Land* (*Ritorno al paese nativo*, 1895) in 1895 for 20,000 lire earned mention in *L'Illustrazione italiana*. A. Centelli, "Dell'Esposizione di Venezia," *L'Illustrazione italiana* 22, no. 40 (October 6, 1895): 210-11. Furthermore, notable works were purchased from individual artists. Morbelli's *Dawn* (*L'alba*, 1890-91) was acquired by the municipal museum in Barcelona, Spain, after being exhibited there in 1894. See letter from Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, June 25, 1894, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.73. Also in 1894, as a result of being shown in the Brera's second triennial exhibition, Longoni's *Reflections of a Starving Man* (*Riflessioni di un affamato*, 1894) was sold to Pietro Corletti on May 15, and Giuseppe Pellizza's *Dashed Hopes* (*Speranze deluse*) was sold to Ignazio Grün on May 18. Unbound ledger, "Esazione delle percentuali sulle opere vendute," Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F III 1. This underlines the importance of these exhibitions which will be discussed at further length in Chapter 3.

195 "*il piú colossale dei pittori olandesi viventi*." Vittore, L'arte a Milano IV," *La riforma* (Rome) 20, no.

in Brussels, Grubicy was apparently aware of Les XX by 1887, when he wrote of a group of artists who exhibited in Brussels annually.[196] Grubicy also traveled to Paris several times, but the timing of his trips indicates that he would have missed the Eighth Impressionist exhibition.[197] Grubicy may have, however, read reviews of or heard about Seurat's *Grande Jatte* and the Neo-impressionist gallery within that exhibition.[198] Most importantly, through the several French and Belgian journals to which he subscribed, such as *L'Art moderne*, Grubicy had learned something of Neo-Impressionism by 1886 or 1887.[199]

By 1887, Grubicy drew on these accounts in his own published art criticism. From 1886 to 1890, he was a frequent contributor to the Roman daily newspaper *La*

129, May 9, 1886, 3. Grubicy frequented the Dutch artists in The Hague in the early 1880s. Besides Mauve, he was acquainted with the work of painters such as George Breitner (prior to his Neo-Impressionist phase), Isaac and Josef Israels, Willem Maris, and Hendrik Willem Mesdag. See Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 6, 28-31.

196 "In Brussels there is an annual Exposition that puts at the disposal of about 30 artists—purposely invited six months prior—the number of spaces that accord with their request, an leaves entirely up to them the curating of the disposition of the works, which are presented as such, in isolated groups, with a very interesting and new effect." ["*A Bruxelles c'è un Esposizione annuale che mette a disposizione di una trentina di artisti—appositamente invitati sei mesi prima—degli spazi abbondanti secondo la richiesta, e lascia intieramente a loro la cura della disposizione delle opere, che si presentano così, a gruppi isolati, con un effetto interessantissimo e nuovo*."] See Vittore, "L'arte italiana a Venezia ed a Parigi," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 27, January 27, 1887, 1. By the beginning of 1890 Grubicy was corresponding actively with Octave Maus of Les XX with regard to the inclusion of Segantini's work in that year's exhibition. Octave Maus to Vittore Grubicy, February 6, 1890, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.1.1.586. In addition, he must have had some contact with Maus previously, as a postcard sent to Segantini in care of Grubicy is likely dated 1886. Octave Maus to Giovanni Segantini , June 30, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.1.1.586.

197 Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 8-11.

198 For a full bibliography of these reviews see Ruth Berson, ed., *The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874-1886: Documentation*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), 1: 427-75.

199 Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne,* 87; and Quinsac, "Dibattito teorico intorno al divisionismo: note sulla fortuna critica del movimento," in Belli and Rella, *L'età del divisionismo*, 101. She also notes that he read about the Neo-Impressionists. See *Segantini: Trent'anni*, 61-62 and fn. 8. Finally, Quinsac specifically cites that Grubicy learned of Seurat's theories in *La libre ésthétique*, although this would have postdated 1893, when Octave Maus began publishing the journal. See Quinsac, "Der Fall Segantini: Schwankugen in der Rezeptiogeschichte und die Bedeutung seines Werkes heute," in *Giovanni Segantini*, eds. Feliz Baumann and Guido Magnaguagno (Zurich: Kunsthaus, 1990), 114.

riforma, whose editor, Primo Levi,—also a highly regarded art critic and painter—was his friend.[200] He became a regular writer for the short-lived *Cronaca d'arte*, after it was founded by Scapigliato author Ugo Valcarenghi, in December 1890.[201] From the late 1880s onward, Grubicy began publishing articles treating the subject of Divisionism in these and other Italian journals and newspapers and became its major advocate in Italy, doing much to give the new idiom visibility and bring it to the attention of the Italians. It is revealing to take a moment and examine a seminal article by Grubicy that addresses issues connected to Divisionism and Neo-Impressionism, as it underscores what he considered important, what he might have taken from the writings of Fénéon and others, and, finally, what then served as the basis for Divisionist parameters in Italy.

In "I colori nell'arte," on the color theory of Ogden Rood, Grubicy traced his understanding of Neo-Impressionist conventions.[202] This significant article marked Grubicy's first mention the Neo-Impressionists in print and was the first in which he alluded to the optical painting technique.[203] A close reading of this text brings up some fundamental questions: Did Grubicy fully understand the information being disseminated about the Neo-Impressionist artists, their technique, color theory, and related optical effects? If so (as I maintain), why did he choose to emphasize different issues, in particular, the importance of form? I believe his shift in emphasis, in part, had to do with

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200 Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 9. *La riforma* was an important forum for modern thought and reflected the liberal attitudes and the prejudices of its founder, Crispi. Thus, articles advocated modernization and reform, but were ambivalent regarding foreign and, in particular, French innovations.

201 Ibid., 14.

202 Vittore, "I colori nell'arte," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 238, August 26, 1887, 1-2.

203 In the first paragraph Grubicy wrote: "In recent times much has been said about the scientific theory of colors, formulated by O.N. Rood, professor of physics at New York's Columbia College, and applied above all in Paris by the Neo-Impressionists." ["*Si è molto parlato in questi ultimi tempi della teoria scientifica dei colori, formulata da O.N. Rood professore di fisica al Collegio Columbia di Nuova York ed applicata sovra tutto a Parigi dai neo-impressionisti*."] Ibid., 1.

Grubicy's discomfort with the foreignness of the movement he hoped to promote in Italy. Grubicy, along with many young artists, desperately wanted the provincial Italian art scene to modernize. However, he wanted these art strategies to be identified with Italy, rather than be seen as deriving from a French idiom that was already well-established in Paris.

The ambiguities around the matter of influence are exemplified in this text for which Grubicy borrowed information from French and Belgian sources, but then developed them in a different direction. As Quinsac has shown, Grubicy took pointers from articles that had appeared in *L'Art moderne* for his examination of Rood's scientific theories regarding optics and color. While Quinsac mentions just two articles in *L'Art moderne* that Grubicy probably read (Fénéon's "L'impressionisme aux Tuileries" and "Le Néo-Impressionisme"), it seems safe to assume that the excerpt of Fénéon's *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* published as "La Grand-Jatte," in the February 1887 of *L'Art moderne*, which also made reference to Rood, was a central text.[204] Kahn's illustrated article, "La Vie artistique," published in April 1887 in *La Vie moderne*, was undoubtedly another source Grubicy might have consulted. All, needless to say, preceded Grubicy's essay by anywhere from three to eleven months.

Though Grubicy might not have intended outright plagiarism, he did not reveal that his discussions were not of his own invention. In actuality, while Grubicy began his article with a rather vague description of the role and importance of color (which does summarize some of Rood's theories, although with his characteristic lack of clarity, he did not state clearly that this was what he was doing), he did not merely restate remarks by Fénéon or Kahn, but rather reinterpreted what he had culled from his French

204 See Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne,* 136.

counterparts.[205] Grubicy was firm in declaring that form was more important than color, but he felt that Rood's theories, rooted in science, were valuable, leading him to pronounce: "Our artists could gain great advantages from the serious pondering of these concepts, resulting from the in-depth studies of a scientist such as Rood, whose works on the subject hold authority in all of the artistic world."[206] He then expounded on his belief that artists were gifted in the creation of form or in the application of color, and each should honestly determine his propensity to better develop his own particular talents. Grubicy's emphasis on form was actually of great significance because, as was already noted in the comparison of Pissarro and Segantini, Divisionist compositions retained three-dimensional modeling, unlike the flattened areas of color in many Neo-Impressionist paintings. While Grubicy could not have known the direction Divisionism's spatial conceptions would take, this alternate emphasis, one based firmly in Italian tradition and redolent of the country's most glorious moments in paintings, those of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, may have been instrumental for the Divisionist development of an approach that was different from that of the Neo-Impressionists.

Quinsac has posited that Grubicy understood little of Neo-Impressionism based on the apparently random selection of the issues that he recounted, his apparent lack of comprehension of the main elements of the style as outlined by Fénéon, and his conflation of certain artists' names, principally that of Impressionist Alfred Sisley (1839-

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205 Rebora also suggests that Grubicy was invested in going in a different direction from the French with Italian Divisionism. See Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 33-34.

206 "*Gran vantaggio potrebbero ritrarre i nostri artisti della seria ponderazione di questi concetti, risultanti da profondi studi d'uno scienziato come il Rood, i cui lavori sulla materia fanno autorità in tutto il mondo artistico*." Vittore, "I colori nell'arte," 2.

1899) with that of Seurat.[207] Moreover, she made much of the fact that he mentioned the term Neo-Impressionism only once, and that he alluded to no artist by name (at least not correctly).[208] He may not have actually seen these artists' works, but he certainly knew the names of Neo-Impressionism's main practitioners, and had some familiarity with their style; in his reviews, Fénéon devoted discrete sections to the minute description of individual works by each artist. Grubicy might have consciously opted to skirt crediting the French origins of a painting approach that he was encouraging young Italian artists to emulate. Identifying this movement as French might have made the style less appealing to Italians and would have undermined his (and many Italian artists') own nationalist goals of wanting to fashion a modern idiom to call their own.

Circa 1886: Segantini vs. Seurat

As it may be virtually impossible to determine exactly how much influence the French ultimately had on the Italians in the genesis of Divisionism, the best proof is to be found in the concrete evidence of the paintings themselves. The Italians never employed the "*point*" that was synonymous with Neo-Impressionism, and were much less rigorous in their actual use of the chromatic theories of complementary color on canvas. Nor did they address urban life or spectacle, with the exception of those works that had a social

207 Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne,* 88, 137.

208 Quinsac reprinted this article in *La peinture divisionniste*, under the heading "First article by Grubicy on the application of 'Rood' in art, product of a careful reading of *L'Art moderne*." "*Premier article de Grubicy sur l'application de 'Rood' à l'art, fruit d'une lecture attentive de 'L'Art moderne'*." As she has staunchly maintained that the Italians really could have had little idea of the work of the French, it is particularly odd to find her supplying evidence which could support the contrary theory. Thus, so as to not undercut her own argument, in parentheses under her heading she is careful to note that this was Grubicy's only article which made reference to the Neo-Impressionists: "(*en fait le seul qui fasse allusion aux Néo-Impressionnistes*)." Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 254. This might be correct semantically, but he refers to Fénéon in at least one article in September of 1887. See Vittore, "Dal libro dei mestieri: Spigolature per artisti," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 254, September 11, 1887, 1. Moreover, as I argue there could be other reasons for this omission within his circumscribed text.

message, a body of paintings analyzed in Chapter 4. Instead, the Divisionists tended to favor religious themes, recurrently cloaked as rural scenes of peasant life. A comparison of Neo-Impressionism's most publicized work, Georges Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884* (1884-86 [fig. 19]), and Giovanni Segantini's first Divisionist effort, *Mary Crossing the Lake* (c. 1886 [fig. 20]), is valuable, particularly given their virtual contemporaneity. Such a comparison underscores many of the fundamental stylistic differences that distinguish the Italians' production from that of their fellow painters in France.[209]

Segantini, an artist born near Trento when the city was still under Austrian domain, had a Dickensian childhood.[210] His destitute parents died when he was a young boy. Left in the hands of an unsympathetic half-sister, he was packed off to a reformatory school for delinquent boys. Almost illiterate, he demonstrated early artistic talent and eventually studied at the Brera in the 1870s. He then began a promising career as a Naturalist painter, eventually going to live in the Swiss Alps where he found ample inspiration for his depictions of rural mountain life and spectacular landscapes. He later made Symbolist interpretations of mystical subjects set in evocative alpine environments.

Segantini's first division of pigment followed on the heels of the exhibition of Neo-Impressionists works in the notorious gallery organized around Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* at the eighth and final Impressionist Exhibition, held in Paris in 1886. With *Mary*

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209 Georges Seurat, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884*, 1884-86, oil on canvas, 207.5 x 308.1 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, 1926.224; Giovanni Segantini, *Mary Crossing the Lake* (*Ave Maria a trasbordo*), c. 1886, oil on canvas, 120 x 93 cm, Museo Segantini, St. Mortiz.

210 The scholarship of Annie-Paule Quinsac, who has dedicated much of her research to Segantini, is a central font on this artist. See Quinsac, *Segantini: catalogo generale*; Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Segantini: Trent'anni*; Gabriella Belli and Annie-Paule Quinsac, eds., *Segantini: la vita, la natura, la morte: disegni e dipinti* (Milan: Skira, 1999); and Annie-Paule Quinsac, ed. *Giovanni Segantini: luce e simbolo: 1884-1899* (Milan: Skira, 2000).

Crossing the Lake, Segantini remade a severely damaged work from 1882. It was a theme dear to his heart: that of maternity imbued with secularized religious overtones. In this pastoral scene of a shepherd with a mother and child bringing a herd of sheep across a mountain lake at sunset, the peasant group becomes a holy family, the scene itself reminiscent in iconography to *The Flight into Egypt*. The composition, while set upon a rectangular canvas, is essentially ovoid, recalling a religious *mandorla* format. It was perhaps influenced by the plates in Sensier's volume on Millet, for example *Sheepfold* (*Parc à moutons* [fig. 21]), a nocturnal scene in which moonlight is crafted in a shimmering circle which envelops the sheep in the fold.[211] The overall ellipse of sky and water which encompasses the surrogate holy trio is bisected horizontally at its center by a narrow strip of land. In turn, this horizon line is broken by the lone spire and dome of the church. The entire composition, meanwhile, is dominated by blue and white, the colors most often associated with the Virgin Mary, as well as gold, perhaps recalling the gold *fondo* background of Italian Quattrocento paintings. Together these elements suggest the sacred nature of this quiet moment of reflection at the day's end.

What separated this treatment from that of the 1882 work was Segantini's experimentation with a divided stroke.[212] However, the painter did not utilize a pronounced application of individual brushstrokes throughout the second painting, an application which he later developed into highly textured filaments and which is sometimes referred to as "the Segantini stitch." Instead, he maintained a smoother surface and a thinner overall layering of paint. Only the modeled backs of the sheep belie a white

211 See Sensier, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Jean-François Millet*, between 170 and 171.

212 Matthias Frehner, "Un precursore dell'arte moderna: Giovanni Segantini—vita e opera," in Stutzer and Wäspe, *Giovanni Segantini*, 23.

impasto, applied in thick, but individuated marks, to convey the woolly texture of their fleece. Elsewhere in the painting the divided method was more programmatically exercised, especially in the realization of the sun's radiating light, which alternates yellow with blue as its ever widening circular glow diffuses in the sky. Here, too, the long, thin strokes of the sun's rays bear a strong resemblance to the treatment of the moon's rays in the black and white engraving of Millet's *Sheepfold*. The curving, needle-thin segments that make up the luminous sky are reflected in broader circular bands in the lake's mobile surface, as Segantini capitalized on the reflection of the heavens in the water to craft a natural halo. He took further advantage of the lake's watery mirror to repeat the arching braces of the boats, the mother and child, and those curious sheep who crane their heads over the boat's edge. All of these elements, ultimately, work in symphonic unison to evoke the most luminous impression possible as Segantini strove to find "the light in color."

How different, by contrast, is the waterside scene of Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*, depicting Parisians caught in a moment of leisure-time consumption along the banks of the Seine.[213] The choice of subject matter is dramatically divergent. Women with parasols, top-hatted gentlemen, children at play, a variety of pets, including an exotic monkey, and a panoply of boaters on the river, are but some of the figures that populate this canvas. Segantini never represented bourgeois life, remaining bound to alpine and rural imagery aligned with the Naturalist tradition and replete with religious allusions linked both to the work of Millet, Victorian painting, and Symbolism. While Millet served as a point of departure for Seurat's investigations of form earlier in his career,

213 The literature on *The Grande Jatte* is immense. For the most recent publication, see Robert Herbert, et al., *Seurat and the Making of "The Grande Jatte"* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago with the University of California Press, 2004).

such earthy and mystical content is absent from his Neo-Impressionist work, which explores, with a certain irony that some scholars have posited as a social critique, the exchanges and disjunctions between Parisians whose backgrounds cut across a swathe of classes.[214]

There are also differences in the brushwork and the actual treatment of space. Seurat's brushwork is laid on with a rigor and a regularized precision at variance with Segantini's looser style and longer, undulating strokes, and generally consists of minute dots and dashes of color.[215] Throughout the plane of the painting there is comparatively little variance, except in the water, where the pigment has been painted with slightly longer, broader strokes to evoke the refracting surface of the river. The image itself has a frieze-like quality, the forms flattened, and the composition hieratic in conception, reflecting the range of Seurat's interests from so-called "primitive" art (a term that for him embraced everything from Egyptian to early Renaissance), to graphics and illustration. While spatial recession and depth are evoked in the upper right area where the trees and figures ebb in the background, the overall effect is more one of frozen action and two-dimensionality.

It is, finally, this split in the desire to represent depth and movement which most distinguished Segantini's painting from Seurat's and continued to separate the Italian interpretation of "divided" color from that undertaken by the French. When the modeled

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214 See, for example, Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, especially 261-67; and Linda Nochlin, "Seurat's *Grande Jatte*: An Anti-Utopian Allegory," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 14, no. 2 (1989): 133-53.

215 As recent studies have shown, this highly systematic approach—evidence of Seurat's commitment to a stringent formula—was the result of extensive reworking and overpainting that occurred over a period of time. See Inge Fiedler, "*La Grande Jatte*: A Study of the Materials and Painting Technique," in Herbert, *Seurat and the Making of "The Grande Jatte*," 196-213.

forms are considered together with the more dynamic nature of Divisionism, the Italian style can be readily distinguished from the Neo-Impressionism of the 1880s, which tended toward more two-dimensional space and static compositions. This legacy would persist for both groups, as will be broached in the last chapter, feeding into the development of Italian Futurism and French Cubism.

Conclusion

The Divisionists' sources need to be understood as stepping stones leading to their own very individual idiom. Their self-consciousness regarding the importance of formulating an art that would embody Italian ideals and still be innovative played into their process of artistic evolution and allowed them to arrive at the creation of paintings that remain distinct from those produced by their European counterparts. The many sources originating in Italy that enter into their painting served to emphasize that parts of Divisionism's lineage came from within the country. Because Italy did not have a succession of dramatic ruptures with the art of the past during the course of the nineteenth century, certain traditions persisted, and this was one of the very reasons painting felt tired and uninspired to the Divisionists, pushing them to do something new. The ongoing interest in modeled form, the representation of three-dimensional space, and the desire to connote movement were all features of Italy's long-lived artistic heritage and were factors which underlined the complicated state of a movement that drew on past tradition, but endeavored to be modern. These considerations counter the Franco-centric notion that Italian Divisionism was a mere imitation of the Parisian style. The numerous Italian fonts also reenforced the nationalist desires of these artists, who must have been

pleased and proud to capitalize on the achievements of their countrymen. However, as the next chapter will demonstrate, their early efforts were not met with immediate acceptance or comprehension by an Italian audience. Critical responses reflected apprehension regarding the radical style, which was seen as a sign of cultural slippage, rather than as innovation. The French references were treated with suspicion as there was anxiety that these exterior artistic influences could dismantle efforts towards a national style. These concerns worked against the very goals of the Divisionists towards the forging of an art that signified modernity and Italian identity.

CHAPTER 3

"*QUELLA SPECIE DI MORBILLO PITTORICO*:" DIVISIONISM AND THE FIRST BRERA TRIENNALE OF 1891[216]

Divisionism may have had its adolescence in the late 1880s, but the painting style emerged in its full form in 1891 at Milan's first Brera Triennale, a newly conceived exhibition many Italians hoped would recapture some of their country's lost artistic genius by fostering young talent and promoting Italian art.[217] Many of Divisionism's eventual protagonists exhibited at the 1891 Triennial, but at this early stage in the movement's history only a handful of works were painted in a style with distinct optical effects that later became characteristic of the movement.[218] These were Giovanni Segantini's *The Two Mothers* (*Le due madri*, 1889), Emilio Longoni's *The Strike's Spokesperson* (*L'Oratore dello sciopero*, 1890-91), Gaetano Previati's *Maternity*

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216 "That sort of pictorial measles" is a phrase taken from a review by a conservative critic, Luigi Chirtani, which will be treated in the latter portion of this chapter. Luigi Chirtani, "A Brera: Discorsi a ritagli," *Corriere della sera* 16, no. 132 (May 15-16, 1891), 3.

217 This is the essence of much of the press that appeared around the time of the Triennale's opening. See, for example, G. Bocciarelli, "Alla vigilia dell'Esposizione di Brera," *Cronaca d'arte* 1, no. 17 (April 12, 1891): 141.

218 While the Divisionist paintings at the 1891 Brera Triennale have been examined, to my knowledge, no one has analyzed them in relation to many of the larger issues at stake for the Italian ethos, nor has the exchange of reviews on these works been tracked and considered as a whole. The seminal writings on the Divisionists in the 1891 Brera Triennale are Annie-Paule Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne: origines et premiers développements, 1880-1895* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), 19-44; Aurora Scotti [Tosini], "Milano 1891: la prima triennale di Brera," *Ricerche di storia dell'arte* 18 (1982), 55-72; and Maria Mimita Lamberti, "1870-1915: I mutamenti del mercato e le ricerche degli artisti," in *Il Novecento* pt. 2, vol. 3 of *Storia dell'arte Italiana*, eds. Giulio Bollati e Paolo Fossati (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), 76-81. For a general examination of the Brera exhibitions during this time period, see Gianni Utica, et al., *Milano Brera 1859-1915: I premi Brera dalla scapigliatura al simbolismo* (Codogno: Cassa rurale ed artigiana del Basso lodigiano, 1994).

(*Maternità*, 1890-91), Angelo Morbelli's *Dawn* (*Alba*, 1890-91), and an unlocated work entitled *Advice from Grandfather-The Parlour of the Pio Trivulzio* (*Un consiglio del nonno-Parlatorio del luogo Pio Trivulzio*).[219] An analysis of the Divisionist works exhibited at the Triennale and of the critical reception they received, introduces the major, intertwined issues of Divisionism during the early 1890s. At the crux of these was anxiety regarding any perceived shift away from existing pictorial traditions and accepted modes of representation. The Divisionists' impulse to be modern, their use of an optical, "scientific" technique, and their development (in Previati's case) of an anti-realist aesthetic, were fiercely debated. Overshadowing much of this debate was the awareness

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219 Segantini, *The Two Mothers,* cat. 109, p. 30; Longoni, *The Strike's Spokesperson,* cat. 101, p. 16; Previati, *Maternity*, cat. 213, p. 30; Morbelli, *Dawn*, cat. 517, and *Parlour*, cat. 518, p. 63. See *Prima esposizione triennale di belle arti: Catalogo ufficiale* (Milan: De Marchi, 1891). The Brera Triennale also included a sizeable number of works by artists who would become identified with Divisionism, but who were still practicing some form of Naturalism in 1891. These were Carlo Fornara's *The Coppersmith's Shop* (*La bottega di calderajo*, 1891), cat. 230, p. 32; Giuseppe Mentessi's *Sad Hour* (*Ora triste*, 1890), cat. 257, p. 35; Giuseppe Pellizza's *Thoughts* (*Pensieri*, 1891), cat. 440, p. 53, *Portrait of Mediator Giani Giuseppe* (*Ritratto di Giani Giuseppe mediatore* [now titled *The Mediator* (*Il mediatore*) or *Portrait of Signor Giuseppe Giani* (*Ritratto del Signor Giuseppe Giani*)], 1891), cat. 384, p. 48, and *Portrait of my Mother* (*Ritratto di mia mamma*, 1891), cat. 557, p. 67. Giovanni Sottocornola showed the still-life *Grapes* (*Uva*, c. 1891), cat. 242, p. 33, and *On the Street* (*Fuori di Porta*, c. 1891), cat. 207, p. 29. Plinio Nomellini, a painter whose leftist politics played out in his images, verged on Divisionism with the broken brushwork of the picture he exhibited, *Piazza Caricamento in Genova* (*Piazza Caricamento a Genova*, 1891), cat. 281, p. 37, a work that will be examined in Chapter 4. In addition, Longoni had two works painted in a realist idiom, *Landscape-Winter Sun* (*Paesaggio sole d'inverno* [now titled *Winter Sun* (*Sole d'inverno*)], 1891), cat. 328, p. 42; and the earlier *The Piscinina* (*La Piscinina*, 1889-90), cat. 329, p. 42. Segantini exhibited an interior from his naturalist phase, *Cow* (*Vacca,* [now titled *Wet Cow* (*Vacca bagnata*)], 1890), cat. 241, p. 33. Grubicy also submitted three landscapes: *Lombard Campagna* (*Campagna lombarda* [now titled *Lombard Campagna (January 1890)* (*Campagna lombarda* [*Gennaio 1890*]) or *The Fertilizer Cart* (*Il carretto di concime*)], 1890), cat. 551, *Forest* (*Bosco* [now titled *Joyous Sensations—Beech Forest* (*Sensazioni gioiose—Bosco di faggi*)], 1887/1912), cat. 552, and *Wheat Harvest* (*Raccolta del fieno* [now titled *Wheat Harvest—Dusk (Scalve Valley)* (*Raccolta del fieno—crepuscolo [Valle di Scalve]* or *Hay* (*Il fieno*)], 1889), cat. 553, p. 66. While Grubicy was the most vocal Divisionist proponent, his own submissions, though proto-Divisionist, were barely mentioned in print. They received a nod in the *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*: "Notable in these is the exploration of light through the dissection of color, on the technical side, and a particular breadth of line—especially in the last of the three—in the composition."[*É in essi notevole la ricerca della luce per mezzo della scomposizione del colore, dal lato tecnico, ed una certa larghezza di linee—specialmente nell'ultimo dei tre—nella composizione*]. La Cronaca, "Attraverso le sale (Guida al visitatore): Pittura: Portico BB," *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*, no. 15 (June 25, 1891): 113-14.

that this new formal approach, along with its theoretical framework, had its roots outside Italy and threatened the integrity of Italy's still-tenuous cultural—and national—identity.

Official Italian Art Exhibitions

The Triennale ran from May 1 to June 30, 1891, and was organized by the Reale accademia di belle arti di Brera. The creation of the Triennale witnessed Italy's desire to compete with other European nations in a broader cultural dimension. This urge, nourished by the nationalist conviction that Italians should have a substantive international role in the arts, dominated the 1890s. It was already felt in Vittore Grubicy's articles on The Italian Exhibition in London in 1888 (the art portion of which was organized by Vittore and his gallerist brother, Alberto).[220] It persisted in his articles on the selection and eventual presentation of artworks for the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle appearing in issues of *La riforma* dating as early as January 1887 and running through July 1889.[221] In fact, all the Divisionists kept abreast of the international art scene and consciously sought to exhibit abroad, in particular Segantini.[222] Such efforts

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220 Among these numerous reports are Vittore, "L'esposizione italiana di Londra," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 136, May 15, 1888, 1; "L'esposizione italiana di Londra," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 137, May 16, 1888, 1; "L'esposizione italiana di Londra," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 138, May 17, 1888, 1; "L'esposizione italiana di Londra," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 140, May 19, 1888, 1; "L'Arte italiana e Sir Frederico Leighton," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 149, May 28, 1888, 1; "L'esposizione italiana di Londra. Non lasciamoci assorbire," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 150, May 29, 1888, 1; "L'esposizione italiana di Londra. L'arte in rialzo," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 152, May 31, 1888, 1; "L'esposizione italiana di Londra. Notizie spicciole," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 172, June 20, 1888, 1; and "Il successo," *La riforma* (Rome) 22, no. 180, June 28, 1888, 1.

221 See, for example, Vittore, "L'arte italiana a Venezia ed a Parigi," *La riforma* (Rome) 21, no. 53, February 22, 1887, 1; "L'arte italiana a Parigi. Meno male!," *La riforma* (Rome) 23, no. 141, May 21, 1889, 1; "Gli artisti italiani premiati a Parigi," *La riforma* (Rome) 23, no. 192, July 11, 1889, 1; and "L'arte italiana all'estero (a Parigi) e l'iniziativa privata" *La riforma* (Rome) 23, no. 195, July 14, 1889, 1-2.

222 His letters with his gallerists, first Vittore and Alberto Grubicy, and later only Alberto, are filled with references to international exhibitions taking place in major centers such as Munich, Brussels, and Vienna. The exchanges between Segantini and Alberto are focused on the strategies they should employ to best position the painter internationally and entail detailed discussions as to which exhibitions merited

may be seen to culminate with the Italian Divisionist presence in the Exposition Universelle of 1900.

As the issue of national identity in art and its proper diffusion beyond the Italian borders gained primacy, so did the need to prove that their country had not fallen into a state of mediocrity as many Italians and foreigners believed. Indeed, the works eventually showcased in 1889 in Paris caused Grubicy to make the pained comment: "Because—let's say it outright—as a presentation of 'all the best that Italian art has produced in the last decade' the cross section in these four galleries in Paris is a real failure."[223] Segantini also expressed concern that Italian art and the Italian art world were ill-regarded in a larger European context.[224] He often fretted about the frequency with which his works were seen, where, and alongside which other artists—especially when they consisted of foreign painters. When the first Venice Biennial was scheduled for 1895, he wrote to Vittore Grubicy:

> You ask me if I were invited to exhibit in Venice? I was, but understand that I cannot, as you wrote, measure myself with foreign artists. After the Exposition in Milan where do you want me to get the paintings never exhibited in Italy? on the other hand, for foreigners all their paintings are new for Italy, thus they can deploy all their forces. and I can but send my last birth.[225]

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submissions, which works should be sent where, who should be permitted to illustrate works in articles, and so forth. Segantini also remained joined to the art world through journals, which he received on a regular basis in Switzerland. Understandably, he paid particular attention to the reviews of his own art, but he also kept abreast of current art criticism on the work of his contemporaries.

223 "*Perchè—diciamola addirittura—come presentazione di 'quanto ha prodotto di meglio l'arte italiana nell'ultimo decennio' la traversata di queste quattro sale a Parigi è un vero insuccesso.*" Vittore, "L'arte Italiana a Parigi: Note tristi," *La riforma* (Rome) 23, no. 140 (May 20, 1889): 1.

224 A sentiment verbalized in a letter he wrote, for example, to Alberto Grubicy, on February 24, 1895, and in an undated letter to the Mayor of Venice (the latter in reference to the 1895 Venice Biennial). Quinsac flags this chip on the artist's shoulder in her notations to the Segantini correspondence. See Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Segantini: Ttrent'anni di vita artistica europea nei carteggi inediti dell'artista e dei suoi mecenati* (Oggiono, Lecco: Cattaneo, 1985), 337-38 and 748-49.

225 "*Mi domandi se fui invitato a esporre a Venezia? lofui ma capirai che non posso come tu scrivi,*

This insecurity regarding the perception of Italian art continued into the new century as evidenced by the criticism of Ugo Ojetti. When writing about the Exposition Universelle in 1900, he lamented—with a dose of sharp sarcasm to make his anger obvious—the poor job done by Italy's commission at the Exposition.[226]

But at the dawn of the decade, optimism prevailed. Italy's Minister of Education, Pasquale Villari, voiced the hope that Milan's Brera Triennale could parallel London's 1851 and 1861 expositions, although, in actuality, it was closer in nature to the annual Salons of Paris or the yearly exhibitions of London's Royal Academy of Arts.[227] In many ways the Triennale represented an effort on the part of the Italian artistic community to establish a single major exhibition in Italy which could showcase Italian talent from all over the country.[228] In his speech at the inaugural ceremonies, the Brera's President,

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misurarmi cogli artisti stranieri dopo l'Esposizione di Milano dove voi che li prenda i quadri non mai esposti in Italia? per il contrario i stranieri tutti i suoi quadri sono nuovi per l'Italia, quindi possono disporre di tutte le sue forze. ed io non posso mandare che il mio ultimo parto." [misspellings are Segantini's] Giovanni Segantini to Vittore Grubicy, February 13, 1895, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.8.69.

226 Ugo Ojetti, "L'arte mondiale a Parigi: Quel che siamo e quel che sembriamo," *Corriere della sera* (Milan) 25, no. 288, October 20-21, 1900, 1-2.

227 This is underlined in the nationalist rhetoric of his opening address for 1891 Triennale, reproduced in "L'inaugurazione dell'esposizione di belle arti," *Corriere della sera* (Milan) 16, no. 124, May 7-8, 1891, 2. In 1894, the Triennale was part of the larger Esposizioni riunite held at the Castello. Per a printed document on 1894 Triennale regulations. See Reale accademia di belle arti in Milano, Seconda esposizione triennale di belle arti, 1894, Art. 1, Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F II 29. This exposition was organized for the promotion of Italian commerce and industry and was made up of individual sections which ranged from theatrical arts, to sport, to mechanics, to wine and oil production. Per Triennale internal correspondence and documentation, Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, in Carpo F II 29.

228 In the wake of the Risorgimento programs undertaken subsequent to unification, a national exhibition was organized starting in the 1870s, which moved from city to city. The idealistic goals of this itinerant exhibition were to encourage the production of an art that would transcend existing regional divisions concentrated around individual academies, and to provide a forum for the presentation of a national art. But their success was limited. After the manifestation held in Turin in 1895, which generated little notice, this series spluttered into oblivion. Largely patriotic in spirit, these shows were directed internally at the country's citizens, aiming to raise awareness regarding the existence of a national "Italian" art. In the 1890s, efforts to organize such events were redoubled and looked to educate a wider European audience. For a discussion of the national exhibitions see Claudio Poppi, "Il fantasma dell'arte unitaria: un viaggio attraverso le esposizioni nazionali," in *Il Secondo '800 italiano: Le poetiche del vero*, eds. Renato Barilli, et

Emilio Visconti Venosta, crystallized this wish: "If this Exposition meets with public approval, in a not so distant future the institution of the Triennale exhibition could become not municipal, but Italian."[229]

Perhaps seeking to keep pace with the newly founded Triennale, a surfeit of larger-scale exhibitions arose in Italy in the 1890s. Regional manifestations multiplied, such as Turin's own Esposizione triennale della società promotrice di belle arti di Torino, first held in 1896. The most significant of these exhibitions—one which has survived and flourished to this day—is the Venice Biennale. From its founding in 1895, the Venetian exhibition differed from other Italian presentations because it had an international scope and was like the presentations which cropped up at the nineteenth-century's end in Paris, Munich, Vienna, and Moscow (not to mention the United States). However, during the 1890s, Milan was the unofficial, but acknowledged center of the Italian art world and, at least for the first half of that decade, the Brera Triennale was the focal point.[230]

1891 Brera Triennale: The Selection and Acceptance of Entries

As the normative art of the day was executed in a largely Naturalist idiom, how did any Divisionist works make their way into an officially sanctioned, academic exhibition? After all, broadly speaking, these pictures were painted in a style that ran

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al. (Milan: Mazzotta, 1988), 58-73. The Brera had held annual exhibitions, which evidently were not deemed successful enough. The Triennale came into being after a three-year pause, as officials debated how to better publicize Italian art.

229 "*Se questa Esposizione incontrerà la pubblica simpatia, in un avvenire non lontano la istituzione della Mostra triennale potrà divenire non municipale, ma italiana*." See [unsigned] "L'inaugurazione dell'esposizione di belle arti a Brera," 2.

230 Anna Maria Damigella broaches the subject of national exhibitions and the problem of establishing a unified Italian front in the arts, noting that despite efforts to realize a universal exhibition in Rome, the trenchant north-south divide remained and Milan prevailed as the dominant artistic center. She attributes this largely to the existence of more affluent industrial supporters in Northern Italy. See Anna Maria Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia, 1885-90*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), 24-26.

counter to many established artistic conventions. To comprehend this phenomenon, an understanding of the division of responsibility for the Brera Triennale is instructive. Organized by the Academy, the Triennale reflected the complex, multi-tiered institutional bureaucracy that already existed in Italy in the nineteenth century (the Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1776). The Academy's president, at that time Venosta, and a dedicated secretary, Giulio Carotti, essentially controlled the stratified intricacies of the Triennale's administration. For the purposes of this discussion it is worthwhile to focus upon a single component of this bureaucratic body, namely the jury that selected and hung the Triennale, the Commissione di ammissione e collocamento delle opere [the Commission of admission and placement of works]. This committee was elected by Academy members belonging to the Consiglio accademico [Academic Counsel], a generally conservative group, and by the Soci onorari residenti [honorary resident members], who were a more varied and broadminded group of artists. Consequently, the jury chosen was not homogenous.[231]

The committee in 1891 did not include any Divisionist artists, since they all belonged to a younger, less established generation. However, it did comprise exponents of Italy's Naturalist landscape school, such as Emilio Gola, as well as artists affiliated with the Scapigliatura, including Mosè Bianchi.[232] Their presence on the jury allowed for

231 The election process itself was lengthy. The submission of nominations for jurors could come from outside sources, such as other artists' groups and organizations. Then there were ballots, charts to count votes, etc. The organization of the first Triennale's election process, as with other aspects of the exhibition, reflected a certain amount of trial by error, and the system became more regularized with each new exhibition. For example, in later years the Admission and Placement committee was spilt into two groups in an effort to be more impartial, and each had fewer members (probably to minimize drawn out disagreements between too many members who differed in opinion). In truth, many things changed with each new Triennale, including the location of the exhibition, which shifted depending on availability of space. Information on the organization of the Real accademia and the Brera Triennale is drawn from multiple documents housed at the Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan.

some latitude, as they were inclined to be receptive to the Divisionist submissions during the process of review and selection.[233] In fact, the minutes from the Brera Triennale archives record that Longoni's *Spokesperson* and Previati's *Maternity* each received 8 out of 11 votes and that painters such as Gola and Bianchi were among those amenable towards their inclusion.[234]

Spatial constraints did limit the number of entries the jury accepted from the numerous submissions. Still, the Triennale was a crowded affair, with 225 painters and 78 sculptors exhibiting works.[235] Within the Brera's galleries, the Divisionist pictures accepted for inclusion were not all installed in prime locations. The catalogue of the exhibition and the layout of the installation also reveal that the Divisionist paintings were scattered throughout the Brera [fig. 22, plan]. Longoni's *Spokesperson* was exhibited downstairs in the large Gallery C. The Morbellis seem to have received lesser treatment and were upstairs in the narrow, enclosed Portico BB. The Previati and Segantini canvases were hung upstairs in corner Gallery L.[236] While the Divisionist compositions at

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232 The names of all the committee's members are documented in the Brera's archives in, for example, an undated internal memo generated by the President's office located in Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F II 23.

233 For example, Bianchi liked Morbelli's work. In a letter to Vittore Grubicy, Morbelli wrote "I am very happy that Mosè Bianchi has a good opinion, I already imagined that he held me [illegible] in some esteem, not for nothing he is an artist even-handed in his judgement..." ["*Sono contentone della buona opinione di Mosè Bianchi, già me lo immaginavo avermi* [illegible] *in qualche stima, non per nulla è un artista equamine nel giudizio…*"] Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, September 12, 1890, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.35.

234 See document, Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F II 23.

235 The spaces of the Brera had to be modified to accommodate the influx of works the Triennale brought. Thus, on the ground floor the usually open air courtyard, called the *cortile d'onore*, was built out to create galleries for sculpture. Upstairs, most of the Pinacoteca's galleries were left untouched as they could not deinstall and store the entire permanent collection. But the committee cleared out the galleries surrounding the courtyard and enclosed the porticos. See "Pianta dell'Esposizione," *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*, no. 2 (May 10, 1891): 15.

236 Grubicy bemoaned the placement of the Previati, claiming that one reason why this work was

the Brera were few, the vibrant new painting mode must have dazzled, or surprised, the unsuspecting viewer.

In fact, despite their lack of prominent display, the lone Divisionist paintings were singled out in print.[237] Negative reviews proliferated on this little-known new movement, even in the major newspapers and magazines, such as the *Corriere della sera* and *L'Illustrazione italiana.* These articles revealed a range of concerns triggered by this unfamiliar application of pigment, and demonstrated that formal issues were at the core of the dispute, although there was also some polemic over content. On the other hand, liberal and specifically artistic journals that had a much smaller circulation—including *La cronaca d'arte*—were complimentary toward of Divisionism. The author of much of this positive press was Vittore Grubicy. Good reviews also appeared in the biweekly *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*, a journal copublished expressly for the run of the Triennale by the writer Gustavo Macchi (another Divisionist supporter).[238] Through a consideration of the four artists' Divisionist submissions—which will be examined in order from least to most "subversive"—and the volley of commentary, some of the greater cultural issues that were at stake behind these works and opinions come to the fore.

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misunderstood, as will be discussed below, was its poor hanging location. Vittore Grubicy, "Discussione libera: La questione del collocamento," *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti* no. 4 (May 17, 1891): 28.

237 Substantial amount of attention was showered upon these works, relative to the inclusions critics loved best.

238 The *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*, in its initial letter of advertisement, gives a mission statement of sorts, as to the role it would serve as a forum for discussion: "Convinced of the importance of this Exposition and of the necessity to facilitate contact between the public and the artists, the underwritten have begun the publication of a weekly periodical **Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti**, destined to give visitors a guide and exhibiting artists a open field for discussion." ["*Convinti dell'importanza di questa Esposizione e della necessità di facilitare il contatto e lo scambio d'idee fra il pubblico e gli artisti, i sottoscritti hanno iniziato la pubblicazione di un periodico settimanale, **Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti**, destinato a fornire insieme ai visitatori una guida ed agli artisti espositori un libero campo di discussione*."] Bolded and underlined words in original. Document, Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F II 18.

The Two Mothers

Segantini's *The Two Mothers* [fig. 23] was the only Divisionist image that did not stir up any trouble.[239] *The Two Mothers*, produced in 1889, recalled the dark interior stable scenes that Segantini was painting prior to his conversion to Divisionism. While other works by Segantini already deployed high-key palettes in keeping with that of his first Divisionist endeavor, *Mary Crossing the Lake Ave* (*Maria a trasbordo*) fig. 20], here he used a less vivid spectrum of hues and did not overtly exploit the effects of complementary color combinations. Segantini evidently was inspired to paint *The Two Mothers* after he saw this very scene in the Savognino (the area where he lived in the Alps), and was struck by the lantern's light.[240] He exploited on earth-bound hues, although the colors were applied with the meticulous individualized strokes of Divisionism, to foster the overwhelmingly golden tonalities. The diffuse light cast by the lantern illuminates the pink of the baby's face and the pink ears of the calf, whose soft, neo-natal fur is still wet from his own birth and his mother's ministrations following his entry into the world.

In addition to its more subtle Divisionism, this comforting rural subject of a young mother's vigil with a birthing cow probably had appeal because it recalled Naturalist representations of country life, such as those by Jean-François Millet.[241] Rather

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239 *The Two Mothers* (*Le due madri*), 1889, oil on canvas, 157 x 280 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan. Segantini was also the most established of the artists showing work in a Divisionist style. He had already had international exposure with paintings in Grubicy's 1888 London exhibition and at the 1889 Paris World's Fair. Moreover, he had exhibited *Two Mothers* previously in Milan in 1890.

240 See Annie-Paule Quinsac, "*Le due madri* (*Effetto di lanterna, Interno di stalla*)," in *Divisionismo italiano*, ed. Gabriella Belli (Milan: Electa and Museo d'arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 1990), 68.

241 The comparison between Millet and Segantini was made in contemporary literature and was one the Italian artist resented (in keeping with the overall displeasure Italians suffered when any reference was

than challenging spectators with angry workers (as Longoni did), or recasting the holy mother and child thematic (as Previati did), Segantini's composition reassured viewers. The work reasserted the accepted gendered pairing of woman and animal with a shared "natural" order in their roles as procreators and *mater lactans* in an idealized meditation on human and bovine mothers and offspring.[242]

From the predisposed *Cronaca dell'esposizione* we learn that *The Two Mothers* had been considered a candidate for the prestigious Principe Umberto prize and was deemed "among the most serious and individual in the exhibition this year."[243] Even a skeptical critic, Luigi Chirtani, lauded Segantini in *L'Illustrazione italiana*, saying: "It is the strongest painting in the Exhibition."[244] He added the caveat: "but in it predominates a wearisome, pitiful preoccupation with technique, of a painting method with a given system…so that, in part, other great qualities of this most worthy artist, among the best of the Italian painters, are eclipsed."[245] Alberto Sormani, another critic ambivalent toward Divisionism, had to grudgingly admit:

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made to similarities with French art). See, for example, Segantini's October 22 or 23, 1889, letter to Alberto Grubicy and fn 2 regarding the 1889 article in *Le Temps* by French critic Thiebault-Sisson, "Un Millet italien: Giovanni Segantini." Reproduced in Quinsac, *Segantini: Trent'anni*, 218.

242 Linda Nochlin makes a similar assessment in an analysis of this work: "the latter [*The Two Mothers*] with its overt connection between nurturing functions of cow and woman, make the presuppositions of a society which maintains motherhood as woman's naturally ordained work, and demonstrates, at the same time, that the *peasant*-woman, as an elemental, untutored—hence eminently 'natural'—female is the ideal signifier for the notion of beneficent maternity, replete with historical overtones of the Christian Madonna and Child." Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 85-86.

243 "*fra le più serie ed individuali che siano alla mostra di quest'anno*." La Cronaca, "Attraverso le sale (Guida del visitatore). Pittura: Sala L-M-N. Scultura: Piano superiore Portico DD," *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*, no. 7 (May 28, 1891): 50.

244 "*È il dipinto...più forte dell'Esposizione*." Luigi Chirtani, "L'esposizione triennale di Brera. II: Il piano superiore," *L'Illustrazione italiana* 18, no. 20 (May 17, 1891): 318.

245 "*ma vi predomina una laboriosa, penosa preoccupazione della tecnica, del modo di dipingere con un dato sistema…così che, in parte, restano eclissate altre grandi qualità di questo valentissimo tra i migliori pittori italiani*." Ibid.

> I'm not saying that I really admire the environment created with light effects, which is successful, but not very interesting…But what impresses me, besides the profound energy with which the entire picture is painted is the intense experience of the mother, whose *interior* feeling is so powerfully expressed, with melancholy, with tenderness, a moral greatness present in her humility, which elevates this work to a symbolic representation of maternal feeling, like that of a madonna.[246]

The Strike's Spokesperson

Longoni exhibited three works at the Triennale, *The Strike's Spokesperson* [fig. 24], *Landscape-Winter Sun* (1891), and *The Piscinina* (1889-90) [fig. 25].[247] Born in Milan, Longoni also attended the Brera (where he roomed with Segantini).[248] Like Segantini, he came from a poor family, but by contrast to him, his working-class roots impelled him to become an anarcho-socialist, often portraying social subjects in his work. In fact, similarly to *The Strike's Spokesperson*, his earlier *Piscinina* also treated a politicized theme, that of the exploitation of child labor. The social message in his depiction of a young sartorial apprentice was embedded within a type of sentimental, quasi-Victorian Realism that deployed the conventions of genre painting. On the other hand, *The Strike's Spokesperson* aggressively portrayed a workers' protest occurring in

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246 "*Non dico di ammirare eccessivamente quell'ambiente ad effetto di luce, riuscita, ma non molto interessante…Ma cio' che mi conquista, oltre all'energia profonda con cui tutto il quadro è dipinto, è quella madre così intensamente sentita, così forte di espressione* interna*, con una malinconia, con una tenerezza, con una grandezza morale nella sua umiltà, che la eleva a rappresentazione simbolica del sentimento materno, come una madonna*." Alberto Sormani, "I miei ideali a Brera, II," *Cronaca d'arte* 1, no. 33 (August 2, 1891): 275-276.

247 *The Strike's Spokesperson* (*L'oratore dello sciopero*), 1890-91, oil on canvas, 193 x 134 cm, private collection, Pisa. Alternate titles for this work are *The Haranguer* (*L'arringatore*) and *May 1st* (*1mo Maggio*). Emilio Longoni, *The Piscinina* (*La piscinina*), 1889-90, oil on canvas, 126 x 71 cm, private collection. I have left this last title in the original Milanese dialect. The young girls who were apprenticed to dress-makers were called *piscinine* and the term has class-specific connotations which would be lost in an English translation.

248 Giovanna Ginex is the primary reference for Longoni. See her thorough *Emilio Longoni: Catalogo ragionato* (Milan: Motta, 1995).

Milan on May 1, 1890, European Labor Day.[249] Its execution was also deemed revolutionary; it was Longoni's first real attempt to paint with divided brushstrokes and color in the new style. Although individualized brushstrokes are not utilized throughout, the sky and the man's shirt both show unmixed colors that are intensely bright.[250] It was the combination of subversive technique and content in the Divisionist *Spokesperson* that fueled discussion.

Among those who commented on Longoni's work was A. Caccianiga, a critic who did not favor art that addressed social issues or unpleasant subject matter, which he termed "ugly." Showing little compassion for the plight of the working-class, he snidely remarked in *L'Illustrazione italiana,* "And Longoni has painted 'the strike's spokesperson' pale due to lead carbonate poisoning—commonly called white lead."[251] Chirtani deigned to acknowledge the work with one dismissive phrase: "[Longoni] has that anarchist who is screaming at the crowd."[252] In response to the negative reactions engendered by *The Strike's Spokesperson*, Macchi, a friend of Longoni's and a socialist, authored an article on him for his *Cronaca dell'esposizione*.[253] He admired Longoni for being among those artists "who are interested in the scientific and social movement," writing that his art demonstrates "an uncommon strength of observation, a very pure

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249 Ginex identified the historical event captured by Longoni. See Ginex, *Emilio* Longoni, cat. no. 121, 184-86. For an extensive analysis of this work see Chapter 4.

250 Ginex has indicated that Longoni's Divisionist style was not so fully developed at this time and that he likely went back and repainted the sky and the lantern later. Ibid., 185.

251 "*E Longoni ha dipinto "l'oratore dello sciopero" che impallidisce per l'abuso del carbonato di piombo—detto volgaremente la* biacca." A. Caccianiga, "Le impressioni d'un eremita su le esposizioni di Milano," *L'Illustrazione italiana* 18, no. 22 (May 31, 1891): 338.

252 "*poi ha quell'anarchico che grida alla folla.*" Luigi Chirtani, "A Brera: Discorsi a ritagli," *Corriere della sera* (Milan) 16, no. 126, May 9-10, 1891, 2.

253 Gustavo Macchi, "Emilio Longoni," *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti,* no. 4 (May 17, 1891): 27.

honesty in art."[254] In his assessment, Macchi later went on to gauge public reactions to all three Longoni works exhibited at the Triennale, and noted that the painters liked his landscape, the public his *piscinina*, and artists, *The Strike's Spokesperson*.[255] Regarding the latter—optimistically adhering to the precept that any press is good press—he added "many dislike it, so that most, at least, talk about it."[256] Despite the fact that the Brera Triennale opened on May 1, thus coinciding with May Day, and the papers were filled with articles on strikes, worker insurgence, and proletariat violence, this overtly politicized image was not among the two works which garnered the most attention.[257] Evidently, radical interpretation of form, combined with the new *facture*, could be as worrisome, if not more so, than a radical politicized content.

Maternity

Indeed, Previati's *Maternity* [fig. 26]—another mother and child image—distressed critics and public alike.[258] Previati was an artist born of a middle-class

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254 "*che s'interessano al movimento scientifico e sociale*." "*una forza di osservazione non commune, una honestà d'arte purissima*." Ibid.

255 Ibid. In his distinction between painters and artists Macchi was perhaps hinting that "real" artists were enlightened enough to see the importance of this work while mere painters responded to the more traditional landscape.

256 "*a molti dispiace, cosicchè i più, almeno, ne parlano*." Ibid.

257 Perhaps, this phenomenon was also due to the painting's placement within one of the larger galleries.

258 *Maternity* (*Maternità*), 1890-91, oil on canvas, 174 x 411 cm, Banca Popolare di Novara. Damigella's contextualization of this work and Grubicy's writings on *arte ideista* within the Italian Symbolist movement are an important source for the discussion of this work. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 94-100. In one of the only studies on Divisionism in the United States, Judith Meighan has traced the controversy around this painting at the time of its exhibition and has linked much of this apprehension to the socio-political problems of the day regarding the problem of unwed mothers and infant abandonment prevalent at this time (in a Catholic country which frowned upon this violation of religious mores and feared the disintegration of the family unit), and Previati's own feelings regarding motherhood based on a biographical interpretation. See Judith Ellen Meighan, "In Praise of Motherhood: The Promise and Failure of Painting for Social Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy." *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A*

religious family in Ferrara.[259] After attending art school in his home town, he eventually studied at the Brera in 1877. During the 1880s he was associated with the Scapigliati artists and his paintings vacillated between the brushy Scapigliato style and the prevalent Naturalist trend.[260] *Maternity* was his first mature Divisionist effort as well as being his first exploration of Symbolist motifs and forms.[261] The artist's particular vein of Symbolism took cues from the curving shapes and idealized, ethereal women of English Pre-Raphaelite painting.[262] Previati's long, filament-like strokes share an affinity with the line of Dante Gabriele Rossetti, and his rendering of angel's wings bears a strong relationship to those by Edward Burne-Jones. Pre-Raphaelite art had gained popularity in Italy by this time among the intellectual elite, but this movement was not yet familiar to the mainstream. Thus, the rapport between Previati's painting and those of these English prototypes did nothing to endorse the Italian's aestheticizing approach for the general public.

Following the opening of the Triennale, agitation and disdain were voiced regarding not only Previati's brushwork, but also towards his handling of the subject

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Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture 1, no. 1 (Spring 2002); url. Meighan certainly covered this ground well and I will try not retrace all of her steps here, especially as my reading is more concerned with elements that were perceived to challenge the cultural apparatus of the day. An early look at the controversy can be found in Nino Barbantini, *Gaetano Previati* (Rome and Milan: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1919), 79-92.

259 No catalogue raisonné exists on Previati to date. The most current and complete resource on the artist is *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920: Un protagonista del simbolismo europeo*, ed. Fernando Mazzocca (Milan: Electa, 1999).

260 For a discussion on Previati's early stylistic developments see Francesco Tedeschi, "Gaetano Previati: Formazione e attività predivisionista," in Ibid., 32-39.

261 Quinsac has pointed out this was the first Symbolist work to be exhibited in an official exhibition. See Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 40. Previati's development of a Symbolist style will be examined in depth in Chapter 5.

262 The Pre-Raphaelites proved an important point of departure for the Symbolist movement which began to flower in Italy in the mid-1880s. The writer Gabriele D'Annunzio certainly had a central role in the promotion of this circle of English artists. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 21-84.

itself. Some found *Maternity* a blasphemous depiction of the traditional Christian subject of Mary nursing the infant Jesus.[263] This secularized interpretation was seen as an unhealthy vision of the sacrosanct theme. Yet, this very secularization represented Previati's intent. In a letter the artist wrote to his brother in 1891, he asserted his wish to depict motherly love stripped of the encumbering elements present in traditional religious painting throughout history.[264] While he felt he achieved his desired result in this painting, it elicited very different reactions from his detractors.

Subject matter notwithstanding, the issue at the epicenter of the outcry surrounding this painting was the moral shock and indignation regarding Previati's unrealistic treatment of form. Conservative critics perceived the mellifluous organic shapes of curving Virgin, child, and surrounding angels, fluidly ensconced in a verdant miasma, as untoward. Conversely, those who approved of the painter's sinuous lines and flowing figures welcomed the innovation expressed in this evocative anti-naturalism. These two poles were indicative of a clash between representational art, which faithfully mirrored external reality, and Symbolist art or "*arte idealista*," which conveyed an allusive, symbolic ideal.[265]

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263 Evidently the iconographic clues were less than clear though, as Chirtani misinterpreted this as Eve nursing the world's first child. Chirtani, "L'Esposizione triennale di Brera," 318.

264 Previati had realized numerous traditional religious images in the past decade, so his choice was pointed. See Maria Grazia Schinetti, "La pittura sacra" in *Gaetano Previati*, 61-62. The letter, dated February 18,1890, is reproduced in Spartaco Asciamprener, *Gaetano Previati: Lettere al fratello* (Milan: Hoepli, 1946), 43-44.

265 The divergence between realism and idealism began in the mid-1880s. As Damigella has shown, the nascent art critic Angelo Conti (who would go on to write for *Il marzocco*), wrote a series of articles in 1885, *L'arte a Roma*, that explored this conflict in favor of idealism. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 42-44. Yet, the Divisionists, as discussed in Chapter 2, maintained certain allegiances to Realist practices. This ambiguous adoption of certain features and rejection of others fosters a sometimes confusing definition as to what constituted Divisionist painting, diacritically highlighting the disparate tangle of elements, both formal, and ideological that frame Divisionist work. To further compound efforts to point to an overarching philosophy which the artists might have shared, Previati differed conceptually

It is likely that this emerging crisis regarding representation and cultural decline, which framed the reception of Previati's Brera entry, spurred the ensuing avalanche of press on *Maternity*. Among the encouraging authors were those who grasped Previati's desired goal to expressively render the feeling of maternal devotion and extolled his success in rendering the concept of motherhood.[266] One noted his ability to represent "the symbolic vision—realized in the field of visual impressions—of motherly love…With light, form, and color, Gaetano Previati has wanted to give not the material evidence of a mother who nurses her child, but to suggest the profound sensation elicited by this sight."[267] Alfredo Melani, despite certain reservations regarding Previati's draughtsmanship, pronounced in *Arte e storia*, a Florentine journal: "Rebelling against every sort of official pedagogy, the author here has painted that which he has felt:—he has seen to *feel* he has not seen to *see*."[268] Grubicy also acclaimed the non-realist idiom in an article dedicated to *Maternity*, asserting that Previati had expressed the tender idea of

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from his Divisionist comrades in that he followed a largely anti-materialist philosophy. This stance would appear to work against his adoption of an empirical painting method, although admittedly a method he adapted into Liberty forms. But these are ramifications which seemed not to disturb his approach and appear ambiguous only with hindsight. Actually, even among French and Belgian painters of the day there was the same odd mix of science and the ideal, so these contradictions flourished in a time when spiritualism was understood by many to appertain to the realm of science. Martha Ward, for example, broaches the multi-pronged relationship between, science, materialism, and mysticism with regard to French Neo-Impressionism. See Martha Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 211-15. The turn to Symbolism will be treated at length in Chapter 5.

266 Previati had been nervous about the use of the divided brushwork to portray this subject, but mainly because he feared it would interfere with his representation of the essence of maternal. See Previati's letter to his brother, dated April 9, 1891, reproduced in Asciamprener, *Gaetano Previati***,** 60-61.

267 "*la visione simbolica—resa nel campo delle impressioni visive—dell'amore materno…Con la luce, le forme e il colore, Gaetano Previati ha voluto dare non l'evidenza materiale di una madre che allatta il bambino, ma suggerire la sensazione profonda che tal vista suscita*." La Cronaca, "Attraverso le sale," 49.

268 "*Ribelle a ogni specie di pedagogia ufficiale l'autore ivi ha dipinto quello che ha sentito:—egli ha veduto per* sentire *non ha veduto per* vedere." Alfredo Melani, "Prima esposizione triennale di Brera: Il quadro del Previati," *Arte e storia* 10, no. 11 (May 20, 1891): 82.

motherhood.[269] But even in reviews that upheld the merits of Previati's work, most critics acknowledged the flood of censorious backlash. A. Sperelli (a pseudonym of Gustavo Macchi) had to admit, "Rarely, in truth, have I seen such great disdain, as that shown in front of Gaetano Previati's great canvas."[270] Later in the month of May, the *Cronaca dell'esposizione* recognized this work to be the one "most violently attacked" in its ongoing series, *Attraverso le sale* [Through the Galleries], which discussed the works in each gallery of the Triennale.[271] Grubicy followed the same line in an article on *Maternity* he wrote for the *Cronaca d'arte*: "it is certain that the idea of Previati's mystical essence, represented with such a radical synthesis of form and color, and appearing in a moment when realism and impressionism reigned supreme, could not but violently jar custom and provoke uproar." So while Grubicy, the champion and dealer of the Divisionists, lauded Previati's interpretation of form and color, he also recognized its affront to prevailing realist tastes.[272]

The most acerbic critic of this work was Luigi Chirtani, who led the attack on Previati. Chirtani was actually Luigi Archinti, the professor who held the chair in Art History at the Real accademia di belle arti at Brera. In the *Corriere della sera* he wrote that the picture: "is very strange, bizarre, it is the most capricious abuse of a real

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269 Vittore, "Alla Triennale di Brera. Pittura 'ideista'—'Maternità di Previati," *La riforma* (Rome) 25, no. 187, July 6, 1891, 1-2. Reprinted in part as Vittore Grubicy, "*Maternità* di Gaetano Previati," in *Prima esposizione triennale Brera 1891. Tendenze evolutive nelle arti plastiche*. *Pensiero italiano* 9 (Milan: Tipografia Cooperativa Insubria, 1891), 51-57.

270 "*Raramente, in verità, io ho veduto così grande sdegno, quanto in faccia alla grande tela di Gaetano Previati.*" A. Sperelli, "Discussione libera. In difesa dell'opera d'arte," *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*, no. 3 (May 14, 1891): 20.

271 "*più violentamente attacato.*" La Cronaca, "Attraverso le Sale," 49.

272 "*è certone l'essenza mistica dell'idea di Previati, simboleggiata con un sintetismo così radicale delle forme e dei colori, comparendo in un momento in cui realismo ed impressionismo regnavano sovrani, non poteva che urtare con violenza le consuetudini e suscitare clamori*." Vittore Grubicy, "*Maternità* di G. Previati," *Cronaca d'arte* 1, no. 22 (May 17, 1891): 181-82.

talent."[273] A week later, in his three-part review on the Triennale published for *L'Illustrazione italiana*, he scathingly queried *Maternity* again: "One struggles to understand what the artist wanted to represent…the painting resembles woolen embroidery that has vanished into its colors."[274] With this last comment he denigrated Previati, demoting his painting technique from masculine high art to feminine craft.[275]

Sperelli (aka Macchi) seemed to have been responding directly to Chirtani in his piece for the *Cronaca dell'esposizione*. Applauding *Maternity* for its modernity, he wrote: "And the meaning of Gaetano Previati's work is great, it is a symptom announcing a new era, an imminent evolution of an art which employs light as a tool for detailed work."[276] His specific reference to "detailed work" was a rebuttal to Chirtani's implicitly demeaning "craft" remark, arguing for the validity of the precise, albeit time-consuming, Divisionist technique.

Previati, himself an outspoken and prolific writer, came to his own defense in a three-part essay in the *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*'s *Discussione libera* [Open Discussion] column, which accepted submissions from artists and the public.[277] Within this lengthy treatise on his artistic philosophy Previati avowed his modern approach,

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273 "*quello è stranissimo, bizzarro, è il più capriccioso abuso di un vero talento*." Chirtani, "A Brera," 3.

274 "*Si stenta a capire quello che l'artista ha voluto rappresentare…la pittura sembra un ricamo in lana svanito nei colori*." Chirtani, "L'Esposizione triennale di Brera," 318.

275 These comparisons between the Divisionist painting style and textiles, as noted in Chapter 2, are like those elicted by Van Gogh's work. While cast in a negative light by Chirtani, his analogy is not inaccurate. The Divisionists relied upon Chevreul's color theory which, in turn, was based, in part, upon his study of the Gobelin tapestry works.

276 "*E il significato dell'opera di Gaetano Previati è grande, è sintomo preannunziante un epoca nuova, un evoluzione imminente di quell'arte che la luce adopra come utensile pel minuto lavoro*." Sperelli, "Discussione libera," 20.

277 Gaetano Previati, "La tecnica nell'arte," *Cronaca dell'esposizione di belle arti*, 1, no. 15 (June 25,1891): 116-118; 2, no. 16 (June 28, 1891): 124-125; 3, no. 17 (July 1, 1891): 5-6.

asserting that innovation was the lifeblood of art. He bolstered the point made by Macchi and others that his ambition was to convey the sensory and emotional dimensions elicited by an episode and not a mimetic representation of that episode, proclaiming: "[the] principle goal of an artwork...is to show the intensity of our feeling before a moment of reality."[278] Previati later underlined his own bravery in daring to paint "a more precise experience of that which I saw," rather than a facile imitation of the art that was ubiquitous at the Triennale.[279] In the third of his articles, he suggested that the scientific tools he employed, while so frightening to critics, actually allowed his art to depict reality more closely, as these optical techniques and chromatic theories followed the laws of nature.[280] Previati argued that all of these elements were ultimately important to the essential evolution of art.

Yet another thematic layer emerges from the *Maternity* polemics when Grubicy's criticism is considered further: that of differentiating Previati's particular form of Divisionistically painted Symbolism, or *pittura ideista*, from the equally stylized Symbolism or *arte idealista* practiced in Italy. Grubicy held up Previati's work as an example of a new language of painting, which he baptized *pittura ideista*.[281] In a somewhat labored argument, he purported that *pittura ideista* differed from *arte idealista* because it transcended the boundaries of Symbolism, which was still tied to a Realist topos. Grubicy maintained that, while it was a departure from Realism or Naturalism into

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278 "*fine principale dell'opera d'arte…è di mostrar l'intensità della nostra sensazione davanti ad un momento del vero.*" Ibid., June 25, 1891, 116.

279 "*alla espressione più esatta di quel che vedevo, e sentivo io*." Ibid., 117.

280 Ibid., July 1, 1891, 6. This was a typical elision of the period between scientific positivism and visionary anti-positivist values which will be addressed in Chapter 5.

281 Vittore, "Alla Triennale di Brera: Pittura 'ideista'," 1-2.

a Symbolist or mystical direction, *arte idealista* had its roots in the tangible, stating that *arte idealista* "has a base of realism, because the interest that leads to its production always resides in the nature of material form, which is in reality."[282] His explanation regarding an idealized art versus an art of the "Idea" became murkier as he endeavored to further support his assertion: "*the idea*, that is, that bit of the ideal that exists therein, consists only in a certain adaptation of things tangible, following more or less accepted or known conventions and prejudices, but without objectivity—as realistic as it can be—ever moving away from painting."[283] Instead, he argued that *pittura ideista* was more radical in its break with the past strategies of veristic representation. The *pittura ideista* Previati practiced exemplified this as it denoted ideas with a special system of signs and eschewed the exact illustration of an objective reality.

Grubicy was not only distinguishing *pittura ideista* from its Italian rival, but also from the *art idéiste* of the French Symbolist movement. In fact, the shades of variance between *pittura ideista* and the French incarnation of Symbolism are minute. Moreover, the term *ideista* specifically adopted by Grubicy is a straight translation of the French word *idéiste*, a term critic G.-Albert Aurier identified as one of the five principle elements defining Symbolist art in his benchmark treatise on Symbolism, "Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin," just published in the *Mercure de France* (March

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282 "*è basata unicamente sul realismo , perchè l'interesse che produce risiede sempre nella qualità della forma materiale, cioè nella realtà*." Grubicy, "Pittura Ideista," in *Prima esposizione triennale Brera 1891*, 47. Grubicy's argument would seem to run counter to Previati's statement regarding Divisionism's grounding in nature due to the use of optical laws, but he was focused on form rather than color in this article.

283 "l'idea*, cioè quel tanto che vi è d'ideale, non consiste che in un certo adattamento delle cose tangibili, seguendo convenzioni e pregudizi più o meno accettati o conosciuti, ma senza che mai essa si discosti nel dipingere—più verosimilmente che può—l'oggetività*." Ibid, 48.

1891).[284] It would seem that Grubicy was once again covertly gleaning and modifying material from the French into the Italian context. His defense of Previati's modern and original form thus proved complex, since he had to prove its originality and avoid the link to foreign and hence un-Italian art.

Dawn

The last of the four Divisionist "culprits" was Morbelli. His *Dawn* [fig. 27] was a seemingly harmless image of a rural outdoor scene not too distant from Segantini's *Two Mothers*.[285] Another mother and child are shown fetching water from their well. Dawn on the farm (with its reference to hard daily labor) was not an uncommon subject, and this particular portrayal of the infant sweetly toddling along behind his or her *mamma* may seem downright sentimental. Yet it incited, perhaps, the most virulent attack on Divisionism.

Morbelli, as we shall recall, had also attended the Brera and was among the artists Grubicy championed from 1883, when he won the Premio Principe Umberto for *Final Days* (*Giorni ultimi*) at the annual Brera exhibition.[286] As Morbelli frequently left Milan for his family's home in Colma, where he painted in the environs, he would often write to Grubicy in Milan to keep him apprised of his work, and this valuable documentary correspondence still exists today.[287] From these detailed letters, in which he painstakingly

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284 G.-Albert Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin," *Mercure de France* 2 (March 1891), 155-64. Excerpts reprinted in Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 192-203.

285 Angelo Morbelli, *Dawn* (*L'alba*), 1890-91, oil on canvas, 70 x 54 cm. MNAC-Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

286 Sergio Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon: 1851-1920* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 1995), 10.

described the progress of each painting, it is possible to follow the development of *Dawn*, his earliest foray into Divisionism.[288]

Morbelli obviously chose this particular time of day to capitalize on the possibilities afforded by the growing light. The foreground of the composition, an area covering almost a third of the canvas, is hardly notable, though it, too, evidences a subtle application of undiluted daubs of color with glimpses of yellow. These highlights appear where the sun is beginning to reach certain points along the earth's surface. The two figures of the mother and child, seen from the back, seem to serve the role of staffage rather than that of subjects within a pictorial narrative. The real protagonist here is dawn itself. The triangular portion of sky, made all the brighter by the contrasting dark silhouette of the tree trunk and foliage, shimmers with the tenuous auroral light. The chrome yellow and touches of orange dominate the lowest, eastern-most point of visible sky. These intense hues alternate with a turquoise blue which gradates in color across the top of the thatched roof of the house to a darker blue-purple, with bright pink highlights.

The beauty of the ephemeral moment was lost on many. In a review for the *Corriere della sera*, Chirtani lambasted Morbelli's efforts, specifically targeting his two canvases. He lamented the young artist as having "gone bad," recalling the success of more realist works on the theme of the old men in the Pio Trivulzio. He said of these:

> If the two paintings did not force us to recognize in signor Angelo Morbelli that genius that some thought to discover in him, they proved that he could draw,

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287 Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto.

288 Morbelli described this work in his July 13, 1890, letter to Grubicy, "I am not unhappy with a dawn that I am making, and I find exactly right the divided theory of colors, mixing them the result is impossible, keeping them separated, as nature herself has taught us." "*Non sono malcontento d'un alba che faccio, e trovo giustissima la teoria div. dei colori, mescolandoli è impossibile il risultato, come a tenerli separati, la natura stessa ci insegna*." Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.32. As with Previati, Morbelli was validating Divisionism and asserting that it was a method akin to the "real," sustaining that the technique left colors unmixed as they were in nature.

> model, paint, compose with modest but serious method, with which he could have undertaken his path very well and, with those qualities succeeded in distinguishing himself among the best artists of Italy…[289]

This type of general criticism had appeared before. What was most fascinating in Chirtani's diatribe was a leit-motif weaving through the article which equated Divisionism with disease, a common theme in end-of-the-century writings, especially those on Symbolism, and a subject that will be addressed in more detail below. The troubled opening lines announced the analogy between Divisionism and infectious illness which dominated his analysis:

> I have identified the dangers whereby the young Lombard school of painting is threatened by the appearance of a contagious infection that snakes among the most beautiful minds, and of which the first symptoms declare themselves with a mania for novelty at any cost.[290]

Then, Chirtani dramatically identified the infected works: "Where that species of measles I have marked as dangerous, presents itself in all its pathological characteristics, without other complications, is in the two pictures exhibited under the numbers 517 and 518 [meaning Morbelli's two images], on the upper floor, when you first enter into the first section of portico BB."[291]

The voluble Chirtani had already introduced the idea of Divisionism's sickness in his introductory article on the Brera, written for the *Corriere della sera.* He began by

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289 "*I due dipinti se non forzavano a riconoscere nel signor Angelo Morbelli quel genio che taluni credettero scoprirvi, provavano che sapeva disegnare, modellare, dipingere, comporre con pratiche modeste ma serie, colle quali avrebbe potuto percorrere la sua strada benissimo e riuscire distinto per qualità proprie tra i migliori artisti italiani…*" Chirtani, "A Brera," 3.

290 "*Ho segnalato i pericoli ond'è minacciata la giovine scuola lombarda di pittura dalla apparizione di un'infezione contagiosa che vi serpeggia tra i più belli ingegni, e della quale i primi sintomi si dichiarano con una tremenda smania di novità a ogni costo*." Ibid.

291 "*Dove quella specie di morbillo pittorico da me segnalato come pericoloso, si presenta con tutte le sue forme patologiche caratteristiche, senz'altre complicazioni, è nei due quadri esposti sotto i numeri 517 e 518, al piano superiore, appena entrati nel primo reparto del portico BB*." Ibid.

ascribing the disease to an unnamed number of exponents of the new Lombard school. The art historian pronounced:

> The Lombards, who are at home, naturally make up the largest group; it is the school most agitated by the fever for novelty, by the passion for research. For all that the excitement that produces this may be noble, and the motive that determines it elevated, fever is still fever, that is a sickness that produces hallucinations and delirium. But, really, it is still not too widespread; in the Lombard school that beautiful constitutional sanity always flowers that has given it the strength to arrive at the heights it has reached, but here and there snakes an irritation, what should I call it, a measles that flushes the faces and glazes over the eyes of some, an irritating cutaneous sickness, superficial, which is anything but reassuring.[292]

He went on to slander Morbelli in particular, most probably because the artist had painted in a fashion deemed acceptable in the 1880s, and had demonstrated an apparent decline.

Secreted within Chirtani's hyperbolic metaphor of malady was the unspoken allusion to a degenerative transformation that could set off the deterioration or deformation of Italian culture. In his view, the Divisionists' use of new optical theories and alternate conceptualizations of form were equal to an epidemic that could wipe out a population. The young artists' "mania for novelty," by which Chirtani meant modernity, signified change and, thus, endangered Italian art as the old-guard professor knew it. Chirtani represented a widespread attitude that mistrusted modernity and change, rather than embracing these qualities as vehicles of progress. They worked in opposition to the continuation of tradition in a moment in which artistic legacy and cohesive style—which

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292 "*I Lombardi, che sono a casa propria, naturalmente formarono la più grossa compagnia; è la scuola più agitata dalla febbre della novità, dalla passione delle richerche.Per quanto sia nobile l'eccitazione che la produce, elevato il motivo che la determina, la febbre è sempre febbre, ossia una malattia, che produce allucinzaioni e farnetiche. Veramante, non è ancora molto diffusa; nella scuola lombarda fiorisce sempre quella bella sanità costituzionale che le ha dato la forza per arrivare all'altezza raggiunta, ma qua e là, vi serpeggia una prurigine, che so io, un morbillo che accende i volti e fa sbarrare agli occhi a taluno, una malattia d'eccitamento cutaneo, superficiale, ma tutt'altro che rassicurante*." Luigi Chirtani, "La Triennale a Brera," *Corriere della sera* 16, no. 124 (May 7-8, 1891): 3. Chirtani was probably also making a punning wordplay between the name Morbelli and *morbillo*.

together constituted a cultural image—were among the few threads binding together the fragile nation's identity.

Chirtani concluded his tirade in the May 15-16 article, with a sentence that identified the source of the Divisionist threat to the lineage of Italian art: "The cause of this system that reduces the surface of a painting to that resembling skin afflicted by scarlet fever, or measles, or an eruption of a rash, has its root in science, and is a foreign discovery found in the exhibitions of the *Salon de refusés in Paris* as we can see."[293] Thus, this disease bred by innovation or modernity was the fault of a foreign, specifically French, element. And, in rereading the phrase equating the inflamed spots triggered by measles with the vivid dots of Divisionism, one has to speculate whether—to further his point—Chirtani was not making a metaphoric allusion to another (degenerative) disease, syphilis, also called *il male francese* or *le mal français*, believed to have been spread in Italy by the French.

Grubicy once again came to the rescue with the rebuttal, "The Brera Triennale: After Previati, Morbelli," in the *Cronaca d'arte*, but he did not address the perceived negative constellation of science, modernity, and the foreign.[294] It is difficult to determine why he chose to ignore the first two criticisms and less so the third. Since these articles followed upon each other in rapid succession and were, no doubt, dashed off quickly, the authors could not—and did not—respond to each other point by point. Grubicy, however, may have purposely avoided the suggestion of foreign influence as he was loathe to admit

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293 "*La causa del sistema che riduce la superficie d'una pittura simile alla pelle d'un affetto di scarlattina, o di morbillo, o d'un'eruzione di migliare, ha la sua radice nella scienza, ed è una trovata estera che ha un certo incontro nelle* Esposizoni dei rifiutati in Parigi *come vedremo noi*." Chirtani, "A Brera," 3.
294 Vittore Grubicy, "La Triennale di Brera. Dopo Previati, Morbelli," *Cronaca d'arte* 1, no. 23 (May 24, 1891): 190.

the direct impact of outsiders and wished to claim Divisionism as Italy's own brainchild, much as he had implicitly sought to separate *pittura ideista* from *art idéiste*.

At least two more rebuttals appeared in the press after the exhibition had already come to a close, signaling the importance of the discussion regarding Divisionism and the younger artists' efforts to employ a modern technique, a discussion that was ongoing and far outlasted the Triennale. In a measured tone and a clearly outlined assessment, Macchi responded to Chirtani's accusation of illness and the adoption of a foreign idiom without the same bias that colored Grubicy's prose.[295] Macchi's overriding thesis was that in trying a new style the Divisionists symbolized the hope of the future for Italian art, which had become "sick," that is to say, staid and complacent, in the work of those who feared any break from accepted modes of representation. Macchi's article was successful because he took the proverbial bull by the horns and cleverly turned Chirtani's metaphor of degeneration and decline on its head. In an argument which seemed almost presciently to suggest the idea of palingenesis which would later dominate the discourse of the Futurists, Macchi proposed that through their disruption, experimentation, and pursuit of the modern, the Divisionists were leading Italy out of an longstanding illness and down the road to recovery and renewal:

> One mistakes for a symptom of illness that which is a symptom of recovery. Even in medicine fever is cured, but this does not discount the fact that fever is precisely the organism's defense against illness, and the symptoms of this, the symptoms of the vitality of the organism, proof that it still reacts. Certainly, our painting is feverish, it is agitated and tormented by the search for new methods, the desire for new ideals, and the blood that runs fiery in the veins, and reddens the surface of its beautiful body here and there. But this period of salutary excitement is a million times better than the decay of the slow hidden illness, which leaves the surface intact and the blood lazy, while the organism dissolves itself.[296]

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295 Gustavo Macchi, "L'arte a Brera II," *La Lombardia* (Milan) 33, no. 186, July 8, 1891, 2.

In his article Macchi specifically singled out Morbelli, Longoni, Previati, and Segantini, citing Morbelli's "minute and curious fracturing of light"; Longoni's "socializing realism"; Previati's "delicate and transcendent symbolism"; and Segantini's "warm luminosity." He was careful to underline that each differed in their adoption of the divided stroke, as one of his arguments for the merits of their work was that they were proposing a new individuality to Italian art, the very individuality that elicited Chirtani's criticism.[297] Acknowledging Chirtani's reference to the appropriation of a foreign style, Macchi noted that: "the artists try Dutch luminosity, and they try the break up of colors through the vehicle of the dotted line—things already practiced in France."[298] He recognized their experiments as a sign of a healthy art and, thus, intelligently framed this aspect of foreign influx in a positive light. The desire for change and for new methods, he concluded, was the indicator that in Italy: "art is not sick, it is not moribund, but it is healthy, and vital, and it prepares itself for new victories, and for new conquests, and for a new flowering."[299]

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296 "*Si scambia per sintomo del male ciò che è sintomo della guarigione. Anche in medicina curano la febbre; ma ciò non toglie che precisamente la febbre sia la difesa che l'organismo oppone al male, e i sintomi di essa, i sintomi della vitalità dell'organismo, la prova che esso ancora roagisce. Certo, la pittura nostra è febbriciante; l'agita e la tormenta la ricerca di nuovi mezzi, il desiderio di nuovi ideali; e il sangue che scorre ardente nelle vene, ed arrossa qua e là la superficie del suo bel corpo. Ma meglio le mille volte questo periodo di salutare eccitamento che il marasmo del lento male nascosto, che lascia intatta la superficie e pigro il sangue, mentre l'organismo si dissolve.*" Ibid. The following year, writing under his pseudonym, Macchi continued on his mission to defend Previati's seemingly irreverent treatment of form and subject. Still utilizing evolutionary language he argued that Previati 's painting was not a sign of decadence or dissolution, but of genius and renewal. See A. Sperelli, "Artisti moderni: Gaetano Previati," *Vita moderna* 1, no. 17 (April 24, 1892): 132-34.

297 "it was exactly this variety of individual efforts, this collision of opposite ideals, this independence upsetting the comfortable divisions of schools which have elicited in some disgust and dismay." ["*è stata appunto questa varietà di tentativi individuali, questo cozzar di opposti ideali, questa indipendenza sconvolgente le comode divisioni di scuole che hanno suscitato a taluni disgusto e rammarico*."] Macchi, "L'arte a Brera II," 2.

298 "*i giovani tentano le luminosità olandesi, e tentano la scomposizione dei colori per mezzo del pointillè del tratteggio—cose già praticate in Francia*." Ibid.

Then, in August, Alberto Sormani also published a defense of Divisionism in his column, "Critica della critica" [Criticism of Critcism], which was a rejoinder to Chirtani's article.[300] He touched upon many of the same points as Macchi and wondered why intelligent people were so afraid of dots or divided colors. The attacks upon this style of painting, he argued, would only stifle individual aspirations and the new directions art in Italy could take. He even correlated the Divisionists' efforts to try a new technique in the hope of achieving success with Darwinian ideas of evolution and survival of the fittest, underlining that these efforts were a manifestation of evolution towards something better.[301] This is a theme Grubicy had also picked up on in his defense of *Maternity*, in which he denied that it was "a deviation or a degeneration of painting, as some had lamented."[302] Both Sormani and Grubicy hit upon one problem at the root of this seemingly excessive hysteria over a painting technique, namely a fear of degeneration. As we shall see in the next section, opposing views of evolution versus

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299 "*l'arte non è malata, non è moribonda; ma è sana, e vitale, e si prepara alle nuove vittorie, a nuove conquiste, a una novella fioritura*." Ibid.

300 Alberto Sormani, "Critica della critica," *Cronaca d'arte* 1, no. 35 (August 16, 1891): 287.

301 "It is a curious phenomenon…that I have encountered in very intelligent people, this becoming angry or frightened because a painter makes a little picture with dots instead of with lines, with divided colors instead of with united [ones]?…This way one only succeeds in blunting, in suffocating any individual aspiration, any attempt in any form, towards the new, in which we can only find the better.—We don't ask for revolutions, but evolution yes! And fast and ardent. And let us remember that evolution, according to Darwin, happens due to a succession of obstinate attempts. Ninety-nine fall, one triumphs. Let us beware that we do not also suffocate that one." [*È un curioso fenomeno...che ho riscontrato in persone intelligentissime, questo adirarsi o di spaventarsi perchè un pittore fa un quadretto a puntini invece che a linee, a colori divisi invece che uniti?...In questo modo si riesce soltanto a rintuzzare, a soffocare ogni aspirazione individuale, ogni tentativo in qualunque forma, verso il nuovo, in cui soltanto possiamo trovare il meglio.—Non domandiamo rivoluzioni, ma l'evoluzione si! e veloce e ardita. E ricordiamo che l'evoluzione, secondo Darwin, è data da un succedersi ostinato di tentativi. Novantanove cadono: uno trionfa. Guardiamo bene di non soffocare anche quell'uno*."]. Ibid.

302 "*una deviazione o degenerazione della pittura, come alcuni lamentano.*" Grubicy, "*Maternità* di Gaetano Previati," in *Prima esposizione triennale Brera 1891*, 52.

devolution or atavism were of major debate in this time period and were applied to manifold cultural manifestations.

Divisionism and Degeneration

Underlying the commentary surrounding the radical politics of Longoni's leftist themes, the amorphous, distorted forms of Previati's revisitation of a religious subject, the "diseased" strokes teeming across Morbelli's canvas, and the overarching analogy between the state of Italian art and the health of the Italian body, was a mounting issue within the Italian (and European) psyche: the emerging concern with degeneration, a concern that would pervade the intellectual and popular writings of the 1890s, especially in discussions of Symbolism. Running counter to the Italian enthusiasm for progress was the idea that modernity, industrialization, urban growth, the immigration from rural areas, especially from the less developed, southern part of the peninsula to the city, and the results of economic advancement, could bring about the converse effect—that of degeneration.[303]

In its broadest definition, degeneration was feared to be the outcome that civilization—or even a nation—could suffer at the hands of progress. After all, some thought modernization brought negative accompaniments: poverty, crime, prostitution, supposed pathological disorders (which went from madness to neurasthenia), and the violent mob behavior often linked to extremist left-wing political groups, particularly the

303 For a close investigation of degeneration in France, Italy, and Britain see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Another source is J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman, eds. *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). In part, Pick notes, 143-44, this trend in thought was the result of a waning confidence in the positivist model that began to make itself felt during the 1890s. But positivism remained an important mainstay from many during the decade.

anarchists. While the term degeneration was absorbed by the medical and budding psychiatric realm to diagnose supposed mental disorders attributed to hereditary decline and the presence of atavistic characteristics, it was also a catch phrase for the general *malaise* thought to be at the core of any unraveling of cultural mainstays of civilization or bastions of political stability.

Multiple sources—from the works of literary authors and philosophers to those of scientists—fed into this pervasive dialectical theory, which often remained ill-defined and inconsistent. The concept of degeneration was formulated by Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809-1873), but one of its main proponents in Italy was the criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), a great advancer of biological determinism and modern day phrenology.[304] By the 1890s, Lombroso had linked criminal behavior to pathological dysfunction and regression (as well as to notions of biological inferiority and evolutionary backwardness attributed to heredity, gender, and race).[305] In 1894 he added anarchists to this group of deviants.[306] Moreover, according to Lombroso even artistic genius could be caused by mental illness, which led him to sustain that the act of creation by individuals with this "condition" was involuntary.[307] However, the best known work

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304 For the most recent analysis on Lombroso see Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Praeger, 2002). Theories of degeneration varied from country to country and, in the case of Lombroso, who was a positivist and socialist, he also believed in the power of science as a tool through which to foster nationhood and by which to understand and contain the inherent problems that threatened the Italian kingdom. See Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 28, 141.

305 Cesare Lombroso first published *L'uomo delinquente* in 1876, but subsequent editions, in which he elaborates upon his theories of classification, appeared through 1896-97, when the book's fifth edition was issued. By the 1884 third edition, he had expanded his system of criminal identification to also embrace the theory of degeneracy. Gibson outlines this succinctly in Gibson, *Born to Crime*, 22-25.

306 See Cesare Lombroso, *Gli anarchici* (Turin: Bocca, 1894).

307 These ideas were originally put forth in his *Genio e follia*, first published in 1864. Lombroso sustained that genius was an uncontrolled state and, like madness, the result of sickness. See Cesare Lombroso,

on the concept of degeneration from the period was Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, originally published in German in 1892 and based largely on Lombroso's theories.[308] Written a year after the first Brera Triennale, it summed up existing perspectives on degeneration. Widely read and translated, *Degeneration* connected many nineteenth-century cultural manifestations—philosophy, music, literature, and art (the latter ranging from the Pre-Raphaelites to Symbolism)—to the mental decay and abnormality of Europe's intellectuals, who had been adversely impacted by the transformations wrought by progress. Nordau argued that the over-stimulation resulting from modern life induced a range of physiological ailments from mental weakness to hysteria.[309]

In the wake of these recently expounded social theories, the dissolution of form in Symbolist work, or *pittura ideista*, was perceived by some as yet another visual manifestation of impending physical and mental degeneracy and as a signifier of the nefarious effects of mental illness on representational imagery. Divisionism's optical and chromatic effects, fashioned with fractured pigment, were more symptoms of the weakening of Italian art and of the cognitive capabilities of those who created it. Indeed, Nordau attributes the divided style to an optical disorder:

> The curious style of certain recent painter—'impressionists,' 'stipplers,' or mosaicists,' "papilloteurs' or 'quiverers,'…—becomes at once intelligible if we keep in view the researches of the Charcot school into the visual derangements in degeneration and hysteria. The painters who assure us that they are sincere, and reproduce nature as they see it, speak truth. The degenerate artist who suffers

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Genio e follia 3rd ed. (Milan: Hoepli, 1877).

308 See Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, intro. George L. Mosse (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska, 1993 [orig. ed. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1895]).

309 Max Nordau published *Degeneration* as *Entartung* in German in 1892. The first Italian edition was produced in 1893.

> from *nystagmus*, or trembling of the eyeball, will, in fact, perceive the phenomena of nature trembling, restless, devoid of firm outline.[310]

The supposed mania of those artists with overexcited senses was also symptomatic of degeneration.[311]

The Divisionists were well aware of Nordau's writings, and in 1893 Grubicy published an article which seethed with hatred for Nordau and *Degeneration*.[312] This prompted a discussion of *Dawn* between Morbelli and Grubicy, which is documented in their correspondence. In response to Grubicy's article, demonstrating a general conversance with Nordau's theories, he questioned his theses. Morbelli challenged Nordau's statements regarding art, turning the "scientific" argument back on Nordau by noting that his conclusions did not entail any physical examination or laboratory analysis of the actual paintings:

> If a comparison were elicited [illegible] I would say that [illegible] vulgar scientists, to judge my painting [illegible] for example Dawn, would begin by examining the canvas, the trace, the support, the myriad colors, the smell of the varnish the width the weight, etc. etc. to conclude etc. etc.[313]

Interestingly, his letter made reference to an infected mind, in wording not unlike Chirtani's, revealing the currency of illness analogies in the 1890s. Morbelli, though, felt that this potential mental ailment could be controlled and directed by the individual:

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310 Nordau, *Degeneration*, 27.

311 Even when the adoption of Divisionism is seen as a sign of health and regeneration, as in the case of Macchi's criticism, there is still an undercurrent of apprehension regarding the decay of Italian culture, only in this case it is conversely blamed upon existing models, which were seen to be in decline.

312 Vittore Grubicij, "Un vivisettore dell'arte. Max Nordau," *La riforma* (Rome) 27, no. 72, March 13, 1893, 2.

313 "*Se fosse lecito un paragone direi che i* [illegible] *vulgo scienziati, pei giudicare il mio quadro* [illegible]*, caso Alba, comincierebbero dall'esaminare la tela, la traccia, il telaio, le miriadi di colori, l'odore della vernice lo spessore il peso, ecc ecc per concludere ecc ecc.*" Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, October 6, 1893, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.65.

> I too believe that genius is a degeneration, an inflammation of the brain that well directed by additional studies or through innate reflection, can lead to great things, while if fragmented or vulgar can lead to madness. But on the other hand what is the step that separates the madman from the sane one?[314]

Morbelli criticized the "brutal" reductive nature of Nordau's "German science," as well as Lombroso's theories. His own more nuanced interpretation of mental states, sanity, and genius was less dependant upon biological determinism, for—in keeping with socialist idealism—he saw learning as a tool for individual growth and self-improvement. Morbelli believed in the importance of free will, took a "nurture over nature" stance that countered notions of degeneration, and optimistically trusted in society's potential for improvement through progress.

So, for some, Divisionism fell under the rubric of degeneration, as the supposed obsessive focus required to create the millions of brushstrokes which constituted the refracted surfaces of a Divisionist canvas and the apparent optical ailment that allowed individuals to view such decomposing compositions demonstrated. These manifestations of degeneration implied physical syndromes threatening the Italian people and were seen as symptoms of a greater force that threatened to usurp the order of the recently forged Italian country.

Conclusion

Whether one were "pro" or "anti," the themes of the modern and the foreign seemed to appear in tandem at a time when Italy was endeavoring to define itself.

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314 "*Ritengo anch'io che il genio sia una degenerazione, un'infiammazione al cervello che ben diretta da studi anteriori o da naturale riflessività, conduca a cose grandi, mentre se sgregolata o volgare conduca alla pazzia.Del resto qual'é il gradino che separa il pazzo dal sano?*" Ibid.

Certainly the tension between responsiveness to new international artistic currents and the desire to remain untainted by these is at play throughout the first part of this decade. Although the Divisionists were wary of admitting "influence" which could detract from their own modern creations, they generally felt that contact with foreign art and the realization of a style aligned with progressive ideas were positive. Conversely, many Italians saw the incursion of foreign influences upon the peninsula's cultural production as a threat, coming as it did only a few decades after Italy had finally shaken off foreign control, and at a time when Italians were actively engaged in recapturing the glory of their country's artistic legacy and heritage. Italy's national image was too frail. The thought many dreaded to verbalize was that the adoption of artistic codes from France or elsewhere would erode Italian identity.

These fundamental fears in Italian society at the beginning of the 1890s were apparent in the discourse surrounding the four very different Divisionist paintings shown at the 1891 Brera Triennale. Their display engendered critiques that encapsulated alarm and ambiguous feelings regarding the modern and the foreign, and anxieties harbored by the Italian people about the possible degeneration of their own culture. These views were amplified by a certain level of hysteria which would soften over time, but which temporarily blinded many Italian thinkers. Moreover, as Chapter 2 suggested, unlike the Neo-Impressionists, the Italian Divisionists maintained a grounding in Italian art of the past and, in fact, did not wholly abandon tradition. The dissenting views regarding Divisionism represented the contradictory perspectives at work in this time: the embrace of modernity and progress could be indicative of society's improvement or it could be a sign of society's disintegration. The next chapter will show that optimistic notions

regarding progress persisted in the Divisionists' ongoing commitment to empirical painting methods and radical politics.

CHAPTER 4
"*ARTE PER L'UMANITÀ*:" SOCIALIST ENGAGEMENT[315]

The Divisionists' adoption of a scientifically inspired technique, which signaled an alliance with modernity, often went hand in hand with a similarly spirited embrace of leftist politics. This political engagement was one the Divisionists had in common with their Neo-Impressionist counterparts in France, Belgium and Holland, and indicated the left-wing political attitudes shared by a number of European artists during this era.[316] The Divisionists' choices were spurred by optimistic attitudes regarding the power of positivist philosophy and its underlying empirical foundation to engender progress in culture and improvement of society. While the commitment to leftist ideals transcended borders, the Divisionists' goals were inherently nationalistic. They sought to address

315 This is taken from a quote by Pellizza: ".now is no longer the time to do Art for Art's sake, but Art for Humanity." ["*ora non è più il tempo di fare dell'Arte per l'Arte, ma dell'Arte per l'Umanità*."] Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo to Angelo Morbelli, May 12, 1895, cited in Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Catalogo dei manoscritti di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo provenienti dalla donazione eredi Pellizza* (Tortona: Comune di Tortona**,** 1974), 39.

316 I note these parallel concerns between the Neo-Impressionists and the Divisionists in Chapter 2. Given these similarities, two important models for this chapter are works on the related movement of Neo-Impressionism and the intersection of French and Belgian manifestations of this style and anarcho-communism and socialism. See Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), and John G. Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994). Major figures among the Neo-Impressionists who were outspoken regarding their leftist views and painted socially conscious work were Maximilien Luce, Paul Signac, Jan Toroop, and Henry van de Velde (1863-1957). While Camille Pissarro had anarchic beliefs and painted in a Neo-Impressionist style from about 1886 until the beginning of the 1890s, he was rarely overtly political in his art, although he did, for example, produce a series of drawings on society's social ills called *Turpitudes sociales*, which were not intended for public consumption. See Richard Thomson, "Camille Pissarro, 'Turpitudes socials,' and the Universal Exhibition of 1889," *Arts Magazine* 56 (April 1982): 82-88. For a study of Pissarro's Neo-Impressionist period, see Martha Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

problems within the confines of Italy in a project that actually ran counter to some of the accusations made against them during the course of the 1891 Brera Triennale. Particularly during the first half of the 1890s, the Divisionists with left-wing political beliefs made pictures informed by socialist and anarchist principles, and employed a number of Realist strategies to clearly express specific messages and narratives.[317] A key theme was the lamentable abasement of the urban and rural poor and working classes.

In some cases the Divisionists proposed positive portrayals of empowerment which pointed to a better future for Italy. Giuseppe Pellizza's monumental image of marching farmers, *The Fourth Estate* (*Il Quarto Stato* [fig. 28]), realized between 1898 and 1901, is one such positive image and represents the apex of this body of work.[318] Painted at the end of a decade marked by political chaos and societal strife, it symbolized the hope many Italians had for social change at the dawn of a new century, which was heralded by the inception of the more liberal Giolittian Era government. This chapter will undertake an in-depth examination of works by Emilio Longoni, Plinio Nomellini, Angelo Morbelli, and Pellizza, which address societal problems, including protests, indigence, and worker exploitation. Through analyses of these paintings and the social, political, and economic conditions represented therein, it is possible to trace the impact that Italy's historical events had upon an important body of Divisionist production of the

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317 Art with social themes in Italy existed prior to the Divisionists' work. There was a long-standing Realist tradition in Italy dating to the 1860s that dealt with social subjects, which became full-blown in the 1880s. See, for example, Rossana Bossaglia, "Dal realismo sociale al simbolismo populista," in *Arte e socialità in Italia: Dal realismo al simbolismo, 1865-1915* (Milan: La Società per le belle arti ed esposizione permanente, 1979), 21-28. While socialist and anarchist perspectives on the worker differ—the former supporting the urban worker and calling for the enfranchisement of the working force, the latter advocating the destruction of the urban and industrial world that debased men and women in favor of an utopian, collectively run, agrarian model—these distinctions were not necessarily acknowledged in the viewpoints expressed by the artists addressing the social problems of the day.

318 Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Fourth Estate* (*Il Quarto Stato*), 1898-1901, oil on canvas, 293 x 545 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan.

1890s. These works also evidence the Divisionists' attention to current political issues, their active engagement in social problems of the day, and their desire to help stimulate positive change in Italy. The intersection of Italy's current events with the Divisionist project provides a visual testament to a nation in the making.

Longoni and Class Struggle

Emilio Longoni was one of the most politically committed of the Divisionist artists.[319] As discussed in Chapter 3, *The Strike's Spokesperson* (*L'oratore dello sciopero*), 1890-91 [fig. 24], was his first incursion into Divisionism.[320] Moreover, it was one of the first works executed in the divided idiom that carried a leftist politicized message. Longoni's impoverished roots led to his dedication to the proletariat cause, a commitment that was further strengthened by his association with the socialist milieu of Milan. He was a friend of the radical writers Gustavo Macchi and Pompeo Bettini, and frequented the salon at the residence of the lawyer, Luigi Majno, and his wife, Ersilia, a nascent feminist. Many leftist intellectuals gathered there, including Anna Kuliscioff and Filippo Turati.[321] Longoni's affiliation with this circle led him to contribute illustrations to numerous socialist journals published in Milan, among them the Partito Socialista Italiano's own *La lotta di classe*, in which *The Spokesperson* was published in 1893, accompanied by a narrative authored by Macchi.[322]

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319 For my analysis on Longoni, I have relied primarily on the exhaustive study by Giovanna Ginex, *Emilio Longoni: Catalogo ragionato* (Milan: Motta, 1995), especially 11-63, 184-86.

320 Emilio Longoni, *The Strike's Spokesperson* (*L'oratore dello sciopero*), 1890-91, oil on canvas, 193 x 134 cm, private collection, Pisa. Alternate titles for this work are *The Haranguer* (*L'arringatore*) and *May 1st* (*1mo Maggio*).

321 Ginex, *Catalogo ragionato,* 26.

322 The image was published with the title *The Spokesperson of the People* (*L'oratore popolare*). See *La*

As already noted, Longoni's painting depicts one of the protests staged in Milan on May 1, 1890, the first year that the European Labor Day, May Day, or the Feast of the Worker, was observed. (It was established by European socialists at their 1889 assembly in Paris.)[323] Although the celebration of May Day was forbidden in Italy, Milanese laborers defied the law and demonstrated for higher wages, improved working conditions, and an eight-hour work day.[324] Milan was one of the industrial centers beset by urban upheaval during the 1890s, and demonstrations like these were not uncommon. Provoked by poor work environments and low pay, factory employees organized numerous uprisings which played out on the city's streets. This decade of protests in Milan would culminate in 1898 with the Bava Beccaris Massacre, which will be addressed within the section of this chapter on Pellizza's *The Fourth Estate*.

Giovanna Ginex has pointed out that Longoni attended this May Day demonstration and sketched it on the spot, so this image is not a dispassionate document, but rather represents Longoni's personal experience of a charged moment in history. It still conveys immediacy today. Longoni portrayed the crowds of demonstrators assembled in Piazza Fontana from a raised viewpoint, though the *oratore* stands above our sightline. The surging crowd is realized with a flurry of brushstrokes that impart the fibrillant movement of the people. The flattened forms of the buildings behind them, executed with a more uniform application of pigments, provide a contrasting backdrop. On the right, the red flags of the radical left are visible. The overall hue of the crowd, as

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lotta di classe no. 17 (April 29-30, 1893): 6.

323 Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia degli anarchici nell'epoca degli attentati* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1981), 11.

324 Nunzio Pernicone discusses the May 1st protests in Italy, as well as their aftermath in his *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 258-69.

well as that of the buildings, is a muted violet with brown undertones. Occasional daubs of green—along the windows of the building to the right and on the *oratore*'s shoe—function as chromatic accents. Along the bottom portion of the composition, the close-up view of the heads of the men nearest to the foot of the platform—upon which the *oratore* has leapt to speak—seem to be located outside the contained pictorial space of the painting, and serve to enhance the effect of witnessing an historic moment firsthand. Finally, in the distance to the right, a rectangular clearing in the crowd denotes the approach of police wielding bayonets to quell the protest.

The *oratore* who delivers an impromptu speech to the mass of workers is the work's focal point. Looming large, he appears to lean out of the painting. A cerulean sky, in which a bright blue predominates, but is juxtaposed with orange to achieve a maximum, light-filled intensity, brings the white-shirted man into even sharper focus. While we cannot know exactly what the *oratore* is saying, the reaction of those men at his feet, one with his fingers in his mouth whistling, another using his hands as a makeshift megaphone to amplify his words, suggests their noisy concurrence. Macchi's text in *La lotta di classe*, while written after the work was executed, provides an idea of the tone of the speech given by this man and, indeed, by those who actually proselytized at the May Day gathering. One paragraph states:

> And he speaks of the great truths that are in the winds of May: all those who have the strength within, in hand, and tear the bread from the earth, and products from machines, and useful secrets from science, and agitated emotions from art—they want to live. But one tyrant takes the air around them, the ground beneath, and steals the machines and the books from theirs hands: Capital.[325]

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325 "*Ed egli dice le grandi verità sono nel vento di maggio: tutti coloro che hanno la forza in sè, in mano, e strappano alla terra il pane, alle macchine il prodotto, alla scienza i segreti utili, all'arte le emozioni agitanti—vogliono vivere. Ma toglie loro l'aria intorno, e la terra di sotto, e rapisce loro le macchine ed i libri di fra le mani, un tiranno: il Capitale.*" Gustavo Macchi, "L'oratore popolare," *La lotta di classe*, no. 17 (April 29-30, 1893): 6.

The overriding theme, a Marxist-inflected denouncement of capitalism, succinctly reflected the radical Socialism espoused by both Longoni and Macchi.

Despite its specificity, *The Spokesperson* bears multiple signs that would come to represent Italy's political identity and, thus, also functions as a more generalized emblem of political protest. The work's alternate title, *May 1*, was a date that quickly came to symbolize, in the collective memory of Italians, the class tensions extant in Italy.[326] The piazza itself, where such protests occur(ed), has witnessed many political sagas.[327] The tradition of the rally is one associated with liberal Italy, first with the Risorgimento movement and Garibaldi. Then, with the inception of May Day, it became analogous with leftist gatherings in public places.[328] Not unlike grand-manner history painting, *The Spokesperson* is an image which transcends the realistic representation of the moment in question and comes to stand for a country's heroic deeds in the face of oppressive government.

Not all of Longoni's social subjects dealt with the insurgent labor force. *Reflections of a Starving Man* (*Riflessioni di un affamato*), 1894 [fig. 29], alternately called *Social Contrasts* (*Contrasti sociali*) or *Class Struggle* (*Lotta di classe*), presents a Marxist interpretation of the distribution of wealth and the division between the disenfranchised and the bourgeoisie.[329] A cold, impoverished man lingers outside a

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326 For the significance of May 1 in Italy see, for example, Mario Fincardi, "Il 1mo maggio," in *I Luoghi della memoria*, 3 vols., ed. Mario Isnenghi (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1997), 2: 129-37.

327 Mario Isnenghi, "La Piazza," in Ibid., 1: 45-66.

328 Giovanni Contini, "Il Comizio," in Ibid., 1: 175-201.

329 Emilio Longoni, *Reflections of a Starving Man (Riflessioni di un affamato)*, 1894, oil on canvas, 190 x 155 cm, Museo del Territorio Biellese, Biella. Documentation on *Reflections* depends upon Ginex, *Catalogo ragionato*, 196-200; and Ginex, *Emilio Longoni: Opere scelte e inediti* (Milan: Motta, 2002), 21-22.

restaurant in winter, on a snow-covered sidewalk, staring longingly into the window at a well-dressed couple dining. In a review of Longoni's painting, Macchi described the man as a well-to-do gentleman and his female companion as a *grisette*.[330] The scene allowed Longoni to fully exploit the possibilities of Divisionist theory, using multicolored thread-like brushwork to create the light effects of the restaurant's illumination shining through the opaque glass. Quick distinct strokes of white, brownish gold, and faint reddish pink make up the exterior background against which the darkly clothed man stands. Compositionally, the diagonal created by the edge of the sidewalk bisects the pictorial space, visually separating the indigent from the well-to-do. Thus, we see that only the tip of the poor man's hat breaks into the edge of the framed window, an otherwise inaccessible realm that he can never enter.

Soon after *Reflections* was exhibited in the 1894 Brera Triennial, it was reproduced along with an imaginary dialogue by Macchi (or possibly Bettini), in the 1894 *La lotta di classe*, issued to commemorate that year's Feast of the Worker. The title of the picture, a play on words in Italian as in English, no doubt inspired the following narrative—an exceedingly frivolous conversation between the couple inside the café, punctuated by the thoughts of the unemployed man, reduced to the state of a beggar, outside—which underlined the wasteful consumption and insensitive attitude of the new Italian bourgeoisie:

> Her: (inside). I'm not hungry. That lobster we ate for dinner tonight upset my stomach.
> Him: (cutting a steak). Do like I do. Just suck the drippings. It is an excellent filet of beef.
> Starving man: (outside). I want to know why they don't eat those four bread rolls. I would eat twelve. I've been wandering around for 24 hours!
> Him: (inside). Would you like something else? Something spicy? A menu?

330 Gustavo Macchi, "Artisti Moderni: Emilio Longoni," *Vita moderna* 3, no. 41 (October 14, 1894): 322.

> Her: (listlessly). No, no.
> Him: Some eggs with truffles?
> Her: I'll try. How I envy your appetite...
> Him: One must try to keep the appetite alive. You see, this morning after I left you I took a magnificent brisk walk. (Calling): Waiter?
> Starving man: (outside). If at least I could find work! I know my trade, and I can last fifteen hours in the factory. (The waiter comes to take their order and removes the steak). What pigs! They send back the meat because they are too full! I'd show you how to eat it. This way no one eats it, and we are the ones who paid for it!
> Him: (inside having noticed the man outside). Hey, what are you doing, stupid! Go away, go to work![331]

This somewhat heavy-handed statement on the gap between the middle-class and the abject poor was not taken lightly in its day, nor was Longoni's image. The Divisionist effects of *Reflections* may have been greatly reduced in the black and white *Lotta di classe* reproduction, but the socialist message was clear, strengthened by the adjacent polemic dialogue. Indeed, the subversive illustration led the police to seize the journal for instigating class hatred, which was prohibited by law.[332] Longoni himself became subject to frequent police checks. Pursuant to *Reflections* and, in part, due to the problems it caused for him, he abandoned explicit political topics in his work, turning first to

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331 "*Lei: (di dentro). Non ho appetito. Quell'arragosta che abbiamo mangiato a cena stanotte m'ha guastato lo stomaco./Lui: (tagliando una bistecca). Fa come faccio io: basta succhiare il sugo di carne; è un eccellente filetto del migliore manzo./L'affamato: (di fuori). Vorrei sapere perchè non mangiano quelle quattro michette; dodici ne mangerei, per dio, chè son ventiquattr'ore che giro!/Lui: (di dentro): Vuoi qualcos'altro, qualcosa di piccante? Una minuta? /Lei: (svogliata): No, no./Lui: Delle uova coi tartufi?/Lei: Proviamo. Come t'invidio il tuo appetito.../Lui: Bisogna pur cercare di mantener vivo l'appetito, vedi stamattina, quando t'ho lasciata, ho fatto una magnifica trottata...(chiama) Cameriere?/L'affamato: (di fuori). Se almeno trovassi lavoro! Il mio mestiere lo so, e in officina resisto quindici ore (Il cameriere viene a ricevere gli ordini e porta via la bistecca). Che porci! Mandano indietro la carne perchè hanno la pancia troppo piena. Vi farei vedere io, a mangiarla. Così nessuno la consuma, e siamo noi che l'abbiamo pagata!/Lui: (di dentro, accortosi di quell'individuo di fuori). Ohe, che fai mammalucco! Va via, va a bottega!*". "Un Passante," "Riflessioni di un affamato," *La lotta di classe*, May 1, 1894, n.p.

332 The censoring and seizure of insurgent press was possible under a new set of laws instituted following the uprisings in Italy in 1894 to suppress radical activity. These included any crimes using explosives, crimes committed by the press—including any prompting to disobey the law or any anti-military propaganda—and limited freedom to assemble and challenge ruling order. Masini, *Storia degli anarchici*, 55-56.

experimentation with genre painting and then, around 1897, to the remove of Symbolist allegories and landscapes.[333]

Nomellini's Workers

Plinio Nomellini was, with Longoni, the most politically active of the Divisionists. Born in Leghorn, he studied with the Macchiaiolo Giovanni Fattori in Florence, where he lived from 1885-1890.[334] He shared a strong personal bond with Pellizza, whom he met in Florence at the Academy in 1888.[335] He then moved to Genoa, a city in which socialist and anarchist communities flourished. Nomellini himself had pronounced anarchic leanings. He counted among his friends the young Genoese poet and political radical, Ceccardo Roccatagliata Ceccardi (1871-1919), whose works included the pamphlet, *Dai paesi dell'anarchia. Impressioni sui moti del 1894 nel Carrarese*, penned in support of the miners who were imprisoned for revolting against the conditions in the Tuscan marble quarries in 1894.[336] In that same year, Nomellini's involvement in anarchist meetings led to his trial for political subversion.[337] The anarchist

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333 Ginex, *Catalogo ragionato*, 29.

334 This section relies upon the scholarship of Gianfranco Bruno, in particular *Plinio Nomellini* (Milan: Stringa, 1985). Biographical documentation is also derived from Eleonora Barbara Nomellini, "Cenni biographici," in *Plinio Nomellini. I colori del sogno* (Leghorn: Allemandi, 1998), 102-12.

335 Aurora Scotti [Tosini] discusses their friendship in her article, "Genova 1892: L'incontro 'divisionista' di Plinio Nomellini e Giuseppe Pellizza," *Quaderni del museo: Accademia liguistica di belle arti*, no. 5 (May 1985), 8-11. I am grateful to Anna Costantini for getting me a copy of this article.

336 See Gianfranco Bruno, "Plinio Nomellini," in *Divisionismo italiano*, ed. Gabriella Belli (Milan: Electa and Museo d'arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 1990), 206. The uprising occurred in Carrara on January 3, 1894, Roccatagliata witnessed the events. See Masini, *Storia degli anarchici*, 23-27; and Ceccardo Roccatagliata Ceccardi, *Dai paesi dell'anarchia. Impressioni sui moti del 1894 nel Carrarese* (Genoa: Tipografia operaia, n.d.).

337 Bruno, *Plinio Nomellini* (1985), 11; Bruno, "Plinio Nomellini," (1990), 206; and Masini, *Storia degli anarchici*, 33. A law implemented in 1889 was used to arrest the anarchists simply for meeting. Article 248 of the Penal Code specifically stated: "When five or more persons associate for the purpose of committing

lawyer, Pietro Gori (1865-1911), came to the defense of Nomellini and his cohorts, but charges were dismissed in just eleven cases out of thirty-five. Nomellini was among those released from charges because upstanding citizens vouched for him, including his highly respected Macchiaiolo teachers.[338]

Anarchic activities, arrests, and trials were not uncommon in Europe in this period. More so than other Divisionist, Nomellini had affinities with the radically committed Neo-Impressionists, in particular the French painter and anarchist Maximilien Luce. Luce also focused on scenes of laborers, industry, and the oppressed and, in 1894, was jailed for a time following the Carnot assassination (as were, among others, Grave and Fénéon) simply because his political affiliations made him a suspicious character in the eyes of the authorities.[339] In contradistinction to his French counterpart, Nomellini eventually abandoned his left-wing political ideals.

Nonetheless, from the 1880s until his trial, Nomellini's commitment to art with a social message was unambiguous. It began with his series of worker paintings of 1889. These included the Naturalist depictions *The Accident in the Factory* (*L'incidente in fabbrica*), *Bricklayers* (*Mattonai*), and *Strike* (*Sciopero*).[340] His best-known images of laborers are those he executed in Genoa in the early 1890s, in particular *Piazza*

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crimes against the administration of justice, the public trust, the public safety, the morals and order of the family, or against persons or property, each of them is punished for the sole fact of the association with imprisonment from one to five years." Cited in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 268.

338 Diego Martelli was instrumental, hiring the lawyers Giovanni Rosadi and Pietro Gori to defend him. However, it was Signorini's intervention that was credited for Nomellini's release. Piero Dini and Alba del Soldato, *Diego Martelli* (Florence: Il Torchio, 1978), 277.

339 For recent scholarship on Luce, see Anne-Claire Ducreaux, *Maximilen Luce:Peindre de la condition humaine* (Paris: Somogy, 2000).

340 Scholars have recognized that these pictures seem related to those of the Belgian artist, Constantin Meunier. How Nomellini would have seen Meunier's work at this early date is unknown, but Gianfranco Bruno proposes that he made a trip to Paris before 1890 and could have gained exposure to Meunier there. See Bruno, "Plinio Nomellini," (1990), 204.

Caricamento (1891 [fig. 30]), and *The Call to Work* (*La diana del lavoro*, 1893 [fig. 31]).[341] Both portray scenes centered around the shipping industry in Genoa, a city which, together with Milan and Turin, comprised Italy's "industrial triangle." Shipping and ship construction were significant enterprises in Genoa, whose large port represented Northern Italy's primary Western marine transport hub.[342] This port was enlarged and modernized between 1877 and the early 1890s. Already at mid-century, almost 10,000 dock workers were employed in Genoa, and their numbers burgeoned during the 1890s with the expansion of the port.[343] Given the prominence of the shipping industry and the visibility of the laborers associated with maritime commerce in Genoa, Nomellini's attraction to this subject matter is not surprising.

Piazza Caricamento is not a full-blown Divisionist work, but it does show Nomellini's nascent exploration of Divisionist tendencies. Although it is a large-scale painting, it did not draw as much attention at the 1891 Brera Triennial as those works addressed in Chapter 3 did. *Piazza Caricamento* features a loose, *Macchia*-type brushwork. It is dominated by cool blues contrasted with light tones and punctuated by dark forms, tonal strategies that preceded Divisionism. It also freezes a moment in time, and lacks an obvious narrative or message; in these respects it recalls Impressionist models. Nomellini captured the daily activities occurring in Genoa's main seaside piazza,

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341 Plinio Nomellini, *Piazza Caricamento*, 1891, oil on canvas, 158 x 175 cm, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Tortona. Plinio Nomellini, *The Call to Work* (*La Diana del lavoro*), 1893, oil on canvas, 60 x 93 cm, private collection, Italy.

342 For an examination of the Genoa port, see M. Elisabetta Tonizzi, *Merci, strutture e lavoro nel porto di Genova tra '800 e '900* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2000); and Elisabetta Bianchi Tonizzi, "Innovazione e modernizzazione nel porto di Genova dall'unità alla grande Guerra," in *Innovazione e modernizzazione in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, eds. Enrico Decleva, Carlo G. Lacaita, and Angelo Ventura (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995), 193-232.

343 Maurice F. Neufeld, *Italy: School for Awakening Countries: The Italian Labor Movement in Its Political, Social, and Economic Setting from 1800 to 1960* (Ithaca: New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1961), 568.

a spacious square, cobbled with large flagstones located at the base of the city's steep hills, which opens onto the port.

In his painting, the artist foregrounded two muscular men whose dark work clothes and heavy boots identify them as laborers. They are more specifically *camalli*, the stevedores at Genoa's docks responsible for loading and unloading the freight from ships.[344] Behind them are allusions to the varied activities of the busy piazza. On the right, bourgeois men in proper hats, knee-length coats, and trim trousers read the newspaper, and two port workers appear engaged in conversation next to mule-drawn carts piled high with cargo. To the left are more laborers, one of whom sweeps the road. Another blue-shirted man, bisected by the left edge of the canvas—a visual device Nomellini favored, which heightens the sense of a random glimpse of a scene in flux—is caught in the motion of swinging a basket. Nomellini chose not to create an apogee of socialist or anarchist principles, but rather to analytically depict the class differences observable in quotidian scenes. He then subtly undercuts this image, supposedly devoid of political purpose, by making the two striding *camalli* in *Piazza Caricamento* its principle protagonists. Shown upright and strong, they project confidence. This is a celebration of the proletariat.

The Call to Work takes a slightly less optimistic tone. The painting represents men gathering at the Sampierdarena shipyards situated along the coastline to the west of Genoa proper (today this area has been incorporated into the city).[345] This quarter was a zone of subversive political activities, and the mere location constitutes an allusion to the

344 The men are identified as *camalli* in Bruno's entry on *Piazza Caricamento* in *Divisionismo italiano*, 212.

345 The shipyards are named in Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 107.

area's radical working-class history. On May 1, 1891, a rally there of 2,000 people, which featured several anarchist speakers, was followed by fights between the protestors and the authorities, concluding with many arrests.

The Call to Work reveals the maturation of Nomellini's brushwork, which had evolved from the *Macchia* idiom into smaller daubs and individual strokes of color, albeit still with a grounding in an impressionistic Naturalism. The artist opposed several single figures in the foreground of the composition against the long, dense crowd at the back of the scene. The empty area of street which occupies the picture's lower left quadrant, along with the cropping of the man, boy, and horizontal stream of workers on the right of the frame, distinguishes this work, and are evocative of photographic models. His close-up focus on the two figures also personalizes the workers, as he had done previously in *Piazza Caricamento*.

Despite Nomellini's radical politics, his pictures are not blatantly incendiary. The *camalli* and the shipyard workmen are neither the excited mob of Longoni's *Spokesperson* nor the downtrodden mass of Sottocornola's *The Dawn of the Worker*, discussed in Chapter 1. Instead, similarly to the farmers in Pellizza's paintings, which postdate Nomellini's, these laborers might have recourse.[346] Nomellini's images of dock workers suggest the power of the working class. These men, he seems to propose, through solidarity, fortitude, and defiance, can prevail over their current plight and better their standard of living.

Like Longoni, Nomellini did not continue in a single-minded pursuit of leftist subjects in his painting, although shipyard workers and sailors did persist as one theme in

346 Several scholars suggest that Nomellini's worker images were influential for Pellizza's own. See, for example, Scotti [Tosini], *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo: Il Quarto Stato* (1976), 17-22; and Bruno, entry on *Piazza Caricamento*, in *Divisionismo italiano,* 212.

his *oeuvre*. In part, he was beleaguered by his trial in 1894. Morbelli tells of his distress in a letter to Grubicy in which he mentions: "Nomellini freed, he wrote me, he is upset, the 5 months disoriented him!"[347] Nomellini voiced this in a letter written to Pellizza, with whom he had a rich correspondence: "The question is if to now continue the struggle and my dear, your Nomellini's Don Quixote has too many windmills to battle and who knows if he will be crowned with full victory."[348] Nomellini's decision was clear: in the years to follow he turned to a variety of apolitical subjects, from genteel ladies (which recall, in tone and composition, the works of the Macchiaiolo Silvestro Lega), to Symbolist imagery. His final break with the left-wing idealism of his younger days came in the 1920s, when he became a Fascist sympathizer, like many former socialists and anarchic syndicalists. Perhaps the windmills had proven too many.

Morbelli's Hospices and Rice Paddies

Angelo Morbelli also focused on the underprivileged with aims that combined formal interests and political commitment. Although perhaps the least radical of the artists examined in this discussion, Morbelli was a supporter of socialist goals and subscribed to journals such as the *Critica sociale*.[349] His views were made more apparent in a survey conducted by *Vita moderna* in commemoration of May 1, on people's

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347 "*Nomellini liberato, mi scrisse, è sconfortato, i 5 mesi lo hanno disorientato!*" Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, June 21, 1894, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru I.4.72.

348 "*La questione si è di ora continuare la lotta, e caro mio, il Don Chisciotte del tuo Nomellini ha da combattere contro troppi mulini e chissà se avrà coronazione di piena vittoria*." Plinio Nomellini to Giuseppe Pellizza, October 7, 1895. Archives, Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, no. 39.

349 Scholars usually define Morbelli as a moderate socialist. See Maria Luisa Caffarelli, "A Milano, l'ideologia, il sociale," in Luciano Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1982), 84-85. Morbelli discussed the subscription to *Critica sociale* in a letter to Pellizza. See Angelo Morbelli to Giuseppe Pellizza, December 18, 1894, Archives, Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, no. 203; also reproduced in Teresa Fiori, ed., *Archivi del divisionismo*, intro. Fortunato Bellonzi, 2 vols. (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1968), 1: 123; and in Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli*, 42.

opinions regarding Socialism.[350] The answers from a cross-section of cultural and political figures were published over the course of several months. Morbelli was among the first polled. The survey consisted of three questions:

> I. How do you feel about socialism: sympathetic, adverse, or indifferent?
> II. Is your sympathy, aversion, or indifference a result of a reasoned examination of the issue or an expression of a set of sentiments?
> III. Allowing for the practical application of socialism, what shall it bring: an asset that is economically more balanced for society or the formation of a superior race?[351]

Morbelli responded:

> I. Sympathetic, because when something is questioned, it almost always brings progress.
> II. A set of feelings born from seeing a part of humanity miserable and ignorant due to the means of education and well-being, and reinforced by the few socialist works I have read.
> III. Perhaps one and the other in equal parts, because once the two extremes of misery and gluttony are suppressed, the worries regarding the struggle for life will diminish, and the race will become increasingly intellectual.[352]

With such concerns in mind Morbelli concentrated on two groups among society's disenfranchised, the aged in Milan's Pio Albergo Trivulzio, and the rice weeders in the Po valley.

The Pio Albergo Trivulzio was a charitable state-run institution (which still exists today).[353] It was established to provide lodging and care for the indigent elderly, a group

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350 "I^{mo} maggio inchiesta sul socialismo," *Vita moderna* 3, no. 17 (May 1, 1894): 133.

351 "I. *Che atteggiamento prendete di fronte al socialismo: simpatico, avverso, o indifferente? II.—La simpatia, l'indifferenza o l'avversione è il risultato di un esame ragionato della questione oppure l'espressione di un complesso di sentimenti? III.—Amessa l'applicazione pratica del socialismo, a che condurrà: A un assetto economicamente più equilibrato della società, o alla formazione di un a razza psicologicamente superiore?*" Ibid., 128.

352 "*I. Simpatico, perchè una quistione che sorge, quasi sempre conduce ad un progresso. II. Un complesso di sentimenti nati dal vedere una parte dell'umanità nella miseria, ed ignoranza per difetto di mezzi d'istruzione e benessere, e rafforzati dalle poche opere socialistiche che ebbi a leggere. III. Forse l'uno e l'altro in pari grado, perchè soppressi i due estremi di miseria ed epulonismo, diminuiranno le preoccupazioni della lotta per la vita, e la gara diverrà sempre più intellettuale*." Ibid., 133.

353 Information on the hospice is drawn from *La nascita del Pio Albergo Trivulzio: Orfani, vecchi e poveri*

that, no longer economically productive, was often left to live out its existence in such hospices. The Pio Albergo opened in the Palazzo Trivulzio in 1771 under the reign of Austrian Empress Maria Teresa. Sadly, the building itself was not an appropriate space for a hospice. Despite some renovations, by the 1890s the Pio Albergo Trivulzio's requirements far exceeded the limitations of the existing structure. In 1890, a reform was instituted which granted admittance to inhabitants from the province of Milan, and not just the city proper. This shift in policy led to a 56% increase in the Trivulzio's number of residents by 1891. A third row of beds had to be added to the already crowded dormitories. Even though the hospice could only adequately accommodate 800 people, by 1903 the count had risen to 1,095. Due to the over abundance of residents and the lack of funds for the necessary improvements, the Pio Albergo Trivulzio was in a state of decay at the time that Morbelli painted its wards and denizens.

Morbelli, who resided in Milan, managed to set up a studio in the Pio Trivulzio so he could better observe its residents. There he frequently employed a new camera he'd acquired to record scenes he particularly liked.[354] In his multiple versions of the old men

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a Milano tra Settecento e Ottocento (Milan: Electa, 1993); and Giorgio Cosmacini and Cristina Cenedella, *I vecchi e la cura: Storia del Pio Albergo Trivulzio* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1994).

354 Morbelli mentioned his desire to establish a studio at the Pio Albergo Trivulzio as early as 1890 in an October 24, 1890, letter to Vittore Grubicy: "But I would like to see whether there is a room at the Pio Trivulzio which could serve as a studio. For my purposes it would be better, much better, than all the other studios in all of Milan." ["*Però vorrei vedere se al Pio Trivulzio fosseci qualche stanza servibile per studio, sarebbe molto ma molto meglio che tutti gli altri studi di Milano tutta, per il mio scopo*."] See Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, October 24, 1890, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru. I.4.38. Morbelli mentioned having a camera to photograph the elderly at the Pio Trivulzio. Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, September 24, 1889, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.23. For more on Morbelli and photography see Marisa Vescovo, "Ombre e luci come grafia e mimesi del reale, in Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli*, 21-32; and Giovanna Ginex, "Fotografia e pittura nel laboratorio divisionista," in *L'età del divisionismo*, eds. Gabriella Belli and Franco Rella (Milan: Electa, 1990), 244-45. A more recent essay that includes a discussion of Morbelli's photography is Silvia Bordini, "Rêve et réalité. Morbelli, Previati, e Sartorio, sur la photographie," in *Italies: 1880-1910; l'art italien à l'épreuve de la modernité*, eds. Gianna Piantoni and Anne Pingeot (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux; Turin: Allemandi, 2001), 80-82. Examples of Morbelli photographs of the Pio Trivulzio are reproduced in Piantoni and Pingeot, *Italies*, 231-32.

and women—seeking to avoid the sentimental dimension of social realism with his commitment to the Divisionist technique—he did not necessarily reproduce the literal state of the hospital, exploring also the formal possibilities afforded by the timeworn space. A model for Morbelli's first incursion into this subject matter was the well-known painting by the Victorian Realist, Sir Hubert von Herkomer (1849–1914), *The Last Muster: Sunday at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea* (1875 [fig. 32]).[355] Depicting rows of old veterans in their red uniforms, one of whom just has passed quietly away, this work is an obvious prototype for Morbelli's Trivulzio paintings, beginning with *Last Days* (*Giorni… ultimi*, 1882-83 [fig. 33]), done prior to his Divisionist explorations.[356]

Holiday at the Pio Albergo Trivulzio (*Giorno di festa al Pio Albergo Trivulzio*), 1892 [fig. 34], is the best known of the Trivulzio series.[357] Here the artist concentrated on the receding lines of the long benches and the effects of sunlight on the wall and the wood-grained surfaces of the tables. Rather than appearing dingy, the entire scene is a harmony of warm tonalities. Morbelli's overriding preoccupation with these features of the hospice was amusingly conveyed in a note to Pellizza written in 1901, at which time improvements had been made in the Pio Trivulzio, in which he complained:

> I suffered a terrible disappointment at the Pio Trivulzio! everything was renovated, whitewashed to delirium, that antique yellowish hue that harmonized so well with the outfits and the parchment-like faces of the patients disappeared!! the walls, the ceilings, all hatefully whitewashed, the layout of the benches changed, in other words, a disaster (for me!!).[358]

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355 Sir Hubert von Herkomer, *The Last Muster: Sunday at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea* , 1875, oil on canvas, 214.5 x 159 cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool.

356 Angelo Morbelli, *Last Days* (*Giorni… ultimi*), 1882-83, oil on canvas, 100 x 161 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan. For a discussion of this work and its relationship to the Herkomer see, for example, Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Angelo Morbelli* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1991), 22.

357 Angelo Morbelli, *Holiday at the Pio Albergo Trivulzio* (*Giorno do festa al Pio Albergo Trivulzio*), 1892, oil on canvas, 78 x 122 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

But Morbelli's absorption with such elements does not obscure the loneliness of these elderly abandoned men. The three who are fully visible in the room seem to have given up all hope of a relative remembering to come pick them up to celebrate the feast day, or are simply alone in the world. The most tragic of the old men, however, is the one who is practically cropped out at the left of the composition. Only his clasped hands and legs are visible, his coat and walking stick laid out neatly before him as he waits for someone who is unlikely to materialize. Morbelli's image of the Pio Albergo Trivulzio strikes a balance between aesthetic concerns and content, effectively interpreting the plight of these men whom society cast out.

Morbelli also lived part of the time in Colma, a farming area in Piedmont where his family had an agricultural business. There he was inspired to paint rural scenes addressing social problems as well, casting his eye upon the women working in the rice fields of the Po river valley, a subject he rendered in several versions, as he did with the Pio Trivulzio.[359] One of his most famous was *For Eighty Cents!* (*Per ottanta centesimi!*, 1895 [fig. 35]).[360] The scene was a common one since, following the implementation of a massive irrigation system in the Po river basin, rice had become one of Northern Italy's primary crops after unification. About 80-95% of the workers in the paddies were

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358 "*Ho subito una tremenda illusione al Pio Trivulzio! tutto fu restaurato, imbiancato sino al delirio, sparì quel giallume d'antico che armonizzava così bene col costume e incartapecorite faccie dei ricoverati!! i muri i plafoni tutto fu odiosamente imbiancato, disposizione banchi, cambiata, insomma un disastro (per mè!!)*." Angelo Morbelli to Giuseppe Pellizza, October 2, 1901, Archives, Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, no. 235. Reproduced in Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli*, 48.

359 Morbelli was not the first to paint this subject matter. Luigi Steffani addressed it in *The Rice Fields* (*In risaia*, 1864) and Giacomo Favretto in *The Collection of Rice in Basso Veronese* (*La raccolta del riso nel Basso* Veronese, 1878). The hardship of the women who worked in the rice paddies continued to be a topic of interest, witnessed by Giuseppe De Santis' 1948 Neo-realist film, *Bitter Rice* (*Riso Amaro*).

360 Angelo Morbelli, *For Eighty Cents!* (*Per ottanta centesimi!)*), 1895, oil on canvas, 69 x 124.5 cm, Museo Francesco Borgogna, Vercelli.

women.[361] Ankle- to knee-deep in water, their skirts gathered and bunched at their waists, these women did not actually gather rice. Instead they weeded the fields, a process which took place over approximately a forty-day period starting around the end of May. The weeding, called *monda* or *mondatura*, was necessary when the rice plants were about two months old, otherwise the young shoots' growth would be obstructed by the variety of weeds which sprang up in the spring. Weeding by hand was paramount, for any other system which existed at the time damaged the rice plants themselves. The *monda*, although strenuous, did not require excessive strength and was a task women could carry out. Women were also recruited for the *monda* because they were more likely to be unemployed and available for temporary work than men (especially in a season when most of the male agrarian labor force was occupied with the grain harvest), and because they could be paid less than their male counterparts.

The title *For Eighty Cents!* refers to the very low wage the *mondine* or *mondatrici*—as the female weeders were called—received for their back-breaking labor. While in 1880 the average wage was 1.65 lira per day, due to the economic depression of the late 1880s-late 1890s, the pay was cut in half in many areas. The women suffered terribly for this little bit of money. The constant moisture emanating from the flooded fields had severe health repercussions. Malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, and scurvy were common. The *mondine* slept outside where everything was permeated with dampness. Their diet was poor and often they had no potable water to drink, forced to subsist on unsanitary ditch water. Despite a series of strikes following the pay cuts in the late 1880s,

361 Historical facts within this analysis on the female labor force and the Italian rice industry rely upon the excellent account by Elda Gentili Zappi, *If Eight Hours Seem Too Few: Mobilization of Women Workers in the Italian Rice Fields* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

the *mondine*'s situation was not much improved. However, this unrest did bring their plight to public attention and may have contributed to Morbelli's choice of the theme.

As with the Pio Trivulzio works, when Morbelli translated the image of the *mondine* at work into painting, his dedication to the subject was bound up in his engagement with pictorial issues. *For Eighty Cents!* is not unlike a photographic pan, the row of bent *mondine* accentuating the horizontality of the composition. The receding perspectival lines of the irrigation ditches, which give the image increased depth, balance the horizontal axis. This device, together with the veritable absence of sky, also emphasizes the immensity of the paddies and the amount of work still ahead of the *mondine.* The aqueous environment may have appealed to Morbelli from a Divisionist stance because it provided an opportunity to recreate the slightly blurred reflections of the ochre-, blue-, and rose-clad figures as well as the shimmer of light upon the water with tiny strokes of contiguous blue and gold pigment. The lush fields themselves gleam, an effect achieved by a juxtaposition of yellow over green. The harmony Morbelli achieved in this image conveys a meditative stillness and a serenity that is at odds with the bowed *mondine*.

Indeed, although he was sympathetic to the *mondines*' difficult work, their suffering, and their exploitation, while actually painting them Morbelli seemed more preoccupied with his own artistic challenges and travails. In a letter to Grubicy he talked of his visit to the paddies, and spoke not of the *mondine*'s efforts, but of his own: "I have been in the rice paddies - I have already sketched out painting with [illegible] 8 figures, but I forsee a huge effort!!"[362] In fact, Morbelli spent long days in the fields studying and

362 "*Sono stato nelle risaie - ho già abbozzato quadro con* [illegible] *8 figure, prevedo però una di quelle fatiche!!*" Angelo Morbelli to Vittore Grubicy, June 21, 1894, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART,

photographing the *mondine*. Despite the intensive labor which is clearly legible in his work, the aesthetic beauty of the image almost overrides the content, revealing Morbelli's strong commitment to the formal side of painting.

The contrast between the beauty of the painting and the *mondine*'s backbreaking labor elicited criticism from opposing camps. Passages from an anonymous letter published within a review of the first Venice Biennale of 1895 in *La Lombardia* protested that Morbelli's interest in painting undercut the social problem depicted in the image:

> Even admitting that with the division of color one can obtain a greater luminosity, it is permissible to ask oneself if, for that, many other qualities which have to converge to form a work of art should be ignored…Those figures, for example, who are working and wearing themselves out for such vile compensation, why don't they show us their suffering with their expressions? How they present themselves (bent in the water, with...their backs turned to the viewer), they do not leave us to suppose that they are victims of social injustices: instead, certain rotundities make us imagine them prosperous, full of health and energy…Instead, it seems to me that the subject should be the first reason for a work. While he was painting, Morbelli forgot this; he made use of that form and that effect which worked best to put into practice his famous theory and, thus, he won't succeed in touching even a Turati or a Prampolini.[363]

In response to that criticism, Grubicy defended the work in a letter to the paper's editor, arguing that Morbelli's choice to sidestep sentimental narrative and paint what he saw utilizing the Divisionist formula was a more effective and unbiased way of honestly representing the situation:

Rovereto, Gru I.4.72.

363 "*Pur ammettendo che colla divisione del colore si ottenga una maggiore luminosità, è lecito domandarsi se per essa si debbano trascurare molte altre qualità che devono concorrere a formare l'opera d'arte…Quelle figure, per esempio, che stanno lavorando e logorandosi per così vile compenso, perchè non ci mostrano con la loro espressione le loro sofferenze? Così come si presentano (chine nell'acqua, col…dorso rivolto al riguardante), non ci lasciano supporre che siano vittime delle ingustizie sociali: che anzi certe rotondità ce le fanno immaginare prosperose, piene di salute e di energia…Eppure mi sembra che il soggetto debba essere la ragione prima del quadro. Mentre stava dipingendo, il Morbelli se ne è dimenticato; si è servito di quella forma e di quell'effetto che meglio giovassero a mettere in pratica la sua famosa teoria, e così non riescirà neppure a intenerire un Turati o un Prampolini.*" P. V. C. "L'Esposizione internazionale d'arte di Venezia," *La Lombardia* (Milan), May 25, 1895, 2. The initials P. V. C. referred to a Professore V. Colombo.

> Morbelli wanted his feelings of sympathy for these poor suffering women to spring simple and austere from the bare exposition of the truth, a scene whose ascetic vitality derived from the vibration of light which directly strikes the senses, dispensing, with abnegation which I dare call heroic, with all the resources offered by mawkish anecdotalism.[364]

On the other hand, in a review published the next year, when the work was exhibited at the first Turin Triennial of 1896, Morbelli's work was accused of being too political:

> The painting which has for its title *80 Cents* has a socialist meaning which is too clear for me to stop to talk about it. In fact, this painting's clarity for me is exactly the reason for its undeniable inferiority as a symbolic work.[365]

Ironically, Morbelli's work suffered criticism from opposing poles. His visually gratifying evocation of the oppressed *mondine*—which showcased the Divisionist technique—offended those who were wed to a more traditional position regarding the portrayal of subject matter. This group expected that the subject of a work should determine its realization, as was the case with the Naturalist genre painting that prevailed in Italy, the very art Grubicy was implicitly downgrading with his comment regarding "mawkish anecdotalism." Instead, simply because of the nature of its subject, a painting like *For Eighty Cents!* was too politicized for those who were champions of a Symbolist aesthetic and privileged abstracted beauty over realistic documentation.

These attacks from both sides would seem to prove that, in fact, Morbelli did not privilege his subject over painterly issues nor vice versa. Instead, he married the two in

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364 "*Morbelli voleva che il suo pensiero di simpatia per quelle povere sofferenti scaturisse semplice ed austero dalla nuda esposizione della verità di quella scena, la cui vitalità estetica doveva scaturire dalla vibrazione della luce che colpisce direttamente i sensi scartando, con obnegazione, oso chiamare eroica, tutte le risorse offertegli dal tenerume anedottico.*" see Vittore Grubicy to the editor of *La Lombardia*, draft, May 25, 1895, Fondo Grubicy, Archivio del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.4.133.

365 "*Il quadro che ha per titolo 80 centesimi ha un significato socialista troppo chiaro perchè io mi soffermi a parlarne. Anzi per me è appunto in questa chiarezza del lavoro che sta la sua inegabile inferiorità come opera simbolica*." Un simbolista, "La questione sociale e la pittura simbolica alla Triennale," *La Triennale*, no. 6 (1896): 43.

an image that could alternately conjure sensorial pleasure and speak to social dilemmas. As with most of his Divisionist colleagues, Morbelli would turn away from explicitly social themes in his later *oeuvre*. His 1901 image of *mondine*, *In the Rice Fields* (*In risaia* [fig. 36]), approaches a conception of the peasant which is heroic or even idealized in poses which echoed those of, for example, Jules Breton (1827-1906).[366] Likewise, his later Pio Trivulzio works started to take on more the symbolic or allegorical significance that characterized much Divisionist painting executed at the end of the nineteenth century.

Pellizza and *The Fourth Estate*

Giuseppe Pellizza (he added "da Volpedo" to his name later), came from the town of Volpedo in Piedmont.[367] He was the son of a small land-owning family of modest, but independent means. After an itinerant existence in the 1880s, during the course of which he studied at several art academies, including the Brera, the Accademia di San Luca, and the Accademia di belle arti in Florence, Pellizza quit his peripatetic life to permanently reestablish himself in his native Volpedo in 1890. There he concentrated on his painting. Around this time, Pellizza began to take an active interest in socialist ideologies tinged with a positivist idealism and he became involved with the local farmers' causes, joining the Società operaia di mutuo soccorso [Workers' Mutual Aid Society]. This personal dedication to leftist politics soon became manifest in his paintings and, by 1891, he had

366 Angelo Morbelli, *In the Rice Fields* (*In risaia*), 1901, oil on canvas, 183 x 130 cm, private collection.

367 Biographical facts are from Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1986), 9-19.

embarked upon a lifelong exploration of the theme of the rural worker.[368] Focusing upon the peasants of Volpedo and its environs, he realized a series of compositionally related images depicting a group of marching farmers led by two men. These culminated in the large-scale canvases *The Human Tide* (*Fiumana*, 1895-96 [fig. 37]), and *The Fourth Estate* [fig. 28].[369] The latter was the zenith of Pellizza's exploration of this image, his most seminal painting, and the focal work of this section.

Although he lived a relatively secluded life in a small Piedmontese town, Pellizza's friendships with other artists and his subscriptions to radical publications fed his growing knowledge regarding the precarious situation of the worker and farmer. In 1892, during a sojourn in Genoa, he spent time with former classmate Nomellini and was exposed to his companion's more revolutionary, anarchist politics.[370] By 1894, he was receiving journals such as the *Critica sociale*. In that same year, Pellizza attended Pasquale Villari's lectures while in Florence for a period, and absorbed the lessons of this historian and statesman who presented history from a positivist viewpoint.[371] Later, the older Morbelli mentored Pellizza, and their correspondence traces a spirited exchange of political and artistic ideas, including reading suggestions and requests for publications. Pellizza often would ask Morbelli to purchase books for him in Milan and send them to

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368 These works and, in particular *The Fourth Estate*, are very well documented. There are several studies focused upon these paintings, most notably Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo. Il Quarto Stato*; and *Il Quarto Stato di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (Milan: TEA, 1998), as well as Fabrizio Quiriti and Giuseppe Luigi Marini's *Il cammino dei lavoratori di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (Cuneo: Galleria d'arte Il Prisma, 1995). In particular, Scotti Tosini's documentation was indispensable to my analysis of *The Fourth Estate*.

369 Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Human Tide* (*Fiumana*), 1895-96, oil on canvas, 255 x 438 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

370 Scotti [Tosini], "Genova 1892," 10.

371 Scotti [Tosini], *Catalogo generale*, 13. Pasquale Villari (1827-1917) was an early supporter of unification, a professor at the Istituto di Studi Superiori of Florence and, later, went on assume a number of political positions, including that of Minister of Education.

him. A letter to Morbelli dated November 6, 1895, included a list that revealed the depth of Pellizza's socialist interests. He itemized the following:

> 1. Edmondo De Amicis = *Osservazioni sulla questione sociale* =
> 2. Prof. E. Ciccotti = *Socialismo di stato e Socialismo democratico (tutto un libro cent. 20* [all one book 20 cents])
> 3. L. Tolstoi = *I doveri del soldato = I frutti del danaro (cent. 5!* [5 cents!]*)*
> 4. Dott. Anna Kuliscioff = *Il Monopolio dell'uomo* =
> 5. Prampolini = *Come avverrà il socialismo*
> 6. F. Engels = *Socialismo Utopistico e Socialismo Scientifico* =
> 7. A. E. Schaffle = *La quintessenza del Socialismo* =
> 8. A. Zerboglio = *Il socialismo e le obbiezioni più comuni* =
> 9. B. Malon = *Il socialismo; compendio storico teorico pratico* =
> 10. Bebel = *La donna e il Socialismo* (*per gli abbonati alla critica lire 3* [for subscribers to the critica lire 3])
> 11. Deville = *Il Capitale di Marx: riassunto (lire 2 per gli abbonati alla critica lire 1.50* [2 lire for subscribers to the critica 1.50]*)*.[372]

He also mentioned sharing subscriptions with Morbelli (as a cost-saving measure) to journals such as the *Critica sociale* and *La lotta di classe*.[373]

In addition to nineteenth-century writings on socialist, Marxist, and otherwise liberal ideologies, Pellizza and his contemporaries were also interested in the radical texts connected to the French Revolution of 1789. One of these influenced his choice of the title *The Fourth Estate*, a work he originally called *The March of the Workers* (*Il cammino dei lavoratori*).[374] Pellizza's friend, Aristide Arzano, first suggested a variation on this phrase after having been stirred by the 1789 pamphlet, *What is the Third Estate?* [*Qu'est-ce que le tiers état?*]. Authored by the French revolutionary, Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836), this text condemned the privileges of the nobility (the First Estate)

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372 See Giuseppe Pellizza to Angelo Morbelli, June 11, 1895, reproduced in Fiori, *Archivi del divisionismo*, I: 178-79. Also cited in Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli*, 65-66.

373 December 23 and December 30, 1895, in Fiori, *Archivi del divisionismo*, I: 180-81.

374 For a detailed discussion on Pellizza's adoption of this term from Jaurès see Michele Nani, "Dalle viscere del popolo: Pellizza, il "Quarto Stato" e il socialismo," in *Il Quarto Stato di Pellizza da Volpedo tra cultura e politica: Un'immagine e la sua fortuna* (Bra (Cuneo): Edizioni Angelo Manzoni, 2002), 27-31.

and the clergy (the Second Estate), and argued that much of the French nation was made up of the remaining "common" class, or Third Estate. Following Arzano's prompt, Pellizza reread the first volume of Jean Jaurès' *Socialist History of the French Revolution* (*Histoire Socialiste de la Révolution Française*) which addressed Sieyès' ideas.[375] However, neither Sieyès nor Jaurès raised the idea of another "Estate." Because the Third Estate ultimately consisted of a divided bourgeoisie and working class, Pellizza built upon the model to formulate his own idealized conception of a Fourth Estate, which he defined as an enlightened proletariat constituency.

Socialist literature and philosophy were not the only inspiration for Pellizza's images of protesting farmers. The crowds of workers which assembled to demonstrate for leftist causes throughout Italy during the 1890s were certainly on the artist's mind. Notably, the year in which he began *The Fourth Estate*, 1898, also marked one the most dramatic moments of worker uprising in Italy, the Bava Beccaris Massacre.[376] This aptly named event was actually a tragic series of encounters in Milan between working class groups and the authorities in May of that year.[377] During the spring, a group of laborers stoned the Pirelli factory in response to the arrest of some comrades who were distributing socialist flyers.[378] Strikes and proletarian unrest ensued. The general heading

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375 Pellizza owned the Italian translation, produced by the socialist publisher Luigi Mongini, in 1900. Jean Jaurès, *Storia socialista 1789-1900 sotto la direzione di Jean Jaurès* (Rome: Luigi Mongini, 1900). Archives, Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, inv. no. 268.

376 Nani cites several examples of crowds, 25-27.

377 Scotti [Tosini] notes this correlation, see Scotti [Tosini], *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (1976), 42-44. For a carefully documented and detailed account of the events in Milan in May 1898, see Alfredo Canavero, "Milano 1898: Tumulti e repressione," in *Il '98 a Milano: fatti, personaggi, immagini*, eds.. Alfredo Canavero and Giovanna Ginex (Milan: Mazzotta, 1998), 11-28; and Alfredo Canavero, *Milano e la crisi di fine secolo (1896-1900)* (Milan: SugarCo, 1976).

378 The events that led to the political activity outside the Pirelli plant had commenced in 1891 when Pirelli lowered wages. By 1898, after years of dispute between worker groups and the company, a rubber

the city's troops, Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris, mistook this insurgent activity for a full-blown socialist and/or anarchist revolution and reacted with violence. Cavalry troops were sent into the city to intimidate the crowds who, in turn, barricaded streets and city gates. The situation escalated. Subsequent to several more violent outbreaks, Bava Beccaris' troops blew a hole in the wall of a Capuchin monastery where there was incorrectly rumored to have been a radical assembly. At the conclusion of this tumult, scores of civilians were dead and more than 450 were injured. Over 2,000 were arrested, including the editors of all of the major radical journals, many of whom received prison sentences. Highlighting the inequities and the chasm that existed between the ruling and working classes, King Umberto praised Bava Beccaris for his actions.

Against this historic backdrop Pellizza painted *The Fourth Estate*. The specific locale and narrative of this painting were established in 1892 and recounted it in a long passage in Pellizza's diary.[379] We know that this image presents a group of farmers on their way to speak up for their cause before the nobleman for whom they worked. The scene is located in Piazza dei Malaspina, Volpedo's main square. The marchers are shown heading up from the direction of the Worker's Mutual Aid Society towards the Palazzo Malaspina, which belonged to the principal landowners of Volpedo. Aurora Scotti Tosini's detailed study of the painting has documented the making of the work and has identified the farmers and laborers therein, who were all men and women Pellizza

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worker's resistance group had been formed, in part under the guidance of Anna Kuliscioff. See Louise A. Tilly, *Politics and Class in Milan 1881-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 169-70.

379 Scotti [Tosini], *Catalogo generale*, 278**.**

knew and who had posed for him, including his own wife.[380] Yet, despite the very local nature of the image, Pellizza intended it as a symbolic work.

Pellizza turned to the art of the Cinquecento for a compositional model when he undertook to paint this complex, multi-figure work, which measures 115 1/3 x 214 ½ inches. The most important image among these was Raphael's *School of Athens*, 1508-11 [fig. 38].[381] In particular, Pellizza must have taken cues from Raphael to determine how to represent each person individually and how to denote the interaction among the people in his painting. These are important aspects of Pellizza's work which serve to animate an essentially homogenous crowd of people clad in shades of brown. In fact, we see that within the populous group each full-length person has a distinct countenance and pose, is carrying out a particular action—turning, talking, gesturing,—and is engaged in some way with at least one other individual. Pellizza made myriad drawings and studies and even utilized photographs prior to executing the final image.[382] Through this lengthy process he gave each visible participant an individual personality and worked out the relationship between the many figures so that each would be integrated into the larger

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380 Ibid., 410-11. Teresa was the model for the main female figure in the work. Pellizza was supportive of the women's rights movement, although his attitudes were tinged with his belief in an idealized notion of the woman, which was tied to her role as mother, a common sentiment among his peers (Chapter 5 addresses this subject at greater length). The inclusion of a woman at the head of the crowd, albeit in a secondary or supportive role, signaled Pellizza's recognition of women's importance to political causes. For a discussion of the feminist implications in this work, see Liliana Ellena, "'Una donna nel quadro può venire in prima linea con essi': Genealogia di un'immagine," in *Il Quarto Stato di Pellizza da Volpedo*, 55-82.

381 Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, 1483-1520), *School of Athens*, 1508-11, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican, Rome. Scotti Tosini traces the spectrum of Renaissance paintings to which Pellizza referred; Scotti Tosini, *Il Quarto Stato di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (1998), 56-70.

382 Scotti Tosini has documented Pellizza's drawings and photography for this work in *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo: Il Quarto Stato* (1976); and *Il Quarto Stato di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (1998). In addition, for more a broader exploration of Pellizza's use of photography and drawing see Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volepdo: Disegni. "Lo studio del uomo mi condusse alla natura"* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1996).

whole. This strategy enlivens the image and renders the entire scene all the more powerful.

Pellizza was also masterful in weaving together the multiple technical components of this painting: the realization of the pictorial space, the relationships between colors, and the length, size, and rhythm of the brushstrokes. The artist arranged his models in a phalanx that reaches across the full breadth of the painting and further emphasizes the long horizontal axis of the composition. With the exception of the three adults and the child at the front of the crowd, the mass of people is set in a rather shallow space, yet Pellizza managed to illusionistically suggest a dense and numerous group. Chromatically, *The Fourth Estate* is a tour-de-force. While the overall tonality is golden and earth-toned, when examined closely the tapestry of colors reveals a profusion of pinks, greens, and yellows. These pigments are applied to the canvas with tiny, consistent, and precise strokes of color. Indeed, the surface of this work is exceptional for being finely painted throughout. Finally, the direction of the strokes themselves varies from verticals, to horizontals, to diagonals, to provide modeling, define the space, and suggest the forward movement of the farmers.

Pellizza's mammoth realization of marching laborers is equally heroic in its conceptual dimensions. Rather than show an insurgent image of angry workers or focus upon the violent dimensions of the strike, the painter had a more idealistic vision of the working cadre and chose to paint the Volpedo farmers calm and unarmed. This portrayal of the crowd differed from current ideas regarding the identity of a politically insurgent mass propagated by a number of thinkers of the day.[383] For example, Cesare Lombroso

383 For a seminal historical and interdisciplinary examination of crowds, see Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984).

proposed that anarchists were congenitally criminal, based upon his studies of heredity and physiognomy in his 1894 *Gli anarchici*.[384] The French social psychologist and promoter of racist and misogynist theories, Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931), described the crowd as primitive or ignorant in his 1895 *Psychologie des foules*.[385] Pellizza subscribed to a more utopian, harmonious notion of the crowd as a unified collective. This view is closer to the socialist theories of Enlightenment figures such as the French philosopher Charles Fourier (1772-1837) and the British reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858), both of whom were defined as Utopian Socialists by Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895). Pellizza would have been familiar with this distinction and with these thinkers through his readings; he owned an Italian edition of Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, which discusses the Utopian Socialists.[386]

Seeking to create an "art for humanity," Pellizza intended *The Fourth Estate* as a hopeful image of a socialist utopia, where positive changes were to be wrought by a confluence of united and educated laborers. Pellizza articulated this conception frequently in letters during the mid-1890s, even as he worked on *The Fourth Estate*'s precursor, *The Human Tide*:

> my aspirations for equality caused me to conceive of a mass of people, of workers of the earth, who are intelligent, strong, robust and united, and who advance in a

384 Cesare Lombroso, *Gli anarchici* (Turin: Bocca, 1894).

385 Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie de foules* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1895).

386 Friedrich Engels, *Socialismo utopistico e socialismo scientifico*, trans. Pasquale Martignetti (Milan: Fantuzzi, 1892). Archives, Studio-Museo Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, inv. no. 245.

> human tide overwhelming any obstacle that impedes them from reaching a place where they will find balance.[387]

and

> a symbolic painting for which I would like to represent the destined path of the people towards a better era.[388]

The balanced world these workers will reach is mirrored by the formal consonance of the painting. Together the farmers exist in a compositionally harmonious relationship. The golden light that envelops them, as they march in a united mass toward a better future, is emblematic of their own enlightenment. Pellizza's colossal work is the apex of a vision of positivist idealism and a democratic art for humanity.

The Fourth Estate has remained a touchstone for Italians and has proven a lasting visual representation of liberalism in Italy. It has been appropriated repeatedly by socialist and syndicalist groups, as well as by women's rights organizations, for political propaganda and advertisements. It has even been translated into the medium of film, by Bernardo Bertlolucci, who introduced *1900*—his saga of two Italian families' lives from the century's start through World War II—with a full-screen still of the enormous painting. Although the art of the late nineteenth century is little know to the general public, even within Italy, *The Fourth Estate* has endured in the shared consciousness of the Italian people as an iconic symbol of optimism. The ideal world envisioned by Pellizza, however, never came to be. Indeed, Fascism happened in its stead. Nonetheless,

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387 "*la mia aspirazione all'equità mi ha fatto ideare una massa di popolo, di lavoratori della terra, i quali intelligenti, forti, robusti uniti, s'avanzano come fiumana travolgente ogni ostacolo che si frappone per raggiungere luogo ov'ella trova equilibrio*." Giuseppe Pellizza to Leonardo Bistolfi, August 1895; cited in Scotti [Tosini], *Catalogo dei manoscritti di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo*, 40; and Scotti [Tosini], *Il Quarto Stato di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (1976), 96-97.

388 *"quadro simbolico per cui vorrei rappresentare il cammino fatale del popolo verso un'era migliore."* Giuseppe Pellizza to Giovanni Segantini, August 16, 1896, Giovanni Segantini Papers, Kulturarchiv Oberengadin, Samedan, Switzerland, 18.8.1896.

The Fourth Estate still resonates with the suggestion of what Italy might one day become: a unified, enlightened people, walking as one.

Conclusion

Identifying scenes and events portrayed in these socially engaged Divisionist images of the 1890s and contextualizing them, stresses the particular intersection of art and history distinguishing this decade, suggesting that the conditions of an agitated time were as formative for the artists treated here as they were for Italy itself. The Divisionists' choice of a light-filled, optical idiom in their socially-minded works declared their alignment with modernity, their dedication to the portrayal of truth, and their idealistic hope for an improved social environment. Within this discussion, however, I do not intend to relegate this series of Divisionist pictures to the category of mere propaganda, or art with a political message. This was an issue disputed in the era of the Divisionists and one that is still alive. As the example of the criticism surrounding Morbelli's *mondine* showed, the ideas of worker reform implied in the painting made it less valid to one contemporary critic. This view represented a broader problem at stake with politicized art throughout Europe. While some artists of the time, from the Belgian van de Velde to Pellizza, called for an art that would not only address social problems, but one that would educate the workers, others felt that following such principles was too restrictive and stifling.[389] Moreover, they feared that art that in anyway resembled

389 This schism was more evident among artists outside Italy, especially in France. Not only was there the marked difference of opinion between Neo-Impressionists and Symbolists, but among the Neo-Impressionists themselves there was a split. An early important study of the adherence and turn away from such ideologically invested art among the Neo-Impressionists is Robert and Eugenia W. Herbert's "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac, and Others," *Burlington Magazine* 102 (November 1960): 473-82. Hutton examines the multiple questions embedded in the notion of social art and the sides taken at various times by the Neo-Impressionists. See especially Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism*

propaganda would work against the goals of modernism as it was subject to an overriding political agenda or program instead of being innovative, individual, or disruptive.[390]

These tensions were certainly one reason for which, by the end of the 1890s, with the exception of *The Fourth Estate*, the number of Divisionist images addressing societal difficulties had dwindled. This was caused by a variety of circumstances, including disillusionment with the promise of positivist ideals and a final break with the more straightforward narrative and mimetic representation associated with Naturalism and Realism—idioms which lingered in these more politically inclined works. What followed was a turn to the spiritual themes, suggestive imagery, and anti-realist style correlated with Symbolism, which infiltrated art across Europe throughout the course of the decade.

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and the Search for Solid Ground, 94-114, 209-236. This same split was not as pronounced between the Italian Divisionists, who were not as programmatic in their application of political ideology within their painting.

390 The allegiance between politics and modernism also runs counter to definitions of the avant-garde. For example, Peter Bürger's *The Theory of the Avant-garde*, which bolsters the franco-centric canonical definition of the avant-garde in pre-WWII art. See Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984). Subsequent studies in art history have challenged this definition and my own reading and interpretation of Divisionist leftist painting is in keeping with the approach detailed by Martha Ward. As she notes: "Bürger's conception of the avant-garde cannot accommodate those artistic movements that have been based on notions of revolutionary reform, progress, or utopian promise (Russian constructivism or even Italian Futurism), and thus he does not accord artists' appropriations of technological or scientific discoveries any special status as aspirations for historical advance or instruments of change." See Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde*, 263.

CHAPTER 5

"*ASCENSIONI UMANE*:" SYMBOLISM, RELIGION, AND DIVISIONISM[391]

Among the Divisionist artists were those who chose to retreat from urban realities, societal strife, and the commotion of city life. Frequently, this retreat coincided with their pursuit of the mystical imagery, sinuous lines, and curvilinear forms of Symbolism.[392] In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe and in America, Symbolism was a reaction against Realism and the vulgar materialism and commercialism associated with the negative side of modernity.[393] Reflecting the changing attitudes that began to

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391 *Ascensioni umane* (*Human Ascensions* or *Human Ascents*), is the title of an 1898 collection of essays by the Catholic author and thinker, Antonio Fogazzaro, which argued for analogies between evolutionary ideas and Christianity, and the possibility that science and faith could coexist and allow room for a belief in the supremacy of the spirit. This title, suggestive of a religious aspiration towards transcendence, expressed a sentiment, although not one necessarily articulated, that wove through much Divisionist production of a Symbolist genre. As such, Fogazzaro's ideas are one point of entry into the mystically inclined work of the Divisionists who had not renounced science wholesale. Antonio Fogazzaro, *Ascensioni umane*, 6th ed. (Milan: Baldini, Castoldi, and Co., 1900). For biographical information on Fogazzaro see Tommaso Gallarati-Scotti, *The Life of Antonio Fogazzaro*, trans. Mary Prichard Agnetti (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922). More recent examinations of Fogazzaro's work are Paolo Marangon, ed., *Antonio Fogazzaro e il modernismo* (Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 2003); Paolo Marangon, *Il modernismo di Antonio Fogazzaro* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998); and Elsa Sormani, *Bizantini e decadenti nell'Italia Umbertina* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1975), 171-205.

392 A key reference that informed this chapter's discussion on the phenomenon of Symbolism in Italy is Anna Maria Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia, 1885-1900* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981). For more general examinations of Symbolism see Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); Philippe Julian, *Dreamers of Decadence: Symbolist Painters of the 1890s* (New York: Praeger, 1971); and Pierre Théberge, ed., *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995). For a thematic approach to art and culture at the turn of the century, see Shearer West, *Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993).

393 The Italians Divisionists were conscious of making this choice. Grubicy wrote about and praised the importance of idealism in art repeatedly as explored in Chapter 3. Even Segantini, who seemed so closely bound to Naturalist traditions, avowed his allegiance to the ideal in art and pronounced his rejection of

privilege spiritual concerns over scientific ones during the course of the 1890s, this style, so vilified in Italy at the 1891 Brera Triennale, had "triumphed" by the Turin Triennale of 1896, according to the official publication of the exposition, the journal *La Triennale*.[394] Certainly by the 1899 Venice Biennale, Symbolism, with its international sweep of works, was a focal point of the exhibition.[395]

All the Italian Divisionists, at some point in their careers, attempted Symbolist subjects if not Symbolist idioms. Those who best exemplified this trend were Vittore Grubicy, Gaetano Previati, and Giovanni Segantini. Emilio Longoni and Plinio Nomellini joined their fellow painters during the course of the 1890s and distanced their art from the political agenda of the early nineties. In contrast, Giuseppe Pellizza bridged these two shores and combined social concerns with suggestive narratives. Later in his career, Morbelli also turned to Symbolist themes.[396]

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strictly Realist art in his essay, "Così penso e sento la pittura" *Cronaca d'arte*, 1, no. 7 (February 1, 1891): 55.

394 Perhaps this view was slightly biased, as this proclamation was made by an anonymous "symbolist," but the positive tone of the article does signal a general turn in the attitude towards the movement. "Un simbolista," "La questione sociale e la pittura simbolica alla Triennale. Appunti di un simbolista," *La Triennale*, no. 6 (1896): 43.

395 The Biennale included the Belgians Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) and Leon Frédéric (1856-1940), the Swiss Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918), the Austrian Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), the British Walter Crane (1845-1915). Among the Italians a personal exhibition was dedicated to Giulio Aristide Sartorio. The Divisionists who participated were Grubicy, Nomellini, Pellizza, and Previati. *Terza Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia. 1899. Catalogo Illustrato*, 2nd ed. (Venice: Ferrari, 1899). The Divisionist strain of the movement still had its detractors. For example, the conservative critic Angelo Conti (1860-1930). Angelo Conti, "L'esposizione di Venezia I: Contro l'impressionismo," *Il marzocco* 4, no. 15 (May 14, 1899): 1-2. Similarly, the Exposition Universelle in Paris provoked praise and censure, depending upon the open-mindedness of the critic. Expectedly Vittorio Pica was positive, applauding the Belgian Symbolists in particular. Vittorio Pica, "La pittura all'esposizione di Parigi," *Emporium* 13, no. 76 (April 1901): 243-62. The author for the popular review *L'Illustrazione italiana* was disapproving. See "Dall'Esposizione di Parigi," *L'Illustrazione Italiana* 27, no. 38 (September 23, 1900): 211.

396 Deciding which Divisionist works fall into the "Symbolist" category is a less than exact science. I made my determinations based upon whether they abided more closely by Realist strategies or by Symbolist ones.

In their Symbolist work, the Italian Divisionists frequently employed religious subjects, landscapes, and rural life as vehicles to convey spiritual themes.[397] Within these paintings mysticism, communion with nature, and utopianism played important roles. To this end, the art of the past, from the Italian Middle Ages through the Renaissance, supplied the Divisionists with a rich repository of Christian imagery and models for their Symbolist paintings. This allowed them to quote their own artistic legacy with a modernist formal language. The reinterpretation of sacred subject matter in a time when science was putting Christian beliefs into question was also a way to reassign importance to spirituality. Even when depicting Christian visions and citing the Italian Old Masters, however, these Divisionists did not abandon their allegiance to the progressive mores which underlay their painting style. These apparently contradictory unions of pragmatic technique with anti-materialist perspectives, of reconceptualizations of faith with traditional religious art, were paradoxes that characterized much of the Italian Divisionists' Symbolist production. Indeed, this coexistence of the scientific and the mystical, the present and the past, were defining factors of the art of the 1890s, phenomena which make this decade all the more interesting.

Focusing on religious thematics, this chapter will explore the directions certain Divisionists took in their pursuit of the spiritual and the sacred; through these subjects they expressed metaphysical ideas and states of mind. The artists treated are Segantini,

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397 The merging of Symbolism and the chromatic division of color was particular to the Italian Divisionists. French, Belgian, and Dutch artists who followed a Symbolist path did not employ a Divisionist painting technique, which was generally associated with leftist politics and irreconcilable with religious ideals. Examples included French painter Maurice Denis (1870-1943), and Dutch artist Jan Toorop (1858-1928), who abandoned the divided brush stroke once he turned to Symbolist imagery and Christian subjects.

Previati, Pellizza, and Grubicy.[398] The work of these Divisionist Symbolists mirrored their chosen surroundings: isolated locations which were usually seen as prerequisite for the artist to connect with the ideal. Segantini went to the Alps and produced fantastic women as well as pantheistic representations of nature. He also explored the mysteries he saw embedded in the cycles of life. On the other hand, Previati retreated to the internal domain of his studio and created lyrical imagery informed by Christian, literary, and mythical subjects. Pellizza opted to live in his hometown of Volpedo in the Piedmontese countryside and depicted his native environs, which he imbued with spiritual and humanistic significance. Grubicy, like Segantini, painted in the mountains and, through his shimmering Alpine lakes, misty forests, and distant snowy peaks, attempted to evoke intangible sensations. I will end this chapter with a look at the multi-panel works which proliferated at the end of the nineteenth century as exemplified by the art of Grubicy and Segantini. These assemblages had their roots in the traditionally religious triptych and polyptych formats of the altarpiece. As with their ancestral sources, these modern-day, multi-panel work served to convey layered messages or narratives and to elicit a spiritual experience.

Religion, and specifically Catholicism, has never been utilized as the main lens through which to read Italian Divisionist Symbolist works. Although religious implications are mentioned in primary studies on Italian Symbolism—to date, Damigella is still the most comprehensive of these—they are never the focus of investigations of painting belonging to this genre. Usually, given the international reach of the Symbolist

398 Other Divisionists, among them, Longoni, Morbelli, and Nomellini, made forays into Symbolist painting,. Longoni and Morbelli also retreated to the Alps, and Nomellini to the rugged seaside locals near Genoa in the region of Liguria. In the interest of limiting the present discussion, these artists will not be addressed in this chapter.

movement and the differing direction each country's Symbolist art took, scholars employ a broad approach, endeavoring to touch upon the multiplicity of strains that ran through Symbolism. This can prove inadequate when endeavoring to understand one single strain of Symbolism. Because Italian Divisionist Symbolist painting from the 1890s regularly made Christian references in some way (whether conceptually, narratively, or formally), I utilize the leitmotif of religion as the means to distill and to organize much of the material in this chapter. This approach reveals many of the larger themes and concerns of the Italian Divisionists. For example, we see the dialectics of tradition/retrograde versus rupture/modernity, and we can discern the varying conceptions of national identity that get caught between these oppositions.

"Symbolism" and Problems of Nomenclature

I employ the term Symbolism to describe a certain style of painting and its content. Symbolism was a stylized, often ornamented idiom manifest in art and literature which spread throughout Europe from the mid-1880s and lasted into the early 1900s. Largely defined by a French model, having originated in France as a literary movement, the term and the style are difficult to define in generalized terms given the spectrum of Symbolist artists from France and Spain to Poland and Russia to the New World.[399] Although the Italians themselves used the term Symbolism, the articulation of Symbolist imagery in Italian Divisionist painting does not always fit comfortably into a Western model, and reveals the independent direction the Italians followed.

399 Symbolism received its taxonomic baptism with the Symbolist manifesto published by poet Jean Moréas in *Le Figaro* (Paris), September 18, 1886, 150; as cited in Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories,* 150-52.

The beginnings of Italian Symbolism, and the related *Decadentismo* [Decadent movement], date to the 1880s in Italy with the circle formed in Rome around writer Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) and the esoteric journal, the *Cronaca bizantina*.[400] In 1895, the legacy of the *Cronaca bizantina* was continued by another Roman journal, *Il convito*.[401] The first exhibition to evidence Symbolist tendencies was a private one in Rome in 1886, held by an association that took the name "In Arte Libertas."[402] The most representative artist of the Roman facet of the proto-Symbolism movement was the painter Giulio Aristide Sartorio (1860-1932), whose work was filled with serpentine, but full-bodied, femmes fatales, which recalled the sinful women and twining snakes of the German painter Franz von Stuck (1863-1928).[403] In his attention to volumetric form and spatial depth, Sartorio retained a grounding in style—if not in subject matter—to academic painting techniques eschewed by Symbolism, which generally favored anti-realistic space, flattened forms, or an organic melding of the two.[404] The Roman circle

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400 The *Cronaca bizantina* was first published in 1881-85. Then, in 1885-86, the journal was realized under D'Annunzio's supervision. For more on the Roman milieu see, for example, Sormani, *Bizantini e decadenti*, 25-65; and Fiorella Bartoccini, et. al., *Decadentismo e Roma*, Quaderni di studi romani, 1, no. 44 (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1980). For examinations of D'Annunzio's writings see Maria Teresa Marabini Moevs, *Gabriele D'Annnunzio e le estetiche della fine del secolo* (L'Aquila: Japadre, 1976); and Paolo Valesio, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: The Dark Flame*, trans. Marilyn Migiel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

401 As its masthead announced, *Il convito*'s mission was to publish prose, poetry, and art. The editor was Adolfo de Bosis, a poet. Among the contributors were D'Annnunzio, the poet Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912), and the artist Sartorio, who regularly published art criticism.

402 The group was founded by the Roman painter, Giovanni (Nino) Costa (1826-1903), and held exhibitions that included the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and Arnold Böcklin. Damigella discusses "In Arte Libertas" throughout the first chapter of her book. Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 21-84.

403 See Bruno Mantura and Anna Maria Damigella, *Giulio Aristide Sartorio: Figura e decorazione* (Milan: Franco Maria Ricci, 1989). Unlike the Divisionists, Sartorio focused on the evil *femme fatale* in his art, and rarely presented a positive interpretation of women.

404 Another artist with quasi-Symbolist underpinnings was Francesco Paolo Michetti (1851-1929), whose bizarre amalgam of Naturalism and Orientalism appealed to D'Annunzio, with whom he became friends. Silvia Cassani andd Paola Rivazio, eds., *Francesco Paolo Michetti: Dipinti, pastelli, disegni* (Naples:

was important for its revival of interest in Italian Byzantine and medieval art, as well as the painting of the Quattrocento (interests the Divisionists shared in the 1890s).[405] However, despite some moments of contact between the milieu of Rome and that of Milan, fundamentally the two had differing goals and there was little connection between their artistic endeavors.[406]

As discussed in Chapter 3, having recognized the difficulties surrounding the term Symbolism and, perhaps, wishing to differentiate the phenomenon in Milan from that in Rome, Grubicy suggested the term *pittura ideista* as an alternate appellation. He attempted, within his definition, to differentiate the concept and goals of *pittura ideista* from those of Symbolism and to lay the conceptual groundwork for an Italian Divisionist realization of a Symbolist aesthetic.[407] Nonetheless we see that Grubicy's *pittura ideista* is a term which presents problems. A modified borrowing from Aurier's *art idéiste*, Grubicy's designation raised philosophical issues that polarized members of the Divisionist group. He proposed that nature could only function as a point of departure for the exploration of metaphorical or allusive themes and the representation of spiritual ideals. In his discussion, Grubicy favored Previati over Segantini because, he argued, Previati was utilizing a new language of signs that brought to mind spiritualized, mystical

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Electa, 1999).

405 The writings of the anti-positivist critic, Conti, who frequented the "In Arte Libertas" circle, contributed significantly to this revival. Pietro Gibellini, "Introduzione," in Angelo Conti, *La beata riva. Trattato dall'oblio* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2000). For more on Conti see Giorgio Zanetti, *Estetismo e modernità: Saggio su Angelo Conti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

406 Sartorio expressed disdain for the Divisionists, accusing them of imitating France's "wormy pictorial process of *pointillism*" ["*verminoso processo pittorico del pointillisme*"], and abandoning the Italy's grand Renaissance forms. See Giulio Aritistide Sartorio, "Nota su D. G. Rossetti Pittore," *Il convito* 4 (April 1895): 285.

407 Vittore, "Alla Triennale di Brera: Pittura 'ideista'—'Maternità di Previati," *La riforma* (Rome) 25, no. 187 July 6, 1891, 1-2. Reprinted in part as Vittore Grubicy, "Pittura Ideista," *Prima Esposizione Triennale Brera 1891. Tendenze evolutive nelle arti plastiche*. *Pensiero Italiano* 9 (Milan: Tipografia Cooperativa Insubria, 1891), 47-50.

realms that transcended the limits of painting, while Segantini was tied to a form of Naturalism in which the mystical was denoted by scenes rendered with a clarity that remained based in the natural world.[408] Thus, while Grubicy's *pittura ideista* does come closer to describing this facet of Divisionist production, it does not inclusively embrace the divergent stylistic interpretations adopted by each Divisionist painter.

Contradictions in Christian Sources

Another issue that emerges within this examination is the employment of Christian and, more specifically, Catholic subjects and iconography by artists who (with the exception of Previati) were not traditionally observant and—more often than not—were anti-clerical. The resort to Catholic imagery exploded the multiple dichotomies already noted above that were implicit in religious references in Italy. Nothing could be considered more "Italian" than the religious art of the past. Medieval and Renaissance pictorial lexicons were deeply embedded within Italy's contemporary visual discourse and had long constituted the bedrock of artistic formation. In fact, the Old Masters served as touchstones for the Divisionists. By capitalizing on their rich heritage, they could override current anxieties about fragmentation and cite an inheritance Italy could claim as its own. Through this reclamation the Divisionists also inserted themselves into a lineage of acknowledged "great" Italian artists and lent value to current Italian painting. At the same time, paradoxically, the Divisionists—a generation of painters seeking to disrupt the static pictorial language of Italian art in the nineteenth century—wanted to make a

408 This signaled the beginning of the temporary break that would occur between Grubicy and Segantini. The situation was exacerbated once Vittore and his brother Alberto quarreled and permanently split. Afterwards, Segantini chose to remain with Alberto as his gallerist. See Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1982), 23-24 and Sergio Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon: 1851-1920* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 1995), 11-12.

break with tradition in order to create something modern or innovative. How could they do so when relying on art of the past?

Ideologically, the allusions to Christian prototypes also presented problems. The way Italian Divisionists appropriated Catholic imagery revealed their desire to specifically articulate alternative, often secularized, notions of the divine. Most Italians (and all the Divisionists) were raised as Catholics, if only loosely so. Christian subjects were part of the Italian cultural fiber. However, in this period, given the Pope's unwillingness to comply with the government, the Church symbolized anti-nationalism and a return to archaic societal structures. Religious themes could suggest an allegiance with the reactionary, anti-positivist stance of the Church which also ran counter to the progressive and modernist goals of the Divisionists. I suggest that the Divisionists negotiated the polarities of tradition and progress that defined the era, and recognized that their ancestors' religious art, as well as the Catholic subjects associated with the Church, could serve as models for new icons of spirituality for Italians once they were reinterpreted and recast with an empirical painting method and modernist forms.

Science and Religion

Perception and Mysticism: Paul Souriau and Jean-Marie Guyau

The 1890s was a period in which positivism, while still strong, was losing centrality and was being modified by society's emerging zeitgeist, a more intuitive system of knowing that gained primacy and segued into the mysticism often associated with Symbolism.[409] This was the era marked by the intersection of science and the occult,

409 As noted in Chapter 1, the 1890s was distinguished by a shift away from positivism, though this occurred slightly later in Italy than, say, in France. This general phenomenon is addressed in H. Stuart

the empirical and the intangible, the provable and the imaginary. The binaries of physiological studies of perception and spiritual transformation and of evolutionary theory and divine creation molded part of the backdrop to Symbolism. The style employed by the Divisionists remained anchored in loosely scientific practices, but they saw art as a vehicle to express the metaphysical that lay outside the reach of empirical theories.[410] Broadly stated, there was a pervasive belief that art could recapture a series of values, truths, and mysteries—via artistic intuition, sensibility, and interpretation—that eluded science. Previati, for example, verbalized these budding attitudes in layman's terms in an 1891 passage he wrote about Segantini's work:

> the whole of the painting represents a fugitive moment in nature, barely perceivable to the most sensitive observers of reality, but frozen and realized with such intense force as to penetrate in its delivery and to move one, as would the most tumultuous scenes in life…The power of Segantini's art comes not from the entirety or lack of the thing represented and is no more attributable to the beauty than to the originality of the objects reproduced, but comes exclusively from knowing how to elicit in us the impression that he experienced before that light effect or that line of mountains, obligating us to feel together with him.[411]

Two key thinkers who developed and confirmed these ideas in their published writings were the French philosopher Paul Souriau (1852-1926) and the French sociologist Jean-

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Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002 [orig. ed. New York: Knopf, 1958]), 33-66.

410 In her discussion of Segantini's and Grubicy's writings Damigella notes that both saw Symbolist art as "the most appropriate to inherit the role religion had lost and to answer to the doubts science had left unresolved" ["*la più adatta a ereditare il ruolo che le religione ha perduto e a rispondere ai dubbi che la scienza lascia irrisolti."*] Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 99.

411 "*l'insieme del quadro rappresenta un momento sfuggevole della natura percepibile appena ai più sensibili osservatori del vero ma fermato e reso con tanta intensità di forza da penetrare nell'arrivo e commuovere come le scene più tumultuose della vita…La potenza dell'arte del Segantini non proviene dall'entità o meno della cosa rappresentata e non è attribuibile alla bellezza più che alla originalità degli oggetti riprodotti ma viene esclusivamente dal sapere destare in noi l'impressione che egli ha provato davanti a quell'effetto di luce o quella linea di montagna costringendoci a sentire insieme a lui.*" Previati to his brother, December 24, 1891; cited in *Gaetano Previati: Lettere al fratello*, ed. Spartaco Asciamprener (Milan: Hoepli, 1946), 94-95.

Marie Guyau (1854-1888).[412] Grubicy published several articles summarizing Souriau's and Guyau's ideas, thereby making them easily available to the Divisionists and giving them a ready circulation in Italy.[413]

In his *La suggestion dans l'art*, published in1893, Souriau maintained that the contemplation of art could cue the human psyche into entering ecstatic states of being, much like the power of suggestion could induce hypnotic conditions.[414] Particular interpretations of color and light in painting, certain harmonies in music, or select passages in prose and poetry could have transformative effects upon the viewer in resonance to the creative impulses of the artist. Grubicy subscribed to Souriau's theories on the possibilities within art to intimate inchoate sensations and thoughts. In "Non c'è arte vera senza suggestione," he freely utilized Souriau's term "suggestion," but did not refer to Souriau by name (a practice, as we have seen, common when he was paraphrasing and reconceptualizing the ideas of others to his own ends).[415] However, Grubicy did later name Souriau, quoting him in another *Triennale* article, "Tecnica ed estetica divisionista."[416]

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412 Damigella, Quinsac, and Rebora all raise the significance of Souriau and Guyau for the Divisionists. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 50-55, 100-06; Annie-Paule Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne: origines et premiers développements, 1880-1895* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), 88, 167-69; and Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 38-39.

413 Among Grubicy's writings on Souriau, see Vittore Grubicy, "Non c'è arte vera senza suggestione," *La Triennale*, no. 8 (1896): 57-59; and Vittore Grubicy, "Tecnica ed estetica divisionista," *La Triennale*, no. 14 (1896): 110-12. Those on Guyau include Vittore Grubicy, "La ginnastica dei sensi: Nuovi orizzonti d'estetica," *La riforma* (Rome) 26, no. 213, July 31, 1892, 1; and "M. Guyau," *La riforma* (Rome) 26, no. 220, August 7, 1892, 1.

414 Paul Souriau, *La suggestion dans l'art* 2nd ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1909).

415 See Vittore Grubicy, "Non c'è arte vera senza suggestione," 57-59.

416 Vittore Grubicy, "Tecnica ed estetica divisionista," 110.

Guyau also played a pivotal role for the Divisionists' development of their Symbolist theories.[417] Guyau argued for the importance of art's role in society during an era when he saw positivism displace it in favor of science.[418] In his writings, Guyau proposed that art could have a mystical, transformative dimension that drew on science, but that also went beyond the empirical. Guyau's ideas had a basis in physiological and psychophysical theories regarding the nervous system, which he used to explain art's sensorial effects upon the viewer and art's ability, through certain colors or lines, to elicit emotional or spiritual states. Extrapolating on Herbert Spencer's theories regarding evolution, Guyau saw civilization's advances as accelerating the evolution and dissolution of social life and argued that art had the power to offset the negative aspects of this process. Moreover, he proposed that art could function as a vehicle for social change while not adhering strictly to Realism's goals, which were no longer seen as an effective tool for engendering improvement. This creditable thesis, which by implication validated art of a Symbolist genre, was appealing and useful for those Divisionists who maintained such values, specifically Pellizza.

In one of his articles, Grubicy locked onto the perceptual aspect propagated by Guyau and, quoting him, stated: "The poetry of light derives from its necessity to life

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417 For analyses of Guyau's writings and theories, I consulted Annamaria Contini, *Jean-Marie Guyau: una filosofia della vita e l'estetica* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1995), and F[rank] J. W. Harding, *Jean-Marie Guyau, 1854-1888, Aesthetician and Sociologist: A Study of his Aesthetic Theory and Critical Practice* (Geneva: Droz, 1973).

418 Guyau's major works were *Les problèmes de l'esthétique contemporaine* (Paris: Alcan, 1884), and *L'art au point de vue sociologique* (Paris: Alcan, 1889), published post-humously. Earlier versions of chapters from *Problèmes de l'Esthétique contemporaine* appeared in the French journal *Revue des deux mondes*. See, for example, "Le plaisir du beau et le plaisir du jeu d'après l'école de l'évolution," *Revue des deux-mondes* 46 (1883): 750-78; and "Un problème d'esthétique. L'antagonisme de l'art et de la science," *Revue des deux mondes* 60 (1883): 356-87. Cited in Harding, *Jean-Marie Guyau*, 13. Guyau wrote specifically about literature, but intended for his ideas to be applied to all the arts.

itself and from the ardent stimulus that it exercises upon our entire organism."[419] He then added his own commentary: "This physiological, human explanation which Guyau gives us on the poetry of light, should give comfort and encouragement to our colleagues and painter friends, who for a few years, following the course of science, have been delving into the mysterious phenomena of the workings of light."[420] Through his somewhat reductive reading of Guyau, Grubicy managed to glean those elements that could best be applied to the Divisionist Symbolist project: a justification for the exploration of light and the optical techniques used to evince these effects, and an explanation for the physiological reactions in the viewer which were akin to a mystical experience.[421]

Evolution and Transcendence: Antonio Fogazzaro and Cesare Lombroso

Guyau was not the only thinker of the day to publish on evolutionary ideas informed by the paradigms put forth by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), whose theories, by the 1890s, had infiltrated popular consciousness and had entered into discussions among the Divisionists.[422] Another approach to evolutionary thought existed in that decade which seemed to better encapsulate the

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419 "*La poesia della luce deriva dalla sua necessità stessa per la vita e dallo stimolo ardente che essa esercita sopra tutto il nostro organismo.*" Grubicy, "M. Guyau," 1

420 "*Questa spiegazione fisiologica, umana, che il Guyau ci dà della poesia della luce, deve tornare di conforto e d'incoraggiamento agli amici e colleghi pittori, i quali da qualche anno, sulle traccie della scienza, vanno approfondendo i misteriosi fenomeni della luce in funzione.*" Ibid., 1.

421 This discussion has limited itself to a focused look at several of the most representative texts among myriad sources that informed the Symbolist thought of the day, especially with regard to ideas about perception, sensory experience, art, and the unconscious. However, other writings were also influential. Among these, Damigella cites the importance of articles by two Lombroso disciples, his daughter Paola Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 110-17, 134 n. 53, 134 n. 54, 134 n. 56.

422 For example, Segantini mentions Herbert, and then proceeds to cite him on the education of children and youth and the role of teaching drawing. Giovanni Segantini to Vittore Grubicy, [undated], Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.8.23.

ambiguities and unresolved amalgam of attitudes felt in Italy with regard to science, Catholicism, and spirituality and, as a consequence, is more applicable to the Divisionist art discussed in this chapter. This approach was present in the ideas espoused by the anti-positivist writer Antonio Fogazzaro (1842-1911), who pursued mystical subject matter in his novels and philosophical essays. In a period in which evolutionary ideas were seen by the Church, not as scientific discoveries, but as a means to overthrow Christian doctrine regarding divine creation, Fogazzaro endeavored to find a way to explain how these apparently opposed poles could both be correct, instead of accepting the denial of spirituality to which believers in the materialism and monism of Darwinian thought ascribed.

Fogazzaro was a devout Catholic from Vicenza who rejected the materialism of positivism, but recognized the validity of evolutionary theory—even though this flew in the face of Church edict—and pushed for a modernization of Church doctrine. Fogazzaro was inspired after having read *Evolution and its Relations to Religious Thought* (1888) by Joseph Le Conte (1823-1901) in 1889. In 1891, he presented the lecture, "For a Recent Comparison between the Creation Theories of Saint Augustine and Darwin" ["Per un raffronto recente delle teorie di S. Agostino e di Darwin circa la creazione"], which would later be one of the essays published in his 1898 *Human Ascents*. Although all his novels addressed thematics revolving around religious faith and scientific progress, *Human Ascents* is the publication in which he endeavored to reconcile Catholicism and Darwinism and faith and reason. In addition to "Saint Augustine and Darwin," the book contained an essay on the evolution of human organisms, which analyzed the theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and Darwin, and proposed that as humankind

advanced biologically it also advanced spiritually. Thus, a greater intellectual understanding of science and scientific progress led to a higher understanding of God and the Divine.[423] Despite his own fervent beliefs, his later novels were condemned by Pope Pius X, who was notorious for his anti-modernist stance. Fogazzaro eventually recanted the views put forth in his works and asked public forgiveness from the Church.

While it might seem as though the choice of Fogazzaro as representative of the zeitgeist of the time is arbitrary, his lectures drew much attention and received criticism from both sides. His works were widely read and known in the Northern Italian cultural and intellectual circles to which the Divisionists belonged. In the early 1890s, Fogazzaro and the Divisionists all contributed to the short-lived *Cronaca d'arte*. By the end of the decade, *Il marzocco* featured a lengthy front-page review of *Human Ascents*.[424] Written by art critic Domenico Tumiati, the review expounded upon Fogazzaro's philosophies and revealed much about current attitudes regarding the perceived conflicts between science and religion. Indeed, Tumiati welcomed Fogazzaro's proposal that

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423 Fogazzaro's arguments were by no means airtight. The following passage exemplifies the logic by which he was able to argue seemingly contradictory concepts: "Between scientific progress and the idea of God there is undoubtedly a spiritual correlation similar to those mysterious correlations that one observes in the organic realm in which the development of one organism corresponds to the development of another…I would say that there are among the roots of human knowledge and the roots of the idea of God a natural occult for which, when the human spirit ascends in science, it also has to ascend and does ascend spontaneously…into the idea of God. With every major scientific advancement our mind conceives of God as being even greater and, above all, more different than man, in his ways. Astronomy's advancements, indicating the real order of the solar system and its probable subordination to other systems, have increased and glorified the concept of our Creator, have multiplied in the zones of space most remote and most invisible to us the designs and ends of his divine action." ["*Vi ha indubbiamente fra il progresso scientifico e l'idea di Dio una correlazione spirituale simile a quelle misteriose correlazioni che si osservano nel mondo organico per le quali allo sviluppo di un organo corrisponde lo sviluppo di un altro...dirò che vi ha tra le radici del sapere umano e le radici dell'idea di Dio una naturale occulta per cui quando lo spirito umano faticando ascende nella scienza, deve pure ascendere e ascende spontaneo…nell'idea di Dio. Ad ogni maggior progresso scientifico la nostra mente concepisce Iddio più grande e, sopra tutto, più diverso dall'uomo nel suo modo di operare. I progressi dell'astronomia, indicando l'ordine vero del sistema solare e la sua probabile subordinazione ad altri maggiori sistemi, hanno ampliato e glorificato il concetto del nostro Creatore, hanno moltiplicati nello spazio più remoto, più invisibile a noi i disegni ed i fini dell'azione sua divina*."] Fogazzaro, *Ascensioni umane*, 107.

424 Domenico Tumiati, "Ascensioni umane," *Il marzocco* 3, no. 45 (December 11, 1898): 1-2.

"…evolutionary theory sheds light upon the problem of divine creation, rather than destroying it…"[425] Fogazzaro's interpretation of evolution, tempered by Christian doctrine, allowed for the soul to be the result of divine creation vis-à-vis the body, whose development was evolutionary. The evolution of the natural kingdom was a sign of divine creation. Thus, the role of science in a time of religious crisis and pessimistic philosophical perspectives could be morphed to take on a mystical dimension which could stand in for religious experience.

In sharp contrast to Fogazzaro's religious readings of evolutionary theory, the criminal anthropologist and positivist Cesare Lombroso built upon the biological determinism of evolutionary science in his studies of the intelligence and the moral capacity of criminals, women, and racial and ethnic groups. His conclusions were based upon ostensibly scientific hypotheses derived from the analysis and categorization of the physiological attributes in his subjects.[426] Lombroso's assumptions about normality and abnormality informed current intellectual trends in Italy. His books were widely published, and he wrote articles for journals such as Gustavo Macchi's *Vita moderna*, which was read by the Divisionists.[427]

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425 *La teoria evolutiva illumina il problema divino della Creazione, invece che distruggerlo*…" Ibid., 1.

426 For a general overview on Lombroso, see Delia Frigessi, *Cesare Lombroso* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003).

427 These included Cesare Lombroso, "La menzogna delle donne," *Vita moderna* 1, no. 38 (September 18, 1892): 297-98; "Tipi di criminale," *Vita moderna* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1893): 4-5; "Gli spettri di Ibsen e la psichiatria," *Vita moderna* 2, no. 3 (January 15, 1893): 17-18. Reviews of his publications were also printed. See, for example, A. Ferrero, "Cesare Lombroso. A proposito del suo nuovo libro," *Vita moderna* 2, no. 16 (April 16, 1893): 129-30; and Adolfo Zerboglio, "Gli Anarchici," *Vita moderna* 3, no. 39 (September 30, 1894): 308-09. Lombroso was not the only prominent exponent of evolutionary theory. Another figure who merits mention is Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910), the physiologist and anthropologist who propagated determinist attitudes in his writings. For a biographical examination see Walter Pasini, *Paolo Mantegazza ovvero l'elogio dell'eclettismo* (Rimini: Panozzo, 1999). For a more theoretical look at Mantegazza's ideas see Nicoletta Pireddu, "Ethnos/Hedonē/Ethos: Paolo Mantegazza, antropologo delle passioni," in *Antropologi alla corte della bellezza: decadenza ed economia simbolica nell'Europa fin de siècle* (Verona: Fiorini, 2002), 131-84.

Yet, despite the pervasive presence of positivist-inspired theories regarding evolutionary superiority, and the Divisionists' familiarity with them, representations of the less advanced "other" were not prevalent in their painting. As the artwork discussed in Chapter 4 demonstrated, the poor or politically extreme were not depicted as depraved groups, but as heroic people as in Longoni's, Nomellini's, and Pellizza's paintings. The non-Western or Orientalist figure made no appearances.[428] This absence could itself signal purposeful omission, especially given Italy's sputtering attempts to colonize in Africa and the bloody defeat the Italians bore there at Adua in1896. I believe, however, that the Divisionists were more preoccupied with the need to foster unifying constructs within Italy before they could address a still-to-be-defined identity abroad, even one that was freighted with ideas of cultural superiority or imperial supremacy.

The only noticeable impact of Lombroso's ideas within Divisionist Symbolist art was in the area of gender.[429] According to his conclusions, if women did act abnormally or criminally they had an excess of male traits, and they were defined as atavistic (biologically backwards). These conclusions "scientifically" confirmed commonly held beliefs in Western culture regarding women who broke with their preordained identity or their biological destiny and were, thus, perceived as deviant or depraved. Examples of both the "normal" or biologically sane and reproductive woman and the deviant woman

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428 Previati's orientalizing paintings *Hashish* (*The Hashish Smokers*) (*L'haschisch* (*le fumatrici di haschisch*), 1887) and his two versions of *Cleopatra* (c. 1888 and c. 1903) are exceptions. These, however, are not Divisionist canvases. Instead, they belie the influence of the older artist, the Neapolitan Domenico Morelli (1826-1901). For more on Previati's early work see Francesco Tedeschi, "Gaetano Previati: formazione e attività predivisionista," in *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920: Un protagonista del simbolismo europeo*, ed. Fernando Mazzocca (Milan: Electa, 1999), 32-39, especially 35-36 for a discussion of Morelli's influence.

429 For a recent and focused examination of Lombroso's theories on women see Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Praeger, 2002), 53-95.

were a focus of Symbolist art and made cameos among several Italian Divisionist painters, among these they were recurrent in the painting of Segantini.[430] These feminine personae return us to the arena of religion, as his paintings of women often engaged the binary opposition of Eve and Mary. However, incarnations of the woman as an evil instigator of original sin were less prevalent than those of the Holy Mother or the idealized woman.

If biological determinism is to be read into Divisionist work, it is more frequently present in the propagation of the perfect mother figure, bound to her reproductive faculties, yet pure. This purity, in turn, connected her to abstracted notions of spiritual transcendence.[431] The role of the immaculate mother would seem an unattainable or suffocating one. In truth, Italian culture made space for such a bizarre position.[432] Mothers were (and still are) beloved above all.[433] Granted, the expectations for such an

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430 In addition to the publications cited in fn 2, for background on the *femme fatale* and other related female stereoptypes propagated in late nineteteenth-century art, see Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

431 An interesting parallel to the Italian conception of femininity and, in fact, to multiple cultural issues of the 1890s, such as the pervasive anxiety around Darwinism and its implicit denial of Christian axioms, were also found in America and in American art of roughly the same period. See Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

432 This is not to suggest that women were not at a disadvantage in Italy as elsewhere in the Western world at the end of the nineteenth century. Women were primarily mothers and wives, unless they belonged to the lower classes and were forced to work due to financial necessity. Women also received less education than men, but the gap was not so wide as one might think. Interestingly, class seemed to have played a greater role in education than gender. For example, between 1881 and 1901 about 60% of women and 45% of men were illiterate. Daniele Marchesini, "L'analfabetismo femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento: caratterisitche e dinamiche," in *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, ed. Simonetta Soldani (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1991), 37-56. There was an emerging feminist movement in Italy. In Milan's Socialist circles there were several politically and culturally important, educated women, including Anna Kuliscoff and Ersilia Majno, who were among its early proponents. The fundamental study on the issue of women's right in Italy in the nineteenth century is Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile*, *1848-1892* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963). For the relationship between feminism and Socialism see Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia, 1892-1922* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1974); and Annarita Buttafuoco, *Questioni di cittadinanza: Donne e diritti sociali nell'Italia Liberale* (Siena: Protagon, 1997).

idealized woman were ultimately restrictive. Women could be mothers and caregivers, but not active equals in the world at large. However, in the literal and psychic ambit of the hearth and home—the locus of Italian life, in which family and food are cloaked in a ceremonial mantle of religious meaning—women reigned supreme. Only when women strayed from this role and their supposed natural destiny as procreators did artists portray them negatively. Segantini's full embrace of this attitude will be explored in the next section.

Segantini's Madonnas and "*Male madri*"

Segantini was a major Divisionist interpreter of Symbolist themes, staging his art in the removed zones of the Alps, where he lived from the early 1880s onward.[434] The painter's entire *oeuvre* steered far from any urban subject matter and, with his permanent exodus from Milan to the high mountains around St. Mortiz, Switzerland, he pursued utopian conceptions of rural existence and idealized visions of nature.[435] While Segantini

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433 Among the Divisionists, Grubicy's mother had a special importance for him. Moreover, several painters elevated their wives or companions to angelic status. Segantini was dedicated to his life-companion, Bice Bugatti, and Pellizza cherished his wife Teresa so much so that he killed himself very soon after her death.

434 Segantini painted in the mountainous zone between Milan and Como, around 1882-84, sponsored by Grubicy. By 1886 Segantini had permanently established himself in the Swiss Alps. First he went to Savognino. Then, in 1894, he transferred to Maloja. From 1896 onwards, he spent winters in Soglio in Bregaglia. In his final year of life, he painted above Pontresina on the Schafberg. On a practical note, Segantini, who was technically an Austrian citizen having been born near Trent, was having difficulty obtaining Italian nationality. Instead, the Swiss had granted him permission to reside in their country, so it was logistically easier for him to live there. Historical information on Segantini's biography relies upon Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 13-32.

435 These were ideas he verbalized. Segantini, "Così penso e sento la pittura," 55. His decision to retreat to more the "primitive" surroundings and life style of the mountains may be seen in a parallel pattern to that of Paul Gauguin, who first went to Brittany and painted the Breton peasants, and later to far-flung islands of the South Pacific, to depict the landscape and the natives of Tahiti and the Marquesas islands. See George T. M. Shackelford and Claire Frèches-Thory, *Gauguin Tahiti* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2004). For a brief comparison of Segantini and Gauguin, see Franz Zelger, "Il Trittico della natura: La risposta di Segantini a Gauguin e ai romantici tedeschi," in *Giovanni Segantini*, eds. Beat Stutzer and

was not an observant Catholic, these pantheistic scenes of mountain life were often imbued with secularized religious references which embodied his own personalized faith. Notwithstanding these religious affinities, Segantini, in many ways, lived his life as an iconoclast who was opposed to the mores intrinsic to organized religion. He never married his partner, Bice Bugatti, mistrusting as he did the sacrament of marriage. Nonetheless, the couple had children. With both choices the artist violated key precepts of Catholicism and, by its standard, led an immoral life. Yet, his writings and art confirmed a belief in the value of spirituality, one which he expressed throughout his art in images that directly and indirectly referenced Christian paradigms.

At the end of the 1880s, Segantini moved from the more modeled, tonal idiom and straightforward subjects of Naturalism to the flattened forms, arabesques, and imaginary themes associated with Symbolism. By 1889, he began to fashion a fantastic, mystical version of the Alpine landscape he inhabited. His shift in interest to Symbolist imagery exemplified trends that were occurring in the countries that lay beyond Italy's northern borders.[436] Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901) the Swiss-German proto-Symbolist, known for his strange interpretations of myth and allegory, was an influential figure.[437] Hodler's conceptions of mystical and dream worlds set in the Alps, and Khnopff's

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Roland Wäspe, eds. (Ostfildern: Hatje 1999), 174-79.

436 Grubicy's criticism of Segantini's realism and his preference for Symbolist painting also is cited as a deciding element in Segantini's initial turn to the exploration of Symbolism. See, for example, Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 117. For an analysis of Segantini's relationship to art abroad see Robert Rosenblum, "Giovanni Segantini: an International View," in *Giovanni Segantini: luce e simbolo: 1884-1899*, ed. Annie-Paule Quinsac (Milan: Skira, 2000), 38-49.

437 Böcklin's presence also was felt in Italy because during the 1890s he lived around Fiesole, Italy. See Katharina Schmidt and Christian Lenz, eds., *Arnold Böcklin, 1827-1901*, trans. Jean Torrent and Aude Virey-Wallon (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001). Segantini referred to Böcklin and his centrality to the Munich Secession in his correspondence to Alberto Grubicy. See letter postmarked February 24, 1895, in Annie-Paule Quinsac, ed., *Segantini: Trent'anni di vita artistica europea nei carteggi inediti dell'artista e dei suoi mecenati* (Oggiono, Lecco: Cattaneo, 1985), 337-38. In footnote 8, 338, Quinsac suggested that Segantini would have only known Böcklin's work through illustrations, but that he was a great admirer of the older painter.

hermetic images of women and the monstrous female creatures of legends and literature were also of import.[438] Despite his escape from the city to remote pastoral locales to pursue his painting, far from the urban centers of art, Segantini remained in touch with contemporary aesthetic trends and was current on the artistic goings on in other countries.[439] Although he did not travel much, he exhibited alongside Khnopff and James Ensor (1860-1949) as early as 1890 in the exhibition organized by Octave Maus (1856-1919) with Les XX in Brussels.[440] In fact, Segantini actively exhibited internationally and would later become a founding member of the Vienna Secession, with whom he showed in 1898. However, as will be discussed below, Segantini took much of his symbolic language from late Medieval and early Renaissance art.[441]

From around 1891 to 1897 Segantini explored the dialectic of holy mother and fallen woman in *The Angel of Life* (*L'Angelo della vita*) and *The Evil Mothers* (*Le cattive*

438 It is tempting to ascribe influence to Austrian art—given the prominence and proximity of Austro-Hungarian culture in the northern regions of Italy as well as the years of Hapsburg rule—and especially the painting of Gustav Klimt. However, the Secession came into being after Segantini and others were well along in their exploration of Symbolism. Klimt became popular in Italy, but this was a phenomenon which post-dated the 1890s. See Emily Braun, "Klimtomania /Klimtophobia," in *Gustav Klimt: Modernism in the Making*, ed. Colin B. Bailey (New York: Abrams; Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada 2001), 41-53.

439 The postal system provided a lifeline for Segantini and he maintained a flow of correspondence with artists, friends, and colleagues in Milan and in other European cities from Berlin to London. He also had cultural journals and magazines sent to him with regularity. Quinsac notes Segantini's awareness of art from across Europe through illustrations in the journals he received. See Quinsac, *Giovanni Segantini: luce e simbolo*, 26; and Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 29

440 Correspondence exists between Les XX and Segantini regarding the logistics of this exhibition. See, for example, Giovanni Segantini to Les XX, October 25, 1889; October 27, 1889; December 19, 1889; and March 27, 1890, reproduced in Quinsac, *Segantini: Trent'anni*, 740-41, 743-44; and Octave Maus to Giovanni Segantini, letter on Les XX stationary, December 12, 1889, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.8.29.

441 Segantini's reliance of Christian iconography is discussed topically in Annie-Paule Quinsac, "Die Mutter, der Tod und die katholische Tradition im Werk von Giovanni Segantini," in *Giovanni Segantini, 1858-1899*, eds. Felix Baumann and Guido Magnaguagno (Zurich: Kunsthaus, 1990), 47-58. I am grateful to Oliver Dettler for helping me translate this essay.

madri), the works which constitute the focus of this section.[442] In addition to embodying contemporary determinist theories regarding female types, these images also reflected Segantini's personal views on women.[443] In their most positive role they were secular Madonna*s*, in their negative manifestation, they were bad mothers. These personifications were, in part, influenced by sentiments Segantini expressed in letters. In corresponding with his friend, the Italian feminist writer Neera, he explained his opinions at length, in a response to an article of hers on the question of women's rights:

> I like women when they are the faithful and spiritual companion to men; man feels the need for this second soul of his, who understands his soul, that caresses his ideal, who pushes him forward towards honesty and duty; but for man to feel attracted to his companion, to this affectionate conveyance of his feelings, he must feel esteem and respect for her and this the woman achieves when she is faithful to her companion and serious in her conduct. Love born of respect and goodness is more lasting than that that is born from only physical beauty. But to have this from these women one must give them a good example within the family, with words and books, a healthy and well-ordered moral and intellectual discipline, and above all care for the health of the little girl and the young woman; this contributes more than anything to form a spiritually and materially sound

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442 For a synthetic summary of Segantini's good/bad woman dichotomy as represented by these two series and the multiple ramifications implicit within these works, see Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 476. While the parameters of the present discussion limit the number of works that can be discussed, I do not mean to imply that Segantini only pursued these two strict thematic lines, though they are the two that dominated his Symbolist portrayals of women. Other works exemplified the positive and negative roles he ascribed to women, such as *Love at the Source of Life* (*L'amore alla fonte della vita,* 1896), and *Vanity* (*La vanità*, 1897). In addition, Segantini was not the only Divisionist to inscribe symbolic female figures within Alpine landscapes. In his brief excursion into Symbolist territory, Longoni painted several versions of a red-haired girl playing the violin by an Alpine stream in a dramatic mountain setting, alternately entitled, *The Sound of the Stream* (*Il Suono del ruscello*, 1902-03) and *The Voice of the Stream* (*La Voce del ruscello*, 1904). These lyrical images recast the allegorical pairing of the woman and the spring as the origins of life or fonts of nature. Longoni, perhaps influenced by the Symbolist interest in abstract representations of the aural, conceived of the young sylph-like woman as a musical personification of the tinkling water.

443 It has been posited that Segantini's frequent focus on mothers—whether good or bad—was related to personal experience. The artist may have felt himself abandoned by his mother due to her early death. His subsequent mistreatment at the hands of his half-sister, his surrogate mother, would only have buttressed these anxieties. See, for example, Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 476. For an early psychoanalytic look at Segantini that raises this issue see Karl Abraham, *Giovanni Segantini: Ein Psychoanalytischer Versuch* (Leipzig: F. Deuticke, 1911). While this may have guided his choices to some degree, his interest in the intertwined thematics of the evil and pure woman are in synch with many of the misogenist representations of women by Symbolist artists active outside of Italy.

> character. Instead, present bourgeois society creates only neurotic women, who more than good mothers and good companions for men, are good coquettes. Whose fault is it? I think it is due to bad example. It is unlikely that a bad tree will bear healthy fruit; the fault is not of the fruit but of the tree, isn't it so?[444]

The final lines of this passage resonate when considering a precursor to *The Angel of Life*, *The Fruit of Love* (*Il frutto dell'amore*, 1889 [fig. 39]), an image depicting a secular Madonna and Child seated on the curved trunk of a tree, with the child grasping an apple.[445] Pushing beyond the allegorical limits of *The Two Mothers*, in which Segantini had cast his shepherdess as a lay Madonna, *The Fruit of Love* reveals his exploration of more specifically Symbolist motifs, Christian imagery, and female archetypes. We see in this work Segantini's evolution of pictorial narratives in a more allusive direction. In *The Fruit of Love* the artist realized a work that had little grounding in Realist themes by painting an unlikely interpretation of Mary and baby Jesus improbably located in the recognizable Alpine landscape where he lived and worked. He reinforced the religious dimension of this painting with his choice of a gilded, trefoil frame, redolent of late medieval and early Renaissance devotional formats. The juxtaposition of the icon-like frame and the representation of a rustic, but clearly

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444 "*A me la donna piace quando si fa la compagna fedele e spirituale dell'uomo; l'uomo lo sente il bisogno di questa sua seconda anima, che comprenda la sua, che carezzi il suo ideale, che lo spinga avanti verso l'onestà e il dovere; ma perchè l'uomo si senta attratto verso la sua compagna, a questa trasmissione affettuosa dei propri sentimenti, occorre che nutra per lei stima e rispetto, e questo, l'ottiene la donna quando è fedele al suo compagno e seria nella sua condotta. L'amore nato dal rispetto e dalla bontà è più durevole di quello che nasce dalla sola bellezza fisica. Ma per avere di queste donne occorre dar loro sia coll'esempio in famiglia, sia colla parola o coi libri, una sana e ben ordinata disciplina morale ed intellettuale, e sopratutto curare nella bambina e nella giovnietta la salute; questa contribuisce più di tutto a formare il carattere spiritualmente e materialmente sano. Invece l'attuale società borghese non dà che donne nevrotiche, che più che buone madri e buone compagne dell'uomo, sono buone civette. A chi la colpa? Secondo me al cattivo esempio. Un albero guasto è difficile che dia frutti sani; la colpa non è del frutto ma dell'albero; non è così?*" Giovanni Segantini to Neera (the alias for the writer Anna Radius Zuccari, 1846-1918), February 7, 1893, reproduced in *Scritti e lettere di G. Segantini*, ed. Bianca Segantini (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1910), 74; and in Quinsac, *Carteggi*, 681.

445 Giovanni Segantini, *The Fruit of Love*, 1889, oil on canvas, 88.2 x 57.2 cm, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig. An important resource for this work is Quinsac's entry. See Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo ragionato*, cat. no. 562, 462.

identifiable Holy *Mater* and Child with the slightly menacing branches of the warped tree and the high mountain pasture create a feeling of disjuncture and evoke a realm not of the material world, but of the metaphysical one.

The frame is not the only element of this work that recalls Old Master sources. Segantini also drew upon Renaissance portrayals of the Virgin and Child for his image. Quinsac has suggested that it calls to mind Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck* of 1534 [fig. 40].[446] The elongated treatment of Parmigianino's figures would help to explain the seemingly awkward spatial rendering of the overly large baby boy.[447] Renaissance references extend to the iconography within the painting as well. In accordance with Renaissance symbolism, a red apple in the hand of the infant Jesus signaled his role as the new Adam and, by association, that of Mary as the new Eve.[448] Yet, in a late nineteenth-century context—and when taken together with Segantini's own metaphor regarding the tree and the fruit—the primal meaning of the apple as an emblem of original sin cannot help but be unsettling and suggestive of a child born out of wedlock, which serves to heighten an underlying feeling of unease within this metareligious representation of the Madonna and Child.

In a subsequent version of this same composition, Segantini produced a rendition of mother and child devoid of any potentially negative implications, *The Angel of Life* (*L'Angelo*

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446 Parmigianino (Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola, 1503–1540), *Madonna of the Long Neck*, 1534, oil on wood, 219 x 135 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

447 See Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo ragionato*, 462; and Quinsac, "Die Mutter, der Tod und die katholische Tradition," 47-58. The disproportionate child was commented upon in Segantini's time. See Vittorio Pica, "L'arte europea a Firenze VII: Giovanni Segantini e i pittori lombardi," *Il marzocco* 2, no. 11 (April 18, 1897): 2.

448 See Mirella Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Florence: Olschiki, 1977), 48. I must thank Liliana Leopardi for providing me with some essential references regarding the literature on late medieval and Renaissance altarpieces and painting.

della vita, 1894 [fig. 41]).[449] Returning again to Renaissance models for inspiration, he loosely drew upon the iconography of Northern and Italian Renaissance paintings, conflating the placement of the Madonna aloft in a tree, like *Our Lady of the Dry Tree*, (c. 1465 [fig. 42]) by Petrus Christus (active by 1444, died 1475/76), with the seated pose of a fourteenth-century Virgin enthroned, like those by Giotto di Bondone (1266/67-1337), and the more modeled figures and informal posture of later Renaissance Marys, such as those by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, 1483-1520).[450] He then reconfigured these generalized borrowings in a monumental Symbolist interpretation of a secular Virgin and Child enthroned in an elaborate tree.

The Angel of Life conjures a dreamlike realm. This effect is, in large part, due to the contrast of imaginary and realistic elements in the picture, and attests to Segantini's adamant credo that even the most symbolic imagery begins with studies from life.[451] The tree is naturalistically rendered, its gnarled branches protrude and recede, twisting and turning in space. The mother and child, for whom the artist used his own son and his nanny as models, have poignantly human features and a natural demeanor. Nonetheless, Segantini did not allow truth to

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449 Giovanni Segantini, *The Angel of Life* (*L'angelo della vita*), 1894, oil on canvas, 276 x 217 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan. General information on this work, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo ragionato*, cat. no. 566, 466.

450 Petrus Christus, *Our Lady of the Dry Tree*, c. 1465, oil on panel, 17.4 x 12.3 cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Quinsac, in particular, cites the Petrus Christus work and possible sources in early Rennaissance *Maestà* (majestic Virgin) depictions. See Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo ragionato*, 466; and Quinsac, "Die Mutter, der Tod und die katholische Tradition," 47-58. In fact, the thorny tree could also be interpreted through a Renaissance lens, in which case the brambles signify Mary's virginity. The origin of this symbolism resides in the burning bush Moses saw, one that while on fire was not consumed. Like the bush, Mary remained unscathed by the fires of passion or lust. See Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance*, 66-67. For general background on Italian painting from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, I consulted Victor M. Schmidt, ed., *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Eve Borsook and Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi, eds. *Italian Altarpieces, 1250-1550: Function and Design* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Jacob Burckhardt, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*, ed. and trans. Peter Humfrey (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Bruce Cole, *Italian Art, 1250-1550: The Relation of Renaissance Art to Life and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

451 Segantini, "Così penso e sento la pittura," 55.

nature to impede him from contrasting these aspects with the holy pair's unlikely arboreal seat and the stylized undulating contours of the mountains in the landscape.

The morality of maternal love is celebrated in this image. Mother and child are physically and symbolically elevated in the tree's silvery branches amidst soft clouds, high above the ground. This impression is emphasized by the composition's very low horizon line which allows the sky to occupy two-thirds of the background of the canvas. The focal point of the image is the pink-suffused face of the mother, with her chin nestled upon the head of her child. Tenderly ensconced in his mother's embrace, the beatific infant cups her breast with one little hand, the source of his sustenance, thus making explicit the title of the work. Segantini has again equated the mother figure with that of nourisher. The mother is no longer the peasant of *The Two Mothers*, nor even the peasant Madonna of *The Fruit of Life*, but an explicitly angelic Mary of a spiritually elevated status who, nonetheless, embodies the biologically essentialist role ascribed to women.

In 1891, Segantini turned to clearly identifiable evil women with his "Nirvana" cycle, a series of works based on the eponymously titled poem by his friend, the *Scapigliato* writer and opera librettist, Luigi Illica (1857-1919).[452] Ostensibly the translation of a Buddhist text, the Pandjavalli by Maironpada, the poem was actually an invention of Illica and signaled syncretic interests of the time in Eastern religions and their correspondences to Christianity.[453]

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452 Segantini was quite taken with the poem, which he deemed magnificent. See Giovanni Segantini to Alberto Grubicy, end of May 1895 (no. 428), reproduced in Quinsac, *Segantini: Trent'anni*, 346-47.

453 Interest in the universality of world religions had begun earlier in the century and is evidenced by publications such as Édouard Schuré, *Les Grands Initiés: Esquisse de l'histoire secrèt des religions* (Paris: Perrin, 1889). Fascination with Buddhism had spread in Italy during the 1890s enough so to prompt the publication of book for the popular "Manuali Hoepli" series, Paolo Emilio Pavolini's *Buddismo* (Milan: Hoepli, 1898). Cited in Giovanna Ginex, "Luigi Conconi. Works in the Gilgore Collection," in *The Winds of Change: The Milanese Avant-Garde, 1860-1900* (Naples, Florida: The Gilgore Collection, 2003), 125.

Up there in the infinite cerulean space,—Nirvana radiates!
There, behind the bitter mountains and the grey precipices,—shines Nirvana!—
There everything is azure, is eternal, is laughter, is song!—It is Nirvana!—
There the great hopes of humanity rise,—where Nirvana is!
And those who suffered and sinned have peace and forgetfulness.—That is Nirvana.
Oh, human is this Faith which forgets—and which forgives!
Even those who have sinned, before that very sweet—laughter of Light,
Must suffer anguish from Nature—and with Her cry.
Things in the manner of humans have tears—and have faults.
Thus the Wicked Mother in the livid valley—in the eternal ice
where no branch turns green and no flowers blooms—wanders rejected.
Your son never had a smile, a single kiss—o hopeless mother?
Did not your soul give forth the shoots of kisses,—o hopeless mother?
Thus silence torments you—pulls and pushes you
gelid larva with tears in your eyes—made of ice!
Look at her! Fluttering wanderer—like a leaf!...
And around her pain everything is silent; all things hush.
Now here outside of the livid valley—appear trees!
There a soul calls loudly from each branch—who suffers and loves;
and the silence is won and a very human—voice that says:
Come! To me, oh mother! Come and proffer me—your breast, life.
Come, mother!...I have forgiven!...The specter—at that sweet cry
flies desirous and proffers to the tremulous branch—her breast, her soul.—
Oh, portent!—Look! The branch palpitates!—The branch has life!
Here! It is the face of a child, and he sucks the breast—avid and he kisses [it]!—
Then the grey tree the child and mother— releases bound together…
Up there Nirvana radiates! Up there the son—with him brings
the forgiven Mother…They overcome the mountains—the two specters!
They overcome the anguish of the clouds and fly—to Nirvana.—
Oh, human is this faith that forgets—and that forgives.[454]

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454 Quinsac cites the poem in full in Italian. See Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 476. The English version is a service translation by the author. "*Là su, ne l'infinito spazio ceruleo, — Nirvana irradia!/Là, dietro a li aspri monti e a balze grigie, — splende Nirvana! — /Là tutto è azzurro, è eterno, è riso, è cantico! — È la Nirvana! —/Là le gran spemi de li umani adergono, — dove è Nirvana! /E chi soffrì e peccò ha pace e oblio. — Tale è Nirvana./Oh, umana questa Fede che dimentica — e che perdona!/Pur chi ha peccato, pria di quel dolcissimo — riso di Luce,/della Natura dee soffrir le angosce — e con Lei piangere./Le cose a guisa degli umani han lacrime — ed hanno colpe./Così la Mala Madre in vallea livida — per ghiacci eterni/dove non ramo inverda o fiore sboccia — gira sospinta./Non ebbe un riso, un sol bacio il tuo figlio, — o invano madre?/Non diè germogli di tuoi baci l'anima, — o invano madre?/Così te la tormenta del silenzio — mena e sospinge/gelida larva con ne li occhi lacrime — fatte di ghiaccio!/Vedetela! Affannosamente vagola — come una foglia!.../E intorno al suo dolor tutto è silenzio; — taccion le cose./Or ecco fuori della vallea livida — appaion alberi!/Là da ogni ramo chiama forte un'anima — che pena ed ama;/ed il silenzio è vinto e la umanissima — voce che dice:/Vieni! A me vieni, o madre! Vieni e porgimi — il seno, la vita./Vien, madre!...Ho perdonato!...La fantasima — al dolce grido/vola disiosa e porge al ramo tremulo — il seno, l'anima. —/Oh, portento! — Guardate! Il ramo palpita! — Il ramo ha vita!/Ecco! È il viso d'un bimbo, e il seno succhia — avido e bacia! —/Poi bimbo e madre il grigio albero lascia — cadere avvinti…/Là su Nirvana irradia! Là su il figlio — con seco*

"Nirvana" tells of the fate of women who have rejected their children. This grievous behavior leads to their punishment in an icy hell. After prolonged suffering they earn the forgiveness of their abandoned offspring and return to embrace motherhood. They are, thus, released from their agony and ascend to Nirvana. The poem's message, while supposedly Buddhist, follows a principle axiom of the Christian faith, whereby forgiveness and peace are attained through penance and atonement. These "hopeless mothers" are also allegories for bourgeois society's neurotic coquettes whom Segantini lambasted in his letter to Neera.

Segantini's first interpretation of *Nirvana* was *The Punishment of Lust* or *The Punishment of the Lascivious Women* (*Il castigo delle lussuriose*, 1891 [fig. 43]).[455] In a letter to Grubicy, Segantini described the work: "I sent to Berlin a painting about 2 meters long the Sinful Ones whom I punish in a nirvana of snow and ice. They are figures launched into the void without wings painfully resigned."[456] Even without the benefit of Segantini's words, *The Punishment of Lust* is a decidedly bizarre painting. It presents a world in which white tonalities prevail. In the foreground, a pair of women hangs in a condition of almost suspended animation in the brittle air above a snowbound Alpine valley—the eternal ice of their damnation all around. These sinful creatures are being castigated for having renounced their natural role in life as mothers. In this work

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tragge/la perdonata Madre…I monti varcano — le due fantasime!.../Varcan l'angoscia de le nubi e volano — dove è Nirvana. —/Oh, umana questa fede che dimentica — e che perdona."

455 Giovanni Segantini, *The Punishment of Lust* (*Il castigo delle lussuriose*), 1891, oil on canvas, 97.5 x 171 cm, Walker Gallery of Art, Liverpool. For a general discussion of the "Nirvana" works, see Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 476. For a specific look at this work, see cat. no. 571, 477.

456 "*mandai a Berlino un quadro di circa 2 Metri le Lossuriose che io castigo a un nirvana di nevi e ghiacci. Sono figure lanciate nel'vuoto senza alli dolorosamente rasegniate*." [misspellings and punctuation are Segantini's]. Giovanni Segantini to Vittore Grubicy, May 21, 1891, reprinted in Quinsac, *Carteggi*, 139-40. Also in Gioconda Leykauf-Segantini, ed. *Giovanni Segantini, 1858-1899: Aus Schriften und Briefen/Da Scritti e lettere* (Maloja: Innquell-Verlag, 2002), 76.

Segantini captured that moment and place described in the poem where no tree turns green and no flowers blooms. The birch trees are dead, their branches withered, and their forms are equated with the women's twisted bodies and spidery red locks. The infertile, bleak land of snow, ice, and rocky mountains to which the wicked mothers are banished parallels their own rejection of procreation.

In 1894, *The Punishment of Lust* was followed by *The Evil Mothers* (*Le cattive madri* [fig. 44]).[457] Similar in imagery to its precursor, it actually illustrates a moment occurring later within the poem's narrative of punishment and redemption, when mother and child are reunited in a moment that should be happy, but in Segantini's interpretation, remains disturbing. *The Evil Mothers* returns to the motif of the woman in the tree of *The Angel of Life*, but seen from the other side of the looking glass. The main subject is a single contorted female who arches against the crooked form of a leafless tree in a snowy desolate plane, a nursing child affixed to her breast.[458] The child's almost vampiric suckling appears to send the woman into a state of ecstasy. While, perhaps, unseemly behavior for a nursing mother, it is somehow suggestive of the religious transformations sometimes associated with representations of saints. In fact, the bare-breasted woman, forgiven by her infant, has gained salvation—if not sanctity—through her return to her proper place as *mater lactans*; it is only thus that can she undergo the conversion from evil woman to good mother.

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457 Giovanni Segantini, *The Evil Mothers* (*Le cattive madri*), 1894, oil on canvas, 120 x 255 cm, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna. Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, cat. no. 574, 482-83.

458 The barren tree or bramble also has a second meaning in sacred representations. It can reference the crown of thorns worn by Christ during the crucifixion and allude to the Passion or to suffering. In the context of *the Evil Mothers* this is a probable symbolism. See Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden of the Rennaissance*, 68. In the background, on the left, a succession of figures in similar poses recedes into the mountains, possibly showing the advancement of the women's evolution within the poem's narrative. See Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 482.

Vaguely echoing Fogazzaro's paradoxical stance, Segantini proposed an idea of the female which relied both upon the roles prescribed for them by Christianity and by evolutionary theory. The sacred motifs that run through the artist's work helped shore up his own personal views on the moral character of women, views which were, in turn, sanctioned by current scientific outlooks. However, his insistence on mystical themes and his frequent quotations of sacred Renaissance art also bear witness to an unorthodox, but felt, credence in religious symbolism and faith. Segantini, then, gave his beliefs a universal religious resonance by passing his archetypal Christian subjects through a secular filter and locating them in a timeless pastoral world.

Virgins and the Via Crucis: Previati's Sacred Symbolism

Among the Divisionists Previati was the strongest adherent to Symbolist themes, many culled from Christian narratives.[459] Together with his embrace of Symbolism's undulating forms, his dedication to overtly sacred subjects set Previati apart from many of his Divisionist cohorts. He also was the most traditionally religious among this group of artists. Born into a very Catholic family, Previati never lost his belief in Church doctrine. He lived much of his adult life in Milan, but voiced disdain for what he considered its ugliness, the superficial behavior of the people, and the overall falsity that characterized the urban texture of that city.[460] Firmly anchoring himself in anti-materialist

459 Given the relative scarcity of contemporary published materials on Previati, this section relies in significant ways upon the scholarship published in Mazzocca, *Gaetano Previati*. The monograph by Barbantini is an important early source; Nino Barbantini, *Gaetano Previati* (Rome and Milan: Bestetti and Tumminelli, 1919). I also depended upon Tumiati's 1901 article on Previati, an essay written by a critic who knew Previati and had an intimate knowledge of his work. See Domenico Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," *Emporium* 13, no. 73 (January 1901): 3-25. Both Tumiati's and Barbantini's analyses of this artist's philosophy and art fit very closely with much of my own interpretation.

strategies, Previati removed himself to the inner reaches of his studio with the goal of creating art that could convey true emotion. In a 1901 article he recounted his feelings: "In certain moments I feel the need to free myself from this artifice that surrounds us, to isolate feelings, to see before me the true idea of things, the spontaneous development of an attitude, of a line, of pain. This is why in my art I abandon the present life and I seek to elicit either a vanished or an ideal environment."[461]

Previati consistently fused Symbolist style with Christian iconography, and his faith led him to dedicate a large part of this *oeuvre* to sacred scenes, but interpreted in an unconventional manner.[462] He returned again and again to the image of the Madonna and Child, but his religious painting was not restricted to this subject. He represented scenes from the nativity, as with his 1892 *The Magi* (*I re magi*), and painted a sequence of canvases focusing on the Passion of Christ. These included his *Via Crucis* of 1901-02, depicting the fourteen Stations of the Cross, a series now in the collection of the Musei Vaticani. During his lifetime Previati also showed his work in exhibitions devoted to sacred art and, in his later career, realized triptychs and decorative works that dealt with a panoply of religious and allegorical themes.

As the reactions to *Maternity* (1890-91) documented in Chapter 3 evidenced, Previati's formal and conceptual approach to Christian subject matter was initially

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460 Previati spoke of his reactions to the city in an article for *Emporium*. See Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," 3.

461 "*In certi momenti sento il bisogno di liberarmi da tutto questo artificio che ci attornia, di isolare i sentimenti, di vedermi inanzi la vera idea delle cose, lo svolgersi spontaneo di un attitudine, di una linea, di un dolore. Ecco perchè nella mia arte io abbandono la vita presente e cerco di suscitare un ambiente o scomparso o ideale*." Ibid.

462 For a discussion of Previati's religious painting see Maria Grazia Schinetti, "La pittura sacra," in *Gaetano Previati*, ed. Mazzocca, 59-68.

greeted with incomprehension by the public and many critics. However, over the course of the decade, as broader audiences became more accustomed to the premises of Symbolism, and as society contemporaneously struggled to find new ways to articulate faith, there was a shift in tone in the critical reception of his work. In a review of the 1894 Brera Triennale, which included Previati's *Madonna of the Lilies* (*Madonna dei gigli*, 1893-94), Pompeo Bettini acknowledged that the painter was "seeking new adorations for old symbols."[463] Later, Tumiati recognized this turn and identified Previati as a "profoundly Christian spirit" whose work was founded on a contemporary notion of the ideal, one that was "Christian and modern."[464]

Previati's Symbolist inclinations were already palpable in the late 1880s in the charcoal and ink drawings he executed illustrating Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*. By 1892 his presence in the international Symbolist arena was hallmarked by the inclusion of *Maternity* in Sâr Péladan's first Salon de la Rose + Croix, which was dedicated to spiritual, idealist art.[465] The Symbolist course Previati took was guided by multiple signposts. Among foreign sources, in addition to the painting of the Pre-Raphaelites, these included the work of Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) and Gustave Moreau (1826-1898). Moreover, as Flavio Fergonzi has shown through a comparison of the Poe drawings with print images by Felicien Rops (1833-98) and

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463 Although Bettini voiced some criticism for Previati's more recent work, he applauded his ingenuity and sincerity in these new Symbolist efforts. See Pompeo Bettini, "Alla Triennale di belle arti," *Vita moderna* 3, no. 38 (September 23, 1894): 296-98.

464 Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," 13.

465 Sâr Mérodack Péladan (Joséphin Péladan, 1859-1918), was a self-proclaimed mystic, promoter of the occult, author, critic, and founder of the Salon de la Rose + Croix. For more on the Salon de la Rose + Croix, see Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 186-94; and Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix* (New York: Garland, 1976).The Italian intelligensia was up to date on Péladan's philosophies and the Salon de la Rose + Croix, and a long review even appeared on the first Salon in *Vita moderna*. See Giuseppe Benetti, "A Parigi: Il 'Salon' della Rosa + Croce," *Vita Moderna* 1, no. 11 (March 13, 1892): 82-83.

Odilon Redon (1840-1916), whose work Previati would have known through images available via journals, these artists were also important for the Italian.[466] In Italy, Previati's studio mate, the Scapigliato painter and printmaker Luigi Conconi, whose work often engaged mystical themes, was an influential presence. Finally, proto-Renaissance artists, the Italian Primitives, and the painters of the Renaissance were of key significance.[467] In particular, Previati acknowledged his predilection for the Italian Quattrocentisti.[468]

The Italian masters of the past also played an additional role for Previati, as fonts of specifically religious imagery. While Previati reconfigured the visual vocabulary of his ancestors to achieve new ends, he seldom quoted an artist or work specifically. In fact, even his contemporaries employed a bit of guess work when identifying potential origins for his imagery. For example, Tumiati likened the conception of *Maternity* to the mosaic of the twenty-two virgins in S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, quickly adding that he did not know whether Previati had seen this mosaic (although it is almost certain that he would have known the image, famous as it was).[469] What mattered was that Previati's

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466 In his excellent essay on Previati's works on paper, Fergonzi is quick to point out that the images available via illustrations by Symbolists such as those by Rops or Redon, were available and influential for Previati. Through a comparison of drawings Fergonzi shows how this comes to the fore in the never-published charcoal and ink drawings Previati executed for Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* in the late 1880s. See Flavio Fergonzi, "Gaetano Previati disegnatore," in *Gaetano Previati*, ed. Mazzocca, 82-83.

467 Tumiati alluded to Previati's relationship to artists such as Andrea Mantegna (1430/31-1506), the Italian Primitives, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," 18-19. Barbantini has a section devoted to the importance of painters such as Giotto and Mantegna. Barbantini, *Gaetano Previati*, 147-53. Comparisons to Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro di Mariano Filippi, 1444/45-1510) were also made.

468 He mentioned this in his letters to his brother. See for example, Gaetano Previati to his brother, August 22, 1893, September 12, 1893, and March 2, 1894; reproduced in Asciamprener, *Gaetano Previati. Lettere al fratello*, 144-49, 153-56, 183-84.

469 Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," 11.

work, like the Byzantine mosaic or other sacred prototypes, conveyed the idea of mysticism.

Previati's quest for a modern Christian art continued and, in 1893, he revisited a subject related to *Maternity* with the *Madonna of the Lilies* (*Madonna dei gigli*, 1893-94 [fig. 45]).[470] The artist's Madonna, a seated Virgin with an ample lap, presented frontally, recalls the iconography of a *Maestà*, such as that in the famed altarpiece by Duccio di Buoninsegna (1308-1311, [fig. 46]).[471] Previati married the regal stance and stylization of a late medieval/early Renaissance Mary with an ideal sentiment of maternity, including gestures which mirrored the behavior of an actual, earthly mother.[472] His, then, is a gentle Madonna, who tilts her head down to look lovingly upon her child as she steadies him with tenderness. Following suit, the Christ Child is a naked, chubby baby boy. Shown as a curious infant, he reaches for a cluster of lilies. Not unlike his Trecento predecessors—who gave new attention to humanism in their sacred depictions—Previati also emphasized the humanity of the mother and child.[473]

Clearly, *The Madonna of the Lilies* is a work that captures much more than motherly love. In this tour-de-force Previati balanced his secularized representation of Mary and the infant Jesus with pronounced symbolism. Mother and child are set at the

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470 Gaetano Previati, *The Madonna of the Lilies* (*La Madonna dei gigli*), 1893-94, oil on canvas, 181 x 221 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan. This may be one of Previati's most beautiful paintings, and fails only in the treatment of the young *Madonna*'s lap, legs and knees, which projects volumetrically to accommodate the baby Jesus, and are disproportionate to her head and her torso. For further analysis of this work, see Schinetti's entry in *Gaetano Previati*, ed. Mazzocca, cat. no. 20, 132.

471 Duccio di Buoninsegna (active by 1278-1318), *Maestà*, 1308-11, tempera on panel, 214 x 412 (original dimensions before dismantling, 500 x 468 cm), Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.

472 As with Segantini, Previati's choice of motherhood as one of his main subjects could have biographical implications. In his case, his mother died when he was an infant.

473 Regarding the image of the Madonna and Child in fourteenth-century Italian painting see, for example, Cole, *Italian Art*, 97-98.

center of an unearthly atmosphere.[474] The sky shimmers, alternating minute strokes of emerald green and yellow pigment with recurrent cross-hatching. The golden tonalities increase in a halo around the figures in a manner that recalls the richness of gold *fondo* paintings or mosaics. The lush verdant background, where the brushstrokes shift to a long, vertical treatment, juxtaposing gold, brown, dark green, and bright green in the rushes, also suggests the fertility of motherhood. This potentially base reference to fertility is, in turn, tempered by the white lilies which allude to Mary's purity and her immaculate conception.[475] The clusters of flowers, whose contrasting brown outlines bring forth the whiteness of the petals, arise from this luxuriant grassland and enthrone the holy pair in a semi-circle. The flowers lean in slightly as well, as if responding to the sun, but here reacting to the radiating light shed by the divine couple. The lily stalks are twelve in number, perhaps presaging the future disciples of Christ.[476] In this alternate vision of the Virgin and Child, Previati has again merged a Christian subject, the abstract feeling of motherly love, and a modernist idiom.

In counterpoint to Previati's beatific scenes of Mary and Baby Jesus are those showing the suffering of Christ on Calvary. *The Three Marys at the Foot of the Cross* (*Le Marie ai piedi della Croce*), 1897 [fig. 47], representing the end of Jesus' life on earth, is

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474 It is impossible to determine what the *Madonna* is sitting upon, which adds to the surreal nature of the overall composition.

475 Lilies are customary in images of the Virgin, especially annunciation scenes. See Levi D'Ancona, *Garden of the Renaissance*, 210-20. Lilies proliferated in nineteenth-century images of Mary, as well as less specific allegorical representations of idealized women. See Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 41-43. Schinetti cites George Hitchcock's (1850-1913) *The Annunciation* (1887), which was illustrated in an 1888 issue of *L'Art*, as as a potential source for Previati use of lilies. See Schinetti, "La pittura sacra," in *Gaetano Previati*, ed. Mazzocca, cat. no. 20, 132. Given late nineteenth-century artists' familiarity with the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, Dante Gabriele Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (*The Annunciation*, 1849-50), is an example of an earlier influential model for this imagery.

476 Alternately, the twelve lilies could allude to the alternating twelve hours of day and night, a theme Previati addressed in a later work executed in a very similar palette, *The Dance of the Hours* (*La danza delle ore*, c. 1899), in which twelve allegorical female figures spin in space between the sun and the moon.

another image that through unorthodox compositional strategies, reiterates Previati's commitment to Christian narratives and his reconstruction of these.[477] Here, again, the theme of motherhood is at the center of the drama, but it is that of a mother's agony at witnessing the torment and death of her son. As noted above, Previati turned to the Stations of the Cross throughout his life. This particular depiction shows the twelfth station and the death of Jesus. His mother, Mary, her sister, Mary, and Mary Magdalene, along with other mourning women, kneel at the base of the Cross, and look upon the crucified Christ and pray. The instant Previati has selected is that when the Virgin Mary, differentiated from the other women by her subtle, silvery halo, has fainted.

In some aspects, the iconography of *The Marys at the Foot of the Cross*, as with the postures of the women, is standard for the scene represented. The organic cluster of mourners recalls the grouping around the deposed Christ in Sandro Botticelli's *Lamentation* of the late 1490s, [fig. 48], which Previati could have seen at the Poldi-Pezzoli in Milan, and which, in turn, has roots in the work of the Florentine Fra Angelico (Guido di Pietro, active by 1417-1455), in particular, his *Deposition* (1430-34 [fig. 49]), now at the Museum of San Marco, in Florence.[478] However, Previati verged far from these Old Masters of the Quattrocento with his radical cropping of the figure of Jesus (at his ankles, no less).[479] His exclusion of the crucified Christ, traditionally visible in this Station, was a startling and effective visual choice. The Savior's physical presence is

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477 *The Three Marys at the Foot of the Cross* (*Le Marie ai piedi della Croce*), 1897, oil on canvas, 125 x 171 cm, Private collection, Italy.

478 I am grateful to Fred Licht for helping me to identifying these specific sources for Previati's *Marys*. Sandro Botticelli, *Lamentation*, late 1490s, oil on panel, 106 x 71 cm, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan. Fra Angelico, *Deposition*, 1437-40, tempera on wood, 176 x 185 cm, Museo di San Marco, Florence.

479 He had already formulated this compositional feature in an unlocated version of this work that predates 1890. Schinetti points to Rossetti's drawing, *Mariana in the South* (1856-57), as a model for this peculiar choice. See Schinetti, "La pittura sacra," 63.

signaled only by way of his feet, gruesomely pierced through at their centers by thick, roughly wrought iron nails. This simple and straightforward detail is a synechdochic device that immediately conjures the image of Jesus nailed to the cross. Finally, Previati's dramatic cropping also served to focus the narrative upon the grieving women.

The painting's tragic subject is not only conveyed through subject and composition, but also through its colors, which reinforce the picture's hopeless mood. Unlike many of Previati's celebratory religious works, which are characterized by gold and green hues, the palette for this painting is made up of browns and muted russets. The shadowy and somber tones intimating the darkness of the moment also may have been cause for the response this painting received when it was first shown in the 1897 Venice Biennale. Guido Martinelli, usually an advocate of Previati's work, wondered for what "melancholic idea" it was included in the exhibition.[480] Notwithstanding this first reaction, the work went on to be presented in a multitude of exhibitions during Previati's lifetime, attesting to its importance within the artist's oeuvre.

Previati's reinterpretation of Christian iconography and his efforts to reassign a spiritual meaning to art were not lost on the next generation. In 1916, the Futurist artist and theorist Umberto Boccioni wrote an article on Previati. He keenly perceived the importance of the older painter and credited this Divisionist for articulating modern ideals while remaining true to the essentials of Renaissance art: "He intuited that style begins when one builds *conception* upon *vision*, but while his vision renewed itself in modernity, the conception remained, like a framework, in the old material which was elaborated by

480 His full quote was: "We do not know for what melancholy idea *At the Foot of the Cross* [an alternate title] by the same was exhibited." ["*L'ai piedi della croce dello stesso non sappiamo per quale malinconica idea sia stato esposto*."] Guido Martinelli, "Le grandi esposizioni internazionali: L'esposizione artistica di Venezia," *Emporium* 6, no. 32 (August 1897): 139.

the Italian Renaissance."[481] Perhaps a paradoxical statement, coming from one of the primary signatories of a manifesto calling for the abolishment of art of the past, but Previati, as the next chapter will show, held a special place in the hearts of the Italian Futurists. Adherents to avant-garde strategies and nationalist rhetoric, the Futurists recognized Previati's accomplishments, which engaged mystical themes grounded in the visual syntax of the Italian Old Masters while achieving modernist goals.[482]

Religious Reflections in Pellizza's *The Mirror of Life*

Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, as the previous chapter outlined, was a proponent of humanitarian Socialism, committed to the betterment of the lives of working classes.[483] Concurrently, he also pursued Symbolist imagery in subjects less obviously connected to leftist themes, which rang with Christian notes and, as with Segantini's and Previati's painting, hearkened to Italian medieval and Renaissance prototypes.[484] Pellizza balanced a life as a secluded painter who created art which expressed higher ideals, with that of an activist artist who remained engaged with the community and believed art should have a

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481 "*Egli ha intuito che lo stile comincia quando sulla visione si costruisce la concezione, ma mentre la sua visione si è rinnovata nella modernità, la concezione è rimasta, come ossatura, al vecchio materiale elaborato dal Rinascimento italiano*." Umberto Boccioni, "Le arti plastiche," *Gli avvenimenti* 2, no. 13 (March 19-26, 1916): 3. Schinetti also raises Boccioni's views in her essay, "La pittura sacra," 65-66.

482 Barbantini also acknowledged Previati's bridging of mysticism and modernity. See Barbantini, *Gaetano Previati*, 107-11.

483 Biographical information, unless otherwise noted, is taken from Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1986), 9-19, 22-44.

484 Pellizza had a great admiration for art of the Italian Rennaissance, especially the Quattrocento, and amassed a substantial photographic archive, mainly made up of Alinari images, of works by, for example, Giotto, Fra Angelico, Benozzo Gozzoli (Benozzo di Lese di Sandro, c. 1420-1497), Botticelli, Perugino (Pietro di Cristoforo Vannucci, active by 1469-1523), Luca Signorelli (active by 1470-1523), and Raphael. This uncatalogued collection is located in the Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, Volpedo. In particular, Pellizza venerated Fra Angelico and had several exchanges in this regard with Domenico Tumiati, who published a book on the artist. This is addressed in Monica Vinardi, "Considerazioni sul simbolismo dell'ambiente fiorentino," in *Pellizza da Volpedo* (Turin: Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea and Hopefulmonster, 1999), 133-35.

moral purpose.[485] Conflating these aims, and roughly informed by Guyau's theories, he ventured to depict a conception of harmony in his paintings that was suggestive both of abstracted human sentiments and socialist ideals.[486]

Pellizza spent much of his life in Volpedo, yet maintained his affiliation with the avant-garde milieu in Turin—Piedmont's capital—a center for Symbolist and socialist activities. One feature that set Turin apart from other Italian intellectual centers was that the elite thinkers there included Cesare Lombroso and his daughter, Paola Lombroso, as well as his collaborator, Guglielmo Ferrero. Consequently, a distinct line of positivist writings by these social scientists directly informed the development of Symbolism in the mid-1890s in that city. This helps explain the origins of the confluence of Socialism, science, and spiritualism that infused Pellizza's philosophy and painting.[487] Moreover, Pellizza's ardent political sentiments kept him from pursuing a too-narrow Symbolist aesthetic or philosophy, as he perceived this to be distanced from the problems of the day and too esoteric to have a social impact.[488]

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485 Pellizza wrote about the underlying principles of his philosophy and his chosen lifestyle for *Il marzocco* in 1897. In "*Il pittore e la solitudine*" [The Painter and Solitude] Pellizza summarized that an artist should not have to live in the city, subject to the prerequisite self-promotion that would earn him more sales, and the production of works dictated by bourgeois consumerism, factors that would impede the creation of anything above a median level. Moreover, he argued that urban life negatively impacted the artist's sensibilities and prevented him/her from making great art. However, Pellizza was not advocating a total withdrawal from society. He advised that it was essential for artistic growth to know of the ideas of others, to see the work of fellow artists, and to show one's own works too. Giuseppe Pellizza, "Il pittore e la solitudine," *Il marzocco* 1, no. 53 (January 3, 1897): 2-3.

486 Damigella addressed Pellizza's aims at length, see Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 169-214.

487 Ibid., 169-71. Pellizza shared this commitment with other thinkers who were in Turin in the 1890s, such as his friend, the writer Giovanni Cena (1870-1917), whose Socialist convictions spurred him to create schools for the agrarian peasantry later in his career.

488 Pellizza's dedication to humanitarianism led to his break with the more mystical group that had formed around *Il marzocco* and with whom he was connected while in Florence. Damigella discusses this at several points; Ibid., 140, 172.

While he did not subscribe to organized religion, Pellizza had profound spiritual beliefs which may explain why, in several of his most important works, he did resort to using abstracted Christian symbolism and curved the tops of his pictures in a format which recalled devotional frames. An early example is *In the Hayloft* (*Sul fienile*, 1893 [fig. 50]).[489] The work depicts a classic act of Christian charity as a poor farm laborer, dying far from the family he was working to support, is administered last rites by a priest in the hayloft of a barn.[490] The metaphorical use of light, bright outside and shadowy within the interior, provides a symbolic dimension for the sad narrative as well as being a favorite format for the light-conscious goals of Divisionist painting.

The Procession (*La processione*, 1894 [fig. 51])—two rows of devout peasants led by white-clad and veiled girls, carrying tapers and missals—is even more overtly religious, and reenacts a powerful ritualistic expression of Catholicism.[491] Situated a few hundred yards from Pellizza's home and studio in Volpedo, the scene is one the artist witnessed and imbued with a pronounced and stabilizing sense of local place. When he painted it, Pellizza wished to denote ideas of spirituality present in the communion between humanity and nature. He, thus, equated the rows of beatific women with the trees lining the road down which they walk. The overwhelming sense of harmony in this

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489 Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *In the Hayloft* (*Sul fienile*), 1893, oil on canvas, 133 x 243.5 cm, private collection.

490 Pellizza wrote a long description on the subject. See Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Catalogo dei manoscritti di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo provenienti dalla donazione eredi Pellizza* (Tortona: Comune di Tortona and Tipografia Ferrari Occella, 1974), 42-43.

491 Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Procession* (*La processione*), 1894, oil on canvas, Museo della scienza e della technologia Leonardo da Vinci. Scotti has a detailed entry on this work upon which I relied extensively unless otherwise cited. See Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*, cat. no. 895, 341-42.

peaceful, bucolic scene was picked up on by reviewers. When this work was reproduced in the popular *L'Illustrazione italiana* the text described it thus:

> Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo has painted a *Procession*, in a wood, in the morning light. The white-garbed girls proceed slowly, the crucifix above their heads, the lines they form lose themselves in the depths of the trees. The sun's fulgent radiance envelops them. The scene is placid as in the canvas of Fragiacomo; this is the same quiet and tranquil poetry.[492]

A procession of a different kind is the subject of *The Mirror of Life (And that which the one does so the others shall do*) (*Lo specchio della vita-[E ciò che l'una fa, e l'altre fanno]*) (1895-98 [fig. 52]), Pellizza's most famous work after *The Fourth Estate*.[493] While it seems to contain less specific religious content—or does so in a more veiled fashion—it is replete with a polyvalenced series of Christian references and will be the focus of this discussion.[494] Pellizza began this, the major Symbolist canvas of his career, in 1894. In this image, remarkable not least of all for its trompe-l'oeil wood "frame," Pellizza took a typical rural scene and transformed it into an evocative mystical image. The painting was inspired by a line from Dante's *Divine Comedy:* "And that which the one does so the others shall do," ("*E ciò che l'una fa, e l'altre fanno*" *Purgatory*, Canto III, line 82).[495] Pellizza intended to call it *Harmonies* (*Armonie*) at an

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492 "*Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo ha dipinto una Processione, in un bosco, nella luce mattinale. Procedono lente lente le fanciulle bianco-vestite; col crocefisso in testa; le loro file si perdono nel fondo degli alberi. Una fulgida irradiazione di sole le investe. La scena è placida come nella tela del Fragiacomo; vi è la stessa poesia mite e tranquilla*." Attilio Centelli, "All'Esposizione di Venezia gli acquisti dei sovrani," *L'llustrazione italiana* 22, no. 19 (May 12, 1895): 291.

493 *The Mirror of Life (And that which the one does so the others shall do*) (*Lo specchio della vita-[E ciò che l'una fa, e l'altre fanno]*), 1895-98, oil on canvas, 132 x 291 cm. Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea, Turin.

494 This work is treated in many of the publications on Pellizza. I have relied upon Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*, cat. no. 2002, 384-86. It is also discussed in Aurora Scotti Tosini, *Pellizza da Volpedo* (1999), 23-25.

495 We find mention of this title, for example, in a July 1, 1894, letter from Pellizza to Morbelli: "When you come to Volpedo you will see the paintings I am working on a procession and a line of sheep "'And

earlier stage of its development.[496] The scrapped title was meant to allude to the abstraction of a musical work and to suggest the harmony in nature between animal and landscape and the corresponding feeling the image was meant to elicit in the viewer. Pellizza's adherence to a positivist model and his knowledge of current ideas regarding the effects of visual experience on mental states led him to pursue a line of thought which proposed that the physiological power of color, line, and form could act upon the individual's perceptual faculties and nervous system to stimulate certain sensations.[497]

Ultimately, Pellizza instead chose the less abstract and more religiously loaded subtitle taken from the work's intended literary source. The Dante quotation, in turn, suggested Biblical passages in which sheep have precise Christian symbolism as the followers of Christ, their shepherd.[498] Building on this series of associations, Pellizza conceived the sheep as a metaphor for humanity. This connection is conveyed by the primary title he chose, *The Mirror of Life*. This poetic evocation plays on words and theme, referring to the actual reflections of the animals in the stream, as well as to the reflection of humankind's destiny in the waters of life, a conflation that intimates an interrelated set of visual, literary, and spiritual references.

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that which the first does, and the others will do.'" ["*Quando verrà a Volpedo vedrà i due quadri a cui sto lavorando una processione e una sfilata di pecore 'E ciò che fa la prima, e l'altre fanno.'*"] Published in Luciano Caramel, *Angelo Morbelli* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1982), 63.

496 Scotti Tosini, *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (1999), 24.

497 Damigella points to the importance of the theories of Guyau, and possibly Charles Henry, among others, for the method by which Pellizza constructed his paintings, suggesting that the geometric structuring he employed was meant to elicit certain psychological responses in the viewer. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 190-95.

498 The specifically Christian reference brings to mind a series of Old and New Testament passages, such as: "The Lord *is* my shepherd." [Psalms 23]; "as sheep having no shepherd" [Matthew 9:36]; "Behold the Lamb of God" [John 1:29]; "I am the good shepherd" [John 10:11]. The wealth of commonly known Biblical quotes on the subject of sheep is abundant and could not have absent from Pellizza's mind in the years it took him to complete *The Mirror of Life*. I am grateful to Catherine Chin for supplying the New Testament references to sheep.

The Mirror of Life, which Pellizza executed in his natal home, shows a horizontal composition depicting a line of sheep trotting along a path that runs through a wetlands. The scene was familiar along the banks of the small river Curone that divides Volpedo from its neighboring town.[499] Shepherds would traditionally utilize the path running alongside the river to move their flocks.[500] An early sketch of June 1894, *Sheep with Little Shepherd* (*Pecore con pastorello* [fig. 53]), done on the site, shows the crystallization of Pellizza's composition.[501] The landscape is already sketched out. In the background, a copse of trees is located on the upper right, while a hill slopes off to the left side of the composition. Some of the organic forms cut by the water in the grassy wetland are already noted with rapid strokes. The sheep are depicted in single-file, rather than as a flock, because the nature of the river path dictated this formation. Notwithstanding the importance of this study from life, I believe that Pellizza's decision to represent the sheep in profile and in a single-file formation was also inspired by early Christian visual prototypes standard in mosaics in church apses which serve to reinforce the spiritual message of the painting.

Traditionally, scholars have cited the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, as a starting point for this hyper-real landscape invested with religious overtones.[502] The literary font for the painting's subject also linked Pellizza's own development of this imagery to a similar pursuit of the Pre-

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499 Scotti Tosini, *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo* (1999), 23.

500 I must thank the Pellizza archivist of the Studio-Museo, Pier Luigi Pernigotti, for showing me where this work was located geographically and pointing out the river.

501 Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *Sheep with Little Shepherd* (*Pecore con pastorello*), 1894, oil on paper, 11.2 x 26 cm, private collection, Milan.

502 See Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*, 384-86.

Raphaelites, who often illustrated poetic tales in their paintings.[503] Prior to beginning this work, Pellizza had spent a winter in Florence during 1893-94, where the PRB's work was the focus of investigations for Italian artists and writers. Scotti has acknowledged that a likely reference for Pellizza's image of sheep as symbols of human destiny may have been William Holman Hunt's *Our English Coasts 1852 (Strayed Sheep*) (1852) [fig. 54].[504] As has been previously noted, the Divisionists were great admirers of the Pre-Raphaelites, shared a belief in the importance of truth to nature and technical exactitude, and were known to emulate the British artists in their choice of themes.

An Italian source hinging on specifically Christian iconography also emerges as an inspiration for this work. This source is the sheep found in mosaic schemes in early Christian and medieval Italian churches, in particular, those representing the twelve disciples of Jesus.[505] Traditionally, a frieze is located below the primary decoration in the apse vault of the church which consists of a single file of twelve sheep with either the figure of Christ or a haloed sheep representing Christ as the Lamb of God at its center.[506]

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503 The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's paintings inspired by poetic or prose texts are many. John Keats (1795-1821) alone was the source for Millais' *Lorenzo and Isabella* (1848-49) and Hunt's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1867), both based on the 1818 poem *Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil*; Millais' *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1862-3), and Arthur Hughes' *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1856), both about his eponymously titled poem of 1819; and John William Waterhouse's *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (1893), which drew upon the poem of that name, published in 1820. Lord Alfred Tennyson's (1809-1892) poetry gave rise to several famous paintings as well, including Hunt's *The Lady of Shallot* (c. 1886-1905), and Millais' *Mariana* (1850-51). The list goes on, Shakespeare being another rich mine for the English painters.

504 For relationship between Hunt and Pellizza, see Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*, 386. William Holman Hunt, *Our English Coasts 1852 ('Strayed Sheep')*, 1852, oil on canvas, 43.2 x 58.4 cm, Tate Britain, London.

505 To my knowledge, this possible model previously has never been cited or documented.

506 For a discussion of Christian iconography in art see, for example, André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins*, trans. Terry Grabar, A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, Bolligen Series 10, no. 35 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980 [orig. 1968]). I am grateful to Nord Wennerstrom for bringing this volume to my attention and to Mary Harvey Doyno for directing me to the churches in Rome that contained the sheep motif.

During the time that Pellizza was working on his canvas, he went to Ravenna and Rome, both cities with churches that contained such decorative programs, where he saw examples of this type of arrangement.

In 1895, the artist went to Venice, by way of Ravenna, for the opening of the Biennale.[507] We learn from the careful annotations he made in his guide book that the sheep in the apse of S. Apollinare in Classe (c. 547 [fig. 55])—a church he deemed "very beautiful"—caught his eye.[508] There the twelve sheep appear twice in the apse, once around the base of the apse, surrounding Saint Apollinaris, and again on either side of the face of the apsidial arch, with an image of Christ above them in a tondo-shaped mosaic. Within the apse itself are three more sheep representing Saint Peter, Saint John, and Saint James as they witness the Transfiguration. Pellizza penned a comment on this trio: "They remind me of my painting And how the first does etc. These also keep their heads high";

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507 Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: Catalogo generale*, 13.

508 Corrado Ricci, *Guida di Ravenna* (Ravenna: Antonio e Giovanni David, 1884), annotated copy, Archives, Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, inv. no. 156. The book contains the note by the author: "Giuseppe Pellizza, Ravenna 18-19 aprile 1895". He wrote regarding S. Apollinare in Classe: "I arrive to visit this very beautiful church at 10:15. I give 40 cents to the guardian, an old polite affable man." ["*Arrivo per visitare questa bellissima chiesa alle 10 ¼. Do' centesimi 40 al custode uomo vecchio creanzato e affabile.*"]. Other churches in Ravenna have examples of sheep, such as those in the mosaics of the so-called Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (c. 425-50), in the north lunette depicting *The Good Shepherd*, although these are in different configuration, six in various recumbent and standing poses, placed around the seated Christ. Likewise, S. Apollinare Nuovo's nave mosaics feature sheep in *The Judgement of the Nation* (c. 500). The right wall of San Vitale (b. 526-consecrated 547), also contains a mosaic of Moses taking Jethro's sheep to pasture. In addition, sheep appear in the Moses cupola of San Marco in Venice, which Pellizza also visited. However, with all of these churches the representation of the sheep and their configurations are far removed from Pellizza's own realization. Pellizza had a guide for Venice as well, in which he marked those churches he visited. See *Sei giorni a Venezia: guida storica artistica illustrata con la pianta della città di Venezia* (Venice: L. Querci,1887), annotated copy, Archives, Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, inv. no. 172. Information on both the Ravenna and Venice guide was supplied by the Studio-Museo Archivist, Pierluigi Pernigotti, in e-mails to the author, dated January 11 and 14, 2005. I consulted the following studies on the mosaics in San Marco and S. Apollinare in Classe, Otto Demus, *The Mosaic Decoration of San Marco, Venice*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Erich Dinkler, *Das Apsismosaik von S. Apollinare in Classe* (Cologne: West deutscher Verlag, 1964).

this indicates that he had made a connection between these medieval creatures and his own.[509]

Then, in January of 1896, he went on a trip to Rome and Naples, a journey undertaken especially to study the art of his Italian avatars, during which the young artist was deeply impressed by the works of the Old Masters he saw in both cities and their environs.[510] The notes in his guidebook for Rome reveal that he also looked at medieval mosaics in the churches of Italy's capital.[511] Although the observations in his guide book indicate that Pellizza was more intently focused upon Renaissance and Baroque churches, he also visited at least two spectacular instances of churches containing Byzantine-style mosaic decoration where he would have seen the twelve-sheep motif. These are the early ninth-century Carolingian church, Santa Prassede, and the twelfth-century church, Santa Maria in Trastevere [fig. 56].[512] The similarities between these later examples of sheep in Christian church decoration and Pellizza's own are remarkable. His side-view rendition of the animals and their hieratic configuration correspond to the frieze-like horizontal format in the medieval apses, as does his color scheme, which echoes the Byzantine predilection for blue and gold.

The technique of mosaic probably had a further dimension of relevance for an artist who had become a recent practitioner of Divisionism. Pellizza may well have paid

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509 "*Mi ricordano il mio quadro E come fa la prima ecc. Anche queste tengono alta la testa,*" in *Guida di Ravenna*, 249.

510 See Giuseppe Pellizza to Giovanni Segantini, February 19, 1896, Segantini papers, Kulturarchiv Oberengadin, Samedan, Switzerland, no. 192.1896.

511 The guide book, *Guida di Roma*, is in the Archive of the Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, (inv. no. 154). As it is lacking its cover it is impossible to ascertain which guide it is, but in all likelihood it is *Guida di Roma pubblicata in occasione del pellegrinaggio a Roma* (Rome: Perino, 1884).

512 These churches are examined in Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). For S. Prassede see especially, 123-127; for S. Maria in Trastevere, see especially, 161-164.

closer attention to these medieval models because the individual colored mosaic tesserae functioned much like the distinct strokes of divided pigment. In fact, Chevreul even used mosaic tesserae as an example of the optical interaction that occurs between separate colors when a surface is viewed from a certain distance.[513] This concept was not lost on other individuals of the artistic circles in Milan. The critic Tumiati, for example, suggested that mosaic was a technique that came close to Divisionism and that, through its textured, many-tiled, often gold, surface, reproduced the effects of moving light.[514] Consequently, the medium of mosaic also would have fulfilled Pellizza's empirical goals when making art.

Following this pilgrimage, Pellizza waxed enthusiastically about the art he saw on the Rome/Naples trip in a letter to Segantini: "back from a rather long trip, after having admired the work of our greats…but they are not only the Botticellis, the Ghirlandaios, the Raffaellos!"[515] No doubt inspired by the art seen on his voyage, he indicated in the same letter to Segantini that he was dedicating himself anew to a "painting that I began last year and I will force myself to reach a stronger artistic expression than I had in the past."[516] It is probable that he was referring to *The Mirror of Life* for, in this period, the only other two paintings on which he was working were *In the Hayloft* and *Procession*, both of which he mentions by name in his letter, so it cannot be either of these. In all

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513 Michel-Eugène Chevreul, *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortiment des objets colorés considérés d'après cette loi* (Paris: Léonce Laget: 1969; facsimile of orig. ed. Paris: Pitois-Levrault, 1839), 213-14.

514 See Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," 11.

515 "*di ritorno da un viaggio abbastanza lungo, dopo aver ammirate le opere dei nostri maggiori...ma essi non sono soltanto i Botticelli, i Ghirlandaio, i Raffaello!*." Pellizza to Segantini, February 19, 1896, Segantini papers.

516 "*Riprenderò fra breve un quadro che fin dallo scorso anno incominciai e mi forzerò di raggiungere più forte espressione artistiche pel passato non feci.*" Ibid.

likelihood the art he saw on this trip spurred his final realization of *The Mirror of Life*. In fact, Pellizza's final image strays little from the preparatory oil of 1894 with one significant exception. The lone figure of the shepherd has been eliminated. Undoubtedly, the vertical form of the man cut though the horizontal swaths of sky, grassland, sheep, and water that otherwise constitute this picture. Pellizza's aim in eschewing this element may have been purely compositional, but it could also have been a strategy drawn from medieval examples. His harmoniously horizontal line of sheep would seem to have a clear visual and symbolic association with a Christian prototype.

This sacred strata of meaning, present via the reference to early Christian iconography and Biblical sheep citations, did not stop Pellizza from overlaying these with positivist socialist references. Even at the time of its execution, this work was interpreted as a positivist view on the progression of life. Critics of the time, Mario Da Siena, for example, in his *Il marzocco* review of the 1898 National Exposition of Turin, gave *The Mirror of Life* an "optimistic interpretation" and cited its "beneficial progressive evolution."[517] The way Pellizza's sheep, representing humanity, follow each other along an allegorical path of existence readily connects them to the "flock" of people in *Fiumana* and *The Fourth Estate*. Once again, modern science and social theory

517 "To return to Pellizza, his painting was discussed in these columns according to an optimistic interpretation and a beneficial progressive evolution." [*Per tornare al Pellizza, del suo quadro si parlò in queste colonne secondo interpretazione ottimista e di benefica evoluzione progessiva.*"] However, while Da Siena praised it for its depiction utilizing a scene taken (and unaltered) from real life to successful Symbolist ends, his interpretation of *The Mirror of Life* exemplified a more pessimistic philosophy and a disbelief in the individual's power over destiny. He saw in this work of sheep following each other the inevitability of death and humanity's susceptibility to the vagaries of fate, and cited the following lines of poetry by the contemporary Ligurian poet Francesco Pastonchi (1874-1953) to accompany this sentiment: "Sheep and clouds to an equal allure/Yield: the ones moved by little wind,/The others, no shepherd prodding,/Yet they go and you could not change their course./For there is a law that compels to surrender/And blade of grass as well as forest tree tops,/Such is the design of inevitable destiny." [*Pecore e nubi ad un'ugual lusinga/Tendono: queste poco soffio investe,/Quelle non è pastor che le sospinga,/Pur vanno…e deviar non le sapreste./Poi ch'a una legge forza è che s'arrenda/E filo d'erba e chioma di foreste,/Così dispone la fatal vicenda*.] Mario da Siena, "Note sull'Esposizione Nazionale di Torino," *Il marzocco* 3, no. 38 (October 23, 1898): 3. I am grateful to Mimmetta Lo Monte for this service translation.

cohabitate with tradition and religion, making *The Mirror of Life* a fusion of realism and allegory that personified Pellizza's own interpretation of spirituality.

The New Altarpiece: Triptychs and Polyptychs as Gesamtkunstwerk

In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, the end of the nineteenth-century saw a marked resurgence of interest in the traditional tripartite or multi-panel format usually reserved for religious painting.[518] The triptych and the polyptych enjoyed a new-found popularity among artists across the continent. Earlier in the century the Nazarenes had revived the structure by subscribing to neo-gothic and Trecento frames with pointed arches and tracery. This trend spread to France and England, and was embraced by the Pre-Raphaelites. As the century progressed, the adoption of multi-panel formats showed diminished reference to medieval models.[519] Nonetheless, these historicizing influences remained strong in Italy. As has been argued previously, the art of the past represented a

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518 This renewed interest in multi-panel painting is discussed in Bruno Foucart, "Le polyptyque au XIX^{e} siècle: une sacralisation laïque," in *Polyptyques. Le tableau multiple du moyen âge au vingtième siècle*, Michel Laclotte, et al. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), 130-39. For comprehensive examinations of the triptych and polyptych in medieval and early Renaissance art see Schmidt, *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*; Caterina Limentani Virdis and Mari Pietrogiovanna, *Polittici* (San Giovanni Lupatoto: Arsenale, 2001); Borsook and Superbi Gioffredi, *Italian Altarpieces 1250-1550*; Peter Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Burckhardt, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*.

519 By the 1890s, with the Nabis, France saw the evolution of multi-panel, large-scale decorative painting, which was far removed from religious models. For a recent examination of this movement, see Gloria Groom, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Puvis de Chavannes' epic, classicizing idylls, and his mural painting, images which celebrate pastoral, utopian, and mythological subjects, were an important precursor for this monumental work, see Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, Circa 1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21-81. However, Italian painters, such as Previati, did not embark upon large-scale decorative work of this kind until after 1900. Moreover, the theme of the idyll, for the most part, does not appear in their painting till after the dawn of the new century, and thus lies beyond the scope of this discussion.

time of Italian cultural dominance. It also permeated the artistic sensibilities of contemporary artists and colored their creations.

In an era in which Catholic tenets and the Church were being questioned, and alternate forms of devotion and faith were being explored, Italians artists deliberately turned to traditional religious formats in their paintings to structure and frame their alternative conceptions of spirituality that ranged from a secular reinterpretation of Christian themes to an evocation of mystical, utopian, and imaginary realms. These formats included the curved top and gold border and/or frame for single image works and—more relevant for this discussion—the triptych and polyptych associated with late medieval and Renaissance altarpieces and devotional images of Christ, the Madonna, and saints. The Divisionist artists who actively embraced this format include Grubicy, Segantini, and, beginning in the early twentieth century, Morbelli and Previati.[520] Each took the multi-panel work to a new level, beyond a strict referencing of past religious painting, while utilizing primarily the tripartite format. Of the two artists to be examined here, Segantini took the triptych to panoramic dimensions. Grubicy, by contrast, was the only proponent who persisted in assembling polyptychal constructions.

Segantini, pointedly, wished to envelop the viewer with his multi-image *Tritypch of Nature* (*Trittico della natura*, 1899 [fig. 57]), which was initially conceived as a panorama, the *Panorama of the Engadine* (*Panorama dell'Engadina*), for the Swiss pavilion at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1900—a plan nixed due to the excessive

520 While the present chapter is limited to a few major examples, other Divisionists also painted multi-panel works in the time period addressed herein. Nomellini realized the biomystical marine quadriptych *Symphony of the Moon* (*Sinfonia della luna*, 1899), and Carlo Fornara, the triptych, *The Parable of Nature* (*La parabola della natura*), executed in 1899-1901.

costs of the project.[521] Although Segantini produced a number of multi-panel works, for example, his diptych *Grief Comforted by Faith* (*Il dolore confortato dalla fede*, 1895-96), which is in keeping with a religious format, he regarded *The Triptych of Nature* as his *magnum opus*. Left unfinished due to the artist's sudden death from peritonitis in 1899, the three enormous canvases consist of *Life* (*La vita,* 1896-98), *Nature* (*La natura*, 1897-99), and *Death* (*La morte*, 1898-99).[522] Returning to the shepherd figures from his work of the late 1880s and early 1890s, Segantini now placed them in an idealized pastoral setting. *Life*, the first painting in the resulting triptych, represents the beginning of the

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521 Segantini had conceived of the panorama as a circular, multi-sensorial work which was to include an elevated viewing structure and special effects to recreate the temperature, light variations, and sounds typical of the Alps. A group of Swiss businessmen from the Engadine who wished to promote the region, primary among them Rudolf Bavier, were the funders. When Segantini was in the planning phases he had a round studio built in Maloja which replicated on a 1:10 scale the plan for the pavilion at the *Exposition Universelle*. Over time the expenses exceeded the estimated budget and the commission was cancelled in 1898. He then decided to realize a triptych instead. The unfinished triptych was exhibited in the Italian pavilion. Today it is installed in a circular room designed expressly for it on the second floor of the Segantini Museum in St. Mortiz. The fortunes of the panorama and the development of the triptych are discussed at length throughout Segantini's letters from 1897-99, Segantini papers, Kulturarchiv Oberengadin, Samedan, Switzerland. See also letters and documents reproduced in Quinsac, *Carteggi*, 641-663; and Leykauf-Segantini, *Giovanni Segantini*, 158-68; 176-83; 212-15. For careful documentation of the panorama and the triptych see Dora Lardelli, "Il panorama dell'Engadina," in *Segantini*, ed. Gabriella Belli (Milan: Electa, 1987), 52-58; and Regula Bücheler, Thomas Germann, Dora Lardelli, et. al. *Giovanni Segantinis Panorama und andere Engadiner Panoramen* (Saint Moritz: Segantini Museum, 1991). More recently, see Julia Klüser, "De maiore ad minorem e viceversa. Per la genesi dell'opera *Il trittico della natura* di Giovanni Segantini," in *Giovanni Segantini*, eds. Stutzer and Wäspe, 164-73. Additional information on this work came from the didactic texts in Segantini's Maloja studio, which still stands today. Quinsac also summarizes the history of the panorama. Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 30. This was not the first Divisionist idea for a "theater in the round." Previati had a commission to realize a hemicycle representing Dante's *Inferno* for the 1894 Esposizioni Riunite in Milan, also cancelled for pecuniary reasons. Mazzocca, "La fortuna di Previati tra pittura storica, simbolismo e Novecento," in *Gaetano Previati*, 25. Previati alluded to the project in letters to his brother, for example, August, 28, 1893 (150-51); September 12, 1893 (155-56); and November 21, 1893 (169). After 1900 he would execute several decorative cycles. See Paola Zatti, "I grandi cicli decorativi," in *Gaetano Previati*, ed. Mazzocca, 199.

522 Giovanni Segantini, *Life* (*La vita*), 1896-99, oil on canvas, 190 x 322 cm; *Nature* (*La natura*), 1897-99, oil on canvas, 235 x 403 cm; and *Death* (*La morte*), 1898-99, oil on canvas, 190 x 322 cm. All in the Museo Segantini, Saint Moritz. Segantini's plans for the triptych underwent several permutations over time. In a letter from Segantini to Bavier he described an early incarnation of the project. See Giovanni Segantini to Rudolf Bavier, January 31, 1898, Segantini papers. Kulturarchiv Oberengadin, Samedan, Switzerland, no. 31.1.1898. Reprinted in Quinsac, *Carteggi*, 653-658. Later, each section of the triptych was also supposed to have a lunettes and two medallions. Elaborate charcoal and pencil drawings in the Kunsthaus Zurich shows the triptych as it was intended to look in its final state. Quinsac documents the stages of the triptych. See Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 512-513. See also Klüser, "De maiore ad minorem e viceversa," 164-173.

human cycle. A young peasant woman cradling her child is organically nestled into the exposed roots of a pine tree, not unlike the Madonnas of Segantini's earlier works. Fertility abounds in the surrounding green pastures, blooming lilies in the pond, and the full udder of the cow in the foreground. *Nature* shows a shepherd couple leading cows and calves home at the end of the day. Certain elements hearken back to previous works, most markedly, the setting sun's exuberant rays, which recall those in *Hail Mary Crossing the Lake* [fig. 20]. Finally, in *Death*, winter abides. A heavy snow blankets the lifeless landscape. The year and nature's cycle have come to a close. Nor is man exempt from this. The shrouded body of a deceased woman is borne to a waiting sled to be taken to her final burial site. The large cloud which looms over the landscape is a symbol of the soul's crossing from the earthly life to the eternal one.

In moving to the Alps, Segantini followed in the tradition of artists who searched for the remote or the exotic. For a man who was raised in an urban setting, the peasant life of the high mountains had the appeal of a pre-modern existence. Inscribed in these arcadian images of his peasantry was a prelapsarian idea of society. In his enormous triptych Segantini described the chthonic ebb and flow of nature, yearly seasons, and life cycles. The peasant is anchored in these, and humanity's existence from birth to death differs little from that of animals and plants. In this sphere of parallelisms there is a suggestion of humanity's own transcendence from the earthly to the celestial dimension tempered by a Schopenhaurian pessimism regarding the difficulty of existence.[523]

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523 Antonella Bestaggini, "The Annunciation of Modernity: Giovanni Segantini and the Transcedence of Fin-de-Siècle Pessimism in Italy," in *Cultural and Artistic Upheavals in Modern Europe 1848-1945*, eds. Sally Metzler and Elizabeth Colledge, Cummer Studies 1 (Jacksonville, Florida: Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, 1996), 121-48. This is related to her dissertation. See Antonella Bestaggini, "The Theme of Palingenesis in the Italian Fin-de-siècle. Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche and the later works of Giovanni Segantini (1886-1899)" Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford Brookes University, 1997.

Grubicy also endeavored to depict transcendent themes in his Alpine, multi-canvas works. In addition to his busy career as an art merchant and critic, he was also a prolific painter.[524] His *oeuvre* consists mainly of landscapes, generally set in a variety of Alpine regions, from the area around Lake Como and Lake Maggiore, to the environs of Miazzina, which, for six years, served as his base. By the late 1890s, Grubicy had begun to configure these paintings into multi-panel works and to record these compositions in photographs.[525] Grubicy's landscapes were meant to not only depict the beauty of the high mountains and lakes, but, additionally, to call up the awe-inspiring feeling and experience of viewing nature's magnificence. This evocation, his conception of "suggestion," drawn largely from Souriau, was intrinsic to his method, which he summarized as:

> —having before one, as an *aid*, the model;
> —getting a direct impression of the real before nature;
> —calling up, in the quiet of the studio, strongly experienced impressions, previously studied in their respective ingredients of form, of specific moments in nature;
> —transcribing images of feelings or of ideals, created from fantasies based on preexisting notions of real elements.[526]

The ineffable sensorial experience Grubicy hoped to induce with his suggestive landscapes was impossible to articulate solely with words. Thus, he sometimes employed musical terms when titling or describing his works, a typical stratagem with Symbolist

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524 This section on Grubicy relies upon the invaluable publication by Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*.

525 Rebora has scrupulously documented the genesis and realization of Grubicy's polyptychs in his catalogue raisonnè. Ibid., 40-48.

526 "*—avendo sott'occhio, <u>come sussidio</u>, il modello;/—impressionandosi direttamente dal vero davanti la natura;/rievocando nella quiete dello studio impressioni, fortemente provate, di determinati momenti della natura e previamente studiati nei rispettivi ingredienti della forma*." Vittore Grubicy, "Non c'è arte vera senza suggestione," 59.

painting.[527] This strategy also preserved the more abstracted and malleable evocations the artist strove to express. In *Sea of Mist-Lunar Night in Miazzina* or *Lunar Night* (*Mare di nebbia-Notte lunare a Miazzina* or *Notte lunare*, 1895 [fig. 58]), he produced a dreamy evening vista with *Japoniste* influxes, in the theme of a nocturne.[528] A canvas capturing the rich orange tones of sunset, tinged with the pinks and midnight blues of dusk, was aptly titled *Twilight Symphony (Mountains of Lake Maggiore)* (*Sinfonia crepuscolare [montagne del lago Maggiore]*, 1896). Then, when Grubicy organized such works together in multi-panel arrangements, the parts, or individual canvases, were like the movements of a larger musical composition. He referred to one such cycle of six paintings as *Detached Songs* (*Canti staccati*). Often he thought of these polyptychs in symphonic terms. These musical analogies also harmonized with the painter's desire to elicit a multi-sensorial response and with the idea of creating an all-encompassing experience.

Grubicy conceived several triptychs and polyptychs. Essentially these consisted of separate canvases which he would show in public exhibition, or arrange in his studio, in very specific groupings and sequences. Some were later separated or reassembled differently. Among those polyptychs he exhibited publicly were *The Four Seasons* (*Le Quattro Stagioni*), presented at the 1901 Venice Biennale, and *Twilights and Nocturnes* (*Crepuscoli e notturni*), shown at the 1903 Venice Biennale. The most ambitious of his

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527 Rebora discusses the musical analogies in Grubicy's work. See Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 46-47. Quinsac notes that Grubicy was inspired to assign musical titles to his paintings by Paul Signac, who often identified his paintings with the subtitle "Opus," and assigned each a number. James McNeil Whistler was another source; he typically employed musical terms in his titles, such as "arrangement," "harmony," "nocturne," and "symphony." Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 67. Grubicy suffered from hearing problems, consequently the assignation of musical titles to images might be seen to take on further meaning, as a visual notation for lost aural experience. Musical analogies or correspondences, in fact, were common in Symbolist art. See, for example, Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 34-36.

528 Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, cat. no. 579, 349.

multi-panel works was *Winter in the Mountains* (*L'inverno in montagna*), an arrangement he only deemed set in 1911, and one which he never showed in its entirety during his lifetime.[529] It encompasses eight canvases executed primarily between 1894 and 1898 in Miazzina, where Grubicy retreated to paint during the winter months. The variously sized works depicting specific sites and moments of the day were a pictorial polyphonic ensemble which, assembled as a symphonic piece, or as the lines in a poem, was to suggest a multifaceted set of visual, musical, literary, physiological, and spiritual allusions. The works in this polyptych, which Grubicy recorded in a photograph [fig. 59] are: *Lunar Night* (*Notte lunare*, 1894 and later [A-fig. 60]), *Sheep on the Rock* (*Pecore sulla roccia*, 1895 and later [B-fig. 61]), *Twilight Symphony* (*Sinfonia crepuscolare*, 1896/98 [C-fig. 62]), *The Good Stream* (*La buona sorgente*, 1896 and after [D-fig. 63]), *From the Window: Winter Evening* (*Dalla finestra: sera d'inverno*, 1896/1902-03 [E-fig. 64]), *Total Candor!* (*Tutto candore!*, 1897 [F-fig. 65]), *Morning* (*Mattino*, 1897 and later [G-fig. 66]), *The Valley of the Toce* (*La vallata della Toce*, 1897 [H-fig. 67]).[530]

Sadly, several of these works have darkened over time. From those that have been cleaned or have better survived the passage of time, the golden tonalities and shimmering

529 He did, however, will the series of paintings to the Galleria d'arte moderna in Milan.

530 Vittore Grubicy de Dragon, *Winter in the Mountains* (*L'inverno in montagna*), 1894-98/11, archival photo of eight works, MART, Rovereto. Rebora identifies the works in the photograph. See Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy de Dragon*, 41. Painting captions are as follows: Vittore Grubicy de Dragon, *Lunar night* or *Moonlight* (*Notte lunare* or *Chiaro di* luna), 1894 and later, oil on canvas, 64.5 x 55.5 cm; *Sheep on the Rock* or *The Crapp di rogoritt* (*Pecore sullo scoglio* o *El crapp di rogoritt*), 1895 and later, oil on canvas, 58 x 98 cm; *Twilight symphony (Lake Maggiore Mountains)* (*Sinfonia crepuscolare (montagne del lago Maggiore)*), 1896/98, oil on canvas, 66 x 55.5 cm; *The Good Stream* or *The Stream* (*La buona sorgente* or *La sorgente*), 1896 and after, oil on canvas, 57 x 99 cm; *From the Window: Winter Night* or *The Evening* or *Evening* (*Dalla finestra: sera d'inverno* or *La sera* or *A Sera*), 1896/1902-03, oil on canvas, 66 x 55.5 cm; *Total Candor!* (*Tutto candore!*), 1897, oil on canvas, 58 x 97.5 cm; *Morning* or *Joyous Morning* (*Mattino* or *Mattino gioioso*), 1897 and later, oil on canvas, 75 x 36 cm; *The Valley of the Toce* or *The Valley* (*La vallata della Toce* or *La vallata*), 1897, oil on canvas, 59 x 98.5 cm. All belong to the Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan.

light conjure the heady feeling of being alone with the beauty of the high mountains.[531] To achieve this, Grubicy, in many of his works, used a series of compositional devices to locate the viewer in the landscape. A few bare trees are silhouetted in the foreground lending a sense proximity to the pictorial space within the work. The ground itself often spills out of the composition, a path or a stream frequently strengthening this mode of access into the picture. The viewer is allowed entry via such devices and is invited to stand upon the highpoint depicted in the foreground of the composition from where a hill slopes down towards a distant lake, behind which gleaming mountains and nebulous skies close the scene. Through these multiple images, the static nature of painting also is transcended. The different locales, seasons, and times of day are meant to be lived simultaneously through this unified construction and permit one to move through an experience which transcends specific temporal and physical restrictions, a sensation perhaps best exemplified in real terms by the fluid, multidimensional qualities of music. This phenomenon also alludes to a divine omniscience, which goes beyond time and space into a mystical realm where spiritual transformation can occur.

Grubicy's polyptychal compositions and Segantini's panoramic triptych were conceived as architectural structures, Grubicy's to fill a wall as an altarpiece would, Segantini's to surround the viewer like a fresco cycle. The viewer is enveloped in narrative and made to feel the same sensations as the artists. Often this was one of transcendent wonder when confronted with the sublime experience of nature, and was thought of as a step into cosmic transfiguration. Underlying these mystical-religious experiences grounded in nature's cycles was the notion that the rituals of faith, when

531 Grubicy's landscapes while not exactly redundant, bear a strong similarity to each other, and warrant being discussed as a unit.

removed from the formal architecture of the Church and relocated in nature, returned to the reifying practices that preceded religion and, concurrently, proposed an alternate mode of spirituality. Moreover, the all-consuming experience and multi-sensorial responses both artists hoped to conjure followed Symbolist constructs regarding sensorial stimuli and perceptual phenomena. These ideas set the stage for the next wave of avant-garde artists and led to the more familiar synesthetic objectives of Vasily Kandinsky and the synthetic goals in the early oeuvre of Futurist Umberto Boccioni, who will be discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The paradoxical intersection of the modern and the traditional, of science and religion shaped the creations of artists living in a time fraught with ambiguities. Cultural identity was an issue of paramount significance, as was the search for and the need to articulate faith. The theme of religion provides a useful paradigm for thinking about this body of work, and connects it to traditions indigenous to Italy. The integration of Christian iconographic elements from religious art of the past and the revival of sacred formats was not only a way to readdress spiritual or ideal subjects, but also provided a means to reactivate a link with Italy's artistic legacy. This is not to propose that the Divisionists were recycling past motifs from a backward-looking stance. Quite the opposite is true. This aspect of Divisionist painting was shaped by an artistic history particular to Italy and dovetailed with overarching nationalist impulses towards creating painting with an unequivocal Italian character. The readily available visual sources that the Divisionists employed for their Symbolist images were a vital reminder of Italy's past

cultural dominance. The Divisionists' combination of this Christian iconography combined with their new painting technique (and often philosophical, if not specifically political, idealism), allowed for the emergence of a visual and narrative model capable of expressing abstract conceptions, evoking emotional states, and eliciting sensations congruent with Italian modernist practices.

CHAPTER 6

"*SINTESI UNIVERSALE*:" BOCCIONI, THE GENESIS OF *MATERIA*, AND THE FUTURIST COOPTION OF DIVISIONISM[532]

After the turn of the century, and concurrent with the ongoing Symbolist production of the Divisionists, another, more overtly, nationalistic generation of artists had its beginnings in Italy: the Futurists.[533] Futurism was founded by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) with the publication, in 1909, of *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*.[534] Subsequently, the movement gained momentum and developed a larger

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532 "Universal synthesis." See Umberto Boccioni, "La pittura futurista," in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Zeno Birolli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1972), 22. Translation taken from Ester Coen, *Umberto Boccioni* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 236. Translations in this chapter are by Stephen Sartarelli unless otherwise noted. An earlier version of this chapter appeared as an essay. See Vivien Greene, "The Path to Universal Synthesis: Boccioni's Development from Divisionism to Futurism," in *Boccioni's Materia: A Futurist Masterpiece and the Avant-Garde in Milan and Paris*, ed. Laura Mattioli Rossi (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2004), 23-33.

533 The bibliography on Futurist art is extensive, although there is no one publication that is totally comprehensive, especially as the movement went through various phases and permutations, including a later affiliation with Fascism, and endured through World War II. For general overviews in Italian see, for example, Claudia Salaris, *Storia del futurismo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985); Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Futurismo 1909-1944: Arte, architettura, spettacolo, grafica, letteratura…*(Milan: Mazzotta, 2001); and Enrico Crispolti, *Il mito della macchina e altri temi del futurismo* (Trapani: Celebes, 1969). In English, see Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzola, *Futurism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977). A more recent overview is Giovanni Lista, *Futurism*, trans. Susan Wise (Paris: Terrail, 2001). A source on documents and letters is Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, eds., *Archivi del futurismo*, 2 vols. (Roma: De Luca, 1958-62).

534 F. T. Marinetti, "Fondazione e manifesto del futurismo," *Archivi del futurismo*, eds. Drudi Gambillo and Fiori, 1: 15-19. Umbro Apollonio, ed., *Futurist manifestos*, trans. Robert Brain, et al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973; reprint Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), 19-24. As the father of Futurism, Marinetti authored numerous texts on myriad subjects as reconceived from a Futurist stance. For a compendium of Futurist writings see Drudi Gambillo and Fiori, *Archivi del futurismo*. For a selection in English see Apollonio, *Futurist manifestos*. For Marinetti's writings in English see, for example, F. T. Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings*, ed. R.W. Flint; trans. R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1991). For an analysis of his writings see Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

project that glorified speed, simultaneity, the machine, and war, and sought to transform all aspects of life including art, theater, music, literature, design, and, even, politics. This chapter examines the relationship between Divisionist painting and the inception of Futurist painting through an investigation of the early work and the writings of the painter, sculptor and the art movement's primary theorist, Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916).[535] In particular, I will examine the path that led to the inception of one of his most important Futurist works, *Materia* (1912 [fig. 68])—a painting of his mother set against a balcony in his apartment, which integrates interior and exterior spaces and actions into one image.[536] This case study emphasizes that several salient facets of the Futurist painting technique and the conceptual results it allowed, which the Futurists claimed as

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535 For sources that address the beginnings of Futurism and connections to Divisionism, to date there is not a comprehensive study. Several exhibitions and catalogues have looked at aspects of this relationship. See, for example, Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, et al., *Giuseppe Pellizza e Giacomo Balla: Dal divisionismo al futurismo* (Prato: Farsettiarte, 2000); Marisa Vescovo, *Da Segantini a Balla: Un viaggio nella luce* (Turin: Elede, 1999); and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, ed., *Giacomo Balla 1895-1911: Verso il futurismo* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1998). See also Anna Maria Damigella, "Modernismo, simbolismo, divisionismo, arte sociale a Roma dal 1900 al 1911," in *Aspetti dell'arte a Roma*, ed. Dario Durbè (Rome: De Luca, 1972), XLIII-LXIII; and Luciano Caramel, "Dal divisionismo al futurismo a Milano: Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo," in *Divisionismo italiano*, ed. Gabriella Belli (Milan: Electa and Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 1990), 394-403. There also exist some focused examinations on specific relationships between Divisionists and Futurists, such as Susan Barnes Robinson, *Giacomo Balla: Divisionism and Futurism, 1871-1912* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981); and Judith Ellen Meighan, "The"Stati d'animo" Aesthetic: Gaetano Previati, Umberto Boccioni and the Development of Early Futurist Painting in Italy," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1998. The literature on Umberto Boccioni is extensive. The main resources on this artist are the catalogue raisonnè, Maurizio Calvesi and Ester Coen, *Boccioni. L'Opera completa* (Milan: Electa, 1993), and the artists' writings, Zeno Birolli, ed., *Umberto Boccioni: Gli scritti editi e inediti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971) and Zeno Birolli, ed., *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*.

536 Umberto Boccioni, *Materia*, 1912, oil on canvas, 226 x 150 cm, Gianni Mattioli Collection, on long-term loan to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. Given the similarity between many of Boccioni's titles, for all Boccioni works cited the catalogue raisonnè number is provided. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 752. *Materia* has generated a considerable amount of scholarship, a testament to this work's importance. Two catalogues gather essays addressing various aspects of this work. See Laura Mattioli Rossi, ed. *Boccioni's Materia: A Futurist Masterpiece and the Avant-garde in Milan and Paris*, and Laura Mattioli Rossi, ed., *Boccioni Materia 1912* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1991). For a specific discussion of gender in Boccioni's images of his mother see, for example, Virginia Spate, "Mother and Son: Boccioni's Paintings and Sculpture 1906-1915," in *In Visible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. Terry Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 107-138.

their own invention, were coopted at an early stage from their Italian forebearers, the Divisionists. The pictorial techniques of early Futurism further underscore the modernist characteristics of the Divisionist movement.

The Futurists' relationship to Divisionism was a conflicted one, for in their content and objective, these emerging artists diverged from their immediate forerunners in a schism that signaled one of the many contradictions inherent in the premises defining Futurism.[537] Initially the Futurists admired some of the proponents of Divisionism, but, in their later iconoclastic rhetoric, which called for an eradication of everything associated with the past in favor of the new, they repudiated much of what the Divisionists produced because of its roots in previous artistic traditions. Moreover, the Futurists railed against the idealized, mystical, or decadent subject matter of Symbolism and Divisionism, even as they exalted the anti-rationalism of their own vision of modernity. The Futurists ceased to recognize the movement's importance to their own development, as any such recognition would undermine their own ideological stance of being modern. Nevertheless, the older style blended imperceptibly into Futurism during the first decade of the twentieth century.

To begin with, the "divided" idiom afforded the possibility of realizing overarching Futurist precepts. The swiftly applied filigree of pigment implied movement and coincided with the painters' desire to depict motion, speed, and dynamism. The often luminous brushwork, especially when used to represent light effects, also came close to approximating the presence of energy or electrical current, both symbols of modernity and topics of great interest to the Futurists. The integrative quality of the brushstrokes

537 For a summary of the paradoxical rapport between the two movements, see Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, 44.

lent itself to the Futurist ideal of visually fusing subject and action. Finally, Divisionism's mobile brushwork, interwoven planes, and chromatic optical effects acted upon human perception and evoked the transmission of sensorial experiences, an essential aim of the Futurists, who endeavored to place the viewer at the center of their painting.[538]

I have limited my examination to one artist, Boccioni, because he remained more ingrained in Divisionist practices than his colleagues and, among the Futurists, his brushwork was very closely bound to the Divisionist mode of pigment application.[539] The existence and availability of Boccioni's writings provides an additional means of studying his growth. During Boccioni's early career the paintings of the Divisionists, especially those by Gaetano Previati, were essential to the articulation of his artistic objectives. He also referred to the work of Giovanni Segantini. In addition, Boccioni appealed to Vittore Grubicy for support. A look at the moments of contact Boccioni had with his Italian forerunners as well as an examination of the development of his own theories and painting through the end of 1911, demonstrates the centrality of Divisionism to his art until he first encountered Cubist work first-hand on a trip to Paris that October.

Early Stages

The first Futurist painters, Boccioni, Giacomo Balla (1871-1958), Carlo Carrà (1881-1966), Luigi Russolo (1885-1947), and Gino Severini (1883-1966), all

538 In their "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto" of 1910, the Futurists wrote: "We shall henceforward put the spectator in the center of the picture." ["*Noi porremo lo spettatore nel centro del quadro.*"] Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, "La pittura futurista manifesto tecnico," in *Archivi del futurismo*, eds. Drudi Gambillo and Fiori, 1: 66. Translation taken from *Futurist manifestos*, ed. Apollonio, 28

539 Boccioni, like his Futurist cohorts, was pro-interventionist and supported Italy's entry into World War I. Interventionism was driven, in part, by the Italians' desire to reclaim irredentist lands, that is Italian territory under Austrian rule. Thus, Boccioni enlisted in the military to fight. However, he did not die in combat, but rather, by falling off a horse.

experimented to some extent with Divisionism and held similar left-wing political views.[540] At the beginning of the twentieth century Boccioni lived in Rome, where he, Severini, and Mario Sironi (1885-1961), were schooled in the Divisionist mode of painting by Balla.[541] Balla was a slightly older artist who initially served as a bridge between the previous generation and the Futurist upstarts. Enthusiastically embracing this relatively new, empirically-based style, these young men also looked directly to the work of the major Divisionist artists—among them Segantini and Previati—as models for their own nascent artistic production. Once the Futurists artists had coalesced into a self-proclaimed group in 1910, they demonstrated admiration for the art of Segantini and Previati in their *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters* (*Manifesto dei pittori futuristi*) of February 11, 1910. In the course of their diatribe against the current state of artistic taste in Italy, they criticized the establishment for ignoring the artists they deemed worthwhile:

> Ask these priests of a veritable religious cult, these guardians of old aesthetic laws, where we can go and see the works of Giovanni Segantini today. Ask them why the officials of the Commission have never heard of the existence of Gaetano Previati. Ask them where they can see Medardo Rosso's sculpture.[542]

Two months later, in their April 11, 1910, *Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto* (*La pittura futurista. Manifesto tecnico*), they declared the Divisionist method to be a necessary component of Futurist painting:

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540 For a study of the intersection of Italian Futurism and revolutionary politics see Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence, Rhode Island: Berghahn Books, 1996).

541 Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giacomo Balla 1895-1911*, 20-21.

542 "*Domandate a questi sacerdoti del vero culto, a questi depositari delle leggi estetiche, dove siano oggi le opere di Giovanni Segantini: domandate loro perché le commissioni ufficiali non si accorgono dell'esistenza di Gaetano Previati; domandate loro dove sia apprezzata la scultura di Medardo Rosso.*' Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, "Manifesto dei pittori futuristi," in *Archivi del futurismo*, eds. Gambillo and Fiori, 1: 64. Translation taken from *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Apollonio, 26.

> We conclude that painting cannot exist today without Divisionism. This is no process that can be learned and applied at will. Divisionism, for the modern painter, must be an *innate complementariness* which we declare to be essential and necessary.[543]

Boccioni and Previati

Boccioni may have learned of Divisionism through his lessons with Balla, but he quickly pursued the progenitors of the movement on his own.[544] Previati was clearly the artist of greatest import to him, since his fusion of figure and ground in a swirling world of activated lines and forms epitomized the synthetic pictorial goals Boccioni was on his way to developing.[545] His diary entries are filled with references to Previati.[546] Those from 1907 indicate that he was closely reading Previati's *La tecnica della pittura* (1905). On December 21, 1907, Boccioni wrote: "I'm reading Previati's la 'tecnica della pittura'

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543 "*Questo naturalmente ci porta a concludere che non può sussistere pittura senza divisionismo. Il divisionismo tuttavia non è nel nostro concetto un mezzo tecnico che si possa metodicamente imparare ed applicare. Il divisionismo, nel pittore moderno, deve essere un COMPLEMENTARISMO CONGENITO, da noi giudicato essenziale e fatale."* Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, "La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico," in *Archivi del futurismo*, eds. Gambillo and Fiori, 1: 66. Translation taken from Apollonio, ed. *Futurist Manifestos*, 29.

544 One of the earliest personal encounters he recorded with a Divisionist was with Giuseppe Pellizza, whom he met in Rome in 1906 through Giovanni Cena, a friend from Turin the two shared. As his entry indicates, Pellizza was not one of the Divisionists whom he admired: "I'd met him in Rome and we discussed a lot. As an artist he wasn't very good." [*L'avevo conosciuto a Roma e avevamo molto discusso. Come artista non era forte*.] Boccioni diary entry, June 16, 1907, Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series III, Personal, 1907-1915, box 4, folder 4; published in *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 246.

545 Previati's importance for Boccioni has been well documented. See Giovanna Ginex, "'Un sogno che svanisce nella luce della modernità': Gaetano Previati nella lettura critica, dalle suggestioni antipositive all'influsso su Umberto Boccioni," *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920: un protagonista del simbolismo europeo*, ed. in Fernando Mazzocca (Milan: Electa, 1999), 69-75. See also Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, especially the section "La poetica dello stato d'animo: Boccioni e Previati," 53-57. Meighan has traced the influence of Previati on Boccioni, particularly that of his writings, in "The "Stati d'animo" Aesthetic: Gaetano Previati, Umberto Boccioni and the Development of Early Futurist Painting in Italy." A recent study by Ilaria Schiaffini also addresses Boccioni and Previati. She does so within a larger discussion of Boccioni's early career, which contextualizes his work within the Symbolist and Spiritualist movements still prevalent in the first decades of the 1900s. See Ilaria Schiaffini, *Umberto Boccioni. Stati d'animo: Teoria e pittura* (Milan: Silvana editoriale, 2002).

546 See *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e* inediti, ed. Birolli, 101, 114, 281-82, and 297.

and feel humbled in the face of so much technical erudition," and again, January 7, 1908: "I'm reading Previati 'La tecnica della pittura,' and have enjoyed it very much."[547] In that same year, he had the opportunity to view Divisionist works first hand on a trip to Paris, where he admired the work of Segantini, Previati, and Carlo Fornara at the exhibition, *I Pittori Divisionisti a Parigi*.[548]

Boccioni eventually attempted to befriend Previati with two personal visits in 1908. As he records in his diary, the first of these went rather well:

> After much time I made the decision and paid a visit to Gaetano Previati. He welcomed me with extreme courtesy and we spoke three hours! How many things we said! What faith! What a difference between him and Balla: to me this spoke well of him. I talked to him about my struggles and he got frightened when he learned that besides my struggles in Art I also have those in life![...]
>
> I found we agreed on almost everything. He is a soul full of faith and courage. He is aware of the derision with which he is regarded but he does not allow himself to be alarmed by it. He did not want to come see the painting of Signora Massimino but I do not remember the reason I think he said that he could hurt me without it being of any advantage to me. I am happy about my visit.[549]

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547 "*Leggo la 'Tecnica della pittura' di Previati e mi sento umiliato innanzi a tanta erudizione tecnica.*" Boccioni diary entry, December 21, 1907, Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series III, Personal, 1907-1915, box 4, folder 3, published in *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 270. A translation appears in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 257. "*Leggo Previati 'La tecnica della pittura', che mi ha procurato molto piacere*." Boccioni diary entry, January 8, 1908 [erroneously noted as 1907], Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series III, Personal, 1907-1915, Box 4, folder 5, published in *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 275. While Previati's *I principi scientifici del divisionismo*, 1906, specifically addressed Divisionism, Boccioni chose to focus on *La tecnica della pittura*. This was Previati's more didactic and general publication, and may have been of greater interest to Boccioni because he had not had a formal academic education and felt the need for a more solid grounding in the basics of painting.

548 "The Divisionist exhibition in Paris, extremely interesting—the canvases by Segantini [are] marvelous, those by Previati very bold, those by Fornara and others respectable—They dealt me the decisive blow—Balla is finished." ["*L'esposizione dei divisionisti a Parigi, interessantissimo—Tele meravigliose del Segantini, arditissime del Previati, e degni quelle di Fornara e altri—Mi hanno dato il colpo decisivo—Balla è finito—* "]. Boccioni diary entry, October 17, 1907, Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series III, Personal, 1907-1915, box 4, folder 3, published in *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 266. The exhibition Boccioni refers to is *I pittori divisionisti italiani a Parigi* held in September-October of 1907 held at the Società Dante Alighieri and organized by Alberto Grubicy.

549 "*Dopo tanto tempo mi sono deciso e ho fatto una visita a Gaetano Previati. Mi ha accolto con somma cortesia e abbiamo parlato tre ore! Quante cose dette! Quanta fede! Che differenza fra lui e Balla: Di*

His second visit was met with less enthusiasm:

> Yesterday I went to Gaetano Previati's. He greeted me with a smile that I was unable to explain. I fear I bore or annoy him. While the first time we spoke a lot, yesterday only an hour and a half. And then it seemed to me that every now and again he gave his voice the intonation that meant: And now go…In fact when I said to him: maybe you have to work I will go, he got up and said yes now I will resume here[…]
>
> While I was about to leave I had him show me some paintings and then we resumed the discussion. We spoke of everything to do with painting. He attacks almost everything and I find him right or almost always.
>
> In conclusion I took away the impression of a universal mind that submits everything to the aesthetic vision he has formed for himself. I saw myself as always an idiot and a little ignoramus. I asked him since he spoke of Beethoven where in Milan he went to hear music and he said that the only way was to have some friend or acquaintance who played.
>
> Going out, he accompanied me to the door, I heard piano notes coming from a closed room and pretended not to notice but outside I was overcome with a certain sadness. What would it take to offer me a bit of music? Why has he never done it? Why doesn't he ever say Why don't you show yourself, come visit me?
>
> Thus he does not see anything interesting promising in me! He does not think me worthy of his attention! And I go beg for an hour of conversation! It is sad![550]

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questo mi ha detto molto bene. Gli ho parlato delle mie lotte e s'è spaventato quando ha saputo che oltre alle lotte dell'Arte ho anche quelle per la vita!…/L'ho trovato d'accordo quasi in tutto. È un'anima piena di fede e di coraggio. Sa della derisione che lo guarda ma non se ne sgomenta. Non ha voluto venire a vedere il quadro della Signora Massimino ma non ricordo il perché mi pare dicesse che poteva ferirmi senza che questo avvantagiasse me di nulla. Sono contento della mia visita." Boccioni diary entry, March 2, 1908 [erroneously dated February 8, 1908], Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series III, Personal, 1907-1915, Box 4, folder 5, published in *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e inediti*, Birolli, 287. Translation by author.

550 "*Sono stato ieri da Gaetano Previati. Mi ha accolto con un sorriso che non mi sono saputo spiegare. Temo di annoiarlo o seccarlo. Mentre la prima volta abbiamo parlato molto ieri solo un'ora e mezza. E poi mi sembrava di tanto in tanto che desse alla voce un'intonazione che volesse significare: E ora vattene…Di fatti quando io gli dissi: forse lei deve lavorare io me ne vado, Egli si alzò e disse si adesso riprendo qui…/Mentre stavo per andarmene mi sono fatto mostrare dei quadri e allora abbiamo ripresa la discussione. Abbiamo parlato di tutto in pittura. Attacca quasi tutto e sempre ho trovato giusto o quasi…/ Insomma, riportai un'impressione d'una mente universale che sottopone a tutto la visione estetica che si è formata. Io mi son visto come sempre cretino e piccolo ignorante. Gli ho chiesto poiché lui parlava di Beethoven dove a Milano andasse a sentire musica ed egli mi disse che l'unico modo è di avere qualche amico o conoscente che suona./Uscendo, egli mi condusse sino alla porta, udii che da una camera chiusa uscivano delle note di pianoforte finsi di non accorgermene ma fuori mi prese una certa tristezza. Cosa ci voleva per offrirmi un po di musica? Perché non lo ha fatto? Perché non mi dice mai: Si faccia vedere venga a trovarmi? Dunque lui non vede in me nulla d'interessante di promettente! Non mi crede degno della sua attenzione! Ed io vado a mendicare un'ora della sua conversazione! È triste!*" Boccioni diary

It is clear that Boccioni wanted Previati to be his mentor, but from his diary entries it is evident that his hero did not embrace the young painter as he might have wished. Not only did the older artist decline to visit Boccioni's studio to look at his work, but later, despite Boccioni's obvious desire to be welcomed into Previati's life, he was quite literally shown the door. Despite these rejections, Boccioni's interest in the Divisionist's work continued. In 1910, Boccioni visited the Previati retrospective at the Società per le belle arti ed esposizione permanente in Milan.[551] He expressed admiration for Previati as late as 1916 in the review he wrote on the Previati exhibition held in Milan.[552]

Previati's art and theories continued to loom large for Boccioni, even in the work traditionally identified as his first truly Futurist painting, *The City Rises* (*La città sale*, 1910-11 [fig. 69]).[553] In this large-scale canvas, Boccioni explored Milan's metropolitan expansion of the 1910s—the urban growth of the city being a subject dear to the hearts of the pro-urban Futurists.[554] Fine Divisionist brushwork and the coupling of intense complementary colors are employed to portray a frenzied scene of workers struggling to control their horses in an industrial setting. In the background are the many signs of

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entry, June 19, 1908, Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series III, Personal, 1907-1915. Box 4, folder 5, published in *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 308-09. Translation by author.

551 See Ginex, "Un sogno che svanisce nella luce della modernità," 69.

552 Umberto Boccioni, "Le arti plastiche: Le Esposizioni collettive di Gaetano Previati e Carlo Fornara a Milano-L'arte di Gaetano Previati, *Gli avvenimenti* (Milan) no. 13 (March 19-26, 1916): 3.

553 Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises* (*La città sale*), 1910-11, oil on canvas, 200 x 295.5 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 675. Among others, Calvesi identifies this as Boccioni first truly Futurist work. Ibid., 44.

554 Boccioni had already treated this subject matter in rather contained and calm interpretations of the industrial landscape with works such as *Factories at Porta Romana* (*Officine a Porta Romana*, 1909). Ibid., cat. no. 423. He had also depicted the accelerated pace and disruptive qualities of modern living in *Riot in the Galleria* (*Rissa in Galleria*, 1910), a painting in a decidedly Divisionist hand which portrayed a less than respectable bourgeois crowd engaged in a brawl in Milan's elegant Galleria. Ibid., cat. no. 657.

Milan's urban expansion. On the right, buildings in the course of construction rise up and dark clouds billow from smoke stacks. To the left, a tram goes by, and an electric pole is visible. Force lines, meant to represent dynamic energy, and rays of light criss-cross the surface of the composition feeding the whirling sense of activity and activated movement.

Ironically, the most direct source for this paean to modernity was Previati's triptych, *L'Eroica*, 1907 [fig. 70].[555] Previati's mammoth work, now owned by and housed in a veteran's society in Rome (the Casa madre associazione fra mutilati ed invalidi di guerra) is a three-part narrative set in classical antiquity, far from the twentieth-century scene depicted in Boccioni's work. *L'Eroica* celebrates martial prowess and valor, borrowing its title from Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, Op. 55 (1804), also called *The Eroica Symphony*, a piece originally written to celebrate Napoleon's military campaigns. The central panel is filled with a quadriga of wild-eyed, rearing horses carrying a helmeted warrior who holds aloft his lance and his shield. A pile of fallen soldiers spills out of the left-hand panel and a classical temple is discernable in the distance under an ominous, sweeping sky which occupies almost half of that canvas. The death of the hero is celebrated in the right-hand panel, where we see the warrior laid out upon a burning pyre. This dramatic triptych is dominated within the central picture by burnt oranges, reds, and golds; these passionate colors parallel the aggressive stance of the warrior. More muted versions of these golden tones reappear in the lateral panels and

555 Gaetano Previati, *L'Eroica*, 1907, oil on canvas, central panel 190 x 230 cm; lateral panels: 199 x 155 cm each. Casa madre associazione nazionale fra mutilati ed invalidi di guerra, Rome. This work is discussed in Mazzocca, *Gaetano Previati*, 148. The relationship between these works has been observed by Calvesi. Ibid., 347.

are contrasted with cool blues and violets to create the somber environment appropriate for the scenes of carnage and funerary rites.

Boccioni was greatly impressed by the *Eroica* triptych when he saw it in the 1907 Divisionist exhibition in Paris. The surging horses in *The City Rises* are a quotation of the equine subjects in the central panel of Previati's epic work.[556] The prostrate figures in Previati's left panel are analogous to the straining men on the left of Boccioni's canvas. Boccioni also appropriated compositional elements from the older artist by translating the fiery curving form in the triptych's right panel into the sweeping blue harness of his central horse. In theme, although millennia apart (one taking place in antiquity, the other in the twentieth century), the images are comparable as well, one extolling the heroism of war, the other the heroism of labor and the modern city. Both subjects are ultimately connected to notions of nationalism and virility which were becoming central to the Italian identity of the pre-World War I era.

Boccioni and Grubicy

Previati was not the only artist whom Boccioni approached around this time. By 1910 he had gone to Vittore Grubicy de Dragon for potential guidance, a relationship that, to date, has been virtually undocumented. Boccioni saw Grubicy as a powerful figure who had helped the careers of other artists.[557] Grubicy's role as a promoter of

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556 Boccioni's fascination with the dynamic possibilities of the galloping horse are manifest throughout his work, and Segantini can also be cited as a source for this. As an early, undated drawing entitled *Studies of Segantini and Andrea del Sarto* (*Studi da Segantini e da Andrea Del Sarto*) demonstrates, Boccioni copied the horse from Segantini's painting, *Cavallo a galoppo* (n.d., probably 1887-89). Ibid., cat. no. 17. See Maurizio Calvesi, "Boccioni prima del futurismo," in *Boccioni prefuturista*, eds. Maurizio Calvesi, Ester Coen, Antonella Greco (Milan: Electa, 1983), 18-19.

557 Other proto-Futurists also sought Grubicy's help. Balla asked for his intercession with the jury of the 1900 Brera Triennale. Grubicy obliged, and managed to have a work of his included in the exhibition, for

modern art may not have been the only reason; Boccioni's own interest in musical models for painting, from those of polyphony to the elicitation of temporal flux, were close to those espoused by Grubicy in his own multipanel works.

Correspondence between the two reveals that Grubicy—unlike Previati—did deign to visit Boccioni's studio and that he provided at least one critique of his work at an important crossroads in the artistic development of the younger man. Following one of these visits, Grubicy wrote in July 1910:

> Your picture of the three figures, since I last saw it in your studio, has come a long way and taken a pleasing turn of development. If I had to assign a number to it, I'd say it has advanced from a 4 to a 10!
>
> As for the other one, which is fine as far as the figure of your mother is concerned, in those places where Futurism is allowed to parade its triumphs—in the sky—the result is entirely negative.[558]

The first work to which he refers is *Three Women* (*Tre donne,* 1909-10 [fig. 71]).[559] A portrait of Boccioni's mother Cecilia, sister Amelia, and a woman friend, Ines, this was a transitional painting for the artist and demonstrated his radical, if understated, Futurist strategies in his rendering of light effects upon the figures. However, it still belongs in the realm of Divisionism, and its traditional subject and relatively tame palette pleased

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which Balla was very thankful. See Giacomo Balla to Vittore Grubicy, postmarked February 8, 1900, Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F III 21; Grubicy letters to the Brera Secretary, September 9 and September 14, 1900, Archives, Accademia di belle arti di Brera, Milan, Carpo F III 16 and 21; and Balla to Grubicy, October 16, 1900, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.1.1.55.

558 "*Il vostro quadro delle tre figure—da quando l'ho visto nel vostro studio—ha fatto un bel cammino ed ha preso uno svolgimento gradevole. Se dovessi precisare numericamente direi che ha fatto un avanzata da 4 a 10!/ Nell'altro—bello nella figura della mamma—là dove il futurismo aveva campo di sfoggiare i suoi trionfi—nel cielo—il risultato è completamente negativo*." Vittore Grubicy to Umberto Boccioni, July 27, 1910, Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series I, Correspondence, 1899-1917, box 1, folder 29.

559 Umberto Boccioni, *Three Women* (*Tre donne*), 1909-10, oil on canvas, 180 x 132 cm, Banca Commerciale Italiana, Milan. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 455.

Grubicy. The older artist's deprecating assessment of Boccioni's other portrait, one that probably employed more expressionistic colors and an abstracted background, indicated his disapproval regarding Boccioni's forays into the experimental waters of Futurism.[560]

The Divisionist's discouraging commentary should not have come as a surprise to Boccioni. Grubicy made public his negative opinion on Futurism in April of that year, in a general article on the movement he authored for *Il Secolo*, in which he acknowledged the young Futurists' enthusiasm in a somewhat patronizing tone that disparaged their bombastic philosophies:

> Such resonant words as 'rebellion,' 'nausea,' and 'disdain,' follow hard upon one another, swelling the 'manifesto' with youthful boldness; [the text], however, demonstrates a substratum of deplorable ignorance on the part of young people who would arrogate to themselves the exacting role of standard-bearers for the Art of tomorrow.[561]

Later in 1910—despite the rebuke of July—he must have asked Grubicy to represent him and was rejected. This is clear from a letter Boccioni sent Grubicy in January 1911:

> Your letter did not surprise me. The entire conversation and the manner in which we said good-bye led me to intuit that you would not be <u>able</u> to do for me what you have so generously done for dead and living artists great and small.
>
> No matter! I've never been helped by anyone, and it is fated that this should continue to be so.
>
> I shall try to go it alone as I have always done. In the meantime, dear Mr. Grubicy, I sincerely thank you for your letter and for what positive things you have said in my regard.[562]

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560 While I have been unable to determine definitively the work to which he refers, this might be *The Mother* (*La madre*), Ibid., cat. no. 456.

561 "*Le parole reboanti di 'ribellione', di 'nausea', di 'disprezzo' si rincorrono allegramente a gonfiare di giovanile baldanza il 'manifesto', il quale mostra però il substrato d'un ignoranza penosamente deplorevole da parte di giovani che vogliono arrogarsi da se stessi il non facile mandato di vessilliferi dell'Arte a venire*," Vittore Grubicy, "Pittori Futuristi," *Il secolo* (Milan) no. 15803, April 19, 1910, 3. Sergio Rebora was kind enough to provide a copy of this article.

562 "*La Sua lettera non mi ha sorpreso. Tutta la conversazione e specialmente il modo con cui ci siamo lasciati mi aveva fatto intuire che per me Lei non avrebbe <u>potuto</u> fare quello che generosamente ha fatto per artisti morti e viventi grandi e piccoli./Non importa! Non sono mai stato aiutato ed è fatale che ancora*

Following this exchange there seems to have been no more direct contact between the two.

"'Sul Divisionismo' and 'La pittura futurista'"

Although his art developed in a fashion that Grubicy viewed as anathema to Divisionist painting, Boccioni still maintained an allegiance to this earlier style, identifying its key role in achieving certain crucial pictorial and conceptual Futurist objectives. He articulated these ideas in "La pittura futurista," [Futurist Painting], a lecture he gave in Rome in 1911.[563] Interestingly, a version of this essay may have had as its working title "Sul divisionismo."[564] In this text, Boccioni supposedly explained that which separated the Futurists from the Divisionists as well as the ways in which the latter style was essential to the former, but ultimately, he reiterated Divisionist principles and ideas as being Futurist without acknowledging (or perhaps being aware of) it.

Boccioni's own assertion that Divisionist methods were a key component to Futurist goals and his reliance upon them are particularly evident with regard to his

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non lo sia./Cercherò di fare da me come ho sempre fatto. Intanto, caro Signor Grubicy, la ringrazio sinceramente della lettera scrittami e di quello che dice di buono sul conto mio." Umberto Boccioni to Vittore Grubicy, January 17, 1911, Fondo Grubicy, Archivi del '900, MART, Rovereto, Gru.I.1.120.

563 For the complete lecture in English, see Boccioni "Futurist Painting" in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 231-39; in Italian see Boccioni "La pittura futurista," in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Birolli, 11-29.

564 Boccioni notes entitled "Sul divisionismo–frammenti," Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series II, Manuscripts, notes and clippings, 1910-1916, box 3, folder 4, manuscript 5. Schiaffini has identified the document's handwriting as that of Decio Cinti, the movement's secretary, who realized this transcription of Boccioni's text. While several drafts of the lecture exist, Schiaffini further suggests that this text is a partial transcription of Boccioni 1911 "La pittura futurista" lecture in Rome, and was likely to have been executed so Boccioni could have a clear copy from which to read. See Schiaffini, *Umberto Boccioni*, 71-77, 158-59. The title "Sul divisionismo" and designation "frammenti" appear to be written on the manuscript title page in yet a different hand and may have been added at a later date. Ultimately, whether or not Boccioni intended to assign this title to his proposed essay at some point, the emphasis on Divisionism throughout the text led to its being titled "On Divisionism" prior to entering the Getty's collection.

notion of universal synthesis, a concept intrinsic to Futurism, whereby simultaneous scenes and sensations are collapsed into a single unified image.[565] As we have seen, the Divisionists, and particularly those pursuing Symbolist goals, endeavored to suggest polyvalenced experiences extending beyond the simply visual and two-dimensional in their work. They sought to evoke synesthetic experiences in holistically conceived images with curvilinear brush strokes and undulating forms weaving together figure and ground into an organic whole. Recognizing these possibilities, Boccioni described Divisionism's potential to represent universal synthesis in his typically grandiloquent prose:

> And so it is that Divisionism, like polyphony in music, like a stanza orchestrated in free verse in poetry, represents an effort of greater intensity and artistic complexity, a vehement aspiration toward what we call the symphonic and polychromatic unity of the picture that becomes ever more a universal synthesis.[566]

Boccioni also suggested that Divisionism was a way of visually understanding the world, not simply a method of painting. In an oft-quoted statement, he pronounced,

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565 Boccioni's preoccupation with the linked concepts of universality and synthesis can be traced back at least as early as 1907 when he wrote about it in his diary: "I am becoming more and more aware that the fundamental flaw of Modern Art is its lack of universality, or at least that is how I call that sense of poetry dominant in ancient works, which makes the artist's song forever extend with amorous exaltation over all of creation. The tremendous analysis made in our century has renewed us by creating specialists. This explains the lack of universality in the modern artwork. I believe that what we need is a vast mind with the courage and strength to synthesize modern knowledge and create the true work of art." ["*Sempre più mi accorgo che il difetto organico dell'Arte Moderna è la mancanza di universalità o almeno cosí chiamo io quel senso di poesia che domina le opere antiche e che fa sí che il canto dell'artista si allarghi sempre con amorosa esaltazione su tutto il creato. L'enorme analisi che il nostro secolo ha fatto ci ha rinnovati creando degli specialisti. Ciò spiega la mancanza d'universalità dell'opera moderna. Credo occorra una mente immensa che abbia il coraggio e la forza di sintetizzare la sapienza moderna e creare la vera opera d'arte.*"] See entry for July 7, 1907, in *Umberto Boccioni: Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 248. This point is noted by Caramel in "Dal divisionismo al futurismo a Milano: Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo," in *Divisionismo italiano*, 395.

566 "*Cosí il divisionismo come la polifonia in musica, come una strofa orchestrata di versi liberi in poesia rappresenta uno sforzo di maggiore intensità e complessità artistica una veemente aspirazione a quella che noi chiamiamo unità sinfonica e policromatica del quadro diventato sempre piú sintesi universale*." See Boccioni, "La pittura futurista," in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Birolli, 22. A translation appears in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 236.

"Divisionism is not a technique. Divisionism is an attitude of the spirit."[567] He amplified this by explaining how the divided idiom was simply a formula for some, but not for the Futurists, for whom it was a way of seeing:

> Indeed those theorists, instead of perceiving divisionistically like us, first looked at the world with conventional eyes (that is, such as culture had formed them), then applied, artificially, the technique of complementary colors to the canvas.[568]

He further maintained that the Futurists incorporated the premise of "innate complementarism" into their manner of perceiving reality, while the older Divisionists used the technique in a more mechanical manner, trapped by artistic conventions. Yet, the Divisionists claimed to avoid doing exactly that, and Boccioni ended up echoing Grubicy's defense of Morbelli's *For 80 cents!* regarding the pitfalls of a formulaic employment of the technique.[569] In his lecture, Boccioni continued to replicate ideas similar to those Grubicy voiced in many of his articles, such as that regarding representation versus anti-realist aesthetics:

> we recognize that our age finds its spiritual expression in Divisionism. Indeed, the dotting, the little brushstrokes, the striations that horrify the partisans of surface facility unquestionably give painting greater expressive and communicative force, in as much as every mark, however small, bears within itself the stamp of the individual. And in this respect we are, therefore, superior naturalists [*veristi*], since we intuitively imitate the action of light-rays when they strike bodies and

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567 "Il divisionismo non è una tecnica. Il divisionismo è un atteggiamento dello spirito." Boccioni, "Sul divisionismo–frammenti," Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series II, Manuscripts, notes and clippings, 1910-1916, box 3, folder 4, manuscript 5, 73. Variation in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Birolli, 19. A translation appears in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 235.

568 "*Quei teorici infatti, invece di percepire divisionisticamente, come noi, guardavano il mondo prima con occhi convenzionali (cioè quali la cultura aveva formati loro) e poi applicavano sulla tela, artificiosamente, la tecnica dei complementari*." Boccioni, "Sul divisionismo–frammenti," Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series II, Manuscripts, notes and clippings, 1910-1916, box 3, folder 4, manuscript 5, 81-82. Variation in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Birolli, 19. Translation in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 235.

569 See Chapter 4 of this study.

> give them color. And this, for us, is the only way to conceive the imitation of nature.[570]

Related to Boccioni's aversion to the use of art as a mimetic tool to replicate nature or reality was his denial of the empirically-based, positivist dimension of Divisionism, something (as we have seen) that caused the Divisionists some philosophical conflict as well. Boccioni argued that art could not be anchored in science as this stripped it of its individuality and its expressive power:

> The unbending application of scientific processes of this sort in an absolutely intuitive field such as art, produced oppressive greys and monotony, embalming objects and discouraging the artists and the observer.[571]

These distinctions were essential to Boccioni, yet, as with many Futurist and Divisionist philosophies, they highlighted certain paradoxes, namely the tension between the "scientific" technique they practiced and its provable perceptual effects versus the spiritual and intuitive dimensions of their images. However, unlike many of the Divisionists, who abandoned their espousal of a positivist model (all the while continuing to paint with the "science"-based style), the Futurists extolled science as being the liberating force bringing forth the modern world from the old, staid one. Thus, Boccioni's

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570 "*noi constatiamo che il nostro tempo trova nel divisionismo la sua espressione spirituale. Infatti, il punteggio, le piccole pennellate, le striature che fanno orrore ai partigiani delle facilità superficiali danno indiscutibilmente alla pittura una maggiore forza espressiva e comunicativa, inquantoché ogni segno anche minimo reca in sé l'impronta dell'individuo. E in questo noi siamo, di consequenza, dei veristi superiori, poiché imitiamo intuitivamente il procedere dei raggi luminosi quando investono i corpi colorandoli, ed è questo per noi il solo modo di concepire l'imitazione della natura*." Boccioni, "Sul divisionismo–frammenti," Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series II, Manuscripts, notes and clippings, 1910-1916, box 3, folder 4, manuscript 5, 100-03. Variation in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Birolli, 21. A translation appears in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 236. Grubicy's opinions on the subject are addressed in Chapter 3.

571 "*La ferrea applicazione di simili procedimenti scientifici, in un campo assolutamente intuitivo, quale l'artistico, produceva grigi opprimenti, monotonia, imbalsamazione degli oggetti, scoraggiamento negli artisti e nell'osservatore*." Boccioni, "Sul divisionismo–frammenti," Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series II, Manuscripts, notes and clippings, 1910-1916, box 3, folder 4, manuscript 5, 90. Variation published in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Birolli, 20. A translation appears in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 235.

statement becomes even more contradictory. In fact, in the same lecture, Boccioni stated: "scientific discoveries have *completely remade the fabric of the human mind*."[572]

Later, Boccioni did become better at separating the style of painting he and his colleagues practiced from the Divisionism of the previous generation, even if only in a verbal and theoretical way. With the perspective offered by hindsight, he would further clarify the distinctions between Futurism and Divisionism in later writings, obviously seeking to establish a certain distance between the two movements. In his book, *Pittura scultura futuriste (Dinamismo plastico)*—published in 1914, although drafted in 1912—in chapter 14, entitled "Complementarismo dinamico" [Dinamic Complementarim], he wrote:

> In our first technical manifesto of painting, in diametrical opposition to the ideas then current in France, we said 'a congenital complementarism' is necessary to the modern painter, just as it is an 'absolute necessity for painting.' Many, of course, thought we were simply latecomers to pointillism...What we wanted, instead, was a dynamic contrast of forms corresponding to the dynamic contrast of complementary colors. We wanted a complementarism of form and color. Thus we fashioned a synthesis of the analysis of color (divisionism of Seurat, Signac and Cross) and the analysis of form (divisionism of Picasso and Braque).[573]

However, the importance of Divisionism is evident in this passage, for Boccioni concurrently differentiated Pointillism or Divisionism, from Futurism, and intimated that

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572 "*le scoperte scientifiche abbiano completamente rifatto il tessuto mentale dell'umanità."* Boccioni, "Sul divisionismo–frammenti," Umberto Boccioni Papers, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (880380), Series II, Manuscripts, notes and clippings, 1910-1916, box 3, folder 4, manuscript 5, 15. Variation in *Umberto Boccioni: Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. Birolli, 13. A translation appears in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 232.

573 "*Nel nostro 1° manifesto tecnico della pittura dicevamo, in completa opposizione alle idee che allora correvano in Francia, essere necessario al pittore moderno 'un complementarismo congenito' come 'necessità assoluta della pittura.' Molti, naturalmente, credettero che noi ci attardassimo nel puntinismo...Volevamo invece che al contrasto dinamico dei colori complementari, corrispondesse un contrasto dinamico delle forme. Volevamo un complementarismo della forma e del colore. Facevamo quindi una sintesi delle analisi del colore (divisionismo di Seurat, Signac e Cross) e delle analisi della forma (divisionismo di Picasso e di Braque).*" Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura Scultura Futuriste (Dinamismo plastico)* (Milano: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia," 1914), 241.

the Futurist conception of dynamism was realized through the marriage of the other two idioms.[574]

The Triptych

Certainly, until 1911, Boccioni's work relied in myriad ways upon Divisionist precepts, several of which come to bear upon *Materia*. Among these was his adoption of a common Divisionist pictorial format, that of the triptych. As we have seen, the triptych, customarily used for religious themes, experienced a renaissance throughout Europe in the 1890s and was employed for less orthodox spiritual subjects or even secular imagery. Some triptychs, as in the case of Previati's, followed a traditional format and were conceived as a single three-part painting within a tabernacle frame. Segantini, instead, realized his monumental *Triptych of Nature* (*Trittico della natura*) on the nature-bound cycle of life as three separate canvases, which were hung together [fig. 57].[575] Grubicy took the multiple painting concept further when he assembled his eight Alpine landscapes in the musically-themed polyptych, *Winter in the Mountains* (*Inverno in montagna*) (1894-98/11) [figs. 60-67]. Balla pursued the triptych format as early as 1904 with *The Day of the Worker* (*La giornata dell'operaio* [fig. 72]).[576] In this socially-minded

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574 Here, one could point to the problematic fact that Boccioni was citing the marriage of two French styles as the source for Italian Futurism. However, earlier in the book he dedicated a chapter to disavowing the Futurists' relationship to the Cubists in "Che cosa ci divide dal Cubismo," ["What divides us from Cubism"], Ibid., 115-54. For more on Boccioni and the Cubists see, for example, Emily Braun, "Vulgarians at the Gate," *Boccioni's Materia*, 1-21.

575 Although this triptych remained incomplete given Segantini death in 1899, the highly finished drawings for it were exhibited at the 1907 Paris show Boccioni visited. See Quinsac, *Segantini: Catalogo generale*, 515.

576 Giacomo Balla, *The Day of the Worker* (*La giornata dell'operaio*), 1904-05, oil on paper, 106 x 145.2 cm, private collection.

meditation on the hopeless life cycle of the urban worker, he varied the tripartite composition in an asymetrical manner by juxtaposing a single image split into two smaller squares with a vertical rectangular one.

Boccioni seems to have taken his cue from Previati with his initial foray into this compositional type, the *Triptych: Homage to Mother* (*Trittico: Veneriamo la madre*, 1907-08 [fig. 73]), which is a clear precursor in subject to *Materia*.[577] A woman, whom we recognize to be Boccioni's mother from her heavy body type and white, gathered hair, occupies the central panel, flanked by two allegorical figures. Her children appear in the smaller subsidiary panels. On the left, Umberto is portrayed reading by a window, while on the right, Amelia is shown sewing by lamplight. This conception of a tripartite composition, depicting three separate but related sequences, could easily have contributed to Boccioni's eventual conflation of multiple narratives into a single scene. In fact, this does seem to be the case with the aforementioned *The City Rises*, painted in 1910-11.[578] This work was originally conceived as a triptych in preparatory drawings, but was then realized as one image. Boccioni persisted in his experimentation with tripartite painting as late as 1911 with *States of Mind* (*Stati d'animo* [fig. 74]).[579] However, the final version of

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577 Umberto Boccioni, *Triptych: We Venerate the Mother* (*Trittico: Veneriamo la madre*), 1907-08, oil on board, 27 x 56 cm, private collection. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 292. Flavio Fergonzi provides a close analysis of this work in catalogue entry no. 8 in Mattioli Rossi, *Boccioni Materia 1912*, 156.

578 Interestingly, while Boccioni ultimately painted a single canvas work, he was considering the format of the triptych in an earlier conception of *The City Rises* (1910-11), evidenced by the 1910 pen drawing, *Night, Day, Dawn* (*La notte, il giorno, l'alba*), Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 673; and the 1910 ink drawing, *Dawn*, *Day*, *Night* (*L'alba, il giorno, la notte*), Ibid, cat. no. 674.

579 Umberto Boccioni, *States of Mind I: The Farewells* (*Gli addii: Stati d'animo I*), 1911, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 96.2 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller; Umberto Boccioni, *States of Mind II: Those Who Go* (*Quelli che vanno: Stati d'animo II*), 1911, oil on canvas, 70.8 x 95.9 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller; Umberto Boccioni, *States of Mind III: Those Who Stay* (*Quelli che restano: Stati d'animo II*), 1911, oil on canvas, 70.8 x 95.9 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller. Ibid., cat. nos. 723, 724, 725.

this trilogy portraying aspects of the psychologically fragmented experience of a farewell defined by the speed, anxiety, and chaos of urban experience, definitely breaks from Divisionism in style. We know that Boccioni reworked the paintings after his trip to Paris, the geometric forms and splintered space in each canvas demonstrating his discovery of Cubism.[580]

The Woman in the Window

During the 1910s, Boccioni also continued to use a very popular Divisionist subject that would have specific relevance to his development of the visual tropes that became full blown in *Materia*. This would be that of the (almost always female) figure seated in a darkened interior set against a sunny window or balcony.[581] Often the woman is shown sewing or doing other handiwork. Behind her the urban activities of the street are often visible. The placement of a sitter, especially a woman, in a window, has its nineteenth-century roots in the work of artists such as Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and, later, Millet, but can even be linked to sources closer to Boccioni.[582] Morbelli depicted the curved, diminutive old women of the Pio Albergo Trivulzio knitting in a dim interior, clustered by the light of a window in *At the Hospice (Knitting)* (*All'ospizio [Il*

580 Ibid., 397.

581 Aurora Scotti [Tosini] examines this trope with *Romanzo di una cucitrice* as her focus in "Boccioni 1908: del vero naturale alla materia in espansione," Mattioli Rossi, *Materia Boccioni 1912*, 115-35. See also section for "La figura e la finestra," Ibid., 169; and entry for *La madre con l'uncinetto* (1907), in Flavio Caroli and Ada Masoero, eds. *Dalla scapigliatura al futurismo* (Milan: Skira 2001), 176-77.

582 For a fundamental study on this type of interior in earlier nineteenth-century art, see Lorenz Eitner, "The Open Window and the Storm-Tossed Boat: An Essay in the Iconography of Romanticism," *Art Bulletin* 37, no. 4 (December 1955): 281–90. Eitner chronicles the interior's turn from mere genre scene to a more charged site and the growing importance of the role of the view from the window in Romantic painting.

lavoro a maglia], 1890 [fig. 75]).[583] Yet another image comes to mind that illustrates the prevalence of this theme, namely the painting by another mother-fixated artist, Vittore Grubicy, who portrayed his bespectacled mother sewing while seated in his studio against a backdrop of densely hung paintings in *My Adored Little Mother in my Studio* (*La mia mammetta adorata nel mio studio*, 1886/1905/1920 [fig. 76]).[584]

These images of women confined in domestic interiors also bring up the issue of the gendering of public and private spaces.[585] By the end of the nineteenth century, as women had become more conspicuous in the public sphere and the suffrage movement gained momentum, traditional gender roles were destablized and threatened. Many domestic interiors in European painting became claustrophobic or repressive, reflecting male desire to contain women and keep binary identities well-defined.[586] However, in

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583 Angelo Morbelli, *At the Hospice (Knitting) All'ospizio (Il lavoro a maglia)*, 1890, oil on canvas, 31 x 34 cm, private collection.

584 Vittore Grubicy, *My Adored Little Mother in my Studio* (*La mia mammetta adorata nel mio studio*), 1886/1905/1920, oil on canvas, 35.5 x 27 cm, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan.

585 The present discussion is aimed at an examination of the technical and conceptual appropriation of Divisionism by the Futurists, thus I do not undertake an in-depth exploration of gender and the potential perpetuation of female stereotypes. I should, however, acknowledge that the lineage of works leading up to Boccioni's *Materia* does raise questions regarding the Futurists' representation of women. *Materia* itself, an imposing and even frightening portrait of Boccioni's mother, also could be tied to Boccioni's personal attitude towards women and, even more specifically, be used in an attempt to interpret the relationship he had with his mother—a charged one, no doubt. These narratives, which may be implicit in the content of Boccioni's painting, are wide-reaching and the complexities surrounding the issue of gender more generally are extensive and are lines of thought which lie outside the scope of this study on Divisionism in the 1890s. As the Futurists diverged in their attitudes towards women, there is no one publication that addresses the subject in all its ramifications. However, Marinetti's misogynist views colored the Futurists' production and are discussed in Blum, *The Other Modernism*.

586 Debora Silverman addresses the relationship between the emergence of the emancipated woman and the emphasis on a gendered division of the public and private spheres in late nineteenth-century French culture. See Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 63-74. For an examination of differing treatments of the interior in late nineteenth-century painting see Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a defining study on the female and male gendering of domestic and public spaces, see Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988; reprint 1994), 50-90.

Italy, within the domestic (feminine) domain, the female caretaker—whether mother, wife, or sister—wielded power; this authority is not questioned nor even addressed in interior scenes. Domestic depictions of women may be genteel, and reinforce the stereotype of the woman in the home, but they do not pierce the sanctity of the private sphere's skin nor otherwise signal obvious alarm regarding any potential anxiety as to the role of the woman in society. In Divisionist portrayals of women in interiors, artists such as Morbelli and Grubicy depicted women executing tasks congruent with their domestic role. They are not represented as trapped within their environments. By contrast, in French painting of the late nineteenth century tensions in traditional gender roles are more apparent, as with Edouard Vuillard's many intimate images of his mother and sister, whose figures are sucked into the very wallpaper of the sitting room they inhabit. However, there is a nuanced difference between Divisionist representations of contemporary women and Boccioni's images of his mother and sister. Boccioni perpetuated this iconography but, by introducing the exterior, urban world into his interiors, he also increasingly blurred the boundaries between the home and the street in a less polarized conception of traditional feminine and masculine realms.[587]

Boccioni's quasi-obsessive focus on the "figure in the window" arrangement emphasizes its importance with regard to the specific pictorial concepts he was formulating. The strategic positioning of a sitter with sun entering and striking him or her

587 Janet Wolff, for example, traces the nineteenth-century development of the idea of the public, male space and the private, female one and the concomitant assumption that modern spaces were analogous to public, masculine ones. See Janet Wolff, "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Theory Culture and Society* 2, no. 3 (1985): 37-46. Instead, Boccioni's images of women in windows allow for the incursion of the modern, public, and male into the interior, private, and feminine space. That said, I am not trying to propose that Boccioni was a feminist. In fact, the Futurists', and especially Marinetti's, insistence upon virility and violence were inherently misogynist. However, I do want to underscore that, like the Divisionists, Boccioni was less preoccupied with the "whore" iconography typical of Symbolism, and more focused upon its opposite, the "holy *mater*" figure, an attitude which was congruent with the quasi-cultish Italian adulation of the mother.

allowed for the full exploitation of the prismatic effects of light upon form and thus corresponded with Boccioni's visual objectives.[588] Granted, from a practical perspective, the typical household scene of a woman sewing or a man reading provided a regular and ready model for a painter, since people performed domestic tasks or pastimes close to a window to benefit from the available natural illumination. Yet the very construction of the scene, whereby a figure is in one space, but set against another, provided the ingredients for those tenets Boccioni and the other Futurist signatories laid out in their *Technical Manifesto*.[589] The window is no longer a view upon an out-of-reach world, as it had been in nineteenth-century interiors of this kind.[590] Instead, with compositional structure Boccioni conceived of an image in which interior and exterior spaces and actions, which actually occur in separate spheres, exist simultaneously, as one would experience them optically but not literally in a spatial sense. This allowed him to arrive at the universal synthesis central to his notion of art. As he developed this idea, he finally merged the two environments physically and elided them temporally. By tracing the genealogy of this visual trope within Boccioni's own *oeuvre* it is possible to follow his evolution during the first decade of the century.

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588 A variation on this theme which bears mentioning is the nighttime version, such as Segantini's *Portrait of Carlo Rotta* (*Ritratto di Carlo Rotta*, 1897), which employs interior light to illuminate the sitter, but to the same end.

589 Specifically, in providing an example that supports their points, they write: "The sixteen people around you in a rolling motor bus are in turn and at the same time one, ten, four, three: they are motionless and they change places; they come and go, bound into the street, are suddenly swallowed up by the sunshine, then come back and sit before you, like persistent symbols of universal vibration. How often have we not seen upon the cheek of the person with whom we are talking the horse which passes at the end of the street." ["*Le sedici persone che avete intorno a voi in un tram che corre sono una, dieci, quattro, tre; stanno ferme e si muovono; vanno e vengono, rimbalzano sulla strada, divorate da una zona di sole, indi tornano a sedersi, simboli persistenti della vibrazione universale. E, talvolta, nella guancia della persona con cui parliamo nella via vediamo il cavallo che passa lontano*."] Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, "La pittura futurista manifesto tecnico," reproduced in *Archivi del futurismo*, eds. Gambillo and Fiori, 1: 66. Translation from *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Apollonio, 28.

590 Eitner, "The Open Window and the Storm-Tossed Boat," 284-86.

Boccioni first explored this type of composition with an early drawing, *Young Woman Sewing* (*Giovane che cuce*), 1902-03, [fig. 77].[591] In this naturalistic depiction, a young woman's back is turned to the viewer as she works by the light of a window in a spare setting reminiscent of Dutch seventeenth-century domestic interiors. Over the next ten years the young Futurist's treatment of this arrangement would undergo extensive and radical transformations culminating in his realization of *Materia*.[592]

In 1908, Boccioni returned to this trope of a woman posed in a window with her sewing with *Story of a Seamstress* (*Romanzo di una cucitrice*) [fig. 78].[593] This painting of Boccioni's woman friend Ines (with whom he had an intimate relationship), shows the sitter reading next to a table with a sewing machine on it, and reprises, in part, *Triptych: Homage to Mother*, discussed above. Boccioni represented Ines reading, while the sewing machine is left idle on the table, and assigned this young woman the position he held in

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591 Umberto Boccioni, *Young Woman Sewing* (*Giovane che cuce*), 1902-03, pencil on paper, 36 x 30 cm, private collection. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 18.

592 Other works that repeat this format are a pastel of his grandmother, *The Old Woman* (*La nonna*), 1905-06; and a pastel of his mother, *The Mother* (*La madre*), 1906; Ibid., cat. nos. 51, 244. Previously in that same year he also realized more ambitious variations in oil portraits of non-relatives *Portrait of Doctor Kopcick (Ritratto del dottor Kopcick*) seated before the open doors of a balcony and *Portrait of Sophie Popoff* (*Ritratto di Sophie Popoff*), who is shown sewing by a window. Ibid., cat. nos. 235, 241. Returning to his mother and sister, who were frequent models, he continued to repeat the construction in the 1907 charcoal *The Mother* (*La madre*), and the pastels, *Sister Sewing* (*La sorella che lavora*), and *Mother Crocheting* (*La madre che lavora*), as well as with *Signora Sacchi* (*La signora Sacchi*). Ibid., cat. nos. 266, 267, 276, 271. His *Two Seated Old Women* (*Due vecchie sedute*, 1907), as Scotti has already pointed out, not only reiterates the thematic but also appears to be a direct quotation of Morbelli, another Divisionist who looked to Millet for this composition type. Ibid., cat. no. 277. Scotti [Tosini], "Boccioni 1908," 122. Interestingly, Boccioni employed a similar arrangement in a self-portrait, *Portrait of a Sculptor* (*Ritratto di Scultore*), 1907, Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 250.

593 Umberto Boccioni, *The Story of a Seamstress* (*Romanzo di una cucitrice*), 1908, oil on canvas, 154 x 173.5 cm, Barilla Collection of Modern Art, Parma, Italy. Ibid., cat. no. 309. For an extensive discussion of this work, see Scotti [Tosini], "Boccioni 1908," 115-35. As Scotti Tosini has noted, the title of this work was based on the English writer, Thomas Hood's 1843 poem, *The Song of the Shirt*, a compassionate Victorian tale of the plight of women forced to do piece work at home to earn a meager living. This popular poem inspired several paintings, such as *The Song of the Shirt* (1902), by British artist Albert Rutherton. But, unlike Rutherston's work which depicts a sad, overworked seamstress, Boccioni portrayed a genteel woman. However, the reference is of interest when one considers that Boccioni's own mother and sister earned a necessary income sewing and doing other handiwork from their home.

his earlier triptych. Here, however, his major concerns are formal: the reason for choosing this arrangement yet again was light. Boccioni obviously desired to show the play of light itself in its shifting permutations as it as it strikes the interior, and in particular, Ines' dress. In addition to the golden light which bathes the wall behind Ines, bright white seems to almost reflect off the front of her dress and down along the contour of her thigh and knee, while thin, white brushstrokes ripple across the folds of her skirt. The resulting brilliance illustrates Boccioni's words regarding this painting: "I detest dark tones. Light, light, light!"[594]

Earlier that same year, Boccioni had returned to a similar theme with *Signora Massimino* (1908) [fig. 79], in which one can see how he more fully realized the possibilities of this composition.[595] This commissioned portrait mapped many of the elements that would provide the structure for *Materia*, including a single female figure who faces out from the composition and is seated in a window with a prominent wrought-iron railing through which are visible a variety of urban sights: people walking hurriedly, a horse drawing a carriage, a tram.[596] This scene, which takes place on the street below, at a lower vantage point than that from which we see the sitter, could not realistically occupy the same frame as Signora Massimino, given the angle from which she is painted. The physical impossibility of the subject and exterior events existing in the same visual space demonstrates that Boccioni was already taking multiple viewpoints and merging these into one image. In fact, this was a work with which Boccioni struggled for quite

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594 Translation by author. Diary entry, April 1, 1908, reproduced in *Umberto Boccioni. Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 299. Boccioni acknowledged Previati's influence on this work as well, mentioning in his diary entry for May 28, 1908 (306), that he felt the figure recalled that of the Divisionist.

595 Umberto Boccioni, *Signora Massimino (La signora Massimino),* 1908, oil on canvas, 123 x 151 cm, private collection, courtesy Galleria dello Scudo, Verona. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 299.

596 See entry for *La signora Massimino* in *Dalla scapigliatura al futurismo*, eds. Caroli and Masoero, 178-80.

sometime, and he recounted his travails in his diary. In particular, he sounds pained in an entry dated March 18, 1908:

> Who knows what that poor portrait will be worth? It's a step, I'm sure of that, but what an effort! What a paucity of resources, what distance between what I wanted to make and what I made... The head, I've probably scraped down thirty times; the drawing, I've probably moved around another ten times. One day, after I'd finished all the iron bars of the balustrade, which give onto the shadow of the piazza (and with what efforts of proportion...), I found the entire perspective of the panes to be wrong. I wavered a day and a night then I scraped it all down and moved everything.[597]

His difficulty with the resolution of the pictorial issues and the time it took him to complete this portrait presaged its success as an image and its importance as a prototype.

The artist revisited a similar format in S*ister at the Balcony* (*La Sorella al balcone*), 1909, [fig. 80], in which he places his sister Amelia in the very balcony where he would paint his mother for *Materia*.[598] Here, with quick daubs of vibrant hues, Boccioni more consciously fuses figure and background, eliminating perspectival clues so the city scene is almost on the same plane as Amelia's arm. These strategies were clearly intentional. A preparatory drawing, *Study for Sister at the Balcony* (*Studio per La sorella al balcone*), includes notations on which colors would denote the depth and the desired perspectival construction of the composition.[599]

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597 "*Chissà cosa varrà quel povero ritratto? È un passo sono certo, ma quale stento! Che miseria di risorse che distanza tra quello che volevo fare e quel che ho fatto...La testa l'avrò raschiata forse trenta volte; il disegno l'avrò spostato a decine. Un giorno che avevo finito tutti i ferri della balaustrata che danno su l'ombra della piazza (e con quali stenti di proporzioni...) trovai errata tutta la prospettiva dei vetri... Tentennai un giorno e una notte poi raschiai tutto e spostai tutto*." *Umberto Boccioni: Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Birolli, 292-93. Other entries which address the execution of this portrait in depth are dated: December 21, 1907 (270); December 24, 1907 (271); and January 8, 1908 (273-75).

598 Umberto Boccioni, *Sister on the Balcony* (*La sorella al balcone*), 1909, oil on canvas, 56 x 60 cm, private collection, Courtesy of Galleria dello Scudo, Verona. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 442.

599 Ibid., cat. no. 443.

Boccioni's application of a distinctly Divisionist stroke is most articulated in a highly intimate portrait of his mother, *Controluce,* of 1909 [fig.81], and the previously mentioned *Three Women* of 1909-10.[600] While neither shows the sitter(s) framed by a window, they are posed near one. Both pictures depend upon natural sunlight to obtain the divided coloristic effects created by the light striking the women's forms.[601] In *Controluce* he used the same fluid dashes of brilliant blue, orange, green, and yellow for his mother's bare back and face as he does for the unspecific background. The direction of the brush strokes is the primary element which differentiates her plump body from her surroundings. In *Three Women*, Boccioni interpreted the rays shining upon the women through the window or balcony as translucent veils of shimmering pigment with quasi-faceted layers of light. These are the precursors to the signature Futurist force lines meant to represent movement and energy in later Futurist works.

By thus expanding Divisionist strategies, Boccioni achieved the goals outlined in "La pittura futurista." With his deployment of refracted light and divided filaments of color, he seemed to imply the molecular constitution of his sitters and their surroundings. This allowed him to disintegrate his forms just enough to meld them better with their environment so as to realize a fusion between subject and setting.

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600 Umberto Boccioni, *Controluce*, 1909, oil on canvas, 62 x 55 cm, private collection, Courtesy of Galleria dello Scudo, Verona. Ibid., cat. no. 434. Another related work from 1909 is *Female Portrait* (*Ritratto femminile*), Ibid. cat. no. 435.

601 It should be noted that he continued on the same tack with the portrait, *Portrait of Signora Meta Quarck* (*Ritratto della Signora Meta Quarck*, 1910). Ibid., cat. no. 467.

The Genesis of *Materia*

By 1911 Boccioni's rupture with Divisionism truly began to occur. The works that immediately preceded *Materia* in the lineage of women in windows are telling in this regard. The 1911 painting *The Street Enters the House* (*La strada entra nella casa* [fig. 82]), depicts the subject, now standing before a balcony with the windows open. The viewer joins her in her circular, all-encompassing experience of the activities on the street as these literally interpenetrate the interior space she occupies.[602] This intended impression was not lost on Boccioni's public and critics. When this work was exhibited in the *Esposizione "Intima"* at the Famiglia artistica in Milan, in 1911, Margherita Sarfatti wrote of it:

> at La Famiglia Artistica, Boccioni is exhibiting a painting entitled *At the Balcony*, in which he means to present a comprehensive synthesis of all the impressions the woman who is at the center of the painting can experience when looking out her window, including not only the buildings she sees in front of her, but also those she knows to be beside her and behind her.[603]

Simultaneous Visions (*Visioni simultanee* [fig. 83]), also from 1911, reproduces the same subject. This time the woman's face is repeated twice (the result of her reflection in the glass of the window through which she looks), as she surveys a street scene from dual viewpoints.[604] These paintings reveal a less divided brushstroke and a more complex treatment of spatial relationships with their broader planes of color, faceted forms,

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602 Umberto Boccioni, *The Street Enters the House* (*La strada entra nella casa*), 1911, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm, Sprengel Museum Hannover. Ibid., cat. no. 745.

603 "*il Boccioni espone, alla Famiglia artistica, una tela intitolata Al balcone dove egli vuole dare la sintesi complessiva di tutte quante le impressioni che può provare, nell'affaciarsi alla sua finestra, la figura di donna che sta al centro del quadro, non solo le case che vede di faccia, ma quelle che ella sa trovarsi di fianco e dietro a lei.*" Margherita Sarfatti, "Esposizione intima alla Famiglia Artistica," *Avanti* (December 13, 1911). I would like to thank Laura Mattioli Rossi for supplying me with this article.

604 Umberto Boccioni, *Simultaneous Visions* (*Visioni simultanee*), 1911, oil on canvas, 60.5 x 69.5 cm, Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, Germany. Calvesi and Coen, *Boccioni*, cat. no. 744.

fractured space, and the more obvious collapse between subject and setting, interior and exterior.

Such elements reached their apex in *Materia*. Boccioni's mother is seated in front of the balcony and posed frontally. Her monumental figure dominates the image, and her hands, folded in her lap, protrude from the compostion. The treatment of forms, broken down into faceted planes, is Cubist. Here Boccioni's mother, the balcony of his studio, and the world outside are essentially joined in a confluence of energized, activated forms integrating the events seen outside the window with the interior space. While Boccioni's multiple layers of paint make this work appear dark and murky, in fact, close up reflectographic images [fig. 84 and 85] reveal the tiny Divisionist strokes of bright variegated colors.[605] These still play an important role, most evident in areas where light strikes solid forms, as in the geometric shapes of the buildings which extend onto the mother's figure and in her projecting hands and dress sleeves. They lend a sense of electrified movement to this composition in which Boccioni succeeded in the Futurist objective of placing the spectator at the center of the action and conveying the immediacy of sentient experience.

Divisionism and the Fourth Dimension

As the works he produced from 1911-12 onward testify, Boccioni followed a course which led him away from a strict application of Divisionism. Nonetheless, the technique itself remained evident in his facture, he sustained his belief in the necessity of innate complementarism, and he held true to his overarching philosophy of universal synthesis. All of this allowed him to develop his aesthetic theories regarding the

605 I am grateful to Gianluca Poldi for providing these images.

coalescence of subjects and objects with their environments. Traces of Divisionism's ongoing influence can be identified in several chapters of *Pittura scultura futuriste (Dinamismo plastico)*. For example, in "Perché non siamo impressionisti," [Why we are not Impressionists] Boccioni proclaimed that the Futurists' reelaboration of the *unità-oggetto* [unity-object] permitted them to better express the relationship between object and environment in their art, stating that "We thereby create a new conception of the object: the *oggetto-ambiente* [object-environment], conceived as a new, *indivisible unity*."[606] The artist continued with the same type of premise in "Che cosa ci divide dal Cubismo," in which he followed in the footsteps of Grubicy in endeavoring to differentiate Italian Futurism from French Cubism. Boccioni observed that: "Today our mental evolution no longer permits us to see an individual or object as isolated from their environment," a phrase which hearkens back to the notion of perceiving divisionistically.[607] Even in the later chapters of this book, in which Boccioni addressed complex, multi-layered conceptions of objects, motion, and spatial relationships, Divisionism made its latent impact felt. It could even be argued that Divisionism provided Boccioni with a concrete base upon which to develop his theories regarding the absolute motion of an object and its state of becoming within a fourth dimension, theories culled from Henri Bergson's writings regarding the duration of an object within the Fourth Dimension.[608] In fact, Boccioni's constructs of continuity and dynamism evidence

606 "*Noi creiamo con ciò una nuova concezione dell'oggetto: l'oggetto-ambiente, concepito come una nuova unità indivisible*." Boccioni, *Pittura Scultura Futuriste*, 110.

607 "*Oggi la nostra evoluzione mentale non ci permette più di vedere un individuo o un oggetto isolati dal loro ambiente*." Ibid., 121.

608 See "Moto assoluto e moto relativo" [Absolute Motion and Relative Motion] and "Dinamismo" [Dynamism] chapters in Ibid., 181-91, 195-208. For more on Boccioni and Bergson, see Flavio Fergonzi's essay "On the Title of the Painting *Materia*," in *Boccioni's Materia*, ed. Mattioli Rossi, 47-53. For a

Divisionism's legacy: the threadlike, shifting brushwork which persisted in his Futurist work imply states of temporal and spatial flux which were key to the evolution and depiction of his ideas.

Conclusion

In part, due to the historiography which the Futurists themselves constructed, the movement has continued to loom large within canonical art history as Italy's first modernist movement. Despite its later problematic association with Fascism, it remains the Italian style that garners more attention, even from non-Italian scholars, than any other nineteenth- or twentieth-century Italian art movement. Its primacy results from the modernist approach to art history and its embedded prejudice regarding the importance of innovation, and it has led Italian and non-Italian art historians to put forth Futurism as a maverick avant-garde movement. In the case of Italian historians, nationalist impulses were also at work and this belief served to bolster notions of an Italian idiom that was supposedly equal to—but different from—its French counterpart, Cubism. If Divisionism is acknowledged in discussions regarding Futurism, the Futurist relationship to its predecessor is explained through a teleological argument whereby the earlier style is validated solely in its function as the precursor to Futurism.

That a painting style from the late nineteenth century should prove such a touchstone for Umberto Boccioni is a testament to the importance of Divisionism. Why

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specific discussion of Boccioni and the Fourth Dimension, see Mark Antliff, "The Fourth Dimension and Futurism: A Politicized Space," *The Art Bulletin* 82, 4 (December 2000): 720-33. Antliff also addresses the Futurists and Bergson in Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson, Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-garde* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 155-66. Earlier examinations of this subject include Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 110-16; and Brian Petrie, "Boccioni and Bergson," *The Burlington Magazine* 116 (March 1974): 140-47.

would an artist who is consciously allying himself with everything new and modern and against anything old or past incorporate a technique developed almost a quarter of a century prior to the birth of Futurism? Boccioni's cooption of Divisionist strategies underlines the modernist possibilities inherent in this older avant-garde movement which supplied foundational visual and theoretical principles that were indispensable to his realization of universal synthesis in his art. Moreover, whether the Futurists ultimately acknowledged it or not, it was the stylistic features of Divisionism that helped them define Futurism against its French counterpart, Cubism. The ongoing focus on movement and the interest in modeled forms and the three-dimensional versus the static, flattened spaces, and hieratic compositions of Cubist painting, reflect the strategies taken from Divisionism that allowed the Futurists to place the viewer at the center of the vortical spaces of paintings that embodied their conception of the modern world. The Futurists' development of the Divisionist idiom also signaled a continuation of an earlier Italian painting style into the twentieth century and was congruent with their hyper-nationalist ideals regarding cultural identity and integrity. Divisionism was not merely a mild-mannered stepping stone for the noisier avant-garde upstarts that followed, but a visual and conceptual construct that persisted, even if not always recognized, in the work of the next generation. As Italy entered the new century, it was a new artistic style that could stand as proof that Italian culture had neither degenerated nor declined.

CONCLUSION

"*Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi*"[609]

At the time of Divisionism's inception many Italians felt that the idealistic promises of the Risorgimento had failed to be realized, and the country was struggling to identify what constituted "Italy" as a nation. The peninsula was still fragmented, defined by sharp regional divisions and, on top of that, a rift between North and South. Cultural centers and institutions reflected these divisions, and continued to be decentralized. Such circumstances prompted the desire for unifying structures. By the 1890s, when Italy began to have a presence as a partially industrial power within the European sphere, conceptions of progress and modernity intertwined with those of nationalism.

This phenomenon was manifest in Divisionism. The movement's adherents were motivated to create a style which could be identified as Italian, forward-thinking, and modern. Their goals thus colored by nationalist impulses, as well as by the left-wing ideologies many of them espoused, they developed an empirically-based technique. Implicit in this project was the desire to foster the image of a new, modern Italy and one that could rival other European countries or, at the very least, one that reflected

609 "If we want everything to remain as it is, everything must change." Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il gattopardo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1958; reprint 1992), 4. A now famous line spoken by the nobleman Tancredi Falconeri, to his uncle, the Sicilian Prince of Salina (the *Gattopardo*, or the Leopard), as he goes off to join Garibaldi and his men to fight for Italian independence and unification.

enlightened ideas regarding cultural and social progress. Notwithstanding these efforts, while everything did change, everything remained the same. Though the Divisionists did establish a modern Italian painting idiom, it was not impervious to the problems that Italy faced as a country during a period rife with contradictions regarding the possible negative effects of progress, the incursion of foreign influences upon Italy's cultural production, and the ambiguities surrounding any break with historically entrenched traditions. Ultimately, many of the Divisionists retreated from active engagement in a nation-making project, and their progressive ideals largely gave way to the quest for a more spiritually inflected art. This signaled yet another contradiction at the core of this movement, for the "divided" method was associated with a radical political agenda elsewhere in Europe, whereas it Italy it was put in the service of Symbolist objectives and religious thematics.

The defining factor that emerged from this period both with regard to art and nation was that of paradox. The fundamental contradictions upon which Italy was founded meant that that no single, clear resolution could be reached to reconcile the multiple incongruities coursing through the country. The precepts upon which Divisionism was established reveal in microcosm a series of such dichotomies: the desire to be modern and the reliance on the art of the past, the embrace of a scientific technique and the eventual rejection by many of positivism, the belief in progressive left-wing and implicitly anti-clerical ideologies and the pursuit of traditional Christian themes, and the adoption of an idiom that had sources outside of Italy to forge an intrinsically Italian artistic idiom at a time when definitions of national identity were fragile. Moreover, these sets of oppositions are not fixed and can be further juggled among themselves. This only

demonstrates how conflicted and complex this moment was in Italian history, as Italians sought to achieve national definition, and the Divisionists in particular attempted to give this form through their pursuit of modernity and progress, albeit down a tortuous path. Indeed, later, the optimism, idealism, and nationalism surrounding constructions of Italian identity and the emphasis on a renewed international cultural prominence would take a wrong turn with Fascism.

Divisionism was a modernist Italian movement and constituted Italy's first artistic avant-garde. Yet, definitions of modernism generally entail the premise of rupture not only with preceding artistic traditions, but also with a country's ruling order. The Italian Divisionists did do both to some degree, but not to the extreme of, for example, the French. They were still trying to define their new nation and culture; thus, too much of a break with existing cultural signifiers would lead to a total dissolution of any realization of a modern or artistic identity. Later, due in large part to Futurism's connection to right-wing politics, this movement would suffer similar vicissitudes of definition as an avant-garde at the hands of the art historical paradigm that equated the avant-garde with anti-capitalist, radical dissent. In the case of Italian Divisionism, I would propose that, instead of rupture as the defining element of its modernism, one might think of paradox as a key ingredient. The country itself existed as paradox, a single *paese* made up of a multiplicity of *paesi*. The paradoxes, the contradictions, the irreconcilable oppositions that coexisted and made up Italy were in themselves the disruptions which catalyzed modernity in this country. Paradox generated many of the shifts and changes that led to innovation and gave rise to the formulation of formal and conceptual artistic invention. Paradox, finally, is at the core of Italy's particular modernism and its national identity.

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