

*To my wife Gabriella,  
a woman of extraordinary intelligence of a love so intense and eternal  
that it would seem that it could only exist in tales of fantasy.  
And instead...*



Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico

**PRESIDENT**

Paolo Picozza

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Paolo Picozza  
Nicolò Martinico  
Lucio Francario  
Gianluca Fusco  
Antonio Porcella  
Katherine Robinson

**SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL**

Fabio Benzi, Willard Bohn, Lorenzo Canova,  
Jean Clair, Riccardo Dottori, Paolo Picozza,  
Elena Pontiggia, Katherine Robinson & Claudio  
Strinati

**CURATOR**

Victoria Noel-Johnson

**LEGAL ADVISORS**

Piero Rescigno, Lucio Francario & Gianluca Fusco

**HOUSE-MUSEUM**

Victoria Noel-Johnson  
Jessica Perna

**ARCHIVE & LIBRARY**

Maria Letizia Rocco

**TECHNICAL EXPERTISE & CONSERVATION**

Alessandro & Lycia Pavia

**NON-INVASIVE X-RAY  
& CHEMICAL ANALYSIS**

Stefano Ridolfi Ars Mensurae

**EXPERTISE SERVICE**

*expertise@fondazionedechirico.org*

**PERIODICAL «METAPHYSICAL ART»**

Editor-in-Chief – Paolo Picozza  
General Manager – Antonio Porcella  
Scientific Coordinator – Katherine Robinson

**FRONTCOVER**

G. de Chirico,  
*Selfportrait*, 1918  
and *Alcestis*, 1918

**AUTHOR OF VOLUME**

Eugenio Bolognesi

**AUTHORS OF ESSAYS**

Fabio Benzi  
Victoria Noel-Johnson  
Paolo Picozza

**ACADEMIC CONSULTATION  
& EDITORIAL COORDINATION**

Victoria Noel-Johnson

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE**

Jessica Perna

**EDITING**

Victoria Noel-Johnson  
Maria Paola Poponi

**BOOK DESIGN**

Lisa Camporesi  
Valentina Giovagnoli

**TRANSLATIONS**

Denis Gailor  
Elizabeth Jenkins  
Victoria Noel-Johnson

© Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

© Giorgio de Chirico by SIAE, 2016

© Maretti Editore

All rights reserved. No reproduction and mechanically or electronically  
transmission of the present book is allowed in any parts, except with  
the permission of the editor's copyright.

ISBN 978-88-98855-21-6

[www.maretteditore.com](http://www.maretteditore.com)



Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico

# ALCESTIS: A FERRARA LOVE STORY

Giorgio de Chirico and Antonia Bolognesi

by Eugenio Bolognesi

 **MARETTI**  
EDITORE

## CONTENTS

- 9 **GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND FERRARA:  
*NUNC ET SEMPER***  
Paolo Picozza
- 15 **ALCESTIS: A FERRARA LOVE STORY.  
GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND ANTONIA BOLOGNESI**  
Eugenio Bolognesi
- Appendix*
- 93 **THE DE CHIRICO – BOLOGNESI CORRESPONDENCE**  
Chronologically ordered and edited by Victoria Noel-Johnson
- 175 **FERRARESE POEMS AND PROSE POEMS  
BY GIORGIO DE CHIRICO (1916-1918)**
- 187 **UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE BY GIORGIO DE CHIRICO  
SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON THE ARTIST’S ACTIVITIES FROM  
METAPHYSICAL ART TO THE RETURN TO CRAFT**  
Fabio Benzi
- 193 **GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND ALCESTIS.  
THE STORY BEHIND THE PORTRAIT**  
Victoria Noel- Johnson
- 210 **MAPS OF FERRARA**
- 193 **GIORGIO DE CHIRICO’S BIOGRAPHY**  
by Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico
- 213 **AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY**



G. de Chirico, *Autoritratto (Self-portrait)*, 1918

G. de Chirico, *Alceste (Alcestis)*, 1918

**GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND FERRARA:  
*NUNC ET SEMPER***

Paolo Picozza

*“I was setting out for Ferrara, I was setting out for that city that Burckhardt defined the most modern in Europe, [a city] that revealed itself as the deepest, strangest and most solitary city on earth”,* wrote de Chirico 30 years later in an unpublished passage extracted from the draft of his *Memoirs* (1945). This passage also narrates the precipitous descent from the train that he had taken from Florence to Bologna and the equally hurried search for the Ferrara-Venice connection. In the published version of *Memoirs of My Life*, he replaces this evocative and pulsating account with a simpler one: that of a new soldier fresh from military recruitment selection in Florence, which sent him to the 27<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment in Ferrara, where he would spend the next 3½ years as a clerk. From the perspective of the new soldier, recalled as a mature artist in the postbellum period of *another war*, a third new panorama opens up today thanks to the exceptional and unexpected discovery of an epistolary correspondence that includes around 100 letters written from the artist to his fiancée Antonia Bolognesi in 1919. The discovery of this important and splendid amorous relationship between de Chirico and the young Ferrara girl allows us to better contextualise the period on a personal as well as artistic and professional level. This can be done from a different perspective, one that falls before the backdrop of a sentimental relationship, which, until now, was completely unknown of. I am thankful to Eugenio Bolognesi, Antonia’s great-nephew, for his receptivity in wanting to share his family’s unusual and intimate story with the Foundation, a story that Bolognesi wanted to be dealt with in a discreet - I would say passive – manner in order that Giorgio de Chirico could speak for himself.

Ferrara - which de Chirico described as being *“extremely metaphysical”* - was the source of new and profound stimuli for his painting following his time in Paris (1911-1915), a period that gave rise to the development of themes such as the Italian square, Ariadne and the Towers. The artist compared this city to Munich due to its humid climate, but above all for its *“northern”* atmosphere. It bewitched and enchanted him, stimulating new forms and settings that resulted in the Metaphysical

Interiors, the Troubadours and the Disquieting Muses. In his subsequent writings, de Chirico often highlighted the strange objects and atmospheres that he had discovered in Ferrara and how these related to his contemplation of the visual world's metaphysical aspect. Another Ferrara “interior” has now been unveiled thanks to these unpublished letters, ones that addresses his personal and emotional state relating to the last two years spent in this city. As we now discover, this period did not just consist of military obligations, but also family and professional relationships, painting and study. There is nothing picturesque about the discovery of this sentimental aspect. Instead, a privileged window regarding the artist's moral temperament has opened up to researchers, one that deals with the hopes and personal plans for his painting that had already been endorsed in France but still awaited success in Italy, a country that found itself in a very particular and evolving post-war context. By reading the correspondence of this important relationship that also included a marriage proposal (which, in the end, did not materialise), one can finally complete the picture about de Chirico the man. Such letters reveal a man of deep personal integrity and honesty who possessed a strong work ethic in the hope of gaining the necessary conditions that would enable him to fulfil his plans. These plans envisaged a life together with his fiancée as well as winning over her trust in the call of destiny: *“happy days of calm and deep and pure love will come; and destiny, which is limitless, will not want to deny us those days as we love each other so sincerely, since our union is a necessity fatal to development and vital achievement for you as for me”* (18 March 1919).

As Fabio Benzi points out in his essay, the correspondence contains multiple references regarding the development of de Chirico's work, with information about exhibitions, the sale of pictures, the publication of his articles and critical reviews about his painting (both positive and negative), professional collaborations that had taken place and others that were in the making. These unpublished snippets of information will certainly be the subject of further study and in-depth examination that will serve to further clarify the artist's biography during that period, undoubtedly prompting new discoveries. Whilst still a soldier, who was soon to be discharged, de Chirico kept Antonia informed about professional issues rather than the development of his important artistic reflections that led him to make the all-important move from metaphysical painting to his study of the Old Masters and the return to craft in 1919 itself. At a moment when it was an absolute priority to forge an adequate financial situation that would enable him to put his marriage proposal

into effect, discussion about his artistic ideas or sending his fiancée drawings or sketches would have appeared, in all likelihood, out of place and superfluous. Society needed to recognise the worth of his painting, and it was not material for seduction or intimate poetic sharing; the prospect of their future happiness would be founded on the result of his art and the success of his undertakings.

This extraordinary ‘diary’ provides an unusual tool of investigation, that of a viewpoint that begins with the idea of a life plan in which the protagonists' nobility of spirit and formal habits of the period have something eternal, classical, harmonious and fatal about them. These qualities coincide with all of de Chirico's art, ranging from his early metaphysical painting to his new classic-orientated research. The name bestowed by de Chirico to his beloved was ‘Alcestis’, the moniker for the mythological figure who represents conjugal fidelity and the ideal wife, ready for the greatest sacrifice of all. As written in a letter dated February 1919, she corresponded to his ideal of goodness, gentleness and beauty.

From the information and suggestions derived from this correspondence, it is possible to reinterpret de Chirico's writings on different levels. Interesting connections develop between the artist's theoretical writings and passages found in his letters. In an essay devoted to Gaetano Previati, which appeared in «Il Convegno» in August 1920, de Chirico wrote: *“Several fatal topographical dispositions increase Ferrara's metaphysical potency, as seen with that wonderful Via Giovecca which, to the east, finishes with the big mountain, where a semicircular building, similar to a ship's stern, overhangs the shore of the Romagna countryside and confers something maritime and harbour-like to that part of the city whilst, to the west, along the [straight roads](#) of Viale Cavour and Viale Cesare Battisti, the metaphysical sensation of Via Giovecca dies off in the nostalgia of the railway station amidst the maze of platforms and the noise of trains”*. Exactly one year before, on 18 August 1919, de Chirico wrote to Antonia from Rome: *“I think about you when I am out in the afternoon hours; I think about you walking along Via Giovecca, and then past the castle; but perhaps you take a different route now.”*

We know that these roads and places exerted a strong impression on de Chirico's soul. Now we see them animated by his beloved's spirit who worked as a clerk in the provincial offices of Castello Estense at that time, as learnt from her great-nephew. Today, perhaps the cardinal work of de Chirico's Ferrara period, *The Disquieting Muses* (1918), can lend itself to new interpretations and contextualisation.

When de Chirico evoked Ferrara in the 1920 article, destiny had already forced

each of them to take a different direction from the one they had wanted, hoped for and believed in at the time. The path that de Chirico took is well-known, but crucial moments and unknown aspects of his life and work remain to be discovered, as gleaned from the recovery of this dense correspondence. The year 2015, which marks the centenary of de Chirico's arrival in Ferrara, opens with the celebration of research, an undertaking that entails "safeguarding Giorgio de Chirico's intellectual and artistic personality", the Foundation's institutional obligation. The year 2010, the centenary of the birth of Metaphysical painting in Florence, provided the opportunity for in-depth studies devoted to the artist, particularly about the painting *L'enigme d'un après-midi d'automne* (*The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, 1910), which was executed after de Chirico's epiphany in Piazza Santa Croce aged 22-years old, when "I had the strange impression of seeing everything for the first time."

It is the Foundation's hope that the portrait of Antonia entitled *Alceste* (*Alcestis*) is recognised as a new symbol of de Chirico's important sojourn in Ferrara, a moment that lies halfway between metaphysics and classicism, drawing and destiny. Above all, it is the Foundation's desire that the city of Ferrara, acknowledging *its own* portrait within this Ferrara painting, will adequately - and fittingly so - promote and honour this 'metaphysical' adopted citizen. Ferrara, as de Chirico wrote, is "the city of surprises [...], splendid apparitions of spectrality and subtle beauty, which stop and amaze the astute passer-by who is educated in the mysteries of intelligence."

Paolo Picozza

President of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico

Il treno d'Inoltrare, verso gli i contrapposti degli Appennini  
 poi Cominciò la traversata delle immensamente gialle;  
 Ogni volta che s'ostava in una galleria qualcuno si  
 precipitava a ~~stendere~~ tirare su i vetri a f'incastri;  
 si precipitava con una velocità ed un orgoglio come  
 se un pericolo imminente avesse sorvegliato l'orgoglio.  
 nel caso che i finestrini fossero rimasti aperti;  
 uscirò dalle gallerie e traversato quel gran  
 tratto di paese che si estende tra l'altipiano  
 dei monti e Bologna, il treno si fermò d'un tratto  
 in una spia di mare di Salsomaggiore di Pineri  
 a poi fu la stazione di Bologna; appena fermi  
 mi precipitai fuori con la mia valigia; dove  
 cambrano tirare il treno in partenza per Venezia,  
 la coincidenza; temere di perdere detta la coincidenza  
 finalmente Roma; il mio treno e mi installai in  
 un scompartimento; ma dopo un po' non scivolai  
 in senso opposto della direzione del treno della stopia.  
 della folla di tutti i si partiva. Partiva per Ferrara  
 partiva per quella città che Baudelaire ~~definì~~ <sup>definì</sup> la più  
 moderna ~~del mondo~~ <sup>del mondo</sup> e che ~~mi~~ <sup>mi</sup> rivela con la città  
 più profonda, più strana e più solitaria delle terre.

Manuscript extract from the rough draft of *Memoirs of My Life* (1945) with unedited passage about Ferrara

**ALCESTIS: A FERRARA LOVE STORY.**  
**GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND ANTONIA BOLOGNESI**  
Eugenio Bolognesi

**INTRODUCTION**

My paternal great-grandparents, Giuseppe Bolognesi (1866-1952), a post office telegraphist, and Ernesta Orlandini (1863-1955), a housewife, had three children: Antonia (1896-1976, fig. 1), Carlo (1897-1944) and Maria (1903-1991). When my great-aunt Antonia passed away in 1976, she joined Carlo who had died 32 years previously in 1944, whereas Maria, the youngest of the three siblings, continued to live a full life for many years thereafter. Indeed, it was Maria who asked her son-in-law Giovanni Resca to clear out Antonia's house located on Corso Isonzo 14, Ferrara, with linen and several items of furniture being distributed amongst the family. I myself lived in Monza at the time. After passing through various relatives, I eventually inherited Antonia's Empire style chest of drawers.

Giovanni had received the specific instructions to keep anything else that remained or, alternatively, dispose of it. Among many insignificant things that he found, he discovered a small parcel in the chest of drawers. It consisted of personal correspondence that Antonia had received when she was younger. Unsure whether to keep it or not, Giovanni decided to keep it. And he did well to. Wrapped in faded tissue paper, this little parallelepiped-shaped bundle (measuring 5 x 10 x 15 cm), contained the abundant correspondence from Giorgio de Chirico to Antonia Bolognesi, as well as some important replies, in rough draft, to some of the most sensitive letters. Up until 2012, Giovanni (commonly known as Nino), a bank accountant and man of great dignity, and his wife, Rita Vallini, chose to carefully and loyally conserve these letters without revealing their secret. As a sign of their great respect and affection towards my great-aunt Antonia, they made the conscious decision to keep such private – and indeed painful – affairs within the family. Furthermore, the 'small parcel' was so diminutive in size that no-one could have imagined just how many letters, lettercards, postcards and picture postcards it contained.

One November afternoon back in 2012, Nino and I decided to sit down and read the letters. It soon became clear to us – as we now know - that they fully illustrate the amorous relationship that took place between Giorgio de Chirico and Antonia Bolognesi. Thanks to Nino and Rita's true generosity, I was able to firstly return these letters to 'their' chest of drawers 35 years on from Antonia's passing, and, secondly, with mutual consent, contemplate the possibility of divulging the sequence



1. Photograph of Antonia Bolognesi, second half of the 1910s

of events through the publication of the letters and documents.

It gives me pleasure to think back to the day when, together with my wife, Gabriella, to whom this book is dedicated, I went to Nino and Rita's house to ask for their blessing without which this book would never have materialised. I began by saying, "Nino, I have read and reread this correspondence; great-aunt Antonia's life as a young woman was so interesting that I really must complete the book!" He and his wife smiled at me revealing their tacit consent. All the other close relatives followed suit. The moment had come to lift the veil from the secret that had remained concealed for practically 100 years.

Having completed the narrative, an agreement was quickly reached with Professor Paolo Picozza, President of the prestigious Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico. Such work was further enriched thanks to the erudite and opportune academic revisions to the text made by Victoria Noel-Johnson. This has resulted in the present publication fully respecting the author's original aims.

There were numerous reasons for publishing the complete correspondence in book-form. Firstly, it was motivated by the desire to portray Antonia Bolognesi (a woman destined to suffer and remain alone in life, a situation that she had never wished for) in the correct light, thus placing her - a figure of almost historical stature - in the elevated position that she so thoroughly deserved. Secondly, there was an awareness of being able to shed light on a young de Chirico through a work that not only brought him closer to the public at large (the narrative section) but also furthered scholarly knowledge (the transcriptions and the important chapter about the painting *Alcestis*). Last, but certainly not least, this publication aims to place - once again - the name of the city of Ferrara on the international map. The artist's love for our city is clearly expressed in this narration. Whoever knows the city cannot help but be deeply impressed by it.

Particular thanks are due to Rita Vallini and Nino Resca, without whom the present work would not have been possible. I should, moreover, like to dedicate the emotions that this book may conjure to all the members of the Vallini, Bolognesi and Bagni families, whose fond memories of Antonia Bolognesi go well beyond mere ties of kinship. My gratitude to Professor Paolo Picozza, President of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, for his warm friendship and moments of emotion shared whilst reading the correspondence together at my home in Ferrara. I should also like to extend my sincere thanks to the following people: Victoria Noel-Johnson for her careful and competent revision of the work, Professor Carlo Mayr and Marco Bissi in their roles as legal advisors, Arianna Ruzza from Relazioni Cosmiche Ltd., for her friendly professional advice, and, finally, to my friend Leopoldo Santini for consenting to the publication of several historical photographs.

## PREFACE

### THE CENTRALITY OF FERRARA - "THE CENTRE OF THE WHOLE UNIVERSE" IN GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S PICTORIAL DEVELOPMENT

By reading the article by the academic Fabio Benzi in «Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio de Chirico» (n. 1-2, 2002, pp.161-172) entitled *The de Chirico-Signorelli correspondence and the beginning of the painter's classicist period (1918-1919)*, one apprehends that the rich collection of letters in our possession is of historical importance.

The love story, which is central to this book, unfolds in the authentic correspondence parallel to that cited above - in our case between Antonia Bolognesi (Ferrara 1896 - Ferrara 1976) and Giorgio de Chirico (Volos 1888 - Rome 1978) - constituting the long searched-for completion to questions raised by Professor Benzi. Whilst this scholar has highlighted that the biennial 1919-1920 is of great importance for the history and study of de Chirico, he also emphasises that such a period is subject to emptiness and silence which - until today - were seen as unbridgeable gaps.<sup>1</sup>

The situation has now radically changed. Many of the letters and postcards, full of personal news and other pieces of information, constitute the artist's autobiographical account, seemingly providing the perfect bridge for that aforementioned gap. In the aforementioned article, Benzi writes as follows: "De Chirico, up until the summer of 1919, was still a purely metaphysical painter and the plastic and visionary force of his scenes certainly does not appear to oppose the avant-garde movement, particularly Futurism, which, in April of that year, he still saw as an 'irrefutable [...] necessity': a movement which 'is of great help' to the new art, as he even wrote the previous year, in June 1918". Benzi goes on to say: "only in the second half of the year does he go back on his position in the search for an avant-garde classicism and a 'return to the craft' of the ancients, for whom every avant-garde movement, Futurism being the case in point, becomes an aberration which 'has brought no benefit to Italian painting', as he stated in the November - December 1919 issue of «Valori Plastici». De Chirico's great transition took place in the initially oppressive then cool summer of 1919. [...] Strangely inexplicable is the fact that no historian - or art historian - has taken it upon himself to conduct an

<sup>1</sup> For further reading about de Chirico's Milanese period that followed his stay in Rome, see E. Pontiggia, "In the Immense Desert of this Big City". *De Chirico in Milan 1919-1920*, in «Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico», n. 5-6, Le Lettere, Florence, pp. 163-173.

*in-depth and complete study of this period which was crucial for the artist's stylistic development, but not only: it is thought that de Chirico's fall from favour with the critics, ratified some years later by the surrealists, originates particularly from this mock-classical transformation which took root at that time, and from his subsequent distancing from the avant-garde period. At best, the poor, and at worst, the romanticised and lengthy biographies of the artist, reduce the years 1919-1920 to a mere page interposed with allusions which are often inflated in significance in order to conceal the superficiality of historical/critical research, denoting a lack of concrete facts and analysis. In fact, the various exhibitions and books on de Chirico as a classicist are named *The Twenties*, but they carefully step around that perilous stumbling block posed by the year 1919. In short, the neglected year of 1919, so crucial to de Chirico's classicist formation, has so far escaped the more general of the historical treatises."*

Today, we are able to add something more substantial than just a few brushstrokes to that "neglect and scarcity of news surrounding 1919" in de Chirico's life: the discovery of the new personal correspondence of the artist would seem to reveal that it was not just the city of Ferrara that acted as muse, accompanying the personal turning point of de Chirico's genius.

Above all, what brought this about was his three-year stay in Ferrara. "The appearance of Ferrara, [was] one of the most beautiful cities in Italy" he was to write in his *Memoirs* in 1945, "but what struck me most of all and inspired me on the metaphysical side, the manner in which I was working then, were certain aspects of Ferrara interiors, certain windows, shops, houses, districts, such as the ancient ghetto, where you could find certain sweets and biscuits with remarkably metaphysical and strange shapes." In fact, the Castello Estense (fig. 2), as the protagonist of the celebrated image of *Le Muse Inquietanti* (*The Disquieting Muses*, fig. 3) of 1918, reappears in many of his paintings (fig. 4). As Emily Braun recently explained: "It was in Ferrara during the war years of 1915-1918 that picturing the illusionary means of our illusions reached a zenith in de Chirico's work. In a period of daily isolation far from the creative stimulus of Paris [...] metaphysical painting moved indoors [...]. The claustrophobic spaces, composed of aggregates of shallow relief planes, contain a novel self-reflexive iconography of art about art, a compendium of visual sign systems: military insignia, flags, schema, gnomons, hieroglyphs, maps, and, finally, illusionist paintings within paintings." (E. Braun, *Greetings from a Distant Friend in Nature according to de Chirico*, exhibition catalogue, curated by A. Bonito Oliva, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, 2010, p. 38, figs. 5-7).

In short, it appears that he loved everything about Ferrara. Up until now, however, no historian has been able to say what the artist loved most about Ferrara: that is, my great-aunt Antonia. Antonia was a lovely, elegant young lady, as can be seen in the photograph taken at the seaside with a friend in the second half of the 1910s



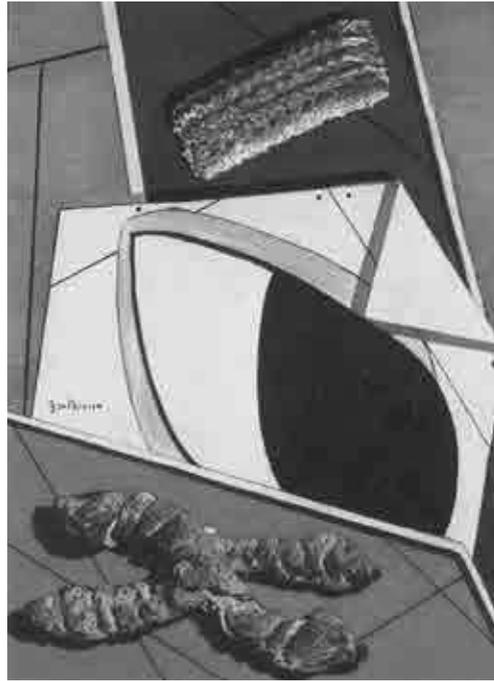
2. Historical photographs of Castello Estense, the cathedral and the market next to it, c. 1915



3. G. de Chirico, *The Disquieting Muses*, 1918, private collection



4. G. de Chirico, *The Amusements of a Young Girl*, 1915, The Museum of Modern Art, New York



5. G. de Chirico, *The Language of a Child*, 1916, Pierre & Maria Gaetana Foundation, New York

6. G. de Chirico, *Greetings from a Distant Friend*, 1916, private collection

7. G. de Chirico, *Metaphysical Interior*, 1917, private collection



8. Photograph of Antonia Bognesi sitting next to a friend, second half of the 1910s

9. Photograph of Antonia Bognesi (sitting on the right) with her colleagues, Castello Estense, Ferrara, 1940s

10. Photograph of Antonia Bognesi (seen on the left in the first row) with her colleagues, Castello Estense, Ferrara, 1940s

(fig. 8). Moreover, I like to think that, whilst painting *The Disquieting Muses*, de Chirico glimpsed, or perhaps just imagined, my great-aunt through the windows of that very icon of Ferrara, the Castello Estense, where she worked as a bookkeeper for the Province of Ferrara throughout her professional life (figs. 9-10). She worked there throughout the period they were in contact, when the artist was actually in Ferrara or away from the city.

The castle, therefore, may have been the place where they first met. Alternatively, they might have met on Via Mentana where Antonia lived with her family (see the map on p. 211, figs. 11-12), similarly to the artist himself who lived in the Santini family home for a short time in August and October 1917 (during the course of 1919, the artist was also a guest of the Bolognesi family on several occasions).

During de Chirico's three-year stay in Ferrara, he lived in various places, but they were nearly always close to the aforementioned street.

As the reader progresses through the correspondence published in this book, he is able to enjoy some of the fond moments shared between de Chirico and Antonia Bolognesi; a love story which should have culminated in marriage. The following text was written on 13 March 1919 (fig. 13):

Rome 13 March [13 March 1919]

Dearest,

*I hope that your mother has completely recovered now, so you won't have to stay in her room anymore, my dear big little girl, keeping her company. At the moment I feel very tired too; it must be the start of spring; it is a season that has always given me trouble. -*

*I count the passing days and they seem so long to me; but the time when we will meet again is coming, dear Antonia, and we will spend this period of separation intensely thinking about our love, elevating and purifying our souls in mutual understanding, mutual respect. -*

*I don't know yet if there are any letters of yours today. I'll go and see now. -*

*Write to me often. I will write to you every day until I get on the train again for blessed Ferrara, which since I met you seems like the centre of the whole universe to me.*

*Best wishes and regards to your mother*

*I embrace you so much*

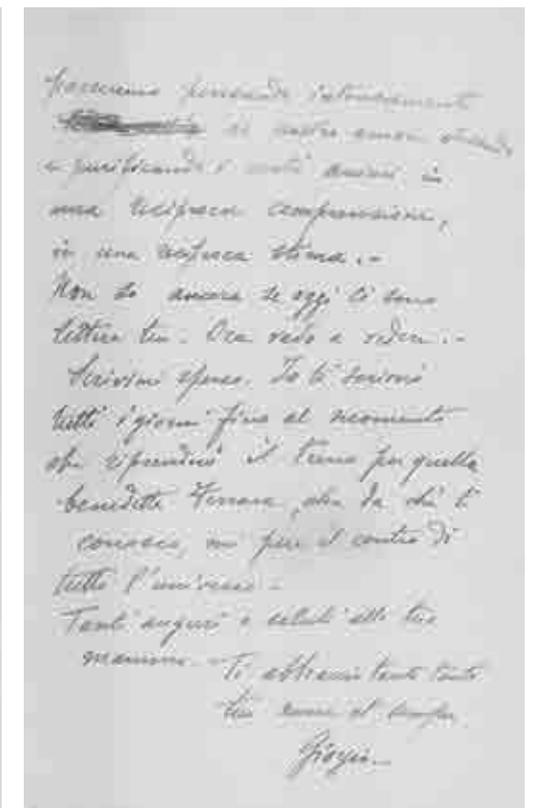
*yours nunc et semper*

*Giorgio. -*



11. Photograph of the road sign for Via Mentana, Ferrara

12. Photograph of the Bolognesi home façade located on Via Mentana 27, Ferrara



13. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 13 March 1919



14. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 29 January 1919



The following postcard, dated 29 January 1919 (fig. 14), forms part of the early phase of their correspondence. It is one of many sent to Via Mentana 27- in Ferrara, of course - where Antonia lived and where the two, as previously mentioned, may have met one another. It is of interest as de Chirico discusses, amongst other things, his first one-man exhibition planned for the following February. Moreover, it helps place the artist's Roman period in its historical context: he was still enrolled in the army until mid-1919 although without any particularly demanding commitments.

*Rome Wednesday [29 January 1919]*

*Dearest*

*I received the picture postcard in which you tell me you are sending a letter. For the time that my exhibition will last (from 2 to 16 February) I thought about asking for leave to have the afternoon free, as if I were to ask for home leave they would not grant it to me later on to take a brief trip to Ferrara, and for me it is important not to go too much longer without seeing you. - Greetings to your family.*

*I embrace you*

*yours*

*Giorgio*

## ALCESTIS: THE STORY BEHIND A PORTRAIT

*Alcestitis* is the celebrated metaphysical portrait by de Chirico executed in 1919 (fig. 15), or rather, the portrait of my great-aunt Antonia (fig. 16). For those who identified the figure in the portrait as de Pisis' sister fell wide off the mark. The extraordinary resemblance between the aforementioned portrait - which shares a sort of "partner" painting according to de Chirico in his letter dated 14 February 1919 (we shall return to this fascinating enigma later on) - and the photograph of Antonia Bognesi cannot help but stimulate a degree of curiosity within the reader. Despite this physical resemblance, it is *Alcestitis'* maker who reveals the true identity of the portrayed figure in his correspondence with Antonia, so let us read on.

In the letter dated 9 March 1919 transcribed below (fig. 17), de Chirico writes to Antonia: "[...] *our love that follows and will follow its fatal course*" and then, in the final lines: "*Before this year closes we will be united dearest 'Alcestitis'*."<sup>2</sup>



15. G. de Chirico, *Alcestitis*, 1918, private collection



16. Photograph of Antonia Bognesi, second half of the 1910s

<sup>2</sup> With regard to de Chirico's use of the name 'Alcestitis' instead of 'Alcesti', in accordance with traditional mythology, see Fabio Benzi in this volume, p.189.

This was not, however, the first time that the artist had bestowed this name upon Antonia (“*You would see your portrait (Alcestis) towering up amid the other works,*” writes de Chirico on 30 January 1919), nor the first time that he had declared his eternal love for the girl from Ferrara.

Most of the correspondence, in fact, consists of letters written by a man in love to his beloved. The letter cited above is not the only one to explicitly mention the idea of their union in marriage. Without knowing anything else, this open declaration of love makes us think that the beloved girl might also have acted as the muse and subject matter portrayed by the artist although, that said, it does not prove that the *Alcestis* portrait precisely portrays Antonia Bolognesi. Unequivocal proof, instead, can be found in the following letter, which confirms Antonia as the muse that inspired the painting of *Alcestis*. It also contains important new evidence for de Chirico scholars. As always, the wonderful city of Ferrara provides the unique backdrop:

Rome – Sunday [9 March 1919]

Dearest,

*Last Sunday at this time I was with you. Those three days of dream and very pure happiness passed quickly.*

*But I am tranquil because I am sure of your thoughts; our meeting after two months of separation has forever sealed our love that follows and will follow its fatal course. – Let us rise to this thought, Antonia; I see in you, in your loyalty, in your beauty, in your gentleness, the remorseless consolation of my life; may I too, dearest, be for you what you are for me. –*

*May will come soon. –*

*Today I have been to see Professor Signorelli and I saw your portrait very well displayed.*

*Tomorrow I will send you Papini’s French magazine where there is a very good article about me. – I have started my active life again and with the faith of your love in my mind I work calmly and hopefully. –*

*I don’t know how to thank your parents for the sweet hospitality that they gave me. – Being among such loyal and sincere people for me was happiness and a sweet rest. Have trust in me and you will see that we will be happy. –*

*Write to me often. I will write to you every day. –*

*Greet your parents and Maria, who is so likable and warm towards me; be tranquil and serene.*

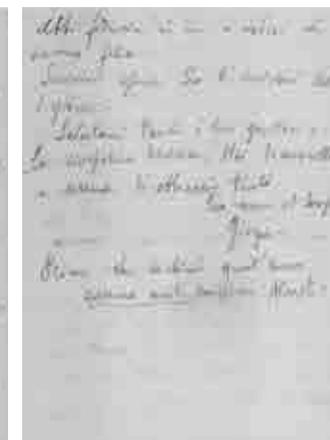
*I embrace you*

*yours nunc et semper*

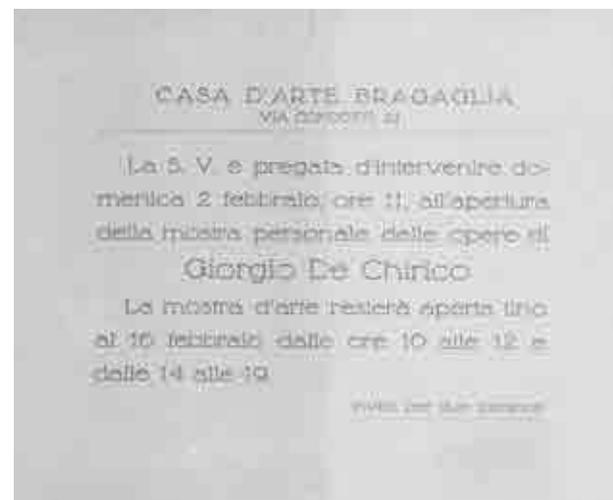
*Giorgio*

*Before this year closes we will be united dearest “Alcestis”*

Here is the official invitation to the exhibition opening held in Rome at the Bragaglia Art Gallery, Via Condotti, 21 (fig.18), where the portrait of *Alcestis* was exhibited from 2 -21 February, a later date compared to the original schedule.



17. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 9 March 1919



18. Note from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi written on the back of the invitation of de Chirico’s first personal exhibition (Casa d’arte Bragaglia, Rome, 2-21 February 1919), 30 January 1919



19. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 12 February 1919

Rome 30-1 - [30 January 1919]

Dearest

I have not received the letter you spoke to me about in the picture postcard.

I am sending you the invitation to my exhibition; pity you cannot see it! You would see your portrait (Alcestis) towering up amid the other works. - I am terribly busy these days, but from Sunday on, once the exhibition has opened, I will be freer and I will write to you more at length ...

- I have the vague impression that you write to me with less desire than the first days ...

I want to hope that this is only an impression ...

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

The portrait was very well received at the 1919 exhibition with the artist fearing he would be separated from it as many people seemed interested in purchasing the work. The letter dated 14 February, however, contains a bolt from the blue: “I will keep you informed about the fate of its partner.” This poses an interesting new enigma, but it is not my task to expand on it.<sup>3</sup> What does de Chirico refer to when he mentions the existence of a “partner” work? A copy of the painting? In any case, his attachment to the work and the model who inspired it is well expressed in the letter dated 12 February, which is also of genuine interest (fig. 19):

3 For further discussion, see Victoria Noel-Johnson’s essay in this volume, pp. 204-207.



20. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 5 February 1919

Rome – Wednesday [12 February 1919]

Dearest,

Excuse me if I always write postcards. I am terribly busy all day; I am never alone, even for one minute. When the exhibition closes I will write you a long letter; and we will meet soon. - Your portrait is successful and probably in a few days there will be some news about it.

I will keep you informed about everything.

Write to me often

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Two days after the artist had updated Antonia about the painting's status, de Chirico wrote:

Rome 14 Feb [14 February 1919]

Dearest,

“Alcestis” is greatly courted and I fear that they will take her away from me. I will keep you informed about the fate of its partner.

Today I will send you a laudatory article in a French newspaper that was published here. -

I received your postcard

- See you soon. -

Write to me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Say hello to your parents, and sister and brother.

In another postcard dated 18 February, de Chirico refers to a forthcoming stay in Milan as well as dealings with a collector from Rome who was determined to buy *Alcestis*. The artist updates Antonia: “[...] *We have not agreed on the price yet but I believe that in the end he will agree.*” Having solved the riddle whereby Antonia corresponds to *Alcestis*, I once more express my conviction that de Chirico’s work underwent a change as a result of him falling in love and the renewed soulful presence of Ferrara, the city which acts as the backdrop to our story here. Whoever has lived in Ferrara - even if just for a few days - cannot help but fall in love with it. It goes without saying, therefore, that an artistic spirit could not be insensitive to its pervasive fascination.

The postcard of 5 February 1919 (fig. 20), which predates the others thus far cited, seals the moment when de Chirico assigned the name of *Alcestis* to the portrait in question:

*Rome – Wednesday [5 February 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*I received a registered letter of yours today.*

*Why did you spend money on a registered letter? I have not received the one you mentioned in which you speak about the magazine. However, I have had other letters and numerous picture postcards; I don't believe that there is anybody that intercepts my correspondence. -*

*The exhibition is going excellently; your portrait is greatly admired; I have entitled it “Alcestis”. This week you will receive numerous newspapers and magazines.*

*I impatiently wait for the time when I will see you again, you who I love so much and who corresponds so well to my ideals of goodness, gentleness and beauty.*

*Write to me often. Tonight I will write a letter*

*I embrace you*

*yours Giorgio*

In the following postcard dated 27 February 1919, de Chirico confirms that a Roman collector had bought the portrait. In a short sentence clearly seen next to the very conspicuous royal postal stamp, de Chirico confirms: “*“Alcestis” has been purchased by a Roman collector.*”

*Milan Thursday morning [27 February 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*I am in Milan for a few days. I will be in Ferrara on Sunday [2 March] where I will stay 2 or 3 days, I cannot stay longer as I also have to go to Florence for a few days. -*

*I am very tired due to the long trip. -*

*Impatient to see you, I embrace you.*

*yours*

*Giorgio*

*“Alcestis” has been purchased by a Roman collector.*

As is well known to de Chirico scholars, Benzi informs the reader in the aforementioned article that the purchaser of *Alcestis* was a doctor, Angelo Signorelli, and that the shift towards his classicist period “*evidently begins to pierce the de Chirico ideal*” with this painting of a female head. It was the very portrait of my great-aunt Antonia, painted between July and September 1918, which he defined as “*the first short circuit between the metaphysical world and the idea of the classical world nourished with reference to Greek art*”. Benzi continues: “*de Chirico wrote a letter to Soffici on 23 July 1918 in which he not only gave advance notice of a personal exhibition he intended to set up in Rome in December (it was, however, held in February at the Bragaglia Art Gallery), but he also spoke of his intention to exhibit a portrait of a ‘female head’*” – which can almost certainly be identified with the one purchased by Signorelli at the future Roman exhibition, the only painting sold on that occasion: “*I continue to work and I will definitely hold an exhibition in December in Rome; I will also exhibit a portrait of a female head, painted here in Ferrara, so that those Romans will see that we are more classical than the ancients when we want to be*”.

Following the execution of *Alcestis*, neither Giorgio de Chirico nor Antonia Bolognesi ever revealed the identity of the female figure portrayed in the painting. It is as if they wished to protectively guard the secret of their love – a profound experience that was also the source of great plans, joy and deep suffering.

I finally had the chance to see, one evening, the work in person (together with my friend from Ferrara Andrea Susmel) whilst on display at the de Chirico show held at Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, in late 2015. In rapturous delight, most likely due to the heightened metaphysical atmosphere of the surroundings, our attention was drawn to the two vertical, geometrical constructions found on the right-hand side of the picture. For several months, one of them (which is also very conspicuous in photographic reproductions) had been the subject of great curiosity. It represents a sort of red brick tower that projects into the sky seen beyond Antonia’s shoulders. The other construction, which is even more evident, especially when seen in the flesh, represents a second tower.

Knowing the great artist, it is possible that de Chirico wanted to play on the surname of his loved one, Antonia Bolognesi, through reference to the two Bolognesi towers, Garisenda and Asinelli. ‘Bolognesi’ means ‘from Bologna’, whereas ‘towers’ are ancient monuments and symbols of the same city, the capital of the Emilia Romagna region. Such a hypothesis becomes all the more compelling when, upon reading de Chirico’s personal correspondence, we discover that the artist often travelled to the city of Bologna in order to buy the best paints available on the market for his paintings.

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DE CHIRICO'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CRITICS, ARTISTS AND OTHER FIGURES

Before providing further testimonies and observations, it is important to recall that this book's aim is to illustrate a love story. It should be remembered that the focus of my account is Antonia Bolognesi and Giorgio de Chirico. The fact that I came across news and situations involving important names belonging to the world of art, literature and culture, or people associated with the city of Ferrara, is purely fortuitous. Needless to say, all of this was judged worthy of note.

Let us, therefore, address the protagonists of this chapter. One of the most important aspects of this correspondence, in fact, deals with interpersonal relationships and people who helped enhance the Italian cultural debate at the time. Opinions, judgements and testimonies emerge that involve critics, Savinio (de Chirico's brother), Soffici (fig. 21), de Pisis, Carrà (fig. 22), art dealers (fig. 23), and other people who formed part of the daily scene. The correspondence's reference to so many figures attests to the fact that actual people (who then reappeared in history books, literature, as well as history of art textbooks) made up the important cultural scene of the period.

At the time, personalities tended to keep an eye on their contemporaries, studying and stimulating one another. Such was the yearning for narcissistic flair (so typical of the artistic temperament), that the desire to stand out and be admired occasionally aroused certain feelings of envy. That, however, was not all. During the wartime period, one realised that the 'best' figures (especially amongst the elite), were able to produce universal and original thoughts and ideas. This required determination and a high level of self-esteem, something that de Chirico did not lack in. I was greatly struck by the fact that academics often associate Metaphysics with the word 'discovery'. In fact, a discovery is usually associated with the spirit of competition, a coveted desire to leave one's mark in history books.

This is all too evident at the time this correspondence was written: the main-springs of de Chirico's ambition were fuelled by a certain desire for fame and economic success. This aspect exerted an important impact on his relationship with Antonia, which, in part, was perhaps due to 19<sup>th</sup> century customs, when great pressure was placed on a man's financial security as head of the family. In the end, the issue of de Chirico's difficulty in obtaining a suitable economic position became one of the stumbling blocks in culminating the relationship with the marriage proposal made to Antonia Bolognesi.



21. Photograph the military journal «La Ghirba»'s editing staff (Soffici appears towards the middle holding the journal's first issue)



22. Photograph of Carlo Carrà as a soldier in Ferrara, 1917



23. Photograph of Paul Guillaume (with de Chirico's painting *The Arrival*, 1912, in the background), Paris, 1916

Throughout the correspondence, one notes constant scrutiny of national and international journals - the voice of the intellectuals - amongst whom de Chirico elbowed his way in search for success along the axis of Rome-Florence-Milan-Paris. De Chirico's name, does, in fact, appear within the pages of journals and art magazines, copies of which were often sent to Antonia with advance notice by post (see the letter dated 14 February 1919): the purpose was to share his progress of success, which was laboriously emerging, with the love of his life. He writes (fig. 24):

*Rome Sunday [23 February 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*Yesterday [Saturday 22 February] I sent you an issue of "Tempo" with a long article that is harsh this time too; however, I have observed that harsh ones give me more publicity than laudatory ones. Tuesday (the day after tomorrow) [25 February] I will go on leave. I will write to you from Milan with regard to the day of my arrival in Ferrara. -*

*Say hello to your parents*

*I embrace you*

*yours*

*Giorgio*

24. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 23 February 1919



25. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 5 April 1919

On the other hand, references concerning the artist frequently appear in judgments handed out by critics or other sources. For example, in the postcard dated 5 April 1919 written a few months later (fig. 25), he irritably mentions "enemies", adding "those who don't like me, grows by the day."

*Rome 5 March [5 April 1919]*

*Today I did not receive anything from you.*

*Tomorrow is Sunday and I won't go to the office, so before Monday I cannot have your news. - I impatiently await this discharge and can't wait to leave Rome; in this city the number of my enemies, or at least those who don't like me, grows by the day. -*

*I await [to receive] an encouraging and comforting letter of yours. -*

*Greet your family from me. I embrace you and I beg you always to have trust in your Giorgio.*

### Ardengo Soffici (1879-1964)

Following a lengthy initial part of the letter dated 14 July 1919 (see transcription below, fig. 26) in which the serious intentions concerning the relationship between de Chirico and Antonia Bolognesi are reiterated, there is mention of Ardengo Soffici, the organiser of an art exhibition dedicated to the artist. A certain embarrassment on behalf of the artist is detected as his economic position - in July 1919 – was yet to “consolidate”. By way of compensation, as if to sweeten the thorny subject, one notes the gallant post scriptum: “No woman possesses your grace.”

Rome 14 July

Dearest,

Yesterday I received your dear letter that for me was a very sweet consolation; it was as I expected from you, you who have never disappointed me and have been, during all the time that we have known each other, always the same angel that I felt the first day I saw you; but you will see, dear big little girl, that I will also be worthy of you and you will never regret having believed in my word and having loved me. -

In a few days I will also write to your father; I will wait to be able to tell him something concerning my position, which now I am doing everything to consolidate; being free is a great thing; I think of this every day. - At the end of this month I will perhaps go to Florence for a few days where my friend Soffici has organised a painting gallery, a gallery in which I will have the place of honour. - I work a lot despite the heat and I will see to staying in Rome, thus holding out against my mother who would like to go to the beach and since she gets bored going there by herself would like me with her; but I think that the beach is a waste of time. I also hope that you don't leave Ferrara. -

I think about the days that I spent in your city; I was so happy; in the evening, those few minutes of unforgettable happiness that convinced me more than ever that we are inseparable now; isn't it true Antonia?

Write to me and believe me forever yours. -

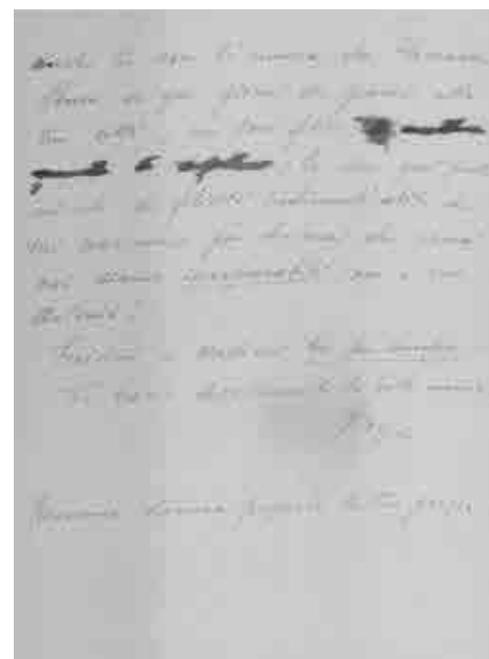
I devotedly kiss your beautiful little hands.

Giorgio

No woman possesses your grace. -

### Filippo de Pisis (1896-1956)

If it is true that there were those who did not like de Chirico in Rome, the same may be said of the artist who wished to distance himself from certain figures, with the aim of defending his talent, his personal creativity and privacy. Such was the case regarding his relationship with de Pisis (figs. 27-29), whom he described as a “nuisance”, as revealed in the contents of the following two postcards written in March 1919 (figs. 30-31).



26. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 14 July 1919



27. G. de Chirico, *Portrait of Filippo de Pisis*, 29 October 1917, Tibertelli Collection, Milan

28. Photograph of Giorgio de Chirico and Filippo de Pisis, Ferrara, April 1918

29. Photograph of Filippo de Pisis with his cousin (in the Red Cross uniform) and his sister Ernesta Tibertelli, during the First World War



30. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 25 March 1919



31. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 19 March 1919

Rome 19 March [19 March 1919]

Dearest,

I don't know yet if there are any letters from you, I will go and see now. I hope that your mother is better and that you too, dearest, have recovered your moral calm. -

That nuisance de Pisis seems not to have known that I came to Ferrara; he sent me a book announcing his arrival in Rome on 28 March!

Even in Rome I can't get away from him!

Never mind!

Write to me often. Today I have sent you the magazine "La Vraie Italie"; I forgot to mark the articles but you will easily find them; the ones by my brother have the titles: Terza Italia and Litterature de Guerre.

Kindest regards to you all and particularly to your mother.

I will go and look if any letters have arrived. -

I embrace you so much

always

your Giorgio.

Rome 25 March. - [25 March 1919]

Dearest,

I am very happy that your brother has returned to Ferrara for good; this fits in well with your mother's recovery. So you see, dearest, that everything passes and one mustn't be downcast because of the grey or dark moments in life. -

Excuse me if yesterday I did not write to you; it was that obsessive de Pisis' fault; after breakfast, while I was working in my room, I heard a nasal voice behind the door calling "Giorgio, Giorgio", as in Via Mentana; he did not leave me for a moment; I had to stay away from the office and I will now have him in the way for at least a month.

By now I am certain that I can never be free; wherever I go he will follow me; he already plans to follow me to Paris; the matter is assuming dramatic proportions.

Write to me often. Affectionate regards to Carlo and your parents.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

In the following postcard dated 27 March 1919 (fig. 32), de Chirico wrote to Antonia: "Following the not very enthusiastic reception I gave him, de Pisis has become less irritating [...]". The same postcard, however, contains two other extremely important pieces of news. It appears that the conscripted soldiers, born in 1888 and 1889 respectively, were to be shortly demobilised, and therefore - he wrote - he might return to Ferrara as a civilian in May.

Among other things, it was a pleasure to read the reiterated mentions concerning



32. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 27 March 1919

the artist's friend, Carlo Bolognesi, Antonia's brother and paternal grandfather of he who writes. The multiple references made about Carlo, however, are accompanied by de Chirico's ever-present regards to Maria, Antonia's younger sister, who was clearly a friend of the artist's. De Chirico was evidently on good terms with the entire Bolognesi family. As such, it is possible that Carlo was the one who introduced the artist to Antonia – thus adding another piece to the puzzle to those already in place. Moreover, as previously mentioned, de Chirico lived either in Via Mentana (where the Bolognesi family resided), or not far from there (see the map on p. 211) for almost his entire stay in Ferrara.

Rome 27 March [27 March 1919]

Dearest,

Today I sent you a magazine in which there is an article of mine; since there is no way of knowing how many postage stamps are required on printed material now, tell me if you have had to pay any surtax for this and for the other magazines that I sent you. -

Today in the newspaper they announced the imminent discharge of people born in '88 and '89. -

So I hope in May to be able to come to Ferrara as a free citizen. -

Following the not very enthusiastic reception I gave him, de Pisis has become less irritating. -

Tomorrow I will write you a letter ...

How is Carlo getting on at the 27th Deposit?

He must have met all the people I spent 3 years with. -  
 Greet him warmly from me together with your parents and Maria.  
 Write to me often  
 I embrace you so much  
 yours  
 Giorgio

Finally, as reported at the foot of the following letter dated 17 March 1919, de Chirico writes: “de Pisis hasn’t written to me; evidently this time he is really angry. Do you sometimes see him in Ferrara?”.

### Alfredo Casella (1883-1947)

The aforementioned letter (fig. 33) – the one with the comment about de Pisis - is of further interest for two reasons; firstly, it contains the announcement about the imminent commission regarding the portrait of the composer and pianist, Alfredo Casella, and, secondly, it mentions the immediate future of de Chirico and Bolognesi as a couple in Italy or Paris (citing a relationship with a trusted art dealer).

Rome 17 March. [17 March 1919]

Dearest,  
 I hope that your mother has completely recovered by now. -  
 I always lead the usual life; hotel room and office; I write and paint in my free time; I will carry out the portrait of my musician friend Casella, whom you know; I will also send you two issues of his magazine where there are some pieces written by me and by my brother. -  
 I have not decided yet if I will stay in Italy after my discharge or return to Paris; I have written a letter to my dealer [Paul Guillaume] to know the exact conditions of the contract that he has proposed; my decision will depend on these considerations. - Besides, for us, living in Italy or France is the same; what is required for our happiness is to be united, isn't it, big little girl?  
 Write to me often and say hello to your family from me.  
 I embrace you  
 yours  
 Giorgio

de Pisis hasn't written to me; evidently this time he is really angry. Do you sometimes see him in Ferrara?

Casella (fig. 34) was a man of extraordinary intelligence. In 1896, he was accepted by the Paris Conservatory to study piano, and then, in 1901, to study composition.



33. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 17 March 1919

He met Zola, Gide, Proust, Dauer, Degas, Koechlin, Enescu and Ravel; he also met Debussy with whom he often played piano duets.

He concluded his scholastic studies at the age of 19, after which he dedicated his time to advancing his career as a concert pianist throughout Europe. He won many international competitions. In February 1915, he performed - assuming the role of conductor - his first concert at the Augusteo in Rome, with *Petruška* in front of the composer, Stravinskij. He was awarded the Chair for piano studies at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome. He was co-founder of the *Italian Society of Modern Music*, founding the musical magazine named «Ars nova» in support of it, with contributors including artists and writers such as de Chirico, Savinio, Papini, Carrà and Laloy.



34. G. de Chirico, *Portrait of Alfredo Casella*, 1924, private collection



35. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 24 April 1919

### Max Ascoli (1898-1978)

Besides the personages cited, the artist mentioned two other important figures from Ferrara, in the correspondence of April 1919 (figs. 35-36), namely Max Ascoli and Adamo Boari.

*Rome 24-4-19, [24 April 1919]*

*Dearest*

*I received 2 letters of yours and a postcard from Carlo.*

*I am conformed by the thought that you are tranquil; these stupid and colourless days will also pass. -*

*Write often to me*

*I embrace you*

*yours*

*Giorgio*

*Ascoli (Max) from Ferrara has come to see me.*

*Send me the 5<sup>th</sup> Ration of Rice without a ration card.*

As a university student, Ascoli had declared himself an anti-Fascist. He chose to leave Italy for New York, where he became an important figure in the American academic world. He was committed to helping Italian refugees abroad. Furthermore, he remained at the forefront of the cultural scene late into life, including the founding of the magazine «Report».



36. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 11 April 1919

Rome 11-4-19 [11 April 1919]

Dearest,

Both yesterday and today I have not had anything from you. I hope you are well. -

I will write to you more at length tomorrow.

I met the architect Boari from Ferrara; he is an intelligent person and an admirer of my art.

He is going to buy a painting from me

- Write to me often and greet all your family from me. -

I embrace you

yours

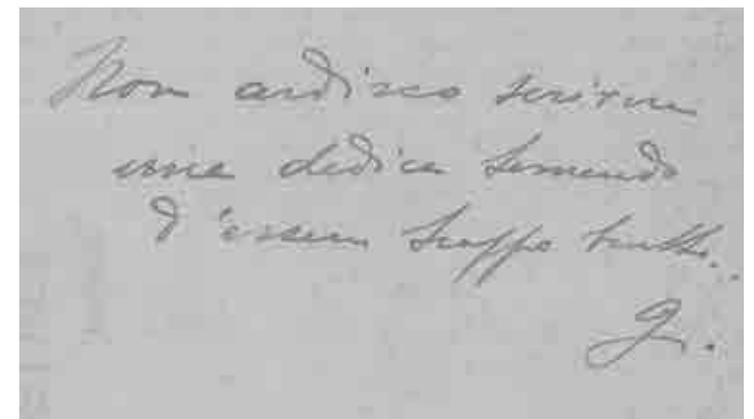
Giorgio.

### Adamo Boari (1863-1928)

Referred to as ‘the Mexican of Ferrara’, Boari graduated from the Faculty of Civil Engineering of Bologna University, where he completed studies that he started at the University of Ferrara. Three years later, together with two friends, he embarked on a ship bound for Brazil. It was from there that he sent over designs and plans for the first Italian Exhibition of Architecture held in Turin in 1890. He worked in Montevideo, Buenos Aires and Chicago. He designed and built one of the wonders of Mexico City, the *Teatro Nacional*, which later became *Palacio de Bellas Artes* (commissioned in 1901), as well as the Post Office building. For the city of Ferrara, he provided plans for the aqueduct water tank and designed the ‘Teatro Nuovo’ (1925-1926). He also took part in the 1927 public competition for building the *United Nations Building*, Geneva. Although he was not awarded the commission, he competed against the best architects in the world, receiving one out of nine honourable mentions made, thus entering the Olympus of architecture.

### Irony and Misunderstandings

Having just illustrated the semi-comic instance contained in the de Pisis episode (letter dated 17 March 1919, fig. 33), it is opportune to add another two, albeit isolated, examples of light-hearted comments made by the artist. The first involves a moment of irony regarding his own appearance: on the back of the photograph of the artist sent with the letter dated 21 July 1919 (fig. 33), he wrote “*I daren't write a dedication fearing I'm too ugly. G.*” Another ironic comment appears at the bottom of a postcard written prior to 22 April 1919 (fig. 38). The comment, which was certainly made to highlight his pleasure in receiving frequent letters from Antonia, did not go down well: “*Don't be lazy about writing to me*”. It was, in fact, misunderstood by her. There is nothing worse than a misinterpreted witticism, especially when combined with forced separation, to create tension and misunderstanding.



37. Photograph of Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, mid-July 1919, with detail of the dedication that appears on the reverse

In an attempt to rectify things between himself and Antonia, de Chirico explained what he had intended and provided a sincere apology. The pithy judgement that de Chirico made about Wilson, President of the United States of America at the time, is also of interest.

Rome Monday [22 April 1919]

Dearest,

Neither yesterday nor today have I received any news from you. - I hope you are well. - I'm suffering a bit with my stomach at the moment so I spent the Easter holidays drinking tea and milk; I am better now. -

I will send you some magazines tomorrow. -

Don't be lazy about writing to me.

greet your family from me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Rome 25-4-19 [25 April 1919]

Dearest,

I am sorry you took umbrage over my little reproach which in effect was perfectly unfair and for which I apologise; but I said it in a friendly and playful tone as I would have said: lazy-bones, etc. I regularly receive your letters and postcards and I thank you.

I am better in my health; it was just passing trouble. -

Nothing new, for what concerns me; but soon I will know something ...

The saddest thing at present is the political situation; that Jesuit Wilson has betrayed us; but the old Italian people, a people of artists and heroes, will know how to put the American dealers in their place. Orlandi gets back from Paris today.

Write to me often and greet your family for me.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio



38. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 22 April 1919



39. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 25 April 1919

**AN EVERLASTING AND ABIDING LOVE:  
THE BEST OF THE DECLARATIONS, SOME  
SERIOUS PROBLEMS AND ANTONIA'S INTITATIVE**

One of the most passionate letters found in this correspondence, dated 9 July 1919 (fig. 40), is fully transcribed in this chapter. It reveals intense feelings and navigates through the relationships that arise from family kinship, confirming the unspoken laws for those approaching matrimony, according to which one takes on the spouse's entire family. De Chirico clearly expresses, among other things, his fear that a family member's interference might negatively affect their feelings for one other. In particular, he says he is even fearful of his friend Carlo, Antonia's brother (fig. 41).

*Rome Wednesday, [9 July 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*I set out from Ferrara on Sunday [6 July] in the afternoon; I would have liked so much to see you again on that festive morning; I saw your father in the morning and your brother at midday; I suffered a lot over being thus separated from you in those few hours that I was still spending in your city. - I set out sad; but now I am full of hope and will, and for this reason I beg you, my dearest Antonia, never to lose the trust that you have had in me until now. -*

*I told you whilst leaving that next Spring we will be united in less than a year's time; you will see that I won't fail to keep my promise; there are first of all various things that make me envision a sorting out in the near future; my brother is in Rome for a few days and he has decided to settle in Milan where his artistic and literary activity finds ample practical application; he has also given me good news for what concerns me, and, besides, the void that his absence creates in the family will be filled by our union. - Therefore I passionately beg you again, my dearest, not to listen to what your parents tell you and especially your brother, who is the most hostile and the one that I fear most. -*

*You will have realised by now that we cannot live without being united and that outside this union it would be useless, for both me and you, to seek happiness. -*

*Now that can I work freely you must trust me more than ever. - And even before the happy day of our union comes I will come to Ferrara again, as I promised you, in Autumn and Winter. -*

*Write to me now and then; think that my love for you is infinite*

*I devotedly kiss your beautiful little hands.*

*yours forever*

*Giorgio*

*Via S. Niccolò Tolentino 22A*



40. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 9 July 1919

My heart skipped a beat when I read the address at the bottom of this letter: I walked up the S. Nicola da Tolentino ascent on my way to the registered office of the *Bonifiche Ferraresi SpA Società Agricola* (Land Reclamation Office) where I had the honour to work as General Manager until 2014. The *Società Bonifiche* was founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, were she still living today, is only slightly older than Antonia herself. De Chirico, instead, had lodgings very near to Via di S. Nicola da Tolentino between July and October 1919 (fig. 42).

Following months of loving harmony between the couple, as described in the previous chapters, it is opportune at this point to relate some tense moments of our story, in order to best contextualise the series of events. The following text was composed after a lull in their correspondence. Since no prior sign of this has been found, its gravity increases in significance: the reader cannot help but notice this, as did Antonia no doubt.

The artist, without doubt, allowed many days to go past before admitting his difficult economic state, discussing possible solutions to the problem and surrendering to the hard reality of his situation. His attitude is one of great honesty but it is also indicative of the depth of this heavy inner struggle, which emerges from the way he analyses the problem in his letter. The date of the wedding is postponed (fig. 43).

*Rome 6-5-19 [6 May 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*Excuse me first of all if I have been writing irregularly and briefly for some time now; this entirely depends on my psychological state that was very bad for various reasons. - The solutions that I had hoped for have not materialised. - The answers that I has been waiting for from*

my Paris dealer are not as I would have liked; he doesn't want to commit himself to a contract so far away after our dealings have been interrupted for four years; I can perhaps arrange something but in order to do this it would be necessary for me to go to Paris and I don't know when I can go there. - So I lose hope of being able to unite you to my fate by next Autumn as I passionately desired and desire. - The situation will be clarified by circumstances and by my will but I can by no means set a date; to say for example next autumn or next Winter etc. You write that you greatly desire to see me again; equally great is this desire in me and I promised you I'd come at the end of this month.

But it is here that a problem arises for me which is moral, so to speak, not for you, as you know me well enough not to have any doubts on my behalf, but for your parents whose hospitality would be too painful for me to accept under such conditions. -

Here is the full truth that I have chosen to tell you. -

I am always the same. My feelings remain unchanged just as my wish for the sweet plans for a common life that we have made together remains unchanged. -

If you absolutely want me to come to Ferrara, I will come, for a few days like the other time. -

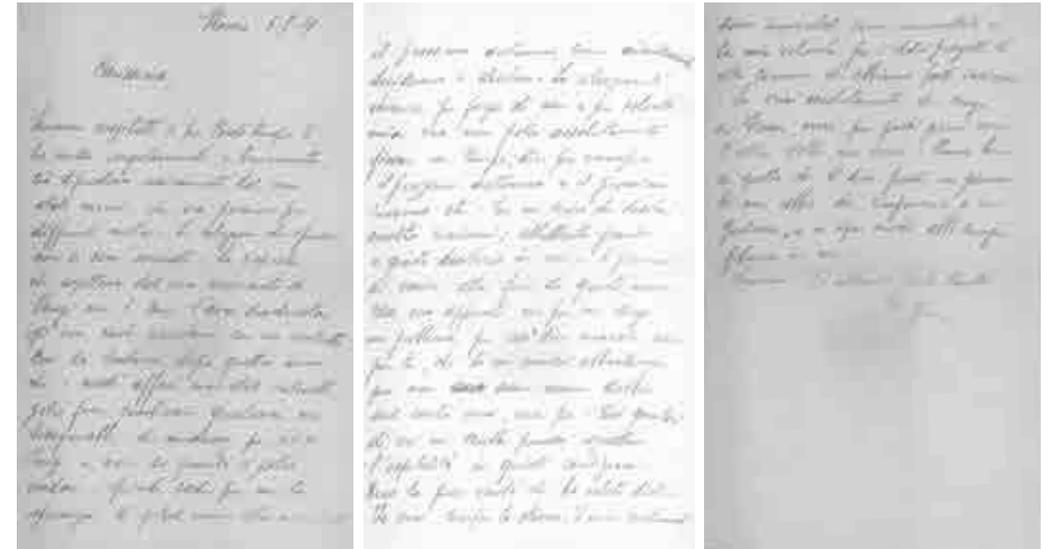
Think carefully about what I say to you so one day you won't have to reproach me for anything; and in any case always trust me. -

Write to me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio



41. Photograph of Carlo Bolognesi, Antonia's brother, first half of the 1940s



42. Photograph of Via S. Nicola da Tolentino 22, in its present state



43. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 6 May 1919

44. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 18 August 1919

In a later note (fig. 44) dated August 1919, de Chirico refers to his mother's awareness of her son's amorous relationship, as can be gathered from the intensity of his almost daily correspondence with Antonia. In fact, the artist was to write: "My mother has made no comments about your letters so far." In the complete transcription of the letter that follows, the reader can, amongst other things, accompany Antonia on her way to the office along Via Giovecca, entering Castello Estense via the bridge that looks out towards the city walls at the end of the beautiful Corso Ercole d'Este, experiencing the same sentimental attachment to Ferrara that de Chirico felt.

Rome – Monday [18 August 1919]

Dearest,

I received your dear letter, which as always, gave me much pleasure. - I also received the Rice[rations] but your postcard has not arrived. - You cannot imagine, my dear Antonia, how happy I am to see your tranquil and serene affection that corresponds to what I had always desired to find. -

As I already wrote to you, I continue to work a lot. In the past few days it has been very hot. - I think about you when I am out and about in the afternoon hours; I think about you walking along Via Giovecca, and then past the castle; but perhaps you take another itinerary now. My mother so far has made no comments on your letters. - Have great trust in me always; I kiss your beautiful little hands and will always be yours

Giorgio

There is no doubt that the letter, which revealed the artist's economic difficulties, clearly alarmed Antonia. As shall be seen, she seized de Chirico's moment of difficulty before any unexpected developments could shake the boat and lead them into perilous waters: by taking countermeasures she tried to 'stop the leak'.

Spurred on, therefore, by rising tensions, in a context of scarce co-ordination between the love letters, a 'desperate letter' began to take shape. Fortunately, we possess a rough copy of it. It was a daring and extremely hazardous act on Antonia's behalf to decide to write unexpectedly and directly to his mother, without first discussing it with de Chirico. He made no bones about revealing his disapproval.

Antonia took a great risk in her attempt to salvage the relationship, which, at that moment, could have been jeopardised by such a real difficulty. But it would have been too much of a temptation to try and transform, with a single stroke, the present greyness into a triumphal rainbow.

It should be noted that the artist had also previously written directly to Giuseppe Bolognesi, Antonia's father, with the same aim as that of his fiancée's. According to de Chirico, he received a rather satisfactory and encouraging reply, even if, one notes, he did not later expand on the subject to his betrothed (fig. 45).



45. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 9 May 1919

Rome 9-5-19 [9 May 1919]

Dearest,

I have received your letter and that of your father. - I am very touched by their content, which is so loyal and sincere. -

Now for me there is only one thing that counts: the demobilisation of my class, all the rest will be a consequence of what goes on first. - I will come to Ferrara this month, I don't know precisely when, perhaps in a few days time. I have an intense desire to see you; perhaps more than you; although I don't show it that much in my correspondence.

I have heard they have suppressed the troop trains; so I can travel a bit more comfortably. The idea of having to travel in a cattle wagon frightens me. -

Write to me. I embrace you

yours

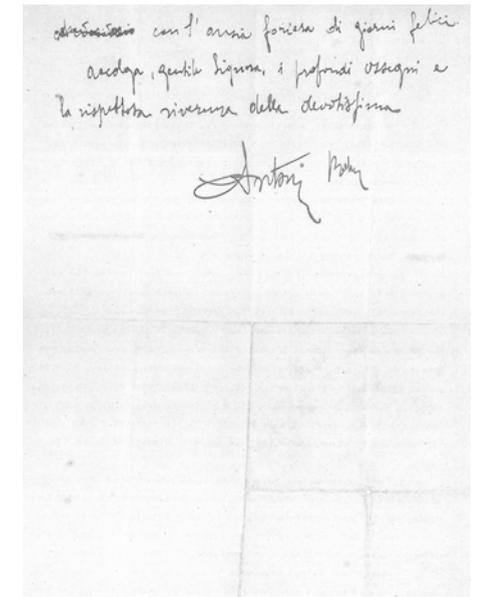
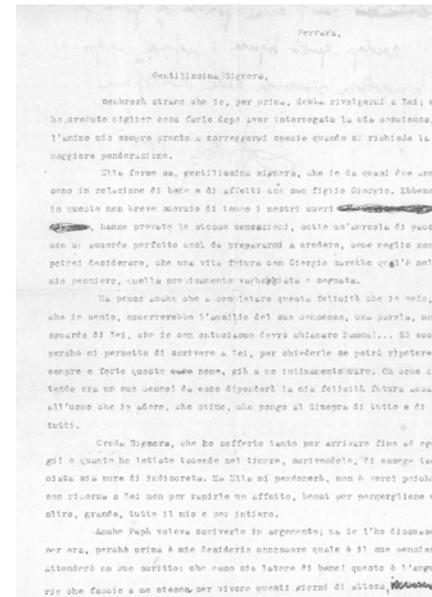
Giorgio

Let us return to the topic of Antonia's initiative. Who knows how many doubts she must have had before taking this step, which probably would not have received the support of either her brother, de Chirico's friend, or her father: they clearly formed a united front in their opinion that such a marriage was out of the question for the moment. And yet, Antonia's letter was, in theory, full of good intentions.

While Alberto Savinio was branching out on his own as a writer both in Italy and abroad, de Chirico still seemed rather close to his mother, who, as long as she could, remained very much present in her sons' lives. It was, therefore, courageous, but not out of place, for Antonia to try to directly board the family wagon rather than tarnish the relationship between son and mother, with the latter being opposed to their relationship, just like her own parents, fig. 47).

In addition, this insight was inspired by the episode that de Chirico had already experienced: whichever way it was to go, Antonia's action would follow a previously tread course that did not produce undesired effects for the sweetheart's 'counterpart'. Her mistake, however, was that she underestimated society's view regarding the equality of the sexes. As shall be illustrated, the mutual treatment of the two similar epistolary episodes – with him writing to her father and her writing to his mother – was absolutely unthinkable.

Here follows a transcription of the rough draft, which was almost entirely type-written by Antonia, an employee of the regional offices located in Castello Estense (fig. 48). It is full of intrinsic beauty, just like the person who wrote it.



48. Letter from A. Bognesi to Gemma de Chirico, the artist's mother, early September 1919



46. Photograph of Antonia Bognesi in a swimsuit (detail), second half of the 1910s

47. G. de Chirico, *Portrait of artist's mother*, 1911, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (donated by Isabella Far de Chirico, 1989)

Ferrara, [early September 1919]

Dearest Madam,

*it will seem strange that I first address you; but I thought it was the best thing to do after questioning my conscience, my soul, [which is] always ready to support me especially when the greatest ponderation is required.*

*You perhaps know, most kind lady, that for almost two years I have been in a close and affectionate relationship with your son Giorgio. Well, during this not brief period our hearts have felt the same feelings, in an aura of peace, with perfect accord so that I can prepare to believe, and I could desire nothing better, than a future life with Giorgio, as that which I have contemplated with pleasure and dreamt of.*

*But I also think that in order to complete this happiness that I see, that I feel, the aid of your consent would be required, a word, a sign from you, whom I enthusiastically will have to call Mother! ... And that is the reason why I take the liberty of writing to you, to ask you if I will be able to repeat always and aloud this name, already intimately dear to me. Oh how I now await a sign from you! On it my future happiness will depend alongside the man that I adore, that I value, that I set above everything and everybody.*

*Believe me Madam, that I have suffered a great deal to arrive at this today! and how much I have fought keeping silent out of the fear of being accused of being indiscreet in writing. But you will forgive me, will you not? I have turned to you not to rob you of an affection, but on the contrary to offer you another one, a great one, mine and wholly so.*

*My father too wanted to write to you about this subject; but I dissuaded him, for now, because first it is my desire to know what you think. I will await your answer: I hope that it brings about something good! This is the wish that I express to face these days of waiting,*

*Anxious of happy days to come, please accept, dear Madam, my deep regards and the respectful reverence of the most devoted*

Antonia Bognesi

The historical importance of the following sentence should be considered: “*You perhaps know, most kind lady, that for almost two years I have been in a close and affectionate relationship with your son Giorgio.*” Dated a few days prior to de Chirico’s piqued reply (which is clearly dated 8 September 1919), this letter contains confirmation that their love story began in the late summer or early autumn of 1917. It is very likely that the two met shortly after de Chirico had been admitted to *Villa del Seminario*, a military hospital (known today as *Città del ragazzo - The Don Calabria Institute*). This hospital was used for soldiers who suffered from nervous disorders due to the war. The artist stayed there from early April until mid-August 1917. Perhaps their first meeting, an event that has yet to be disclosed, took place during one of the many occasions (even in the daytime) when de Chirico visited his friend the physicist, Bongiovanni, at the astronomical observatory situated at the top of Castello Estense’s north-western tower. This is a fascinating hypothesis as Ferrara is unique in allowing ordinary citizens into the castle grounds.

Below follows a transcription of the letter by de Chirico, which contains his almost furious reaction after having learnt about Antonia’s initiative (fig. 49).

8/9/19 Rome Monday [8 September 1919]

Dear Antonia,

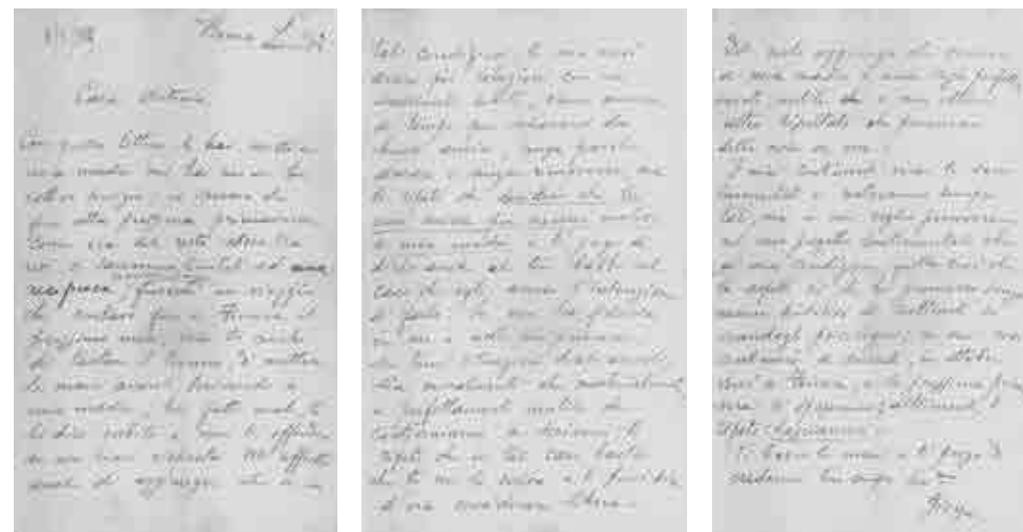
*With that letter you wrote to my mother you have done me a very bad service; I hoped that until next Spring, as after all was agreed between us, we would limit ourselves to reciprocal correspondence, except a journey that I hoped to make to Ferrara next month; you now try to test the ground, to be on the safe side by writing to my mother; you have made a mistake, I will tell you immediately and do not be offended if you don't receive an answer. I also hasten to add that if in such conditions you don't want to have any more to do with me, write to me at once to tell me; we are still in time to part as good friends, without bitter words and without reproaches, but I repeat to you that I desire you not to write to my mother for any reason and I beg you to also tell your father in case he intends to do so. If you don't trust me and my promises, if you fear unpleasant situations, both morally and materially, it is perfectly useless for us to continue writing to one another; I repeat that in this case it is sufficient for you to write this to me and you can at once consider yourself free. -*

*I also add that writing to my mother is perfectly useless and that you will obtain no other result than that of causing me trouble. -*

*My feelings toward you are unchanged and they will always remain so; but I only want to persevere in my sentimental plan on one condition: that is to say that you will await what I have promised without any attempt to venture into psychological sounding; if you wish I will go on writing to you; in October I will come to Ferrara, and next Spring we will get married; otherwise I repeat: let us leave each other. -*

*I kiss your hands and I beg you to always believe me your most devoted*

*Giorgio. -*



49. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 8 September 1919

We can just imagine how the entire scene of these last letters bore the warning signs in Antonia’s palatable and tactful attempt to infuse the relationship with renewed vigour. It might have been pure coincidence, but it cannot escape our attention that a photograph enclosed in an earlier letter written by Antonia caused a hint of jealousy in the artist (as de Chirico informs us in his reply of 23 May 1919). In fact, in the postcard’s post scriptum, the artist light-heartedly enquired after the young man reflected in the mirror where the photograph was taken. A touch of mischievousness might lead us to believe that, at a time when great attention was paid to photograph set-ups, the background presence of a young man may have been ‘specifically requested’ by Antonia.

## HOW LONG DID OUR RELATIONSHIP LAST? (AND OTHER DIFFICULT MOMENTS)

The story of requited love between our protagonists began to take shape in late Summer - early Autumn 1917, as stated by Antonia in her unfortunate letter to Mrs de Chirico. The artist himself, in a letter dated 27 August 1919, confirmed that the engagement lasted almost two years. He came to Ferrara in 1915 and left the city on 31 December 1918, so that he was in Rome on 1 January 1919, where the first letters were written from. In the surviving correspondence, his last letter to Antonia is dated 23 December 1919, the transcription of which appears further on.

Before getting to grips with this vital issue, it is useful to read some of the more interesting dated letters, whose consistently delicate expression and numerous references to everyday life I wish to highlight. As always, they contained exchanges of information that appeared in magazines, details regarding the consignment of paintings for exhibitions, as well as personal greetings and news concerning relatives. Furthermore, they contain news about journeys from Rome (where de Chirico resided owing to military commitments until June or July 1919) to Milan, Florence, Bologna and Arezzo, not to mention visits to Ferrara ... next month, in the early Spring... the wedding (figs. 50-51). Even if we already know the scheme of things, the very interesting details about the two protagonists' daily life deserve further attention. Moments of difficulty alternate with expressions of serenity and optimism.

One observation that is probably shared by the reader is the letters' complete lack of suggestion about the possibility of Antonia visiting Rome rather than them meeting up in a supposed mid-way city. Perhaps, at that time, this was considered too daring an act for a man and woman who came from good families? That a young woman might undertake such a long journey unaccompanied and then stay in a guesthouse alone was inconceivable, even more so given the fact that they were still living in times of war. Moreover, the weighty presence of the artist's mother, who practically lived with him, would have created difficulty for the couple.

Even if accompanied by a complaisant relative or friend, the idea of her visiting him in Rome would simply not have entered their minds. Theirs was an intense and serious relationship seen as inevitably destined to culminate in marriage, but one that never considered any infringement of protocol. Armed with this understanding of our protagonists, we can further appreciate other letters and postcards (figs. 52-54).



50. Picture postcard of Bologna from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 6 July 1919

51. Picture postcard of Arezzo from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 7 July 1919

*Rome Tuesday [7 January 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*Nothing new. I am very sorry not to have had a letter from you yet; however, this doesn't worry me as the mail is a big mess ...*

*The crate with the paintings and drawings I sent from Ferrara hasn't arrived yet. - I am confident about everything that concerns us, and I hope that you too preserve this trust intact. Do me a favour: pass by Taddei's and see if in his window*

*there is the magazine Ars Nova and my brother's book and let me know. I lead the same life waiting for liberating demobilisation. Tomorrow I will write you a letter.*

*I embrace you, yours Giorgio*

*Rome Friday [10 January 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*Today I finally received a letter from you dated 7 January. However, I have not received the postcard and the other letter that you said you wrote me.*

*Tomorrow I will send you some magazines and newspapers; an exhibition of mine will perhaps open on the 25<sup>th</sup> of this month.*

*I don't think the demobilisation up to 91 is close off. If only what you wrote to me was true.*

*I hope you will soon receive news of Carlo.*

*Say hello to your parents and Maria for me, and trust me...*

*Write to me often. I will also write to you tomorrow.*

*I embrace you, yours*

*Giorgio*

Rome 17 January [17 January 1919]

Dearest,

I have moved to a different office so please now send my letters to the following address: War Ministry - Auditing Office - Corso Italia 88. - This way I will get them sooner as I only see the post once a day at the hotel and then there is such a mess due to the great number of travellers and a lot of letters get lost.

Now that the refugees are starting to go away a bit, we hope to find furnished lodgings.

My exhibition has been delayed by 15 days as the hall is not ready yet.

Write to me as soon as you can

I embrace you

yours Giorgio

The reader will have undoubtedly noticed that much of the correspondence is pervaded by a sense of apprehension over the health of the interlocutor or some relative. In one long letter dated 18 March 1919 (fig. 55), de Chirico describes an important nightmare.

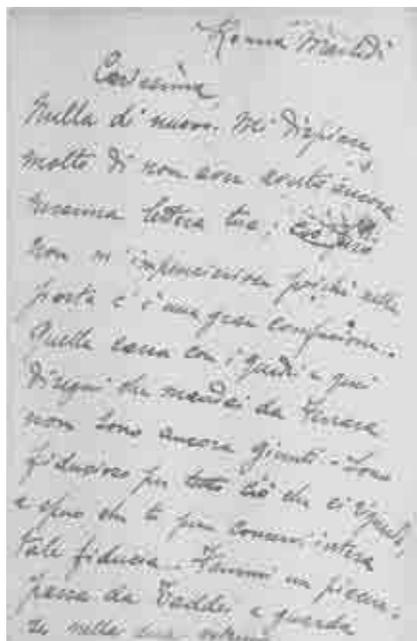
Rome 18 March 19 [18 March 1919]

Dearest,

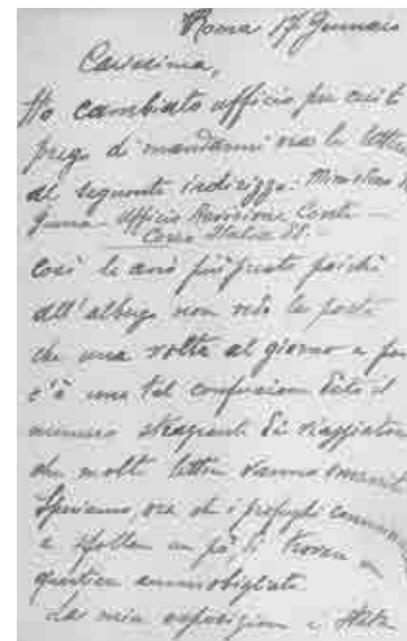
I received your dear letter of 14 March; you seem very sad, poor big little girl. Don't be dismayed over this period of sadness that you are going through, indeed we are both going through, since I too, my beautiful angel, am sad and will be sad as long as I have to live away from you. But these days will pass, I have certain faith of it, and as a reward, happy days of calm and deep and pure love will come; and destiny, which is limitless, will not want to deny



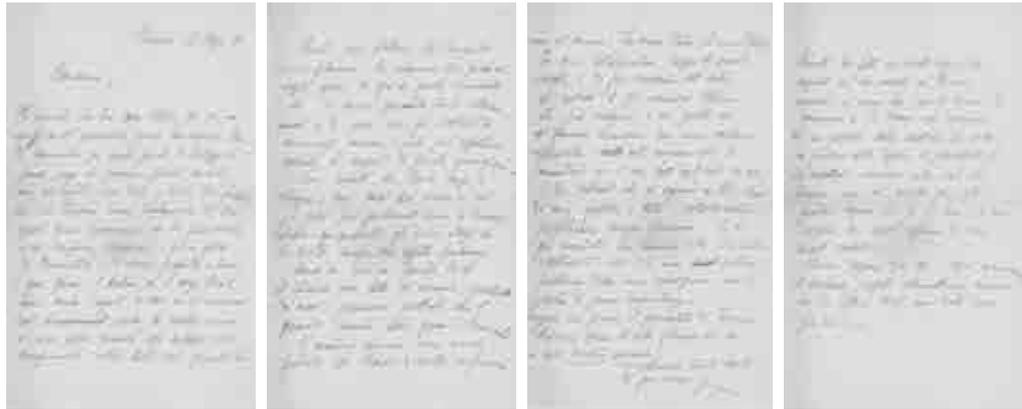
53. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 10 January 1919



52. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 7 January 1919



54. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 17 January 1919



55. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 18 March 1919

us those days as we love each other so sincerely, since our union is a necessity fatal to development and vital achievement for you as for me.  
 So, dear Antonia, be calm and live confidently; your mother will recover; I want to hope that as I write thinking so intensely about you, that she is already better; convey to her once again my most affectionate regards and wishes for a speedy recovery. -  
 I am happy that Carlo is coming to Venice; so he will be closer to you and will be able to come and see you more easily. Send him my greetings whenever you write to him and tell him that I always remember him with brotherly affection. -  
 I too am going through a sad and undecided period; but all will be clarified; it is a matter of months; let us think, rather, that the great nightmare of the war is over.  
 Tomorrow I will send you a magazine founded by Papini and written in French it is called "La Vrai Italie" [The Real Italy].  
 I collaborate with this magazine, the purpose of which is to make known the best Italian artists and men and not those that get themselves known with brazen-faced publicity; there is a fine article about me in the issue I will send you; the two articles that I will mark in blue are by my brother; all the collaborators publish without signing. I have already sent you an issue of "Cronache d'Attualità" where there is a late critique of my exhibition; but it is something of little importance. -  
 I will read the little Ferrara paper with pleasure.  
 Write to me often and trust me and our future.  
 I embrace you  
 yours forever  
 Giorgio  
 Last night I had a very bad dream; I dreamt that I had gone to Ferrara and went to your house and didn't find you; your mother and Maria told me you had gone away in the morning to take piano lessons; and I waited anxiously in the dining room, where I remember seeing the pendulum striking 10 in the evening, and I woke up with that worry of not having seen you...  
 They are right to say that dreams announce the contrary; indeed this morning I received a sad letter from you but one so dear to me!...

In the three years from 1918 to 1920, a terrible flu epidemic - the 'Spanish flu' - swept across Europe taking a considerable number of victims in its wake. De Chirico referred to this pandemic on many occasions. Some instances remind us of just how the wartime uncertainty also had to contend with this latest environmental difficulty (figs. 56-57). The artist writes:

Rome 20 March [20 March 1919]

Dearest,

I received your dear letter and I am very pleased to know that your mother is better and is now up and about; I am only worried by what you tell me about the influenza that has reappeared in Ferrara. Be careful and cover yourself up well; do not trust the initial warm weather; public health is good here for the time being. -

As I already wrote to you, I lead the same life as always. -

I count the passing days.

You will see that they will pass quickly. -

Say hello to everyone and best wishes to your mother.

Write to me often.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Rome 22 March [22 March 1919]

Dearest,

this morning I received the pretty winter postcard. I am now tranquil and very pleased that your mother is quickly getting better. -

Send her my most affectionate regards and wishes and write to me often.

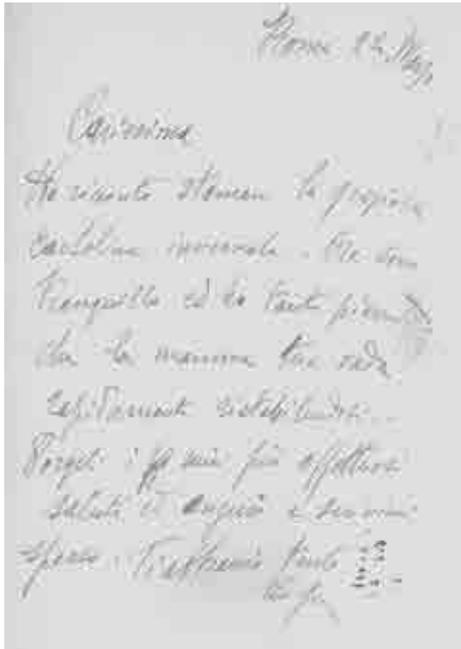
I embrace you

yours Giorgio

I lead a monastic life; I get back from the office at 6 o'clock and only go out at 9 o'clock in the



56. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 20 March 1919



57. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 22 March 1919



morning. When you don't feel like writing a letter, send me a postcard, two words are enough provided that I have something every day.

Rome 28-3-19 [28 March 1919]

Dearest,

I wrote to you telling you to send me a postcard every day but I now think that perhaps I exaggerated. I was afraid at that time that you would get sick. -

You can write to me just three times a week, if you want; provided you know that I will be calm. -

Greet your family for me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

I received the picture postcard.

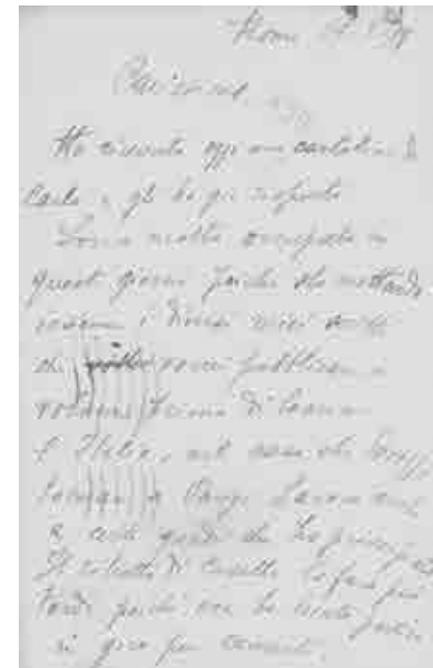
Similarly to the other two postcards that date to early April, de Chirico enjoys some moments of tranquillity as seen in the postcard written the following day (figs. 59-61). He recounts to Antonia:

Rome 29-3-18 [29 March 1919]

I received a postcard from Carlo today and have already answered him.



58. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 28 March 1919



59. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 29 March 1919

Apr 1 April 19  
 Carissimo  
 Ho ricevuto la tua lettera di  
 Firenze senza averla letta  
 con il solito ritardo. Ma  
 per il passato apprenderò  
 ogni giorno.  
 Sono lieto di sapere che  
 hai fatto un viaggio a  
 Firenze per un momento  
 non è lontano. Ti farei  
 piacere con grande compiacimento  
 di vederti.  
 Ti abbraccio  
 Giorgio



60. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 1 April 1919

*I am very busy at the moment since I am putting together the different pieces I've written that I would like to publish in a volume before leaving Italy, in case I have to return to Paris. I'm also working on a few paintings I have begun.*

*I'll do Casella's portrait later since he had to go away for concerts.*

*Spring is very beautiful in Rome. A sky of marvellous purity. We'll meet again in a month's time; I impatiently await that happy day. -*

*Say hello to your family*

*Write to me often*

*I embrace you*

*yours*

*Giorgio*

*Rome 1 April 19 [1 April 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*Sorry to have gone two days without writing to you. This won't happen again; from now on I will regularly write to you every day.*

*I receive your pretty postcards.*

*We are now in April; the day of our meeting is not far off. You can imagine how impatiently I await it.*

*Write to me often and say hello to all your family. -*

*Has Spring arrived in Ferrara too?*

*I embrace you*

*yours*

*Giorgio*

*Rome 3-4-19 [3 April 1919]*

*Dearest,*

*Thirty days will pass quickly. - Write to me often and do not give yourself up to sad thoughts.*

*Greet your family from me.*

*I embrace you*

*yours nunc et semper*

*Giorgio*

At times, these peaceful moments were, however, accompanied by apprehensive thoughts. It is due to this very context of surrounding difficulties that the physiological uncertainty of life causes the best of intentions to vacillate. The lack of economic security was another issue previously touched upon. In fact, the letter dated 2 April 1919 (fig. 62), which is decidedly clear in its frankness, did not create any particular problems for the couple at the time. It is opportune here to consider the significance of the sentence: "[...] *the war has seriously damaged my career just as it damaged my mother's interests*". De Chirico writes:



61. Picture postcard of Rome's Temple of Vesta from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 3 April 1919

Rome 2 April [2 April 1919]

Dearest,

I received your letter of 30 March today; I was very sad about that sentence that you wrote.

Why do you give in to this pessimism? Please be more sincere with me and tell me the reason for these presentiments of yours and the mistrust that you feel; I hope that you never doubt me since this would be the greatest pain you could give me.

Therefore, dear big little girl, have no more melancholy thoughts and live tranquilly and confidently. As I already promised and as I wrote to you back in May, we will meet again and at the end of this year I hope to be able to be united to you forever. - And you, on your side be prepared for this event both psychologically and materially; I will try to explain more clearly, big little girl; this is what I mean: you know that I am not rich, but perhaps you believe me less poor than I really am; the war has seriously damaged my career just as it damaged my mother's interests; my mother and I live very economically because we are forced to; I'm certain that with time I will get back on the right track but you too can understand that these are not things that can be done in just a couple of months so it is likely that the day when I return to Ferrara for our union (next Autumn), the state of my finances will be more or less as they are now; I have not had any answer yet from Paris; as I told you and always promised you, I place every dream of happiness of mine in you alone; but you on your side consult your heart well, after this confession of a practical nature that I have made to you; think about this carefully. I repeat this sentence, one everybody says, and then answer me frankly and faithfully what your heart dictates to you and if it says yes to you then, as I told you at the start of this letter, be prepared to live with me; but therefore get used to some sacrifices; I know that you love elegance a lot (I do too), but you also know how expensive this is for a woman, especially these days. - It is hard and unpleasant for me to have to tell you all of this, but I cannot help it, so, dear Antonia, I await [to receive] an answer from you and I repeat again that you must be sincere and hide nothing from me. - If, after everything I have said to you, your feelings and your intentions remain unchanged, then follow my advice and wait confidently for me since I will never betray my promise. - If you consider it necessary to also talk to your relatives and your brother about it, please do; but they will only manage to dissuade you.

Then it will depend on your feelings whether or not to live with me. -

- Greet your family for me and if you love me, never be sad since you can trust me entirely.

I embrace you

yours forever

Giorgio



62. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 2 April 1919

During the month of April, de Chirico writes once more (figs. 63-64):

Rome 7-4-19 [7 April 1919]

Dearest,

I received your dear letter that was very consoling; I in turn beg you to forgive me for my moment of pessimism;

I feel hope reviving within me; besides, you also said to me in Ferrara: where there's a will there's a way; and then I believe that there is fate in this meeting of ours and that nothing can hinder our plans. -

Time goes by, for me not fast enough. -

I work a lot at the moment as I would like to exhibit once more in Rome before leaving. -

Thank you again for everything that you say to me which for me is the sweetest consolation that I can have. -

Live in trust and write often to me

I embrace you

yours forever

Giorgio

Rome 21 April [21 April 1919]

Dearest,

Excuse me if I have taken so long to write you a letter. I am so busy all day long with this exhibition of mine that I don't have a spare minute to write. - Don't bear me a grudge for this.

I think of you all the time, remember that my love will be eternal and unchangeable.

Next Sunday [27 April] I will be in Ferrara. -

I kiss your hands.

yours

Giorgio de Chirico

Some of the letters that the artist sent to Antonia contain some signs of tension. The following letter of 17 June 1919 (fig. 65), seems to reflect the strain of their separation. Certain latent grievances suddenly make their way to the surface in more explicit terms: complaints about the occasional inconstancy in the correspondence, signs of a veiled cooling in their relationship. The claim of one over the other could evidently no longer be avoided. The tone of the correspondence becomes very harsh. The reader can appreciate the man's artistry when, half way through the letter, the moment had arrived to move towards a more reconciliatory tone: he writes "*Concerning sentimental matters [...]*" as if by affecting an air of nonchalance he could make up for the harshness of his previous words. The usual polite gentleness appears at the end: "*I kiss your dear and beautiful hands. Ever yours Giorgio.*"

Rome 17-6-19 [17 June 1919]

Dearest,

I received the two brief letters, curt and imperious. -

You could have avoided sending the second one as a registered letter and addressing it to the hotel. First of all I am not at the hotel anymore; I am still doing military service and when

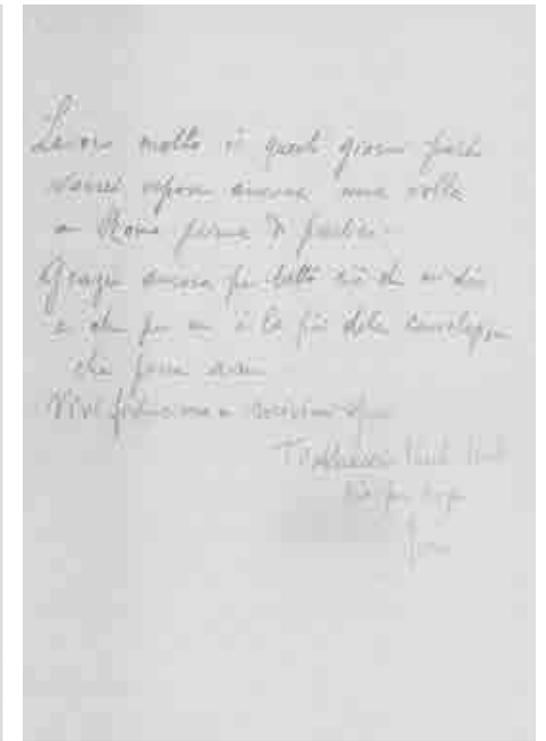
you want to write to me please always use the usual address. -  
 You speak of a cooling and about the way of proceeding. - Allow me to point out that both the first phenomenon and the second action are something I could also reproach you for; the fact is that you slowed down the correspondence and also reduced it to the dispatch of the two letters mentioned; I have always answered your letters and postcards.  
 I don't understand what you mean by written justification with your family; I don't have to justify myself to anybody; I don't owe anything to anybody and I am free in my actions; so it is useless for you to assume that tone of laconic severity. I have never claimed to be very kind; the opinion that others may have of me doesn't worry me, nor does it interest me. -  
 And now enough of these unpleasant things. -  
 Concerning sentimental matters I will tell you (though it may seem strange to you) that my feelings towards you are unchanged. But I don't believe that you can say the same. - Your letters have revealed your true psyche; so if you absolutely want to return my word, as you say, I will accept this restitution; although you are for me (sentimentally) what you were before, I am not a slave to my feelings. -  
 Perhaps I'm wrong; I want to hope so. -  
 I have had quite a lot of things to worry about over the last few days.  
 It's very hot and I feel very tired.  
 If you are sad on my account you need not be anymore; but I believe that you are more galled than sad.  
 I kiss your dear and beautiful hands.  
 Ever yours  
 Giorgio.

In the following postcard (written over a month prior to the one cited above), de Chirico also conveyed some uncertainty regarding their relationship, which was probably due to the prolonged separation from his beloved. Various letters are, in fact, written in such a vein, the tone of which, like the aforementioned one, is somewhat heated. The postcard was written unusually hurriedly: the calligraphy itself reflects the context (fig. 66).

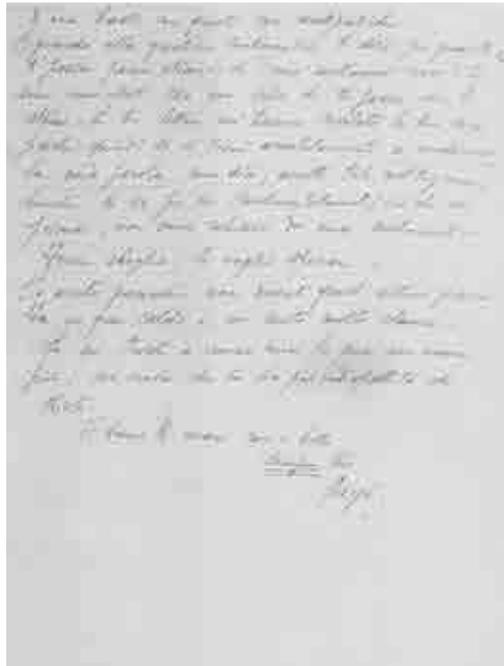
12-5-19 [12 May 1919]  
 Dearest,  
 I have not received any news from you today. -  
 I hope that you are not angry with me or, at any rate, do not have a bad impression of me ...  
 I beg you to believe that what is happening is independent of my will.  
 I will do everything that depends on me. -  
 Write two sentences to me and believe in me  
 yours  
 Giorgio



63. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 7 April 1919



64. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bognesi, 21 April 1919



65. Letter from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 17 June 1919

66. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 12 May 1919

An observation to make: the real possibility of keeping up a dialogue as offered by the postal service (which was much faster than that which we would expect) is testament to the efficacy of pen and paper. Moreover, when written by hand, the correspondence was bestowed with a kind of formality, regardless of the occasion. Proof of this lies in the fact that we rarely find banal remarks or failure to maintain a certain level of formality by either one of the two protagonists in such a large number of letters and postcards (numbering almost 100 overall). Furthermore, the effects of the Great War could not help but confer an additional sense of seriousness and dignity to the lives of those who were directly involved in it.

The following letter (21 November 1919) was written by an acquaintance in reply to an enquiry made by Antonia. The positive development of gentility seemed to be coming to an end. The suspension in correspondence, which replaced the passionate exchange of one another's news, compelled Antonia to make third party enquiries about the artist. In Mrs. Masciarella's letter, she refers to "this Baroness" (in other words, de Chirico's mother), Gemma Cervetto, a woman of aristocratic Genovese origin. This specific reference is significant regarding the fairly reserved bearing of the woman, an aspect that transpires when referenced on various occasions. She recounts to Antonia as follows:

*Dear Antonietta,*

*Rome 21-11-19 [21 November 1919]*

*Only yesterday did I have an answer from my cousin at the War Ministry. However, he tells me that nothing is known at this Ministry despite all the searches made, therefore I have nothing to add for the moment to what I already wrote to you.*

*My daughter Tina passed by S. Nicola da Tolentino and called in on the concierge with the pretext of looking for furnished rooms and thus learnt that this Baroness did live in a subleased furnished apartment, but that she left the rooms in early November, she didn't know whether it was to leave for Rome or for a simple change of lodgings. Unfortunately she was not a very loquacious concierge and, besides, Tina didn't think it was right to ask questions. The landlady came down at that moment so Tina pretended to ask her about her rooms for relatives who would be arriving, and so she also heard from her about this change and that the rooms were already rented.*

*Besides, you will already know if a change of residence has occurred or otherwise you will know the new address in Rome.*

*If you now believe that a change of house has taken place and the landlady can be asked for some information, you can tell me, but I did not want to make further enquiries without hearing your opinion first.*

*Greet all your family for me and Tina, particularly your mother. Also let me know something via Fiorina, who writes to me all the time.*

*Please accept my regards and my hope that everything will work out only for your good, believe me*

*Affectionately*  
*Maria Chevanton Masciarella*

## EPILOGUE

The merry-go-round of fluctuating emotions continues to offer us moments of high-flown sentiments. The letter written by Giorgio dated 23 December 1919 (see below) is a decisive example. Although we do not possess the rough copy of Antonia's reply to it, this can perhaps be explained by the reply sent by her father, Giuseppe Bolognesi (figs. 67-69). To the best of our knowledge, the following transcription constitutes the last letter that de Chirico sent to Antonia Bolognesi (fig. 70):

*Milan 23-12-19. - [23 December 1919]*

*Dearest Antonia,*

*Perhaps you won't want to hear about me anymore, following my long silence and rightly so. However, I assure you that I have not forgotten you and that I always hope to be able to be united with you one day. - I am spending the Winter in Milan I will go to Florence in the Spring. Before speaking to you of what I am doing, of my projects etc., I would like to know if you still desire to have a relationship with me. Answer me by return of post since I am moving to different lodgings in a few days time. -*

*I kiss your hands and am always yours*

*Giorgio*

In answer to a query posed by the artist, we recall what he, himself, wrote to Antonia in a letter dated 9 July 1919: “*Therefore I passionately pray you again, my dearest, not to listen to what your parents tell you and especially your brother, who is the most hostile and the one that I fear most.*”

Notwithstanding the question personally directed at Antonia in a letter dated 23 December 1919, both de Chirico and Antonia knew that a parental blessing was essential for their dream to come true. Consequently, we are certain that de Chirico wrote to his potential father-in-law for this precise reason. There is no doubt that he wrote at least one such note to him in which he clearly stated his intentions to marry. Whilst no physical trace of this has survived, a rough copy written by her father (found amongst Antonia's collection of letters) undoubtedly constitutes the reply. This copy is dated 24 December 1919 (fig. 71): its finality is sealed by the serious and official tone of its writer. A work of art in formality, it brought a crushing blow to his daughter's suitor.

*24/12/1919 [24 December 1919]*

*Dear Mr. De Chirico,*

*Antonia passed your note on to me.*

*The reasons I gave you of the clear and precise manifestation of our intentions remain unchanged. We are still of the opinion not to create difficulties if you clearly show that you have created a solid base that would allow you to start a family bearing in mind the demands of life today.*

*So I consider your instance inappropriate before having obtained the conditions indicated above.*

*Greeting you respectfully,*

*Bolognesi Giuseppe*



67. Photograph of Giuseppe Bolognesi, Antonia's father, 1930s

68. Photograph of Giuseppe Bolognesi in later life as a Post Office telegrapher

69. Photograph of Ernesta Orlandini (Antonia Bolognesi's mother) in later life



70. Postcard from G. de Chirico to A. Bolognesi, 23 December 1919

71. Rough draft of a letter from A. Bolognesi to G. de Chirico, 24 December 1919

Written on Christmas Eve by Giuseppe Bolognesi, at a time when de Chirico had reiterated his declarations of love for Antonia, his words unquestionably dashed the young man's hopes of marriage. Was the final copy of the letter ever sent? It is a valid question. Even though no explicit reference to such a letter exists in the correspondence, the fact that their relationship came to a halt thereafter appears proof of its delivery.



72. Photograph of Antonia Bolognesi, early 1930s

## THE SEARCH

The letter transcribed in this chapter (probably written in early April 1919) constitutes the first of several letters involving new figures who are neither our two protagonists nor their closest relatives. We now find ourselves in a period that followed the moment when de Chirico and Antonia had distanced themselves from one other and the young Antonia had tried, with touching nostalgia, to reestablish contact.

Having lost all contact with de Chirico, Antonia tried to trace his tracks by other means, namely, through ladies (whose sympathy for her was perhaps mixed with curiosity), as well as offices and hotels where the artist had been. This search, which was conducted over a number of years – and in various states of mind – remained inconclusive as Antonia herself admitted and can also be deduced from the multiple newspaper cuttings about the artist that she collected well into old age. There was a story with a sad ending, at least for Antonia. It was to be thus so. As an author with emotive ties to Antonia, my sympathies lie with her, especially considering the reserve and dignity that characterised her actions. There is little point imagining the story with a different ending, other than the couple's mutually agreed interruption, which might have caused less suffering; but this is not what happened. De Chirico probably did not want to admit, even to his loved one, that he had succumbed to many difficulties. In any case, he decided to cut off contact with no explanations, and disappear.

I do not wish to comment on that which follows. It constitutes documentary evidence of a search conducted by a deluded Antonia – over the years – in an attempt to revive their relationship or receive news from probably the only man that she loved in her life. I understand the reader's curiosity who has followed these events thus far and rightly wants to know how the love story between Antonia and de Chirico ended. The bounds of modesty, on the one hand, and duty, on the other, compel me to illustrate Antonia's post-de Chirico period solely through her epistolary correspondence (remaining close to and respectful of the noble feelings that belonged to a woman who, in my opinion, was exceptional).

*Dear Miss, [probably written in early February 1920]*

*Not receiving any answer to my letter sent to Rome in the month of January, I presume that a usual postal hitch may perhaps have caused it to go amiss; therefore I am writing to you again to give you the little pieces of information we have succeeded in having on Di [sic] Chirico.*

We went to Bragaglia's to have tea and there we had the fortune of meeting acquaintances of my husband's who gave us these precise bits of information.

One has to be a little careful in getting information in order not to arouse suspicion and to provoke questions which one would not know how to answer.

While we were at Bragaglia's De Chirico was there but then he went away immediately and so we just caught a glimpse of him.

The address for the letters and for everything regarding Di [sic] Chirico is: Trinità dei Monti 18. But you can also write to Bragaglia's: Casa d'aste Bragaglia – Via degli Avignonesi – Palazzo Fattori – Rome.

Di [sic] Chirico finds himself immersed in his futurist environment but I repeat that we were not able to ask much so as not to arouse suspicion regarding the origin of our questions. Why do you not make a short journey to Rome?

Two words spoken are better than 10 letters. Don't you think?

Use me and don't stand on ceremony.

I realise that the information that I send you is limited but it is better than nothing.

Not having had my first letter, I am sorry if this one perhaps reaches you too late.

Regards

Angelina Ortolani Ziotti  
Via Margutta 55A, Rome

Her search in tracking down de Chirico (who, in the meantime, had moved to another city), finding out where he was going – perhaps discovering where his affections lay - was carried out with cunning yet charming craftiness that bordered on illegality. Taking advantage of her position as an employee of the Provincial Administration in the office *Patronato Provinciale per Gli Orfani dei Contadini Ferraresi Morti in Guerra* (the office which dealt with war-time orphans from Ferrara) located in Ferrara's Castello Estense, Antonia sent an official enquiry on headed-letter paper (as if it was a work issue) regarding the whereabouts of de Chirico in Milan (fig. 73). She wrote:

No. 128  
SUBJECT

Ferrara, 11/9/1922

Please notify this Office with polite promptness if Mr. Giorgio De Chirico the son of Evaristo and Gemma Cervetto is domiciled there, and if so, inform us of his current address.

Awaiting for your reply, Respectfully yours,

THE SECRETARY

Illustrious Mr.  
Mayor of the Commune of Milan



73. Letter from Antonia Bognesi, *Patronato Provinciale* on behalf of *Gli Orfani dei Contadini Ferraresi Morti in Guerra* to the *Commune di Milano*, 11 September 1922, with reply dated 22 September 1922

A few days later, Antonia received the following reply from the local authorities in Milan:

*Di [sic] Chirico Giorgio has not lived at at Via Lauro 2 for several years  
- It was not possible to find out the new address.  
21/9/22*

THE MUNICIPAL DELEGATE

Using the same technique, she received a similar reply from the local authorities in Florence, which contained further interesting details about de Chirico's new residence in Rome:

*Answer to the letter of 11/9/1922*

*In reply to the letter indicated in the margin, I inform you that it appears from this population register that De Chirico Giorgio son of Evaristo emigrated from this Comune to that of Rome on 24/11/1921.*

FOR THE MAYOR

In an original letter from Alberto Savinio (fig. 74) - which was addressed to one of his acquaintances (we do not know how it ended up in Antonia's possession) - de Chirico's Parisian address was revealed.

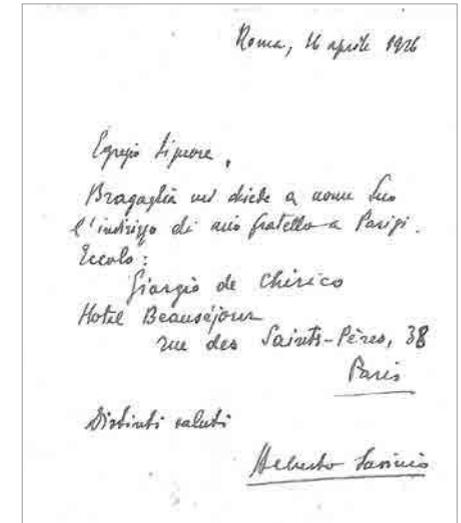
*Dear Sir, [16 April 1923]  
On behalf of yourself, Bragaglia gave me  
my brother's address in Paris.  
Here it is:  
Giorgio de Chirico  
Hotel Beauséjour  
Rue des Saints-Pères  
Paris*

*Yours sincerely  
Alberto Savinio*

The drama of a love story lost forever comes to light in the following letter that is dated as late as 7 December 1922 (fig. 75). It is a moving letter from Antonia to de Chirico, which immortalises the purity of her faithful candour towards the artist. Such an act prompts our respect for this woman.

*Ferrara, 7/12/1922 [7 December 1922]  
Dear Giorgio  
I beg you very much to forgive me if this action may displease you after such a period of silence. It is dictated only by the dear memory that I have preserved and I still preserve of you, and, I can't hide from you, will only abandon me with death. I have followed you everywhere and have always thought of you during all this time, writing several times to different addresses, hoping to know something about you.  
I wrote to Via Lauro 2 in Milan, then to Via dei Pioppi and lately to Florence because I heard you exhibited there. None of this has never received a reply. You probably never got anything at all. It is only now that I have been able to get hold of this address of yours and that of your studio in Via delle Pradelle. On 13 October I sent a return-receipt registered letter to the latter [address], which only today was returned to me, because [the recipient was] unknown.  
And so I am writing to you at the following address because if you can have the present letter you will know once more that I have never forgotten you and neither will I ever forget you. But this period of silence, which has passed between us, has perhaps changed your feelings; and another love has perhaps taken my place in your heart. My God!  
If this has happened, I beg you to have the courage to tell me, so that I can oblige my heart, that was already beentortured enough, to keep silent forever.  
If you believe me worthy of knowing this, I beg you to do so at the following address: Provincial deputation - Castello Estense.  
Believe me always  
yours Antonia  
PS. Do forgive me very much if I send the letter to this address, but what else could I have done?*

The years passed by but Antonia's love for de Chirico remained resolute (figs. 76-78). We now find ourselves in the Jubilee Year of 1950: it appears that Antonia met de Chirico in Rome, most likely by chance (fig. 79).



74. Letter from Alberto Savinio to an unknown acquaintance, 16 April 1923



75. Letter from A. Bolognesi to G. de Chirico, 7 December 1922



By that time, de Chirico's life had undoubtedly undergone great changes from every point of view. She could not help but note that, on that occasion, the artist had been accompanied by a "person". Such a meeting provided Antonia with the opportunity of sending him her best wishes for the Christmas festivities. We do not know if the following was written up properly and sent to him. Perhaps it was sent and returned to the sender, or Antonia might have had second thoughts and chose not to send it. In any case, its date and contents are important:

21-12-1950 [21 December 1950]

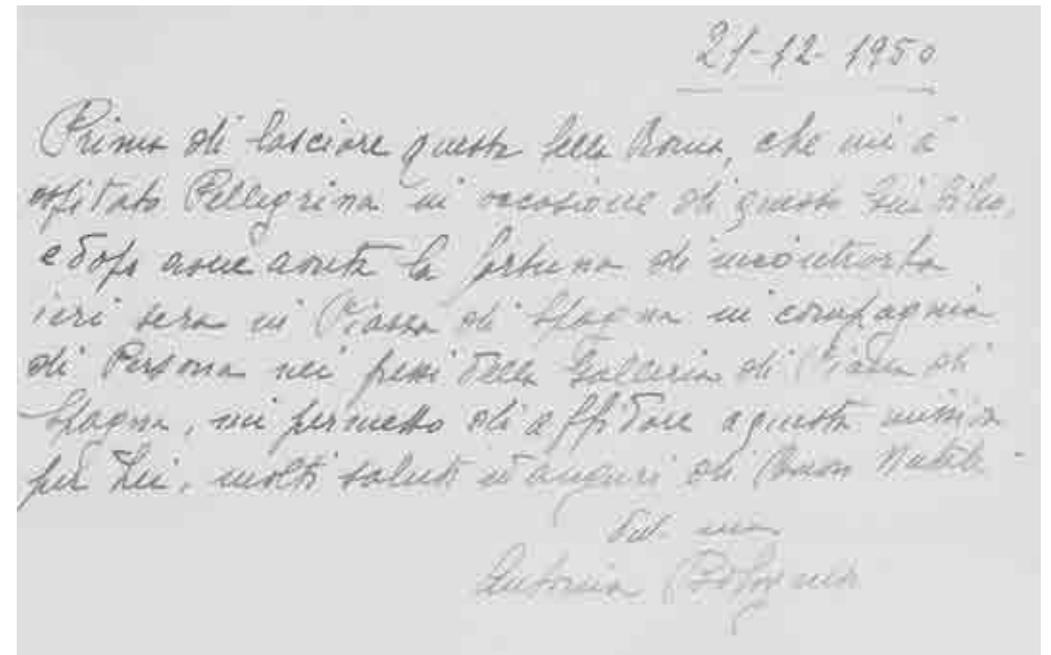
*Before leaving this beautiful Rome, where Pellegrina has had me to stay on occasion of this Jubilee, and after having had the fortune to meet you in Piazza di Spagna yesterday evening together with a person near the gallery in Piazza di Spagna, I take the liberty of sending you many regards and best wishes for a Happy Christmas with this missive most devoted*

*Antonia Bolognesi*



76. Photograph of Antonia Bolognesi with her sister and a friend, 1930s

77. Photograph of Antonia Bolognesi with her nephew and niece, 1940s



78. Photograph of Antonia Bolognesi, 1950s

79. Letter from A. Bolognesi to G. de Chirico, 21 December 1950

## PERSONAL MEMORIES ABOUT ANTONIA

I occasionally go to visit great-aunt Antonia who is buried in the family tomb at Ferrara's *Certosa* cemetery, taking a walk down memory lane (fig. 80). I think it is fairly common for people to treat their past relatives as if they were still present and living. Whether one is a believer or not, we take it for granted, or pretend to believe, that they remain - irrespective of their present state - up to date with all that happens in the here and now. In this way, we can pick up conversations from where we left off. For this reason I feel at ease as I walk among the marble gravestones in Ferrara's cemetery and no less so when I reach Antonia's. I have vivid memories of my great-aunt in her old age, an elegant and dignified unmarried great-aunt, devoted to her relatives. She was especially dedicated to those on the Vallini side of the family, descendants of her sister, Maria Bolognesi and, in our case, to her nieces and nephews in Monza and Genoa, descendants of her brother, Carlo Bolognesi.

At Easter, the Bolognesi's used to go to her house located on Corso Isonzo 14, Ferrara, to eat the traditional maccheroni pie followed by guinea fowl with thin-cut French fries. We breathed in the atmosphere of old family ties there. Much to my amazement, my father, then in his forties, was still very much pampered by his aunt Antonia. I did not realise it at the time, that Giampaolo Bolognesi (my father), was her nephew. He was not the son she had never had, but rather a nephew orphaned at the age of 20.

Antonia's brother, Carlo Bolognesi, (my paternal grandfather), whom de Chirico so feared, together with his wife, Idelme Bagni, were from Ferrara. During his banking career, Carlo, and consequently his family, were transferred to many Italian cities among which Ferrara, Pescara, Ancona, and Aquila. In Lucca, they lived near the railway station which was bombed on the night of 6 January 1944. Unlike their parents, Giampaolo and Massimo were miraculously rescued from the debris; my father was found under a window shutter, which had protected him from the blast. The survivors were taken in by relatives in Ferrara: Massimo Bolognesi entered the Vallini family and for about four years by Antonia herself, my father entered the Bagni family (the maternal branch of the family).

When I want to be alone, I take a walk through the *Certosa* cemetery and I like to look at small photographs of Idelme Bagni and Carlo Bolognesi in the tomb where Antonia was also laid to rest: they were grandparents just over 45 years of age, whom I never knew and elegant in my eyes, even if eternally covered in the debris dust of their house destroyed by a passing plane.

In the photograph reproduced here (fig. 81), sent to Antonia from Corso Isonzo

14, we see her brother and de Chirico's friend, Carlo Bolognesi, together with his wife, Idelme Bagni. It was taken in Lucca two years before the tragic bombardment, which put an end to their lives (6 January 1944). One should note that 6 January was also Antonia's birthday, and, as well known within the family, she never celebrated her birthday again after this tragedy.

While having lunch at Antonia's house in more recent times (1966-1970), the meal was interrupted whilst the elder nieces and nephews were given presents of money extracted from a nest egg hidden in the recesses of the grandfather clock. It was on such occasions that my elder brothers, then teenagers, used to tease her a little. By the way my great-aunt Antonia remained wide-eyed in amazement when listening to the exaggerated accounts of our undertakings, I realised what a good and generous woman she was: seemingly a woman belonging to the past century, she was nonetheless actively involved in the present.

In fact, she got on very well with my older brothers, Martino and Tommaso. As a young man, the latter struck up several friendships with some young girls from Ferrara. He was therefore always happy to go to Ferrara, leaving his home in Monza to stay as a guest in Antonia's house. During every visit, they always found time to go to the cinema together to watch the latest Alan Delon film or featuring some other film star about whom Antonia was surprisingly well informed.

As for Martino, today I feel that I can look afresh towards the fact that Antonia indulged his bent for painting in watercolours and oil with such well-chosen presents as paints, palettes and material for sculpting (I am sure the reader can understand why).



80. Antonia Bolognesi's tombstone, Vallini Chapel, Certosa Cemetery, Ferrara



81. Photograph of Carlo and Idelme Bolognesi, early 1940s

## THE DISCOVERY:

### A PERSONAL LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR TO ANTONIA BOLOGNESI

*Dear great-aunt Antonia,*

*I eagerly await the moment when this letter, which I write to you, is returned to me at the address of Corso Isonzo 14, Ferrara. I imagine seeing the postman taking out his pen, crossing out the envelope and sending it back to me with the words "Return to sender", just like your final letters sent to Giorgio de Chirico. I wanted to write to you all the same.*

*I would like you to know that the publication of the correspondence we found (almost 100 years after it was written, 35 years after it was discovered when clearing out your house following your death, and nearly 4 years after I first knew about it), was decided after much thought and consideration of the respect for privacy that such a personal matter deserves. Crucial to this decision was the fact that the impression we gain of you throughout the correspondence is one of a loyal and dignified woman in love.*

*Perhaps Giorgio de Chirico was rather underestimated by our family. Your nephew – my father, Giampaolo – used to tell us what his grandfather Giuseppe, your father, once said in confidence: "Clu' là al fa al pittor e l'è sol bon ad far di quadar" ("He is a painter and all he can do is paint pictures"). In hindsight, this was a seriously misgiven judgement...*

*Among other considerations, it is most surprising that de Chirico never gave you one of his paintings or drawings with a personal dedication to you, unless, of course, we have yet to discover one. No letter contains a postscript or enclosure with even a pencil drawing of a flower, a landscape or something else. We have puzzled over this with our children, Anna and Daniele, who came to the conclusion that perhaps the artist simply had no time for such frivolities as a sketch, even if it was for his loved one. What's more, I often think about a sentence that appears in the letter (which appears at the beginning of this book) dated 13 March 1919: "I will write to you every day until I get on the train again for blessed Ferrara, which, since I met you, seems like the centre of the whole universe to me." In my mind, this places Ferrara well above other cities like Florence, Turin and Paris. In fact, I like to think that it was here, around Castello Estense, that Giorgio de Chirico gave the best of himself mainly because he was in love with you.*

*It is for this very reason that I regret that while your portrait, Alcestis, appeared in reproductions in modern art books throughout the world, nobody knew of its true identity until now.*

*With love and gratitude,  
Eugenio Bolognesi*

## AFTER THE FIRST PUBLICATION

A veil of dust lies over Antonia's gravestone in the *Certosa* cemetery. Much time has passed, but the memory of her as an old lady visiting close relatives just a few houses away from hers to ease her solitude, at least during the weekend, is still very much alive.

Although many years have elapsed since the events that interest us, it is now possible to enhance the Italian publication of *Alcestis* with a further piece of news surrounding the correspondence: the emergence of a new fact. At first, I did not consider it to be that important but now, on second thought, it would appear to crown our story with a touch of tenderness.

The episode that I wish to relate regards a personal experience recounted to me by Massimo Bolognesi - my father's brother, Antonia's nephew. It refers to the time of the exhibition that de Chirico held in Ferrara in 1970. On the day of this episode, Massimo happened to be in Antonia's flat located on Corso Isonzo 14.

Antonia had gone out to buy something. Someone rang the doorbell and my uncle, who was not in his own home and was initially uncertain about answering it, eventually decided to look through the door's eyehole. Not seeing anyone on the landing, he then hurried to the window just in time to see a distinguished elderly gentleman leaving the building's entrance door. He opened the door - perhaps in an attempt to run after him - and found a beautifully wrapped red rose placed elegantly on the doormat.

I recalled this episode immediately after the book presentation of *Alcestis*, held at Bologna's *FierArte* fair, in front of Katherine Robinson (the scientific coordinator of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico's journal «Metaphysical Art») who had asked me to recount any other love stories that I knew of in Antonia's life. In the meantime, we were joined by Victoria Noel-Johnson (the Foundation's curator) and Paolo Picozza (the Foundation's President), who excitedly exclaimed: "*The elderly gentleman of the rose? It must have been him. Not simply because we know that he was definitely in Ferrara at that very time, although this does not prove that he was directly involved in the episode, but because knowing him like I did, I recognise the gentlemanly behaviour in this gesture which was so typical of him; I fully acknowledge that Giorgio de Chirico wanted to honour the lady he had never forgotten, someone who certainly occupied an important, perhaps the most important, place in his affections*".

I leave it up to the reader to form his own opinion about this episode. As far as I am concerned, had I wanted to provide a happy ending to this love story at all costs, I would have published this anecdote in the Italian edition, but I did not. I must, however, confess that after disclosing the complete love story between Giorgio de Chirico and Antonia Bolognesi, I am delighted to now have such an epilogue. Notwithstanding the vicissitudes of life that physically kept them apart, this episode is testament to the true love shared between Antonia and Giorgio, one that resided in the metaphysical dimension of the eternal present.

*Appendix*

**THE DE CHIRICO-BOLOGNESI CORRESPONDENCE<sup>1</sup>**  
Chronologically ordered and edited by Victoria Noel-Johnson

**1. 1 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Hôtel Park, Via Sallustiana, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 2.1.19, Ferrara 3.1.19.**

*Front*

Ferrara 1 January 19<sup>2</sup>

Dearest

I arrived [in Rome] last night after a disastrous journey in a cattle wagon;  
I lost almost all my things. -

Today I will rest. Tomorrow I will write a more explanatory letter to you  
and, as promised, you will receive a letter or a postcard from me every day.

– Say hello to your father, mother and Maria.

I embrace you

yours Giorgio

*Back*

Write to me for the time being at

Hôtel Park

Rome

do not write lance-corporal

**2. 2 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Hôtel Park, Via Sallustiana, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmark: Ferrara 4.1.19.**

*Front*

Rome - 2 January,

Dearest

Forgive me for sending you another postcard; if you only knew the trouble I've had these first few days. I cannot even find the time to eat. The day after tomorrow, Saturday, I will finally take my place at the office, so hope to find some peace and quiet and be able to write letters to you. – For that which concerns my personal affairs, I nourish the most positive

Back

Hôtel Park

Rome

hopes; on Saturday I will send you a magazine in which a work of mine is reproduced with an article of mine; I will also send you an issue of "Tempo" with a very good article by Papini about my brother's book. The weather is spring-like. Wilson arrives tomorrow but none of this interests me. You will understand why... yours G. de Chirico

**3. 3 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Hôtel Park, Via Sallustiana, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 4.1.19, Ferrara 5.1.19.**

Front

Rome 3 January

Dearest,

Today I saw Wilson's arrival and it was an unforgettable spectacle. - The weather's like spring here; I go out walking without a cape. I have not received any letters from you yet; I hope to have something from you today or tomorrow. -

I will write you a letter tomorrow telling you about my new life...

Back

Say hello to your parents

I don't regret coming to Rome as I can take care of my affairs here, which should move events forward and will be a good thing for us.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Write to me

Hôtel Park

**4. 5 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Hôtel Park, Via Sallustiana, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi (presumably sent to Via Mentana 27, Ferrara). The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

Page 1

Rome Sunday

Dearest,

Yesterday morning I finally settled into the new office. I do absolutely nothing; I am in a luxuriously furnished place heated with radiators and my boss is a colonel who addresses me formally and treats me like a colleague. I take advantage of this comfort and freedom to write the articles for the magazine that I collaborate with. I hope to be exempted or demobilised soon but even if this life should continue for a few months I could not complain

Page 2

that much since it is a wholly bourgeois life.

An exhibition of my drawings opens in a few days; there will then be two other [exhibitions] of paintings; I am waiting for the crate with the paintings, which hasn't arrived yet. There is also a big project for a political-artistic magazine to be set up here in Rome that I will collaborate on with a regular salary; it will be a fine thing if no difficulties arise. I will keep you informed about everything. I am impatiently waiting for a letter from you. - I will write to you every day as I promised you and, as a gentleman, I will keep all the other promises I made you.

Write to me

I embrace you

yours Giorgio

Hôtel Park

Via Sallustiana

Rome

Say hello to your parents, your brother and Maria

**5. 7 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 8.1.19, Ferrara 10.1.19.**

Front

Rome Tuesday

Dearest,

Nothing new. I am very sorry not to have received a letter from you yet; however, this doesn't worry me as the mail is a big mess...

The crate with the paintings and drawings I sent from Ferrara hasn't

arrived yet. - I am confident about everything that concerns us, and I hope that you too preserve this trust intact. Do me a favour: pass by Taddei's and see if in his window

Back

there is the magazine Ars Nova and my brother's book and let me know. I lead the same life waiting for liberating demobilisation. I will write you a letter tomorrow.

I embrace you, yours Giorgio

**6. 10 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 10.1.19, Ferrara 12.1.19.**

Front

Rome Friday

Dearest,

Today I finally received a letter from you dated 7 January. However, I have not received the postcard and the other letter that you told me you wrote. I will send you some magazines and newspapers tomorrow; an exhibition of mine will perhaps open on the 25<sup>th</sup> of this month.

I don't think the demobilisation up to 91 is close off. If only what you wrote to me was true. I hope you will soon receive news of Carlo.

Back

Say hello to your parents and Maria for me, and trust me...

Write to me often. I will also write to you tomorrow.

I embrace you, yours

Giorgio

**7. 11 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 11.1.19, Ferrara 13.1.19.**

Page 1

Rome Saturday

Dearest,

I received the other letter and postcard; I am happy to read your pages

- You seem a bit sad to me in the first letter; you seem to reproach me because I don't write to you more often; I do my best to keep my promise to write to you every day; if it ever happens that one day I don't write to you, something very serious has prevented me from doing so. I earnestly beg you, dear Antonia, to trust me, and not to think for even a second that I would go back on what I promised you. The time that we must still spend apart from one another is brief and will soon pass.

Page 2

I continually live with the thought of you Antonia; there is no moment in my life when your dear image is not present. Don't be sad, I don't want that at all. Have complete trust in me (do you not think that after the oath we made to each other that I can commit the infamy of not keeping my promise?). So be calm and serene. Once we are united, nothing will be able to separate us any more; only death could prevent me from uniting myself to you. -

I sent you an issue of "Tempo" today where there is a fine article by Papini about my brother. I also sent you a magazine which contains drawings and written work of mine...

Page 3

Put lance-corporal on your letters so you can post them for 10 cents...

Say hello to your parents and Maria.

Send me news of Carlo

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**8. 12 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 12.1.19, Ferrara 13.1.19.**

Front

Rome 12-1-1919

Dear Antonia,

I hope that you received my letter and the newspapers I sent you. I have written to a soldier at the Deposit to bring some frames I left at the office to your home; do me the favour of telling your mother too, in case they bring them while you are out; they are small frames and there aren't many

of them; you could put them in the wine cellar; I will get them when I return to Ferrara.

*Back*

I am very busy during my free time due to the exhibitions I want to organise...

I will keep you informed about everything ...

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**9. 13 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 13.1.19, Ferrara 15.1.19.**

*Page 1*

Rome Monday

Dearest,

I received no letters from you today.

I lead a monotonous life; outside my occupations. I never go out in the evening; I stay in my mother's room painting, drawing or reading. There is a lot of hustle and bustle in Rome that disturbs me. I have always desired calm and I have always had the misfortune of living in large cities. -

I think continually about you and the thought that you are keeping your promise is sweet and consoling.

*Page 2*

and that our desire is to be together. -

Don't be sad and, as I have already written and will always write, have complete trust in me whilst I am away from you. -

I hope that you have received good news of Carlo. Let me know if his address has changed.

Say hello to your parents and Maria for me.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**10. 14 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 14.1.19, Ferrara 16.1.19.**

*Front*

Rome 14 January

Dearest,

I have not received news from you today. I know there are big delays in the post so I'm not worried. I get very tired, during my free time, going round dealing with the things that concern me. The distances here are enormous and the roads tiring because of the continual hills and descents. However, I have arranged something with an art critic who has rented me a studio that will also serve as a painting gallery. Next Sunday

*Back*

an exhibition of my drawings will open in the studio; this will significantly help me to get known.

I will send you the newspapers that talk about it.

I'm going to a lecture tonight where I will meet a lot of journalists.

However, I miss the sweet quiet of Ferrara...

You know why...

Write to me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**11. 15 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 15.1.19, Ferrara 17.1.19.**

*Page 1*

Rome - Wednesday

Dearest Antonia,

I have not had any news from you again today. There is a real mess up with the letters at this hotel; some get lost every day and you have to keep giving tips to the doorman to get your own post; so in future please address your letters to the following address: Lance-corporal etc... Giacomo Medici Autonomous Unit 5<sup>th</sup> Group-Rome. I will get your letters quicker this way. -

There is nothing new in my life. - I constantly live with the thought of you and eagerly await

Page 2

seeing you again. -  
Write to me often.  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

Say hello to your parents and Maria, also send me news of your brother.-

**12. 16 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmark: Rome 16.1.19.**

Front

Colour reproduction of The Sea Horse Fountain, Villa Borghese, Rome

Back

Rome, Thursday  
Dearest,  
I received your Sunday letter and the picture postcard with the dogs.  
Write to me at the address that I sent you yesterday so that I will get your letters quicker.  
There is nothing new.  
It seems like the discharges are postponed *sine die*. Patience is required.  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**13. 17 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 17.1.19, Ferrara 19.1.19.**

Front

Rome 17 January  
Dearest,  
I have moved to a different office so please now send my letters to the

following address: War Ministry - Auditing Office - Corso Italia 88. - This way I will get them sooner as I only see the post once a day at the hotel and then there is such a mess due to the great number of travellers and a lot of letters get lost.

Now that the refugees are starting to go away a bit, we hope to find furnished lodgings.

My exhibition has been

Back

delayed by 15 days as the hall is not ready yet.

Write to me as soon as you can

I embrace you  
yours Giorgio

**14. 18 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 18.1.19, Ferrara 19.1.19.**

Front

Rome 18 January,

Dearest,

I have had a lot to do as the crate with the paintings finally arrived today. Now I can also perhaps hold a painting exhibition at the same time as the drawings. I am very annoyed not to be completely free; who knows just how much more time I will waste with this stupid office life ...

Back

You haven't told me if they brought those frames to your home. -

Write to me often and trust me. -

I embrace you

yours Giorgio

War Ministry - Auditing Office Corso Italia 88 -

**15. 20 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: 20.1.19, Ferrara 22.1.19.**

Page 1

Rome 20 January.

Dearest,

It was impossible for me to write to you yesterday as I didn't have a single minute of freedom. There is no office work on Sundays and so I completely devote this day to my painting. You will understand that for a person like me, who has had his career interrupted for the last year and a half in a new city like Rome, everything is new and has to be started from scratch. However, I am happy and more than ever confident in the future. I received your letter, which pleased me immensely and it has slightly lessened

Page 2

the melancholy that, has become chronic since I left you, dearest. - I also received a postcard from Carlo; I have not replied to him since he told me he was passing through Ferrara so I suppose he would have already have left. I will write to him at the unit at the address that you sent me. My exhibition will open in a few days time. I will write to you every day and in a month's time, at the latest, I will make a short visit to Ferrara for a few days. I believe that 1919 will be the year of the final victory for us, the year when we will become husband and wife. I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**16. 21 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 21.1.19, Ferrara 22.1.19.**

Front

Rome Tuesday,  
Dearest,  
Today I have not received any news from you.  
There is nothing new in my life. The weather is like spring and the city is full of people and movement and merriness.  
But I have neither the time nor the desire to participate in this merriness. I will write to you every day as I promised you and I will keep you informed of everything.  
I embrace you  
yours

Giorgio

Back

Say hello to your parents and Maria.

**17. 22 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following stamps postal Rome 22.1.19, Ferrara 23.1.19.**

Page 1

Rome Wednesday  
Dearest,  
I'm still waiting for my discharge that doesn't come. We are in the second half of January by now and there is no talk of discharging new classes [years of birth].  
Never as now have I felt the need to be free as I do now, since opportunities are being heaped on me and me I have to spend three-quarters of my day in this stupid office life. I am forced to work at night, as I did in Ferrara. I hope you received

Page 2

the newspapers I sent you.  
I keep the paintings I sent from Ferrara in my room so that every evening, before going to sleep, I contemplate your dear image for a long time that reminds me of happy times in Ferrara. But much happier times will come for us, I am sure of it, and you too Antonia mustn't doubt it.  
Write to me often. Say hello to your family for me  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**18. 23 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears just the following postmark: Rome 23.1.19.**

Front

Rome Thursday

Dearest,

The exhibition of my paintings will open on 1 February; the definitive date set by the organiser; I am doing all that I can to lend the greatest importance to this. - There will be an exhibition just of drawings in another place at the same time.

I received your pretty picture postcard and I thank you. Your portrait made a good impression on my mother (the only person who has seen it so far). I hope people will speak a lot about it at the exhibition.

Back

Lodgings are a big problem in Rome; but once I'm discharged I will see about settling in better. - Say hello to your family for me and write to me soon ...

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**19. 24 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 24.1.19, Ferrara 25.1.19.**

Page 1

Rome 24 January

Dear Antonia

There was nothing from you today; I hope to receive something tomorrow...

I'm preparing my exhibitions, which keep me very busy. - But you will understand that, for me, this is something of the utmost importance, especially now that I'm about to fully return to my artistic and intellectual activity, since I believe that the day when they discharge me is not

Page 2

far off now. - What I regret more than being far away from you, is being forced to live in such a noisy, lively city; the calm of Ferrara was sweet to me! As you can see, I am keeping my promise and write to you every day.

I will also keep my other promises in the same way.

Write to me often and trust me.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**20. 25 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears just the following postmark: Rome 26.1.19.**

Front

Rome 25-1-19

Dearest

I have not received any letters from you again today... a delay in the post, probably...

As I already wrote to you, my exhibitions will open on 1 February, and will last about twenty days so I will not be able to make the short visit to Ferrara on the 15<sup>th</sup> of next month, as we arranged, but I will certainly do so

Back

at the end of February. -

If you knew how much I desire to come to Ferrara, even if just for a few days, and the thought that this will happen quickly consoles me.

Greetings to your family. Write to me

I embrace you yours Giorgio

**21. 27 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 28.1.19, Ferrara 29.1.19.**

Front

Rome Monday,

Dearest,

I received your postcard of 22 January in which you tell me that you don't regularly receive my letters.

I write every day according to the promise made to you.

Did you not receive the newspapers I sent you?

Preparing for the exhibition keeps me very busy. It opens on Sunday, 2nd February.

I will send you all the newspapers that talk about it. -

Back

Write to me often.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**22. 28 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 28.1.19, Ferrara 30.1.19.**

Front

Rome Tuesday

Dearest

Today I have once again not had anything from you; I hope I will do so tomorrow.-

The invitations for my exhibition have been printed. -

I will write you a letter tomorrow.

- I walk kilometres and kilometres each day through the streets of Rome;

I am preparing the press in order to get the maximum output; you might perhaps think that I am ambitious and a status seeker, but it isn't like that

...

Back

Write more often to me and say hello to your family for me.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**23. 29 January 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 30.1.19, Ferrara 31.1.19.**

Front

Rome Wednesday

Dearest

I received the picture postcard in which you tell me you are sending a letter. I thought about asking for leave to have the afternoon free during the time that my exhibition is on (from 2 to 16 February), as if I were to ask for home leave they would not grant it to me later on to take a brief trip to Ferrara, and for me it is important not to wait that much longer without seeing you. -

Back

Greetings to your family.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**24. 30 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi (presumably sent to Via Mentana 27, Ferrara). The letter was written on the back of the invitation for the exhibition held at Casa d'arte Bragaglia (Via Condotti 21). The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

Front

CASA D'ARTE BRAGAGLIA

VIA CONDOTTI, 21

-----

You are invited to attend on Sunday 2 February the opening of the solo exhibition of the works, 11 am of

Giorgio De Chirico

The exhibition will remain open until 16 February from 10 to 12 and from 2 to 7 pm.

Invitation for two people

Back

Rome 30-1 -

Dearest

I have not received the letter you spoke to me about in the picture postcard.

I am sending you the invitation to my exhibition; pity you cannot see it!

You would see your portrait (Alcestis) towering up amid the other works.

- I am terribly busy these days, but from Sunday on, once the exhibition has opened, I will be freer and I will write to you more at length ...

- I have the vague impression that you write to me with less desire than the first days ...

I want to hope that this is only an impression ...

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**25. 31 January 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The letter bears the following postmarks: Rome 1.2.19, Ferrara 2.2.19.**

Page 1

Rome - Friday

Dearest,

I received your letter of 28<sup>th</sup> and the postcard of 29<sup>th</sup>. Why such melancholy,

my dear? What you write saddens me and at the same time I also like it; I don't know why, but, over the last few days, I got the impression that you weren't writing me with the same feelings as in the beginning. - But I beg you, my beautiful angel, not to be sad; what I told you the first time that I spoke to you has life-long validity, nor must any doubt ever arise in your heart. Despite the strenuous, uneasy and complicated life that I lead, the thought of you never leaves me and if I want

Page 2

to have a smiling vision, I only have to evoke your darling and beautiful face and it is only thinking about the future time, the days of happiness that await us and that we deserve, thinking about that time, I say, I can feel the sweetness of a true and serene happiness, without doubts and without uneasiness. -

I will come to Ferrara at the end of February; we will see each other, don't doubt that, and this year we will be united, be certain of that. Do not be sad, write often to me. - the new issue of "Ars Nova" has come out with my work in it; I will send it to you tomorrow; I will set up the exhibition tomorrow; I will have to work the whole night, working like a carpenter, upholsterer etc; but I hope to receive the reward that I deserve. Excellent news from Paris. My dealer [Paul Guillaume] has offered me a contract.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**26. 2 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: 2.2.19, Ferrara 2.2.19.**

Front

Dearest,

Excuse me if I have not written to you for a few days; I have had a few problems.

I will write a letter tonight.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**27. 2 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard only bears the following postmark: Rome 2.2.19.**

Front

Dearest,

Excuse me if have been negligent for a few days, don't reproach me and don't love me any less; I promise it will not happen again. I received your letter and postcard and a postcard from Maria. -

- There has been a printers' strike here so many articles about my painting have not come out yet; but work has now started again and they will come out now.

Back

I will send you everything about me.

We'll see each other in about 20 days from now.

Greetings to the family and Maria I embrace you

yours always

Giorgio

Rome Tuesday<sup>3</sup>

**28. 3 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 4.2.19, Ferrara 5.2.19.**

Front

Rome Monday

Dearest,

I have gone 2 days without writing to you; forgive me; if only you could see how busy I've been with this blessed exhibition. It has now opened. Everything is all right.

Tomorrow I will send you the newspapers that talk about it. - We'll meet in a month's time. -

Write to me often; I received your pretty postcard

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Back

Greetings to the family, to Carlo and Maria

**29. 5 February 1919. Postal note from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postal note bears the following postmarks: Rome 5.2.19, Ferrara [illegible].**

*Inside*

Rome - Wednesday

Dearest,

I received a registered letter of yours today.

Why did you spend money on a registered letter? I have not received the one you mentioned in which you speak about the magazine. However, I have had other letters and numerous picture postcards; I don't believe that there is anybody that intercepts my correspondence. -

The exhibition is going excellently; your portrait is greatly admired; I have entitled it "Alcestis". This week you will receive numerous newspapers and magazines.

I impatiently wait for the time when I will see you again, you who I love so much and who corresponds so well to my ideals of goodness, gentleness and beauty.

Write to me often. I will write a letter tonight

I embrace you

yours Giorgio

**30. 6 February 1919. Postal note from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postal note bears the following postmarks: Rome 6.2.19, Ferrara 7.2.19.**

*Inside*

Rome Thursday

Dearest,

Forgive me if I don't write more often to you; I am very busy with this exhibition; I have not even had time to pick up any newspapers to send you; but, I will surely send you something tomorrow. -

Love me always; be tranquil and trust me. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**31. 7 February 1919. Postal note from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postal note bears the following postmarks: Rome 7.2.19, Ferrara 8.2.19.**

*Inside*

Rome Friday

Dearest,

I have received a postcard addressed to Bragaglia's; please don't write to me at this address any more; it displeases me that the things you write, especially the ones without an envelope, fall into the hands of people with whom I only share business relations with. I am touched that you take so much trouble to dissipate a slight doubt, and now I beg you not to worry, since not even a shadow of it exists any more. -

I receive your letters and postcards regularly: if a letter gets lost once in a while, it is not something that will throw us into disarray.

You will receive newspapers and magazines in the next few days. -

The day of our meeting approaches; so be calm and confident. I have still not had a message from Mrs Vallini - why trouble strangers? Write to me

I embrace you yours Giorgio

**32. 8 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 8.2.19, Ferrara 9.2.19.**

*Front*

Rome Saturday

Dearest,

I have received your pretty postcard of 5 Feb. Today I sent you a Roman newspaper with a long article containing sharp criticism about my painting; there is no lack of envious people; I will send you all the newspapers and magazines that speak of me as they come out. My celebrity increases day by day and this is something I want and seek. -

I will also write to Carlo today. -

I will make the short visit to Ferrara in about twenty days time; we will spend a few days together. Write to me and don't forget the motto: trust and faith.

Back

Say hello to your parents and Maria for me  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio  
See if you can have at least the afternoon off during my stay in Ferrara

**33. 12 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmark: Rome 12.2.19, Ferrara [illegible].**

Front

Rome - Wednesday  
Dearest,  
I apologise if I always write postcards to you. I am terribly busy all blessed day; I am never alone, not even for one minute. I will write you a long letter when the exhibition closes; and we will see each other soon. -  
Your portrait is successful and probably there will be some news about it in a few days time.

Back

I will keep you informed about everything.  
Write to me often  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**34. 13 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 13.2.19, Ferrara 14.2.19.**

Front

Rome Thursday  
Dearest  
I received your dear letter, which pleased me greatly. Don't doubt my arrival in Ferrara. I always keep my promises.  
The exhibition closes on 18 Feb. You will receive other newspapers soon.  
I embrace you

yours Giorgio

Back

Say hello to your parents and Maria.  
It has been freezing in Rome over the last few days

**35. 14 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 15.2.19, Ferrara 16.2.19.**

Front

Rome 14 Feb  
Dearest,  
"Alceste" is greatly courted and I fear that they will take her away from me. I will keep you informed about the fate of its partner.  
I will send you a laudatory article [published] in a French newspaper that was published here today. -  
I received your postcard  
- See you soon. -  
Write to me  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

Back

Say hello to your parents, and sister and brother.

**36. 17 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 17.2.19, Ferrara 18.2.19.**

Front

Rome Monday  
Dearest,  
I have sent you "Tempo" which contains some intelligent words about my art.  
The exhibition has been extended to 22 Feb; I will ask for leave after it closes. I should also go to Milan to see my brother and a dealer who will

probably organise an exhibition of mine there. I will ask for 10 days so that I can spend 5 in Milan and 5 in Ferrara.

*Back*

When I am in Ferrara make me, at least once, one of those cakes which you alone know the secret to since there is nothing here in Rome. -

Write to me. See you soon

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**37. 18 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, 27 Via Mentana, Ferrara. The postcard bears just the following postmark: Rome 18.2.19.**

*Front*

Rome Tuesday

Dearest

I received your picture postcard. -

I plan to ask for leave next Monday. - As I already wrote, I first have to go to Milan; I think I'll be in Ferrara on the 29<sup>th</sup> of this month...

You cannot imagine how impatient I am to see you; the separation from you is a cruel thing for me although perhaps from

*Back*

what I write this is not apparent. -

There is a collector in Rome that would like to purchase "Alcestis".

- We have not agreed on the price yet but I believe that he will agree in the end. -

Say hello to your parents and your sister for me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**38. 19 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard only bears the following postmark: Ferrara 20.2.19.**

*Front*

Rome Wednesday

Dearest

I sent you a newspaper today that contains a reproduction of a painting of mine as well as an article of mine. - I hope you received the other newspapers I sent you. -

I am impatient to see you and I can't wait for that happy day to arrive.

*Back*

Say hello to your parents and your sister for me. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**39. 21 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 21.2.19, Ferrara 22.2.19.**

*Front*

Rome 21-2

Dearest,

I have received the postcard.

Monday [24 February] I will leave first for Milan and then Ferrara

Say hello to your parents

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**40. 23 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 24.2.19, Ferrara 25.2.19.**

*Front*

Rome Sunday

Dearest,

Yesterday [Saturday 22 February] I sent you an issue of "Tempo" with a long article that is harsh once again; however, I have observed that harsh ones give me more publicity than laudatory ones. Tuesday (the day after

tomorrow) [25 February] I will go on leave. I will write to you from Milan with regard to the day of my arrival in Ferrara. -

Back

Say hello to your parents  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**41. 27 February 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Milan, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Milan 27.2.19, Ferrara 1.3.19.**

Front

Milan Thursday morning  
Dearest,  
I am in Milan for a few days. I will be in Ferrara on Sunday [2 March] where I will stay 2 or 3 days, I cannot stay longer as I also have to go to Florence for a few days. -  
I am very tired due to the long trip. -  
Impatient to see you, I embrace you.  
yours  
Giorgio

Back

"Alcestis" has been purchased by a Roman collector.

**42. 6 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Milan, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 6.3.19, Ferrara 7.3.19.**

Front

Rome Thursday  
Dearest,  
I had to renounce going to Florence, since I felt ill during the journey. I feel better now that I have had a good sleep. – I will write you a long letter on Saturday (tomorrow is Friday).  
I forgot the buttons. Tell me if I have to send them to you

Back

or if I can bring them when I return in May.  
Regards and thanks to your parents.  
Write to me. I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**43. 9 March 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 10.3.19, Ferrara 11.3.19.**

Page 1

Rome - Sunday  
Dearest,  
Last Sunday at this time I was with you. Those three days of dream and very pure happiness passed quickly.  
But I am tranquil because I am sure of your thoughts; our meeting after two months of separation has sealed forever our love that follows and will follow its fatal course. – Let us rise to this thought, Antonia; I see in you, in your loyalty, in your beauty, in your gentleness, the remorseless consolation of my life; may I too, dearest,

Page 2

be for you what you are for me. -  
May will come soon. -  
Today I went to see Professor Signorelli and I saw your portrait [which was] very well displayed. Tomorrow I will send you Papini's French magazine where there is a very good article about me. - I have started my active life again and with the faith of your love in my mind I work calmly and hopefully. -  
I don't know how to thank your parents for the sweet hospitality that they gave me. - Being among such loyal and sincere people for me was happiness and a sweet rest.

Page 3

Have trust in me and you will see that we will be happy. -  
Write to me often. I will write to you every day. -  
Greet your parents and Maria, who is so likable, and warm towards me; be tranquil and serene.

I embrace you  
yours *nunc et semper*  
Giorgio  
Before this year closes we will be united dearest "Alcestis"

**44. 10 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 10.3.19, Ferrara 11.3.19.**

Front

Rome, 10 March  
Dearest,  
I returned to the office today but I did not find a letter from you. I hope to receive something tomorrow. I think about Ferrara and you all the time, and I feel lost in this bizarre city.

Back

The company of some rare friends is the only thing that consoles me, among them are the doctor-collector and his wife who, though not beautiful, is the nicest woman to be with (except for you) that I have met so far.  
Write often to me.  
I embrace you  
yours always  
Giorgio

**45. 12 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 12.3.19, Ferrara 13.3.19.**

Front

Rome 12 - March  
Dearest,  
I received your dear letter, which greatly pleased me.  
I am only sorry to hear that your mother is ill; I hope it's nothing particular...  
However, I won't hide from you that I like the thought of you in your mother's room; forgive my intransigent egoism.  
I'll send you a newspaper today which contains something about me.

Back

I'll write a letter tomorrow.  
Best wishes for your mother's speedy recovery and regards to your father and Maria.  
Write often to me  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**46. 13 March 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome. 13.3.19, Ferrara 14.3.19.**

Page 1

Rome 13 March  
Dearest,  
I hope that your mother has completely recovered by now, so you won't have to stay in her room anymore, my dear big little girl, keeping her company. I feel very tired at the moment too; it must be the start of spring; it is a season that has always given me trouble. -  
I count the passing days and they seem so long to me; but the time when we will meet again is coming, dear Antonia, and we will spend this period of separation

Page 2

intensely thinking about our love, elevating and purifying our souls in mutual understanding, mutual respect. -  
I don't know yet if any letters of yours arrived today. I'll go and see now. -  
Write to me often. I will write to you every day until I get on the train again for blessed Ferrara, which, since I met you, seems like the centre of the whole universe to me.  
Best wishes and regards to your mother  
I embrace you so much  
yours *nunc et semper*  
Giorgio. -

**47. 14 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 15.3.19, Ferrara 16.3.19.**

*Front*

Rome 14 March 19.

Dearest,

Today I received your dear letter of 11 March. I am so sorry to hear that your mother is ill again; in cases such as these you have to be prudent and not get up too soon; send her my warmest greetings me and my most fervent wishes for a speedy recovery; I hope that her healthy and strong nature will soon overcome the illness. - There are some newspapers and magazines that I wanted to send you but I think that now that your mother is not well

*Back*

it is a bad time to send them to you; I will send them when you write telling me she is better.

Don't get too tired and look after your own health too. -

Say hello to all of your family from me and write to me often. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**48. 15 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 15.3.19, Ferrara 18.3.19.**

*Front*

Rome 15 March 19

Dearest,

I have received your pretty picture postcard. I am very happy [to hear that]your mother is better.

I too wait impatiently to see you again.

You will see that the moment will come soon.

I have also received a postcard from Carlo who is in Tyrol.

Write often to me. Say hello to all your family from me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio.

**49. 17 March 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 17.3.19, Ferrara 18.3.19.**

*Page 1*

Rome 17 March.

Dearest,

I hope that your mother has completely recovered by now. -

I always lead the usual life; hotel room and office; I write and paint in my free time; I will carry out the portrait of my musician friend Casella, whom you know in a few days time; I will also send you two issues of his magazine where there are some pieces written by me and by my brother. - I have not decided yet if I will stay in Italy

*Page 2*

or return to Paris after my discharge; I have written a letter to my dealer [Paul Guillaume] to know the exact conditions of the contract that he has proposed; my decision will depend on these considerations. - Besides, for us, living in Italy or France is the same; what is required for our happiness is to be united, isn't it, big little girl?

Write to me often and say hello to your family from me.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

de Pisis hasn't written to me; evidently this time he is really angry. Do you sometimes see him in Ferrara?

**50. 18 March 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi (presumably sent to 27 Via Mentana, Ferrara). The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

*Page 1*

Rome 18 March 19

Dearest,

I received your dear letter of 14 March; you seem very sad, poor big little girl. Don't be dismayed over this period of sadness that you are going through, indeed we are both going through, since I too, my beautiful angel, am sad and will be sad as long as I have to live away from you. But

these days will pass, I have certain faith of it, and as a reward, happy days of calm and deep and pure love will come; and destiny, which is limitless, will not want to deny us those days as we love each other so sincerely, since our union is a necessity fatal to development and vital achievement for you as for me.

Page 2

So, dear Antonia, be calm and live confidently; your mother will recover; I want to hope that as I write thinking so intensely about you, that she is already better; convey to her once again my most affectionate regards and wishes for a speedy recovery. -

I am happy that Carlo is coming to Venice; so he will be closer to you and will be able to come and see you more easily. Send him my greetings whenever you write to him and tell him that I always remember him with brotherly affection. -

I too am going through a sad and undecided period; but all will be clarified; it is a matter of months; let us think, rather, that the great nightmare of the war is over.

Tomorrow I will send you a magazine founded by Papini and written in French

Page 3

it is called "La Vrai Italie" [The Real Italy].

I collaborate with this magazine, the purpose of which is to make known the best Italian artists and men and not those that get themselves known with brazen-faced publicity; there is a fine article about me in the issue I will send you; the two articles that I will mark in blue are by my brother; all the collaborators publish without signing. I have already sent you an issue of "Cronache d'Attualità" where there is a late critique of my exhibition; but it is something of little importance. -

I will read the little Ferrara paper with pleasure.

Write to me often and trust me and our future.

I embrace you

yours forever

Giorgio

Page 4

Last night I had a very bad dream; I dreamt that I had gone to Ferrara and went to your house and didn't find you; your mother and Maria told me you had gone away in the morning to take piano lessons; and I waited anxiously in the dining room, where I remember that I saw the pendulum marking 10 in the evening, and I woke up with that worry of not having seen you ...

They are right to say that dreams announce the contrary; indeed this morning I received a sad letter from you but one so dear to me! ...

**51. 19 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmark: Ferrara 20.3.19, Rome [illegible].**

Front

Rome 19 March

Dearest,

I don't know yet if there are any letters from you, I will go and see now. I hope that your mother is better and that you too, dearest, have recovered your moral calm. -

That nuisance de Pisis seems not to have known that I came to Ferrara; he sent me a book announcing his arrival in Rome on 28 March!

Even in Rome I can't get away from him!

Never mind!

Write to me often. Today I have sent you the magazine "La Vraie Italie"; I forgot to mark the articles but you will easily find them; the ones by my brother

Back

have the titles: Terza Italia and Litterature de Guerre.

Kindest regards to you all and particularly to your mother.

I will go and look if any letters have arrived. -

I embrace you so much

always

your Giorgio.

**52. 20 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 20.3.19, Ferrara 21.3.19.**

Front

Rome 20 March

Dearest,

I received your dear letter and I am very pleased to know that your mother is better and is now up and about. I am only worried by what you tell me about the influenza that has reappeared in Ferrara. Be careful and cover

yourself up well; do not trust the initial warm weather; public health is good here for the time being. -  
As I already wrote to you, I lead the same life as always. -

Back

I count the passing days.  
You will see that they will pass quickly. -  
Say hello to everyone and best wishes to your mother.  
Write to me often.  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**53. 21 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 21.3.19, Ferrara 24.3.19.**

Front

Rome 21 March  
Dearest,  
I did not receive any news from you today. I hope you are well but not having received a letter, I am anxious after what you wrote to me. -  
Send me a postcard but write to me every day. - Regards to your family.  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**54. 22 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 22.3.19, Ferrara 24.3.19.**

Front

Rome 22 March  
Dearest,  
this morning I received the pretty winter postcard. I am now tranquil and very pleased that your mother is quickly getting better. -  
Send her my most affectionate regards and wishes and write to me often.  
I embrace you  
yours Giorgio

Back

I lead a monastic life; I get back from the office at 6 o'clock and only go out at 9 o'clock in the morning. When you don't feel like writing a letter, send me a postcard, two words are enough provided that I have something every day.

**55. 25 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: 25.3.19, Ferrara 26.3.19.**

Front

Rome 25 March. -  
Dearest,  
I am very happy that your brother has returned to Ferrara for good; this fits in well with your mother's recovery. So you see, dearest, that everything passes and one mustn't be downcast because of the grey or dark moments in life. -  
Excuse me if yesterday I did not write to you; it was that obsessive de Pisis' fault; after breakfast, while I was working in my room, I heard a nasal voice behind the door calling "Giorgio, Giorgio", as in Via Mentana; he did not leave me for a moment; I had to stay away from the office and I will now have him in the way for at least a month.  
By now I am certain that I can never be free; wherever I go he will follow me; he already plans to follow me to Paris; the matter is assuming dramatic proportions.

Back

Write to me often. Affectionate regards to Carlo and your parents.  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**56. 26 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 26.3.19, Ferrara 26.3.19.**

Front

Rome 26 March  
Dearest,  
I received your dear letter and the little newspaper that greatly amused me. I

will send you two magazines tomorrow. I am happy to see from your letter that you are calm and happy now. -  
Write often to me and greet your family.  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**57. 27 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 27.2.19, Ferrara 28.3.19.**

*Front*

Rome 27 March

Dearest,

Today I sent you a magazine in which there is an article of mine; since there is no way of knowing how many postage stamps are required on printed material now, tell me if you have had to pay any surtax for this and for the other magazines that I sent you. -

Today in the newspaper they announced the imminent discharge of people born in '88 and '89. -

So I hope in May to be able to come to Ferrara as a free citizen. -

Following the not very enthusiastic reception I gave him, de Pisis has become less irritating. -

Tomorrow I will write you a letter ...

*Back*

How is Carlo getting on at the 27<sup>th</sup> Deposit?

He must have met all the people I spent 3 years with. -

Greet him warmly from me together with your parents and Maria.

Write to me often

I embrace you so much

yours

Giorgio

**58. 28 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 28.3.19, Ferrara 29.3.19<sup>5</sup>.**

*Front*

Rome 28-3-19

Dearest,

I wrote to you telling you to send me a postcard every day but I now think that perhaps I exaggerated. I was afraid at that time that you would get sick. -

You can write to me just three times a week, if you want; provided you know that I will be calm. -

Greet your family for me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

I received the picture postcard.

**59. 29 March 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome "29.2.19", Ferrara 30.3.19.**

*Front*

Rome 29-3-18

I received a postcard from Carlo today and have already answered him.

I am very busy at the moment since I am putting together the different pieces I've written that I would like to publish in a volume before leaving Italy, in case I have to return to Paris. I'm also working on a few paintings I have begun.

I'll do Casella's portrait later since he had to go away for concerts.

*Back*

Spring is very beautiful in Rome. A sky of marvellous purity. We'll meet again in a month's time; I impatiently await that happy day. -

Say hello to your family

Write to me often

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**60. 1 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: 1.4.19, Ferrara 2.4.19**

Front

Rome 1 April 19

Dearest,

Sorry to have gone two days without writing to you. This won't happen again; from now on I will regularly write to you every day.

I receive your pretty postcards.

We are now in April; the day of our meeting is not far off. You can imagine how impatiently I await it.

Write to me often and say hello

Back

to all your family. -

Has Spring arrived in Ferrara too?

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**61. 2 April 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome "21.4.19" [2.4.19], Ferrara 3.4.19.**

Page 1

Rome 2 April

Dearest,

I received your letter of 30 March today; I was very sad about that sentence that you wrote.

Why do you give in to this pessimism? Please be more sincere with me and tell me the reason for these presentiments of yours and the mistrust that you feel; I hope that you never doubt me since this would be the greatest pain you could give me.

Therefore, dear big little girl, have no more melancholy thoughts

Page 2

and live tranquilly and confidently. As I already promised and as I wrote to you back in May, we will meet again and at the end of this year I hope to

be able to be united to you forever. - And you, on your side be prepared for this event both psychologically and materially; I will try to explain more clearly, big little girl; this is what I mean: you know that I am not rich, but perhaps you believe me less poor than I really am; the war has seriously damaged my career just as it damaged my mother's interests; my mother and I live very economically because we are forced to; I'm certain that with time I will get back on the right track but you too can understand

Page 3

that these are not things that can be done in just a couple of months so it is likely that the day when I return to Ferrara for our union next Autumn, the state of my finances will be more or less as they are now; I have not had any answer yet from Paris; as I told you and always promised you, in you alone I place every dream of happiness of mine; but you on your side consult your heart well, after this confession of a practical nature that I have made to you; think about this carefully, I repeat this sentence, one everybody says, and then answer me frankly and faithfully about what your heart dictates to you and if it says yes to you then, as I told you at the start of this letter, be prepared to live with me; but therefore get used to some sacrifices; I know that you love elegance a lot (I do too), but

Page 4

you also know how expensive this is for a woman, especially these days. - It is hard and unpleasant for me to have to tell you all this, but I cannot help it, so, dear Antonia, I await [to receive] an answer from you and I repeat again that you must be sincere and hide nothing from me. - If, after everything I have said to you, your feelings and your intentions remain unchanged, then follow my advice and wait confidently for me since I will never betray my promise. - If you consider it necessary to also talk to your relatives and your brother about it, please do; but they will only manage to dissuade you.

Then it will depend on your feelings whether or not to live with me. -

- Greet your family for me and if you love me never be sad since you can trust me entirely.

I embrace you

yours forever

Giorgio

**62. 3 April 1919. Rome. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 3.4.19, Ferrara 4.4.19.**

Front

Black and white reproduction of the Temple of Vesta, Rome

Back

Rome 3-4-19

Dearest,

Thirty days will pass quickly. - Write often to me and do not give yourself up to sad thoughts. Greet your family from me.

I embrace you

yours *nunc et semper*

Giorgio

**63. 5 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: that of Rome "A.IV.19"; Ferrara [illegible].**

Front

Rome 5 March

Today I did not receive anything from you.

Tomorrow is Sunday and I won't go to the office, so before Monday I cannot have your news. - I impatiently await this discharge and can't wait to leave Rome; in this city the number of my enemies, or at least those who don't like me, grows by the day. -

Back

I await [to receive] an encouraging and comforting letter of yours. -

Greet your family from me. I embrace you and I beg you always to have trust

in your Giorgio.

**64. 7 April 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 7.4.19, Ferrara 8.4.19**

Page 1

Rome 7-4-19

Dearest,

I received your dear letter that was very consoling; I in turn beg you to forgive me for my moment of pessimism;

I feel hope reviving within me; besides, you also said to me in Ferrara: where there's a will there's a way; and then I believe that there is fate in this meeting of ours and that nothing can hinder our plans. -

Time goes by, for me not fast enough. -

Page 2

I work a lot at the moment as I would like to exhibit once more in Rome before leaving. -

Thank you again for everything that you say to me which for me is the sweetest consolation that I can have. -

Live in trust and write often to me

I embrace you

yours forever

Giorgio

**65. 9 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 9.4.19, Ferrara 10.4.19**

Front

Rome 9-4-19

Dearest,

I received your postcard and I thank you for writing to me so regularly. -

I am a bit annoyed; because the discharge is continuously postponed and I get the impression that calamitous times are not completely over.

Back

I too wait with impatience for the time to come to Ferrara. -

Live trustingly and tranquilly

Write often to me and greet your family from me. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**66. 10 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 10.4.19, Ferrara 11.4.19.**

*Front*

Black and white reproduction of the Temple of Vespasian, Rome

*Back*

Affectionate regards  
from your Giorgio  
10-4-19.

**67. 11 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 11.4.19, Ferrara 12.4.19.**

*Front*

Rome 11-4-19

Dearest,

I have not received anything from you either yesterday or today. I hope you are well. -

I will write to you at greater length tomorrow.

I met the architect Boari from Ferrara; he is an intelligent person and an admirer of my art.

He is going to buy a painting from me

- Write to me often and greet

*Back*

all of your family from me. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio.

**68. 12 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: 14.4.19, Ferrara 15.4.19.**

*Front*

Rome 12-4-19

Dearest,

I received your postcard.

April will pass quickly and we will meet in May. -

There is nothing new in my life. -

Write often to me and live tranquilly. - Greet your family from me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**69. 14 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: 14.4.19, Ferrara 16.4.19.**

*Front*

Rome 14-4-19

Dearest,

I received your postcard.

I have been a bit negligent lately not writing to you on a daily basis; please excuse me. I will send you an issue of "Ars Nova" today; there is nothing by me in it but it is a fine issue that may interest you. -

I await the moment of my discharge with impatience. -

*Back*

Write often to me and say hello to your family.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**70. 15 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 16.4.19, Ferrara [illegible].**

*Front*

Rome 15-4-19

Dearest,

I regularly receive your postcards. - I hope to be able to make the desired trip to Ferrara next month.

I say I hope, since if I'm not discharged it will be a bit difficult; in any case, if my arrival should be delayed a month due to the fatality of events, please do not for this reason lose

*Back*

the trust that you have always had in me.  
For my part I will do everything possible to come as soon as possible.  
Write often to me and greet your family for me  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**71. 18 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome. 18.4.19, Ferrara 19.4.19.**

Front

Rome 18-4-19

Dearest,

I received your letter and the postcard with the German poem.

I will write at greater length tomorrow.

My class [year of birth], won't be demobilised from what I have heard before 15 May so I believe that I cannot come to Ferrara the end of May. -

I hope that this delay doesn't arouse suspicions about me, trust as I do you and live tranquilly.

There is nothing new.

I have entrusted my friend Casella,

Back

who has gone to Paris for a few days, to get a precise answer out of my dealer. I will keep you informed. Boari, whom I mentioned, is called Adamo and made his fortune in Mexico. Your father must know him. -

Write often to me. I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**72. 21 April 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi (presumably sent to Via Mentana 27, Ferrara). The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

Page 1

Rome 21 April

Dearest,

Excuse me if I have taken so long to write you a letter. I am so busy all day long with this exhibition of mine that I don't have a spare a minute to write. - Don't bear me a grudge for this. I think of you all the time, remember that my love will be eternal and unchangeable.

Next Sunday [27 April] I will be in Ferrara. -

I kiss your hands.

yours

Giorgio de Chirico

**73. 22 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 22.4.19, Ferrara 23.4.19.**

Front

Rome Monday

Dearest,

Neither yesterday nor today have I received any news from you. - I hope you are well. - I'm suffering a bit with my stomach at the moment so I spent the Easter holidays drinking tea and milk; I am better now. -

I will send you some magazines tomorrow. -

Back

Don't be lazy about writing to me.

greet your family from me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**74. 24 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 24.4.19, Ferrara 25.4.19.**

Front

Rome 24-4-19,

Dearest

I received 2 letters of yours and a postcard from Carlo.  
I am comforted by the thought that you are tranquil; these stupid and colourless days will also pass. -  
Write often to me  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

Back

Ascoli (Max) from Ferrara has come to see me.  
Send me the 5<sup>th</sup> Ration of Rice without a ration card.

**75. 25 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 26.4.19, Ferrara 27.4.19.**

Front

Rome 25-4-19  
Dearest,  
I am sorry you took umbrage over my little reproach which in effect was perfectly unfair and for which I apologise; but I said it in a friendly and playful tone as I would have said: lazybones, etc. I regularly receive your letters and postcards and I thank you.  
I am better in my health; it was just passing trouble. -  
Nothing new, for what concerns me; but soon I will know something ...

Back

The saddest thing at present is the political situation; that Jesuit Wilson has betrayed us; but the old Italian people, a people of artists and heroes, will know how to put the American dealers in their place. Orlandi gets back from Paris today.  
Write often to me and greet your family for me.  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

**76. 28 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 28.4.19, Ferrara 30.4.19.**

Front

28-4-19  
Dearest,  
I still haven't received any news from you today. I hope you are well. -  
Nothing new about me. I will keep you informed of every new development. -  
Write often to me  
I embrace you  
Yours  
Giorgio

**77. 30 April 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome [illegible]; Ferrara 1.5.19.**

Front

Rome 30-4-14  
Dearest,  
I received the postcard and the small newspaper.  
I too await impatiently for the time I will come to Ferrara; but things are getting more and more complicated as, after all, you must also know by now. However, I don't despair.  
Greet your family from me and write often to me  
I embrace you  
yours  
Giorgio

Back

Don't criticise me if I don't write every day and if I always send postcards. -  
It is a period in which I am a bit annoyed; this too will pass.  
Trust me and believe that I am and always will be your Giorgio for you

**78. 2 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 2.5.19, Ferrara 3.5.19.**

Front

Rome 2-5-19

Dearest,

I received the postcard. -

I hope to be able to make the greatly desired short visit to Ferrara this month; I say I hope since at the moment you can't be sure of anything ...

Excuse me if I don't write to you more often and don't let this worry you. -

You who are more tranquil than me, write often to me. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Back

Greetings to all of your family.

**79. 5 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 5.5.19, Ferrara 6.5.19.**

Front

Dearest

I received the postcard.

I will write a letter tomorrow.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Rome 5-5-19

**80. 6 May 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 6.5.19, Ferrara [illegible].**

Page 1

Rome 6-5-19

Dearest,

Excuse me first of all if I have been writing irregularly and briefly for some time now; this entirely depends on my psychological state that has been very bad for various reasons. - The solutions that I had hoped for have not

materialised. - The answers that I was waiting for from my Paris dealer are not as I would have liked; he doesn't want to commit himself with a contract so far away after our dealings have been interrupted for four years; I can perhaps arrange something but for this it would be necessary for me to go to Paris and I don't know when I can go there. - So I lose hope of being able to unite you to my fate by

Page 2

next Autumn as I passionately desired and desire. - The situation will be clarified by circumstances and by my will but I can by no means set a date; to say for example next Autumn or next Winter etc. You write that you greatly desire to see me again; equally great is this desire in me and I promised you I'd come at the end of this month.

But it is here that a problem arises for me which is moral, so to speak, not for you, as you know me well enough not to have any doubt on my behalf, but for your parents whose hospitality would be too painful for me to accept under such conditions. -

Here is the full truth that I have chosen to tell you. -

I am always the same. My feelings

Page 3

remain unchanged just as my wish for the sweet plans for a common life that we have made together remain unchanged. -

If you absolutely want me to come to Ferrara, I will come, for a few days like the other time. - Think carefully about what I say to you so one day you won't have to reproach anything to me; and in any case always trust me. -

Write to me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**81. 8 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 8.5.19, Ferrara 9.5.19.**

Front

Black and white reproduction of the outskirts of Homs – Bebda – Ruins of Roman constructions

Back

Rome 8-5-19

Dearest,

I received the postcard.

I send affectionate regards to you and your family

Ever yours

Giorgio

**82. 9 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 10.5.19, Ferrara 11.5.19.**

Front

Rome 9-5-19

Dearest,

I have received your letter and that of your father. - I am very touched by their content, which is so loyal and sincere. -

Now for me there is only one thing that counts: the demobilisation of my class [year of birth], all the rest will be a consequence of what takes place first. - I will come to Ferrara this month, I don't know precisely when, perhaps in a few days time. I have an intense desire to see you; perhaps more than you; although I don't show it that much

Back

in my correspondence.

I have heard that they have suppressed the troop trains; so I can travel a bit more comfortably. The idea of having to travel in a cattle wagon frightens me. -

Write to me. I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**83. 12 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 12.5.19, Ferrara 13.5.19.**

Front

12-5-19

Dearest,

I have not received any news from you today. -

I hope that you are not angry with me or, at any rate, do not have a bad impression of me ...

I beg you to believe that what is happening is independent of my will.

I will do everything that depends on me. -

Write two sentences to me and believe in me

yours

Giorgio

**84. 14 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 14.5.19, Ferrara 15.4.19.**

Front

Rome, 14-5-19

Dearest,

I received your postcard. -

The warm weather has arrived here. -

I hope that they will allow me a few days' leave to come to Ferrara towards the end of the month. You cannot imagine how great my desire is to see you again; therefore don't deduce anything and don't judge me from the few words that I write. -

Back

Greet your family for me and live tranquilly. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**85. 16 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 16.4.19, Ferrara 17.5.19**

Front

Rome 16-5-19

Dearest,

I will shortly make a brief visit to Ferrara; I will have to go to Milan first; I hope to get short leave for these two cities. Tomorrow I will send you a Milanese magazine which contains a very beautiful story by my brother; he too is now a collaborator of "Illustrazione Italiana".

I will be very happy to see you again; and so you can ascertain *de visu* that I have not changed, at least morally.

Greet your family from me.

I embrace you

Ever yours

Giorgio

**86. 18 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 19.5.19, Ferrara 20.5.19.**

*Front*

Rome 18-5-19

Dearest,

I hope to be able to get this leave; I will ask for it towards the end of this week. -

In any case don't worry and don't be sad if I should delay a bit; it would be a delay of just a few weeks.

If they don't demobilise my class [year of birth] this month, I will try to obtain this greatly desired freedom in some other way. Unfortunately, things threaten to take a long time. -

*Back*

Greet your family from me and write often to me. -

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio.

**87. 20 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 21.5.19, Ferrara 22.5.19.**

*Front*

Rome 20-5-19

Dearest,

I have been a bit unwell; so I have gone a few days without writing. I am better now. - In a few days I will ask for leave. -

I received the pretty postcard.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**88. 23 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 23.5.19, Ferrara, 24.5.19.**

*Front*

Rome 23-5-19

Dearest,

I received the letter with the photo, which I like a lot and I find that it is the one that resembles you most, the nicest and most touching that you have given me so far.

There's no hesitation on my part about the short visit to Ferrara but I will perhaps have to postpone this visit by about two weeks for various reasons. I will write you a long letter tomorrow explaining the problem to you; but nothing

*Back*

has changed.

Live tranquilly and always trust me.

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

Who is that young man seen in the mirror behind you?

**89. 24 May 1919. Postal note from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postal note bears the following postmarks: Rome 25.5.19, Ferrara 26.5.19.**

*Inside*

Rome 24-5-19

Dearest,

I have to postpone my short visit to Ferrara for about three weeks, at the most, since I am now replacing a person who is on leave. There are also other reasons why my presence in Rome is essential at present; my brother has been discharged as unfit for military service; he is coming to Rome for a few days and then will return to Milan; there are various things I have to arrange with him; I am in a happy moment of artistic inspiration and I work a lot and with the greatest confidence. Know that my feelings are unchanged and don't be sad; if you really love me you will see that we will be happy one day. I found your photo very touching; you are very beautiful, dear big little girl; you have a sad and thoughtful look that I like a lot; you also seem a little old; which makes you even more interesting. Live confidently and tranquilly. I embrace you so much  
yours forever Giorgio

**90. 28 May 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 28.5.19, Ferrara 30.5.19.**

Front

Rome Wednesday.

Dearest,

I received your dear letter.

I too am very sorry to have to postpone my short visit, but we have to be patient; it is enough, I believe, to have mutual trust (and we have it, don't we?) for us to surely consider a happy ending.

My trip has only been postponed.

I will send you the magazine that I promised you.

I think about you all the time

Back

Greet your family from me.

I embrace you so much.

yours

Giorgio

**91. 3 June 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Rome 4.6.19, Ferrara 5.6.19.**

Front

Rome 3-6-19

Dearest,

I received the postcard; I have received no news from you for several days. I'm not scolding you because I too am very lazy about writing.

Greet all your family for me

I embrace you

yours

Giorgio

**92. 17 June 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope only bears the following postmark: Rome 17.6.19.**

Page 1

Rome 17-6-19

Dearest,

I received the two brief letters, curt and imperious. -

You could have avoided sending the second one as a registered letter and addressing it to the hotel. First of all I am not at the hotel anymore; I am still doing military service and when you want to write to me please always use the usual address. -

You speak of a cooling and about the way of proceeding. - Allow me to point out that both the first phenomenon and the second action are something I could also reproach you for; the fact is that you slowed down the correspondence and also reduced it to the dispatch of the two letters mentioned; I have always answered your letters and postcards.

I don't understand what you mean by written justification with your family; I don't have to justify myself to anybody; I don't owe anything to anybody and I am free in my actions; so it is useless for you to assume that tone of laconic severity. I have never claimed to be very kind; the opinion that others may have of me doesn't worry me, nor does it interest me. -

Page 2

And now enough of these unpleasant things. -

Concerning sentimental matters I will tell you (though it may seem strange to you) that my feelings towards you are unchanged. But I don't believe that you can say the same. - Your letters have revealed your true psyche; so if you absolutely want to return my word, as you say, I will accept this restitution; although you are for me (sentimentally) what you were before, I am not a slave to my feelings. -

Perhaps I'm wrong; I want to hope so. -

I have had quite a lot of things to worry about over the last few days.

It's very hot and I feel very tired.

If you are sad on my account you need not be anymore; but I believe that you are more galled than sad.

I kiss your dear and beautiful hands.

Ever yours

Giorgio.

**93. 6 July 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Bologna, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Bologna 6.7.19, Ferrara 7.7.19.**

Front

Colour reproduction of Palazzo Re Enzo and Podestà, Bologna

Back

Sunday afternoon

While I pass through Bologna, I send you many affectionate greetings

Yours *nunc et semper*

Giorgio.

**94. 7 July 1919. Postcard from Giorgio de Chirico, Arezzo, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postcard bears the following postmarks: Arezzo 7.7.19, Ferrara 8.7.19.**

Front

Black and white reproduction of a panorama of Arezzo

Back

Monday morning

As I pass through Arezzo, I send you many, many affectionate greetings

Yours *nunc et semper*

Giorgio

**95. 9 July 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Via S. Niccolò Tolentino 22a, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 9.7.19, Ferrara 10.7.19**

Page 1

Rome Wednesday,

Dearest,

I set out from Ferrara on Sunday [6 July] in the afternoon; I would have liked so much to see you again on that festive morning; I saw your father in the morning and your brother at midday; I suffered a lot over being thus separated from you in those few hours that I was still spending in your city. - I set out sad; but now I am full of hope and will, and for this reason I beg you, my dearest Antonia, never to lose the trust that you have had in me until now. -

I told you whilst leaving that next Spring, that

Page 2

we will be united in less than a year's time; you will see that I won't fail to keep my promise; there are first of all various things that make me envision a sorting out in the near future; my brother is in Rome for a few days and he has decided to settle in Milan where his artistic and literary activity finds ample practical application; he has also given me good news for what concerns me, and, besides, the void that his absence creates in the family will be filled by our union. - Therefore I passionately beg you again, my dearest, not to listen to what your parents tell you and especially your brother, who is the most hostile and the one that

Page 3

I fear most. -

You will have realised by now that we cannot live without being united and that outside this union it would be useless, for both me and you, to seek happiness. -

Now that can I work freely you must trust me more than ever. - And even before the happy day of our union comes I will come to Ferrara again, as I promised you, in Autumn and Winter. -

Write to me now and then; think that my love for you is infinite

I devotedly kiss your beautiful little hands.

yours forever

Giorgio

Via S. Niccolò Tolentino 22A

**96. 14 July 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 14.7.19, Ferrara 15.7.19.**

Page 1

Rome 14 July

Dearest,

Yesterday I received your dear letter that for me was a very sweet consolation; it was as I expected from you, you who have never disappointed me and have been, during all the time that we have known each other, always the same angel that I felt the first day I saw you; but you will see, dear big little girl, that I will also be worthy of you and you will never regret having believed in my word and having loved me. -

In a few days I will also write to your father; I will wait to be able

Page 2

to tell him something concerning my position, which now I am doing everything to consolidate; being free is a great thing; I think of this every day. - At the end of this month I will perhaps go to Florence for a few days where my friend Soffici has organised a painting gallery, a gallery in which I will have the place of honour. - I work a lot despite the heat and I will see to staying in Rome, thus holding out against my mother who would like to go to the beach and since she gets bored going there by herself would like me with her; but I think that the beach is a waste of time. I also hope that

Page 3

you don't leave Ferrara. -

I think about the days that I spent in your city; I was so happy; in the evening, those few minutes of unforgettable happiness that convinced me more than ever that we are inseparable now; isn't it true Antonia?

Write to me and believe me forever yours. -

I devotedly kiss your beautiful little hands.

Giorgio

No woman possesses your grace. -

**97. 21 July 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. A black and white photo of de Chirico accompanies the letter. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 21.7.19, Ferrara 22.7.19.**

Page 1

Rome Monday

Dearest,

The day before yesterday I received your dear letter and if I didn't answer you immediately it was because I was waiting for some photos to be developed, one of which I enclose and that I almost feel like not sending you since I find that, although resembling me, it makes me uglier; if you don't like the photo tear it up; unfortunately I am not like you who is always beautiful in any pose. -

Page 2

These are very busy days as I would like to have a certain number of new paintings for next Autumn so as to be able to hold other exhibitions; which everyone encourages me to do. With regard to work I think of you all the time and I never cease to trust that I can be happy in a life that I will live together with you; you too must always trust in this. I cannot announce anything new to you for the simple reason that it is the quiet season now;

Page 3

all the people I could have dealings with are in the countryside; but in September they will return and I am more than sure that I will organise something; then I will come to see you in October and we will talk at length; you will see that these two months (August and September) will pass quickly; meanwhile let's write often to one another and at length.

I am happy that you are staying in Ferrara. After we are married, we will go to the countryside together. -

I'm waiting to get a good letter from you. Tell me sincerely how you find the photo. -

I kiss your beautiful and dear little hands

yours forever

Giorgio. -

Portrait photograph of de Chirico (black and white):

Back

I daren't write a dedication fearing I'm too ugly. G.

**98. 28 July 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears only the following postmark: Rome 28.7.19.**

Page 1

Rome - Monday

My dearest Antonia,

You cannot imagine how happy I was reading your dear and affectionate letter; everything you say is so kind, loyal and true that I am more and more touched seeing how beautiful your nature is, even more than I imagined.

I work continually thinking of you; waiting impatiently for the happy moment of seeing you again; it won't be long, since these two months

Page 2

ahead of us will pass quickly. -

Meanwhile, here in Rome, I have found a dealer that displays my paintings in his gallery; this will be a good place to sell so that, with the relationships that I am creating, I have very good reason to hope that in this period I spoke to you of (until next Spring) it will be easy for me to resolve my financial problems favourably. On all these matters, of a practical nature,

Page 3

I will keep you informed in detail. -

My work is also helped by the weather, which has gotten cooler; so I get less tired working in the afternoon hours whilst I paint copies of old paintings in the museum at Villa Borghese. As far as amusements are concerned, my life is always the same one: monastic, like yours.

Write to me. I kiss your beautiful little hands.

Ever and ever yours

Giorgio

**99. 9 August 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Rome 9.8.19, Ferrara 10.8.19.**

Page 1

Rome - Saturday

My dearest Antonia,

I received your dear letter; just think that I was the one who was worried because you hadn't written to me; so you did not receive my last letter? Probably not; perhaps someone in your house opened it and didn't give it to you; but perhaps this is not the case.

Anyway let's forget these little things and you, dear big little girl, when these delays happen, never have any doubts on my behalf, since I will always be the same for you. Do you understand, dear bunny?

Page 2

I work a lot; as I wrote to you I have already found a dealer who shows my paintings in his gallery; so now my works are exhibited in three places: Paris, Florence and Rome; I believe that it is impossible, also in view of my activity, that the financial problem will not be solved in this way. - Besides, in Milan, my brother is doing extremely well, a publisher has purchased some pieces of music from him for ~~six thousand lira~~ and has appointed him the editor of a magazine that he is founding. So my

Page 3

brother, in the worst case, could help me, as he has already started to do; but this of course would be the last resort. - So, dear big little girl, always have trust and never doubt your

Giorgio

who kisses your beautiful and dear little hands.

it is better to write to each other as we now do; possibly not every day, but good letters. -

**100. 18 August 1919. Postal note from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postal note bears the following postmarks: Rome 18.8.19, Ferrara 19.8.19.**

Inside

Rome - Monday

Dearest,

I received your dear letter, which as always, gave me much pleasure. - I also received the "Rice"[ration] but your postcard has not arrived. - You cannot imagine, my dear Antonia, how happy I am to see your tranquil and serene affection that corresponds to what I had always desired to find. -

As I already wrote to you, I continue to work a lot. In the past few days it has been very hot. -

I think about you when I am out in the afternoon hours; I think about you walking

along Via Giovecca, and then past the castle; but perhaps you take a

different route  
now; but perhaps you take another itinerary now. My mother so far has  
made no  
comments about your letters. - Have great trust in me always; I kiss your  
beautiful  
little hands and will always be yours  
Giorgio

**101. 27 August 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope just bears the following postmark: Rome 27.8.19.**

Page 1

Rome Wednesday

Dearest,

I received your dear letter of 22 August. It is, like all the others, affectionate and serene. There is nothing new for now. -

I work very hard, also helped by the fact that my brother sends me a monthly salary so that I am not forced, as before, to run here and there to sell a painting; next winter I will put on quite a few exhibitions

Page 2

both in Italy and Paris and so sales will come all at once and my production will be greater and better.

Work and the heat have made me a bit tired; I will feel better in the winter. -

You cannot imagine, my dear Antonia, how impatiently I await the time to see you again; we have known each other almost two years now; old friends, inseparable we will be, in good as in adverse fortune; and so be it.

Page 3

I will be proud of you, big little girl, but you will see that you too will have reasons to value me since I am on the way to celebrity. -

Write to me as you have done till now. -

Live tranquilly and trust that I love you so much and I kiss your beautiful and dear little hands.

yours forever

Giorgio

**102. Early September 1919. Draft of letter from Antonia Bolognesi, Ferrara, to Gemma Cervetto, Giorgio de Chirico's mother, Rome.**

Page 1 (typewritten)

Ferrara,

Dearest Madam,

it will seem strange that I first address you; but I thought it was the best thing to do after questioning my conscience, my soul, [which is] always ready to support me especially when the greatest ponderation is required. You perhaps know, most kind lady, that for almost two years I have been in a close and affectionate relationship with your son Giorgio. Well, during this not brief period our hearts have felt the same feelings, in an aura of peace, with perfect accord so that I can prepare to believe, and I could desire nothing better, than a future life with Giorgio, as that which I have contemplated with pleasure and dreamt of.

But I also think that in order to complete this happiness that I see, that I feel, the aid of your consent would be required, a word, a sign from you, whom I enthusiastically will have to call Mother! ... And that is the reason why I take the liberty of writing to you, to ask you if I will be able to repeat always and aloud this name, already intimately dear to me. Oh how I now await a sign from you! On it my future happiness will depend alongside the man that I adore, that I value, that I set above everything and everybody.

Believe me Madam, that I have suffered a great deal to arrive at this today! and how much I have fought keeping silent out of the fear of being accused of being indiscreet in writing. But you will forgive me, will you not? I have turned to you not to rob you of an affection, but on the contrary to offer you another one, a great one, mine and wholly so.

My father too wanted to write to you about this subject; but I dissuaded him, for now, because first it is my desire to know what you think. I will await your answer: I hope that it brings about something good! This is the wish that I express to face these days of waiting,

Page 2 (handwritten)

Anxious of happy days to come, please accept, dear Madam, my deep regards and the respectful reverence of the most devoted

Antonia Bolognesi

**103. 8 September 1919. Letter from Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

Page 1

8/9/19 Rome Monday<sup>8</sup>

Dear Antonia,

With that letter you wrote to my mother you have done me a very bad service; I hoped that until next Spring, as after all was agreed between us, we would limit ourselves to reciprocal correspondence, except a journey that I hoped to make to Ferrara next month; you now try to test the ground, to be on the safe side by writing to my mother; you have made a mistake, I will tell you immediately and do not be offended you if you don't receive an answer. I also hasten to add that if in

Page 2

such conditions you don't want to have any more to do with me, write to me at once to tell me; we are still in time to part as good friends, without bitter words and without reproaches, but I repeat to you that I desire you not to write to my mother for any reason and I beg you to also tell your father in case he intends to do so. If you don't trust me and my promises, if you fear unpleasant situations, both morally and materially, it is perfectly useless for us to continue writing to one another; I repeat that in this case it is sufficient for you to write this to me and you can at once consider yourself free. -

Page 3

I also add that writing to my mother is perfectly useless and that you will obtain no other result than that of causing me trouble. -

My feelings toward you are unchanged and they will always remain so; but I only want to persevere in my sentimental plan on one condition: that is to say that you will await what I have promised without any attempt to venture into psychological sounding; if you wish I will go on writing to you; in October I will come to Ferrara, and next Spring we will get married; otherwise I repeat: let us leave each other. -

I kiss your hands and I beg you to always believe me your most devoted Giorgio. -

**104. After 8 September 1919. Draft of letter from Antonia Bolognesi (presumably written in Via Mentana 27, Ferrara) to Giorgio de Chirico.**

Page 1

I received your letter today of 8 September.

from the moment that I must be worthy of an answer, ~~which should be~~ whatever it has to be and principle of the most elementary politeness and courtesy on your mother's part, I don't intend to continue and [?] along so false and unknown a pathway. What convinces me most is the fact that while you were asserting your mother ~~was conscious of~~ was informed of our relationship, today instead I realise, and this is proved by your lively protests, because both I and my father we ~~can not~~ write to her any more, that she only learned everything following my letter.

~~So~~ I don't want therefore to be any longer a cause of friction and trouble, in your household, I see it as necessary to ~~separate to~~ forget one another: ~~The decision taken by me [?] from the fact of the wait until next spring from your contradictions~~

Page 2

I have received your letter dated 8 September.

~~It is not already~~ It is all right that we agree to ~~write to one another to~~ continue to correspond with one another, until Spring ~~here~~ having therefore written to your mother I ~~didn't believe I was doing anything bad writing to your mother. all the more because you had said that she already knew about our relationship~~ doesn't mean that I don't want to await the established date - I did this, since as you affirm that she would have known of our relationships, now or later on; it was something to be done; ~~not [?] now~~ besides [?] I realise that she learnt of everything today.... after my letter.

After all, any answer; on your mother's part should constitute a principle of elementary politeness and courtesy. Since I don't have to be worthy of this, I don't want however to be a cause of trouble in your house, and to continue a relationship along so false and unknown a pathway.

~~May a smiling future, as I hope it may be for you~~ my sincere wish for a smiling fortune and perhaps of a better encounter, accompany you.

**105. 4 October 1919. Envelope written by Giorgio de Chirico to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The accompanying letter has been lost. The envelope just bears the following postmark: 4.10.19 [the city is illegible].**

**106. 21 November 1919. Letter from Maria Chevanton Masciarella, Rome, to Antonia Bolognesi (presumably sent to Via Mentana 27, Ferrara). The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

*Page 1*

Dear Antonietta,  
Rome 21-11-19

Only yesterday did I have an answer from my cousin at the War Ministry. However, he tells me that nothing is known at this Ministry despite all the searches made, therefore I have nothing to add for the moment to what I already wrote to you.

My daughter Tina passed by S. Nicola da Tolentino and called in on the concierge with the pretext of looking for furnished rooms and

*Page 2*

thus learnt that this Baroness did live in a subleased furnished apartment, but that she left the rooms in early November, she didn't know whether it was to leave for Rome or for a simple change of lodgings. Unfortunately she was not a very loquacious concierge and, besides, Tina didn't think it was right to ask questions. The landlady came down at that moment so Tina pretended to

*Page 3*

ask her about her rooms for relatives who would be arriving, and so she also heard from her about this change and that the rooms were already rented.

Besides, you will already know if a change of residence has occurred or otherwise you will know the new address in Rome.

If you now believe that a change of house has taken place and the landlady can be asked for some information, you can tell me, but. I did not want to make further enquiries without hearing your opinion first

*Page 4*

Greet all your family for me and Tina, particularly your mother. Also let me know something via Fiorina, who writes to me all the time.

Please accept my regards and my hope that everything will work out only for your good, believe me

Affectionately

Maria Chevanton Masciarella

**107. 23 December 1919. Postal note from Giorgio de Chirico, Milan, to Antonia Bolognesi, Via Mentana 27, Ferrara. The postal note bears the following postmarks: Milan 23.12.19, Ferrara [illegible].**

*Inside*

Milan 23-12-19. -

Dearest Antonia,

Perhaps you won't want to hear about me anymore, following my long silence and rightly so. However, I assure you that I have not forgotten you and that I always hope to be able to be united with you one day. - I am spending the Winter in Milan, I will go to Florence in Spring. Before speaking to you of what I am doing, of my projects etc., I would like to know if you still desire to have a relationship with me. Answer me by return of post since I am moving to different lodgings in a few days time. - I kiss your hands and am always yours

Giorgio

**108. 24 December 1919. Draft of a letter written by hand by Giuseppe Bolognesi, the father of Antonia Bolognesi, to Giorgio de Chirico (presumably sent to Milan).**

*Page 1*

24/12/1919

Dear Mr. De Chirico,

Antonia passed your note on to me.

The reasons I gave you of the clear and precise manifestation of our intentions remain unchanged. We are still of the opinion not to create difficulties if you clearly show that you have created a solid base that would allow you to start a family bearing in mind the demands of life today.

So I consider your insistence inappropriate before having obtained the conditions indicated above.

Greeting you respectfully,

Bolognesi Giuseppe

**109. Post 24 December 1919. Draft of a letter written by hand by Antonia Bolognesi (presumably in Via Mentana 27, Ferrara) to Giorgio de Chirico.**

*Page 1*

The present letter is to tell you that under the pressure of my family's

wishes I had to write you my latest letter, which you will have already received, but I don't intend to abandon our relationship, well knowing your feelings for me are sincere and positive, and also that my feelings are unchanged towards you. Fearing that my family may come to know your answer before I do, I would advise you to write to me in such a way as not to reveal you have received this letter of mine.

I think at this moment of your mother and I am convinced that her affection for you will bring things to a good conclusion ~~of mine that with so much affection I have sent her every thing.~~

Page 2

~~I don't demand an answer, I await an answer from you, your love!~~

**110. Undated but probably dated early February 1920. Letter from Angelina Ortolani Ziotti to Antonia Bolognesi (presumably sent to Via Mentana 27, Ferrara). The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

Page 1

Dear Miss,

Not receiving any answer to my letter sent to Rome in the month of January, presume that a usual postal hitch may perhaps have caused it to go amiss; therefore I am writing to you again to give you the little pieces of information we have succeeded in having on Di [sic] Chirico.

We went to Bragaglia's to have tea and there we had the fortune of meeting acquaintances of my husband's who gave us

Page 2

these precise bits of information.

One has to be a little careful in getting information in order not to arouse suspicion and to provoke questions which one would not know how to answer.

While we were at Bragaglia's De Chirico was there but then he went away immediately and so we just caught a glimpse of him.

The address for the letters and for everything regarding Di [sic] Chirico is: Trinità dei Monti 18.

Page 3

But you can also write to Bragaglia's: Casa d'aste Bragaglia – Via degli Avignonesi – Palazzo Fattori – Rome.

Di [sic] Chirico finds himself immersed in his futurist environment but I repeat that we were not able to ask much many so as not to arouse suspicion regarding the origin of our questions. Why do you not make a short journey to Rome?

Two words spoken are better than 10 letters. Don't you think?

Use me and don't stand on ceremony.

I realise that the information

Page 4

that I send you is limited but it is better than nothing.

Not having had my first letter, I am sorry if this one perhaps reaches you too late.

Regards

Angelina Ortolani Ziotti

Via Margutta 55A, Rome

**111. 25 February 1920. Draft of a letter written by hand by Antonia Bolognesi, Ferrara, to Giorgio de Chirico.**

Page 1

25/2/920

Illustrious

Mr. Mayor

Milan

Registry Office

Please kindly send me the address or the lodging of Mr. Giorgio Dechierico  
..... [?] resident there.

While waiting ...

Page 2

My father is still waiting for an answer from you to his 24.X m 1919. - since you must well realise that I am impatient, desirous to be in continual correspondence. I cannot *forget you* [?] as you, I am certain, will not be able to forget me.

That's all,?!!

Written in the left margin

25/2/920

Dearest

You haven't answered the letter sent by my father until 24/12/n 1 Why? Do you perhaps believe that I have forgotten you, not receiving anything in answer of mine? No, I cannot love so much... to understand at least are you perhaps offended not having an answer from me? Because I have not changed towards you either.

I am concerned however to tell you that for my part I have not forgotten you. Nor will I know however I tell you that I have not forgotten you or if I will ever manage to forget you

Your Antonia

**112. 18 April 1922. Article entitled *A slash at the Spring exhibition in an unidentified newspaper.***

*A slash at the "Spring exhibition"*

Florence, 18 April 1922

In the Building of the Spring exhibition yesterday a slash was made by an unknown evildoer to a painting on display, "The painter and his mother", a canvas by the young painter Giorgio De Chirico, an avant-garde artist and the promoter of so-called "metaphysical painting", seriously damaged with a penknife. The authorities are investigating. The painting is in an underground room at the exhibition.

**113. 11 September 1922 (Front). Official letter from Antonia Bolognesi, Provincial Benevolent Fund for Orphans of Ferrara Farmers killed in the War, Castello Estense, Ferrara, sent to the Mayor of the Commune of Milan.**

**12 September 1922 (back). Official letter from the Commune of Milan, Milan, to Antonia Bolognesi, Benevolent Fund for Orphans of Ferrara Farmers killed in the War, Castello Estense, Ferrara. The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

Front

BENEVOLENT FUND FOR ORPHANS OF FERRARA FARMERS  
KILLED IN THE WAR, CASTELLO ESTENSE

No. 128

Ferrara, 11/9/1922

SUBJECT

Please notify this Office with polite promptness if Mr. Giorgio De Chirico the son of Evaristo and Gemma Cervetto is domiciled there, and if so, inform us of his current address.

Awaiting for your reply, respectfully yours.

THE SECRETARY

Illustrious Mr.

Mayor of the Commune of Milan

Back

Right column

COMMUNE OF MILAN

12 SEP 22

PROT. GEN. RIP. 8

14 SEP 22

REGISTRY OFFICE

for the office

The Head of the Section

Registry Office II 15 SEP 22

De Chirico Giorgio 2 f. Officially notified at Via Lauro 2. -

Rip. 8, II 16 SEP 1922

The Delegate of District I

For information and reference it is confirmed

The Head of the Section

Left column

The Delegation of District I 4572

Di [sic] Chirico Giorgio has not lived at Via Lauro 2 for several years

- It was not possible to find out the new address.

21/9/22

THE MUNICIPAL DELEGATE

28 SEP 1922

To the sender it has given no news

The Extraordinary Royal Commissar

**114. 19 September 1922. Registry Office of the Commune of Florence, Florence to the Secretary of the Benevolent Fund for Orphans of Ferrara Farmers killed in the War, Castello Estense, Ferrara (official answer to the letter of 11.9.1922 from Antonia Bolognesi). The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

COMMUNE OF FLORENCE

19 SEP

1922

REGISTRY OFFICE

Re. Chirico (De) Giorgio

Gen. Reg. No. 41249

Off. Reg. No. 9995

Answer to the letter of 11/9/1922

In reply to the letter indicated in the margin, I inform you that it appears from this population register that De Chirico Giorgio son of Evaristo emigrated from this Commune of that of Rome on 24/11/1921.

FOR THE MAYOR

To the Illustrious Secretary of the Benevolent Fund for Orphans of Ferrara Farmers killed in the War (Castello Estense) FERRARA.

**115. 13 October 1922. Letter not delivered and sent back by Antonia Bolognesi, Ferrara (presumably sent from Via Mentana 27), to Giorgio de Chirico, Via delle Pradelle, Rome. The accompanying envelope bears the following postmarks: Ferrara 13.10.22, Rome [illegible].**

Page 1

Ferrara 13/10/1922

Dearest,

I beg you very much to forgive me if this action after such a period of silence may displease you.

It is dictated only by the dear memory that I have preserved and I still preserve of you, and that I don't hide from you will only abandon me with death. I have followed you everywhere and always thinking of you during these three years of tormented silence due only, I assure you, to not very exact knowledge of your address, and not to a change in my feelings for you. Now that I am given the happiness

Page 2

of knowing more precisely where you are, I don't know however what you think of me. Will I still be worthy of knowing it? I don't know. I wait trembling for an answer of yours that I would beg you to send to the following address:

Benevolent Fund for Orphans of Ferrara Farmers killed in the War  
Castello Estense

Believe me always your Antonia

**116. 7 December 1922. Rejected letter from Antonia Bolognesi, Ferrara (presumably sent from Via Mentana 27) to Giorgio de Chirico, Via Veneto, Rome. The accompanying envelope just bears the following postmark: Ferrara 7.12.1922.**

Page 1

Ferrara, 7/12/1922

Dear Giorgio

I beg you very much to forgive me if this action may displease you after such a period of silence. It is dictated only by the dear memory that I have preserved and I still preserve of you, and, I can't hide from you, will only abandon me with death. I have followed you everywhere and have always thought of you during all this time, writing several times

Page 2

to different addresses, hoping to know something about you.

I wrote to Via Lauro 2 in Milan, then to Via dei Pioppi and lately to Florence because I heard you exhibited there. None of this has ever received a reply. You probably never got anything at all. You have very likely never received anything. It is only now that I have been able to get hold of this address of yours and that of your studio in Via delle Pradelle. On 13 October I sent a return-receipt registered letter to the latter [address], which was only today

Page 3

returned to me, because [the recipient was] unknown.

And so I am writing to you at the following address because if you can have

the present letter you will know once more that I have never forgotten you and neither will I ever forget you. But this period of silence, which has passed between us, has perhaps changed your feelings; and another love has perhaps taken my place in your heart. My God!

If this has happened, I beg you to have the courage to tell me, so that I can oblige my heart, that has already been tortured enough, to remain silent forever.

Page 4

If you believe me worthy of knowing this, I beg you to do so at the following address: Provincial deputation - Castello Estense.

Believe me always

yours Antonia

PS. Do forgive me very much if I send the letter to this address, but what else could I have done?

**117. 12 December 1922. Draft of a letter written on headed paper of the *Provincial Benevolent Fund for Orphans of Ferrara Farmers killed in the War, Castello Estense, Ferrara, from Antonia Bolognesi to an unidentified professor of the Municipality of Rome.***

Page 1

Ferrara 12/12/922

Dear Professor,

I beg you very much to excuse me if I take the liberty of writing to you personally although I do not know you personally - I turn to you to ask you for a great favour though I do not know if you can do it.

I would desire to know the precise address of a certain Mr. Giorgio de Chirico a painter that has a studio in Via delle Pradelle. ~~I do not know, and he lives his~~ residence in Via Veneto - I would possibly desire to know the number, ~~of the road~~ and the district, either of one or of the other address, the one that ~~I have written to~~ the only add. that it will be easiest for you to know.

Page 2

~~writing to the simple addresses, given the vastness of Rome, they very probably didn't find it~~ The task that I give you is rather troublesome, but since you are from Rome, you can more easily succeed in doing something.

However, I would like you to make these searches always without the gentleman in

question knowing.

~~I won't know in what way I will be informed of the phases of your searches.~~

I would also ask you to address the answer to me personally to the address of the Benevolent Fund, where I work.

If can do what I ask, do it and I will be eternally grateful to you I apologise to you again, and I thank you in advance.

Post scriptum (it appears on the first page top left)

Written 22/10/922 saying that it doesn't serve any purpose anymore

**118. 2 January 1923. Official letter from Antonia Bolognesi, *Provincial Benevolent Fund for Orphans of Ferrara Farmers killed in the War, Castello Estense, Ferrara, sent to the Registry Office of the Commune of Rome. The Commune of Rome answers on 9 January 1923.***

PROVINCIAL BENEVOLENT FUND FOR ORPHANS Ferrara, 2/1/1922 [sic]  
OF FERRARA FARMERS KILLED IN THE WAR  
CASTELLO ESTENSE

Right column

Please indicate with polite promptness to the writer the Number of the house and the district of Mr. Giorgio De Chirico son of Evaristo and Gemma Cervetto, living in Via Veneto.

Waiting for your polite answer on the subject I thank you respectfully.

The secretary

A. Bolognesi

At the centre

Stamp: S.P.Q.R.

4th SECTION

No. 29535 4 Jan 1923

Bottom left

Dear Sir

Registry Office of the Commune of Rome

Bottom right

Stamp: Director 4<sup>th</sup> Municipal Office

General Affairs Section

Rome - Via Poli 54 9 JAN 1923

*Written by hand*

To the sender. [?] is not enrolled in this population register  
The Director

**119. 17 January 1923. Draft of a letter written by hand by Antonia Bolognesi (presumably written in Via Mentana 27, Ferrara) to Giorgio de Chirico.**

Page 1

17/1/23

Giorgio,  
three very long years have passed, very sad ones for me, because of the regret of having feared that circumstances contrary hostile to us were insurmountable obstacles and so not having answered your last very dear letter.

I perhaps believed that the thought of you would disappear with time, I perhaps considered it my duty to comply with my loved ones, but I didn't realise I loved you above them and that I would never be able to forget you ... And I realised it when, constantly, persistently, the memory of you returned to me in the silence of so many sleepless nights or other moments of loneliness that I sought on purpose, and it brought red-hot tears out of me, and it made me recall our love, with endless regret!

Page 2

Yet I never wanted to attempt anything, to find out about you and your life, almost jealous of preserving my secret, yet I would jump if, at random I heard your name even uttered by indifferent people, and a great desire took me to know something about you and that would have interested me so much!

Giorgio tell me a little about your life, tell me what you do, tell me that you think, because I cannot go on living with all that darkness that enwraps you, because I have a great, boundless, irresistible desire to have a letter of yours, to read some words of yours that are addressed to me.

Even if a bad destiny has caused me to be alone ~~to love~~ to preserve the cult of our love ~~write to me just the same~~ do not deprive me of an answer, I beg you – and if

Page 3

this was not true, Giorgio, forgive me this ~~thought~~ ~~idea~~ doubt.

Excuse me if I have written to this address and if I beg you to answer me and .....

I wait impatiently, almost feverishly, and I clasp your strong hands that I would like to cover with kisses and tears.

Yours Antonia

**120. 16 April 1926. Letter from Alberto Savinio, Rome, to an unknown person, subsequently given to Antonia Bolognesi. The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

Page 1

Dear Sir,

On behalf of yourself Bragaglia gave me my brother's address in Paris.

Here it is:

Giorgio de Chirico

Hotel Beauséjour

Rue des Saints-Pères

Paris

Yours sincerely

Alberto Savinio

**121. 29 September 1932. Article by P. Sighi, *The solo Exhibitions of Modern Painting at Galleria Milano*, «Corriere Padano», Ferrara.**

*The Solo Exhibitions of Modern painting at Galleria Milano*

Contemporary painting tends to a clarification of ideas and conquests for which the need has long been felt. It wants to arrive quickly at broad understanding: it spreads in the certainty of its immediate influence.

It must finally be felt and understood in its aesthetic and pictorial values.

This precise and coherent desire that it has, the incessant work of transformation and spiritual torment of the last few years, have living expression in the most significant artists that in Italy and abroad tirelessly pursue the aim of giving Italian painting undisputed superiority and its noble characteristics worthy of our artistic tradition. This is work of vulgarization that will be carried out in a series of personal exhibitions in Milan, from October to April, in the rooms of the Milano

Gallery, which for a long time has decidedly sided with the energies and the densest convictions of an acute modern conscience, overcoming controversies and serious sacrifices, even creating a Press Office – the first of the kind in Italy -.

The exhibitor – painters and sculptors – are embattled men with well-known names: Arturo Martini, Giorgio de Chirico, Mario Sironi, Achille Funi, Filippo De Pisis.

The atmosphere of a rare artistic event will be given by the return to personal exhibitions of Cipriano Effisio Oppo, who for quite a long time has been absent as an exhibitor from painting art events.

Some older works will also be displayed, which with the new ones will give a clear vision of the ascending evolution of this strong and ingenious artist of ours.

The “solo exhibitions” of Borra, Savinio, Leonora Fini, Messini and Marini, will complete the display activity of the Milano Gallery that will also take to Paris, Antwerp, Prague, Rome, Brescia, Turin, Ferrara, Genoa and Bergamo the most representative painting in modern Italy.

**122. 12 March 1934. Official letter from the Registry Office of the Commune of Florence, Florence, to Mr. Giovanni Negrini, Via Frescobaldi 23, Ferrara, subsequently given to Antonia Bolognesi. The accompanying envelope has been lost.**

COMMUNE OF FLORENCE

12 March; 1934 XII year V

REGISTRY OFFICE

RE Address

Gen. Reg. No. 10779

Off. Reg. No. 678

Answer to the letter of 7/3/34

In reply to the letter indicated in the margin, I report that:

Mr. Giorgio De Chirico son of Evaristo is not enrolled in this population register.

FOR THE PODESTÀ

To Mr. Negrini Giovanni  
Via Frescobaldi 23 Ferrara

**123. 13 May 1942. Draft of handwritten letter from Antonia Bolognesi to Giorgio de Chirico.**

I am so grateful to you for the fine opportunity that you have offered me, and I take it to express all my admiration for you.

In “Corriere padano” of 10 April a portrait of Countess Ciano appeared that faithfully portrays the features of the original, wisely refined and softened by your skilled hand. I don’t know, nor can I tell you any more, because my intellectual knowledge in this field is very limited, in any case you can also add this modest appreciation to the endless corollary of those that will certainly interest you most.

But in addition to sometimes pleasing my eye, you also often give us varied notions and exhaustive explanations on the subject of painting, with your discourse that is published in episodes, in our daily paper. Why precisely in Ferrara? ~~You know~~ Do you too still remember this calm but so dear provincial city? I am convinced that you would like it, which even today is much more awake and renewed, but nevertheless would be able still to provide some good inspiration for a metaphysical spirit like yours. Will you come here some day? Or only when the famous project of the Gallery of Modern Art is ready? (Corriere padano December 1939). - I desire it, and I hope for it.

Please accept my best wishes, sure that you will want to judge me kindly, and to forgive my boldness.

Ferrara 13-5-942-XX

**124. 21 December 1950. Letter from Antonia Bolognesi to Giorgio de Chirico. Rome, presumably never sent.**

Page 1

21-12-1950

Before leaving this beautiful Rome, where Pellegrina has had me to stay on occasion of this Jubilee, and after having had the fortune to meet you in Piazza di Spagna yesterday evening together with a person near the gallery in Piazza di Spagna, I take the liberty of sending you many regards and best wishes for a Happy Christmas with this missive.

most devoted

Antonia Bolognesi

**125. 6 November 1974. Mario Stefani's article, *Immortal De Chirico. Today he is honoured with the title of Academician of France. It is very rare for the very high honour to be conferred on a foreigner – Ceremony at the "Institut de France", in an unidentified newspaper.***

*Immortal De Chirico. Today he is honoured with the title of Academician of France. It is very rare for the very high honour to be conferred on a foreigner – The ceremony at the "Institut de France"*

Giorgio De Chirico receives the highest recognition from French culture today: he is named an Academician of France, among the immortals.

That an Academician of France should be Italian is no mean thing. The fact is that it is rare for this great honour to be conferred on a foreigner. Piazza di Spagna, where De Chirico lives, is full of Japanese and American tourists. They have showy shoulder cameras and say, all the time, in a chorus "Sayonara" and "Beautiful."

Various stands full of objects made by hand with local pseudo-hippies full of hair and strange necklaces in roughly wrought silver with a certain naïf grace, who do wonderful business. The artist observes it all without looking. He has an ironic, detached smile, a bit childish and a bit bitter. He is almost eighty-seven years old but nobody would believe it. Perhaps he does not even believe it himself. His wife Isa, active, races from Japan to France, America. Exhibitions follow exhibitions, successes follow successes.

But De Chirico, with English coolness, is unworried. He has other things to think about. Trials, never-ending lawsuits, forged paintings spring up everywhere like mushrooms. It is an accursed forest with every protocol storm, every bureaucratic delay, every procedural exception. I believe that a whole section of the court is clogged by the "De Chirico" case. But it certainly is not his fault, the "pictor optimus", as he defines himself, says, signing his paintings. He does not love hearing about certain painters, Modigliani can be relied on. If one wants to dig at him, he knows what to do. For him Apollinaire is a great poet, but he does not want to hear him embalmed, dehumanised. They ask him about the French poet as if they were asking him about an oriental guru. "I am a genius", he proclaims. But he says it more out of coquetry, to amuse himself and others. His wife Isa gets angry because she fears the indiscretions of journalists. But you have to know how to distinguish in this case too. If one reports such a sentence in a serious form one can be a slanderer. If one repeats it with the exact intention of the author, it is demythologised and indeed is very

pleasing for the interviewee.

De Chirico is honest and at times, in spite of evil-minded people that say he is stingy, he is very generous. He arouses hatred and deep likings, grudges and jealousies. No painter exists that does not recognise that he has merit, but also there is no painter that does not hold something against him (the fact of being an academician of France will be the last step on a staircase he has already reached the top of).

He relives his classical models, his "pure" and "lost" Greece, with the melancholy of a modern man. The technological and "modernist" irruption, like the train, enters an abandoned and classically tired and perfect fabric.

The great De Chirico, there is no doubt about it, is the metaphysical De Chirico. The ability appears, obviously, and so does the genius, also in the "seventeenth-century" paintings, where the artist and the model, Isa, often appear almost naked. The metaphysician par excellence gets agitated if other names of that current are mentioned to him. "Who is Carrà? I think I have already heard of him."

Rome and Venice are the cities that he particularly loves. He says he is a man "that loves slippers", but actually his life has been very lively. He has lived in Greece, in Germany, in France, and in America. In his autobiography he lovingly remembers the beautiful cafés of the past, the few that remain, that genteel and "literary" aura that still wafts through them.

I ask him with curiosity which drawing will used for the hilt of his rapier as an Academician of France, but the noise of a scooter suffocates my voice in a Piazza di Spagna that is crowded and whirling as Rome can be around one o'clock on any day.

**TECHNICAL NOTES**  
**THE DE CHIRICO - BOLOGNESI CORRESPONDENCE**

1. The de Chirico-Bolognesi correspondence consists of 125 documents, including 104 letters, postcards and postal notes sent by Giorgio de Chirico to Antonia Bolognesi, and 8 letters and drafts of letters written by Antonia Bolognesi to the artist.

The correspondence and documentation's chronological ordering is based on the careful analysis of content, postmarks, as well as specific mention of dates and days, in close parallel to the calendar of 1919.

The transcriptions of the de Chirico-Bolognesi correspondence in the Italian edition (Maretti Editore, Falciano, 2015) faithfully reproduce the originals and, as such, spelling errors, grammatical mistakes and afterthoughts have been retained.

A succinct caption for each transcription indicates - when known with certainty - the name, address of sender and/or recipient, date when the letter was written and postmarks.

With regard to the three press cuttings, the journalist's name, the article's title, the publication date and the newspaper's name have been provided (when known with certainty).

In a few instances, various discrepancies have been identified regarding the date, city, or postmark date. Such incongruities have been specified, on a case-by-case basis, in the footnotes below (n. 2-8).

This section of transcriptions (translated into English) has been collected, ordered and accompanied by essential technical indications. The material will be carefully examined and analysed in a forthcoming study by Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico.

2. In the letter's heading, "Ferrara" is clearly an error as de Chirico had just arrived in Rome, as deduced from the postcard's contents. This postcard allows us to finally date de Chirico's departure from Ferrara as 31/12/1918 and his arrival in Rome as 1/1/1919.

3. The day of the week written by de Chirico appears to be incorrect as Tuesday fell on 4 February 1919. The postmark date proves that the letter was actually sent on Sunday, 2 February 1919.

4. The letter that de Chirico refers to has evidently been lost.

5. Both the year of the letter (1918 rather than 1919) and the Rome postmark date (February rather than March) are erroneous.

6. The month specified in the letter's date was probably a simple error made by de Chirico. Both the postmark ("A. IV.19") and the artist's statement that "*Tomorrow is Sunday*" attest to this error. In actual fact, 5 April 1919 fell on a Saturday, whilst 5 March 1919 fell on a Wednesday.

7. The letter was written on Monday, 21 April 1919 (Easter Monday) and was sent on Tuesday, 22 April 1919. In the year 1919, Easter Sunday fell on 20 April.

8. It is not known whether the date specified in the letter, "8/9/19", belongs to de Chirico's hand or was subsequently added by Antonia Bolognesi.

**FERRARESE POEMS AND PROSE POEMS  
BY GIORGIO DE CHIRICO (1916-1918)<sup>1</sup>**

**MYSTERIOUS NIGHT<sup>2</sup>**

*for Bongiovanni the astronomer*

It was the professor Martino and his sweet friend Grancane.  
Inseparable in good as  
in adverse fortune. Through the same telescope  
the one gazed at the afternoon constellation  
already spotted by the other.  
O sweetness...  
Two iron artichokes on the ochre table.  
The geometry of shadows lacerated the heart  
all melancholy morning.  
But evening came and the volumes and forms fused.  
Men and animals were passing like silent shadows in the crepuscular light.  
Long dream's light. The strange sounds arrive stifled  
only the mind's wheels, vertiginous, rotate.

.....

And morning was late. In the stable I saw them and I also saw myself.  
The stench of the cows shortened my breath.  
Nude lay Martino and Grancane in the rafters still damp with the fluids of their  
parts. Nude they lay and their backs were covered with hair, brown and shiny-long  
like silk. Each one on all fours in his rafter was singing like the nightingale in love

---

<sup>1</sup> English translation from the original Italian by Stefania Heim. De Chirico's complete poems are published in the original French and Italian in *Giorgio de Chirico - Tutte le poesie. Edite e inedite*, in «Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico», n. 7-8, Le Lettere, Florence, 2008, pp. 423-500. The first extensive English language translation of de Chirico's complete French and Italian poetry is published in «Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals», n. 14-16, Maretti Editore, Falciano, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The poem's original title is *La notte misteriosa*. It is dated "January 1916" and dedicated "to Bongiovanni the Astronomer". Giuseppe Bongiovanni was a well-known astronomer and physicist who worked in Ferrara who Savinio and Filippo de Pisis also mentioned in their prose. It was published in «Noi» (directed by Enrico Prampolini) in January 1919.

on a moonlit night. Taciturn men with Herculean arms slowly circled curves over them.

Snow-white skin appeared beneath the livid lightning of steel shears.

The night is long...

That I never hear! ...Are they screams? ...Maybe the raving crowd splinters the dreadful beam against the unsteady door that shatters like battlements beneath the blows of the cat and the ram?

No, it is nothing. Everything sleeps; even the owls and bats who also in the dream dream of sleeping.

*January 1916*

### SONG<sup>3</sup>

Tetzcatlipoca

Brilliant mirror and I go

with hopes more beautiful than down

from the tall palm trees they pour like shaken ripe higueros

in the lustre of autumn.

The sea moorings no longer broken

magnetic the kayak will row.

Under the hard rectangular blue sky

like in Guadalajara the façade

of the gubernatorial building blues the heart

(in the clamp oil in the wool)

I brought borealis.

Now I trace on the dullness of the dry walls

the calculiform signs of the mind.

Rubbergloved the fingers on the frame

delicate my joy I draw like

a good Aztec craftsman the profound

mosaic of iridescent plumes.

*Ferrara, June 1916*

---

3 The poem's original title is *Canzone*. It is dated "*Ferrara June 1916*" and was published for the first time in Rome's «Avanscoperta» (directed by Ettore Marchionni) in January 1917.

### FRAGMENT<sup>4</sup>

I am a piece of mortgaged real estate.

The blind doorman – *ad limina custos* – teaches the plaster disciple the algebra of my longings.

My window is a ship's porthole.

My base is a mast without its sail.

I am a piece of mortgaged real estate.

Reheated, comforted by afternoon's warmth – warned by the daily howling of the calling siren.

I am mortgaged real estate.

Today, feast of San Michele, the yellow van (X Bros. Moving and Shipping via Caravelli 7B TORINO)

Has reinflated my languor

In the autumn that lessens Odorless evacuations.

Now it goes along the canal (streetcar rails)

Toward faraway stations

Of the avant-city.

### JOURNEY<sup>5</sup>

*for Carlo Carrà*

O Quetzalcoatl

Strident rigid banner of zinc

black above the roof tiles of my paternal

house, which I will never see again.

Magnetic pole in the snowy air.

On the sidewalk white with dust and cold,

*étrange jouet*, of my already far-off

childhood.

---

4 This "*fragment*" was written in 1916-1917. It was published in February 1917 in «Avanscoperta», *op. cit.* English translation by S. Heim in «A Public Space», n. 24, New York, 2016, p. 70

5 The poem's original title is *Viaggio*. Dated "*April 1917*", it was written in Poggio Renatico and was dedicated to Carlo Carrà. It was published in May 1917 in «Avanscoperta», *op. cit.*

I think of a city in Alaska on a winter morning, white below the white mountains, near the dark sea.  
 I think about a packet-boat taking coal in Tenerife on a warm September afternoon and then steaming off toward the ports of old Europe.  
 And in this hour of grace we don't remember the spring, destroying storm, cyclone of love and of death.  
 Winter will come loosely dressed with a Browning automatic in the pocket of its trousers.  
 "Vous ne fûtes jamais en Italie Madame?"  
 And you Piedmontese engineer, constructor of new railway lines, why are you so melancholy today?  
 That America was not a part of Asia no one suspected until that evening in 1513 when from the highlands of Panama Balboa saw the vast Pacific Ocean and understood that the world discovered was *truly*  
*a new world.*

*Poggio Renatico, April 1917*

### MR. GOVONI SLEEPS<sup>6</sup>

In the city where they hail him among a thousand statues on pedestals so low it seems they are walking with the hurried citizens.  
 On stage everything is mystery...  
 The mirror on its stand. The picture is not yet finished.  
 The philosopher sleeps. He bangs himself against the door.  
 It is the friends; because the sun is already descending, and shadows already long get longer, and invite

6 The poem's original title is *Il signor Govoni dorme*. A passage from this poem was published in A. Savinio's "Frara" città del Worbas, in «La Voce» on 31 October 1916, and later on in Savinio's *Her-maphrodito*, Florence, 1918. English translation in «A Public Space», op. cit., p. 75.

peripatetic friendship.  
 ...He bangs himself against the door. In vain! In vain!...  
 The obscene foot soldier shrieks from the window:  
 All night he has been wakeful, watching the piazza, and the red castle, and the clear river...  
 and now he sleeps, sleeps, sleeps, ...and one must not, must not wake him!

### EPODE<sup>7</sup>

– Return O my earliest felicity!  
 joy inhabits strange cities  
 a new magic has descended on the earth.

City of dreams not dreamed  
 built with holy patience by daemons  
 it is you that faithfully I will sing.

One day I will also be a human statue  
 widowed spouse on the Etruscan sarcophagus  
 on that day o maternal city  
 hug me in your great stony embrace.

### RESORT<sup>8</sup>

*for Carlo Carrà, the painter with the seven levels*

I set up the beautiful games  
 In the gardens between the gates

7 The poem's original title is *Epodo*. Dated "Ferrara 1917", it was published in January 1919 in «Ars Nova» (directed by Alfredo Casella). The manuscript once belonged to Filippo de Pisis. De Chirico later included a French translation of *Epode* in the lyrical text *Salve Lutetia* which was published in «Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne» (directed by Léonce Rosenberg), Paris, March 1927.

8 The poem's original title is *Villeggiatura*. Dated "May 1917" and dedicated to Carlo Carrà, it was published in «Cronache letterarie», Rome, August 1917. English translation in «A Public Space», op. cit., p. 71.

Seraphic mediators. Who won the game? In the packet-boat café they bore in triumph the president in alpaca.  
There was a terrible chest of drawers and a never-before-seen animal speaking in the street.  
I am sleeping. The image comes to me of shadowy trees seen from the corridor of a house I lived in as a boy.  
Someone was calling me from the other room.

I pushed the motorboat near the promontory. It was afternoon, friends. The sea all boiling.  
The workshops and the mines were smoking on the jagged rocks of the coast. A metaphysician in a pink sweater slept under a pine tree. Colourful tin birds were moving about the beach.  
– I gambled soul and happiness. He remained for a long time without moving a die. The game was impossible. We went out because the air was already beginning to blacken. In the street, suddenly, I thought of that box of those bright and multicoloured things abandoned *alone* in the terrifying solitude of the rental property.  
The hurricane breaks out. Where have you led me O dreadful destiny?  
I look all around me at the marvels positioned on spring's terrible stages. Each booth contains a ghost. I discover them one after another shifting the curtains.  
– I am the survivor and the unborn.  
I carry the diver's helmet. My brain's throbbing shatters into many little bubbles on the lacquered platform of my seventh ceiling.  
The sky is a mosquito net of iron thread.  
The shipyards no longer smoke.  
Farewell days of tired bliss.  
The shutters are closed. The doors barred.  
Everywhere is the wait and the gathering.

*Villa Seminario, May 1917*

## ANXIOUS HOUR<sup>9</sup>

All the houses are empty  
Sucked up by the aspirator sky.  
All the piazzas deserted.  
All the pedestals widows.  
The statues – migrated in long  
Stone caravans  
Toward faraway ports.  
– Strange inscriptions crop up at each crossroads.  
Gloomy warnings to *go no further* –  
“Danger of death”  
But even immortality is dead  
In this hour without name on the quadrants  
Of human time.  
Can it be that I am left alone with  
the remains of vital warmth at the  
top of my skull?  
Can it be that I am left alone with a beat  
surviving in a heart that won't quiet?  
Come back tired bliss of my spent years!  
That which I have lost I will never have again.  
But in your beautiful hand, oh woman, you hold  
the sacred token of eternal youth.

## PROMONTORY<sup>10</sup>

Nine years have passed since that discovery illuminated the dark room of my consciousness with stormy nocturnal lightning; I know no photographs more terrible than those taken inside a house at night by flash of magnesium. Today this well-defined surface remains continually before me, like a compass: two-faced level for the mounting of walled-up sadness and the multi-coloured scaffolding of ever-living joy.

9 De Chirico sent the original poem, *L'ora inquietante*, to Mario Broglio to be published in «Valori Plastici»'s first issue. In the end, his prose poem, *Zeuxis the Explorer*, was chosen for publication. English translation in «A Public Space», *op. cit.*, p. 74.

10 The prose poem's original title is *Promontorio*. Dated “*Ferrara July 1917*”, de Chirico sent it to Bino Binazzi, together with a text by Savinio, for publication in «La Brigata», although it remained unpublished.

No one would have supposed *before* that on the floor of a room (similar to the painted deck of a long distance packet-boat) one day I would position big pears of coloured papier-mâché to represent: *The Fruit of the Poet*; not even I imagined it, even when during the daily hallucinations of my gloomy infancy I would see the tragedy of Golgotha above a city street shaded by two rows of pepper trees.

There is also an enormous pike, made of zinc and lead, raised up on iron poles, and placed in the middle of a solitary room with a large red rug.

And so today, from this 29<sup>th</sup>-year promontory I see the latitude of my work lengthen for kilometres and kilometres, to the South and due North, without the foolish indeterminacies of sidereal infinities. The ship of the Argonauts has disappeared amid the ice and mists.

Profundity and solitude have finally left the oceans unfathomed. Amphibians with sensitive skin, wrapped in a net of strange shivers, now slither through the tepid waters of the ports. In those waters bounded by burnt and solid land and by industrial buildings. Waters that don't stupidly reflect the superimposed landscape because they are fully coloured by the boiling sulphurous cascades that pour down continually from the smoking rocks of the coast.

Gentlest outlets of telluric bile.

In that fecund heat made up of the steamy sulphurous afternoon the work soaked in bitter sweat is born from a thousand throbs.

To accompany this happiness of mine the most perfect reliefs form along the walls of my room.

I see Roman centurions, pressed by serragonii, crossing in tender symmetry the bridges of boats cast on fated faraway conquests.

At the end, like a promise, (similar to a glossy map tacked to the wall) the sweet profile of the Laurion takes shape.

*Ferrara, July 1917*

## THE WEARY ARCHANGEL<sup>11</sup>

On this April afternoon, while the idiot almond trees are not the only ones tossing the flowers of promises, I want to affix onto the windows and door of my house the banner of the newly established publicly traded company of which I am the

---

<sup>11</sup> Dated "April 1918", the prose poem's original title is *L'arcangelo affaticato*. The manuscript was given to Filippo de Pisis. English translation in «A Public Space», *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

principle shareholder.

My room is a beautiful vessel in which I can take adventurous voyages worthy of a headstrong explorer. In the anteroom the revenants crowd.

What do they do while I can't see them? While the wall's motionless curtain remains drawn between them and me? Nobody could tell me. Whenever, curious, I leave my work and approach on the tips of my slippers that half-closed door and look into the mystery of that anteroom *they* always appear in the same *natural poses*. True still lifes.

It is the terrible naturalness, the inexorable logic that each object – destined by the immutable laws of gravity to remain on the earth's crust – carries within, printed on its Center.

But when I go away and see them again only with my mind's eye; when I aim my gaze like the metallic dart of drill on the wall-curtain then, oh then every revenant seems still another, and behind every curtain I hear things moving that I've never imagined.

Then even the natural pose of the chess player seated at the meditation table appears to me in all its tremendous spectrality. And from the vine-stitched, gagged, sealed, armored mouth, I hear welling up the most dismal murmuring summoning the companion who at that hour perhaps also sits down there, in some faraway city in the industrial territories beyond the seas. Cities sliced by asphalted and shining streets; beautified by the sunny squares' perfect quadrants and by piazzas pregnant with shade. Cities where the strident life sings night and day amid the cheerful circle of mines and industrious shipyards, with the dwarfish railroads that climb and run pitching like hasty ants, along the cement bastions and on the platforms yellowed by the yellow earth, with the armored trucks filled with the flesh and the blood of the freshly sliced channels. Cities that joust between the metallic scaffolding decked out in blasts of steam, and the sweet symmetry of the long, low workshops wrapped in a belt of large academic windows; curled up into herds beneath the noontide heat; kept awake by the solemn sentry of the tall chimneys continually spewing thick, dark clouds that slowly fade in a most comforting *premier* between the city and the sky turbid with heat where up above nostalgic families of bald-necked birds of prey trace tired spirals circling without rest...

Then I, too, feel beaten by all that distance and fatally as though pressed by the plaster hand of some inexorable ghost who would wake me, I fold beneath the contractions of an imminent birth...

Then the great metaphysical paintings go, the hermetic visions squared for populous cities of faraway continents.

The great river of the idiot crowd will filter them forward without trembling for

the terrible mystery frozen within the frames' rectangles...

But then as centuries will have followed centuries and the new mechanics will have plotted new metal laces, sketched out new complications for the ossified exhaustion of the dead planet, my name, murmured within tribes chosen by the future, will be the sweetest emotion to the brother who I will never know but who will carry stamped in his eyes that strange and tremendous longing that in this faraway today burns my heart and brain, and shakes my weary body with rape, and blackens the veins across all my flesh with a blood pregnant with bile and tears.

*April 1918*

### **ZEUXIS THE EXPLORER<sup>12</sup>**

*for Mario Broglio*

Once the passageways are opened within the idiot fences that shut in the various *groups* – whimpering or roaring – the new Zeuxis' depart alone in search of curiosities that burrow like moles across the crust of the terraqueous globe. "The world is full of demons," said Heraclitus of Ephesus, strolling in the shade of the porticos, in the hour pregnant with high noon's mystery, while in the dry embrace of the Asiatic gulf, the salty water was simmering beneath the south-western wind.

*You must find the demon in every thing.*

The ancient Cretans printed an enormous eye in the middle of the skinny profiles that chased each other around their vases, their domestic tools, the walls of their houses.

Even the fetus of a man, of a fish, of a chicken, of a serpent is, in its first stage, entirely an eye.

*You must find the eye in every thing.*

I was already thinking that way in Paris during the final years preceding the explosion of the conflict. Around me the international gang of *modern* painters

was stupidly striving between exhausted formulas and sterile systems.

Only I, in my squalid atelier on the rue Campagne-Première, was beginning to perceive the first ghosts of an art more complete, more profound, more complicated and, to say it in a word though at the risk of giving hepatic colic to a French critic: *more metaphysical*.

New lands appeared on the horizon.

The big zinc coloured glove, with the terrible golden nails, swung on the shop door in the sad breaths of the civic afternoons; with its index finger pointing toward the slabs of the sidewalk it showed me the hermetic signs of a new melancholy.

The papier-mâché skull in the middle of the hairdresser's window cut in the strident heroism of gloomy prehistory, burned my heart and mind like a recurring song.

The demons of the city opened the road for me.

When I returned home other harbinger ghosts came towards me.

On the ceiling I discerned new Zodiac signs when I watched its desperate flight go to die at the back of the room in the rectangle of the window opened onto the mystery of the street.

The door half closed upon the night of the anteroom had the sepulchral solemnity of a rock shifted before the empty tomb of the resurrected.

And the new harbinger paintings arose.

Like autumnal fruits we are now ripe for the new metaphysics. That strong winds may bear down from distant turbulent seas.

That our cry may reach the populous cities of faraway continents.

We must not fatten ourselves, not even in the happiness of our new creations.

We are explorers ready for new departures.

Below roofs echoing with metallic clanging the quadrants are struck at the sign of departure. In the signal boxes the bells ring out.

It is time ...

"Gentlemen, all aboard...!"

*Rome April 1918*

---

<sup>12</sup> The prose poem's original title is *Zeusi l'esploratore*. Dated "Rome April 1918" and dedicated to Mario Broglio, who was director of «Valori Plastici», it was published in the periodical's first issue (year I, n. 1, November 1918).

**UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE BY GIORGIO DE  
CHIRICO SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON THE ARTIST'S ACTIVITIES  
FROM METAPHYSICAL ART TO THE RETURN TO CRAFT.**

Fabio Benzi

An extensive epistolary has unexpectedly emerged (as always occurs with the discovery of archival documents) between Giorgio de Chirico and the unknown love of his, a Ferrara woman named Antonia Bolognesi. This wholly exceptional event highlights how much there is still to discover concerning our early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists as well as the importance of archival sources. We are dealing with events so recent that, up until a few years ago, they could have been conveyed through the memory of living witnesses, an event that makes us aware of just how many historical events still remain unknown. The correspondence also reminds us of an analogous case that occurred in fairly recent times regarding Umberto Boccioni, another key Italian painter of the same period.<sup>1</sup> The analogies between the two stories are curious and striking: the discovery of an important love affair until now unknown with significant data emerging about crucial periods of the lives of the respective artists (1916 for Boccioni,<sup>2</sup> 1919 for de Chirico). Unlike the Boccioni correspondence, in which some letters of his loved one, Vittoria Colonna, are also conserved, we have no trace of Antonia Bolognesi's letters (except some late notes). The overall number of letters held in the Boccioni epistolary (11 of the artist's and 8 by Colonna) is noticeably inferior, however, to the de Chirico correspondence, which comprises of circa 100 letters.

Antonia Bolognesi's great-nephew, Eugenio Bolognesi, found this precious material among inherited documents and took it upon himself to write this episode of his family's history. With this thoughtful book, he details a significant part of the contents of this frequent, intense correspondence, which now awaits a philological and integral edition that I hope will soon appear on the pages of the periodical «Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals».

In the meantime, the present volume offers, in and of itself, detailed testimony to

---

<sup>1</sup> The Boccioni correspondence was published by M. Caracciolo Chia, *Una parentesi luminosa. L'amore segreto fra Umberto Boccioni e Vittoria Colonna*, Milan, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For the topics raised by Boccioni's apparently generic letters, see my reflections in F. Benzi, *Il Futurismo*, Milan, 2008, p. 193.

a period strangely lacking in documentation, which happens to coincide with one of the most crucial changes in de Chirico's art, from his Metaphysical Art of the Ferrara period to the Return to Craft and classicism of the «Valori Plastici» periodical. Years ago, whilst publishing a fundamental epistolary between de Chirico and the most important Roman art collectors at the time, Olga and Angelo Signorelli, I observed that “*the neglected year 1919, a year crucial to the development of de Chirico's classicism, has been overlooked and substantially circumvented by researchers, who have not gone into the specific details of the moment.*”<sup>3</sup> This was due to an effective lack of documents, which made the sparse objective data devoid of a framework and network of references. One need only reflect on the fact that this impassioned love story, which lasted about two years and was destined to culminate in marriage, was completely unknown until today. The discovery of the Bolognesi correspondence, comprising of almost daily missives during the course of 1919, is indeed noteworthy.

Let us provide a brief framework, which the present volume gives full account of. First of all, an exceptionally intense love story (one, I repeat, that was unknown until now), comes to light in which an impassioned and devoted de Chirico wrote to his beloved almost every day (military and artistic commitments permitting), with tones of afflicted melancholy over their separation and warm, heartfelt affection. He wrote letters and missives almost every evening to the young woman he longed to marry, posting them the following morning before going to work (the letters are frequently dated to the day before the postmark). Their love story dates to the Autumn of 1917 in Ferrara (as de Chirico incidentally notes in a letter of August 1919, specifying that they had known each other for almost two years). On 1 January 1919, Giorgio was sent to Rome by the army and the correspondence begins that very day: it is curious that no trace of letters or even simple notes exist prior to that moment, indicating that the two must have frequented one another intensely and assiduously, to the point of making written communications unnecessary. Their relationship continues now from afar, dense with promises of marriage and declarations of impassioned and tender love and the scheduling of the wedding. Initially planned for the end of 1919, it was then postponed to the Spring of 1920 due to de Chirico's uncertain financial conditions and work prospects. The artist hoped for a change in his difficult post-war period financial situation. Some traces of impatience, after months of separation, emerge in June, and worsen in September 1919 when

3 See F. Benzi, *Il Carteggio de Chirico - Signorelli e gli esordi classicisti del pittore*, in C. Crescentini (ed.), “*Nulla sine tragoedia gloria*”. *L'opera di Giorgio de Chirico attraverso la storiografia contemporanea*, in *Proceedings of the European Conference*, Rome, October 1999 (Rome, 2002), later republished in «*Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico*», n. 1-2, Techne Editore, Rome, 2002, pp. 173-182.

Antonia forces his hand by writing to his mother, Gemma, upon which an abrupt rupture occurs. The young woman's family also seems to insist on a solid financial and professional position, but, back then, de Chirico could only think about his work as a painter, which at the time did not yet provide him with financial security. Between September and December, the love story that de Chirico had transfigured into absolute mutual devotion, so much so as to identify Antonia with the heroine of a tragedy by Euripides, *Alcestis*, comes to an end. *Alcestis*, in fact, is the title (and the protagonist) of a very famous tragedy by Euripides. The daughter of the King of Iolcus, Pelias, marries Admetus (one of the Argonauts), and agrees to die in his place: but Heracles, at the time of the burial, faces Thanatos, beating him and wresting *Alcestis* from him, so she is able to go on living.

Between June and the first half of July 1918, de Chirico painted a portrait of a woman that he entitled *Alcestis* and which was shown on occasion of the exhibition of his works at the Bragaglia gallery in February 1919 (fig. 1). I had previously identified this portrait with its correct title thanks to the Signorelli correspondence, but we learn, thanks to the correspondence, that it is a portrait of Antonia Bolognesi, the young woman he loved, whom he often refers to with this moniker in the letters (fig. 2).

The original title of the painting, purchased by the collector Signorelli, reveals the origin of and first meditation on a theme that was to be very significant for de Chirico: that of Euripides and of art as tragedy. A heroine of antiquity, *Alcestis* alludes to and introduces various themes of de Chirico's new ‘Roman’ and classical work: from Apollo to the Argonauts, to his inspiration and interest in the figure of Euripides as seen in *Self-portrait with bust of Euripides* of 1922-1923 (fig. 3). According to Savinio's interpretation, Euripides was the inventor of “*tragedy as art*”, a “*mnemonic, intellectual, ironic expression and an 'artistic' one of the tragic in life*”, “*a mediated representation of the universally tragic and human tragedy, which marks the beginning of intellettualistic art: ours.*”<sup>4</sup> *Nulla sine tragoedia gloria*, the motto that appears as a caption to the self-portrait with Euripides, turns the Greek tragedian into a ‘metaphysical’, allusive and metaphorical image of the painter. *Alcestis*, the heroine that conquers death with fidelity, echoed later by Alberto Savinio in *Alceste di Samuele*, becomes an image of passion and fidelity to the ideal of art.

Many other meaningful aspects come to light in the correspondence,<sup>5</sup> for instance

4 A. Savinio, *Nuova Enciclopedia*, Milan, 1991 (1977), p. 369.

5 It also allows us to date an undated letter from Anna Antonelli to Olga Signorelli more accurately (published together with the correspondence referred to in footnote 3): which I had hypothetically dated as late December 1918. It can now be dated to early January 1919, as we finally know the exact date of de Chirico's move from Ferrara to Rome: 1 January 1919.

