Revival: Sheppard, although a nationalist, was a protestant, and the equally talented John Hughes (1865–1941) was compromised by having sculpted fine memorials to William Gladstone and Queen Victoria.

The choice as a cover image for the book of the death mask of Cathal Brugha, an anti-Treaty soldier and politician, may seem perverse, given the low level of artistic agency required, but, as in the case of the MacSwiney, such macabre preliminaries were what gave authority to a number of Power's images of men who were seen to have been martyrs to their beliefs. In the case of two other posthumous portraits, of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, Power was given access to the mortuary by a friend, the author and doctor Oliver St John Gogarty. The stories surrounding these portraits have given them almost a sacral aura, similar to the parading of bodies of revolutionary martyrs by Jacques-Louis David, a precedent not mentioned here, and possibly unknown to Power. The image of these men in death was not the end product, although the head of the suffering MacSwiney, eyes closed, comes close enough to that. Power's portrait busts are dramatic and vital in a way which sometimes suggests that the example of Rodin had made its mark. William Orpen reported that during his trip to Paris, Power had boasted, 'Ah, sure I can do as well myself!' (p.11).

In celebrating the heroes and martyrs of independent Ireland, Power was clearly inspired by an invigorating sense of playing a part in his nation's history. However, a large part of his business – and it was a business, one in which several of his children were involved – consisted in catering to the need for Catholic devotional statuary and Celtic crosses for memorials in Glasnevin Cemetery. Here his true feelings were probably expressed in some spectacular procrastination. It was an area in which an opinionated priesthood stood in the way of any artistic innovation. Unlike the Irish-American sculptor Andrew O'Connor (1874–1941), whose wayward triple crucifixion for Dún Laoghaire, honouring the doctrine of Christ the King (following Pius IX's introduction of the Feast of Christ the King in 1925), was forced to languish for some years in a back garden, Power never took risks with his religious sculpture. His own contribution to the papal attempt to give a new propulsion to the faith, the *Christ the King* erected on a high plinth in the main street of Gort, County Galway, in 1929, resembles any number of Gothic-revival saintly royals. A *Christ the King* on such a high plinth and in marble was perhaps the new Ireland's version of a royal statue, a rather obvious point that the author forbears to make.

Six years later, Power was to display a more innovative spirit in a statue of the Irish-language author Pádraic Ó Conaire for Galway (it is now in the Galway Museum after being vandalised in 1999). In Irish limestone rather than bronze or marble, and unveiled by Eamon de Valera on a rainy day in 1935 (Fig.6), it showed its subject scribbling in his notebook, wearing his hat back to front, atop a crumbling dry stone wall. We are told that Rodin had intended his *Burghers of Calais* to walk directly on the pavement ('*à même les dalles de la place*' – 'on the paving stones of the square'), but this was not done and pedestals continued to be the rule for public statues, although these sometimes consisted of rough-hewn rocks. Here then, in Galway of all places, the artistic mould was being broken, and a subject presented in an imaginary continuum with the landscape. Power declined the offer of a tall plinth previously occupied by a statue of Lord Dunkellin by John Henry Foley, bringing home the point that this was a deliberate subversion of normal procedures.

The author of this nicely written monograph occasionally admits stories about Power that have passed into folklore, some of which are hardly credible, to which she adds exclamation marks, indicating that we should suspend our disbelief. The only liberty to which this reviewer took exception was a slight obfuscation over the authorship of a figure representing Science on the former College of Science in Dublin, for which Power, working from a model by Sheppard, was only the executant.

Giorgio de Chirico: The Changing Face of Metaphysical Art

Edited by Victoria Noel-Johnson. 264 pp. incl. 209 col. ills. (Skira, Milan, 2019), £29.95. ISBN 978–88–572–4058–9.

by **ROBERT RADFORD**

In 1919, Giorgio de Chirico left Ferrara, where he had been stationed during the First World War, for Rome. There he was well placed to pursue his study of the techniques of Renaissance art, which he felt had been abandoned by the avant-garde generation. It was also the year that the Surrealists marked as the end of his metaphysical exploration,[1] a designation that coloured much of the artist's critical reception over the following years. To mark this centenary and to offer evidence of the need to question the Surrealists' verdict, the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa mounted a select exhibition (closed 7th July), which was accompanied by the important book under review.

In her introduction, Victoria Noel-Johnson proposes that we should honour De Chirico's own insistence that his art never strayed from being metaphysical. In addition to the most widely recognised elements of Arte Metafisica – the robotic humanoid mannequins, the town square statues on the verge of stepping away from their pedestals and the abiding strangeness of the life of objects – the term denoted for De Chirico a mood of profound loss and melancholy, a questioning of contemporary reality that dominated his lifelong œuvre. This is most patently demonstrated in his later work, now generally designated 'neo-metaphysical'. De Chirico was much indebted in his governing philosophy to Friedrich Nietzsche and in particular to the notion of the eternal recurrence of time, and references to departures, journeys and joyful returns animate much of his painting and writing. His self-portrait as a fate-driven Ulysses (Fig.7) poignantly reinforces this association. In the prose poem *Zeuxis the Explorer* (1918), one of a number of De Chirico's texts included in the book, he asserts that 'We are explorers, ready for new departures'.

Something of the complexity and intermingling of his references to the 'Grand Tradition' of European art can be glimpsed in *Diana asleep in the forest* (1933; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome), in which a blonde woman, whose appearance is very much of her time (in fact his companion Isabella Pakszwer), stages the Classical scene, which recalls aspects of Titian, Ingres and Renoir.

The book's essays cover a variety of related topics. Ara H. Merjian examines the criticism of Roberto Longhi, who in 1919 responded to De Chirico's metaphysical claims using the phrase 'the orthopaedic god' ('*Al dio ortopedigo*') to describe the mannequin figures that recurred in De Chirico's paintings at the time, a phrase that would have brought to mind the casualties of the War.[2] This stung De Chirico sharply and he and Longhi maintained a lifetime animosity – Merjian reproduces a couple of the critic's private caricatures of De Chirico. Daniela Ferrari introduces another critic, Margherita Sarfatti,

7. *Ulysses*, by Giorgio de Chirico. 1922. Tempera on canvas, 90 by 70 cm. (Private collection).

whose essay 'Eternal returns' was intended to establish modern Italian art as a continuity of its earlier Classical traditions. She played a leading role in trying to establish the Novecento Group at the centre of official national culture. Simona Bartolena traces the record of De Chirico's 'affinities' with Renoir, who similarly argued for the necessity of contemporary artists to rediscover the artisanal skills of the past. In 1911 Renoir wrote a preface to Cennino Cennini's treatise on the crafts of the artist and, like De Chirico, he mixed his own colours and prepared his own canvases.[3] De Chirico, meanwhile, looked closely at the French artist's still lifes and nudes, apparently studying his technique for painting flesh.

By the close of the 1930s and throughout the 1940s De Chirico's interests in researching the qualities of *bella pittura* were concentrated single-mindedly on esoteric experimentation, an approach that Fabio Benzi characterises as typifying his 'Neobaroque' tendency. He devised, for instance, an oil technique that he referred to as emulsion and took up modelling in terracotta, leading him to theorise about the relative qualities of sculpture and painting,[4] proposing that sculpture should be soft and coloured, even painterly. Its advantage was that its contours were not artificially restricted by the finite nature of the drawn line. His interest in theatricality surfaced not only in self-portraits posed in operatic costume, but in his arrangement of his typical subjects, such as mythological horses striding across the beach, scenographically framed by stage curtains.

Benzi admits that by the late 1940s, De Chirico's enthusiasm for the manner and subject-matter of obscure museum artists resulted in a noticeable decline in quality, a view shared by contemporary critics. Giuliano Briganti wrote in 1945, for instance, that 'the matter is slimy, dead, confused, the brushstroke is imprecise, the drawing is just about academic'.[5] Benzi concludes, however, with the redeeming suggestion that De Chirico's extreme reaction against Modernism at this time might alternatively be considered somehow Dadaistic, in the manner of Picabia.

The exhibition and the book include a section on drawings and prints. Davide Spagnoletti draws a distinction between the early sketches, when drawing remained private and experimental, with later, more finished drawings that could gain circulation through art journals. Also included are De Chirico's illustrations for Massimo Bontempelli's musical farce *Siepe a nordovest* (1922), which, in their somewhat ironic take on seventeenth-century figures, demonstrate the imaginative range of historical reference on which he was drawing.

The selection of works for the book and exhibition successfully illustrates the idea of a recurrent journey extending through De Chirico's career, and also brings to light some less familiar pieces. The Piazza d'Italia subjects, for instance, are drawn largely from later periods than the familiar early versions. Less obvious metaphysical comparisons are also made available, such as the *Chariot of the sun* (1970; private collection) and *Sun on the easel* (1973; Fondazione Isa e Giorgio de Chirico), with its motifs derived from hermetic alchemical emblems.

The artist's multifarious motivations might well be summed up by considering *Head of young girl after Perugino* (1921; Casa-museo Boschi de Stephano, Milan), and noting that Perugino actually painted a head of St Michael. De Chirico's enigmas will no doubt continue to intrigue.

1 A. Breton: *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, Paris 1928.
2 R. Longhi: 'To the orthopedic god', *Il Tempo*, 22nd February 1919.
3 V. Mottez, ed.: *Le Livre de l'Art*, Paris 1911.
4 G. de Chirico: 'Brevis pro plastica oratio', in *Area d'Italia*, Spring 1940.
5 G. Briganti: 'L'ultimo de Chirico', *Cosmopolita* 22 (1945), p.6.