De Chirico might have been seriously ill with influenza in the autumn of 1918, but he was not too ill to mourn the loss of Apollinaire, his first perceptive and helpful friend in Paris when he had arrived there from Italy in 1911. Apollinaire had never lost faith in him, and twice in the last few months of his life he had mentioned him favourably in reviews, saying that he had never been influenced by any French painter and was now beginning to influence young painters in Italy. He also mentioned that Carrà, the 'old futurist' (not the 'former futurist'), was now in tune with the younger man's ideas.

De Chirico knew how much he owed Apollinaire, and if in 1945 he was to sound somewhat offhand about the poet's Saturday gatherings he seems to have been deeply moved by his death in November 1918, just as the armistice was being signed. In December he wrote in the Rome review *Ars Nova* that people who had not known Apollinaire were mistaken in thinking he was a self-satisfied dilettante. 'Instead he was a man crushed ... [by] universal melancholy – the painter was still drawn to melancholy – and de Chirico referred to all the sadness of the poet's life, including his imprisonment for the suspected thefts from the Louvre. De Chirico obviously appreciated Apollinaire's early attitude towards him and other struggling young artists: 'He defended the latest painting with disinterested intelligence ... He was the enemy of all mean tricks and all pettiness in art' and any criticism was expressed with 'refined diplomacy'. He was ready to write for the Italian review *La Voce*, even if he preferred to write in French. The piece ended with a moving evocation of the house at 202 bis boulevard Saint-Germain where Apollinaire had lived on the top floor. De Chirico saw it again as though in a dream:

*between the tragic innocence of the vanished canvases by the douanier-painter and the metaphysical buildings by the undersigned I see the light of an oil lamp, cheap clay pipes yellow with nicotine, a long bookcase ... friends sitting silently in the shadow ... and then, as though in the luminous beam from a magic lantern there appears on the wall the fateful rectangle of a Veronese sky and against that sky is once again the curving profile of a melancholy centurion ... It is Apollinaire, Apollinaire the ghost returning, it is the poet friend who supported me in a foreign country and whom I shall never see again.*

*De mortuis nil nisi bonum:** although de Chirico did not forget to talk about himself and his work, this article shows, as do the paintings of the late war years, that if he himself was still something of an enigma, if his voice was still 'speaking darkly', that voice was growing warmer, more human. Apollinaire had been an innovator who looked constantly into the future, but he now belonged to the past. De Chirico, escaping from the war, was beginning to live in the present, aware of Apollinaire's legacy, l'esprit nouveau in art and writing. Even before he officially left the army and Ferrara late in 1918 he was fully occupied with writing, both creative and critical, in addition to painting.

Although the cloud of war had still hung over Europe in early 1918 there had been no shortage of activity in the artistic field. In May of that year de Chirico contributed for the first time to an exhibition in Italy, held at the gallery of the magazine *L'Epoca* in Rome, in the via del Tritone, and moving later to Viareggio. It was an 'independent' exhibition arranged on behalf of the Red Cross and included painters in various styles, such as Carlo Carra, Ardengo Soffici and other less remembered Italian names. De Chirico did not fare well at the hands of the critics. In *L'Idea Nazionale* of 28 May C.E. Oppo referred to him as a 'tragic metaphysical puppeteer', working in dark, frightening colours, adding 'emerald green skies, vast empty squares, black and white houses' and a sun that had grown dark from universal judgement on things. It was perhaps too soon for de Chirico's six paintings on show to be better appreciated, for anyone apart from the most enlightened critics to understand the true value of *Hector and Andromache*.
seen as mannequins or the melancholy solitary figure of *The Troubadour* or *The Grand Metaphysician* and the ghostly *The Return*. This last work appears to show the 'return' of the male figure with closed eyes from *The Child's Brain* - perhaps an unconscious, or maybe even half-conscious, memory of de Chirico's father - while at the same time it seems to introduce in reverse the theme of the Prodigal Son - in reverse for it could be said that the artist had visualized the father returning to the son, here shown as a dummy figure, and not the other way round, as described originally by Saint Luke.

De Chirico's work was now to be reintroduced in Paris, for Paul Guillaume, who was still acting as his agent, presented some of his metaphysical paintings at the Vieux Colombier theatre during the interval of a Dada show in November. In the following month he reopened his gallery, now refurbished, in the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, showing work by de Chirico in the excellent company of Matisse, Derain, Picasso and Modigliani.

In fact de Chirico could not complain that the war years had interrupted his career; he had been able to go on working, his paintings had intrigued people, and if his sales were not great, if critics failed to understand him, at least he had work to show - unlike Carra, who was now painting very little and going through an intellectual crisis. Indeed, in February 1919 de Chirico was able to hold his first one-man show, at the Galleria Bragaglia in Rome, exhibiting several works he had completed in Ferrara. It was not a great success and the only painting sold was a portrait of a girl, seeming to prove that Italian buyers were 'disquieted' by these works and did not want to see them on the walls of their houses. Yet the show occasioned two incidents which the painter never forgot: his first encounter with one Diana Karenne, an actress, who could not think of anything to say except 'What a lot of work', and his first crushing review - a *stoncatura*, to use the word invented by that destructive writer Giovanni Papini.

De Chirico had known Papini much earlier, in Florence, and from now on he assumed that his former friend had organized a dirty-tricks campaign against him. Papini had advised de Chirico to talk to the critic Roberto Longhi and explain the background 'to his work'. The painter did so, 'like a poor innocent', and talked freely about his hopes, his dreams, 'told everything, confessed everything innocently and ingenuously' - only to be rewarded, on 22 February in *Il Tempo*, 'in a perfidious, devilish and horrifying way', with a 'treacherous blow'. The piece, entitled 'To the orthopaedic god', poured scorn and ridicule over the mannequin figures, comparing them to 'legless cripples'. Mention was also made of unmentionable painters, such as the Dutch-born Alma-Tadema, the successful sentimental painter of Victorian England. De Chirico never forgave either Papini or Longhi, asserting that the latter avoided him in the street and only bought a picture from him later in order to give it away. The *stoncatura* obviously hurt de Chirico deeply; it was another of many incidents which gradually drove him into a state of paranoia, and he set about growing a thicker skin.

That same year, 1919, was to bring other important developments for him, but it is vital to remember at this stage how de Chirico the writer had developed during the last few years. In the earliest of his prose writing known to us, the pages written in Paris in 1913 or so and kept among the papers of Paul Eluard and Jean Pautlan, the young painter had written with near-poetic exuberance an enthusiastic evocation of what painting should express and what it should mean to him. During the same year he translated (apparently from a French version) four poems by Schopenhauer and signed his copy of the philosopher's essay 'On Appearances', adding a few words in Latin and giving his name as 'Giorgius de Chirico Florentinus', followed by the date in Roman numerals: 'A.D. MCMXII'. He seems to have added his translations of the poems at the end of the book. Poems of his own written in Paris around this time were published in Rome in 1980 by the critic Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, who has discovered many important pieces, prose and poetry written by the painter when he was young. One of these short poems was quoted in Chapter 4 because its date was relevant, but other, more lyrical, poems were to follow.
The prose fragment he dedicated to Carrà during 1917, 'Viaggio e villeggiatura', has a near-surrealist atmosphere:

*I am sleeping. In my imagination I see shadowy trees by the entrance to a house where I had lived since I was a child. Someone called me from the other room. The motor-boat went swiftly past the promontory. It was afternoon, mends. The sea foamed. A metaphysician in a rose-coloured jersey was sleeping beneath a pine tree. Birds made of coloured tinware moved along the beach.*

Another intriguing piece, written during the same year, is 'Promontorio', where the poet-painter describes himself looking at his work from 'the promontory of my twenty-ninth year' and conjures up mysterious visions of unplumbed oceans', returning to a theme from Greek mythology that he had used earlier and was to use again later, adapting it whenever he thought it necessary: 'The vessel of the Argonauts has vanished in the ice and snow.' He used this myth in different ways: he likened himself and his fellow artists to explorers searching for a new and valid style of painting, and he often thought of himself as an exile in a foreign land. His home country was the Greece of ancient gods, and one reason why he always hated travel was surely his knowledge that no amount of travelling would ever take him back to that land of true heroes, the ones who remained important to him all his life. He also used poetic prose to make a plea for the formation - of a group or a metaphysical school - he wrote about putting up a sign indicating that he was the only shareholder.

He was now working closely with Mario Broglio, who, in addition to 'On Metaphysical Art' and 'Zeuxis the Explorer' already mentioned, published four other important pieces by de Chirico in his journal *Valori Plastici*. They are essential reading for anyone who wants to study the painter's message, and since the review soon became known in most European countries his writing surely reached those at whom it was aimed.

De Chirico also contributed sixteen articles to *Il Convegno*, a review published in Rome and Milan. In 1920 and 1921 these included the pieces about Böcklin and Klinger already quoted, while he also wrote about painters much better known - Raphael, Renoir (whose portraits were to influence him) and Gauguin - and about artists well known at least in Italy at the time: Gaetano Previati and Ardengo Soffici. For *Il Convegno* in August 1920 de Chirico reviewed Carrà's book *Pittura metafisica*, which had been published by Vallecchi in Florence. It might have been a moment for him to take revenge, but he did not condemn the book out of hand. However, he made one telling comment: 'The undersigned has also searched... for his own name... but to no avail!'

Later written work included a short piece about another metaphysical painter, Giorgio Morandi, which he contributed to the catalogue of the big exhibition *La Fiorentina primaverile* in 1922. Morandi, who has since attained classic status, rarely left his native Bologna but was known to admire de Chirico's work. Just as he limited his travel, Morandi limited his subject matter, preferring bottles and other everyday objects which through his treatment became in fact truly metaphysical - real and unreal at the same time. An important essay by de Chirico on Gustave Courbet was published in the *Rivista di Firenze* in November 1924.

But that is to anticipate, for it was a new, later, de Chirico who took an interest in the nineteenth-century French realist. His own 'realism' for the time being was that of technique. During the none too successful show at the Galleria Bragaglia he had passed a good deal of time in museums and galleries, especially the Villa Borghese, for he had been deeply impressed both by the paintings housed there and by the classical beauty of the trees and plants growing round the Villa. It was one morning at the Villa Borghese, in front of a painting by Titian, that I had a revelation of what great painting was: I saw tongues of fire appear in the gallery, while outside, beneath the dear sky over the city, rang out a solemn clangour as of weapons beaten in
salute, and together with a great cry of righteous spirits there echoed the sound of a trumpet heralding a resurrection.

It sounds like a religious conversion, and in one way it was, for he thought he was now looking at paintings in a new way: he no longer saw them as 'painted images' - although it is not clear what precisely he did see - and the man who had achieved the individual style of metaphysical painting now spent a great deal of time studying the great works of the past.

Did that vision, that conversion, come at a convenient moment? Did the painter sense that his achievements in Ferrara, and also in Paris earlier, could not be continued for ever at the same pitch, that some change of mood and style was inevitable? Probably. And probably too those 'tongues of fire' provided a useful theatrical device, an impressive explanation for what was a brave decision. Just when he was becoming internationally known he felt bound to announce, first of all to himself, that he was changing course. Was this a way of admitting failure in his search for metaphysical truth? A careful look at his paintings even during the Ferrara period shows that, despite his efforts, a faintly human and sexual element had crept into his work, seeming to prove that transforming people into mannequins had not finally reduced them to abstractions. The people wanted to be alive; they did not want their images to represent ideas only.

Only painters and picture restorers are likely to be closely interested in the experiments which de Chirico now carried out with grinding colours and, on the advice of Nikolai Locoff, a Russian painter and restorer, with working in tempera. Locoff was a skilled copyist, and de Chirico himself, sometimes in Rome, sometimes in Florence, worked hard at making copies of the old masters. Fortunately, however, despite his copying and researching, he also continued to paint original works, some of them recalling the early paintings of his first stay in Florence. But the great metaphysical paintings were 'a procession no one could follow after': he had reached the end of that period, although he was to deny the fact until the end of his life. In fact his most intriguing work in the immediate post-war years was autobiographical, namely several striking self-portraits and at least two double portraits, the subjects being himself and his constant companion during the early days in Rome, his mother.

When they had returned to Rome together from Ferrara after his recovery from Spanish flu, de Chirico and his mother had found a very crowded city and there was nowhere to live. He also had another problem: he had no money at all - not even corporal's pay now - and his mother too was badly off, for the Greek railroad shares she had inherited had lost nearly all their value. However, she succeeded in finding a room in the Park Hotel in the via Luculla, described by Luisa Spagnoli as 'a second-rate establishment much frequented by artists'. Her son, however, failed to find any helpful friend who might give him some space, and for a time he shared his mother's room, sleeping on a mattress on the floor. His brother was not far away, and the story goes that same time later the two men shared a blue suit; unfortunately far Giorgio he was the taller of the two, and the sleeves came down only to his elbows. However, he now wore his old army cape, which he had had dyed black. During the worst of the winter cold he would borrow a bodice or camisole from his mother and wear it under his shirt.

His mother was useful, and in Rome she made an impression on the neighbours at least, for as soon as she could she left the Park Hotel for furnished rooms, changing them every two weeks or so and arranging to remove her possessions by carriage. Everything was packed in baskets and suitcases, strapped alongside her valuable Turkish carpets, the whale surmounted with another piece of equipment from which she was never parted, a bidet. An elderly woman painter remembered this performance clearly, several decades later, and never forgot the Baronessa's jewellery, which included a fine cross set with brilliants.
De Chirico painted his mother on several occasions but never more strikingly than in the two double portraits of 1919 and 1921. She, understandably, is shown in the foreground on each occasion, looking to the front in the former, to the side in the latter but dominating the scene in both, just as she clearly dominated her son. In the earlier portrait he is shown in profile, but since his hand conceals his mouth and chin he is not obviously recognizable, while in the later work he looks outward with an expression of romantic melancholy, as though asking, 'What can be done about this situation?' or 'What can be done about me?' He seems to accept both questions as inevitable and embellishes the painting with two flowers and two figs. In the earlier work the two figures are separated by two pears; he had used two, pear halves in a drawing of 1917, *Autumnal Geometry*.

The inclusion of figs has sent critics to a passage in the painter's novel *Hebdomeros* where he refers to figs as 'immoral', their consumption with cracked ice at breakfast earning 'a punishment of ten or fifteen years' imprisonment'. Was this some childhood memory, same fantasy or a reference to images he had seen in classical paintings while haunting museums and galleries during his copying work? This kind of association remains one of the many de Chirico enigmas, but it illustrates the fascination of the dual-media imagery which occurs constantly in the work of this artist-writer.

He also painted his mother on her own in a conventional manner, while Savinio is said to have painted her to, in his fashion, choosing to show her wearing a ball dress, carrying flowers, while for her face and head he substituted the head of a fierce bird. This, *The Faithful Spouse* of 1929, was Savinio's far from straightforward way of showing his love, just as he had described his father as being cruel to the dog Trallalò. The two sons loved their mother, and she loved them in her nineteenth-century overprotective manner. The brothers, the former 'Dioscuri', were still good friends, and de Chirico painted a double portrait of them too. The surviving family today find it unnecessary to talk about the older generation, but surely the paintings and the writing tell all that we need to know about the relationships between these intriguing people.

De Chirico made no comment about his mother in his *Memoirs* until she died in 1936, while he was away in the USA. Indeed, in the first seven chapters of the *Memoirs*, which cover the period from his childhood to the end of 1918, he mentioned just two women by name and then only *en passant*: in Chapter 6 he included Marie Laurencin in a list of people whom he saw at Apollinaire's gatherings, and a few pages later he included the novelist Matilde Serao, mainly associated with Naples, in a list of writers who happened to have been born in Greece. In the next chapter he expressed gratitude to the wife of the poet Govoni, but she remains merely 'the Signora'. During the early Rome period he said he was 'excited' then disappointed by the actress Diana Karenne when she came to the Bragaglia show in 1919. In Chapter 9 he referred to the 'charming Pasqualina', wife of the painter Armando Spadini, but by the end of the same paragraph he was already extolling the articles written by Isabella Far, who had become his second wife by the time he wrote these memoirs. In Chapter 10 he mentioned three sisters called Braun, who were Dalcroze dancers. Then on the next page he suddenly began to generalize in a disparaging way about women, making only one exception in a grudging reference to the young Russian Marie Bashkirtseff, 'who began by being a very beautiful girl, then she wrote very well and painted moderately well; she knew Greek and Latin, was not affected to the point of hysteria but had a touch of it, sometimes busied herself with boring other people, but not always'. He did not add that she died at twenty-four but went straight on to attack the Baronne Hélène d'Oettingen, whom he had known in Paris and who had written, at too great length, in *Les Soirées de Paris*, using the name Roch Grey, as well as painting badly and writing bad novels.

By the time he wrote his *Memoirs* de Chirico seemed to assume that by some obscure process of social change women could only deteriorate; men should be glad, he wrote, that they were
born at that time and not later. Nevertheless, he had already made it clear, when talking of the young men who surrounded the poet Vincenzo Cardarelli, founder of the review *La Ronda*, that he was 'proud of the fact that I have never given rise to wild passions in young men and I have never been in love with a Maestro'. Then he found it necessary to make a clear statement of his heterosexuality: 'In any case I would have been in love with a Maestra.' Perhaps he was suddenly aware that the absence of any feminine element in the metaphysical work might cause people to assume he was homosexual.

What did he know about love? He had been strongly attracted to a prostitute in Paris, but his views about women were surely influenced by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger. Their message was simple: women did not think; they had no imagination; they were incapable of friendship; they were to be used for the basic purpose of sex. During the successful days of futurism two women had defied such attitudes. One of them, Valentine de Saint-Point, had published in 1913 a leaflet entitled *Futurist Manifesto for Lust*; her radical views were attacked in *Lacerba*, even though it supported futurism. The other was the beautiful and fascinating Marchesa Casati, who impressed the futurists and was painted by Giacomo Balla, one of their number. But Boccioni, that other futurist, preferred to paint his mother rather than any other model of any age.

As de Chirico worked hard at his copying and research into technique, he lost no time in urging other painters to follow his example, publishing his article 'The Return to the Craft' in *Valori Plastici* in 1920. He told painters they must learn to draw, quoting Ingres's observation that a painting based on good drawing is always likely to be fairly well painted. He urged his readers to study statues, 'to dehumanize you a little', and if it was not possible to study them in museums then the students should buy plaster copies and work from them. They would have to work hard, and in his last sentence he wrote in a self-satisfied way, 'As for me, I am calm, and I adorn myself with three words that I wish to be the seal of all my work: *Pictor classicus sum*.'

He was asserting a new complacency, but had he truly embarked on a new phase of creativity? He still painted a few works that could be described as metaphysical, but today they seem too crowded and fragmented. The 'Roman Villa' series, where the houses are surmounted by statues, are decorative in their way and maintain de Chirico's links with the classical world, but his admirers tend to lose interest when confronted by a goddess sitting on a cloud. Various echoes of Böcklin appear, but the five or six years following de Chirico's return to Rome offer fascinating biographical evidence of another kind - the series of portraits and especially the self-portraits.

Despite the negative attitude he had displayed towards women, he certainly painted them - all types of women, including peasants in costume, anonymous sitters and a striking portrait (1922) of Amelia Bontempelli, wife of the author Massimo Bontempelli. Her novels, which she signed 'Diotima', are surely unread today, but de Chirico may well have been flattered by her husband's book *La Scacchiera davanti alla Specchia* (The Chessboard in Front of the Mirror), for it was influenced by his metaphysical painting and the writer used the phrase 'magical realism', adopted in Germany to describe the work carried out by artists there who had been influenced by de Chirico.

The self-portraits are particularly intriguing, for there are so many of them that one feels de Chirico must have been searching for his true image. Also, he did not always seem ready to appear on his own: he felt he must add a classical bust, of Mercury or Euripides, or even show his own head twice over - once realistically, once as a kind of marble silhouette. Was he living in ancient Greece or in the real world of Rome, Florence, Milan? There is one interesting development: the painted figure no longer holds a notice, as appeared in earlier self-portraits, reading, for instance, 'NULLA SINE TRAGŒDIA GLORIA': he begins to use his hands in
dramatic gestures, indicating either infinity or some message from the ancient world, while his hair often hangs over his forehead as though he sees himself as a romantic hero still in the mood of mystery and melancholy.

However, if he was forever searching for himself, his work had been found by critics, dealers and buyers in several European countries - Germany, Holland and of course France. The 'revelation' in the Villa Borghese had taken place in 1919 and so, by a coincidence of the post-war situation, had the early formulation of surrealism in Paris. Although it began 'officially' in 1924, with the surrealist manifesto, some historians and participants have quoted earlier dates. It is known that the word was used in 1917 by Apollinaire apropos the ballet Parade, while the same year saw the first meeting of Andre Breton and Jacques Vaché, who was either a living example of surrealism or else a poseur, whose display of cynical disillusioned bravado on the battlefield was guaranteed to attract attention, as he wanted. Vaché died in 1919, either by suicide or by accident, but the same year saw the rise of automatic writing, held by Breton to be a crucial event in the prehistory of the movement. At the same time the poets Philippe Soupault and Paul Eluard discovered de Chirico. The dream-like atmosphere of the early paintings, a mingling of real and unreal, seemed to express everything the surrealists were interested in. In 1922 Breton, presenting an exhibition of de Chirico's work at Paul Guillaume's gallery in March 1922, wrote, 'I think that a true modern mythology is in formation. And it is Giorgio de Chirico who is setting up the record of it for all time.'

Art histories are full of surrealist painting reflecting the influence of de Chirico, and there are several stories of the dramatic effect his work could have. Magritte said it caused him to see his true vocation; according to a lecture he gave in Antwerp in 1938, he saw in de Chirico's work 'a new vision in which the spectator discovers his solitude once again and hears the silence of the world'. He had not forgotten his discovery nineteen years later, writing that his first sight of the painting The Song of Love was 'one of the most disturbing in my whole life: my eyes "saw thought" for the first time'. Yves Tangui is said to have jumped off a Prais bus in order to take a long look at an early de Chirico painting glimpsed in a gallery window; he afterwards learned that André Breton had first come across de Chirico's work in precisely the same way. The Italian painter was inescapable, but he was in Rome, not Prais, and, if the surrealists read Valori Plastici, it took them some time to catch up with 'the return to the craft', although at least one of de Chiricos copies (of a work by Raphael) was included in the March 1922 Paul Guillaume show, along with other postmetaphysical work. In the meantime surrealism was moving on through the Dada influence of the first series of the magazine Littérature, published from March 1919 to August 1921. The magazine's range was wide: the title came from Paul Valéry; its contributors included André Gide, Raymond Radiguet (still only sixteen at the time), a host of forgotten names, and of course Breton and his coterie. In January 1920 Breton wrote about a pamphlet which reproduced twelve of de Chirico's paintings. The second series of the review ran from March 1922 to June 1924, and in the first issue de Chirico made three appearances. There was a reproduction of The Child'd Brain - owned of course by Breton - a piece about the painter by Roger Vitrac, who went on to publish a short book about him in 1927, and a letter from de Chirico to Breton dated that same month. It was a long letter, and those who read it - mainly surrealists and their supporters, no doubt - must have wondered what was going on. The painter addressed the poet as his 'very dear friend', who had presumably given him some encouragement, for he wrote that 'For a long time I worked without hope.' He said that he had to 'clarify one point. . . the point which has to do with my painting of today.' (The Paul Guillaume exhibition was in progress at the time.) He knew that he was being criticized for producing 'museum art' and that it was being said that he had lost his way, but he had a clear conscience and was 'full of inner joy'. He was certain that eventually the value of his new work would be understood, and surely it was a good sign that he had come to know Breton.
He enlarged on what had changed in the arts generally, although he was not going to talk about 'neo-classicism, revival etc.' He spoke instead about 'this magnificent romanticism which we have created' and said that 'these dreams and visions which troubled us' would be judged by posterity. He mentioned 'Apollinaire and a few others, my paintings, those of Picasso, Derain and a few others' but went on to explain how the problem of métier, craft, had 'tormented' him, how he had made copies, ground his own colours, etc. He was convinced that his own painting was now much better. He thought the impressionists had used the wrong methods in their attempts to portray light: 'the source of shadows' was their only palette. He would send Breton a photograph of a recent self-portrait which he thought 'could figure in the Louvre'. Although de Chirico sounded tolerably well pleased with himself, he apologized for his 'barbarian' French. He told Breton that he embraced him.

Breton does not seem to have answered the letter: his reply was its publication in Littérature.

Relations with Breton were not easy, however, for de Chirico apparently promised four sketches for inclusion in Breton's book of poems Clair de terre (1923), but they never came and the book appeared with a portrait of the poet by Picasso. But relationships with the surrealists did not break down at once. In 1922 Max Ernst produced that intriguing work Le Rendezvous des Amis, eighteen of them, all numbered, with a key below. De Chirico can be seen in the backrow, but he is not actually present, for Ernst shows him as a bust (not in any way ressemblant) standing on a classical fluted pillar. The column may be intended to evoke de Chirico's origin, his painting or, since he was still in Rome, his absence from Paris. To his right, slightly in front, stands Breton - shown larger than the others and looking as though he had just dashed in - while by de Chirico's left shoulder stands Gala Eluard (later Gala Dali). The painting is an essential part of the history of surrealism; later on de Chirico attacked the movement and all its practitioners with unparalleled fury - but not yet.

Breton was given to displays of great enthusiasm, but they did not always last long. He was a born authoritarian, which explains why his leadership of the surrealists was never questioned, and he did not like to be proved wrong. How dare de Chirico change his style - for that is what had happened - without his permission? The painter had meant a great deal to the early or proto-surrealists, and Breton had helped him by advising the wealthy but cautious collector Jacques Doucet to buy his work. What were the surrealists to think of him now? Breton had not forgiven Jacques Vaché for dying, for deserting him; he would not tolerate another desertion. And maybe a rumour had already reached him that the painter did not copy only Raphael and other classical painters: he also copied himself.

Strong evidence of this came from Rome in 1924. De Chirico was convinced that Andre Breton had ordered his supporters to boycott all his later work, but that did not prevent Paul Eluard and his wife from coming to Rome, buying a self-portrait by de Chirico exhibited at the Biennale which opened there in October 1923 and then visiting the painter in his studio, where he painted a portrait of them together. Gala Eluard wanted to buy The Disquieting Muses, that important painting from the Ferrara days, owned at the time by the painter's friend and admirer in Florence Dr Giorgio Castelfranco. They also wanted to buy from Mario Broglio the equally famous Sacred Fish. Unfortunately the owners did not want to sell for the prices offered, despite the painter's 'insistence'. So he made a different kind of offer: 'If you would like exact copies of these two paintings,' he wrote to the Eluards, 'I can do them for you at 1,000 lire each. The only drawbacks to these copies will be their execution with better materials and with greater technical understanding.' This was apparently written on 10 March 1924 and has been described as the first evidence, direct from de Chirico himself, of his activities as a self-copyist. James Thrall Soby reports that Eluard commissioned a copy of The Disquieting Muses. In June de Chirico said that he had no news of Breton for a long time and hoped he was not angry with him about the Disquieting Muses affair. But he surely was.
De Chirico was still developing that deprecatory attitude to everyone and everything that continued to grow blacker for the rest of his life. In the 1923 Rome Biennale he had exhibited some of the 'Roman Villa' series. He thought his contribution was very good - as were his sales, mainly to foreigners - but the critical response was poor. This led him to become inversely rhapsodic in describing it - especially the review by the well-known Emilio Cecchi, which de Chirico described as 'failure to understand, confusion, bad faith and envy, blended together in a symphony of such beauty that it could have been translated into music it would have figured worthily in ... those concerts which in Rome today are called *musica viva* but which ought to be called still-born music'. What in fact had Cecchi written? He maintained that the effect of the paintings was not 'entirely negative' but said it was debatable whether de Chirico was really a painter in the full sense of the term. He was a 'fantasist, a visionary, an individual; and for better or worse, an artist'. And Cecchi added that de Chirico's feeling for the hideous and his vulgar expedients 'could not succeed in depriving all his things of a sinister fascination, between the legendary and the provincial'.

De Chirico fared no better when he showed at the Venice Biennale of 1924: his work was found to be 'heavy' and 'illogical'. However, during this year there occurred two events which could be described as 'logical', for his painting and his solitary life meant they were bound to happen: for the first time he was invited to work in the theatre, first in Paris; then, when visiting another theatre, in Rome, he fell in love.

There had been a theatrical element in his work at different periods – unexpectedly perhaps in early works such as *The Enigma of the Oracle* of 1910 and then undeniably in the *Hector and Andromache* subjects painted in Ferrara. In addition he had been dramatizing himself in portraits during the last few years. As for love, painting was infinitely more important to him than anything else, but so far his only muse of the conventionally feminine kind had been supplied by the marble or plaster bust of Venus or some other deity. He was now in his thirties thirty-six in 1924 - and, although disappointed that his current painting was not better understood and appreciated, was well known for his earlier work. His celebrity and the theatrical effect of the self-portraits, the atmosphere of mystery, melancholy and enigma, were inevitably attractive to women.