

"DRAMMATICITÀ DI LEOPARDI" (1938): A STAGE ON ALBERTO SAVINIO'S ROUTE TO A MORE "ROMANTIC" ITALY

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Abstract

This paper deals with Alberto Savinio's 1938 conference "Drammaticità di Leopardi," presupposing the nineteenth-century poet as one of his most important sources. Tracking a hidden self-portrait in Savinio's homage to Giacomo Leopardi, we encounter the problem of identity and the question of cultural belonging. This key issue seems to unite Savinio with Leopardi: both can be considered as outsiders within their culture, and this status appears to be globally connected with their modernity. Thus, dealing with Savinio and Leopardi promises to provide further understanding of "anti-modern" Italian culture from its margins.

Introduction

Romantic feeling was once characterized by Alberto Savinio as an "invito a morire," an "invitation to die."¹ Perhaps nowhere in Italian literature would Giorgio de Chirico's younger brother have encountered as near perfect an example of this phenomenon as in Giacomo Leopardi's "Cantico del Gallo Silvestre" (Song of the great wild rooster).² In this work of prose – which formed a part of the nineteenth-century poet's collection *Operette morali* (The moral essays; the first group of texts was published in 1827) – a large rooster tells of how everything that exists more or less consciously desires not to be. The bird also reminds us that only the provisory death called sleep keeps us alive, even offering, in dreams, some relief and refreshment to suffering. Waking and sleeping, pain and happiness, life and death seem hopelessly muddled.³

The subject of this paper is an analysis of an essay by Savinio from the late thirties, titled "Drammaticità di Leopardi," that characterizes Leopardi as a salvific

“Drammaticità di Leopardi” was first published in 1938, in an anthology of lectures on Leopardi given at the Lyceum di Firenze.⁴

Examining Savinio and Leopardi together promises to be worthwhile because, beyond having in common a radical skepticism, both poets can be considered outsiders to Italian culture – a status generally connected with their modernity. Thus, in comparing them we may be able to sharpen the image of a culture often labeled as “antimodern,” namely, proceeding from its margins.

However, how can we define these two important Italian artists’ foreignness within their own culture? With Savinio, we can place Leopardi, the *investigative ironist*, beyond classical “Italian Poetry” and its unwavering “Goddess gaze.”⁵ In a country devoted to the cult of appearance, Leopardi, as described by Savinio, was the only poet to “give the underside of things the same amount of dignity as their facade.”⁶

And what about Savinio himself? All his life, the inveterate *déraciné* grappled with an anything-but-self-evident national identity. In a way, he may be considered *twice born abroad*: first in Athens, in 1891; and again in Paris, as an artist, in 1914. It is well known that the problem of identity was a lifelong, poetically prolific question for Savinio, and that it guided his cultural philosophical drafts in the thirties, close to the bombastic renaissance of classical Rome officially promoted in Mussolini’s Italy. In a recent publication issued by Archivio dell’Arte Metafisica,⁷ I had the opportunity to trace the meandering path of a European intellectual who, over the course of a series of exiles and repatriations during the first two thirds of his life, arrived at a compromising “classicism” from which he ultimately also managed to find *a way out*.⁸

He found this means for escape in a *partial romanticization* of Italy’s image. In *Dico a te, Clio* (Speaking to Clio), Savinio’s central Italian travel picture, composed in 1939,⁹ this revitalizing job is done by long-deceased Etruscans, defined as the Italians’ “romantic fathers” and consequently described as anti-Romans. Yet, an important step on Savinio’s route from the reborn Roman Empire to a more romantic Italy had already been accomplished in 1938 with the help of a mentor who, in comparison to those distant ancestors, can be considered a *contemporary*: Leopardi.

To demonstrate how Savinio discovered qualities in Leopardi that he otherwise missed in Italian culture, I will take a two-step approach. First, I will briefly review some opposing concepts in Savinio’s essays from the thirties and forties that may

prove crucial in understanding the underlying premises of his 1938 lecture. Second, I will elucidate how, according to “Drammaticità di Leopardi,” even classical Italy *is not perfect*. Such imperfection, however, proved highly treatable. The “remedies” were to be found in Leopardi – as well as in Savinio. More specifically, I will illustrate the following observations:

- The Bel Paese could hope for salvation from petrification in classical immortality thanks to Leopardian romanticism.
- Savinio’s eminently autobiographic writing – his tendency to talk about himself when talking about other poets¹⁰ – allows us to see his portrayal of the author of *Operette morali* as a hidden self-portrait.
- By portraying himself in Leopardi, Savinio consciously hybridized his own Italianity. (“Hermaphrodito” rediscovers his Greek roots!)

Finally, I will briefly consider Savinio’s *re-hermaphrodization* in the context of his painted works. A certain nonsimultaneity between essayistic and pictorial expression will be taken into account. Must it be recognized that, in certain aspects, Savinio’s brush was more farsighted than his pen?

“Unique like Basques among Indo-Europeans”: A review of several Savinian concepts from the thirties and forties

In his 1938 essay on Leopardi, Savinio describes Italians with their rather peculiar mentality toward Western Europeans, as “unique like Basques among Indo-Europeans.”¹¹ To gain a better understanding of this original idea, it makes sense to briefly revisit the early thirties, when Savinio was employing Oswald Spengler’s historical-philosophical work *Decline of the West* as the intellectual premise for his hypothesis that Italy was in no way part of the declining Occident. In the first half of this decade, he stood by Spengler’s prognosis that Western civilization’s end was imminent. Many contemporaries believed they had heard its death knell among the sound of gunfire during the First World War. However, Savinio’s use of the German philosopher’s apocalyptic prophecies is heterodox as far as it does not rigorously apply the Spenglerian axiom of civilization’s mortality to *ancient Roman civilization*. As Savinio expressed in 1933, there had been two glorious returns of classical Rome in European history: in the Renaissance, five centuries ago, a rebirth accredited by no less than Jacob Burckhardt; and in fascism.¹²

However, already in his juvenile readings of Leopardi, Savinio had certainly encountered the politically problematic topos of vanishing imaginative and creative abilities owing to the development of intellectual capacities in human history. In simple terms, philosophy banishes poetry, truth precludes beauty. Extensive references to this topos of decadence can be found not only in *Operette morali*,¹³ but also in *Zibaldone di pensieri* (the title of these notes, written between 1817 and 1832, can be translated to “Hodge-Podge”),¹⁴ Leopardi’s postmortem collection of aphorisms, observations, and philosophical reflections. The contrast evoked in this work between an essentially *southern ancient civilization* and a *northern modern civilization* foreshadows the Savinian contrast between Italy and the West. Despite that not exactly reassuring historical narrative, Leopardi offered comforting news to his compatriots, as quoted by Savinio in 1938: “Italy, nevertheless, keeps something of its natural imagination, of its beauty, of its natural disposition for joy and happiness.”¹⁵ Leopardi’s image of a nation that seemingly remains reluctant to embrace modern urban civilization *as alienation*, finds its way into Savinio’s paradoxical fusion of classicism and primitivism.

Classicism and romanticism, apart from being successive periods in European history, are described by Savinio as *states of mind*: they may be attributed not only to individuals but also, as “mentalities,” to entire nations. The first half of the twentieth century was an era distinguished by flourishing essentialist fictions of stable collective identities, perceived as unchangeable over centuries. According to Savinio’s essay on Leopardi, Dante Alighieri’s finding the “right way” after being lost in the “dark forest,” from the *Divine Comedy*’s opening verses¹⁶ – that is, the voyager’s “return into himself” – follows an “intransgressable law of Italian Man,” the classical principle of *verticality*.¹⁷ The exact opposite of this is Ulysses, whose traveling becomes a *raison d’être*, and returning proves to be an error.¹⁸ One year later, in *Dico a te, Clio*, we see classical and romantic souls that are distinctly opposed:

The romantic soul is horizontal, the classical soul vertical. The romantic soul is centrifugal, the classical soul centripetal. The romantic soul desires what it doesn’t have and tends to detach itself from reality and even from earth, the classical soul is unaware of the wish and replenishes itself.¹⁹

In Savinio’s *Nuova enciclopedia* (New encyclopedia; written mainly in the forties for various periodicals, such as *Domus*, but published as a book only posthumously in 1977), this opposition of mentalities is the subject of the “Romanticismo” entry (with the earliest version published in *La Nazione* in 1937).²⁰ In the wake of Giambattista Vico’s allegorization of historical periods as

biological ages, Savinio sketched a kind of typology attributing romanticism to youth and classicism to maturity. As is appropriate to young age, the first type, the *romantic*, is receptive to any material that nature generously offers to him. After this purely impressionable phase, sometimes a more active, genuinely creative one may follow, personified by the true artist, the *classic*. This second type must be rigorously selective in a work on the material offered by nature. He has to carry out a rigorous choice, the result of which is a work resistant to time and nature: the work of art.

However, this succession of complementary phases in individual or collective biographies relativizes the assumption of a stable classical mentality attributable to a single nation as “intransgressable law.” Indeed, if the classical soul gains immortality by overcoming the laws of time and nature, it requires, despite its asserted needlessness, a preliminary “baptism in the Romanticism River.”²¹ In line with Christian tradition – however laicly revisited – baptism is intended as a metaphor for dying into new life.

Classical imperfection, to be remedied by Leopardi (and Savinio)

The complementarity of both mentalities nourishes the already expressed suspicion that an exclusively classical Italy might not be perfect. Implicit in “Drammaticità di Leopardi” is the paradox of *classical imperfection*. It may seem exaggerated to discover already in the admission of such a contradictory possibility a veiled dissent from fascist cultural politics. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that the same country which – in Savinio’s essays from the early thirties, in line with official concepts of national identity – had only been a bestower of inspiration for the rest of Europe, suddenly required spiritual complements. With diplomatic caution, Savinio, himself a notorious Parisian cosmopolitan, introduced Leopardi as “the living testimony of everything that is *apparently* lacking in the Italian mind.”²² Despite using this reassuring assumption as a starting point for his reflections, he reached a rather critical review of his country’s culture.

“One of the numerous gaps Leopardi fills in Italian literature”²³ involves doubt. He “introduces doubt – the useful, fertile, precious doubt, in Italian literature: in this literature without doubts, in this too self-confident literature, in this affirmative literature, in this literature that insists on the tonic chords, that ignores the dominant, that ignores Schumann’s *warums*.”²⁴ Doubt, here associated with one of the epitomes of romanticism in music, never obscures the “Goddess gaze” of Italian literature, whose immobility likewise excludes doubt’s

counterpart, the *change of perspective*, precious to Leopardi as well as to both de Chirico brothers. The list of merits attributed to Leopardi culminates with his qualification as a kind of *failed Nietzsche* – one of the highest possible distinctions to be conferred by Savinio. In textual terms, “One more step forward in research, in rebellion, and Leopardi would have given to Italian literature the necessary ‘destroyer’ [...] the ‘purificator of the Heavens.’” Anyway, Savinio had found in Leopardi a radicalism he otherwise failed to see in Italy’s “too solemn and conformist literature.”²⁵ Even Leopardi’s glorified *Latinity* turns out to be in striking contrast to Dante’s praised *verticalism*.

In reference to the dialogue between Christopher Columbus and Pietro Gutierrez in *Operette morali*, Savinio’s essay compares these two sailors’ attitudes towards the Atlantic crossing on the *Santa Maria*. In the Leopardi text, Columbus points out the following issues: “Even if we won’t have any other benefit from this voyage, to me it still seems very profitable in so far as, for a certain amount of time, it keeps us free from boredom, it makes us appreciate Life, and many things we otherwise don’t even care about.”²⁶ While Columbus is shown to appreciate risky travel for increasing the value of “Life,” an increasingly impatient Gutierrez only has an uncertain destination in mind. For Savinio, the latter, with his deplorable fixation on the goal ahead, represented the Occident, while Columbus – “Colombo-Leopardi” – symbolized Italy, offering a reminder “that every moment is an aim in itself, and that the present is just as important as the future, and is to be enjoyed in every single particle.”²⁷

Nonetheless, such present-minded *Italianity*, which includes the joys of an odyssey, is distanced from Dante’s aforementioned regaining of the lost “right way.” Within the same text, besides the afterlife pilgrim, the presumed discoverer of the New World – with all his Faustian wanderlust²⁸ – symbolizes the spirit of the *classical country* par excellence!

Certain resemblances in the features of the portrayed poet and his portrayer confirm the conjecture formulated at the beginning of the present essay, that Savinio intentionally revealed himself in “Drammaticità di Leopardi.” Remembering Leopardi’s passion for etymology, his way of dismantling words “in order to see how they are made inside,”²⁹ the essay alludes to a childhood quirk the author shared with his brother, their well-known habit of vandalizing toys, which he justifies in the light of their inquiring minds.

In Leopardi, Savinio claimed to have discovered “the quality of a *man of intellect* [...] who [...] contemporaneously, or alternately, is a philosopher, a poet, an artist, because he does not operate instinctively but by will and reasoning.”³⁰ The sketched versatility unites the above-named *man of intellect* with the *dilettante* that the poet, the artist, the composer, the “philosopher”³¹ Savinio, averse to any specialization, used to define himself. Furthermore, they even seem to be brothers by “intellectualism.” Far removed from the romantic ideal of the creative process as *unshackled furor*, both operate “in a perfect calm of passions, giving form to what the mind had conceived.”³² Thereby, Savinio was true to the poetics he had formulated around 1920 in *Valori plastici*, according to which the artist ought to veil and transform what nature has revealed to him.³³ Rather than being solely a romantic complement to Italian classicism, Leopardi – or rather *Leopardi-Savinio* – generally represents the ideal of a *more complete Italian art*, a balance of classicism and romanticism, thus harmonizing the supposedly irreconcilable conflict of knowledge and imagination.

From the perspective of his antinaturalistic poetics, Savinio’s judgement of Leopardi’s dialogues, which make up an important part of *Operette morali*, is not surprising. He identifies the dramatic quality of these “mini-dramas” particularly in their *non-drama*, in their absence of action, in their drama “di là dal dramma.”³⁴ In a review published in *Omnibus* in 1938, “beyond drama” is also how he situated a Florentine production of Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*, directed by Jacques Copeau: “We are beyond drama. [...] Every movement, every rumor, every dramatic stress is now hidden under an impermeable skin, and from there, nothing leaks, [...] like in well-run households, kitchen smells do not arrive in the parlor.”³⁵ In Copeau’s staging of Shakespeare, as well as in Leopardi’s dialogues, art realizes its task, which is, according to Savinio, “to pass through drama and to resolve the problem of evil.”³⁶ In his opinion, if there is one thing here on earth to fulfill the eschatological hope of overcoming the drama of life, *it is art*. It is, for instance, Leopardi’s prose. It is its continuation and solution: the music of Polish-French composer Frédéric Chopin. So, what do Chopin and Leopardi have in common? Mainly, it is a certain *Greekness* that the Athens-born artist detected in their works with manifest delight. It is an essentially “romantic” Greek antiquity that finds continuation in the writer and the composer. A melancholic Greece, which, nevertheless, gained a special “state of happiness:” *la noia – boredom!*³⁷

[...] boredom that excludes expectance, that excludes desire, that has extinguished the last spark of drama: boredom, this very tenuous breath passing imperceptibly through the *Dialogues* of Leopardi: boredom, this very soft sigh that, one by one, like ships, pushes forward the notes of Frédéric Chopin.³⁸

Certainly, such desirable boredom is not to be confounded with Leopardian “boredom” as *taedium vitae*. It rather describes a blissful state of *desirelessness*. From the viewpoint of such Schopenhauerian *negation of the will* realized in art, Savinio definitely opposed every *nonartistic* realization of messianic hope, ridiculed under the term *socialism*. Though he would go on to consider similar tendencies with greater indulgence in the forties, he shared, in principle, Leopardi’s skepticism toward the perfectibility of humankind. Yet, while Leopardi, saw the main reason for human alienation in an increased distance from nature – prompting Sebastian Neumeister to place him close to Jean Jacques Rousseau³⁹ – a rather Voltairean Savinio identified the only conceivable “state of grace” in “civilization.” He basically welcomed the loss of illusion that Leopardi complained about. Yet despite these divergences, Leopardi and Savinio may be seen, from the perspective of the latter, as united in a kind of wise resignation whose homeland besides Italy, or merging with it, is a scarcely classical Greece.

In his life and work, Savinio may have become a champion of *experienced hybridity*. His literary star had already risen at the sign of the hybrid entity par excellence, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. Yet during an important period of the fascist era, the cultural identity of the *repatriated vagrant* seems to have assumed the marmoreal consistence of the column, the symbol of Roman verticalism.⁴⁰ In two previous studies, I presumed an escape from such a dead end in Savinio’s own re-hermaphrodization, in his marriage to the actress Maria Morino, in 1926.⁴¹ Psychologically and ideologically, this restoration of the mythical original *male-female totality* – before being split in two by Zeus – may have opened the door to a slow erosion of any remaining concepts of monolithic selfdom. Thus, on the way to a more permeable, more generous Italianity, on the way to a *more conscious* appropriation of his extraterritorial roots, the appearance of Leopardi’s romantic “Greekness” should be considered a groundbreaking revelation.

Conclusion: From Impure Arts to an Impure Artist

An acknowledged Greek infiltration of the mature Savinio’s Italianity might be a promising subject for future papers, as is the question of how much “Buddhism,” mediated by his Schopenhauer reception, is to be included. In the context of a

biography marked by discontinuities, I have here exemplified the deliberate appropriation of the heterogeneous, multicultural imprinting undergone by the artist during his *Balkan childhood*.⁴² Savinio’s conscious assimilation of European heritages declared as incompatible with the Italian national character laid the ground for his subsequent commitment to a united Europe.

Long before the end of the thirties, however, Savinio’s paintings were teeming with examples of combined iconographic borrowings from different cultures and various historical and biographical contexts. For instance, the “painted collage”⁴³ *Senza titolo - Couple et enfant* (Untitled – couple and infant, 1927; figure 1), which shows a nineteenth-century upper-class couple with the features of the artist’s parents, has two disturbing importations: an intruder, a *Graeculus* from Salomon Reinach’s *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* (Repertoire of Greek and Roman statuary, 1906),⁴⁴ has taken the child’s place (figure 2).

Here, however, the child with a goose that in Reinach’s drawing *Enfant à l’oie* still corresponds to classical canons of proportion, has undergone a metamorphosis – into a grotesquely beefy little Hercules!⁴⁵ Moreover, the only touch of color in the monochrome group is the emblematic symbol of romanticism in the mother’s hand: the blue flower.

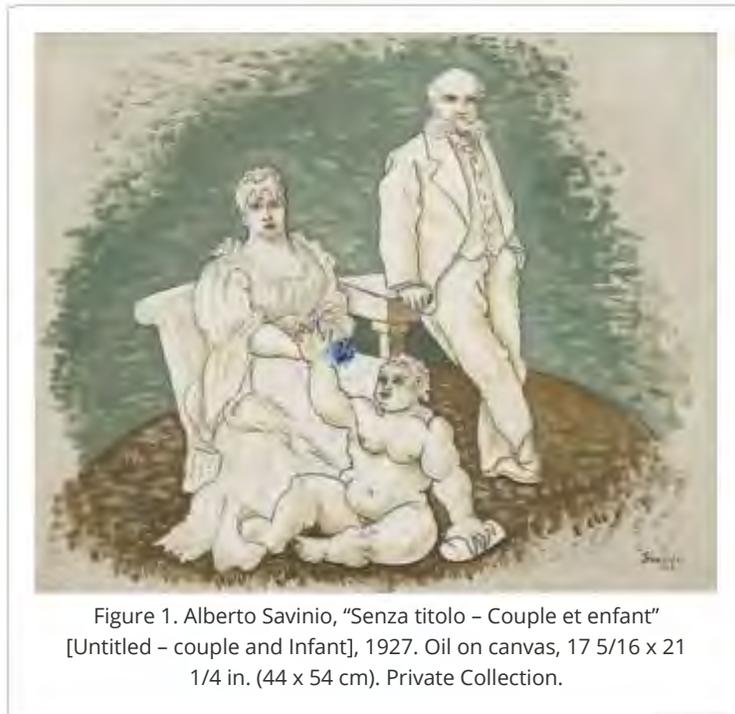


Figure 1. Alberto Savinio, “Senza titolo - Couple et enfant” [Untitled – couple and Infant], 1927. Oil on canvas, 17 5/16 x 21 1/4 in. (44 x 54 cm). Private Collection.

Thus, essayistic reflection seems to have realized *and accepted* only with delay what painting had already started: identity as a collage of the nonidentical. A rather prominent self-portrait precedes, by four years, the discreet literary one just uncovered. I am referring here to the owl-headed figure dressed in a Bohemian style (*Autoritratto in forma di gufo*, [Self-portrait as an owl], 1934; figure 3), which, in terms of hermaphroditism, can certainly compete with the

melancholically bored
Greeks Leopardi and
Chopin. An irreversibly
hybrid art – or, to use a
Savinian expression, an
*impure art*⁴⁶ – anticipates
the complete self-
awareness of an *impure*
artist.

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Figure 3. Alberto Savinio, “Autoritratto in forma di gufo” [Self-Portrait as an owl], 1936. Tempera and charcoal on paper applied on plywood, 27 1/2 x 19 11/16 in. (70 x 50 cm). GAM – Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin.

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- 1 . Alberto Savinio, “Perché noi Italiani non amiamo la psicanalisi,” in *Scritti dispersi*, ed. Paola Italia (Milan: Adelphi, 2004), 1221–25, especially 1223. All translations in this essay, unless otherwise noted, are mine.
- 2 . Giacomo Leopardi, “Cantico del Gallo Silvestre,” in *Operette morali* (Milan: Mursia, 1982), 211–15.
- 3 . For Leopardi’s considerable influence already on the literary debut of young Alberto de Chirico (who only a few years later would adopt his today well-known nom de plume), see Nicol M. Mocchi, *La cultura dei fratelli de Chirico agli albori dell’arte metafisica. Milano e Firenze 1909–1911* (Milan: Scalpendi, 2017), 36–49.
- 4 . Jolanda de Blasi, ed., *Giacomo Leopardi. Letture tenute per il Lyceum di Firenze da A. Castiglioni, G. Mazzoni, E. de Michelis...* (Florence: Sansoni, 1938), 109–32 . A considerably shorter version, titled “Utilità di Leopardi,” had been published a year earlier, on January 7, in the daily paper *La Stampa*. The essay was republished in *Torre di guardia* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1977, 159–63), a volume of Savinian essays from the thirties edited by Leonardo Sciascia. In 1980, the full essay appeared as an independent book, which is the version of “Drammaticità di Leopardi” I will be quoting here: Alberto Savinio, *Drammaticità di Leopardi* (Rome: Edizioni della Cometa, 1980).
- 5 . “La Poesia Italiana guarda di faccia. Ha uno sguardo da dea. Senza sospetti e senza sottintesi.” *Ibid.*, 18.
- 6 . “Dare al rovescio delle cose la stessa dignità che alla facciata: non è questo forse il segreto del fascino leopardiano?” *Ibid.*
- 7 . The Archivio dell’Arte Metafisica is a nonprofit cultural association whose “primary aim is to promote research, focusing specifically on the work of artists who contributed to the cultural and aesthetic realm of Metaphysics (De Chirico, Savinio, Morandi, Carrà, De Pisis), and artistic movements –such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Magic Realism, and Neo-Romanticism – that were closely correlated to the Metaphysical movement, in order to cultivate a more accurate and detailed knowledge of one of the most influential artistic phenomena of the Twentieth century.” Retrieved here on February 22, 2019.

A Stage on Alberto Savinio’s Route to a More “Romantic” Italy

- 8 . Martin Weidlich, *Tramonti e aurore di Alberto Savinio. Percorso meandrino di un intellettuale europeo del '900* (Milan: Scalpendi, 2017).
- 9 . Alberto Savinio, *Dico a te, Clio* (Rome: Edizioni della Cometa, 1940); first published in the newspapers *Il Mediterraneo* and *Oggi* in the summer and fall of 1939. In the present paper, I will be quoting the English version *Speaking to Clio*, trans. John Shepley (Marlboro, Vermont: The Marlboro Press, 1987).
- 10 . To name only two examples: Friedrich Nietzsche in Alberto Savinio, *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città* (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), 13; Henrik Ibsen in *Vita di Enrico Ibsen* (Milan: Adelphi, 1998), 77–84.
- 11 . “Tanto singolare la posizione ‘mentale’ dell’Italia nell’Europa occidentalista, quanto quella dei Baschi nell’Europa indoeuropea.” Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 15.
- 12 . Mainly, I am referring to Savinio’s lecture “Tramonto dell’occidente. Aurora di una nuova civiltà italiana,” given at the Istituto Fascista di Cultura in Florence in May 1933, which remains for the most part unpublished. A typescript with Savinio’s own handwritten corrections can be consulted in the Fondo Alberto Savinio at the Archivio contemporaneo Alessandro Bonsanti of Gabinetto Vieusseux in Florence (IT ACGV AS.II 34.2). See Weidlich, *Tramonti e aurore di Alberto Savinio*, where the text, with the kind authorization of Angelica Savinio and Ruggero Savinio, is widely treated and textually quoted; on Burckhardt, see especially 41–42.
- 13 . To give an example, in “Storia del genere umano” (in Leopardi, *Operette morali*, 29–44), the introduction of Truth into the world is represented as a punishment inflicted by Jove onto ungrateful humankind.
- 14 . See Lizzy Davis, “Translation of Giacomo Leopardi’s Zibaldone published,” *The Guardian*, August 1, 2013, available [here](#). Retrieved April 20, 2019.
- 15 . “L’Italia conserva tuttavia qualche poco della sua naturale immaginazione, del suo bello, della sua naturale disposizione alla letizia ed alla felicità.” Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, vol. 1 (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), 671, [932]. The passage is quoted in Savinio’s essay, where it is *simplified* to “l’Italia conserva tuttavia qualche poco della sua naturale disposizione alla letizia ed alla felicità.” *Drammaticità*, 20.
- 16 . “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, /ché la diritta via era smarrita.” Dante Alighieri, “Inferno,” in *La Divina Commedia* (Milan: Mursia, 1965), canto 1, 5. The verses are quoted with slight typographic variants in Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 16–17.
- 17 . *Ibid.*, 17.
- 18 . *Ibid.*

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- 19 . Savinio, *Speaking to Clio*, 87.
- 20 . Savinio, “Romanticismo” entry, in *Nuova enciclopedia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1977), 323–26. First published as “Sotto la maschera letteraria,” *La Nazione*, March 18, 1937; republished as “Classicismo e romanticismo,” *La Stampa*, April 7, 1937, and as “Romanticismo,” *Il Popolo di Roma*, January 12, 1943.
- 21 . Savinio, *Nuova enciclopedia*, 326.
- 22 . Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 18. Emphasis mine.
- 23 . Ibid.
- 24 . Ibid., 19
- 25 . Both quotations in *ibid.*, 21.
- 26 . “Quando altro frutto non ci venga da questa navigazione, a me pare che ella sia profittevolissima in quanto che per un tempo essa ci tiene liberi dalla noia, ci fa cara la vita, ci fa pregevoli molte cose che altrimenti non avremmo in considerazione.” Leopardi, “Dialogo di Cristoforo Colombo e di Pietro Gutierrez,” in *Operette morali*, 197–201, especially 200.
- 27 . Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 19–20.
- 28 . In Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, the Italian sailor Columbus incarnates the Faustian spirit of discovery; cf. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2000), *passim*.
- 29 . Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 22.
- 30 . Ibid., 25.
- 31 . “Philosopher” in the etymological sense as specified by Savinio himself, who had characterized the modern artist as “amico della conoscenza” (friend of knowledge) in “Arte = Idee moderne,” *Valori plastici* 1, no. 1 (November 1918): 3–8, especially 4; republished in: Savinio, *La nascita di Venere. Scritti sull’arte* (Milan: Adelphi, 2007), 31–43, especially 33.
- 32 . Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 26. With special reference to Savinio’s painted work, Paolo Baldacci discusses extensively this concept of artistic creation as a *rationaly controlled* process that seems to be diametrically opposed to the surrealist idea of *écriture automatique*. See Paolo Baldacci, “Savinio e il surrealismo,” in Pia Vivarelli and Paolo Baldacci, eds., *Alberto Savinio* (Milan: Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta, 2002), 19–34.
- 33 . See Alberto Savinio, “‘Anadioménon.’ Principi di valutazione dell’arte contemporanea,” *Valori plastici* 1, nos. 4–5 (April–May 1919): 6–14; republished in Savinio, *La nascita di Venere* (Milan: Adelphi, 2007), 45–63, especially 62–63.
- 34 . Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 38.
- 35 . Alberto Savinio, “Come vi garba,” in *Palchetti romani* (Milan: Adelphi, 1982), 248–52, especially 249.

- 36 . Savinio, *Drammaticità*, 39.
- 37 . Ibid., 43.
- 38 . Ibid.
- 39 . “Tutti e due, Rousseau come Leopardi, si chiedono se la perfettibilità può aiutare a ottenere la felicità individuale, e tutti e due rispondono negativamente.” Sebastian Neumeister, “La perfettibilità in Leopardi,” in Sebastian Neumeister and Raffaele Sirri, eds., *Leopardi. Poeta e pensatore/Dichter und Denker* (Naples: Alfredo Guida, 1997), 105–17, especially 117.
- 40 . On Savinio’s direction of the *Colonna* review in 1933–34, see Lucilla Lijoi’s contribution to the same Study Days, “Alberto Savinio and the “years of consent:” The experience of “Colonna” (1933–1934),” now published in this same issue here
- 41 . See Weidlich, *Tramonti e aurore di Alberto Savinio*, 94–95; see also “Savinio und ‘der Andere.’ Oder: ‘Nietzsche’ contra ‘Nietzsche,’” *Studi Online (Rivista in linea dell’Archivio dell’Arte Metafisica)* 2, no. 3 (January 1–June 30, 2015): 22–36, especially 30–31, available here.
- 42 . The expression *Balkan childhood* is mine. Verbatim, the second of Savinio’s two autobiographic childhood novels starts as follows: “L’infanzia e parte dell’adolescenza, Nivasio Dolcemare le ha consumate in una capitale della Balcania (i. e. Athens, M. W.) [...]” Savinio, “Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare,” in *Hermaphrodito e altri romanzi* (Milan: Adelphi, 1995), 565–687, especially 567.
- 43 . For the “painted collage” method as a principle in Savinio’s painting, see Gerd Roos, “Alberto Savinio’s Découverte d’un monde nouveau. Eine Reflexion über das Apollinisch-Dionysische,” in *Savinio europäisch*, ed. Andrea Grewe (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2005), 83–102, especially 87–88.
- 44 . Salomon Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ernest Leroux Éditeur, 1906), 536.
- 45 . I would like to thank Gerd Roos for informing me of this important source as well as for deepening the present discussion. The figure of this child seems to anticipate, in caricature, an artistic concept formulated in 1937 in “Commento a Tragedia dell’infanzia:” “La paura dell’artista in famiglia – che si vuol giustificare con gli stenti, l’incertezza della vita d’artista – è il terrore che in seno alla famiglia, tra uomini ‘ridotti,’ abbia da formarsi un uomo di sviluppo pieno: un gigante. [...] Nei soli artisti – si sa – l’età adulta è la continuazione *naturale* dell’infanzia.” Alberto Savinio, *Tragedia dell’infanzia*, ed. Paola Italia (Milan: Adelphi, 2001), 129.

46. The term *arte impura*, which describes collective arts such as theater and cinema, appears in Alberto Savinio, “Il teatro è fantasia,” in *Palchetti romani* (Milan: Adelphi, 1982), 17–21, especially 18 (“Le forme d’arte collettiva portano sottane a strascico, raccattano polvere e ogni sorta d’impurità. In ultimo, il carro di Tespi diventa carro della nettezza urbana”). From the forms of collective art, however, I would like to extend this term to an individual but faceted art, namely Savinio’s oeuvre, which manages to make of the heterogeneity and fragmentation of modern experience the main capital of modern art.

About the Author

Martin Weidlich earned his master’s degree in Romanic literature and German as a foreign language, as well as a Ph.D. for his dissertation on Alberto Savinio (published 2006), from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich. Since 1997, Weidlich has taught German language to foreign students, providing instruction at all academic and professional levels. In 2013, responding to considerable demand among international scholars, he created the *Dr. Martin Weidlich, Lektorat – Korrekturen* editorial office in Munich, offering linguistic revision of various types of texts. In addition to these activities, Martin Weidlich works as an essayist, translator, philologist, and researcher.