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*Pittura ideista: The Spiritual in Divisionist Painting*¹

Vivien Greene

The Divisionists were a loosely associated group of late-nineteenth-century painters intent on creating a distinctly Italian avant-garde art. Their mission was underpinned by modernist and nationalist aspirations,² while their painting method drew on scientific theories of optics and chromatics and relied on the application of brushstrokes of individual, often complementary, colors to craft shimmering surfaces that capitalized on light effects.³ Although the movements' members generally aligned

I am grateful to those who read this essay: firstly, at its inception, Giovanna Ginex, more recently, Jon Snyder, and, lastly, my anonymous readers. I am also thankful to all my colleagues at the museums and archives named herein who gave me access to artworks and documents and supported my research efforts, even long distance.

¹ This article is a recast and expanded version of an earlier essay of mine, "Divisionism's Symbolist Ascent," in *Radical Light: Italy's Divisionist Painters, 1891-1910* (exh. cat.), ed. Simonetta Fraquelli (London: National Gallery; Zurich: Kunsthaus Zurich, 2008), 47-59. My title borrows from a term that the Divisionist artist and critic Vittore Grubicy De Dragon developed to differentiate Italian Symbolism from similar tendencies among other artists and in other nations, calling it *pittura ideista*. See especially Vittore Grubicy De Dragon, "Pittura Ideista," in *Prima esposizione triennale Brera 1891. Tendenze evolutive nelle arti plastiche: Pensiero italiano* 9 (Milan: Tipografia Cooperativa Insubria, 1891), 47-50. Grubicy's moniker was probably inspired by G.-Albert Aurier's concept of "*art idéiste*," a term bandied about then, which was most famously discussed in his "Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin," *Mercure de France* 2 (March 1891): 155-64. Excerpts of Aurier's article are reprinted, along with commentary, in Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: a Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 192-203. While my thesis focuses on sacred subjects, there are many dimensions to these works that fall outside of the purview of this text, especially those of social significance, and the linked notions of social harmony, nurtured by the Divisionists' primarily left-wing politics.

² I utilize the term "avant-garde" loosely here, because the Divisionists did not necessarily break in full with the art movements that preceded them, which is usually considered a condition for the emergence of an avant-garde. Italy's recent unification made the notion of rupture complicated, since the cultural practitioners of the new country attempted to articulate a national identity that did rely at times on the past, even in instances when artists were being consciously "modern" (an issue this essay explores).

³ The genesis of Italian Divisionism is convoluted. Among the most influential theories for the Divisionist method were Michel-Eugène Chevreul, *De la Loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortiment des objets colorés, considérés d'après cette loi* (Paris: Léonce Laget, 1969; facsimile of orig. ed. Paris: Pitois-Levrault, 1839), and Ogden Rood, *Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry* (New York: Appleton, 1879). Charles Henry's theories of optics, color, and the emotive possibilities of line and color (often absorbed through secondary sources) were also a conceptual compass. Italian Divisionism is closely related to and relies upon similar sources as French Pointillism, or Neo-Impressionism, a painting style the Italians initially discovered via second-hand accounts in journals such as the French *La Vie moderne* and the Belgian *L'Art moderne*. Though his timing did not coincide with the Neo-Impressionists' initial activities in Paris or Brussels (the two principle loci for this movement), Grubicy, who had spent significant time abroad, was a principal conduit for international theories. But Italian Divisionism also capitalized on multiple Italian fonts. For more on the relationship between the Italian and the French movements, see Vivien Greene, ed., *Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy* (exh. cat.) (Berlin and New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2007). For a detailed exegesis on the inception of the Italian Divisionist style, see Vivien Greene, *Italian Divisionism in the 1890s: the Forging of a Modern Identity* (PhD dissertation, New York: The Graduate Center, CUNY, 2005). General reference works on Italian Divisionism include Gabriella Belli, ed. *Divisionismo italiano* (exh. cat.) (Milan: Electa and Museo d'arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 1990) and Gabriella Belli and Franco Rella, ed., *L'età del divisionismo* (Milan: Electa, 1990). For more on color theory see, especially, John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

themselves with some form of socialism and were thus anticlerical, nonetheless almost all their painted canvases with religious or mystical overtones sometimes depicted specifically Catholic subjects. And, despite their call for modernity, the sources for the majority of the Divisionists' mystical paintings resided in medieval and Renaissance art.⁴ However, this confluence of an empirical painting method and leftist politics with anti-materialist and sacred themes, and modern art with historical prototypes, was not—paradoxical as it may well seem—an altogether surprising phenomenon in the 1890s, and it occurred not only in Italy. In this decade, Symbolist art thrived, with an overlap between spiritualism and science and the legacy of a past too omnipresent and important to fully escape.⁵

Focusing on sacred subject matter, this essay will explore the cultural context within which the Divisionists pursued spirituality and expressed metaphysical and transcendent ideas.⁶ The artists discussed hailed from geographically diverse places, emerged from divergent socio-economic

⁴ This fascination with past art was multipronged. Nineteenth-century revivalist and historicist trends prompted a revisitation of styles from the past in art, design, and architecture in Europe and the United States. In Italy, the 1870s and 1880s saw a Neo-Renaissance movement, which tied into nationalist objectives and notions of *italianità*. This is examined in, for example, Rosanna Pavoni, ed., *Reviving the Renaissance: the Use and Abuse of the Past in Nineteenth-Century Italian Art and Decoration*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Neo-Grec and Neo-Renaissance tendencies were also popularized in Angelo Sommaruga's Roman magazine *Cronaca bizantina* (1881-86). See Vivien Greene, "Byzantium and Emporium: *fine-secolo* Magazines in Rome and Milan," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, Vol. III: *Europe 1880-1940*, Part 1, ed. Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 543-46. But, in the late nineteenth century, especially among Symbolist artists, there was a resurgence in taste for art of the past, particularly the Italian Primitives (a catch-all term referring to Italian artists of late 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries), even among modernist artists such as the proto-Symbolist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, the conservative Catholic Nabis Maurice Denis, and the anti-clerical, left-wing painter Paul Gauguin. An excellent set of essays on the medieval revival in France is Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: the Medieval Revival in Fin-de-siècle France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003). Puvis's traditional modernism is examined in Jennifer L. Shaw, *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). For a recent comprehensive analysis of Gauguin's oeuvre, see Henri Dorra, *The Symbolism of Paul Gauguin: Erotica, Exotica, and the Great Dilemmas of Humanity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007); for an excellent look at Gauguin and issues of religion see Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000). Michael Marlais includes a nuanced discussion of Denis's reverence for the Italian Primitives and his role as a conservative modernist in *Conservative Echoes in Fin-de-siècle Parisian Art Criticism* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 185-219.

⁵ It should be emphasized here that the merging of Symbolism and the division of color was particular to the Italian Divisionists. A key publication on Symbolism in Italy is Anna Maria Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia, 1885-1900* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981). She also examines the Symbolist tenets of Divisionism in "Divisionismo e Simbolismo," in Germano Celant and Pontus Hultén, ed., *Arte italiana: presenze 1900-1945*, exh. cat. (Milan: Bompiani, 1989), 37-50. More recently Anna Mazzanti has investigated the theories behind Symbolist art in Italy in *Simbolismo italiano fra arte e critica. Mario de Maria e Angelo Conti* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007). For a recent exhibition on Italian Symbolism, see Maria Vittoria, Marini Clarelli, Fernando Mazzocca, and Carlo Sisi, ed., *Il Simbolismo in Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2011). For a current general examination of Symbolism, see Michele Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009). An older but still important reference remains Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

⁶ Other Divisionists, among them Emilio Longoni, Angelo Morbelli, and Plinio Nomellini, made forays into Symbolist painting, but did not necessarily use sacred themes. In the interest of limiting the present discussion, these artists are not addressed here.

backgrounds, and each had a personal and distinctive relationship to religion and spirituality.⁷ The latter were therefore expressed differently in their respective bodies of work. Giovanni Segantini (1858-99), who lived in the Alps, was greatly inspired by his dramatic surroundings and produced holy imagery couched in pantheistic representations of nature, along with allegorical conceptions of women as Madonnas or fallen angels. Gaetano Previati (1852-1920) had a more traditional faith and was the Divisionist whose work was most consistently Symbolist in its execution. He retreated to his Milan studio, rejecting the urban world outside his window for inner realms, and he mused upon religious and even overtly Christian subjects in his art. Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo (1868-1907), from the rural Langhe area of Piedmont, was a committed socialist who identified with the local peasantry. He imbued the images of his environs with a spiritual and humanistic symbolism indicative of his sympathy towards the farmers' personalized piety and their agrarian religious ceremonies grounded in timeless native traditions. Instead, Vittore Grubicy De Dragon (1851-1920) painted in the Alps, although his work as dealer ensured he maintained his residence in Milan, and he theorized at length about his ideas on art and sacred meaning. His was a more abstracted definition of spirituality, related to his conception of *arte ideista*. The least accomplished of the Divisionist painters, he was largely self-taught, yet—perhaps to compensate for his autodidacticism—he was probably the most informed by international contemporary (or recent) discussions on this subject. He attempted to evoke the intangible divine in suggestive landscapes devoid of figures, with gleaming Alpine lakes, misty forests, and distant snowy peaks his portal to transcendence.

The present examination also parses the Divisionists' strategies to create a new idiom that could be nationalist and correlated with Italy through the painters' oblique reliance on the art of the country's past. Medieval and Renaissance pictorial lexicons were deeply embedded within Italy's contemporary visual discourse, given the ubiquity of artworks, secular architecture, churches, and other sites that surrounded Italians. In addition to this immersion, the Divisionists consciously visited and viewed—and in some cases collected images of—their predecessors' work. Thus references to past styles, conventions, and iconography were unavoidable in their art. While the Divisionists' dialogue with the art of the past was motivated, in part, by nationalist goals, by linking themselves to the “old master” art of a formerly divided Italy they also risked contradicting another nationalist desire, that of being modern.⁸ But they were aware of these issues and judicious in their artistic adulation. For, by

⁷ The Divisionists also had diverging notions of nationalism. For example, Segantini was born in the Trentino Alto Adige when it was under Austrian Hapsburg rule. When Italy failed to grant him citizenship, he remained in Switzerland. In fact, at the 1900 Paris *Exposition Universelle*, he was originally going to exhibit in the Swiss Pavilion. See Hans A. Lüthy, “Advertising Switzerland: Giovanni Segantini's Panorama for the 1900 Paris World's Fair,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 5, Swiss Theme Issue (1993): 34-41. Interpretations of nationalism were still convoluted, even among a group of artists with many shared goals, and constitute a subject worthy of a separate essay.

⁸ As mentioned in footnote 4, the Italians' admiration for past art, especially that of the Italian Primitives, was shared by modern artists in France (who also looked to their own medieval antecedents and to Northern models, such as Hans Memling). Consider, for example, the figures associated with the Pont-Aven school, who adopted the flatness and deformations of the Italian Primitives (among other models), seeing these formal excesses as “modern,” also because these qualities countered the traditions of naturalist painting. Between critics and artists of late 1880s and 1890s France, a discussion raged about what was conservative or avant-garde vis-à-vis this emulation of Trecento and Quattrocento Italian religious art, which could be, and was, read both ways and was employed by artists on either side of that divide. This problematic, concomitant with works by many Symbolist proponents, was shared across national boundaries. The Italian Divisionists differed because, as argued above, they had additional nationalist reasons for their recall of past art. This conundrum is certainly too large an ancillary topic to be further developed here. For more on this issue with regard to France see, for example, Marlais, *Conservative Echoes in Fin-de-Siècle Parisian Art Criticism*.

capitalizing on their rich heritage, the Divisionists responded to some pressing nationalist exigencies. They could override current anxieties about cultural fragmentation in a still newly forged, but disconnected Italian kingdom, as well as underscore an inheritance that came from within Italy rather than from abroad.⁹ Through this reclamation project, the Divisionists also inserted themselves into a lineage of acknowledged Italian masters and earned gravitas for their art.

Ideologically speaking, however, allusions to Christian prototypes, even if prompted by the venerable altars and niches of churches, presented problems for these painters. The Vatican was, by definition, anti-nationalist because the Church had fought to keep its lands separate from the Italian kingdom. More specifically, given Pope Leo XIII's (1878-1903 Papacy tenure) unwillingness to comply with the Italian government in the later nineteenth century, the Church came to symbolize anti-nationalism and a return to archaic societal structures.¹⁰ Leo XIII's predecessor, Pius IX (1846-1878), was responsible for much of this post-Unification gap between Church and state; he notoriously rejected modernity and progress in his 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*, issued with the *Quanta cura* encyclical. Leo XIII, by contrast, recognized that Church doctrine needed to reconcile itself with a changing world and called for a Christianity that could better meet the demands of contemporary society. Leo XIII's comparatively progressive views are represented in his 1891 *Rerum novarum* encyclical which, while anti-socialist and in favor of the Church's paternalism, was dedicated to Italy's growing social problems, addressed the need for reforms to aid the disenfranchised, and appealed to Catholics to face emergent social and economic dilemmas. He nonetheless persisted in the anti-liberalist and anti-nationalist veins of his predecessor, opposing the politics of Francesco Crispi, who actively sought to divest papal power (for example, the state established and administered charitable and educational institutions that had traditionally fallen under the jurisdiction of the Church). Consequently, religious inferences in artworks could suggest an alliance with the reactionary, anti-positivist stance of the Church, which also ran counter to the progressive and modernist goals of the Divisionists. Notwithstanding these possible associations, as mentioned at the start of this discussion, many of these works with spiritual thematics also fall into the category of Symbolism, an international movement distinguished by myriad religious and spiritual interpretations. Thus, in the newly unified Italy, mystical art was not necessarily *Catholic* art.

I suggest that Divisionists negotiated the polarities of tradition and progress that defined the post-Unification era. They recognized that their antecedents' sacred art, as well as the Catholic subjects associated with the Church, could serve as new icons of spirituality for Italians once they were reinterpreted and recast with a rational painting method and modernist forms. The Italian Divisionists did not, in fact, slavishly emulate traditional religious imagery. They instead appropriated and adapted the sacred models of their forebears for their own alternative, often secularized, conceptions of the

⁹ As mentioned in footnote 1, though Grubicy argued for the distinctiveness of Italian Divisionism and Italian Symbolism, dubbing "*pittura ideista*" the latter Divisionist thread that engaged with mystical themes, Divisionism was an idiom that adapted major theories from foreigners, including the French Neo-Impressionist or Pointillist movement, and a percentage of Italian Divisionist production was clearly Symbolist—which was, instead, an international style. Thus these Italian avatars were important to emphasize a specifically Italian identity for the Divisionists.

¹⁰ For Church history of this time, see David I. Kertzer, "Religion and Society, 1789-1892," in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796-1900*, ed. John A. Davis (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181-205, and Adrian Lyttelton, "An Old Church and a New State: Italian Anti-Clericalism, 1878-1915," *European History Quarterly* 13 (April 1983): 225-48. For a general overview see Gregorio Penco, *Dal Concilio di Trento ai nostri giorni*, Vol. 2, *Storia della Chiesa in Italia* (Milan: Jaca, 1978).

divine. In this manner, they overcame the seeming contradiction between the former and the latter, while pointing the way toward later avant-garde movements.

During the 1890s, when the Divisionists were most active, positivism was losing centrality in European culture as more intuitive systems of knowledge gained primacy.¹¹ With the discoveries of the nineteenth century—including, for example, photography (first used commercially in 1839) and Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theories (his *Origins of the Species* was published in 1859)—Realism, naturalism, and trust in the empirical dominated art, literature, and philosophy for decades. But science was not foolproof. It proved to be subjective and failed to resolve the ills of modernity. Concurrently, artistic trends evolved away from the mimesis and snapshots of daily life that the prose of the French Realists and paintings of the French Impressionists popularized first in France, and then in Europe and the United States. By around the mid-1880s, arbiters of culture surmised that positivist trends had debased an essential spiritual dimension of art and life. Symbolism was one result, an international movement with broad thematic and stylistic parameters encompassing literary and mythical narratives, the mystical, and occult subjects. Symbolism was born in reaction to the Western world’s rapidly developing urban centers, industrialization, and loss of faith in favor of materialism and science. The intersection of opposites, consequently, marked this period: empiricism coexisted with mysticism, physiological studies of perception with practices of spiritual transformation, and evolutionary theory with divine creationism. These binaries influenced the art of the *fine secolo*, allowing us to understand why the Divisionists’ technique could be anchored in contemporary scientific theories while, concomitantly, their works could often qualify as Symbolist art. Despite their modernism, these painters and many of their cohorts believed that their art conveyed metaphysical and impalpable elements outside of the reach of empiricism.¹²

There were several thinkers in late nineteenth-century Europe whose ideas were relevant for the Divisionists in addressing these dichotomies and who helped shape the zeitgeist of the moment. Among these, despite any anti-foreign and, especially, anti-Francophone sentiments, two were French: the philosopher Paul Souriau and the sociologist Jean-Marie Guyau. The Divisionist artist and critic Vittore Grubicy De Dragon digested their writings, sometimes recasting their premises (on occasion, it would seem, because he misunderstood their theories) and sometimes paraphrasing them. Grubicy then disseminated his versions in several articles, with titles such as “Non c’è arte vera senza suggestione,” and “La ginnastica dei sensi: nuovi orizzonti d’estetica,” making the thoughts of Souriau and Guyau

¹¹ This overriding shift is addressed in H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: the Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002 [orig. ed. New York: Knopf, 1958]), 33-66. But in Italy the shift was not so clearly defined. Confidence in the science-progress axis endured through the 1890s, still fed by the positivist philosophy that continued to be prevalent in the country. Witness the evolutionary ideas of Cesare Lombroso, for instance. For a discussion of positivism’s quicksands in Italy see, for example, Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo: la cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985). For a more specific look at Lombroso’s theories of evolutionary determinism, criminal anthropology, and degeneracy in this period, as well as their relationship to ideas of nationalism, the progressive, and the anti-clerical, see in particular Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: a European Disorder, c. 1848-c. 1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989 [reprint 1996]), 109-52. A revelatory study of the intersection of anti-positivism, anti-naturalism, modernism, the avant-garde, and pro-Catholic currents in the art and criticism of the 1890s, especially Symbolism, may be found in Marlais, *Conservative Echoes in Fin-de-Siècle Parisian Art Criticism*, 5-76.

¹² In her discussion of Segantini’s and Grubicy’s respective writings, Damigella notes that both men saw Symbolist art as “the most appropriate to inherit the role religion had lost and to answer the doubts science leaves unresolved” [“la più adatta a ereditare il ruolo che la religione ha perduto e a rispondere ai dubbi che la scienza lascia irrisolti”]: Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 99. All translations are by the author.

easily available to the Divisionists and circulating them in Italy.¹³ In his *La suggestion dans l'art*, published in 1893, Souriau maintained that “the contemplation of the beautiful [by which is meant the arts] is accompanied by a certain cerebral exaltation.”¹⁴ He proposed that art could cue the human psyche into entering ecstatic states of mind, much as the power of suggestion could induce a hypnotic trance in a human subject. Particular interpretations of color and light in painting, certain harmonies in music, or select passages in prose and poetry could foster an experiential state of mind in the viewer parallel to that which the artist experienced in the act of creation. Grubicy subscribed to Souriau’s theories on the possibilities within art to intimate inchoate sensations and thoughts, and he propagated them in his own “Non c’è arte vera senza suggestione” (in which he also freely made use of Souriau’s term “suggestion”), noting that “the faculty of suggestion is undoubtedly dependent on energy from the nervous system” and that “the work created without the ingredient of suggestion, even if very perfect, is **outside of art**, it is artifice.”¹⁵

Instead, Guyau argued that art was important for modern society because it could draw on science, while also possessing a mystical, transformative dimension that went beyond the empirical.¹⁶ He relied on newly developed physiological and psychophysical theories regarding the nervous system to explain art’s sensorial effects upon the viewer and art’s ability, through certain colors or lines, to exhort emotional or spiritual states. Extrapolating on Herbert Spencer’s concepts regarding evolution, Guyau postulated that civilization’s advances were accelerating the dissolution of social life and argued that art had the power to offset the negative aspects of this process.¹⁷ Moreover, he contended that art could function as a vehicle for social change while not adhering strictly to Realist axioms (first broadcast primarily in French literature and art in the 1830s, these had quickly made themselves felt in most Western cultures), which were no longer considered effective in engendering social engineering. This thesis, which by implication validated Symbolist art, was appealing and useful for those Divisionists who wished to defend socialist values, specifically Pellizza, and institute sweeping changes in Italian society.

¹³ Damigella, Quinsac, and Reborà all insist on the significance of Souriau and Guyau for the Divisionists. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 50-55, 100-06; Annie-Paule Quinsac, *La Peinture divisionniste italienne: origines et premiers développements, 1880-1895* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), 88, 167-69; and Sergio Reborà, *Vittore Grubicy De Dragon: 1851-1920* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 1995), 38-39. Among Grubicy’s writings on Souriau, see Vittore Grubicy, “Non c’è arte vera senza suggestione,” *La Triennale*, no. 8 (1896): 57-59; and Vittore Grubicy, “Tecnica ed estetica divisionista,” *La Triennale*, no. 14 (1896): 110-12. His writings on Guyau include Vittore Grubicy, “La ginnastica dei sensi: nuovi orizzonti d’estetica,” *La Riforma* (Rome) 26, no. 213, July 31, 1892, 1; and “M. Guyau,” *La Riforma* (Rome) 26, no. 220, August 7, 1892, 1. Many of Grubicy’s published articles are now gathered in Vittore Grubicy De Dragon, *Scritti d’arte*, Ilaria Schiaffini ed. (Rovereto: MART, 2009).

¹⁴ “La contemplation du beau est accompagnée d’une certaine exaltation cérébrale”: Paul Souriau, *La suggestion dans l’art*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1909), 5.

¹⁵ Grubicy, “la facoltà suggestiva è indubbiamente dipendente da una forza nervosa,” in “Non c’è arte vera senza suggestione,” 58; and “l’opera creata senza l’ingrediente della suggestione, anche se perfettissima, è **fuori dell’arte**, è artificio,” *ibid.*, 59. Bold in original.

¹⁶ Jean-Marie Guyau, *Les Problèmes de l’esthétique contemporaine* (Paris: Alcan, 1884). For more on Guyau, see Frank J.W. Harding, *Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-1888), Aesthetician and Sociologist: a Study of his Aesthetic Theory and Critical Practice* (Geneva: Droz: 1973).

¹⁷ Among Spencer’s prolific writings, Guyau was looking at a portion of Spencer’s essay on “The Philosophy of Style” (1852), which was available in French in Hebert Spencer, *Essais de moral de science et d’esthétique*, Vol. I, *Essais sur le progrès*, trans. Auguste Burdeau (Paris: Baillièrè, 1877). See Harding, *Jean-Marie Guyau*, 40.

Grubicy circulated Guyau's hypotheses among the Italian cognoscenti, even if in reductive terms. For instance, Grubicy cited the French academic's claim that "[t]he poetry of light derives from its necessity to life itself and from the ardent stimulus that it exercises upon our entire organism," to which he added his own commentary: "[t]his physiological, human explanation, which Guyau gives us on the poetry of light, should give comfort and encouragement to our colleagues and painter friends, who for a few years, following the course of science, have been delving into the mysterious phenomena of the workings of light."¹⁸ This conclusion crystallized the arguments that could be applied to the Divisionist-Symbolist project: a scientific justification for the exploration of light and the optical techniques used to evince these effects, as well as an explanation for the physiological reactions that the "poetry of light" elicits in the viewer, which were seen to be akin to a mystical experience.

Guyau was not the only thinker of the day to publish on the evolutionary ideas that developed in the wake of Darwin and Spencer. By the 1890s, their theories had not only infiltrated popular consciousness but led to evolutionary discussions among the Divisionists and among forward-thinking members of the Italian intelligentsia. The anti-positivist Catholic writer Antonio Fogazzaro was another to take up the question.¹⁹ During that decade, he pursued mystical subject matter in his novels and philosophical essays, while espousing a line of attack with regard to evolutionary thought that better encapsulated the ambiguities and unresolved amalgam of attitudes felt in Italy towards to science, Catholicism, and spirituality. As a consequence, Fogazzaro's work is applicable to the Divisionist art discussed here. While the reactionary Church viewed evolutionary theory as a threat to divine creation and an attempt to overthrow Christian doctrine and flatly rejected Darwin's theories, Fogazzaro tried to validate these apparently opposed outlooks by arguing that devotion need not be denied even if Darwinism were accepted into the discourse of modern Italian culture.

Fogazzaro was in fact a staunch Catholic who rejected the materialism of positivism but, at the same time, recognized the validity of evolutionary theory, though this flew in the face of Church teachings. Joseph Le Conte's *Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought* (1888) was a key to his push for a modernization of Church doctrine.²⁰ In 1891, Fogazzaro presented the lecture, "Per un recente raffronto delle teorie di S. Agostino e di Darwin circa la creazione" (For a recent comparison between the theories of Saint Augustine and Darwin on creation), which would later become one of the essays he published in his 1899 *Ascensioni umane (Human Ascents)*.²¹ Although all his novels revolved around religious belief and scientific progress, in *Human Ascents* Fogazzaro attempted to reconcile Catholicism and Darwinism, as well as faith and reason. In his analysis of the evolution of human organisms, employing the theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Darwin, he posited—with admittedly less than

¹⁸ Grubicy, "M. Guyau," 1: "La poesia della luce deriva dalla sua necessità stessa per la vita e dallo stimolo ardente che essa esercita sopra tutto il nostro organismo"; and "Questa spiegazione fisiologica, umana, che il Guyau ci dà della poesia della luce, deve tornare di conforto e d'incoraggiamento agli amici e colleghi pittori, i quali da qualche anno, sulle traccie della scienza, vanno approfondendo i misteriosi fenomeni della luce in funzione."

¹⁹ Fogazzaro argued for analogies between evolutionary ideas and Christianity, and the possibility that science and faith could coexist and allow room for a belief in the supremacy of the spirit. His ideas are thus one point of entry into the mystically inclined work of the Divisionists, who had not renounced science wholesale. Pertinent examinations of this vein of Fogazzaro's work include Paolo Marangon, ed., *Antonio Fogazzaro e il modernismo* (Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 2003) and Paolo Marangon, *Il modernismo di Antonio Fogazzaro* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998).

²⁰ Joseph Le Conte, *Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought* (New York: Appleton, 1888).

²¹ Antonio Fogazzaro, *Ascensioni umane* (Milan: Baldini, Castoldi, and Co., 1899), 5-60. The book has an 1899 publication date, but actually came out at the end of 1898 and was reviewed in Domenico Tumiati, "Ascensioni umane," *Il Marzocco* 3, no. 45 (December 11, 1898): 1-2.

airtight arguments—that humankind advanced biologically as it advanced spiritually.²² Thus a learned understanding of science and scientific progress led, not to moral decay, but rather to a higher understanding of God and the Divine. Despite Fogazzaro’s fervent Catholicism, the notoriously antimodernist Pope Pius X (who served 1903-1914) condemned the writer’s later novels. Rather than rebel against this treatment, Fogazzaro eventually recanted the views he put forth in his writings, and asked for public forgiveness from the Church.

Although Fogazzaro may today seem an arbitrary choice to represent the views of this complex moment in post-Unification Italian history, his lectures drew attention from contemporaries and received criticism from both sides. His works were known and discussed in the Italian cultural and intellectual circles to which the Divisionists belonged. For example, in the early 1890s Fogazzaro and several of the Divisionists contributed to the short-lived journal *Cronaca d’arte*.²³ At the end of the decade, the journal *Il Marzocco* featured a lengthy front-page review of *Human Ascents*.²⁴ In this review, art critic Domenico Tumiati expounded upon Fogazzaro’s philosophical claims, revealing much about current positions regarding the perceived conflicts between science and religion. Indeed, Tumiati welcomed Fogazzaro’s proposal that “evolutionary theory sheds light upon the problem of divine creation, rather than destroying it.”²⁵ In Fogazzaro’s reading of evolution, tempered by Christian doctrine, divine creation generated the soul, while evolution produced the body. The evolution of the natural kingdom was therefore nothing less than a sign of divine creation. Such discursive and ideological maneuvers—in a decade of religious crisis and pessimistic philosophical perspectives—provided science with a mystical dimension.

Against this convoluted backdrop, the Divisionists created their own versions of the sacred. Giovanni Segantini gave his images a universal religious timbre by passing archetypal Christian subjects through a secular filter and situating them in an unchanging pastoral world. His rural scenes of shepherds in the Alps where he lived are often reinterpreted of the holy family, the Madonna, or Virgin and Child, replete with vernacular religious references that embodied his own bespoke faith.²⁶ Segantini presented an idealized, pantheistic vision of nature and mountain life indicating a liminal space between the material and the metaphysical. His first Divisionist effort, which Grubicy—already his dealer—encouraged him to paint, *Hail Mary Crossing the Lake (Ave Maria a Trasbordo, 1886, Museo Segantini, St. Moritz)*, restages the traditional iconography of the *Flight into Egypt*, depicting a

²² For a recent compendium on Lamarck, often dubbed the father of evolutionary theory, see Snaith B. Gissis and Eva Jablonka, ed., *Transformations of Lamarckism: from Subtle Fluids to Molecular Biology* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2011).

²³ The *Cronaca d’arte* (1890-92) was a Milanese magazine published by the Symbolist writer Ugo Valcarengi focusing on avant-garde art and literature. See Greene, “Byzantium and Emporium: *fine-secolo* Magazines in Rome and Milan,” 549-52.

²⁴ Domenico Tumiati, “Ascensioni umane.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: “la teoria evolutiva illumina il problema divino della Creazione, invece che distruggerlo.”

²⁶ These were ideas that he put into words: see, for instance, Segantini, “Così penso e sento la pittura,” *Cronaca d’arte* I, no. 7 (Feb. 1, 1891): 55. Segantini’s reliance on Christian iconography is discussed topically in Annie-Paule Quinsac, “Die Mutter, der Tod und die katholische Tradition im Werk von Giovanni Segantini,” in *Giovanni Segantini 1858-1899*, Felix Baumann and Guido Magnaguagno, ed., exh. cat. (Zurich: Kunsthaus, 1990), 47-59. Annie-Paule Quinsac’s scholarship is a central source for the study of Segantini. See Quinsac, *Segantini: catalogo generale*, 2 Vols. (Milan: Electa, 1982); Annie-Paule Quinsac, ed., *Segantini: trent’anni di vita artistica europea nei carteggi inediti dell’artista e dei suoi mecenati* (Oggiono: Cattaneo, 1985); Gabriella Belli and Annie-Paule Quinsac, ed., *Segantini: la vita, la natura, la morte: disegni e dipinti*, exh. cat. (Milan: Skira, 1999); and Annie-Paule Quinsac, ed., *Giovanni Segantini: luce e simbolo, 1884-1899*, exh. cat. (Milan: Skira, 2000).

shepherd, his wife, and their infant traversing a tranquil, radiant mountain lake in a boat at sunset, which they share with a flock of sheep (another common Christian symbol). Segantini also converted a shepherdess into a lay Madonna in *The Two Mothers* (*Le due madri*, 1889, Museo d'Arte Moderna, Milan).²⁷ In a stall aglow with lamplight, a young woman tenderly holds her baby after a late night vigil with a birthing cow in a barely cloaked nativity scene. Throughout the 1890s, the artist continued to explore the holy mother thematic, so common in post-antiquity Italian art. He sometimes reinforced the religious dimension of his painting by quoting the medieval and Renaissance pose of the Virgin enthroned and by availing himself of late medieval and early Renaissance devotional frame formats—gilded, curved, or trefoil—as with *The Angel of Life* (*L'angelo della vita*, 1894, Museo d'Arte Moderna, Milan).²⁸ Underlying these spiritually resonant images was the strategy that the rituals of faith, when removed from the formal architecture of the Church and relocated in nature, returned to the practices that preceded the introduction of Christianity into the peninsula and proposed an alternate mode of religion.

In contrast to Segantini and his other Divisionist cohorts, Gaetano Previati's religiosity impelled him to depict sacred scenes, which occupy a large part of his *oeuvre*, but interpreted in an unconventional manner.²⁹ He fused Symbolism's curvilinear syntax, syncretic mysticism, and anti-materialist tactics with Christian iconography and compositions. He endeavored to transcend the limits of painting to convey true emotion. His dissolving forms and backgrounds, which relied on repeating, undulating, pencil-thin Divisionist lines in a limited tonal range, were as modernist in their abstracted nature and their rhythmically reverberating, almost echoic musical quality, as they were inspired by Previati's fonts of religious imagery, among them Italian Primitive and Renaissance painters. In particular, he borrowed from the Italian *Quattrocentisti*, such as Sandro Botticelli and Andrea Mantegna.³⁰ Through this historical lens, he returned continually to the Madonna and Child, as with his first major Divisionist painting, the imposing *Maternity* (*Maternità*, 1890-91, Banco Popolare di Novara e Verona), but he also represented moments from the nativity and the Passion of Christ in his sacred paintings.³¹

The public and many critics initially greeted Previati's unorthodox formal and conceptual approach

²⁷ For more on this work see, for example, Greene, "Painted Measles: the Contagion of Divisionism in Italy," in *Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism*, 17.

²⁸ Quinsac identifies Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck* (1534) as a source for this Madonna: see Quinsac, *Segantini: catalogo ragionato*, Vol. 2, 462. For an analysis of this work, see also Greene, "Divisionism's Symbolist Ascent," 49-50. The historical frame style was very popular among the English Pre-Raphaelites, who also idolized the Italian Trecento and Quattrocento, and were nineteenth-century predecessors whom many of the Italian Divisionists revered.

²⁹ To date the most complete resource on Previati remains Fernando Mazzocca, ed., *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920: un protagonista del simbolismo europeo* (Milan: Electa, 1999).

³⁰ See, for example, the letters of Gaetano Previati to his brother, dated August 22, 1893, September 12, 1893, and March 2, 1894, reproduced in *Gaetano Previati: lettere al fratello*, ed. Spartaco Asciamprener (Milan: Hoepli, 1946), 144-46, 153-56, 183-84. Tumiati cited Andrea Mantegna and the Italian Primitives as models for Previati: see Domenico Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," *Emporium* XIII, n. 73 (January 1901): 18-19. Barbantini pointed to the importance of the Renaissance and painters such as Giotto and, again, Mantegna (whose works are in the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, where Previati could easily see them): see Nino Barbantini, *Gaetano Previati* (Rome and Milan: Bestetti and Tumminelli, 1919), 147-53.

³¹ For a socially tinged analysis of Previati's *Maternity*, see Judith Ellen Meighan, "In Praise of Motherhood: the Promise and Failure of Painting for Social Reform in Late-Nineteenth-Century Italy," in *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: a Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2002): www.19thc-artworldwide.org. For more on the work and its reception, see Greene, "Painted Measles," 19.

to religious subject matter with incomprehension. Over the course of the decade, however, as broader audiences grew more accustomed to the premises of Symbolism and as society contemporaneously struggled to find new ways to express faith, the reception of his work became more positive. In a review of the 1894 Brera Triennale, which included Previati's *Madonna of the Lilies* (*Madonna dei gigli*, 1893, Museo d'Arte Moderna, Milan), a Symbolist Madonna in a natural verdant floral setting, Pompeo Bettini recognized that the painter was "seeking new ways to adore old symbols."³² Later on, Tumiati called Previati a "profoundly Christian spirit" whose work was founded on a contemporary construal of the ideal, one that was "Christian and modern."³³ Previati's reformulation of sacred narratives and his efforts to restore a spiritual meaning to art were even celebrated by the Futurist artist and theorist Umberto Boccioni, who credited the Divisionist painter for enunciating modern ideas while remaining true to the essentials of Renaissance art: "[h]e intuited that style begins when one builds *conception* upon *vision*, but while his vision renewed itself in modernity, the conception remained, like a framework, in the old material which was developed by the Italian Renaissance."³⁴

Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo is perhaps the most complex case within this discussion.³⁵ Notwithstanding his leftist political affiliations and concomitant anti-clerical views, Pellizza held deep spiritual beliefs.³⁶ Several of his most important works resort to a generalized Christian symbolism and employ formats, such as gilded frames with curved tops, which hearken to Italian medieval and Renaissance devotional images.³⁷ Pellizza, in accordance with Guyau's theories, strove for harmony in

³² See Pompeo Bettini, "Alla Triennale di Belle Arti," *Vita moderna* 3, no. 38 (September 23, 1894): 296-98. See also Greene, "Divisionism's Symbolist Ascent," 51-52, which indicates the parallels between this work and, especially, Sandro Botticelli's tondos of the Madonna and Child.

³³ Tumiati, "Artisti contemporanei: Gaetano Previati," 13.

³⁴ "Egli ha intuito che lo stile comincia quando sulla visione si costruisce la concezione, ma mentre la sua visione si è rinnovata nella modernità, la concezione è rimasta, come ossatura, al vecchio materiale elaborato dal Rinascimento italiano": Umberto Boccioni, "Le arti plastiche," *Gli avvenimenti* 2, no. 13 (March 19-26, 1916): 3. Schinetti also notes Boccioni's views in Maria Grazia Schinetti, "La pittura sacra," in *Gaetano Previati*, ed. Mazzocca, 65-66. Barbantini acknowledges that Previati bridged mysticism and modernity: see Barbantini, *Gaetano Previati*, 107-11.

³⁵ Biographical information, unless otherwise noted, is taken from Aurora Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1986), 9-19, 22-44.

³⁶ Pellizza's affiliation with the avant-garde milieu in Turin, the capital of Piedmont and a locus for Symbolist and socialist activities, informed his approach. One feature that set Turin apart from other Italian intellectual centers was the presence of Cesare Lombroso and his daughter, Paola Lombroso, as well as his collaborator, Guglielmo Ferrero. Their distinct line of positivist writings impacted the development of Symbolism in the mid-1890s in that city, which helps explain the stimulating mix of socialism, science, and spiritualism that infiltrated Pellizza's philosophy and painting.

³⁷ Following a trip to Rome and Naples, Pellizza waxed enthusiastically about the art that he saw in a letter to Segantini: "back from a rather long trip, after having admired the work of our greats...but they are not only the Botticellis, the Ghirlandaios, the Raphaels!" ("di ritorno da un viaggio abbastanza lungo, dopo aver ammirate le opere dei nostri maggiori...ma essi non sono soltanto i Botticelli, i Ghirlandaio, i Raffaello!"). See letter from Pellizza to Segantini, February 19, 1896, now in the Segantini papers, Kulturarchiv Oberengadin, Samedan, Switzerland. Pellizza admired Italian Renaissance art, especially the *Quattrocento*, and amassed a substantial photographic archive of works by, for example, Giotto, Fra Angelico, Benozzo Gozzoli, Botticelli, Perugino, Luca Signorelli, and Raphael. This collection is now in the Studio-Museo di Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, in the town of Volpedo. Pellizza, in particular, venerated Fra Angelico and had several exchanges regarding this with Domenico Tumiati, who published a book on the artist. See Monica Vinardi, "Considerazioni sul simbolismo dell'ambiente fiorentino," in Aurora Scotti Tosini, ed., *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo*, exh. cat. (Turin: Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea and Hopefulmonster, 1999), 133-35.

his paintings through his use of line and color as well as his messages of socialist utopianism.³⁸ These stratagems are visibly at work in *The Procession* (*La processione*, 1893-95, Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia “Leonardo da Vinci,” Milan). The painting portrays a ritual of blessing held yearly in Volpedo and connected to the agricultural calendar, in which white-clad, veiled girls, carrying tapers and missals, lead devout peasants in a procession. In *The Procession*, Pellizza described the vernacular divinity of a regional custom hinging on the communion between humanity and nature. This union of potentially contradictory ideas was representative of his philosophy and is most apparent with the Christian iconography and sources of *The Mirror of Life* (*And that which the one does so the others shall do*) (*Lo specchio della vita [E ciò che l’una fa, e l’altre fanno]*, completed 1898, Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin).³⁹ Here Pellizza translated another typical pastoral scene from Volpedo’s surrounding countryside into a mystical image. He equated the flock of sheep with humankind, while also citing the Byzantine mosaics of S. Apollinare in Classe that he had seen in Ravenna.⁴⁰ But these attendant sacred strata of meaning did not stop Pellizza from overlaying them with positivist socialist references. In this painting, modern science and social theory cohabitate with tradition and religion, making *The Mirror of Life* a fusion of realism and allegory that personified Pellizza’s own particular version of faith.

Pellizza was joined by most of the Divisionists in frequently adopting typically religious formats for paintings. In addition to the gold-curved top frame for single works, artists also turned to the triptych and polyptych associated with late medieval and Renaissance altarpieces and images of worship representing Christ, the Madonna, and saints. The Divisionist artists who actively embraced these formats include Grubicy, Segantini, and, beginning in the early twentieth century, Morbelli and Previati.⁴¹ Each transmogrified the multi-panel work. Segantini’s *Triptych of Nature* (*Trittico della natura*, 1897-99, Museo Segantini, Saint Moritz) was initially conceived as a panorama and pointedly seeks to envelop the viewer.⁴² Although Segantini produced a number of multi-panel works, *Triptych of*

³⁸ Damigella writes that Guyau’s theories, and possibly those of Charles Henry, among others, were important to Pellizza’s method for constructing his compositions. She suggests that his geometric structuring sought to provoke specific psychological responses in the viewer. See Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia*, 190-95.

³⁹ This work is treated in many of the publications on Pellizza. I have relied upon Scotti [Tosini], *Pellizza da Volpedo: catalogo generale*, 384-86. It is also discussed in Aurora Scotti Tosini, “I molti aspetti dell’armonia: itinerari nella pittura di Giuseppe Pellizza,” *Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo*, 23-25.

⁴⁰ For this connection, see the examination in Greene, “Divisionism’s Symbolist Ascent,” 52-53.

⁴¹ While the present essay is limited to a few major examples, other Divisionists also painted multi-panel works in the period addressed here, such as Plinio Nomellini’s mystical marine quadriptych *Moon Symphony* (*Sinfonia della luna*, 1899) and Carlo Fornara’s triptych, *The Parable of Nature* (*La parabola della natura*, 1899-1901).

⁴² The *Panorama of the Engadine* (*Panorama dell’Engadina*) was intended for the Swiss pavilion at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1900—a plan that was eventually rejected because it was too costly. Segantini’s panorama was going to be a circular, multi-sensorial work including a raised viewing structure and special effects to recreate the temperature, light variations, and sounds typical of the Alps. The panorama and the development of the triptych are discussed at length throughout Segantini’s letters from 1897-1899; see the Segantini papers. See also letters and documents reproduced in Quinsac, *Segantini: trent’anni di vita artistica*, 641-663; and Gioconda Leykauf-Segantini, ed., *Giovanni Segantini, 1858-1899: Aus Schriften und Briefen/Da Scritti e lettere* (Maloja: Inquell-Verlag, 2002), 158-68; 176-83; 212-15. The panorama and the triptych are addressed by several scholars. For example, see Dora Lardelli, “Il panorama dell’Engadina,” in *Segantini*, ed. Gabriella Belli, exh. cat. (Milan: Electa, 1987), 52-58; and Regula Bücheler, Thomas Germann, Dora Lardelli, et. al., *Giovanni Segantini’s Panorama und andere Engadiner Panoramen* (Saint Moritz: Segantini Museum, 1991). More recently, see Julia Klüser, “De maiore ad minorem e viceversa: per la genesi dell’opera *Il trittico della natura* di Giovanni Segantini,” in *Giovanni Segantini*, ed. Beat Stutzer and Roland Wäspe, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje 1999), 164-73.

Nature was his *magnum opus*. Left unfinished due his sudden death from peritonitis in 1899, the three enormous canvases consist of *Life* (*La vita*, 1896-99), *Nature* (*La natura*, 1897-99), and *Death* (*La morte*, 1898-99).⁴³ Returning once again to shepherd figures, Segantini depicted them in an idealized bucolic setting in order to represent the respective lifecycles of humanity and of nature. The work sought to correlate the mountain peasants' existence with that of a prelapsarian and arcadian society, even while referencing Romantic ideals regarding the sacred and spiritual found in nature. In this sphere of parallelisms, there is a suggestion of humanity's own transcendence from the earthly to the celestial dimension, tempered by a Schopenhauerian pessimism regarding the difficulty of existence.⁴⁴

Vittore Grubicy was the only Divisionist who assembled polyptych constructions.⁴⁵ His *oeuvre* consists mainly of landscapes, usually Alpine settings, which by the late 1890s he had begun to configure into multi-panel works, recording these compositions in photographs.⁴⁶ Grubicy depicted the beauty of the high mountains and lakes to educe awe in the soul of the viewer. The ineffable sensorial experience he hoped to "suggest"—one of elevated wonder when confronted with nature's sublime (as a step towards cosmic transfiguration)—relied largely on Souriau's theories. Grubicy also employed musical analogies in titling his landscapes—a typical Symbolist conceit—to convey the more abstracted aspects of this viewing experience.⁴⁷ The most ambitious of his triptychs and polyptychs was the multi-panel work, *Winter Poem* (*Poema invernale*, 1894-1911, Museo d'Arte Moderna, Milan). It encompasses eight canvases executed primarily between 1894 and 1898 in the Italian Alps. The variously sized works portraying specific sites and moments of the day are a pictorial polyphonic ensemble that aims to suggest a multifaceted set of visual, musical, literary, physiological, and spiritual allusions associated with the heady feeling of being alone with the beauty of the high mountains. Through these polyptychs, the viewer also surpasses the static status of painting as an art form. The different locales, seasons, and times of day are meant to be lived simultaneously through this unified construction, permitting the viewer an experience which vaults the temporal and physical restrictions that are normally associated with the experience of painting and that find analogies in the fluid, multidimensional qualities of music and listening. This experience alludes at the same time to a divine omniscience, which goes beyond the limits of time and space into a mystical realm where spiritual transformation can occur. Grubicy and his circle adhered to Symbolist principles regarding sensorial stimuli and perceptual phenomena to conjure this all-consuming event on canvas, as well as the multi-sensory responses it instigated.⁴⁸ These ideas—which were by no means limited to Grubicy or other

⁴³ Segantini's plans for the triptych underwent several permutations. Quinsac documents the stages of the triptych in Quinsac, *Segantini: catalogo generale*, Vol. 2, 512-513. See also Klüser, "De maiore ad minorem e viceversa," 164-73.

⁴⁴ See Antonella Bestagini, "The Annunciation of Modernity: Giovanni Segantini and the Transcendence of Fin-de-Siècle Pessimism in Italy," in *Cultural and Artistic Upheavals in Modern Europe 1848-1945*, ed. Sally Metzler and Elizabeth Lovett Colledge, *Cummer Studies* 1 (Jacksonville, Florida: Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, 1996), 121-48.

⁴⁵ This section on Grubicy depends upon the invaluable publication by Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy De Dragon*.

⁴⁶ Rebora has scrupulously documented the genesis and realization of Grubicy's polyptychs in his catalogue raisonné: *Vittore Grubicy De Dragon*, 40-48. See also Greene, "Divisionism's Symbolist Ascent," 54-55.

⁴⁷ Rebora discusses the musical analogies in Grubicy's work: see Rebora, *Vittore Grubicy De Dragon*, 46-47. Musical correspondences were common in Symbolist art. See, for example, Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 34-36. Quinsac notes that Paul Signac led Grubicy to give his paintings musical titles (the former often identified his paintings with the subtitle "Opus" and assigned each a number): Quinsac, *La peinture divisionniste italienne*, 67. James McNeil Whistler was another earlier source for this practice. Whistler employed musical terms in his titles, such as "arrangement," "harmony," "nocturne," and "symphony."

⁴⁸ These concepts are perhaps most famously laid out in Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture."

Divisionists—set the stage for the next wave of avant-garde artists in the early years of the twentieth century, leading to the more familiar synesthetic objectives of Vasily Kandinsky and the synthetic goals in the early paintings of the Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni.⁴⁹

The paradoxical intersection of the modern and the traditional, of science and religion, impacted the creations of these artists who lived in a time fraught with ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions. For these new Italians, cultural identity was an issue of paramount significance, as was the search for and the need to articulate faith in the face of the dramatic transformations modernity was engendering—a modernity to which they also aspired in their art. The theme of the sacred provides a useful means through which to think about this body of work and connects it to traditions indigenous to Italian art after antiquity. The Divisionists' integration of varied elements from the religious art of the past in their painting and their revival of sacred formats not only served to readdress spiritual or ideal subjects, but also reactivated a channel to Italy's national artistic legacy. This is not to suggest that the Divisionists were merely recycling past motifs out of nostalgia for a receding artistic greatness, or in the hope of reviving it. Quite the opposite is true. This aspect of Divisionist painting was molded by an artistic history particular to Italy and coincided with overarching nationalist impulses towards creating modern painting with an unequivocally "Italian" (i.e., post-1870) character. The readily available visual sources that the Divisionists employed for their Symbolist images were a vital reminder of Italy's past cultural dominance in Europe. They were also reminders of Italy's inescapable links to the Catholic Church, which was the sole surviving institution to exist continuously on the peninsula since late antiquity. Although the current leadership of the Church was conservative and antimodernist, not to mention bitterly opposed to Unification, and although the Church's decisive role since the Renaissance in the (supposed) stagnation of Italian society and culture was viewed in highly negative terms by many Italian elites, the presence of the Vatican on Italian soil (for so it was until the Lateran Accords of 1929) nonetheless represented continuity with the first and most powerful Italian nation-state, an incarnation of Italy that the new state could legitimately aspire to restore. The Divisionists' combination of Christian iconography and their new painting technique allowed for the emergence of a visual and narrative model capable of expressing abstract conceptions, evoking a range of emotional states, and eliciting sensations congruent with emerging Italian modernist practices.

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⁴⁹ For Boccioni's writings, see Zeno Birolli, ed., *Umberto Boccioni: gli scritti editi e inediti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971) and *Umberto Boccioni: altri inediti e appariti critici* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1972).

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