3 *La Voce:* The Making of a Florentine Avant-Garde

New Departures, New Divisions

After the demise of *Leonardo,* Papini kept busy by writing literary articles for various newspapers and reviews, both mainstream and avant-garde.[1] One of them was the prestigious *Corriere della Sera* of Milan, whose literary editor, Ettore Janni, had given him some reason to believe he might land a permanent position on its staff. So, in the first days of 1908 he and Giacinta moved to the Lombard capital. His first impressions came in letters to Soffici: "The city is not poetic, but it is active. One feels everywhere the will to create, and that excites my own industriousness, which has languished so in these last months . . . Florence had become hateful to me. The only people it pains me to leave behind are you and Prezzolini. All the others bored me, and I could not succeed in working enough."[2]

Yet if to escape his spiritual crisis Papini had felt the need to escape Florence, Milan presented difficulties of its own. The position on the *Corriere* did not materialize, and the young couple's meager resources quickly proved inadequate to life in Italy's largest commercial center. Perhaps in part because of his sense of the added responsibilities children would bring (their first child was conceived at about this time), Papini was soon fearing a kind of bohemian regression. As he wrote to Prezzolini on January 9: "Despite all the love you and I have for the spiritual life, we do not want to live like ascetics in little monastic communities. You yourself enjoy a certain comfortableness, and since you have far more than I do, you want to earn a decent living so you can travel the world. I feel that I cannot

live the lamentable life of the troubled bohemian . . . and that I need therefore to earn a decent living and to earn it with the work best suited to me, with intellectual work."[3] It was a specter familiar to idealistic young writers at least since Balzac had presented it a half-century before in *Lost Illusions,* although Papini seemed quite prepared to put his intellect to work for the literary establishment if only he could avoid financial ruin.

Today, if we turn our minds back to Milanese high culture in 1908, we are most likely to think of F. T. Marinetti, whose first futurist manifesto was then only a year away and who had been editing the lavishly produced journal *Poesia* since founding it early in 1905. Not unlike *Il Marzocco* in sensibility, but much more oriented toward France, *Poesia* mixed the work of an older generation of French symbolists such as Gustave Kahn, Henri de Régnier, and the Flemish poet Émile Verhaeren, with that of newer French avant-gardists such as Alfred Jarry, more familiar Italian symbolist poets such as Gian Pietro Lucini and Adolfo De Bosis, and the two major Italian aestheticists of the previous generation, D'Annunzio and Pascoli.[4] Mario Morasso's work also appeared in its pages, his book on the aesthetics of the modern machine having been as influential on Marinetti as it had been reprehensible to Prezzolini.[5] Not surprisingly perhaps, in view of the attitude toward Italian aestheticism that *Leonardo* had projected, neither Papini nor Soffici, who would soon join him in Milan, showed any interest in or even any awareness of Marinetti's group.[6]

What did interest them, especially Papini, was a very different kind of Milanese cultural movement, that of the Catholic modernists around the journal *Il Rinnovamento.* In Catholic terms, modernism referred to the organized effort to turn the church toward a doctrine incorporating modern science and philosophy as well as toward political support for progressive reform. In some cases, such as that of Romolo Murri, Catholic modernism was socialist or radical. The editors of *Il Rinnovamento*—A. A. Alfieri, Alessandro Casati, and Tommaso Gallarati Scotti—were all Milanese aristocrats far more moderate than Murri, but like him, they too would soon be excommunicated by Pope Pius X, who, unlike his predecessor Leo XIII, was not at all receptive to modernist ideas.[7]

The modernism of *Il Rinnovamento* struck Papini, in the words of one of his biographers, as being "more like a lecture hall than a temple," and although it certainly moved him closer to Catholicism than he had been, it did not produce the conversion experience he would have a decade later in the aftermath of the war.[8] Its wholly secular effect was rather to provide him with a concrete model for channeling his own diffuse "revolutionary" energies. In early February he, Soffici, and Casati

began to walk the streets of Milan plotting how they might start another journal, one with the same general purpose as *Il Rinnovamento* but devoted to an avant-garde cultural audience rather a Catholic one. In a matter of days they were thinking through the first issue of something they called *Il Commento* and encouraging Prezzolini to come to Milan to join the new effort.

The first and, as it turned out, only issue of *Il Commento* appeared on February 16, 1908. Its prologue, written by Papini but like the rest of the articles unsigned, read as follows:

> It appears weekly. It costs ten cents. Subscriptions cannot be accepted. This issue and those that will follow are designed as an *essay.* Depending on their reception by others and our own desires, it may be continued or begun again. We seek to create a new type of journal—rapid, laconic, severe, sincere—that works at the *margins* of the great newspapers. We write without regard to what others may say. Our intentions are: to reawaken the consciousness of the good Italians faced with the stupidities, ugliness, and indignities of present Italian life, both civil and intellectual; to interest our fellow citizens in everything having to do with the life of the spirit; to teach them to think instead of gossiping and to say a lot in a few words.[9]

Many of the appeals in Papini's earlier rhetoric are apparent—to "sincerity," the "severe" virtues, cultural "reawakening," and the "good Italians" of the second Italy—but so, too, is its central contradiction: between addressing one's "fellow citizens" with respect as a principal source of hope and displaying open contempt for their lamentable habits and cultural level. What is new is the emphasis on rapid-fire presentation, pithiness of expression, and anonymity, an emphasis that might be seen as a faint anticipation of more recent commercial advertising and that is, in that respect, similar to some futurist writing a few years later. For reasons that these associations suggest, the new style would quickly become a source of friction between Papini and Soffici on the one hand and Prezzolini on the other.

Il Commento contained a number of provocative citations from famous, mostly foreign authors, a list of "books you should buy," and twenty-one short articles, fourteen of them by Papini, four by Soffici, two by Casati, and one by Prezzolini. Papini's efforts included an appraisal of the Catholic modernism of Alfred Loisy and a call for a new "Spiritual Party," while Soffici produced a rather vague "announcement to art critics" and a denunciation of "the ostrich nation." Unlike the other articles, Prezzolini's, which took up his new interest in Romain Rolland, was written from Florence. Whether he purposefully decided not to come

to Milan because of reservations about the new journal is unclear, but we do know that he detested its first issue and that he continued to harbor a deep sense of bitterness about it for several months thereafter.[10] Prezzolini's view was that the new stylistic features of the review threatened to undermine the commitment to reasoned and clearly presented argument as well as to careful preparation of evidence that was crucial to any genuine educational mission. The point may seem relatively minor, yet it opened a wide breach.

At least two factors were involved in the tensions that surfaced when Prezzolini declined to become seriously involved in *Il Commento* and that continued to mount through the spring and early summer of 1908. The first, and probably the lesser of the two, was the arrival of Soffici as a kind of third force. One of Papini's biographers has suggested that Prezzolini was jealous of Papini's new relationship with Soffici, the "Paris intellectual," and that for someone like Prezzolini, so "serious, studious, and educated in accord with the rigorous ideals of his father the prefect, Soffici was too much the artist, too 'subversive' and too interested in the subversive art of France."[11] But this assessment overstates the difference between them. In much of his early work Prezzolini had shown a mystical bent that frequently overpowered his more rationalist one, and though not an artist himself, he did write on art and was interested in the Paris art scene, even if his tastes leaned more toward impressionism than toward Picasso.[12] Yet it is certainly true that Prezzolini renewed and intensified his commitment to the virtues of seriousness and rigor at just this point.

The second factor in provoking the tension was precisely this new intellectual departure by Prezzolini, which culminated in his becoming a "Crocean" after a visit to Naples in April 1908.[13] Unlike Soffici, whose 1907 spiritual crisis had resulted in no new intellectual allegiances, or Papini, whose own crisis had led only to short-lived and relatively superficial new interests in Catholic modernism and syndicalism, Prezzolini had shown signs of a basic reorientation as early as the winter of 1907. After his flirtation with Novalis and the tradition of German mysticism in 1906, which represented the final stop on his quest for a secular religion during the *Leonardo* years, Prezzolini had become interested in Catholic modernism and had begun a correspondence with Casati in March 1907. For much of the rest of the year he was engaged in two books on the Catholic modernist movement. Nonetheless, Prezzolini remained too much the skeptic to become a Catholic, even a modernist one, and what he retained from this experience was primarily his personal relationships with Casati, who would become the principal financial backer for *La Voce*, and with Giovanni Boine, a young partici-

pant on *Il Rinnovamento* whom Prezzolini met in Milan in March 1908 and who would become an important contributor to *La Voce* after the Milanese journal's demise at the end of 1909.

In an important self-assessment in the fall of 1908, Prezzolini summed up his experience in the previous two years as follows:

> *Leonardo* was the most beautiful expression of the arbitrary moment of individual consciousness when this consciousness, outfitted with the creativity that it recognizes in itself, becomes master of the world. This is a truly divine moment, which justifies the theory of the Man-God. But just as Heinrich Heine recognized one day that a God cannot have a stomach-ache, so, too, arbitrary consciousness recognizes that it is not alone in and separate from the world, but that it has in its inner depths a communication with the infinite from which all individuals are sent forth. One might say that all the merits and defects of arbitrary consciousness were reflected in *Leonardo*.[14]

Then, after a long list of the defects, including *Leonardo*'s tendency toward "sudden shifts that were not thought through," ill-considered claims of originality, an overly biographical approach to the history of philosophy, an overly emotional approach to art, and a "lack of discipline for serious study," he suggested that for him a "spiritual moment" had ended and a new one had been born, a moment of properly social consciousness.

Catholic modernism, he continued, looking back upon it as a finished chapter in his intellectual biography, had contributed to his new spiritual moment. "Studying this movement, I became fully conscious of the value of reason and overcame, I hope forever, my arbitrary moment. To the same movement I also owe a good deal both of the knowledge I have acquired about myself and of my possible function for the Italian public."[15] In 1905, it will be recalled, Prezzolini had posed for himself the question of whether Christianity was essentially "solitude or love." Two years later Catholic modernism had helped him to see that the latter was the better answer. Yet only the idealist philosophy of Benedetto Croce was capable of providing that answer with a foundation he could accept. As he wrote many years later, "curiously, through the philosophy of Croce I was able to find the sense of active life that I had not found in the church and that enabled me to become passionately involved in national problems."[16]

Although he had always been interested in Croce's philosophy, and had maintained an avid correspondence with him since early 1904, Prezzolini's conversion to Croceanism came very suddenly. As late as

the final issue of *Leonardo,* he had criticized Croce for being intolerant toward the activism and apparent irrationalism of the younger generation.[17] Yet as it became clear that he wanted to adopt a more social orientation and that Catholic modernism would not provide it, Croceanism became the logical move. Bergson remained identified with individualism and "magic"—Prezzolini's "arbitrary moment"—and thus was more the source of his spiritual crisis than its solution. True, Georges Sorel was building his social philosophy of syndicalism on a Bergsonian foundation, and Prezzolini was quite interested in this effort; but whereas Sorel could use Bergson to explain the attractiveness of myth for the human psyche and thus its political usefulness, he himself did not have any such myth or faith to undergird his position. That was Croce's great strength. His system gave his followers confidence that human history is rational because humanly created, and thus faith that it will ultimately turn out for the good. Moreover, Croce's personal politics offered precisely the right combination of sophisticated scholarship and seriousness of purpose on the one hand with a contempt for mere scholarship on the other.[18]

In 1909 Prezzolini published two more books, one on Croce, the other on Sorel and syndicalism. Although he did not actually become a syndicalist, it is clear that he was attracted to Sorel because of the apparently more concrete politics he offered. It is also clear that Prezzolini viewed Sorel and Croce as mutually reinforcing perspectives.[19] Such appearances might lead one to wonder whether in fact Prezzolini's "new moment" involved a political left turn. This impression is intensified by other contextual factors: he developed a good relationship with the maverick socialist Gaetano Salvemini, whose activity on *La Voce* in its first three years was very conspicuous; he soon published a good deal by Romolo Murri there as well; and, most important, his own writing for *La Voce* in its first two years was clearly more sympathetic to arguments associated with the democratic left than his earlier writing had been.[20] Despite these developments, which will be considered in their proper context later in the chapter, two facts lead me to doubt that Prezzolini's new social consciousness involved any fundamental turn to the left. One is that he went out of his way to deny it in print.[21] The other is that Papini, whom no one thinks of as having moved left in this period, shared his interest in syndicalism.[22] Both Papini and Prezzolini in 1908 seem to have been looking seriously at all movements that appeared to promise any possibility of "real" change, as against the mere rhetoric of change they had so long identified with socialism. Hence their interest in Catholic modernism and in syndicalism, the prestige of which as a moral force

was dramatically evident in the agricultural strikes at Parma that spring.[23]

Despite these similarities in position, however, an unprecedented tension became evident in the correspondence between Papini and Prezzolini after the failure of *Il Commento,* a tension that reflected Prezzolini's new intellectual direction and Papini's profound lack of sympathy for it. For Papini, the choice between "solitude or love" would always be for solitude. Indeed, not only did he never abandon the "magical" individualism expressed in *Leonardo,* but he seemed actually to reinforce it in the years after 1907 in which his allegiances shifted from philosophy toward poetry and, less dramatically but still significantly, from Florence toward Bulciano. In general terms, the same is true of Soffici. Despite all his *toscanità,* which might appear to imply a socially oriented philosophy, his main concern came to rest with his "religion of art," for which *toscanità* was simply the principal subject matter. Moreover, like Papini, he was dumbfounded by Prezzolini's adherence to a philosophical "system" that seemed so intellectually rigid, so antithetical to spiritual freedom and openness, so staid in relation to contemporary modernist experiments in art and literature.[24]

In a sense, then, the intense debate that weighed down the correspondence among the three men during the spring of 1908 might be seen as based upon a polarity of philosophy versus art. Yet, since Prezzolini was actually writing about art, was still receptive to artistic modernism, at least in its tamer forms, and was sometimes critical of Croce's attitudes in this regard, it might be better to see the conflict in terms of whether logos or mythos should be the central basis for a modernist culture. In any case it was, paradoxically, out of this extremely polemical correspondence that *La Voce* was born.

In his letters to Papini, who would return to Bulciano in April, Prezzolini took great care to preserve their friendship even as Papini was criticizing him sharply and speaking of "Soffici and I" as a force apart. At one point, for example, Prezzolini suggested a principle of tolerating differences that would later provide the basis for Papini's participation on *La Voce* as well as for the rather delicate internal balance of the journal more generally.[25] At the same time, however, he seemed to be trying to separate Papini from Soffici, and in an angry letter written while visiting Croce in Naples, he broke off relations with Soffici altogether.[26] A few weeks thereafter, and possibly also as a result of Croce's influence, Prezzolini would be inspired to draft a "Plan [*Progetto*] for a Journal of Thought in Italy" and to circulate it among a number of potential contributors, including Papini, Casati, Croce, Boine, Giovanni Amendola, and Romain Rolland.[27]

Of these figures, only Papini and Amendola would become major contributors in *La Voce*'s first years, although Casati and Croce would become two of its principal financial backers. Probably because he already sensed how important Papini would be to the effort's chance of success, Prezzolini put intense pressure on him to participate. In a letter sent with the *Progetto,* he wrote: "If you, for personal reasons, refuse to participate in this work, I will be very sorry (this matters little), but it seems to me that you would betray one of the principal duties you have, that of working in order to make the conditions of Italian intelligence improve. Unless you want to appear not to have the seriousness, honesty, and clarity of intentions and acts that raise you above the charlatanisms and irresponsibility of the present, I do not believe you can refuse."[28]

In the *Progetto* itself, Prezzolini articulated the character and goals of the review in terms quite reminiscent of *La coltura italiana,* the book he and Papini had coauthored in 1906. The review would be an "autonomous organ in which we can express the needs and movements of a predominantly philosophical and religious sort that concern and attract the spirits of our generation." It would be educational and, for that reason, favor progressive reform, but it would not be directly political. It would be Italian in focus, and so would concern itself with cities in addition to Florence (thereby making necessary a network of correspondents from those cities), but it would also pay close attention to cultural developments abroad. It would be written in plain language, open to polemic, and closed to the "dilettantish advertising" of mainstream or "bourgeois" magazines. Its principles would be "sufficiently broad to admit persons of very diverse views." The only obligatory commitment for its writers would be that "what they write is capable of rational defense and is not the titillation of their fantasies or the venting of their emotional needs." Finally, it would carefully cultivate its audience and make use of a subtle dialectic between tradition and modernity in order to do so:

> A new review cannot then arise except by making use of . . . tradition. But at the same time it must prize highly the practical and theoretical lessons that are taking place in the present. A new review that wants to correct the errors of the past ought to begin by not allowing itself to be used as an outlet for writings and essays that, though certainly valuable, have no influence on the public, and that represent only a coterie or brotherhood of intellectual revelers. One creates a journal in order to act on the public, and it is hardly sincere to appear to be disdaining the very public for which one works and exerts energy. The first characteristic of the journal, then, will be the *contemporaneity of the objects* it uses to gain public attention.

Such a journal, he concluded, might be called *La Coltura italiana* or *L'Italia che pensa* (The Italy That Thinks).

It was the latter title, perhaps more than any other single indication, that encouraged Papini to read the *Progetto* as essentially Crocean in inspiration, a reading that seems quite reasonable despite Prezzolini's explicit rejection of it.[29] Nor was Papini necessarily off the mark in reading the discussion of the journal's commitment to rationally defended argument as a slap at Soffici. Yet Papini went far beyond these sorts of objections in his reply of more than sixty handwritten pages, the major thrust of which was to update Prezzolini on his intellectual position. As such, it was as much a personal confession as a response to Prezzolini's program. In particular, Papini recounted how he had developed his new, more intimate relationship with Soffici as a way of explaining his own emerging artistic side. He was, he said, "no longer a pragmatist," no longer interested in "pure speculation."

> In me, as you know, are mixed two tendencies of about equal force, the artistic and the philosophical, and however hard I try, I do not do well when I make one of them dominant . . . The third tendency in me is a *practical* one. I am driven to change things. I feel in myself in my best hours that intolerance for present conditions and that mania to change them that makes for missionaries and apostles. I want, in short, to make the life of men better by means of a preaching in the spiritual sense, but carried out above all through artistic means . . . You would say to me, I think, that it is enough to think about moral truths to be moral . . . For me the moralist should first know, but know in order to create. And to create, that is, to act on men, the simple and bare manifestation of thought is not enough. It is necessary also to have art, that is, something that moves and persuades people like us at a more universal level, and that is why I have decided to become a moral apostle, a thinking being . . . and an artistic being who uses passionate reasoning and aesthetic representation, fables and sermons, to move men forcefully and induce them to change their lives.[30]

In short, we need the power of art as our Sorelian myth mediating between pure thought and political practice. Prezzolini's program is too restricted, for while it is right to begin with thought, it is wrong to end there. To limit the means of persuasion to the merely cognitive is to deprive oneself of precisely those means most likely to excite and engage.

Despite a somewhat defensive tone in his response ten days later, Prezzolini appeared to accept this argument about the mediating power of art, at least when rephrased in Crocean terms as the importance of the first moment of "intuition" in preparing the way for the higher

moment of "knowledge."[31] Moreover, in the same letter he reaffirmed his promise not to impose his own Crocean views on the new review, and the tone of his subsequent letters became increasingly upbeat as he continued to seek to assure Papini's participation in the effort. While Papini grumpily agreed to contribute, his attitude as expressed in letters to Soffici remained intensely critical of Prezzolini's "air of being the corrector and reformer of Italy and of thought."[32] Remarkably, however, on July 11, as Soffici was on his way home from Papini's house at Bulciano, he encountered Prezzolini, apparently by chance, when the coach in which he was riding stopped to change horses near the latter's summer residence in the mountain town of Consuma. The two men became immersed in conversation, Soffici allowed the coach to continue without him, and after a full day together they became reconciled to each other's views.[33] By early August Prezzolini had met face to face with Papini as well, and it was on his forty-mile walk back from Bulciano to Consuma that he had what he would later recall as the vision that gave birth to *La Voce.*

But the healing process that these face-to-face conversations encouraged was not quite complete. In particular, the sensitive issue of the new journal's name remained unresolved. Prezzolini now favored *Il Criterio,* a suggestion that proved no less objectionable to Papini than the ones offered earlier. Meanwhile, as active correspondence between Prezzolini and Soffici resumed, the latter sent a long list of possible titles, which, however, did not include the eventual choice.[34] Most likely the name *La Voce* was simply imposed by Prezzolini, who had used it previously as a chapter title in one of his books.[35] In any case, the three writers met together in mid-October and agreed to cooperate on the venture.[36] A few days later Papini wrote the circular that announced it publicly.[37] Yet even as the first issue appeared on December 20, for which Papini wrote the lead article and Soffici, a short polemic against Anatole France, many doubts remained about just how committed they were to an enterprise that, in Prezzolini's words, neither of them "ever understood or loved" and for which they wrote "out of friendship for me rather than conviction."[38]

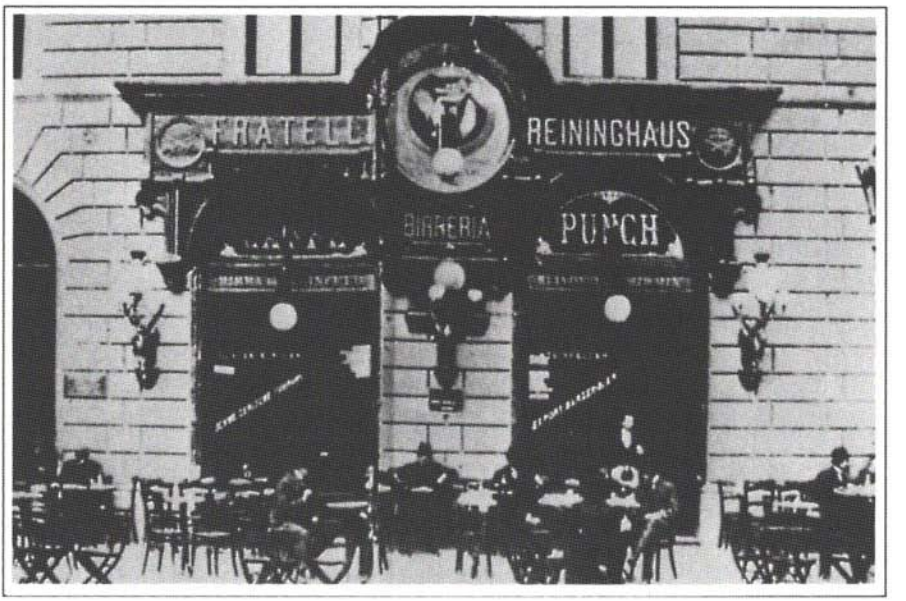
Cultural Politics in Florence, 1909–1911

It is not clear to what extent the Florence into which *La Voce* was born had become "hateful" to Papini because of changes it (rather than he) was undergoing, but the city's transformation over the past five years had been significant in certain respects, and it is doubtful that he liked what had transpired. First and foremost, the cries of protest with which the

working-class movement had earlier disrupted the town's quiet complacency were now being translated into political power. In 1908 Florence had a mayor, Francesco Sangiorgi, who, though not himself a socialist, certainly leaned to the left and had much socialist support. The following year, after new parliamentary elections, three of the city's four deputies (including Giuseppe Pescetti) were socialists. Moreover, the mounting strength of socialism at the national level had been demonstrated locally during the fall of 1908 when the city played host to a national convention of the Socialist Party that was attended by such well-known personalities as Filippo Turati and Anna Kuliscioff. Even the powerful speech delivered there by Salvemini on the problem of the "two Italies" probably would not have pleased Papini, since the two men shared little, despite the common support they were about to lend to *La Voce.*[39]

In cultural life, the biggest recent event in Florence had been the arrival in April 1906 of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show with its troop of nearly a thousand entertainers and five hundred horses. While Papini may have attended out of nostalgia for his childhood, he could hardly have found in it any reason to believe that Florence was about to produce the "party of intellectuals" of his early dreams. Even more disturbing for him were the recent expressions of what passed for high culture in Florence, such as the plays of a working-class dramatist from Prato, Sem Benelli. Benelli's *La cena delle beffe* (Dinner of Jests), an antiquarian romance written in medieval language, was the stage hit of 1909, leading Papini to dub him the "the rag-and-bone man of our dramatic literature, a ragpicker and ragsorter, a man who washes and then redyes the foulest rags of poetry and history seen here in recent years."[40] Nor was there any consolation to be found in improved relations between the cultures of university and avant-garde. If anything, the gap between them had intensified, as would be most dramatically evident when a youthful participant on *La Voce,* Scipio Slataper, had his scholarship withdrawn because of his association with the journal.

When Papini chose to visit Florence in 1909, he spent much of his time at the Caffè Reininghaus or Giubbe Rosse, as it became known after the red smoking jackets worn by its waiters. He was joined there only rarely by Prezzolini, who disliked cafés; but Soffici was a frequent companion, at least on those two or three days a week when he came into the city from his house at Poggio a Caiano. During the warmer months the two would sit outside at one of the tables that stretched into the ghostly expanse of the Piazza Vittorio; otherwise they would sit in the café's "third room" in the rear, as far as possible from the heavily foreign crowd of lunchgoers. Now and then for a change of scene, Papini and Prezzolini would visit Soffici in Poggio, a feat that required taking



6. The Caffè Giubbe Rosse or Reininghaus on the Piazza Vittorio, the center of Florentine avant-garde life in the prewar era.

a steam-powered streetcar so embarrassingly primitive and inefficient that it came to symbolize for them the magnitude of the task of national renovation they faced.[41]

When Prezzolini again took up permanent residence in Florence after his years in Perugia, he rented an apartment on the Via dei della Robbia, one of the new streets just outside the historic center that had been created after the destruction of the city walls. Its four rooms stood on the top floor, some eighty steps up a winding staircase from the street. So arduous was the climb that when mail arrived it was placed in a basket attached to a long rope, which was then hauled up through a window. "That basket," Prezzolini later recalled, "proved invaluable when my study became the center of an international movement in mail and people, as well as the cause of a lot of complaints from our neighbors, who were all very quiet people without Don-Quixotian vocations like mine."[42]

The study itself, which doubled as the apartment's living room, contained "a wall of rather rickety wooden bookshelves that bore the signs of frequent repair and many moves, a couch in a red and yellow floral pattern, a desk with very weak legs, a small table on which sat a typewriter, and, added later, a painting by Soffici full of light and Tuscan springtime that was the only beautiful thing one could see."[43] It was here

LA VOCE

Esce ogni domenica in Firenze, via dei Rustici, 42 — Direttore GIUSEPPE PREZZOLINI — Abbonamento per l'Italia, Trento, Trieste, Canton Ticino, L. 6.00. Un numero cent. 10.

Anno I — N.° 1 — 20 Dicembre 1908.

La politica francese.

L'Italia risponde.

7. The front page of *La Voce*'s first issue (20 December 1908), which featured an article by Papini on Italian intellectuals that Romain Rolland soon translated into French.

that *La Voce* was assembled just before being brought to the printshop every Thursday. The task would be repeated like clockwork for 263 consecutive weeks, until, exhausted and largely deserted, Prezzolini turned the journal into a biweekly in 1914.[44]

In contrast with *Leonardo, La Voce* presented itself rather austerely, its four folio-sized pages of small print largely unrelieved by artistic embellishments.[45] Gone were the handmade paper and elaborate *art nouveau* mastheads that had given the earlier review its distinctive flavor. In their place was a cleaner and denser look, suggesting that what was considered important was what was being written. Although avant-garde art did grace its pages from time to time—artists reproduced included Georges Braque, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Paul Gauguin, Hans von Marées, Pablo Picasso, Henri Rousseau, and Vincent van Gogh, as well as Italian natives such as Soffici, Medardo Rosso, Giovanni Fattori, and even the futurist Carlo Carrà—it almost invariably appeared in connection with an erudite discussion of their work rather than as a celebration of art for its own sake.

La Voce's seriousness of purpose was also communicated in its policy toward advertisements. Not only were they few in number, but they generally refrained from utilizing pictorial illustrations and were relegated to the last page. Usually they brought the reader's attention to books by the journal's own staff, or to a local bookseller, or perhaps to the furniture of the "Papini Brothers" (as the modest business of Giovanni's family was known). Sometimes they touted a foreign journal with similar aims such as *Der Sturm*, edited by Herwarth Walden in Berlin, or a local institution with international connections such as the language classes of the Istituto Francese.

Yet this seriousness was complemented by a real effort to establish a personal relationship with *La Voce*'s readers. By 1910 Prezzolini was printing his home telephone number in the journal, and "young readers" were being invited to call between two and four on Wednesday afternoon or to drop by his apartment during these "office hours."[46] The extent to which this approach succeeded is difficult to say, but there is no doubt that *La Voce*'s influence was strongly felt among the younger generation of intellectuals, as the example of Antonio Gramsci reminds us. From his fascist prison cell, Gramsci would make a very favorable assessment of the intellectual role that *La Voce* had played in building Italian civil society during his student years in Turin: "De Sanctis fought for the creation *ex novo* in Italy of a national high culture and against worn-out traditional ones . . . *La Voce* fought only to spread this same culture at an intermediate level and against such things as traditionalism. *La Voce*

was an aspect of militant Croceanism, because it sought to democratize what had necessarily been aristocratic in De Sanctis and had remained aristocratic in Croce."[47]

If we look at more mundane measures of the journal's influence, such as subscription levels and total copies printed, its role in Italian cultural life appears less exalted. Even at its height in 1911, *La Voce* never published more than 5,000 copies of a single issue or had more than 2,000 subscribers.[48] Yet the pride with which Prezzolini reported these figures at the time suggests that they were quite good for that era and that, in any case, the journal had certainly not fallen into his nightmare of being only a self-enclosed "coterie or brotherhood of intellectual revelers." From the beginning it had a distribution network covering about a hundred Italian cities, and its price of ten cents an issue or five lire a year made it affordable to all but the nation's poorest citizens.[49]

Another contrast with *Leonardo* was the very large number and wide range of contributors *La Voce* had in its first five years. Certainly Prezzolini made by far the greatest single contribution, and it is perhaps not surprising that he was followed in this respect by Soffici and Papini. In addition, however, very substantial contributions were made in literature and religion by Scipio Slataper, Piero Jahier, and Emilio Cecchi; in politics and history by Salvemini, Amendola, Antonio Anzilotti, and Luigi Ambrosini; in philosophy by Croce and Boine; in music by Giannotto Bastianelli; and in psychiatry by Alberto Vedrani. Lesser but significant contributions were also made by Murri, Giovanni Gentile, Fernando Agnoletti, Roch Grey (the pen name of Hélène d'Oettingen, with whom Soffici had been romantically involved during his Paris years), Benito Mussolini, Margherita Sarfatti (who would later be romantically involved with Mussolini and who wrote for *La Voce* on the English suffragettes, among other topics), and many, many others.[50] All in all, *La Voce* involved more than 300 different writers, of very varied backgrounds, tastes, and outlooks, whose contributions ranged across nearly every field of thought and human endeavor. As Soffici would later remark, "*Il Marzocco* first, and then *Leonardo*, had created fresh air in their respective eras, but in particular fields; *La Voce* opened the windows to a view of the entire panorama of the spirit in its multiple manifestations; it was concerned not with this or that mental faculty of the individual but with, so to say, the whole person."[51] Considered as individuals, however, the only factor that seemed to hold *La Voce*'s contributors together was generation, most of them having been born in the 1880s.

In a book he wrote in 1912 but published only decades later, Prezzolini recalled:

In its first year, *La Voce* was a convention with many different kinds of people attending, different in terms of origin, age, aims, and cultural background. The encounters were often violent, the resolutions contradictory. Attitudes clashed. How was it, then, that the public saw a family atmosphere, a sense of unity, a mission that tied everyone together? It is not clear how this happened, but it did. Or to put the point more sharply: it is clear how it happened, since there really was this unity, this family, in comparison with the disorganization of the schools, political parties, religions, and all the rest. The previous generation was a generation of unbelievers, of skeptics. These new people from *La Voce* were different: they believed, badly or well, arbitrarily or rationally, pushing toward the universal or restricting themselves to the particular, with prejudices or without, with dogmas or more philosophical beliefs—but they believed. They felt that life was a serious matter, and they took it seriously . . . By the second year, *La Voce* was still a convention, but it had also become a group. And the group did not bore the convention, nor the convention the group. There was discussion, some dissent, but no misunderstandings and no separations.[52]

From the vantage point of 1912, this relative unity and identity as a group appeared as a brief moment now gone, one that, in Prezzolini's view, had been made possible by three fundamental agreements—on religion, art, and politics:

For the young generation belonging to *La Voce,* there was no doubt about the fundamental moral problem of their time. Religion had died; what new creation could take its place? Idealist philosophy had taught them to deny religion but also to justify it; to understand it and to exclude it. For this philosophy, to believe offered the promise of knowledge, to know meant completing one's belief: religion was the promise of philosophy, philosophy was religion grown full and mature . . . A movement ought to be joined together by and fully rooted in art, and not with art in general, but with that art that best appropriates an idealist way of seeing, with that art that has reduced the Ideal to the Real in the manner of the philosophy that has reduced God to man and religion to thought, with that art that has reduced the whole cosmos to a drop of water and can reveal the whole spirit in a clump of turf . . . an art that is popular because naive and interested in fables, that reacts against inherited rhetoric, against the academy, against aristocratic pretense . . . A movement ought to have practical effects, we might say even political effects, perhaps even becoming a party; but it needs to have depth, an ethical and metaphysical viewpoint, religious in a certain sense . . . And this movement, were it to be political, would be realist, practical, wary of labels, concrete, always making this or that problem precise, calling always for this or that solution, breaking fully with the formulas of the parties.[53]

Yet, while one need not go so far as to call Prezzolini's reconstruction of these fundamental agreements a myth, there is little doubt that the extent of the agreement is overstated. The *vociani* might well have agreed that the central problem of the age was religious, that avant-garde art was a necessary means of spiritual self-realization, and that their movement should have "practical effects" and should break "with the formulas of the parties" in doing so; but even in this early heyday they would not have agreed that idealist philosophy should be the new source of religious inspiration or the foundation of art, or that *La Voce* should expend its time and effort on practical political problems.

In fact the "convention" of *La Voce*'s first year already contained in embryo the antagonisms, schisms, and defections of 1911, but it was able to lay them aside in favor of a common commitment to cultural modernism in part because of the orchestrating skill of its floor leader and in part because the convention took no votes. Thus Prezzolini, who clearly understood his position as that of a facilitator rather than a unifier, was careful to set out the journal's aims with broad and accommodating language quite in contrast to the more programmatic and ideological tone of the *Progetto.* In what amounted to the opening manifesto of *La Voce,* he wrote that the journal aimed to build the Italian character, to be "sincere, open, and serious," and to defend "the ethical character of intellectual life," but he avoided any more precise statements regarding its point of view.[54] Moreover, while discerning readers of the journal's early issues doubtless did see many statements about religion, art, and politics that reflected the agreements its editor would find retrospectively in 1912, what they more obviously found was an exhilaratingly diverse array of articles concerning the various manifestations of high culture then current across Europe, as well as many more culled discerningly from the Italian tradition. Thus, the very first issue featured a "letter from London" on Bernard Shaw; "notes" on Georges Sorel, the "ignorance of specialists," and Rudolf Eucken (who that year had won the Nobel Prize for literature); an interview with a German editor; a review of a book on Italian romanticism; and longer discussions of French cultural politics, of the cultural situation of Italy with respect to Europe, and of the need to pay greater attention to the art of the young generation.

Within this diversity, nonetheless, several common themes and emphases emerged. One was antipositivism, although in comparison with *Leonardo* there was far less pure philosophizing (such battles having become, for most of the *vociani,* either won or superseded) and far more attention to the philosophical underpinnings of other cultural studies. Thus the psychiatrist Vedrani took on the positivist psychology of Cesare Lombroso.[55] Another common theme—and, in terms of the conflict of

generations, a related one—was a critique of Florentine cultural institutions, particularly the city's university life and its aestheticist journals such as *Il Marzocco.* At the same time there was also a keen interest in comparing the nature of Florentine culture with that of the various other cities and regions in Italy, such as Trieste, Venice, the Trentino, Emilia-Romagna, and the Italian south. For Prezzolini especially, such comparisons were important in "making Italians known to themselves" and thereby for fashioning a new Italian culture based on interconnections among regions, each of which should be encouraged to take pride in its own distinctive ways, rather than one based on attempts to suppress this diversity in the name of some fictitious culture of a homogeneous nation.[56]

Yet if any single set of issues could be described as the most central to the first years of *La Voce,* it would be that concerned with the relation between Italian and European culture. That Italian intellectual life was viewed by its northern neighbors as backward and, at least in recent decades, derivative was clearly a sore point among the *vociani,* and Papini made it the theme of the lead article for the journal's very first issue. There he argued that although "distinguished foreigners" had heavily influenced Italian culture until recently (Nietzsche was his central example), this tendency was now slowing considerably, and he himself felt a new freedom to speak. At the same time, he was careful not to push the national pride he felt in this liberation to the point of chauvinism. In his concluding paragraphs he wrote: "We should read Comte, but also Galileo; we should admire Loisy but also Sarpi; we should cite Hegel but also Bruno; we should translate Nietzsche, but we should also enjoy Machiavelli. Everyone says this is already being done, but it is not true. We always speak about the glories of our nation, and yet we read the latest foreign writers much more readily and frequently than the Italians of old. We need to give Italy again not only contact with European culture but also the historical consciousness of our own culture, which is certainly a significant part of European culture. I shall content myself with a few words: nationalists no, Italians yes!"[57]

As *La Voce* appeared week after week in 1909 and 1910, it was precisely this idea of expanding the reader's intellectual horizon to include both the best the rest of Europe had produced and the best of Italy's own tradition that seemed to be the most central principle of editorial policy. Yet attaining the proper balance always remained a delicate issue, as was most clearly evident in Soffici's articles. For although Soffici had spent much of the decade learning that only in Tuscany was he consistently able to realize an art based on the innovating aesthetic consciousness that Paris had excited in him, now that he

was living in Tuscany fulltime the need he felt most keenly was to educate his readers about the art of France. That this could sometimes land him in hot water is evident from a concluding passage in his four-part article on French impressionism: "As I already have been and will again be speaking, here and elsewhere, of modern French painting with admiration and proposing it as a model for Italy, I do not want it to be thought that my intent is to bastardize our art, to corrupt it with forms and concepts of foreign origin and character; nor do I propose impressionism as a pictorial method to be followed blindly, as has been done with so many other artistic and literary theories that have come from outside and degenerated among us to the point of provoking eternal laughter—or tears." No, he continued, "as a heartfelt lover of the genius of our race, I do not await light from the north" but merely "recognize in impressionism's efforts the possibility of a vigorous [*virile*] education that, absorbed by our youth, might serve them as an impulse toward personal quests that can produce vital results while also being completely Italian."[58]

Although it was a sensitive point for Soffici's self-image and, perhaps, for *La Voce*'s readership, the idea that French culture was the world's most advanced and "revolutionary" remained virtually a given among the *vociani* themselves, even as their understanding of the relation between France and avant-garde culture became much more complex than it had been at the turn of the century. Then they were completely overwhelmed by the myth of Paris. Now there was a fuller sense that the avant-garde was a European phenomenon, and therefore that in educating the Italians they should look at all of the continent's many nationalities. Thus German expressionism and its antecedents excited the interest of Prezzolini and, even more intensely, of Slataper, whose background as a *triestino* gave him an edge in appropriating it. Moreover, when they informed *La Voce*'s readership about what reviews like their own were doing in other European countries, they were as likely to consider the Germans or even the English as they were the French. Finally, some of *La Voce*'s most successful issues were focused on a single theme in which contrasting perspectives from different intellectual traditions were set side by side. In one such issue on "the sexual question," a lead article by Sorel on "the social value of chastity" was followed by an inquiry into "Sigmund Freud's ideas on sexuality," the latter being one of the first such discussions to be published in Italy.[59]

A second way in which the Florentines had arrived at a fuller appreciation of the complex relation between French and avant-garde culture was that they were now much more able to see themselves as participants in an international avant-garde rather than as merely its spectators. In

1910, for example, Giannotto Bastianelli would introduce a new "revolutionary" Florentine musical ensemble to *La Voce*'s readers by writing, with evident irony, that "certainly in France, or more precisely in Paris, where they believe in all seriousness that they are the navel of the spiritual world . . . they are unaware of how in that old serene and apathetic Florence there is now silently emerging a world of music that is absolutely new and genuinely concrete."[60]

A final complexity in the understanding of avant-gardism held by the *vociani* was that French culture was no longer identified entirely with Paris. They had come to appreciate that much of what was important in the French intellectual world had been produced by intellectuals from the provinces, or by provincials who had moved to Paris but retained identities rooted in their native regions. Thus, Papini had written to Rolland in 1909 that for him Rolland had been the "revelation of the *good* France that consoled me after the horrible commercial bustle of Paris."[61]

Despite these complexities, however, when *La Voce* turned to Europe, as it did in virtually every issue, its most frequent focus was on France, and inevitably much of that was on Paris. Not surprisingly perhaps, when one looks at the whole of this discussion one discovers that, just as there were "two Frances" for Papini, so there were "two Parises" for *La Voce.* One might be called Soffici's Paris, the Paris of art and poetry. Although Soffici was by no means the only writer for *La Voce* to focus on this Paris, it was he who was most responsible for introducing its readers to the Paris art scene with early articles on Gustave Courbet, Henri Rousseau, Auguste Renoir, and Picasso, in addition to his topical pieces on impressionism; and it was also Soffici who provided their first introduction to French avant-garde poetry with his 1911 book on Arthur Rimbaud, the first book on Rimbaud published in Italy.

The other Paris was the Paris of philosophy and social thought, the Paris of Bergson, Sorel, Péguy, and Rolland—Prezzolini's Paris. Far more than Soffici's, this was a Paris of émigrés from the various regions of France: Sorel from Cherbourg on the Normandy coast, Péguy from Orléans, Rolland from Clamecy along the Yonne River; only Bergson had been born and raised in Paris. In part perhaps because of those provincial origins, this was a Paris of moralism and of high intellectual seriousness, of the Sorbonne rather than Montmartre. Unlike the Paris of the arts, which was mostly just written about in *La Voce,* this Paris actually contributed to the Florentine review, modestly but still significantly.[62] Moreover, the considerable interest that Rolland especially showed in the young Florentines sometimes provided fresh contacts for *La Voce* with their youthful counterparts in France, such as Rolland's protégé Jean-

Richard Bloch, who in June 1910 began the avant-garde journal *L'Effort* in Poitiers.[63]

When the Prezzolinis joined Soffici in Paris in March 1910 in order to make arrangements for an exhibition of impressionist painting in Florence that spring, the existence of these two rather different Parises and their relative isolation from each other became readily evident. Soffici, who had arrived several weeks before, had been spending his time with Serge Ferát, Max Jacob, Picasso, Apollinaire, and Medardo Rosso (who then had a studio on the Boulevard des Batignolles below Montmartre); but once Prezzolini arrived, his company changed rather abruptly to that of Péguy, Sorel, and Rolland.[64] Despite this difference, however, the two Florentines worked well together on the project that had brought them to the French capital, and it ultimately proved quite successful. From mid-April through mid-May the citizens of Florence were able to see an exhibition, billed as the first of its kind in Italy, that featured works by three artistic generations: that of Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Auguste Renoir, Cézanne, and Degas; that of Gauguin, van Gogh, Rosso, and Jean-Louis Forain; and that of Henri Matisse and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec.[65] In Prezzolini's estimation at least, the exhibition did not mark the end of the city's sluggish provincialism—the "red-tape of its bureaucracies, the diffidence of its powerful families"—but it had created, at least momentarily, the beginnings of a genuine public space in which the "good sense, generosity, firmness of will, and love of art" of the "second Italy" had been permitted expression.[66]

In the midst of all the cultural discussion, there was also embedded in the *La Voce* of these early years a moral rhetoric readily identifiable as *"vociano,"* despite the evident diversity of its many writers. In many ways this rhetoric simply continued the emphases already developed by Papini and Prezzolini in *Leonardo:* on the need to renew culture, to overcome "decadence," to allow the new generation to galvanize the "second Italy," and, thus, to cultivate virtues such as discipline, courage, and sincerity. Indeed, in one respect—the veneration for the antifeminism of Otto Weininger—the moral rhetoric of *La Voce* expanded and intensified the legacy of *Leonardo.* Where, earlier, Weininger had been more or less the private domain of Prezzolini, now he was taken up enthusiastically by a number of other *vociani,* including Papini and Slataper, despite the fact that *Sex and Character* would not be translated into Italian until the fall of 1912.[67] When this event finally occurred, Papini declared the book "a true masterpiece . . . the most important theoretical work that Germany has produced since the last books by Nietzsche."[68]

Although not everyone associated with *La Voce* shared the extremism

of Papini's view of Weininger, which would reach even greater heights in 1914, it is notable that even those who dissented from it shared Weininger's central contention about the absoluteness of male-female difference. Thus, the feminist and sometime *vociana* Sibilla Aleramo, whose autobiographical novel *Una donna* (A Woman) had become one of the most sensational and celebrated books in Italy after it appeared in 1906, separated herself sharply from Weininger's argument that women were intellectually and creatively inferior.[69] Nonetheless, she read Weininger quite seriously and would even concede the influence of this "sad genius" when, in early 1914, she refashioned her feminism into one that stressed female difference as a source of artistic creativity.[70] Similarly, Soffici would argue in a review of Anna Gerebzova, a Russian artist living in exile in Paris whom he had known during his years there, that "the lack of discipline in the feminine soul, her instincts as an elemental creature, her spiritual anarchy, all things with which woman is stigmatized and upon which those who deny her creative capacities base their views, far from constituting an argument without appeal for her necessary impotence, seem to me so many favorable conditions for the creation of new and unusual accents, harmonies, and images."[71]

Yet it was not in controversy over Weininger that *La Voce* showed its most important breaks with the rhetoric of the *Leonardo* years, and these were in fact notable, arguably more notable than the continuities. One such change was the relative absence of the ideals of solitude and the solitary genius, although they would have a brief resurgence during Papini's seven months as *La Voce*'s interim editor in 1912, as well as in the journal *Lacerba* that he and Soffici would begin in 1913. Another change was that anxieties about the Italian *popolo* became much less evident, and in certain articles (above all those concerned with the politics of suffrage reform) they seemed positively overcome. Finally, the rhetoric of regenerative violence became much less pronounced than it had been in the *Leonardo* years. In the spring of 1911 *La Voce* (though not all the individuals associated with it) opposed the prospect of a war in Libya, and even in the fall when the military campaign was launched and *La Voce* reversed itself on the issue, the rhetoric of war was relatively restrained and instrumental in orientation.[72]

In general, these attitudes offer better clues to the nature of *La Voce*'s political rhetoric from 1909 through 1911 than do the rhetorical continuities with *Leonardo* such as Weiningerian antifeminism. Indeed, when one looks at this rhetoric, in which the causes championed included universal suffrage, support for the Italian south (or Mezzogiorno), free trade, and reforms in taxation, schools, and railroads, it appears so strikingly different from its counterparts in *Leonardo* and *Il Regno* that

it is tempting to characterize *La Voce*'s first years as a kind of "democratic parenthesis" in the history of Florentine avant-gardism. While this would be misleading, in part because Prezzolini would not be an unambiguously committed democrat until two more decades had passed and in part because those like Papini and Soffici who remained the most vigorous antidemocrats chose mostly not to speak about politics in this period, it is certainly true that, owing to a number of contingencies, a political rhetoric developed in *La Voce* that would later be an inspiration not only to Gramsci but to many others on the left including the liberal Piero Gobetti. This development, however, was far from straightforward.

As we have seen, the fundamental idea behind *La Voce* was to become an institution of cultural education leading the spiritual rebirth of Italy by bringing it into relation with the avant-garde culture of Europe and the best of its own tradition. For this purpose, *La Voce* needed to present broadly reflective essays with serious intellectual content rather than technical discussions of particular social, economic, and political problems. At the same time, virtually everyone on *La Voce* believed, as Croce would argue in a landmark "interview" in the journal in 1911, that "socialism was dead" and that, more generally, the political ideologies inherited from the nineteenth century were either dead or dying.[73] In such a context, the only way to talk about political problems was to address specific issues and, inevitably, to propose specific (often technical) solutions to them.

Faced with this dilemma, Prezzolini might have overcome it simply by avoiding political rhetoric altogether, except that he was determined, as we have seen, to avoid the individualism and philosophical aloofness that had plagued *Leonardo* and to use *La Voce* to make a public impact. So, lacking this option, he fell initially into a somewhat ambivalent attitude. As he declared in its sixth issue, *La Voce* had not been intended as a "political journal—it cannot and will not make socialist, republican, or radical declarations—but it always remembers that the problems of our culture can be resolved only in relation to political and economic ones."[74] Yet the line here being drawn—between permitting articles that presented culture "in relation to political and economic problems" and prohibiting those that took up the latter by themselves—was almost no sooner articulated than crossed. As early as April 1909 Salvemini was offering overtly political commentary on the national government.[75] By the end of the year, when the government of Giovanni Giolitti fell after three and a half years in office, Prezzolini felt the need to exult in the event—and to herald Giolitti's replacement by local hero Sidney Sonnino—in a front-page lead.[76]

The rhetorical appeals underlying the critique of Giolitti, particularly

in Prezzolini's version, were largely continuous with the journal's cultural and moral ideals. Thus, in the article just mentioned Prezzolini identified Giolitti with corruption, inefficiency, and dishonesty, called Sonnino "the only honest, cultured, and independent leader" in parliament, and ended with a ringing exhortation to the "young generation, which has moral force and a desire to do good, to abstain from the politics of the politicians and to create the higher politics of the common people who think and work: forget the government, parliamentary deputies, and bureaucrats; disregard the triple corruption that from Rome infects Italy; prepare a better Italy through study and moral self-improvement." Still, Prezzolini so obviously appeared to be crossing into previously forbidden territory that he had opened the article with yet another firm declaration that, "no, *La Voce* is not today becoming and will never become a journal of political criticism or propaganda." The reason for the appearances to the contrary, he continued, was simply that "in trying to deal with all the problems of Italian life, we cannot avoid occasionally occupying ourselves with politics," at least if we do not wish to suffer "that ruinous divorce between political activity and the other intellectual and moral activities of the human spirit . . . that has always been one of the greatest maladies in our country."[77]

In 1910 and 1911 this "occasional occupation with politics" became much more than occasional, even if the predominantly cultural character of the journal remained intact. Probably the foremost reason for this was the simple physical presence of Gaetano Salvemini. A decade older than Prezzolini and far more experienced in national life, Salvemini used his tenacious personality to gain a hold over *La Voce*'s sometimes quite impressionable young editor that was far stronger than intrinsic support among journal associates for Salvemini's pro-south and reformist views would ever have produced by itself. Salvemini's influence was probably also increased by the fact that he was himself undergoing a transition in this period away from socialist politics and toward an as yet somewhat vague independent radicalism, and Prezzolini clearly wished to influence the speed and direction of this transition by giving Salvemini a significant editorial voice.

Once having allowed Salvemini's influence to move the journal in a more political direction, Prezzolini was encouraged to move tactically toward a "democratic" political rhetoric by two further contingent factors. One of these was that many of the issues Salvemini championed, and especially the interrelated democratic claims he advanced on behalf of the south and suffrage reform, appeared to provide a means of attacking that symbol of the liberal establishment whom Prezzolini had always hated, Giovanni Giolitti. Thus, in his article celebrating Giolitti's defeat

in December 1909, Prezzolini had flatly predicted that "universal suffrage would destroy Giolitti's power base in parliament."[78] Although Giolitti ultimately proved agile enough to turn the suffrage issue to his advantage by bringing it forward himself, it did appear to be a thorn in his side until well into 1911.

The other contingent factor that encouraged a rhetoric of democracy in *La Voce* was the birth in Florence of the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI) in 1910. Although the *vociani* had themselves always been committed to some sort of nationalist outlook and program, and although they continued to champion the views of independent nationalist writers such as Alfredo Oriani, they were all firmly opposed to the Corradinian variety of nationalism that predominated in the ANI.[79] This opposition was based in part on personal animosities, the relationship between Corradini and Prezzolini in particular having deteriorated so far from the days of *Il Regno* that Prezzolini was publicly accusing Corradini of having attacked him with his walking stick on a Florentine street.[80] Yet those animosities were rooted in what seemed to the *vociani* to be profound differences in outlook. Corradini's was a nationalism that appeared antimodern, overly bombastic, and overly concerned with external appearances in its appeals to irredentism and the glories of the Roman imperial past. It was a "nationalism of literati" that, as Papini had remarked in 1909, "contaminated Julius Caesar with Maurice Barrès, a Latin song with a French refrain."[81] In order to mark their difference with this rhetoric and to establish their own modern and more "internal," spiritual orientation, some of the *vociani* had come to appreciate the usefulness of appealing to democracy. Thus, as Prezzolini would write in his most important political article of 1910, nationalism was dangerous because,

> with its vagueness and grandiloquent imprecision, it lends itself above all to our [nation's] rhetorical inclination and distances our thinking from those practical and specific internal problems that had begun to concern Italians and that unless resolved will prevent us from ever becoming a nation, problems such as the Italian south, education (primary, secondary, university, teacher training, professional), regional decentralization, and the relation of state and church . . . If on these four problems precise technical solutions were presented—some of which already exist, as in the cases of public instruction and the south—one would perhaps have a basis for developing a new party, one that would be both democratic and honest.[82]

None of the *vociani* were democrats in the sense of being fundamentally committed to parliamentarism or the rule of law, but some of them did want to broaden the base of political participation as a means of

overturning the prevailing political élite and the corruption associated with it. Certainly they all agreed that no program of national renewal could be serious without engaging the masses. Yet the rhetoric of democracy in *La Voce* did not prevent the journal from being far more interested in political movements on the extreme right, such as Action Française, than in any democratic movement. Nor did democratic rhetoric endure once Giolitti moved to counter it with reforms and, even more significantly, once the mass demonstrations associated with the war in Libya indicated what appeared to be a much more effective way of awakening the second Italy. Before we examine this latter transformation, however, we need to become better acquainted with some of the more important new figures who joined the Florentine avant-garde with *La Voce* and the range of positions they represented within it.

A Widening Circle of Participants

Perhaps the major weakness of *Leonardo,* as we have seen, was that it failed to build an effective avant-garde group and became increasingly the private vehicle of Papini, Prezzolini, and, to a lesser extent, Soffici. Only with *La Voce* does one begin to see the development of a common position and some signs of genuine group solidarity. Although the solidarity was probably weakened by the fact that some of the *vociani* lived outside Florence, visiting the city infrequently, there were at least a dozen individuals who were publicly identified as central to the *La Voce* group, and many others who were associated with it on a regular basis. By the end of 1911, when the journal formally incorporated its small press, there were even bylaws, a board of directors, and meetings at which a formal record was kept.

Yet, even as they projected a common position vis-à-vis opponents such as the aestheticists of *Il Marzocco,* Corradini's nationalists, and Giolitti, from within the *vociani* remained a deeply contentious lot, and a wide field of positions was apparent at least to insiders. Essentially, this field ran in three dimensions: from those whose thinking was centered morally to those whose central concerns were aesthetic; from those concerned above all with philosophy to those concerned primarily with questions of history and society; and, finally, from those few whose thinking remained Catholic or Protestant to the majority who were secular in outlook. Still, there were many subtle complexities in this dispersed field as well as at least one particular mode of fusing apparently contradictory values that made otherwise discordant views appear similar.

One of the writers with the longest-standing ties to the circle around

Leonardo and *La Voce* was Giovanni Amendola. Born in 1882 into a poor family from Sarno in Campania, young Giovanni went to technical schools but showed a romantic, even mystical temper in his life outside school, becoming passionately involved in theosophy and other esoteric and occult philosophies while still in his teens. When the family moved to Rome so that his father could take a position as an attendant at the National Museum, Amendola joined the city's Theosophical Society. Soon thereafter he pursued philosophical studies, more formally though only briefly, at the University of Rome as well as at universities in Berlin and Leipzig.

An avid reader of the early *Leonardo*, Amendola began a correspondence with Papini in 1904 and was contributing by 1905. In July of that year, when Papini was in Rome, he encountered the "tall and handsome young man with dark skin and hair, black and powerful eyes, and a face that reminded me immediately of certain Hellenistic profiles."[83] Within a few weeks Amendola had also begun a correspondence with Prezzolini, one that would endure until just before Amendola's premature death in 1926 from the blows of fascist thugs.[84] In 1905, however, his relations with Papini were more important. It was Papini who put him in touch with William James and who advised him on how to get in touch with the symbolist circle in Moscow when Amendola had a chance to spend a few weeks there in the summer of 1906.[85]

It was after the visit to Moscow that Amendola went to Berlin to study philosophy, but he soon found the city "heavy and unpleasant, oppressive in its dead massiveness, and enlivened only very badly by a mercantile spirit that has been created almost ex-nihilo in only fifty years."[86] He thus moved on to Leipzig, which he found more "gemütlich" as well as more intellectually stimulating, largely because of the presence there of the neo-Kantian psychologist Wilhelm Wundt.[87] Yet Amendola was never sufficiently adapted to university life to realize his dream of a degree, and by year's end he had returned to Rome with a new bride, a Lithuanian by the name of Eva Kühn.

Eva and Giovanni had actually met four years before at the library of the Theosophical Society in Rome, where she had come to study comparative literature. Born in 1880 in Vilnius, and thus a native speaker of both Russian and German (to which she would later add English, French, and Italian), she grew up to be, in Papini's words, "a woman of passionate spirit, very cultured, who had written or was writing a quite original study on *Schopenhauer's Optimism*" at the moment early in 1910 when she joined her husband in Florence.[88] The two then struggled to support themselves and their two young children, she by doing translations into Italian (an anthology of passages from Dostoyevsky would

appear from *La Voce*'s press in 1913), he by directing the library of the Theosophical Society and writing freelance journalism.

Already well established as a contributor to *La Voce* even before his arrival in Florence, Amendola distinguished himself among the *vociani* through his "profound moral seriousness" and the personal manner reflected by that seriousness—"the arching of his thick black eyebrows, the disdainful expressions of his lips, the dogmatic self-assurance of his speech."[89] The young Slataper was sufficiently impressed to see in him "the only man among us."[90] In later years Amendola would become very well known in Italian political life, first as the Rome correspondent for Luigi Albertini's *Corriere della Sera,* then as the democratic interventionist who joined the postwar cabinet of Francesco Nitti, as the parliamentary deputy from Salerno who organized the small but vocal liberal-democratic group in the Chamber of Deputies, as the leader of the constitutional opposition to fascism, and as a martyr to that cause when, after being severely beaten by fascists near Pistoia in July 1925, he went into exile in Cannes and then died some months later at forty-four. But these facts offer few clues about his life during the *La Voce* years. Although even then he had begun at least to write about politics, it was above all as a philosopher that he was known.

Like Prezzolini, Amendola had moved from the philosophical position he had held in the *Leonardo* years, in which intellect played only a very modest role in the immensity of "life," to one in which intellect was much more central. Yet his way of making this transition was very different than Prezzolini's. Rather than seeking to escape skepticism by adhering to a new rational metaphysics quite distant in spirit from his earlier life- philosophy, as Prezzolini had, Amendola sought to transform the latter by redefining its concept of will. In his early writing, he had conceived the will on the cosmic dimensions of Arthur Schopenhauer, but he now turned to the ideas of François-Pierre Maine de Biran, a Frenchman one generation older than Schopenhauer, in order to reconceive the will as the center of the human self. As such, the will for Amendola was both wholly rational and intimately connected to the emotional and spiritual.[91] As he wrote in 1911: "The rationality of the good is just this harmony and this cohesion of the human person, held in place by the will and thus raised above the chaos of the animal life to the order and clarity of the self."[92]

This position put Amendola somewhat at odds with Prezzolini, whose Croceanism he viewed as too narrow in its concept of reason and too dismissive of the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the human self. Indeed, in philosophical matters though not in moral or political ones, he seemed to be more comfortable with Papini, with whom in January

1911 he would launch *L'Anima*, a philosophical journal that offered the first clear sign of a potential splintering among the *vociani*.[93] Nonetheless, Amendola's influence on *La Voce* was for the most part steadying. According to Prezzolini, he alone on the journal had "no taste for polemic or scandal," and his conduct continually made manifest the same fundamental commitment to an ethics of spiritual discipline that underlay his thought.[94] Moreover, in terms of the internal politics of *La Voce*, his was as close to a middle ground as there was. Moralistic, philosophical, and secular, his position lay between the more aesthetic orientation of Papini and Soffici and the more social and historical one of Salvemini and Prezzolini. Yet, like Soffici, he was thoroughly international, a linguist almost as accomplished as his wife (with whom he corresponded in French), and a deep believer in culture as the central problem in renewing Italy and modern life more generally. At the same time, like Salvemini, he was adept in historical and political analysis as well as deeply committed to dealing with the particular problems of their native Mezzogiorno, although he was not yet the democrat he would become.

Salvemini, who was born at Molfetta in Puglia in 1873, had come to Florence much earlier and under quite different auspices than had Amendola. Though from an equally modest social background, he had won a scholarship to the Istituto di Studi Superiori, where he became the student of Pasquale Villari not long after his seventeenth birthday. He proved to have much in common with Villari, including what Prezzolini later called their love for "clarity and simplicity of thought"; but Salvemini was much more politically passionate than his teacher, and he allowed those passions to shape his historical thought.[95] After the Italian defeat at Adowa in 1896, he, like many other idealistic youths in his generation, became a socialist, and his early scholarship continually reflected that commitment. Among the topics of his early books were the class struggle in thirteenth-century Florence, the French Revolution, the nineteenth-century Milanese radicalism of Carlo Cattaneo, the military campaign in the south during the Risorgimento, and the thought of Giuseppe Mazzini. Moreover, Salvemini wrote frequently for socialist journals such as Turati's *Critica sociale*, and he chided its predominantly northern audience for what he saw as its lack of faith in the emancipatory potential of the working classes, particularly those in the south, and thus for its complacency and smugness.

When *Leonardo* made its debut in 1903, Salvemini was thirty and had already begun to look, as one of his colleagues on *L'Unità* later put it, "like an old Silenus: [with] a large skull, rendered wide by his baldness; small eyes, filled with kindness and intelligence; a snub nose; high cheekbones; a wide mouth which when he smiled showed a great fence

of teeth; a pointed beard; wide shoulders; a thick-set figure; a heavy step—a man from the fields, not from literary drawing rooms."[96] It is thus not surprising that he was not drawn to write for *Leonardo.* Yet the journal did not escape his notice. Indeed, in one of his early letters to Prezzolini he even lamented its 1907 demise.[97] In the same letter Salvemini also told Prezzolini that his reading of the latter's *La coltura italiana* had led him "to believe that we are in agreement on many fundamental ideas," and it is not hard to see what he had in mind. Like Prezzolini and the other *vociani,* Salvemini had only contempt for the "first Italy" of the Italian political establishment, and he outdid them all in his condemnation of Giolittian politics as dead, dull, and morally reprehensible.[98] Moreover, although he wrote with great intensity of conviction, he was sometimes capable of a satirical style that helped make him more palatable to the young writers of *La Voce.* When tragedy struck him in the form of the Messina earthquake in late December 1908—it killed his wife and all five of his children—the *vociani* even became for a time his surrogate family, and he became, if not their patriarch, then at least their elder statesman.[99]

Yet, as we have seen, Salvemini never shared and probably never fully understood the concept of culture on which *La Voce* was based, and he was out of his element among so many who worried about the latest book or intellectual fashion from Paris or Vienna. What he had in common with the others was mostly an enemy *(giolittismo)* and a status—that of being an "individual on the margin of a group."[100] When tensions that had long percolated between him and his younger colleagues came to a head over the politics of the war in Libya, Salvemini moved quickly to establish his own strictly political voice, the journal *L'Unità,* and he never looked back.[101] Yet, unlike Amendola, who moved into political journalism at roughly the same time, Salvemini never ceased to indulge in a politics of idealism as a voice of conscience. Although this did not prevent him from making a brief excursion into practical politics—he served as a parliamentary deputy from 1919 to 1921—it did prevent him from ever being truly effective there. As Croce later wrote in his history of the period, Salvemini "nourished in the depths of his mind Mazzini's ideals of international justice and national good faith, and was prone to indulge in violent polemics of a moral character, half naive and half unjust, and tinged with utopianism."[102]

If Salvemini was *La Voce*'s elder statesman, then Scipio Slataper was the youngest of its many young Turks. Born in 1888 into a bourgeois family in Trieste, his mother Italian and his father Slavic, Scipio grew up torn between the natural beauty and the cultural and political tensions that surrounded him. Though under the control of Austria-Hungary, the

population of Trieste was nearly two-thirds Italian, and the city had long been an object of irredentist fervor. One symbolic event that deeply impressed the young Slataper had come in 1882 when a twenty-four-year-old Italian *triestino* by the name of Guglielmo Oberdan was executed by the Austrians for allegedly plotting the assassination of the Emperor Francis Joseph. About Oberdan, whose martyrdom would later inspire many in the movement for Italian intervention in the First World War, Slataper wrote to Prezzolini in 1910: "Do you know that there is even an enormous physical resemblance between him and me? Sometimes I feel terribly close to him, as if he were the only real solution to my Trieste side."[103]

That the Italians of Trieste regarded union with Italy as the key to the city's spiritual survival was not lost on the Austrians, who developed Trieste as a port and an economic center but did not allow it a university.[104] Thus, in the fall of 1908 Slataper had gone to Florence to pursue a university degree. Almost as soon as he arrived, however, he discovered an early issue of *La Voce* in a Florentine bookstore and shifted his intellectual center of gravity to the *La Voce* circle, an association that ultimately cost him his university scholarship but not his degree, which he attained with a thesis on Henrik Ibsen in 1912.

Physically, Slataper was, as Soffici remembered him, "tall, with a big head of curly blond hair, a drooping mustache, and a nose red from the cold, wrapped in a black cape and moving his long legs in big strides beside Prezzolini, Papini, and me."[105] Similarly, his friend and fellow *triestino* Giani Stuparich recalled that "even in his walk he looked like a beautiful animal, heavy and agile at the same time."[106] Throughout his four years in Florence, Slataper had a series of passionate love affairs with girls from Trieste, the letters from which survive as vivid literary documents of the prewar era in Italy.[107] Yet what truly distinguished him among the *vociani* was neither the intensity with which he lived his private life nor his relative youth but the extreme passion and dogged determination that infused his intellectual pursuits.

Foremost among those pursuits, initially, was an effort to make more widely known both the glories and the plight of his native region. In 1909 his "letters from Trieste" appeared in *La Voce* as a seven-part series. Far from being (as their title might imply) a mere travelogue for the curious Tuscan or Roman, these "letters" were anguished reflections on the failure of the city's intellectual and professional élites, caught as they were "in a terrible conflict" between their spiritual needs (their "Italian soul") and their economic dependence on Austria (their "commercial soul").[108] Yet Slataper's problem as a *triestino* was also in many ways only a special case of *La Voce*'s general commitment to renewing

culture and to building an Italian civil society that would be both vigorous and genuine. As time passed, he became more and more focused on the modern world's loss of contact with the divine and on the need to develop some new secular-religious framework. He read Nietzsche and Croce, coming away ultimately dissatisfied with each but with a deepened sense of the way positivism "represents a tiredness, a lassitude, and a discordant pause in the 'work of humanity.'"[109] Yet Slataper was not finally drawn to philosophy; at least on a personal level, he placed his hopes on a new poetic art. As he wrote in his diary in 1911: "I know that if there is something to which I can give birth it is a form of art with new, moral, religious content. I need to be drenched in this new consciousness to be able to do something, and sacrifice is therefore necessary."[110]

Slataper's idea of developing a new poetic art was very much in line with Soffici's project, as well as with the ideals of cultural renewal and generational revolt that Papini and Prezzolini had long been championing. In 1909 he wrote what was perhaps the most passionate appeal to the latter ideals ever to appear in the pages of *La Voce.* Addressed "to the intelligent youth of Italy," his article built an emotional crescendo from the quiet, confessional tone with which it began—in praise of poetry and the virtues of courage and sincerity—to a broad-based criticism of Italian society, and then to an exhortation to the new generation to "become moderns" and "to liberate ourselves, and to try to liberate others, from the false culture" that surrounded them. By the end, the idea that avant-garde art was the only possible source of deliverance for modern society had become an angry scream:

> Even art has a morality all its own, a specific one, higher than human morality because it surpasses it and precedes it: sincerity, liberation of the spirit from all the moral judgments of the day, expansion of the unconscious so that it becomes like a warm ethereal vapor rising against the obstructing twist of material necessities, against all the standards that gag us, against the individual yearning for great orgies in which we are intoxicated with incense and gold. When art becomes a pulsating nervousness inside your soul, and you see that in the common opinion of the day art has become a commodities exchange where bankers and brokers haggle, you should feel your fingers tightly curl and tremble before the need to seize these filthy beasts by the neck: to strangle them.[111]

Slataper actively cultivated the anarchic and destructive attitude evident in this passage, and he was sometimes quite critical of the *vociani* in whom he did not find it. "The mistake of *La Voce,*" he wrote to his

future wife in 1911, "has been that it schematizes life . . . Prezzolini lacks above all a certain joyousness, a sense of abandon, an openness to outings in the country and to conversation that is casual or even a bit silly; Prezzolini is always serious."[112] "Life" for Slataper was instinctive and primitive, best lived "barbarously" as a quest for elemental values such as love, friendship, health, and spontaneous contact with nature.[113]

Yet balanced against his championing of frivolity and "abandon" was another aspect of "barbarism," one involving a deeply moralistic attitude, especially in its commitment to other elemental values such as sacrifice, discipline, and—above all—work. In an article written shortly after the one just quoted, Slataper spoke of a "soul of joyousness that is extremely efficacious for our work" and of a "form of work with strategic intent, one that spurs and invites, rather than one that promotes work for the sake of work."[114] As Stuparich would later write: "Do you understand what work means [for Slataper]? It means living, feeling oneself act freely against an external obstacle, changing one's life in some sense, convincing, teaching, loving, creating. A divine thing, friendship among people, happiness. Precisely happiness: work is the apparent renunciation that leads to happiness."[115]

What is most interesting about Slataper is the way his feeling for "life" led him to attempt to fuse the extremes of anarchy and order, lightheartedness and discipline, expression and renunciation, love and work—in short, the aesthetic and the moral. As Sibilla Aleramo perceived, Slataper had at once a "stone-hard character" and an abundant "capacity for joy," a combination that helps to explain how he could be simultaneously a friend of Soffici and an admirer of Amendola, two men who could not abide each other.[116] Moreover, just as Amendola was launching the philosophical *L'Anima* with Papini, Slataper and Papini were plotting the establishment of a journal of literature and poetry to be called *Lirica.* The idea never got off the ground, but in its relation to *L'Anima* it symbolizes how the moralism of *La Voce* could take both poetic and philosophical forms in the service of the same ends.

Despite his relative youth, Slataper was among the first *vociani* to recognize in himself and consciously to live out this dialectic of anarchy and order. Also despite his youth, Slataper was recognized for his intellectual leadership, twice serving as the journal's acting editor: in March 1910 while Prezzolini was in Paris, and again from December 1911 until March 1912. Yet once he finished his university degree, Slataper moved slowly away from the circle. He spent most of 1913 teaching Italian literature in Hamburg, and when he returned in September to marry, it was to Trieste. By early 1915 he and Gigetta had gone on to Rome to be at the center of the movement for Italian intervention. In May Slataper

volunteered, and by early June he was at the front. Wounded almost immediately, he returned to the front in November only to be wounded again, this time mortally, from a bullet in the throat while he was out on patrol. On that third day of December 1915, Slataper was twenty-seven; he had just received news of the birth of his first child.

In death Slataper joined the great anonymous mass of victims in the mindless slaughter of the First World War. In life, however, his way of fusing two of the values central to the Florentine avant-garde experience—at the most general level those of creativity and control—was exemplary in showing that these values did not have to remain separate and irreconcilable. We have already noticed how Prezzolini moved from an early "Bergsonian" cultivation of the wellsprings of individual creativity to a more "Crocean" emphasis on historical rationality and social order—separate phases that were never reconciled. In coming chapters we will see how Soffici and Papini attempted their own fusions of anarchy and order, fusions that held together for a time but that would ultimately appear more like separate phases of aggressive assertion and a "recall to order." Yet Slataper was not entirely alone among the *vociani* in his moral outlook. There were at least two others whose lives and intellectual positions manifested equally steadfast versions of the same dialectic but in whom the principle of order was ultimately stronger, probably because it assumed in each case a more traditionally religious form.

Piero Jahier and Giovanni Boine were the *vociani* for whom the question of Christian faith was the most agonizing and who yet remained believers. In personal manner and appearance as well as in many other aspects of their outlooks, however, they could hardly have been more different. Jahier was the son of an evangelical Protestant minister from the Waldensian valley in the mountains of Piedmont; Boine, a Catholic from the seacoast of Liguria.[117] Jahier was heavyset, outgoing, and vigorous; Boine, broad-shouldered but rather thin, withdrawn, and sickly—he suffered from tuberculosis throughout his adult life. Jahier was a vociferous critic of the Italian ruling class who went so far as to write for Mussolini's *Il Popolo d'Italia* during the campaign for Italian intervention but who, after the war, became a democrat and a fierce opponent of fascism. Boine was a contemplative but also cantankerous writer with the political values of Joseph de Maistre who did not live to see fascism, but he was certainly never a democrat.[118] Still, both were poets who experimented with "fragmentist" styles and who wrote prose like poetry, and both were especially attracted by the French Catholic poet Paul Claudel.

Jahier had two decisive and interrelated experiences in his early life. The first derived from his father's suicide in 1897 because of guilt over

having engaged in adultery. Only thirteen at the time, Piero, as the oldest of four boys and the second oldest of six children, had to work very hard to help his hitherto unemployed mother support the family in the relatively expensive environment of Florence, where they had moved two years before. After graduating from high school in Florence in 1902, Jahier attended the divinity school of the Waldensians, but he abandoned these studies in 1904 because of growing doubts about Calvinism. Although he would later take degrees in law and French literature at the universities of Urbino and Turin, Jahier began a lifelong career as an employee of the Italian state railroads in 1905, and his intellectual activity even for *La Voce* was always an evening affair.

The second decisive experience for Jahier came on one of those evenings late in 1911 when he discovered Claudel, whose life, he soon recognized, bore some striking similarities to his own.[119] A poet of the older symbolist generation who had participated in Mallarmé's circle in the early 1890s, Claudel was a fervent convert to Catholicism who nonetheless had had a torrid romance with a married Polish woman from 1900 until 1904, an episode that became the inspiration for his famous play of 1906, *Partage de Midi* (Break of Noon). In the play, the clash between the call of the flesh and the fear of eternal damnation is portrayed at both a human and a cosmic level, the events onstage activated by the four Aristotelian elements of earth, air, fire, and water. For obvious autobiographical reasons, Jahier was immediately captivated by the drama, which he translated into Italian in 1912.

Later that year Jahier became embroiled in a dispute with Soffici that centered on Claudel, in which Soffici attacked Claudel as a neoromantic like Gauguin who had been passé for a decade because of his failure to attend sufficiently to language in the search for primal experience, while Jahier celebrated him as one of the currently central figures in the Parisian avant-garde who nonetheless had not fallen prey to the desacralizing immoralism and destructive attitudes then being promoted by Parisian "futurists" such as Apollinaire.[120] In some ways the conflict was between the "two Parises," and it definitely prefigured the divergence between the aesthetic attitudes of those poets with a primary loyalty to *Lacerba* and those like Jahier who remained primarily loyal to *La Voce.* Still, Jahier's poetry in this period was no less rebellious and radically innovative than Soffici's, and it is also no less frequently described as "futurist." What did distinguish it from Soffici's was its deep and genuine identification with the *popolo,* an identification reinforced by its convincing deployment of the everyday language of the street.

More the philosopher, less the poet, and far less the populist than Jahier, Giovanni Boine was the son of a railroad stationmaster, a position

that took the family from the coastal towns of Porto Maurizio and Finalmarina, where Giovanni was born in 1887, to the mountain village of Modane (near the Waldensian valley), and then to Genoa, where he entered high school, and to Milan, where he graduated. Once in Milan, however, his parents separated, and Boine effectively lost his father just as Jahier had a few years before. Fortunately, however, he soon met the wealthy nobleman Alessandro Casati, who, recognizing his brilliance and seriousness of purpose, took him under his wing. Casati supported his studies at the University of Milan, brought him into the circle around *Il Rinnovamento,* and even financed a six-week trip to Paris late in 1907 so that his young protégé might attend the lectures of Henri Bergson.

Already as a university student, Boine was showing signs of what Papini would later call the "torment of a soul tearing itself to pieces, which seeks to lie down in a natural peace, in an unburdening contemplation, but is unable to so."[121] In a letter written at the age of nineteen, Boine expressed a mystical attachment to death as a way of being united with God, and soon thereafter he dedicated one of his first articles for *Il Rinnovamento* to the Spanish mystic San Juan de la Cruz.[122] He also began a brooding correspondence with Miguel de Unamuno and, upon his recommendation, read Kierkegaard, whose sensibility was indeed very close to the one emerging in Boine.[123] Arguably, however, it was his discovery of Claudel in the spring of 1910 that made the strongest and most enduring impact on his intellectual position. What he found in Claudel was "Bergson imbibed by a poet . . . a universal spirit who has inside himself the cosmic chaos of Walt Whitman but who expresses it more profoundly and harmoniously."[124] For Boine, Claudel's virtue was to have recognized the "chaos" and thus the mystery of the universe, as well as the depths of human sinfulness, at the same time that he also pursued the Catholic spiritual discipline through which our vision of the world could become ordered and our "sin" rendered capable of making life substantial and concrete.

Following Claudel, Boine developed a Catholic idealism in which the concept of sin—like the concept of work for Slataper—was what guaranteed individual expressiveness, kept people firmly anchored in reality, and prevented them from falling prey to abstractions. The fullest and aesthetically most interesting expression of this idea came in Boine's "fragmentist" novella of 1914, *Il peccato* (Sin), in which a central theme is that those who "do not know sin" are "pure in death but not in life," since one can only "arrive at purity with substance when one has sinned a great deal, when one has 'sinned strongly.'"[125]

But Boine was already deploying Claudelian allusions and insights with regularity in *La Voce*—and in a surprisingly wide variety of contexts.

The first of these presented itself when, just at the time he was discovering Claudel, he replied to a polemic by Prezzolini on the sorry state of contemporary Italy. Casting Prezzolini's position in its most Salveminian light (but not unfairly) as the claim that Italy's problem was essentially economic and the solution primarily technocratic, Boine argued in good *La Vocean* fashion that, on the contrary, Italy's problem was essentially moral. Then, in a Claudelian twist, he suggested that perhaps only the "sinfulness" of a good war could serve as a cure. Despite the fact that the idea of war was then, in his view, being vulgarized by nationalists who treated it as a means of national power and expansion, it was still, he thought, preferable to Prezzolini's equally vulgar notion of "maximizing economic well-being." War, for Boine, should mean "spiritual revival" and "national education"; it should serve to help a society overcome "moral, intellectual, and political lassitude." Yet since there was no immediate prospect for a good war in 1910, he argued that the most pressing need was for "one of us to write for Italy a book that would be for our civilization what Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* was for the Greek," a book that would make Italians aware of the seriousness of their own moral and religious tradition and through which they might ultimately be led to heroic action.[126]

Two years later Boine turned his polemical edge against Crocean idealism, which for him was far too rationalist, secular, and "Hegelian."[127] Here again Claudel was invoked in support of a view of "the world not as an ordered succession of things, thoughts, objects, and actions with final conclusions, a linear succession in space and time of a more or less logical syllogism" but as "a hundred million actions and things present simultaneously with a hundred billion very diverse lives lived harmoniously in the present." In Boine's view, despite the fact that Croce adopted as his "criterion of the beautiful . . . the objective recognition of each particular expression of individuality," he had failed to take particularity with sufficient seriousness and was too willing to see it subsumed by a "logical" view of history and human reality. That was why, Boine remarked, "the artists all complain, curiously, in the face of the 'freedom'" that Croce accorded them.[128] And that, too, was why Boine himself sought to articulate a "postromantic revolution" in aesthetic expression that would take the particular—the word, the phrase, the fragment—with absolute seriousness.

Almost immediately after the polemic with Croce, Boine initiated one with Soffici over his autobiographical novel of 1912, *Lemmonio Boreo*, which Boine found derivative (a "*Jean-Christophe* for Italy") and without literary value.[129] Soffici did not reply directly, although it seems to have been partly to Boine that he was responding in his subsequent dispute

with Jahier over Claudel. Yet Soffici's silence may have represented his sense that there was little need to reply, Boine having allowed his polemical tendencies to reinforce his increasing isolation within Florentine intellectual circles. As Prezzolini would later remark, Boine was "not an easy man to get along with," and the fact that he came to Florence only occasionally from his home in Porto Maurizio probably increased the strain still further.[130] This strain would reach its climax when, just as the European war was being declared, Boine lived out his concept of "strong sin" in a desperate love affair with Eva Kühn Amendola.

Despite this isolation and strain, Boine remained a vital presence in the pages of *La Voce* throughout 1913 and the first half of 1914. Surprisingly, however, in view of the aesthetic revolution he had called for in his polemic with Croce, Boine's greatest popular success as a writer was his *Discorsi militari,* a deeply felt but, from a literary point of view, utterly conventional book published late in 1914 by *La Voce*'s press and later widely distributed in the trenches. The *Discorsi* were a kind of meditation on the military code, a catechism for Italian soldiers on how they might bring "spiritual order" and "discipline" to their conduct of warfare. If we take the book together with Boine's *Il peccato* of the same year, it appears that he, no less than Slataper, had a dialectic of order and anarchy. Although in Boine these remained separate (if nearly simultaneous) moments that would never be integrated or reconciled, it is possible that a coming reconciliation was overtaken by events. Too enfeebled by sickness to volunteer for the war himself, Boine nonetheless entered it as a medic and was wounded in battle in November 1915. His greatest enemy, however, remained his sickness: on May 16, 1917, Boine died of tuberculosis, three months before his thirtieth birthday.

Despite their divergent personalities and positions, Amendola, Salvemini, Slataper, Jahier, and Boine were all central figures in what would prove to be *La Voce*'s heyday. This was not the case with Benito Mussolini, who contributed just two articles to the review and never lived in Florence or fraternized with members of the group.[131] Yet it is worth considering his position in relation to those of other writers for *La Voce,* both because he was already developing a very close personal relationship with Prezzolini and because of his obvious centrality to the fate of Florentine modernism after 1914.

Born in 1883 into a poor rural family in Dovia near the Romagna town of Forlì, the young Mussolini shared many experiences and cultural attitudes with his generational counterparts across the Apennines in Florence. Like them, he had gone abroad in the early years of the century—they to Paris, he to Lausanne (1902–1904)—in order to escape

what they all regarded as the constricting cultural atmosphere in Italy and to learn about and participate in the controversies then current in European intellectual life. In his autobiography of 1912, Mussolini referred to his "bohemian" life in Lausanne, and he departed with enough esteem for French culture to think for a brief period about becoming a professor of French.[132] Like the Florentines too, he was drawn in this period to Nietzsche, to the religious socialism of Sorel, and to the élite theory of Pareto, whose lectures he attended while in Lausanne. He believed as they did that Italy needed a "new aristocracy," and he drew his concept from the same sources: Pareto and Oriani. Finally, like them, Mussolini worried intensely about the social implications of the "death of God," and his first long essay, finished in July 1904, bore the title *L'uomo e la divinità.*

There was also, of course, an important difference between Mussolini and the young men of *Leonardo:* his active interest in socialism and their vehement rejection of it. Yet we must not be misled by this difference. Mussolini was never strictly a Marxist, despite the efforts of friends such as Angelica Balabanoff to move him in that direction; and his socialism was more instinctive than doctrinaire, the first of several forms that his rebelliousness would take during the years before the fascist seizure of power.[133] Thus it is not surprising that when Mussolini returned to Italy in November 1904, he quickly became a reader of *Leonardo.* Apparently he was able to perceive the deep-seated generational rebelliousness beneath its antisocialist veneer, and he clearly admired both its anti-academic rhetoric and the way it canvassed new philosophical currents in search of a secular-religious faith.[134] From 1905 to 1908 Mussolini did very little socialist organizing or writing, and by the end of this period he was entirely devoting himself to intense intellectual reflection. During the second half of 1908 he wrote a number of cultural pieces for nonsocialist journals, including an essay on the poet Friedrich Klopstock, three briefer articles on poetry, and a long and quite good essay on Nietzsche. In that essay he characterized the crisis of the epoch in terms that hardly suggest orthodox Marxism or socialism: "The superman is a symbol, an index of this anguished and tragic period of crisis passing over the European consciousness in its search for new sources of pleasure, beauty, and ideals. He is the recognition of our weakness, but at the same time the hope for our redemption. He is the sunset—and the dawn."[135]

Even while Mussolini was in the Trentino in 1909, devoting much of his time to writing for the local socialist press, he underwent what one historian has called a "brief but intense exposure . . . to European decadentism, from Baudelaire to Verlaine, Wilde to D'Annunzio," and it

is perhaps indicative that one of his major contributions to the socialist journal *Il Popolo* was a serialized historical novel, *Claudia Particella, l'amante del cardinale.*[136] It was also while in Trento that he became an avid reader of *La Voce,* even helping in its local distribution. From the beginning it was clear that he fully understood—and fully shared—*La Voce*'s agenda of spiritual and cultural renewal. As he wrote to Prezzolini in October 1909: "*La Voce*'s latest initiative is excellent: to make Italy known to Italians. Besides political unity, which is slowly but progressively becoming consolidated, it is necessary to forge the spiritual unity of the Italians. This is difficult work, given our history and temperament, but it is not impossible. To create the 'Italian' soul is a superb mission."[137] Many years later, in 1924, when Prezzolini credited Mussolini with "realizing many of the things that I wanted when I founded and directed *La Voce,*" it was very likely this modernist project of spiritual and cultural renewal that he had most centrally in mind.[138]

Even though Mussolini wrote only two articles for *La Voce,* he tried unsuccessfully to interest Prezzolini in several others, and there were signs that he felt great kinship with a number of the *vociani.*[139] One such sign was a short article he wrote about *La Voce* for a journal in Trento in which he cited extensively from Papini and Prezzolini's *La coltura italiana* and was wholly enthusiastic about their enterprise:

> To create a culture it is not enough to educate; to create a party it is not enough to have a program, even a maximalist one; to justify a present permeated with what is base and vulgar it is not enough to have a glorious past; to assign a nation a mission in world history it is not enough to unify it politically—if there is not also the psychological unity that binds its will and directs its efforts. Italian intellectual life lacks courage, and *La Voce* seeks to inspire it. It seeks to resolve "the terrible problem" posed before our national soul: "either to have the courage to create the third great Italy, not the Italy of the popes nor of the emperors but the Italy of the thinkers, an Italy that has not yet existed—or to leave behind only a few signs of mediocrity that the wind can quickly blow away." That is *La Voce*'s program. A superb effort . . .[140]

Another sign of the kinship Mussolini felt for *La Voce* was the great enthusiasm with which he pursued his correspondence with Prezzolini. As he would confess later to a biographer:

> I first had the feeling of being called to announce a new epoch when my correspondence brought me close to the group around *La Voce.* My study of the Trentino had aroused a certain interest in Florence, and my articles on the publications of Papini and Prezzolini had provoked some curiosity in Trento . . . Of the *vociani* I loved above all Soffici, Slataper, and Jahier. I felt that

they were close to me in temperament: young, open, clearheaded. Soffici appeared to me even then as a chapter on faithfulness, just as Slataper appeared as a treatise on the magnificent life. Slataper and Oberdan; the images became blurred together. It seemed to me that Slataper had been destined to write what Oberdan had only been able to say. These poets announced a whole new world, while I limited myself to interpreting statistics and the minutes of meetings of syndicalist and working-class organizations in Trento, but while I also was translating Klopstock and Platen and calling them great poets![141]

Of course not all the *vociani* were focused on poetry, and Mussolini wrote more about syndicalism than dry memoranda. In 1909, when Prezzolini had published his book on syndicalism, Mussolini had reviewed it—favorably—for *Il Popolo.* While noting that he held syndicalist convictions that Prezzolini did not share, he nonetheless characterized syndicalism's weakness in a way that owed much to Prezzolini's analysis: "By now syndicalism is complete as doctrine; it lacks men. We must make them."[142] Moreover, although Mussolini had earlier often taken the orthodox syndicalist position that a "new aristocracy" could emerge out of a properly educated working class, he treated Prezzolini's contrary position with great respect and at some points seemed even to agree with it.[143] Over the next several years the political importance of "spiritual elevation," "culture," and "ideals" was so strongly emphasized in Mussolini's writing that Renzo De Felice has located the essence of his "revolutionary socialism" in its "conjunction with *La Voce.*"[144]

When Mussolini broke with the Italian Socialist Party in October 1914, it was above all to the *vociani* that he turned for intellectual support.[145] Yet already in July 1912, at the height of his influence in the party, he had written Prezzolini plaintively that he felt "exiled" from his fellow socialists because of his own "religious concept of socialism" and their "philistine revolutionism," and he wondered if *La Voce* might have space for his "efforts at revisionism in a revolutionary sense." Clearly, Mussolini was casting about for an alternative to the party organ *Avanti!* that he then edited. By November 1913, when he founded the theoretical journal *Utopia,* he had given up the idea that the future élite would come from the working class alone by appealing in the manner of *La Voce* to "the younger generation today—socialist and nonsocialist alike—the as yet unrecognized intelligentsia."[146] In a brief note in *La Voce,* Prezzolini recognized *Utopia*'s kinship to the journal but nonetheless deemed it a "hopeless enterprise" to try to "revive the theoretical consciousness of socialism."[147]

Very shortly, Mussolini would come to agree with him. Yet, as Mus-

solini later told a biographer, he also "feared that the *vociani,* who had thrown open the library windows so as to allow the noble winds of fantasy to enter its stuffy rooms, might be forced to close them again before there could be produced from within this new culture not so much a renaissance of cultural themes involving liberty as the birth of a new sense of history."[148] From this point of view, fascism was the effort to keep those windows open—by whatever means necessary.

War in Libya and Simmering Discontent

Ever since the Italian army had suffered the humiliation of a defeat by the Ethiopians in 1896, the citizens of Italy had yearned to restore the nation's reputation through foreign conquest. One object of this interest, despite its dubious value as real estate, was the desert territory of Libya (Tripolitania and Cyrenaica), which the nationalists had come to call Italy's "fourth shore." Controlled in 1911 by the decaying Ottoman Empire, it appeared to be there for the taking, but the Italian government had nonetheless proceeded cautiously given the delicate interdependencies in European diplomacy that even an apparently small initiative by a secondary power might unravel. In the summer of 1911, however, the crisis in Morocco, fears that Italy might be "awarded" Libya as compensation for an Austrian advance in the Balkans, and mounting nationalist provocation at home combined to force Giolitti's hand. To the cheers of huge throngs in every major Italian city, the troops were deployed across the Mediterranean on September 29.

Despite widespread expectations of a quick victory, the conquest of Libya proved a difficult undertaking. Turkey did not surrender formally for more than a year, and the war dragged on for several more in inland areas poorly controlled from Constantinople. Indeed, the conquest and colonization of the "fourth shore" remained a live issue in Italian politics for another three decades.[149]

The conflict in Libya has its appointed place in the intricate history of the origins of the First World War, but the sea change it represented in Italian domestic politics is perhaps less appreciated. Events in Florence were typical. On September 27, a day before the last-minute ultimatum to Turkey and two days before the departure of the troops, tricolor flags were draped in every public square, while socialist opponents of the war called for a general strike. Despite a demonstration the next day by several thousand leftist protesters, however, the strike quickly fizzled, and an even larger counterdemonstration, with its Garibaldian banners and songs, moved late in the evening from the Duomo to the barracks of the Eighty-fourth Infantry Regiment, due to

depart the next day. When the departure took place, Florence saluted with still another demonstration of unprecedented size and a banner headline in *La Nazione* predicting the imminent conquest of Tripoli.

In the coming days and weeks, as patriotic fervor and political animosities continued to mount, a new domestic mood became apparent, one in which the heightened pride and hopes of many citizens mixed apocalyptically with their equally heightened sense of danger.[150] In cultural life the passions of nationalism and the cult of violence had been set ablaze, and in politics it began to appear impossible that the established liberal order could survive unaltered. Social conflict between defenders of the new "Italy first" attitude and their socialist opponents reached new heights, yet both sides were driven by many of the same extremist attitudes. Even those who most fervently opposed the war, such as the radical wing of the Socialist Party that Mussolini would soon lead, began to sound ever shriller in their commitment to and celebrations of violence. Among more moderate political elements, significant reform now appeared certain (and near-universal male suffrage did arrive in 1913), but no one had any clear idea of how to transform the political system in a comprehensive way. As Amendola wrote in an important assessment of the national atmosphere late in the year: "We must certainly admit that we would not have hoped to see in so short a time such a sharp rise in the tone of our civic emotions . . . The problems and preoccupations that the war raises for the best-informed sectors of Italian public consciousness do not succeed in overpowering the sense of relief that pervades this consciousness and everywhere reanimates it . . . What most interests us in the war, what most interests the Italian people, is the moral drama that is being played out behind it in the soul of the nation."[151]

During the spring and summer of 1911, *La Voce* had been clear in its opposition to war in Libya, in part because of economic calculations that appeared unfavorable and in part because of the journal's contempt for *L'Idea Nazionale*, the nationalist weekly that Corradini had begun to edit from Rome in March and that was trumpeting its enthusiasm for the enterprise in every issue.[152] On the first of these points, Salvemini had been especially vehement; the second was a favorite of Prezzolini's. Yet there was also a deeper reason for *La Voce*'s opposition to the war, one involving its nearly automatic reflex against any government-sponsored initiative. After all, how could the "first and second Italies" ever be expected to make common cause? By early October, however, in the words of *La Voce*'s lead editorial, "the die was cast," and the enormous groundswell of popular support made all but the most politically idealistic among the *vociani*—like Salvemini—fall into line. As if to empha-

size the parting of the ways between Salvemini and *La Voce*, the same front page on which appeared the editorial grudgingly accepting the war also contained a meditation by Slataper on the poet Carducci titled "And the Cypresses of San Guido?"—just the sort of piece that the new editor of *L'Unità* had always least understood and most detested.[153]

The politics of *La Voce* would change profoundly in the wake of Salvemini's departure and in the new atmosphere of the Libyan campaign. The democratic rhetoric that marked the early *La Voce* as a distinctive phase in the development of the Florentine avant-garde was put aside, never to return, although the rhetoric combining bellicosity and discipline that would replace it emerged only very gradually over the next two years. This was not because this latter rhetoric had to be entirely invented; something very much like it had already been developed in the *Leonardo* years, and a rhetoric of discipline shorn of the connection with violence had played a role in the early *La Voce*. Much of this legacy, however, had been appropriated by the nationalists in crassly materialist ways that the *vociani* found reprehensible. It would take time to develop a way of speaking about politics that was both intrinsically convincing and sufficiently "spiritual" that they would not appear to be joining the nationalist camp. Above all, it would take time to integrate the rhetoric of violence and discipline with the European modernist culture that it was always *La Voce*'s first task to diffuse and promote.

Among the *vociani* the one exception to this gradualism (though not to the antinationalism) was Papini, who was immediately overwhelmed by the war mood. In an article on October 19 on the coming "victorious war" he gloried in his long-standing advocacy of it, separating himself "sharply from Prezzolini and Salvemini" and proclaiming that "Italy is no longer the land of carnival, dreams, or Goethean lemon trees; it is becoming a fairytale kingdom, a country of marvels, a true *Dreamland.*" He also made clear, somewhat ominously, that "one does not make national policy with calculation and reasoning" and that "the life and greatness of a nation may require what appears *useless* to cotton merchants." Yet even he took pains to point out that the present war was not "a serious war, a great war with a great nation like Austria or France, for example," and that the "great-war myth" Corradini had been spinning was therefore only that, a myth.[154]

In a reply in *La Voce*'s next issue, Amendola wrote not of the "victorious war" but of the "pitiful war" and cautioned that it "should not be a cause of bellicose rhetoric."[155] But by the end of the year, though still separating himself from "the advocates of war for its own sake," Amendola appeared to take a step toward Papini's position by identifying "the

men of the war in Tripoli" with "the men of my generation" and by taking pride in the way they were now overthrowing the image held "by foreigners of a nation that does not fight, a nation of shrewd politicians and able businessmen, but therefore also a nation of passive and egotistical men without restraint or discipline."[156] Yet what distinguished Amendola's words from Papini's, and what marked them as one of the first indications of the new rhetoric of *La Voce*, was the closing emphasis on "restraint and discipline."

Over the next year, many writers for *La Voce* with quite diverse perspectives were pursuing and developing the connection between war and social "discipline." Thus, Antonio Anzilotti distinguished between the true "nationalism that is inconceivable without disciplined preparation"—such as that evidenced during the struggles of the Risorgimento—and the "imperialist megalomania" of the Italian nationalists.[157] In an editorial on "the discipline of the Italians," Riccardo Bacchelli wrote similarly that his people, despite being "so deplorably undisciplined, that is, so unsociable regarding the little things in life, are now showing great discipline in enduring the weight of war without the slightest grumbling."[158] By the end of the year Prezzolini had crystallized the point: "War is death, disease, destruction. We know that. We feel that . . . But war, for us, is above all something else. War is the *general examination* to which peoples are called every so often by history. When this occurs, everything that is healthy, even if hidden, is revealed; and what is rotten is also revealed . . . The winners are not [necessarily] the big or heavily populated states, but those with peoples who are constant, prepared, disciplined, faithful, believing, farsighted."[159]

Even before the heady days of 1914, then, Prezzolini and his fellow *vociani*, though still disavowing war for its own sake, were very close to advocating war for the sake of discipline, war for the sake of building civil society. From the Libyan episode, they had learned the value of war as an instrument of popular education, as a vehicle for awakening the "second Italy." War, they now understood, could mobilize a population through mass political demonstrations, military recruitment, and the experience of sacrifice shared by those left at home. Whether a particular war made sense as an economic proposition or as a way of increasing national power—the sources of their initial hesitations regarding Libya—now appeared to matter less than whether (and how well) a particular war could function as a spiritual educator.

It might appear, then, that the war in Libya had greatly strengthened the Florentine avant-garde by providing it with a new rhetoric and strategy. For even if the rhetoric owed a great deal to ideas already

developed in the *Leonardo* years, it was now being amplified and refined in a very different context, one that had fired the passion of the nation and that, in so doing, had begun to create a public space, and thus the possibility of a vital civil society, which the *leonardiani* not only had never found but had been unable even to conceive. Yet this point sums up at most half the story, and probably not the more important half. By 1912 the Florentine avant-garde was also deeply divided and dispirited, so much so that Prezzolini had actually discussed *La Voce* in the past tense in the book he was then writing, *Italia 1912*.[160] This division and dejection owed something to the war in Libya as well, although its most important sources lay elsewhere.

We have seen that, from the beginning, Papini and Soffici were uncomfortable with *La Voce*. Although their many letters to Prezzolini during its early years certainly contained words of support and even solidarity with the enterprise, they also contained many expressions of dismay and, occasionally, of open hostility. The essential feeling of the two men was perhaps most succinctly and directly captured by Papini: "When I write for *La Voce* I do not feel free . . . If I make pure art, it doesn't fit in with *La Voce;* had I written philosophy, I would have collided immediately with your ideas, and I don't always feel like writing—and can't always be expected to write—articles of information."[161] In addition to having these same feelings, Soffici felt hamstrung by what he regarded as Prezzolini's incomprehension of the cutting edge of avant-garde art, such as the cubist designs of Picasso.[162] In short, both men dissented from *La Voce* on matters of taste, believing that the concept of culture and the specific ideas about culture that it transmitted were insufficiently radical, overly moralistic, and too wedded to logos rather than mythos.

But even though these principal *vociani* felt the greatest unease, hardly anyone in the group was wholly satisfied with the journal or felt it to be an adequate reflection of his or her personal views. Prezzolini complained in his diary about personal antagonisms between Amendola and himself as well as between Soffici and Slataper.[163] When at one point he thought of asking Amendola to replace him as editor, he feared such a move would mean the flight of Slataper, Jahier, and Soffici.[164] Virtually everyone complained about Prezzolini's Croceanism, and, as we have seen, Amendola and Papini began *L'Anima* largely in order to have an alternative outlet for philosophical writing. Some thought that *La Voce*'s politics were too leftist, particularly on the question of suffrage, and this issue would cost *La Voce* its principal financial backing when Casati withdrew over it in the spring of 1911.[165] Others, like Slataper, felt that

the journal was too preoccupied with political issues, whatever their ideological valence, and that this preoccupation had caused it to sacrifice its true "function of spiritual unification." Such views tended to hold Salvemini responsible for the problem.[166]

One incident in July 1911 pushed the tension level among the *vociani* nearly to the breaking point. Since it involved the emerging relationship between the Florentine avant-garde and the futurists of Milan, a bit of background is necessary. Papini later recalled that he and Soffici were at the Giubbe Rosse when they read the first futurist manifesto in February 1909. At that time they had applauded the futurists' desire to rid Italy of "the weight of all the bad antiquarianism" but had disapproved of the "air of tragic clowns with which they presented themselves."[167] That "air" had moved Soffici to write his "recipe" for futurism in *La Voce:*

> Take a kilo of Verhaeren, two hundred grams of Alfred Jarry, one hundred of Laforgue, thirty of Laurent Tailhade, five of Vielé-Griffin, a dash of Morasso—yes, even some Morasso—a pinch of Pascoli, a small bottle of holy water. Then take fifteen automobiles, seven airplanes, four trains, two steamships, two bicycles, various electric batteries, a few burning caldrons; put in some of your own flower of impotence and pomposity; mix everything together in a lake of gray matter and aphrodisiac foam; boil the mixture in the emptiness of your soul, on a burner of American quackery, and then give it to the Italian public to drink.[168]

By June 1911, however, Soffici had begun to recognize the futurists as serious rivals in the business of importing Parisian avant-garde culture into Italy, and he shifted from a tone of lighthearted jest to one of caustic polemic and fierce *ad hominem* critique.[169] A few days after having written just the sort of article that Prezzolini had most feared when he was drafting his *Progetto* in 1908, Soffici was sitting with Medardo Rosso at one of the Giubbe Rosse's outside tables, enjoying the summer air and some military band music from the Piazza Vittorio.[170] Suddenly someone tapped him on the shoulder to ask if he were Soffici, and moments later a fist landed in his face. A punitive expedition of futurists—F. T. Marinetti and the painters Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Umberto Boccioni (the striker of the first blow)—had arrived in Florence. After a rousing brawl in the piazza, Soffici took his revenge the next day by hiding at the train station with Prezzolini and Slataper and ambushing the futurists just as they were about to board for Milan.

A few days later Prezzolini exulted in their "victory" by publishing the following "warning" in *La Voce:*

> Recognizing that there have been attempts to overpower those who write for *La Voce* with violent fisticuffs, taking them by surprise and when they were at a physical disadvantage, the various collaborators, friends, and sympathizers of *La Voce* who reside in Florence have decided to rally together whenever similar events occur and to reciprocate with violence as quickly as possible and with the greatest possible assurance of superiority. And they warn that the lesson taught the futurists at the Florence train station, as they were leaving for Milan in the aftermath of the sort of incident just indicated, is only the first application of this system. A warning to those who come next.[171]

Not all the *vociani* were amused, however. Amendola was so incensed by the "warning" that he immediately submitted his "resignation" from *La Voce* in two angry letters to Prezzolini.[172] Only after much pleading did he agree not to make this separation a public matter.[173] Salvemini was perhaps even more incensed. "Soffici was not in the right," he wrote Prezzolini the day after the "warning" in *La Voce.* "He provoked the futurist painter, baiting him more or less directly. He who baits another man opens an unjust dispute and should be the one to forget it . . . Soffici criticized *a man in particular,* saying that his paintings were trash, just as once before he had said about some sculptures that they were the stuff of homosexuals. If in this case a person who has not just been criticized but who has been insulted reacts, it is Soffici who has to give in. *La Voce* has nothing to do with this."[174]

Initially Prezzolini did his best to shrug off the whole affair, telling Salvemini that "my function is to understand everyone, admire everyone, help everyone, and hold us all together. If I don't succeed, then goodby: I will go study or sell wine and olive oil."[175] But the letters of criticism from Amendola and Salvemini so shook him that by the day after his "warning" appeared, he was proposing that one of them take over as editor.[176] This conciliatory attitude succeeded in somewhat defusing the tension, and by autumn Amendola had taken back his "resignation," at least in practice. Indeed, during the first half of 1912 he once again became a regular contributor. Nonetheless, *La Voce* was in many ways still reeling from the "Soffici affair," as Salvemini had called it, when the situation in Libya exploded.

In mid-September, as an Italian invasion began to appear imminent, Salvemini became impatient with what he saw as *La Voce*'s failure to do enough to mobilize public opinion against it. As he wrote to Prezzolini

on September 17: "Don't worry about doing too much politics and not enough culture. To explain to those Italian jackasses [the nationalists] what Tripoli means and what the dangers and potential ruin of '*tripolismo*' are is no less a matter of *culture* than speaking about Péguy or Picasso. Except for the fact that Péguy and Picasso can wait, while Tripoli cannot."[177] Discussing Tripoli was "true culture," he argued a few days later, whereas discussing Péguy and Picasso was mere "literature."[178] Yet none of the other *vociani,* including Prezzolini, were willing to redefine culture in this fashion. At the same time, they did their best to explain to Salvemini why his attitude was inappropriate for *La Voce.* Interestingly, in this enterprise it was the "former" *vociano* Amendola who took the lead.[179]

Yet Salvemini remained unalterably focused on what he saw as the tragedy in Libya. When the invasion occurred and Prezzolini and Amendola reluctantly decided to change course and support the government, Salvemini's departure from *La Voce* became only a matter of time. Nonetheless, even after this occurred on October 6, he honored an earlier commitment to serve on the governing board of *La Voce*'s press, the first meeting of which was held in Florence in November. For he was leaving the journal itself, as he wrote Prezzolini, only because he could not "sacrifice the central nucleus of his individuality" and despite the fact that the move would cause him "infinite pain."[180]

For *La Voce,* Salvemini's departure meant the end of one kind of political rhetoric and the beginning of another. Fittingly, Prezzolini actually used the latter in his letter bidding Salvemini farewell: "No, dear Salvemini, we do feel, yes, that there are things above politics, but these do not have to do with literature; they have to do with the moral life, discipline, historical judgment."[181] Yet the issue that Salvemini had raised concerning the relation between "culture" and "literature" would not only endure within the Florentine avant-garde but would become increasingly important for it, even if what came to stand behind these concepts was not quite the same as what Salvemini had understood by them. Should we aim to develop a culture through which the masses are genuinely educated for practical political action, even if this culture is not based on what passes for avant-garde "literature" in Paris? Or should we strive to create our new culture in the most avant-garde way, even if it does not engage the masses—or, more likely, if it *does* engage them but at an irrational and elemental level that conventional education tends to ignore or repress? If we choose the former, how can we continue to say that our concept of culture is truly modernist, especially given that a hallmark of modernist art, literature, and philosophy is the exploration

of the irrational forces in human consciousness and life? If we choose the latter, how can we continue to say that our artistic, poetic, and philosophical efforts as individuals are really helping to produce a common culture and "the intellectual and moral redemption" of Italy? This was the fundamental issue that would be posed with increasing insistence in 1912 and that would mark the dividing line between *La Voce* and *Lacerba* after the founding of the latter in 1913.

Although these questions were very much in the air when Papini and Soffici were fighting with Prezzolini over the founding of *La Voce* in 1908, *La Voce* had survived as a "convention" during its first three years in large measure because such questions were never posed in its pages. The journal had simply heaped together artistic modernism, Crocean idealism, Salveminian politics, and discussions of the need to educate the "second Italy" and to provide an outlet for the "new generation." At an organizational level, there had been a sense that *La Voce* was moving toward some more organized form like Papini's "spiritual party" or "party of the intellectuals," although there was little enthusiasm for creating a party in the conventional political sense. As late as August 30, 1911, Amendola had written to Boine that plans were under way for "a convention of ten or fifteen people, absolutely private, to see if it is possible to specify some fundamental points of a political program for further *study*." But by November 7, in another letter to Boine, he had given up on this hope because of the events in Libya.[182]

Thereafter, it was clear to all that the organization of the Florentine avant-garde would be at most a kind of loose confederation of individuals and groups, each pursuing its own personal, intellectual itinerary. In 1913 it may have appeared that there were two loose confederations, one around *La Voce* and the other around *Lacerba,* one cultivating the philosophical sources of a new social discipline, the other celebrating art and poetry as the sources of an angry, boisterous anarchism. Yet the two always remained tied by *La Voce*'s press and, above all, by friendships, even if according to the definition Papini then proposed, "friends are only enemies with whom we have concluded a truce—one that, however, is not always honestly observed."[183] In 1915 just such a "friendship" would be in effect between the *vociani* and the *lacerbiani* as they pursued their common goal of Italian intervention in the First World War.

What ended in the fall of 1911, then, was not the Florentine avant-garde but rather the possibility of unifying it—either within *La Voce* or under some other, not yet available auspices. Yet if, by 1912, Florentine avant-gardism appeared to have been weakened in this way, it had also been radicalized by Libya and made more self-confident in its conviction

that a new Italy was about to be born. This combination of organizational weakness and self-confident radicalization may appear paradoxical, but it is in fact what prevailed from 1912 through the spring of 1915. On balance, it was probably the worst of both worlds. For as the rhetoric became more virulent and as the audience for it increased dramatically in size, the Florentine avant-garde also became more and more divorced from any prospect of a unified organization capable of acting both forcefully and responsibly.