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The “New” Giorgione:
Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Pater, and Morelli

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted anywhere for any award.

Luke Uglow

MORELLI & GIORGIONE

Morelli is unique in the historiography of art. He began writing as a connoisseur in his late fifties with several articles in the Viennese journal *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* between 1874 and 1876. His first book was published in 1880, *Die Werke italienischer Meister in den Galerien von München, Dresden und Berlin: Ein kritischer Versuch*, and was translated into English by Louise Richter in 1883, wife of Morelli's friend Jean Paul Richter (1847-1937). This was followed by three further articles between 1881 and 1887, culminating in *Kunstkritische Studien über italienische Malerei*, published in two volumes, 1890 and 1891. The first is subtitled "Die Galerien Borghese und Doria Panfilii in Rom"; the second "Die Galerien zu München und Dresden". In this chapter I will focus on Morelli's late work, particularly the English translation: *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of their Works*.¹ These two volumes were published posthumously in 1892 and 1893, translated by Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes, and edited by Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894).

Italian Painters is a re-publication of Morelli's earlier writing, edited and updated. There is an additional study of the Doria Pamphilj Gallery and a new introduction entitled "Principles and Method". Although structured around four famous art galleries, this does not limit the scope of Morelli's criticism, the internal framework being single studies of artists and schools, passing through different collections, and tackling various art historical problems. Morelli's 1870s articles have been described as "frammentaria e caotica",² and this digressive arrangement survives in the later works. Being a re-publication, *Italian Painters* has a self-conscious construction that shows an awareness of its own development over time. Reflexive material is included in the two prefaces, while there are also introductions to the Borghese

¹ I will quote from the original German when significant changes have been made.

² D'Angelo, 1993, p.25

and Dresden studies, and multiple self-considering digressions. This retrospective structure is manifested in the long “Principles and Method”, a narrative in the form of a fictional reminiscence. This is indicative of *Italian Painters*, which moves between conventional academic analysis and imaginary dialogues. My intention is to understand Morelli’s Giorgione, and the artist’s function, within the context of this complicated book.

Morelli has an ambiguous reputation. On the one hand, Anderson introduces him as “the celebrated inventor of scientific connoisseurship” claiming he “needs little introduction as the author of one of the most revolutionary books in the history of art”.¹ With his “scientific” method and attribution to Giorgione of the *Sleeping Venus* (Fig.A2), Morelli secured his place within the history of art history. Today, Morellian method is represented as “an inductive procedure modelled on scientific methods”, commonly understood as the comparison between paintings of anatomical details – hands and ears – “identity of form indicating identity of authorship”.² Morelli was also politically active in Italy during the Risorgimento, Anderson arguing that he helped make connoisseurship “a powerful instrument in the development of national cultural policy”.³ However, it can be said that Morelli’s method is “not particularly evident in his discussion of individual pictures”, and it has been suggested he was merely “dando veste di scientificità a una pratica consueta dei conoscitori”.⁴ His politics are also problematic, Federico Zeri (1921-1998) once calling Morelli “il primo grande corruttore dell’arte italiana”.⁵ Pope-Hennessy argued that Morelli expressed his results in “a form which was deliberately designed to cause the greatest possible antagonism”, and accused the connoisseur of “astounding disingenuousness”.⁶

¹ Anderson, 1999, pp.8-9

² Hatt and Klonk, 2006, p.41; Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.222

³ Anderson, 1999, p.61

⁴ Hatt and Klonk, 2006, p.51; Levi, 1988, p.289

⁵ Qtd. in D’Angelo, 1993, p.22

⁶ Pope-Hennessy, 1980, pp.13-14

Morelli's writings were always controversial, and in seeking to understand his "new" Giorgione, it is necessary to explain this ambiguous reputation.

Giorgione plays an important role in the intentionally antagonistic design of *Italian Painters*. Pope-Hennessy has argued that Morelli's motivation for publishing was to correct other histories, being "concerned with rectification rather than the groundwork for original research".¹ The texts therefore contain the names of writers as much as painters, constantly referencing and aggressively remedying other scholars' mistakes. Sometimes, indeed, it is as if we are reading two texts simultaneously.² In this scheme Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *New History*, their status as the "New Vasari", and their "new" Giorgione, were important targets. One of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's reviews prophetically concluded: "[They] have rectified the errors and filled up the omissions of Vasari, and he will be a bold man who undertakes to do the same by them".³ Almost inevitably, Morelli's confrontational connoisseurship arrived to do exactly that.

Giorgione was an important artist for Morelli, and Layard remembered how he "always talked of his favourite painter, whose name was almost the last word upon his lips".⁴ Although it was not until 1879 that the connoisseur attributed the *Sleeping Venus*, the artist was highly significant for Morelli even in the early 1870s. Elected to the Italian Parliament in 1861 and to the Senate in 1873, Morelli helped pass legislation prohibiting the sale to foreign buyers of art works from public or religious institutions.⁵ However, he was also involved in

¹ Pope-Hennessy, 1980, p.14

² For instance: "Turning to Dr. Marggraff's new catalogue..." – Morelli, 1893, p.9 [Marggraff, R., *Verzeichnis der Gemälde in der ältern Königlich Pinakothek zu München*, 1865]

³ *The Edinburgh Review*, 1872, p.149

⁴ Morelli, 1893, p.[36]

⁵ Fernie, 2003, p.103

the export of paintings to the National Gallery in London and English private collections.¹ Anderson has considered the connoisseur's motives, arguing that he engineered the market so works by "lesser" artists were sold to England, while masterpieces remained in Italy.² For instance, he intervened in the sale of *The Tempest* (Fig.A3), dissuading Sir James Hudson (1810-1885) from buying the work (25 May 1871), arguing that the price was exaggerated and the image "troppo lubrico" for the British public. Later, he prevented Wilhelm von Bode (1845-1929) and Julius Meyer (1830-1893) from acquiring the picture for the Berlin Museum by instigating a sale to keep the painting in Venice.³ These activities reflect Morelli's regional patriotism, a context in which Giorgione becomes the supreme representative of Venetian painting.

Morelli's Giorgione

Morelli's treatment of Giorgione is a revealing instance of his mode of enquiry. It has been argued that the connoisseur's novelty lay in the number of pictures he attributed to the artist for the first time: five compared to Crowe and Cavalcaselle's one.⁴ However, although there are some similarities between the *New History* and *Italian Painters*, a comparison between their catalogues shows that Morelli identified a new Giorgione, implying a different approach. I will now briefly review the artist as he is found in *Italian Painters*, which in terms of the attributions, shows the complexities and variances in Morelli's stance.

¹ D'Angelo, 1993, p.22

² Anderson, 1999, p.36

³ Anderson, 1996, p.113-114; and Anderson, 1997, pp.251-253

⁴ Hope, 2004, p.50

Morelli deliberately marks the change in scholarship: “Raphael Mengs was reminded in this picture of Giorgione, which would be incomprehensible were it not for the fact that no painter has ever been, and still is, so entirely misunderstood as Giorgione”.¹ His main discussion of the artist takes place in the Dresden gallery study. In 1880, he denied the authenticity of several key paintings, outlined his idea of Giorgione, described the basis of his method, and enumerated Giorgione’s authentic works. Finally, with much ceremony, he attributed the *Venus*. In 1890-1891 he added several paintings, discussed drawings by Giorgione, and attributed a portrait in the Borghese study.

Morelli introduced “Giorgio Barbarelli, known as Giorgione” with a regional emphasis, explaining that like Bissolo and Catena he came from the March of Treviso. In 1880 and 1891, he disattributed the five paintings in Dresden given to “this very rare master”, notably the *Jacob and Rachel* (Fig.A26).² Next, he outlines the problem of the pan-giorgionesque, arguing that Giorgione “has for centuries been little more than a myth to writers on art”. Morelli then poses a question: “How are we to gain a true insight into the art of this most refined and imaginative [*feinsten und phantasie reichsten*] of painters, or to acquire any knowledge of him in the midst of such bewildering confusion?” And the answer is: “There seems to me, therefore, to be but one way out of this labyrinth of difficulties, and that is, to make a close and careful study [*genau zu betrachten und in sich aufzunehmen*] of the few undoubtedly authentic works”. He lists three works of this status, giving details of their location and condition: *The Castelfranco Altarpiece*, *The Tempest*, and *The Three Philosophers* (Figs.A10, A3, A4). The last two are justified as authentic by the mention of their appearance in Michiel’s *Notizia*; the first has no explicit justification.

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.157-158; 1891, p.208

² *Ibid*, 1893, pp.206-209; 1891, pp.270-273

The references to these works are very brief, although Morelli strangely disparages *The Castelfranco Altarpiece*, referring to the fact it has been “terribly repainted” meaning “we can no longer see, but only guess at, the original harmony of the colours”. *The Tempest* is listed with reference to its recent sale, while Morelli notes for *The Three Philosophers* the “unsatisfactory state of preservation”.¹ Instead of offering his reader a close visual analysis, Morelli moves on to acknowledging the disappearance of the exterior frescoes. This is followed by a lengthy reattribution of the Pitti *Concert* (Fig.A12) to the young Titian, and a reiteration with specific examples of the pan-giorgionesque problematic. With another regional emphasis he argues that Vasari’s contention that Giorgione learnt the *maniera moderna* by imitating Leonardo was “municipal vanity”, before asking: “Where, we may well ask, should Giorgione at that date have seen pictures by Leonardo at Venice?” This question is left unanswered, and instead Morelli goes on to place Giorgione in relation to Giovanni Bellini. Finally, before discussing the pictures, Morelli devotes a long section to characterising the artist. He writes of Giorgione’s “poetic feeling” [*hochpoetischer Geist*] and his personality, “simple, unconventional, and refined” [*einfache, unbefangene, feine Künstlernatur*]; these are *expressed* in his works and found in Vasari.²

Morelli’s study appears to be highly structured: “I shall now enumerate in chronological order those works which I believe to be by Giorgione”. The paintings attributed are numbered and discussed at different lengths, ranging from one sentence for *The Tempest*, to nearly a whole page for a single portrait. As with Crowe and Cavalcaselle, the sequence begins with the two Uffizi panels, *The Trial of Moses* and *The Judgement of Solomon* (Figs.A23, A24). Morelli suggests these “may have been painted in Giorgione’s sixteenth or eighteenth year” and should be linked to Bellini’s *Sacred Allegory* (Fig.A31), concluding that Giorgione “must

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.209-211; 1891, p.273-275

² *Ibid*, 1893, pp.213-214; 1891, pp.278-279

have drawn inspiration” from it, implying significantly “the new tendency in Venetian painting [...] emanated from Bellini”. Importantly, it is from these two images that Morelli describes Giorgione’s characteristic details.

The next picture is the “much-damaged half-length figure” *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Fig.A41). Morelli observes that “the glance of the eyes is remarkably keen” and that like the Uffizi panels, it recalls Bellini. This time *The Castelfranco Altarpiece* is dated specifically “between 1504 and 1505, prior to the execution of his frescoes on the Fondaco de’ Tedeschi”, and a comparison is drawn to one of Morelli’s new Giorgione attributions. In *The Tempest’s* one sentence, the first clause is a translation of Michiel’s description, the second its current location, both stated earlier. A new attribution, the *Madonna and Child with Saints* (Fig.A42) is placed next, Morelli mentioning the good condition, the gallery’s attribution to Pordenone, and Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s to Francesco Vecellio. Morelli then writes: “I must confess that it was no small satisfaction to me to have at once recognised in this masterpiece of Venetian art the hand and the feeling of Giorgione”.

Following this comes *The Knight of Malta* (Fig.A32) “which though much damaged is undoubtedly genuine”. Although there is no analysis, Morelli does say that any attribution to Pietro della Vecchia is “positive heresy” [*eine wahre Häresie*]. Next we have another apparently new attribution, the *Apollo and Daphne* (Fig.A38), which Morelli connects to the claim that Giorgione painted *cassoni* with Ovidian subject matter. There is a remark about the state of preservation, and a footnote on Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s attribution to Andrea Schiavone, but again there is no visual analysis. An interesting attribution is *The Three Ages of Man* (Fig.A43), where Morelli argues that the head of the boy “half in shade” is “so

splendid and so thoroughly Giorgionesque, that I have no need of further proof of the authorship of the picture”.¹

Next in sequence is the *Concert Champêtre* (Fig.A1); the damage by restoration is mentioned, and it is compared with Titian’s frescoes in Scuola del Santo, Padua (Fig.R15), Morelli arguing that one of Giorgione’s foreground figures was copied by Titian. The final painting to be numbered is a fragment in Budapest, *The Birth of Paris* (Fig.A44), which Morelli connected with “el nacimiento de Paris” that Michiel saw in the Contarini collection in 1525.² There is a comparatively long visual description, mentioning the fifteenth-century Venetian costumes, the narrative gestures, the light, and the landscape, which is compared to the Dresden *Venus*.

With the next painting in Budapest, the *Portrait of a Young Man* (Fig.A45), again there is a long description of the costume, the pose, moving into an evocation of the visual experience. Morelli concludes that it is too damaged, that he could not see Giorgione in the technique, and that he therefore prefers not to include the portrait in his list of genuine works.³ Why then did Morelli create such a compelling ekphrasis? This is just one of many uncertainties. In 1880, the next painting is *The Three Philosophers* (Fig.A4), where Morelli again references Michiel, which provides an opportunity to mention the “Venus” from the *Notizia*. In 1891 however, before the *Philosophers*, Morelli adds a new section: “My own studies now enable me to add a few more to the twelve pictures by Giorgione already mentioned”; twelve pictures which therefore included the *Portrait of a Young Man*.

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.214-217; 1891, pp.280-283

² Pignatti, 1971, p.166

³ Morelli, 1893, pp.217-218; 1891, pp.283-285

The first of these new pictures is the “mysterious” *Portrait of a Lady* (Fig.A46) which Morelli had already discussed in the Borghese study. The next addition is the *Nymph and Satyr* (Fig.A30), which is described as “an early work”, the attribution justified by reference to the forehead, the hair, the eyes and the hand.¹ After this Morelli evocatively described the Berlin *Portrait of a Young Man* (Fig.A47), with reference to its recent acquisition by Richter. The Hampton Court *Shepherd Boy with a Flute* (Fig.A48) is considered an attribution “not without reason” [*nicht mit Unrecht*]; however, Morelli explains that he saw the picture in a bad light and cannot be certain of its authenticity. Again, Morelli did not commit to a positive attribution of the *Judith* (Fig.A49), writing that it was attributed by another connoisseur, that judging from a photograph he would agree, but that “it remains to be seen whether this picture be an original or merely an old copy”.²

At this point Morelli begins the attribution of *Venus*, moving from Michiel’s mention of *The Three Philosophers* to the “Venere nuda, che dorme in un paese” in the Marcello collection. This is interrupted, however, by the disattribution of *The Dead Christ* (Fig.A11).³ In another digression Morelli discusses his incomprehension that critics should have failed to notice the *Venus*, and his intense disappointment that the art world does not understand Giorgione. This is followed by a brief laudatory description and a comment on the canvas’ current condition. Morelli then moves into an aesthetic comparison with nudes by Botticelli, Correggio, and Titian, before offering a justification for the attribution by explaining the provenance. In 1880 there was a footnote giving a visual analysis of characteristic details, although this was cut in 1891. Another change is that in 1880 the main body of the text included an expression of surprise that Crowe and Cavalcaselle accept the gallery’s attribution to Sassoferrato, while in

¹ This painting was disattributed by Crowe and Cavalcaselle, and is now accepted as being an early work by Dosso Dossi; the attribution to Giorgione dates back to 1861 – Humfrey and Lucco, 1998, p.84

² Morelli, 1893, pp.218-219; 1891, pp.285-286

³ *Ibid*, 1893, pp.219-220; 1891, pp.286-287

1891 this is relegated to a footnote. Finally, the attribution has two different endings. In 1880 a challenge was posed for the art world to decide between Morelli's and Crowe and Cavalcaselle's attributions; in 1891 Morelli commented on his satisfaction that the picture has been "accepted as an undoubted original", not only by the director of the gallery, "but by the majority of art-critics in Europe".

After his Giorgione catalogue, Morelli makes a distinction, with a political edge, between those paintings which remain in Italy and those abroad, listing the eight attributions that could be seen in foreign galleries. After this he states: "The sum total of his works is therefore, barely nineteen".¹ Moving on to "the numerous sketches and drawings so gratuitously ascribed to him", Morelli concluded that only three or four are genuine: *The Beheading of a Saint* (Fig.A50); *Landscape with Two Men Sitting near a Coppice* (Fig.A51); and two landscapes, one in the His de la Salle collection, the other in the Albertina, Vienna. There are no arguments given for these attributions. Instead, Morelli considers the possibility that the last is by Domenico Campagnola (c1500-1564), writing that nearly all the drawings in the Uffizi attributed to Giorgione are, in his opinion, by Campagnola.²

Regarding Morelli's Giorgione, Hope argues that the pictures display no consistent style, and concludes that the connoisseur does not seem to have used Morellian method "as it is commonly understood today".³ However, as was said at the Morelli conference in 1989, there is no critical consensus on the definition or application of "Morellian" method.⁴ The source of this confusion is the text itself, since *Italian Painters*, complex and often contradictory as it is, presents the method in various and conflicting ways. I argue that Morelli's method is

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.221-225; 1891, pp.287-292

² *Ibid.*, 1893, p.225; 1891, pp.287-292

³ Hope, 2004, p.50

⁴ Ferino-Pagden, 1993, p.340

surprisingly similar to Pater's. The aim of the method is not attribution (this is a by-product), but establishing a relationship between the critic and the artist. Both Morelli and Pater combine idealist and positivist methods, basing their work on the observation of isolated details, like fingernails or eyelids; in this way, both make steps towards a formalist conception of expression.

The Unreliable Author: Ivan Lermolieff

As many writers on Morelli have done before, I have been treating the texts as if they were Morelli's own words. In reality, however, *Italian Painters* is written in character and, with the addition of "Principles and Method", forms a narrative. In his articles of the 1870s Morelli published under the Russian pseudonym Ivan Lermolieff. This signals the start of the problems. Scholars have found it hard to accept Morelli's blunt tone, dramatisation of discourse, and combative anti-academic stance, acknowledging this as being a cause of the initial interest in Morelli's work, but never engaging with it directly. It seems enough to mention "una certa corsività di tono che talora è sul punto di degenerare nel volgare" which earned Morelli his reputation of the "enfant terrible".¹

Layard addresses these issues in his introduction to the 1890s English translations, writing of how Morelli "adopted, it is true, a bantering and somewhat sarcastic tone in his criticisms on his opponents, calculated to cause offence, and this is, perhaps, to be regretted". This "banter and irony" were, however, "consistent with his assumed character of an ignorant Russian". Layard tells the reader that Morelli's "love of fun and his delight in mystifying pretentious

¹ D'Angelo, pp.8, 27

pedants” caused him to assume the character of Lermolieff, and so “with much humour, and sometimes, it must be admitted, with cutting, and perhaps needless, sarcasm, exposes the ignorance of those who pretend to be infallible”.¹ There are though, I will argue, more complicated reasons for this. The use of fictionalisation and narrative, the act of publishing under a pseudonym and writing in character (structural defamiliarisation), within the context of connoisseurship, suggests that *irony* was an active concept in Morelli’s thinking. While some commentators have briefly discussed his use of satire and irony,² the ethical and intellectual implications of his deviant rhetorical strategies have not been explored.

Schlosser describes Morelli as lively and sarcastic: an angry wasp.³ But is the wasp Morelli or is it Lermolieff? In the two volumes of *Italian Painters* we find a developed character placed in a narrative that blends fact and fiction, because Morelli’s publishing career becomes Lermolieff’s. Morelli, or rather Lermolieff, explains in the preface that the reason he has written “Principles and Method” is “to give my fellow-students an account of the curious circumstance which first led me to become an art-critic”.⁴ This story sees Lermolieff travel through France and Germany, becoming disillusioned with art history along the way, as we discover through a conversation in a Florentine gallery with “an Italian of the better class” [*gebildetern Stande*], the inventor of the famous method.⁵ In their dialogue they express their mutual contempt for art literature, expound many “Morellian” principles, and the Italian demonstrates his method of attribution. After this initial stay in Italy, the Russian returns home and revisits paintings he had known since youth, pictures attributed to a great artist. However, once he had applied the method they become something “positively absurd”

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.[2], [28]

² Zerner, 1978, p.211; Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.200-202

³ Qtd. in Anderson, 1993, p.90

⁴ Morelli, 1892, pp.[42-43]; 1890, pp.vi-vii

⁵ *Ibid*, 1892, p.1; 1890, p.1

[*lächerlich*].¹ These experiences encourage Lermolieff to become a connoisseur. In the final passage, after returning to Italy and failing to rediscover his mentor, he tells his reader he has spent several years studying before finally deciding to offer his results for the benefit of students in Russia. This narrative blends with reality as the retrospective comments throughout *Italian Painters* look back on the controversy surrounding Morelli's initial publications. However, the voice that reflects, criticises and judges is always to some unknown degree a fictional voice.

The English editors were clearly uncomfortable and after Morelli's death published *Italian Painters* with his name on the title page, whereas in the German editions only Lermolieff's appears. The first time Morelli's real name appeared on his connoisseurship was the 1883 English edition of the German galleries book, which in the 1886 Italian translation reverted to accrediting only Lermolieff with its authorship.² Scholars have followed Layard in trying to explain or excuse the use of a pseudonym, attempting to treat the text as a stable entity. It has often been said that the use of Lermolieff was a political expedient allowing Morelli to publish controversial papers despite being a respected politician.³ However, the question remains: why did Morelli persist in publishing under a pseudonym to the end? I would like to suggest that the motive was more than just a desire for controversy or, conversely, anonymity, and that this ironic mode reflects back as a comment on connoisseurship itself.

What has not been considered are the rhetorical and intellectual reasons for this use of a pseudonym, or the repercussions of writing in character. Morelli is an author who seemingly loves to irritate, annoy, and confuse, who is at the centre of the text, yet effaces himself; this

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.60; 1890, p.75

² D'Angelo, 1993, p.19

³ For this debate see Zerner, 1978, p.211; Anderson notes the connoisseurial precedent in Théophile Thoré (1807–1869) – Anderson, 1999, p.33; and for counter-arguments, see Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.200-202

has ethical implications for the reader. In the preface to the first volume of *Italian Painters* we read: “The entire responsibility for the opinions expressed, however, lies with me” [*auf mich falle*]. But who says this? Who is this “me”? The same question applies when we are told that new attributions will be marked with a cross “in order that the student may always know with whom he has to deal”.¹ The two prefaces are both signed: *Ivan Lermolieff. Gorlaw: October 1889 and December 1890*. “Me” is undeniably Lermolieff, and therefore it is he with whom the student (and the historiographer) has to deal. Treating the text of *Italian Painters* as if it was a sincere expression of Morelli’s own ideas, in his own words, is wrong. This duplicity is troubling. Interpretations of Morelli that fail to resolve these issues therefore contain within themselves the possibility of contradiction. The question is: Where can you draw the line? How do you separate Lermolieff, competition and rhetoric, from Morelli and his contribution to connoisseurship?

Gibson-Wood argues that Morelli’s “statements on art often seem vague or inconsistent”; that there are “inconsistencies and contradictions in his thought”.² However, the structure Morelli uses involves a destabilising foundation which inevitably spreads out to infect a reading of the whole text as fundamentally uncertain. I would like to consider the possibility that these contradictions and inconsistencies were intentional, designed to challenge authority and allow for a blend of “science” and subjectivity.

The central irony of *Italian Painters* is tangible. From the first pages the text adopts a position against the historiography of art: “Books are apt to warp a man’s judgement” [*Ueber den Büchern verliert der Mensch fast immer sich selbst*].³ Anderson has argued that “Morelli was genuinely ahistorical in his art writings, and his works were intended to be about the

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.[43]; 1890, p.vii

² Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.211, 223

³ Morelli, 1890, p.21; 1892, p.18

centrality of looking.”¹ *Italian Painters* is a text which is anti-text. The contradictions and uncertainties are resolved when we see Morelli’s irony function as a satire of the literature of art, a rhetoric that subverts discourse in order to affirm the primacy of visual experience. There is however a problem; Morelli was read as literally proposing a “new” method and “new” language for art history; in this way he had a dramatic influence on the development of the discipline. Nevertheless, this was only an interpretation; instead, a close reading shows a habitual duplicity.

Irony exploits the gap between “a reality and an appearance”,² between a superficial, literal reading and the hidden, “intended” meaning of a text. Theoretical definitions often begin with classical irony: a rhetorical figure or “deceptive use of language”, simply saying the opposite of what is intended. They may then progress to the useful but complex tripartite division proposed by Wilde: *mediate irony*, primarily satiric, aiming at a world “lapsed from a recoverable norm”; *disjunctive irony*, one that “strives towards a condition of paradox”; and *suspensive irony*, one that promotes a fundamentally ambiguous view of the world, a “vision of multiplicity, randomness, contingency, and even absurdity”.³ We must also be aware that irony is “something very threatening, against which interpreters of literature, who have a stake in the understanding of literature, would want to put themselves on their guard”.⁴ Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), one of the most influential irony theorists, argued that “Irony is a disciplinarian”.⁵ The question for the interpreter of *Italian Painters* is: what lesson are we being taught?

¹ Anderson, 1996, p.117

² Meucke, 1982, p.33

³ *Ibid.*, p.8-22; Wilde, 1981, p.10

⁴ de Man, 1996, p.167

⁵ Qtd. in Gilroy, 1989, p.ix

Morellian irony is achieved by fictionalisation, or rather “defamiliarisation”, meaning no statement is not characterised and therefore conditional. Theorists refer to the space between authorial intention and literal meaning as *distance*, and Morelli creates distance by writing as Lermolieff. It is the extent of this distance that must be assessed. Kierkegaard wrote under pseudonyms, though carrying more obviously comic intent than Morelli’s. The Danish philosopher became “Hilarius Bookbinder” or “Anti-Climacus”, and although he did finally admit his authorship, he complicated the issue by claiming he was merely “a collaborator who has helped the pseudonyms to become authors”.¹ This distance can be so vast that, as Barthes says of the novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), “one never knows if he is responsible for what he writes”.² Although with Morelli the gap does not seem to be so immeasurable, irony still functions as it should, to allow the author “to say dreadful things”, which they may do because they are said by “means of aesthetic devices, achieving a distance, a playful aesthetic distance, in relation to what is being said”.³

Reading Morelli in this way raises a lot of questions. How to judge the author of the strange, intricate, contradictory *Italian Painters*? How should we interpret the intentionally antagonistic design, or the digressive and tangential structure? How to explain the incessant intertextual competition, and a connoisseur who takes alternative attributions as personal provocation? An author who ostracises his audience, appealing instead to an ideal reader as an attempt to undermine authority? What about Morelli’s claims of objectivity, compared to his obvious value judgements? What about the method which eludes definition, being both an inductive procedure, yet deeply aesthetic process? Ultimately, how do we measure this “new” Giorgione against Morelli’s standard of “more or less scientific certainty” [*mehr oder minder*

¹ Kierkegaard, 2001, p.2

² Hutcheon, 1994, p.120

³ de Man, 1996, p.169

wissenschaftlicher Sicherheit]?¹ While Morelli's ironic stance does not allow for a definitive answer to these questions, I do intend to offer an interpretation of how Morelli *used* Giorgione, concentrating primarily on the texts themselves.

One issue which arises from examining the English edition of Morelli's late work is translation. As we know, his editor Layard was unhappy about Morelli's aggression and satire.² It is no surprise, therefore, that a comparison between the German and English versions of the text reveals multiple changes. While it is known that Layard and Morelli agreed to remove much of the polemic content regarding German art history,³ many of the changes were also stylistic or rhetorical. For instance, when Morelli disattributes the five paintings given to Giorgione in Dresden, he makes no changes between the 1880 and 1891 editions, despite the fact that his attributions by this time had been accepted. In the Layard version, however, "Morelli" writes that he is "glad to see" that the present director agrees with him.⁴ Again, compared to the 1880 and 1891 editions, with the English text of the attribution of the Budapest *Portrait of a Young Man* (Fig.A45), "Morelli" ends on a long, conciliatory passage concluding that he "must leave the final decision of the point to others" as opposed to Lermolieff's ambiguity.⁵ Finally, in English the "comic style" has been edited, the language seeming therefore less adorned and more "scientific". This can be seen in the concluding sentence to Morelli's Giorgione. In English it is the very simple: "The sum total of his works is therefore, barely nineteen". In German it contains the additional clause "*eine allerding's magere Ernte!*"⁶ Nevertheless, following the English text is revealing, highlighting the problems Layard had with Morelli's writing. Also I would argue, since Layard was not

¹ Morelli, 1890, p.89; 1892, p.71

² Morelli, 1892, p.[28]

³ Anderson, 1987a, p.125

⁴ Morelli, 1880, pp.179-180; 1891, p.270; 1893, p.206

⁵ Morelli, 1891, p.285; 1893, p.218

⁶ *Ibid*, 1891, p.225; 1893, p.292

interpreting the text as fundamentally uncertain, he did not remove the contradictions, conditions, and digressions that have made *Italian Painters* consistently problematic.

I want to explore this way of thinking about Morelli, considering his “new” Giorgione through an examination of his method, rhetoric, relationship with Crowe and Cavalcaselle, and finally, with an analysis of his use of irony. From this I will argue that doubt is central to the structure of *Italian Painters*, and therefore Morelli’s Giorgione is intrinsically uncertain.

Morellian Method: An Idealist Science

A major problem with discussing Morellian method is that, within *Italian Painters*, different artists are treated in various ways. This might lead to the view that there can be no one definition of the method; however, I will argue that Giorgione is an exemplary case of Morellian connoisseurship.

The double nature of Morelli's enquiry can be heard in his appeal to the reader: "Giorgione is an artist with whom every student should hold daily intercourse [*taglich ins Gesicht schauen*], in order by degrees to gain a more intimate knowledge of the forms and feelings [*den Geist und die Formen*] of this most refined of all Venetian painters".¹ In "Principles and Method", previous scholarship is characterised as superficial: "As a matter-of-fact, all art-historians, from Vasari down to our own day, have made use of only two tests to aid them in deciding the authorship of a work of art – intuition, or the so-called general impression, and documentary; with what result you have seen for yourself."² Instead, Morelli is interested in the *Geist* and *Formen* or the *spirit/mind* and *forms* of the artist. As he writes in his 1880 book, the attributions are "established on spiritual and material grounds".³

A recent contribution to the debate on Morellian method discusses the ideological foundations of scientific connoisseurship. Traditionally, the development of art history through the second half of the nineteenth century has been understood as the supplanting of the nationalist and political *Kunstgeschichte* with Morelli's *Kunstwissenschaft*, a formalist

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.214; 1891, p.279

² *Ibid.*, 1893, p.21; 1891, p.26

³ Morelli, 1883, p.209; 1880, p.243

and objective art science. Conversely, Griener argues for their interrelation.¹ I argue that Morellian method, at a fundamentally methodological level, should be understood through the traditions which it defines itself against. While Morelli may not offer his reader a cultural history, he brings scientific methods to the idealist study of art.

Carrier has connected Morelli to Pater through their synecdochic rhetoric.² Both writers attempt to establish a relationship with the artist by isolating visual details and giving them value as expressions of the *spirit* of the artist. Having established this relationship, Morelli can make attributions, while Pater can discuss the nature of authorship. Both critics were influenced by positivism and both based their work on the primacy of sense perceptions. However, Morelli's idealism is rarely acknowledged, and if *Geist* is included, it is understood as psychology, allowing for anachronistic analogies to psychoanalysis. This preserves Morelli's scientific reputation, but the content of *Italian Painters* suggests that a comparison with Pater's aestheticism is more appropriate.

Morelli's method was caricatured by his contemporaries as crude and mechanical, a trick by which the gallery-going-public could reattribute any picture.³ Yet from a close reading of *Italian Painters* a very different picture emerges:

As in the human eye we discriminate between long and short sight, so among those who study art we find that there are some who have eyes to see, and others whom the most powerful of glasses would not benefit in the slightest degree, because there are practically two types of sight – physical and mental. The first is that of the public at large, and writers on art have at all times traded on the boundless credulity of this class; the second belongs to a very few intelligent and unprejudiced artists and

¹ Griener, 2004 pp.47-48

² Carrier, 1991, p.132

³ Ginzburg, 1980 pp.8-9; Bode, 1891, p.509

students of art [*Kunstfreunde*]. Endowed with natural capacity, it is the privilege of the latter, after long and careful study, to discern in the features, in the form and movement of the hand, in the pose of the figure – in short, in the whole outward frame – the deeper qualities of the mind; [*kurz in der menschlichen Gestalt geistige Beziehungen wahrzunehmen*]¹

Here Morelli has said that critics who have “mental” sight can perceive the spirit/mind of the artist through visual representation of the body. It is in this context that we must consider Morelli’s Giorgione; the reason the connoisseur does not seem to have used Morellian method as it is commonly understood is that the method is much more complicated than positive identifications. Instead, the key to explaining Morelli’s Giorgione is *Geist*.

The Theory of Morellian Method

Pope-Hennessy, after expressing ambivalence about speaking at the 1989 conference on Morelli, drew the conclusion from “Principles and Method” that “più importante del metodo sono i principi”.² Significant Morellian principles include correct attribution, rigorous and systematic study, regional and historical organisation of galleries; while the characters in Morelli’s dialogues express various opinions on art history, connoisseurship, and the art world. Although these “principles” provide a context for the reception of Morelli’s attributions, the foundation of the method itself is “doubt and uncertainty”

I maintain, therefore, and could support my assertion with any amount of evidence, that, so long as we trust the general impression for identifying a work of art, instead of seeking the surer testimony of the forms peculiar to each great master with which

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.[44-45]; 1890, p.ix

² Pope-Hennessy, 1993, pp.17, 20

observation and experience have made us familiar, we shall continue in the same atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty, and the foundations of the history of art will be built as heretofore on shifting sands.¹

Here we have not only a brief definition of the method, but also a claim for its epistemological significance. The method is opposed to the *general impression* [*Totaleindruck*], being based on *observation* [*Beobachtung*] and *experience* [*Erfahrung*], which can be understood as repeated exposure to characteristic details. This may seem complete, if condensed, but a close reading shows the origins of the problems of definition. First, *forms* [*Formen*] are nonspecific and could in theory designate any visual element; also, they are characteristic only in *great* [*grossen*] painters, implying a quality judgement in the method's application. Second, although the method is defined as an opposition between *observation* and *impression*, these are both semantic variants of perception, and suggest different discourses. The former denotes an activity, *observations* are measurable, scientific; the latter is a superficial consideration, *impressions* being vaguely epistemological, as in Pater's aestheticism.

Should this method be described as an *open* or *closed* system? Was it a process depending solely on the observation and comparison of anatomical details and therefore *closed*, or, an *open* investigation allowing for arguments based on a variety of evidence? What is the status of the visual observations; are they considered as objective facts with positive value, or simply subjective? How can we account for the provisos Morelli places on the method? Given that the text was developed over a period of time, the problems of definition may result from Morelli's changing attitudes. However, *Italian Painters* was his final statement, and therefore I would argue, there is something intentional in this lack of resolution.

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.20; 1890, p.24

At points Morelli did present the method as a closed-system, using diagrams (Fig.R16) and arguing that his observations were “indisputable and practical facts, accessible to every observer, [*sinnlich wahrnehmbare, jedem sehenden Auge zugängliche Thatsachen zurückgeführt werden*] and are not merely subjective and aesthetic, dependent upon individual impressions”.¹ The closed-system, what Morelli calls his “usual method” [*materialistischen Methode*], is explained in these terms: “first particularise those characteristic signs which distinguish the paintings and drawings of this master from those of other contemporary Milanese artists”.² The operative words in this formulation are *particularise* [*unterscheiden*], which is the action of connoisseur, and *signs* [*Zeichen*], being the observation’s value as indications of authorship.

Even in his late work, Morelli continued to defend the closed-system position: “I must reiterate here that the *typical form* [*Grundform*] of hand and ear peculiar to each of the great masters is not only to be found in all their pictures, but even in their portraits”.³ His often quoted self-description (or more properly Lermolieff’s of the old Italian), also suggests a closed-system: “This matter-of-fact way [*unästhetische Art*] of identifying works of art by the help of such external signs savoured more of an anatomist [*Natur-*], I thought, than of a student of art, and was moreover entirely opposed to the usually accepted method”.⁴ The translator’s use of the idiomatic “matter-of-fact” suggests an inductive process; however, Morelli’s emphasis is on the opposition between *aesthetic* and *scientific*. Strangely, in “Principles and Method”, the old Italian talks of “the pure delight which real knowledge [*Wissen dem Menschen*] has to offer”; he therefore suggests the method is a “synthesis” of

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.10; 1891, p.16

² Morelli, 1892, pp.191-192; 1890, pp.247-248

³ *Ibid*, 1892, p.77, n.4; 1890, p.99, n.1

⁴ *Ibid*, 1892, pp.35-36; 1890, p.43

material and spiritual, but that “such refinement of perception is not to be expected of the multitude”.¹

At other points Morelli presents his method as necessarily open and subjective; in “Principles and Methods” the old Italian criticises art historians’ preference for abstraction over observation, claiming: “It is no easy matter, I admit, to see form correctly [*die Form richtig zu erfassen und zu sehen*] – I might almost say to feel it right [*richtig zu fühlen*]”.² Morelli never confined himself to anatomical comparisons, nor does he argue that any detail is more characteristic than any other. Instead, he makes his method conditional by providing provisos that restrict its appropriate application. The most important is that the method is only valid for “true artists” [*wirkliche Künstler*], as opposed to “imitators” [*Nachahmer*], who do not have “a characteristic and independent mode of conception and expression” [*eine besondere Art der Auffassung und des Ausdrucks (Stil) besitzen*].³ Quality is therefore crucial; Morellian method distinguishes between master and pupil, separating “an original from a good work of the school”.⁴

Another proviso restricts the method to early and high Renaissance painters. The old Italian argues that this is because in *quattrocento* and early *cinquecento* artists “the bones and muscles are less hidden by the flesh” meaning the characteristic forms of hand are more apparent.⁵ However, Lermolieff offers a contradictory basis for this proviso, appealing to *spirit* or “individuality”:

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.8; 1890, p.10; for an exemplary “closed-system” analysis, see the treatment of Bacchiacca – *Ibid.*, 1892, pp.104-107; 1890, pp.131-135

² *Ibid.*, 1892, p.23; 1890, p.28

³ Morelli, 1893, p.3; 1891, p.5

⁴ Morelli, 1892, pp.72-73

⁵ Morelli, 1890, p.42; 1892, pp.34-35; Anderson, 2000, p.18

In the declining period of art in Italy, shortly after the death of Raphael, the painter lost all individuality [*Charakter des Künstlers*]; hence the forms, which are the expression of character [*geistigen Personalität des Künstlers*], cease to be distinctive. We have, therefore, nothing to guide us in recognising his work but the general impression and certain external and accidental signs. These mannerisms, which are like flourishes in calligraphy [*diese äusserlichen Merkmale, diese kalligraphischen Zeichen oder Schnörkel*], are however, very untrustworthy guides [*trügerisch*], and of small value [*höchst problematischen Werth*] in identifying pictures.¹

Instead of a change in the technique of representation, the explanation is a traditional value-narrative of Italian painting. For Lermolieff, *Formen* support attributions because they express “character”; the problem is therefore the superficiality of mannerist expression. The importance of *Geist* in his attributions can be seen when Morelli disattributes a Botticelli because although the hands are “of the master’s typical form”, they appear “absolutely lifeless, and the hair is treated without intelligence [*ohne Geist*]”.²

Scientific Connoisseurship

Another central question is whether Morellian method was, or was not, “scientific”? Should it be understood as a rhetorical variation of traditional practice, or something genuinely original? Despite having been studied for over a century, these questions have still not found satisfactory answers. One recent article that summarises the range of responses during the past forty years can only conclude that “the method was not altogether new”, but Morelli gave his connoisseurship “a more scientific twist”.³ Although it could be argued that this “twist” is rhetorical, Morelli did inspire his followers with a scientific attitude, a belief in

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.4, n.1; 1891, p.7, n.1

² Morelli, 1892, p.83; 1890, p.106

³ Vakkari, 2001, p.52

systematic and practical methods. Scientific principles appear to be put into practice with his Giorgione, Morelli enumerating attributions, listing characteristic details, and founding his treatment on “a close and careful study”. However, the structure is confusing, the argumentation variable, while the text is also persistently digressive.

In the opening passages of the Munich study Morelli questions his friend and fellow connoisseur Müндler, asking why “with his fine perception and passion for art” he occasionally made “such palpable mistakes?” The answer given is that “he pursued no method in his studies”. Again Morelli underlines the importance of science, explaining that:

...even the most highly gifted and accomplished connoisseur will never attain to certainty of judgement without a definite system of study [*ohne Methode*], and this, I believe, must be the so-called “experimental method” which, from the time of Leonardo da Vinci, of Galileo, and of Bacon, to that of Volta and Darwin, has led to the most splendid discoveries. In the history of art it can, of course, only be regarded as a means to assist [*Hilfsmittel*] in identifying the author of a picture.¹

A source for this appeal to scientific method and the connection to Bacon and Galileo, I would suggest, is the introduction to experimental chemistry by Justus von Liebig (1802-1873): *Ueber das Studium der Naturwissenschaft* (1852). In fact, I feel this was a key source for Morelli’s rhetoric of science in connoisseurial discourse, as will be highlighted. Liebig also cites the “außerordentlichen Fortschritte” produced by experimental method, claiming “wir Franz Bacon und Galiläi verdanken”.² However, Morelli’s final sentence places a proviso on the relationship between connoisseurship and the “experimental method”. Therefore, although aligning himself with Baconian induction and Galilean experiment, this is a difficult analogy to sustain. It might be possible to compare Morelli with Bacon in the

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.1-2; 1891, pp.3-4; 1880, pp.1-2

² Liebig, 1852, p.12

listing of “forms”, or with Galileo in the use of dialogue, but beyond this his writing undermines these associations.

The interpretation of Morelli as the “inventor of scientific connoisseurship” can be read in the contemporary English reviews of *Italian Painters*. The author is described as “the father of what must be termed the *analytical* or *scientific* criticism of the arts of design,” and the method as a “system of criticism” based on “analysis of the picture itself, as minute as that of the naturalist”.¹ However, Morelli’s adversaries mocked what they saw as his mechanical positivism and the naivety of his diagrams, while there has always been the suspicion that this was a calculated rhetorical strategy.² In the prefaces to *Italian Painter* Morelli responds to criticisms against him; however, this creates uncertainty about the method’s status as scientific. Answering the claim that his connoisseurship “cannot yet claim to be called a science” Morelli writes:

Now let me ask any unprejudiced reader [*aufrichtigen Kunstfreund, der ohne vorgefasste Meinungen*], who may have glanced at my unpretending writings [*unschuldigen Schriften*], whether on one single page of my ‘Critical Studies’ I have ever claimed for them the rank of a scientific treatise? [*für Wissenschaft ausgegeben habe?*] To have done so would have been simply ludicrous on my part. [*Ich glaube im Gegentheil... die ja meinerseits nur lächerlich wäre*]³

The English version is of course true, *Italian Painters* never literally claims to be “a scientific treatise”; the German version, however, is much more troubling. Morelli’s studies are literally *not* “science”, and he claims to believe the opposite. This negates Morelli’s appeal to certainty and definite systems of study, the English modification being intended to lessen this

¹ *The Edinburgh Review*, 1892, pp.330-331

² Friedländer, 1942, p.167

³ Morelli, 1893, p.[10]; 1891, pp.x-xi

stark contradiction. The final sentence edits the long passage from the German which protests against this impertinence [*Zumuthung*]. Morelli continues that:

...the experimental method was only to be regarded as an aid to determining the authors of works of art – an aid, that is, to connoisseurship – and that in time it may come to serve as a more solid foundation for that science of art-criticism which we all alike to desire to see established.¹

In his early work Morelli does not regard his method as an “aid”, or merely “a more solid foundation”, but a new way to attribute pictures with “*mehr oder minder wissenschaftlicher Sicherheit*”.² However, even this is phrased paradoxically, and I would argue that Morelli is not sincere about his “scientificness”; his writings are not “innocent” [*unschuldigen*].

How then did Morelli understand “science” and “scientific”? The closest we come to such a definition is: “Observation and experience [...] are the foundation of every science”.³ The openness of this classification could conceivably include all previous connoisseurial practice, yet Morelli implies an interpretation in which *observation* combined with *experience* brings objectivity, placing this in opposition to the subjectivity of *impression*. This is in line with the popular view of science in nineteenth-century Germany; the popularisation of methods based on “observation” can be seen in Liebig’s discussion of “die Kunst der Beobachtung”.⁴

Rather than being new and scientific, it has been argued that Morellian connoisseurship reformulated the practice of Rumohr, and following him Crowe and Cavalcaselle. Rumohr and Mündler were Morelli’s early influences, his method essentially being the observation of

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.[10]; 1891, p.xi

² Morelli, 1874, p.6

³ Morelli, 1892, p.11; 1890, p.13

⁴ Schirmacher, 1996, p.ix; Liebig, 1852, p.17

securely attributed works and their comparison with works not securely attributed.¹ However, within *Italian Painters* the source of methodological inspiration is the French naturalist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873). Morelli quotes Agassiz in a footnote:

...*observation* and *comparison* being, in his opinion, the intellectual tools, most indispensable [*les qualités fondamentales*] to the naturalist (and, I may add, to the art-connoisseur also). His first lesson was one in *looking*. [*il commençait par enseigner à ses élèves à bien voir;*]²

This reinforces the inclusive definition of science, one that could describe Rumohr's and Cavalcaselle's methods. However, Morelli does not choose to emphasise his consistency with other connoisseurs, but promotes interdisciplinary study. Anderson, discussing Morelli's scientific development, especially his education in comparative anatomy at Munich and Bonn, emphasises the zoologist Georges Cuvier's (1769-1832) "principle of correlation of parts" and argues that this was the basis of his visual method.³ While Morelli makes use of this early education, the openness of "science" as "observation" allows for connections to Cuvier and Rumohr; Morellian methods can therefore be read as *either* a new science, *or* a rhetorical variation.

Anderson has argued that Morelli's notebooks of the early 1860s show the early formulation of his scientific practice, the terse entries – "le sue mani grasse, le bocche diseguate con precisione a controni taglienti" – being a product of his education and show a practical application of the method.⁴ This scientific interpretation is supported by the diagrams. However, Anderson has shown that some of these were removed from the Borghese study in

¹ Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.173-174

² Morelli, 1892, p.74; 1890, p.94; Anderson has pointed out that Agassiz is himself referencing Ignaz von Döllinger (1770-1841), under whom Morelli studied at Munich.

³ Anderson, 1987b, p.53

⁴ Anderson, 2000, pp.13-26; Anderson, 1987b, p.50

1890. She also cites a letter to Richter (5 February 1889), in which Morelli doubts the diagrams, explaining that the *forms* had to be caricatured to be comprehensible to the public, and that the understanding of *form* is subjective: “Es ist doch eine eigene Art ums Sehen!”¹ From this I would argue that in *Italian Painters* we have both a morphological theory of which the diagrams are an important illustration, and simultaneously, an open and subjective method for which the diagrams are considered reductive. This may be explained by Morelli’s first explanation of the method, where the simple analysis of “forms” found in the 1860s has been conflated with the personality of the artist.

Morelli wrote about the “forms and feelings” of Giorgione, and yet it is still possible to consider the method as scientific: firstly, if we separate material and spiritual; secondly, if we interpret the spiritual method as *Kunstpsychologie*. However, this is a difficult position to maintain; Morelli’s assumptions about spirit/mind are romantic, while he claims they are indistinguishable from his material analysis. This can be seen in the 1874 definition of the method, which materializes from the criticism of a specious attribution to Leonardo by Charles Blanc (1813-1882):

What would M. Blanc have said if I had replied, ‘Mon cher Monsieur Blanc, I too, like you, believe myself to have, if not fathomed, at least studied ‘la tournure, le genie singulièrement complexe,’ of Leonardo to the best of my ability; but in addition to these studies of the master’s personality [*geistigen Persönlichkeit*], which is ever present in a true work of art, and is indeed that which speaks to us out of the painting and touches the heart, in addition to these psychological studies, I repeat, I have never neglected the *procédes*, the *faire*, of the master, being well aware, from long experience, what tricks the imagination is apt to play on us. And because it has been my wont, in my art studies, to give heed to the spirit as well as the form, I believe I

¹ Richter and Richter, 1960, p.546; Anderson, 1999, p.56

may confidently reply: this ‘St Sebastian’ which you extol as a work by Leonardo is, in my opinion, assuredly not the work of the great Florentine.¹

The key to understanding Morellian method is the relationship between *form* and *spirit*. Morelli tells us the *spirit* alone “will help us very little, when we wish to decide the authorship of a work of art with more or less scientific certainty”. Instead, Morelli explains that “I feel daily more and more convinced that it is only through unremitting study of form that one may gradually attain to understanding and recognising the spirit which gives it life”.² The idea of recognising *spirit* in *form* shows that this concept is intimately connected with the process of attribution. Morelli differs from Blanc in his understanding of the *Geist* or *esprit* of the artist: Morelli’s is apparently psychological and expressed in morphology, while Blanc’s flows from an aesthetic appreciation of subject matter.

In the 1892 English translation a section has been cut in which Lermolieff speaks about himself in the third person, disavowing as hubris claims to know “die Seele eines italienischen Künstlers”. This leads to Morelli’s final explanation of the relation of *form* and *spirit*, which is translated; it is equally illuminating and abstruse:

On one point, however, there is not, and cannot be, any longer the slightest doubt in his mind – that in pursuing such studies it is essentially through the medium of ‘form’ that we must penetrate to the spirit, in order, through the spirit, to win our way back to a truer knowledge of ‘form’ itself.³

Morelli immediately writes that this sounds like “a philosophical precept” and so suggests that we should place an idealist interpretation on *Geist* and *Form*. Morelli then offers the clearly ironic comment that “its practical application is by no means so easy as it appears”,

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.69-70; 1874, p.4; 1890, p.88

² *Ibid.*, 1892, p.71; 1874, p.6; 1890, p.90

³ “his” refers to Lermolieff and not Blanc, as it seems in the English version.

and therefore asks the question: “What, for instance, is the ‘form’ in a picture, through which the spirit of a master – ‘l’âme, la tournure de l’esprit’ – finds expression?”¹

Anderson and Zerner both state that Morelli delineates three categories of formal observation.² However, these distinctions are far from concrete, and importantly are understood in relation to *spirit*. The first is a negative assertion phrased as a rhetorical question: “Surely not the pose and movement of the human frame alone, nor the expression, type of countenance, colouring, and treatment of the drapery?” Morelli explains that these “do not constitute the whole form”:

There still remain, for instance, the hand, one of the most expressive and characteristic parts of the human body, the ear, the landscape background if there be any, and the chords, or so-called, harmony of the colour. In the work of a true artist all these several parts of the painting are characteristic and distinctive, and therefore of importance, for only by a thorough acquaintance with them is it possible to penetrate to ‘l’âme, la tournure de l’esprit’ – to the very soul of the master. [*zum Geistes des Schöpfers*]

The first category is therefore defined by *expressiveness*. The second category (an addition in 1890) could encompass the first, being “the character, or style, in a work of art”. This “originates simultaneously with the idea”, and Morelli elaborates “to put it more plainly, it is the artist’s idea which gives birth to the ‘form’ and hence determines the character or style”. Here there is a complicated interaction between the concepts of *idea*, *form*, *spirit* and *expression*, and Lermolieff’s ironic comment shows us that it is neither plain nor practical. Instead, what needs to be acknowledged by critics of Morelli is that he employed the language of idealism.

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.73-74; 1874, p.7-8; 1890, p.93

² Anderson, 2000, p.29; Zerner, pp.212-213

The third category is authentically Morellian and had a genuine impact on the theory of connoisseurship:

As most men, both speakers and writers, make use of habitual modes of expression, favourite words and sayings, which they often employ involuntarily and sometimes even most inappropriately, so almost every painter has his own peculiarities, which escape him without being aware of it. It does even happen that an artist reproduces certain of his own physical defects in his work. Anyone, therefore, intending to study a painter and become more closely acquainted with him, must take into consideration even these material trifles (a student of calligraphy would call them flourishes [*Schnörkel*]), and know how to discover them...¹

It is this passage that has led to Morelli being connected with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and psychoanalysis, even though, as D'Angelo argued, the idea of unconscious expression, as fascinating as it is, was left undeveloped.²

The effect of this inconsistent theoretical presentation, of the intractable relationship between science and aesthetics, can be read in the critical reception of Morellian method. It was the positivist, closed-system interpretation that shaped Morelli's reputation in England. One contemporary review of *Italian Painters* narrates the origins of the method as itself an inductive discovery. When studying Botticelli, Morelli was "suddenly struck" by the idea that "the hands and the ears, whether in young or old, in man or woman, had all the same character". This fact had "not been remarked before", but turning to Filippino Lippi, Morelli saw that the same pattern repeated. The method is presented as self-supporting: "in cases where the application of the test failed, the picture itself proved to be falsely or doubtfully

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.74-75; 1874, p.8; 1890, pp.93-95

² D'Angelo, 1993, p.36

named”. The reviewer echoes the appropriate passages from the text, describing Morelli’s application of “the so-called experimental method which, from the time of Galileo to that of Darwin, has served the ends of science”. Morellian method is presented as a “matter-of-fact form of proof, by which the picture becomes its own interpreter”.¹

Anderson, to maintain this scientific interpretation, argued there was a discrepancy between the actual method and its theoretical presentation, explaining that friends of Morelli claimed it had not received an adequate explanation in his publications.² In Layard’s introduction to *Italian Painters*, the editor offered his own elucidation; Morelli considered decisions on authorship:

...should depend upon scientific analysis, upon an accurate knowledge, derived from long and careful study, of [the painter’s] manner and style, and especially of his delineation of the different parts of the human body [...] In addition, the student should endeavour to associate himself in spirit with the painter to whom he would ascribe a work, and to ascertain whether the mental disposition of the master would have led him thus to treat his subject.³

This neat clarification proposes a definition of “scientific analysis” (rigorous study with a peculiar emphasis on anatomy), while also acknowledging the importance of the individuality of the artist. However, Layard has made a separation between material and spiritual to maintain the scientific view; instead, as we have seen, Morelli argued for the synthesis of *spirit* and *form*. At any rate, elsewhere in the introduction Layard negates the inductive definition by offering examples of “Morelli’s almost intuitive recognition of the author of a painting”.⁴

¹ *Quarterly Review*, 1891, p.242

² Anderson, 2000, p.13

³ Morelli, 1892, pp.[29-30]

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.[8-9]

An important factor in the reception of the method was its subsequent development by Morelli's followers, significantly Bernard Berenson (1865-1959). Pope-Hennessy argued that Berenson's "Rudiments of Connoisseurship" of 1894 "stabilised the whole concept of connoisseurship", while Gibson-Wood suggests that this "systematization" validated yet confused Morelli's legacy.¹ In this early essay Berenson developed a closed-system interpretation, allocating forms a relative value as indicators of authorship.² Much later, in *Three Essays in Method* (1926), after establishing a painting's period and school, Berenson moves to search for exact authorship: "using at this point the Morellian procedure, the best ever perfected for this purpose, namely the reintegration of an artistic personality from internal evidence".³ Here Berenson proposes an open-system, one that aims at establishing a consistent pictorial individual; however, this individuality is a visual construction as opposed to a romantic, idealist *Geist*. Nevertheless, even Berenson, the most successful of Morelli's disciples, doubts his mentor, telling his reader not to be "foolish enough to take him at his word".⁴

Recent studies vacillate between *open* and *closed* system interpretations. For instance, Wollheim examines the logic of Morellian method, but eventually supports the open-system view, the method amounting to "a means of correcting or refining judgement".⁵ Wind offers an alternative to the scientific interpretations, relating Morelli to the Romantic "cult of the fragment", and specifically Schlegel's *Fragments* (1798-1800). The method is understood as a reversal of "the normal aesthetic reaction", identifying an artist "not by the power with

¹ Pope-Hennessy, 1980, p.16; Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.168

² Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.239-240

³ Berenson, 1926, p.46

⁴ Berenson, 1901, p.viii

⁵ Wollheim, 1973, pp.187-193

which he moves us, [...] but by the nervous twitch”.¹ Zerner understands Morellian method as a systematising of traditional connoisseurship that opened the door to Aloïs Riegl’s (1858-1905) formalism. The method’s real significance is said to be the *will* to objective rigour, Morelli urging his reader to adopt a scientific attitude, not a particular method.² Anderson has argued that the method was strictly designed to resolve the issue of restoration, to search out the genuine parts of a painting.³ Morelli does specifically argue that to recognise an artist from under “the black mask” of the restorer requires systematic comparison of “the forms peculiar to each master in his treatment of the human frame”.⁴ For Giorgione, Morelli offers his reader a list of these characteristic *Formen*; next I will discuss this *material* element of the method, before moving to the *spiritual* aspect in the description of the artist’s *Geist*.

Giorgione’s *Formen*

Morelli acknowledges the complexities of his method and promises that by an example he will make it “more intelligible to my readers”.⁵ It could be said that “arguments are, fundamentally, about descriptions from the point of view of the regulative ideas of truth; content; and verisimilitude”.⁶ Given the polemic with Crowe and Cavalcaselle, it would be useful to compare their technical ekphrasis with Morelli’s morphological descriptions. However, as has been argued, even in the 1870s articles Morelli was not interested in following any particular method, and more importantly, in demonstrating the basis for his

¹ Wind, 1985, pp.36-39

² Zerner, 1978 pp.211-214

³ Anderson, 2000, p.28

⁴ Morelli, 1893, p.2; 1891, p.4

⁵ Morelli, 1892, p.76

⁶ Popper, 1975, p.120

judgements.¹ Unfortunately, these confusions are not resolved by the way Morelli justifies his attributions in *Italian Painters*, where his descriptions of characteristic details are essentially nominal. This creates discordance with the claim that: “in every branch of research the same principle holds good, that arguments unless well sustained are worthless.” [*der Wissenschaft keinen Werth haben kann, wenn man nicht in der Lage ist, es durch triftige Gründe zu beweisen*].²

I want to discuss the way Morelli uses “forms”; to do this I will look at Giorgione’s characteristics details and the exemplary descriptions from “Principles and Method”, making comparisons with relevant Venetian painters. Morelli creates doubt about the value of strictly morphological analysis, the nominal descriptions, or absence of arguments, showing that the method justifies the attributions by proxy.

Morelli particularises Giorgione’s indicators of authorship within *The Trial of Moses* and *The Judgement of Solomon* (Figs.A23, A24):

...the long oval of the female faces, the eyes placed somewhat near together, the hand often with the first finger extended, the fantastic costumes, the poetically conceived landscape with the tall trees, &c. [*das längliche Oval der Frauengesichter, die etwas nahe an die Nase gerückten Augen, die phantastische Art, die Figuren zu kleiden, die Hand sehr oft mit ausgestrecktem Zeigefinger darzustellen, die poetischen landschaftlichen Gründe mit den hochstämmigen Bäumen, u. s. f.*]³

The first two details are morphological, the third a gesture, the fourth fashion, and the fifth a style of landscape with a particular type of tree. One might argue with these details, suggesting that although extended forefingers can be seen in both panels, pointing is such a

¹ Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.226

² Morelli, 1892, p.193; 1890, p.249

³ Morelli, 1893, pp.214-215; 1891, pp.279-280

crucial device in Renaissance pictorial narrative that it cannot function as an indicator of Giorgione's authorship, but this would be unproductive. When Morelli discusses the *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Fig.A41), he describes his observation that “the glance of the eyes is remarkably keen” [*scharfblickende Kopf*]; not morphology but expression is important.

In practice the method creates problems; even if the comparisons were uniform, there is no linguistic difference between Giorgione's and Boltraffio's “long oval of the Madonna's face”.¹ With the additional attributions in 1891, Morelli offers further characteristic details, which are described in the *Nymph and Satyr* (Fig.A30). Here he perceives “the low forehead, the charming arrangement of the hair upon the temples, the eyes placed near together, and the hand with tapering fingers [...*und anderes*]”.² The arrangement of the hair and the low forehead are both referenced in the attribution of the Borghese *Portrait of a Lady*, however, in other cases where comparisons could have been made, they are noticeably absent. For instance, the *Shepherd Boy with a Flute* (Fig.A48) has a low forehead and the forefinger is extended, while the face and hair of *Judith* (Fig.A49) seem to be comparable to the *Sleeping Venus* (Fig.A2). In most cases, the appearance of Giorgione's characteristic features is assumed not demonstrated.

Morellian method was designed to distinguish between master and pupil, original and school, and with Giorgione this is especially important. Morelli demonstrates this distinction with Girolamo Genga (1476-1551), who, like “all pupils, or rather imitators [*Nachahmern*], of Michael Angelo – he became the caricature [*Caricatur*] of his prototype [*Vorbildes*]”.³ In Morelli's praise of the Dresden *Venus* he uses the same language, lamenting the many works which “have been recognised as specimens of his brilliant genius [*strahlendes Antlitz*] which

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.163; 1890, p.206

² Morelli, 1893, p.219; 1891, p.285

³ Morelli, 1892, p.93; 1890, p.119

are in reality but caricatures.” This *Venus*, he argues, “became the prototype, [*Prototyp*] among painters of Venetian school, for all other pictures of the class [*dieser Art Liebesbilder*]”.¹ The question would be then, do Morellian descriptions really allow for a distinction between caricature and prototype, between Giorgionesque painters and Giorgione himself?

In the Munich study Morelli discusses some relevant painters in direct comparisons: “Palma’s ear is large and rounded in form, and terminates in a pointed and a well-defined lobe; Cariani’s ear is also rounded, but has no distinct lobe; Bonifazio’s ear, on the contrary, is always long”.² Here the descriptions become contingent, the adjectives being opposed to allow for practical comparison. In the Doria Pamphilj we discover that “Bellini’s ear is round and fleshy; that of Mantegna is longer and very cartilaginous”.³ Here there can be no doubt that *round* and *long* are not identical; however, the next descriptions are figurative, describing not the object but the representation, producing an illusory effect. By their own standards they allow us to distinguish between artists, although for Giorgione we have no description of an ear, despite their noticeable appearance in seven of Morelli’s fourteen original attributions.⁴

With regard to the distinction between Titian and Giorgione, anatomical comparisons seem to be critical. In “Principles and Method” the old Italian instructs Lermolieff to look at the hand in Titian’s *Portrait of Ludovico Beccadelli* (Fig.R17), “particularly at the ball of the thumb, which is too strongly developed, and at the round form of the ear”. The first detail is seen as a technical idiosyncrasy, while the ear is given the same description as Palma’s and Cariani’s.

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.221-222; 1891, pp.288-289

² *Ibid*, 1893, p.18; 1891, p.27

³ Morelli, 1892, p.270; 1891, p.354

⁴ Figs.A23, A24, A10, A42, A1, A43, A45

Morelli encourages the reader to judge the forms for themselves by listing comparable works. A diagram of the “allzu stark accentuirten Daumenballen” is also given, but this is not the hand from the Beccadelli portrait (Fig.R18). The old Italian continues that Titian is “constantly confounded” with Giorgione, Pordenone, Bordone and Schiavone, and that “these hints [*Bemerkungen*] may be of service to you in judging disputed pictures, for Titian’s hand and ear differ considerably”.¹ However, the shape of Giorgione’s ear and hand are not described, and again, the emphasis is on the reader performing the method themselves.

Morelli’s separation of Titian from Giorgione, on morphological grounds, cannot be considered particularly successful, especially with regards to the *Venus*. In the 1880 visual analysis, Morelli describes the “the red-brown cloth with the gold border against which stands out the finely modelled arm” and also the “pinched pleats of the white cloth”, both are considered “thoroughly Giorgionesque”. I would argue, however, that the diffuse light that falls on her body is different from that which creates the chiaroscuro of the drapery and instead suggests two different artists. Morelli cites the morphology of the thumb, being “so very different in Giorgione from what it is in Titian”. Although Morelli uses antithesis here, the description is only categorisation. There is also “that glorious oval face!” which is compared with *The Castelfranco Altarpiece* and the *Madrid Madonna and Child with Saint*.² This may be fair, although the Prado’s current attribution of the *Madonna and Child* to Titian might suggest that *Venus* is a fusion of two artists or that this is a specious comparison, most of all it illustrates that the separation of Giorgione from Titian, particularly within this one painting, is extremely difficult.

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.47; 1890, pp.58-59

² Morelli, 1883, p.168, n.1; 1880, pp.196-197, n.1

Landscape is possibly the defining feature of the Giorgionesque, and in Giorgione's two Uffizi panels, Morelli considers them "poetically conceived" and "with the tall trees". This is a strange description, half-visual and half-conceptual; I would argue that it shows the combination of material and spiritual which is the basis of Morellian method. However, from Morelli's analysis of the *Venus* we may question how clear an idea he had of Giorgione's typical landscape, as he writes of a "bright streak of light [*Lichtstreifen*] on the houses", described as "quite Giorgionesque" and compared to *The Tempest*.¹ It is difficult to agree with Morelli, as today we know that this group of buildings is almost identical with those in several Titians, notably *Noli me tangere* (Fig.R19).

Another question would be, are Morelli's morphological descriptions objective, practical, or scientific? I would argue that Morelli, like Crowe and Cavalcaselle, inscribes value judgements in his analysis. The descriptions found in "Principles and Method" were designed to be, and are often quoted as, exemplars of Morellian method: Botticelli's fingernails are "square with black outlines" and his short noses have "dilated nostrils".² These are indeed objective and referential; I would argue, however, that they are not typical of *Italian Painters*. Instead, like much Victorian literature, class allusions offer a cultural context in which value can be suggested, as with the word "plebeian" [*plebejisch*], used by Morelli as a negative adjective.³ Class allusions describe Raphael's morphological development; the hand in the *Madonna della Seggiola* (Fig.R20) being "no longer the *bourgeois* type [*bürgerliche*], faithfully reproduced from nature, but is of the elegant and refined form [*aristokratische*]"⁴. In the German text Morelli places these class-adjectives in quotations, ironically distancing himself from Crowe and Cavalcaselle's language, yet nevertheless using it to express

¹ Morelli, 1883, p.168, n.1; 1880, pp.196, n.1

² Morelli, 1892, p.35; 1890, p.43

³ *Ibid*, 1892, p.80; 1890, p.103

⁴ *Ibid*, 1892, p.51; 1890, p.63

Raphael's changing character. Like Pater and Crowe, Morelli repeats adjectives; for instance "feine" describes Giorgione's *forms*, and projects a particular *idea* of the artist, as in the Borghese *Portrait of a Lady* with her "refined mouth".¹

With Giorgione, Morellian method justifies the attributions by proxy, emphasising science without discursive arguments. When no details are mentioned, as for instance with the *Judith* (Fig.A49), this seems to challenge the reader to test Morelli's attribution. The absence of description was deliberate; this is shown by a letter Richter wrote to Morelli (29 November 1880): "ich – aber lachen Sie nicht – einen Giorgione entdeckt". From a print of the *Judith*, Richter attributed the original, having "den Castelfranco-Typus". Richter sent Morelli a photograph of the print (23 January 1881), to which Morelli replied (26 January 1881) that it "machte mir sogleich den Eindruck eines echten Giorgione". He goes on to describe Giorgione "am Oval des Gesichts, and der Form und Stellung des linken Beines, and den gekniffenen Bruchfalten".² In the published text, Morelli offers no analysis, crediting Daniel Penther (1837-1887) with the attribution, and deciding that to "judge from a photograph, I should say that he was right".³ Why would Morelli not mention *Judith's* face, legs, or drapery? Again, the method gains its most compelling justification by the reader rediscovering these details, and therefore experiencing the process of induction.

Morelli's list of Giorgione's details is not prescriptive, finishing with the curious "&co." or "u.s.f." [*und so fort*]. Why would he do this? Is he assuming the reader understands what *poetic conception* looks like? Is he implying that there are more, but unlisted, attributive details (as he does with the second list: "*und anderes*")? Or does *etcetera* actually suggest

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.249; 1890, p.324

² Richter and Richter, 1960, pp.134-147

³ Morelli, 1893, p.219; 1890, p.286 – Penther's attribution is recorded in "Kritischer Besuch in der Ermitage zu St. Petersburg", which was published as a supplement to *Allgemeine Kunst-Chronik* (1883) – from "Eastlake's Travelling Agent", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.83, No.486, 1943, pp. 211-216

that these descriptions are unimportant? Morelli rarely mentions them again. The use of abbreviation is part of Lermolieff's fragmented literary style and functions to unsettle argumentative descriptions. The "u.s.f." is reluctant or dismissive, making the reader perform the operation. Instead of morphological analysis, the most significant characteristic is "poetischen", since it reveals Giorgione's *spirit/mind*.

Giorgione's *Geist*

Instead of pure *forms*, the key to understanding Morellian method is acknowledging the importance of *spirit*. Examining Giorgione's individuality as it is described in *Italian Painters*, I will demonstrate that the catalogue is justified by a consistent expression of the artist's personality. Morelli uses "Morellian method" not in the popular sense, but in the original sense: a "synthesis" of scientific or positivist observations, with idealist, aesthetic and romantic psychology.

In a letter (24 March 1878), Richter states his belief that the *Concert Champêtre* (Fig.A1) is by an absolutely new master, but asks his friend who he believed painted the picture. Morelli responds (5 April 1878) by expressing his deep faith in the traditional attribution: "Meiner festesten Überzeugung nach ist jenes Gemälde eines charakteristischsten, liebenswürdigsten Werke des Giorgione, etwa um 1508-1510 entstanden". He goes on to make the comparison between the *Concert* and Titian's frescoes in Padua (Fig.R15), explained by the fact the latter are "durch und durch vom Hauche des Giorgionischen Geistes belebt sich erweist".¹ What is characteristic about the *Concert* and the frescoes is that they embody the *liebenswürdig*

¹ Richter and Richter, 1960, pp.39-46

Giorgionesque spirit; in 1880 Morelli describes the canvas as a “herrliche Idyllenbild”, while in 1891 it is a “hochpoetische Idyllenbild”.¹ Morellian method allows him to see the influence of Giorgione’s spirit/mind in other artist’s work. In this way Morelli approaches Pater’s view of the painting; furthermore, the connoisseur writes of the *poetry* of the Giorgionesque, perceiving Giorgione’s “hochpoetischer Geist” in the relationship between *den Geist und die Formen*.² Morelli consistently analyses *Formen* in a language that reminds the reader of his characterisation of the painter as a profound poet, conditioning their response to the images and attribution with this idea of *Geist*.

Morelli characterises Giorgione using information derived from a combination of Vasari, Ridolfi, and nineteenth-century writers, together with his emotional reaction to the works themselves. He begins by placing Giorgione alongside Giovanni Bellini and Titian as “perhaps the noblest of Venetian masters”. Next he asks how we can gain “true insight” into the art of “this most refined and imaginative of painters” [*feinsten und phantasie reichsten*], before stating that Giorgione was “truly great” and that this is evidenced by the “high opinion” of his contemporaries and his “far-reaching” influence over other artists. The answer to the question is a close study of the three undoubted works: *The Castelfranco Altarpiece*, *The Three Philosophers*, and *The Tempest* (Figs.A10, A4, A3).

After discussing the pan-Giorgionesque, disattributing the Pitti *Concert*, and arguing that Giorgione’s “power and greatness became fully developed” in the period 1505-1511,³ Morelli writes:

¹ Morelli, 1880, p.190; 1891, p.283

² Morelli, 1893, pp.213-214; 1891, pp.278-279

³ Morelli, 1880, pp.183-187; 1883, pp.154-158; 1891, pp.273-278; 1893, pp.209-213

...the few works by him which have been preserved are so fully imbued with his original and intense poetic feeling [*leuchtet uns sein origineller, hochpoetischer Geist so hell entgegen*] – his own personality, simple, unconventional, and refined, appeals to us in them with such irresistible fascination [*spricht seine einfache, unbefangene, seine Künstlernatur so frisch, so einnehmend zu uns*] – that the impression they produce can never be forgotten by those who have once been able to understand him [*dass wer ihn einmal verstanden, ihn nie wieder aus seinem Geiste verlieren wird*]. No other artist ever succeeds in entrancing our imagination so powerfully yet with such simple means, [*mit so wenig Mitteln unsere Phantasie zu bezaubern, unsern Geist stundenlang zu fesseln*] though often enough we are unable to explain the signification of the scenes.¹

Morelli's emphasis is on the relationship between the artist and the observer through the object. Giorgione "speaks" to us; his "highly-poetic spirit/mind" is measured by the emotional reaction of the viewer. The originality, power and simplicity of the object are projected onto its creator. Like with Crowe and Cavalcaselle, the artist is imaged by a series of adjectives, Morelli summing him up in the statement: "Giorgione was a genuine, harmless, cheerful nature, a lyric poet", or "*eine echte, harmlose, lebensfrohe Dichternatur, ein Lyriker*" (1880). In 1891 Morelli added *lebensfrohe und dabei so tief sinnige Dichternatur*, translated in 1893 as: "His nature was that of a true poet, profoundly thoughtful, yet at the same time taking and innocent pleasure in life".² Although Morelli's Giorgione is a lyric poet, these romantic, sensualist associations are combined with ethical values, especially in translation.

This characterisation is opposed to Titian's, allowing for a connoisseurial discrimination:

¹ Morelli, 1880, p.187; 1883, p.158; 1891, p.278; 1893, p.213

² *Ibid*, 1880, p.187; 1883, p.158; 1891, pp.278; 1893, p.213

He was a lyric poet in contradistinction to Titian, who was essentially a dramatist. The art of Titian is unquestionably more powerful and energetic, but Giorgione is, in my estimation at least, a painter of more refined and subtle feeling. [...eine Lyriker, im Gegensatz zu Titian, der durch und durch Dramatiker war. Dieser letztere ist unstreitig ein gewaltigerer, energischerer Geist, Giorgione jedoch, wenigstens meinem Gefühle nach, ein Künstler von feinerm Schrot und Korn.]¹

Upholding *Ut pictura poesis*, the painters take on the attributes of types of writers and literary genres, argued so as to distinguish Giorgione's paintings as poems from Titian's dramas. Giorgione is given a very positive characterisation, compared to the presentation of Titian, about who Morelli demonstrates mixed feelings. The reason, Morelli explains in the Munich study, that he has "no admiration for Titian's personal character" [*moralische Charakter*] is the way he "so greedily, and with so much intriguing [*allerlei Intriguen habgierig*], snatched away [Bellini's] pension".² Criticism of Titian is prefatory to praise of Giorgione, and after claiming the education of Titian is "a question of no great historical moment", Morelli insists on the historical importance of Giorgione: "What cannot be denied is the influence of Giorgione, which is so manifest in the works of [Titian's] youth". This estimation is taken even further, naming nine Giorgionesque painters and "many others".³

Like other nineteenth-century critics, Morelli follows Ridolfi's *Ut pictura poesis* presentation, echoing Lübke's 1868 description of Giorgione's landscape as "bedeutend poetischem" and the argument that in all his paintings we see his "poetischen Geist".⁴ Also, Morelli strangely follows Pater in making Giorgione specifically a lyric poet, although the parallel description of Titian as a dramatist seems his own. The moral judgements about

¹ Morelli, 1880, p.187; 1883, p.159; 1891, pp.278; 1893, p.213

² 1883 translation; Morelli is referring to Titian having finished Bellini's *The Submission of Frederick Barbarossa before Alexander III* (lost) in the Doge's Palace, for which he was given a *senseria* which Vasari relates yielded 300 crowns a year – Vasari, Vol VI, 1987, pp.157-158

³ Morelli, 1880, p.42; 1883, pp.41-42; 1891, p.75-76; 1893, pp.56-57

⁴ Lübke, 1868, p.275

Giorgione's character also seem to be Morelli's, so that the painter is "*harmlose, lebensfrohe*", which shows an awareness of the ethical censure of Venetian painting.

Morelli continues his positive presentation by paraphrasing the Vasarian Giorgione; "the principal objects of his devotion were music, fair women, and above all his own lofty art", or rather: "*Seine Liebe gehörte der Musik, den schönen Frauen, und vor allem seiner hehren Kunst*".¹ Morelli then digresses into another moral judgement:

His independent spirit rendered him totally indifferent to the favours of the great. He would certainly never, like Titian, have sacrificed to them his liberty, and still less his dignity. [*Keiner war so unabhängig wie er, die Grossen und Mächtigen der Welt liessen ihn gleichgültig, keinem von ihnen hat er wie z. B. Tizian seine Freiheit und noch weniger seine Würde geopfert*].

After this long, value-judgement-filled paragraph, Morelli gives the impression that he is dispassionately assessing a source: "Such, in the main, is what we gather from Vasari's narrative touching the character of Giorgione, and the account is probably correct" [*So ungefähr schildert ihn uns Vasari, und ich denke, dass sein Bildniss damit getroffen ist*].² The relationship between Morelli and Vasari is complex, and I will discuss the way the *Vite* functions in *Italian Painters* below.

I would suggest that in this simple, moral characterisation of the artist, *Italian Painters* responds to Rio's *De l'art Chrétien*. Elsewhere, Morelli criticised Rio explicitly, referring to him as "the amiable neo-catholic writer" [*der neokatholische lebenswürdige*

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.213; 1891, p.279; Vasari, Vol IV 1976, p.42

² *Ibid*, 1893, p.213; 1891, p.279

Kunstschriftsteller].¹ With Giorgione, the response can be heard in this bizarre digression on *The Castelfranco Altarpiece* (Fig.A10), an addition in 1890:

We are struck by the simple and natural demeanour of the two saints who stand on either side of the throne. How different are they to the saints in the altar-pieces, even of the middle of the sixteenth century, who are saints only in name, and who, but a few years later, become physically repulsive! Giorgione's saints are no fanatical impostors, but Christian heroes, animated by a true and living faith. [*Und wie einfach, wie natürlich stehen nicht die zwei Heiligen am Throne der Mutter Gottes da! Das sind wahrlich keine Heiligen von Profession, wie sie schon auf den Kirchenbildern aus der Mitte jenes Jahrhunderts, namentlich aber auf jenen aus der folgenden Zeit, abstossend uns entgentreten; nein, dieser Georg und dieser Franciscus sind gesunde, von ihrem Glauben beseelte Naturen, es sind Helden der Christenheit und nicht fanatische Gaukler.*]²

This description, with its obvious agendas, has little to do with attribution or scientific connoisseurship; it cannot be fairly compared to Crowe and Cavalcaselle's ekphrasis of the *Altarpiece*.

From Morelli's depiction of Giorgione's personality the reader is left with a series of adjectives: *simple, poetic, profound, mysterious, refined*. These are then utilised in the analysis of the works, the attributions being justified by their expression of Giorgione's *Geist*. After this, the reader is enabled to decide between Giorgione and Titian, not by anatomical comparison, but by contra-distinguishing the moral-literary character of their works. When discussing the Budapest *Portrait of a Young Man* (Fig.A45), Morelli is reluctant to positively attribute the picture to Giorgione, yet the description is entirely in line with the artist's characterisation: "We linger over this melancholy figure, fascinated by the expression that

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.226; 1891, p.294

² *Ibid*, 1893, pp.215-216; 1891, p.281

seems so full of meaning, as though this young man were about to confide to us the secret of his life”.¹ Neither technical nor morphological analysis will suffice; instead, emotional reaction is the validation for the attribution. The Berlin *Portrait of a Young Man* (Fig.A47) recalls the Budapest *Portrait*: “highly suggestive” it exerts “over the spectator an irresistible fascination” [*so fesseln und so viel uns zu sagen haben, dass man sich nur schwer von ihnen trennt*].² We find echoes of Giorgione’s personality throughout Morelli’s catalogue; *The Knight of Malta* (Fig.A32) has a “nobly conceived head” [*fein aufgefassten Kopfe*]; the repeated emphasis on the look in the eyes of the *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Fig.A41) and the Berlin *Portrait*; the *Three Ages of Man* (Fig.A43) is “finely conceived” [*schön gedachte*]; the *Concert Champêtre* is “hochpoetische”.³

While this language may give a sense of Giorgione’s art, and help create consistency in the attributions, the importance of this type of analysis in terms of Morellian method is shown in the attribution of the Budapest *Portrait*. After the compelling description of the “melancholy figure”, Morelli explains that “Giorgione is not to be recognised in the workmanship”. In 1880 the connoisseur concludes that he will therefore not consider it an undoubted attribution; in 1891 Morelli decides instead that “*wol aber sprechen zu Gunsten des Giorgione sowol die Auffassung als auch der Geist, der aus dem Bild einem entgegenleuchtet*”, or as it is translated into the English “the whole feeling of the picture and the conception seem to point to Giorgione”. The 1893 English edition includes the additional explanation, quoted above, attempting to resolve the inconsistency between the *Geist* and *Malweise*;⁴ this is not written in the style of Lermolieff, and instead sounds like Layard’s voice. The problem with this attribution arises from the duality of Morellian method, the

¹ Morelli, 1880, pp.190-191; 1883, pp.159; 1891, pp.284-285; 1893, p.218

² Morelli, 1893, p.219; 1891, p.285

³ *Ibid*, 1893, pp.210-218; 1891, pp.280-285

⁴ *Ibid*, 1893, p.218; 1891, p.285

conflict between *Formen* and *Geist*, between *material* and *spiritual* arguments. It seems then that idealist and positivist methods could not be *synthesised*; in 1880 Morelli trusted the material and did not give the picture his complete approval; in 1891 he favoured his spiritual understanding and essentially endorsed Giorgione's authorship. This incongruity, or duplicity, has been a central problem for the interpretation of Morellian method.

Giorgione: Documents

The troubling relation between material and spiritual analysis may be ironic, but this would affirm "the centrality of looking"; however, even this standard is rendered questionable by Morelli's use of "documents". This can be seen if we consider the theory in relation to the practice within *Italian Painters*, especially the relationship with Vasari, and the attribution of the Pitti *Concert* (Fig.A12), but most importantly the *Sleeping Venus* (Fig.A2).

In "Principles and Method" the old Italian blames faith in "tradition" for the poor state of attribution. Lermolieff enquires:

[...] 'I suppose, however, that you respect documentary evidence?'

'Written documents,' he replied, 'are only of value in the hands of a scientifically trained and competent critic [*wissenschaftlich gebildeter Kunstkenner*]; in those of a novice in the study of art [*dem Neuling in der Kunstwissenschaft*], or a keeper of archives who knows nothing of the subject, they are not only useless but misleading' [*hilft dasselbe nicht nur nichts, sondern es führt ihn in den meisten Fällen sogar auf Abwege*].

Morelli does not define “scientifically educated”, but even so, confirms the primacy of visual evidence, the old Italian further emphasising: “The only true record for the connoisseur [*Das einzige wahre Document...*] is the work of art itself”.¹

As we have seen, however, documentary evidence and tradition are the basis on which Morelli defines his “undoubted works” of Giorgione, while in other parts of *Italian Painters* he quotes written sources in full.² Morelli criticises Crowe and Cavalcaselle for opposing Vasari and Ridolfi, complaining they have no document in support of their theory on Palma Vecchio, a theory based on delusion: “Haben sie etwa Documente aufzuweisen, mit denen sie ihre Thesis stützen könnten? Nein. – Vermuthe ich recht, so muss ihre Ansicht auf einer Täuschung beruhen”.³ And finally, we have heard Morelli attribute *The Three Ages of Man* (Fig.A43) for being thoroughly Giorgionesque, “ohne andere Documente zur Stütze meiner Ansicht zu besitzen”.⁴ This creates a provisional irony denying and affirming the predominance of written sources.

One of Morelli’s new attributions, the *Apollo and Daphne* (Fig.A38), produces stylistic inconsistencies in the catalogue, being full of movement in comparison with the statuesque figures of *The Tempest*, *The Three Philosophers* and *The Castelfranco Altarpiece*. In fact, Morelli offers no visual analysis, instead indirectly connecting the *Apollo and Daphne* to Ridolfi’s claim that Giorgione painted *cassoni* with Ovidian subject matter. This use of written sources is confusing; instead of citing Ridolfi, Morelli adds a footnote referencing

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.26-27; 1890, p.32

² Morelli, 1892, pp.202-203

³ Morelli, 1893, p.38; 1891, p.52

⁴ *Ibid*, 1893, pp.214-217; 1891, pp.282-283

Vasari's explanation of the function of *cassoni*.¹ This makes Vasari appear to be the source; like Pater, Morelli manipulates and misleads with his referencing.

These distortions are important in relation to Vasari, because Morelli bases his characterisation of Giorgione's personality on the *Vite*: "Such, in the main, is what we gather from Vasari's narrative [...] the account is probably correct".² His portrait of the artist is apparently in line with Vasari, but again the *Vite* is used and abused, simultaneously doubted but employed as a primary source. Throughout *Italian Painters* we are given varying assessments of its historical significance. Morelli questions the reliability of a multi-authored source, discussing "the Venetian who furnished Vasari with information", judging Vasari himself as "that most delightful and naive of art-historians" [*naivsten und lebenswürdigsten*].³ He also criticises Crowe and Cavalcaselle for what he sees as their uncritical reliance on historiography, exclaiming: "As though Vasari's statements were to be accepted without question!" [*als obs Vasari's Bilderbestimmungen so unbesehen angenommen werden müssten*].⁴

The ironic importance of documents can be seen in Morelli's two most important and most successful attributions. Morelli's disattribution of the Pitti *Concert* is brief, structured and convincing. It begins by describing Ridolfi as "a most uncritical writer", creating doubt about the *Maraviglie's* presentation. This is supplemented in 1891 by a footnote on two other works mentioned by Ridolfi but no longer believed to be genuine. The second step is to single out Paolo del Sera as responsible for the attribution to Giorgione, mentioning his nationality and profession ("a Florentine merchant settled in Venice"). Morelli then gives a negative

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.216; 1891, p.282; Ridolfi, 1648, p.79

² Morelli, 1893, p.213; 1891, p.279

³ Morelli, 1893, p.29; 1891, p.40; 1892, p.111; 1890, p.139

⁴ Morelli, 1893, p.107; 1891, p.140

characterisation, tainting the attribution with venality: “del Sera was not above [*nicht verschmähte*] making a good bargain”. The traditional attribution is excluded by morphological categorisation, so that despite the damage, “from the form of the hands and of the ear and from the gestures of the figures we are led to infer [*mit einer gewissen Sicherheit*] that it is not a work of Giorgione”. The positive attribution is held back until the final word: “I think... it is an early work by Titian”.¹ With this *Concert* Morelli undermines Ridolfi, and yet in justifying the attribution of the *Sleeping Venus*, the *Maraviglie* is crucial.

As discussed, Morelli removed the visual details of the *Venus* from the 1891 edition; instead of typically “Morellian” analysis, I would argue that circumstantial connections in the provenance secured the picture for Giorgione. The documentary justification is combined with a presentation of the *Venus* as the masterpiece of Giorgione’s *Geist*. The basis for the attribution is Michiel’s *Notiza*; however, true to the principle of the “centrality of looking”, Morelli offers the proviso: “It has been no small satisfaction to me to have been able to discern [*empfunden und gesehen*] the genius and the hand of Giorgione in this marvellous picture before I discovered that it had been mentioned by the ‘Anonimo’ as his work”.²

There are three written documents that concern the *Venus*; the first is Michiel, the second is Ridolfi, the third and most decisive is the Dresden gallery’s catalogue. Although the connection of these three make the case convincing, Morelli mentions them separately so that structurally they do not form the foundation of his argument; instead, the reader is given an evocation of Giorgione’s personality. Morelli refers to the *Maraviglie*, this time with no pejorative slant, but with an important manipulation: “An exquisite nude figure of Venus sleeping is in the Casa Marcella, and at her feet is Cupid holding a little bird, which (that is,

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.211-212; 1891, pp.276-277

² *Ibid*, 1893, p.221; 1891, pp.287-288

Cupid) was finished by Titian”. This insertion plays down Titian’s involvement in the landscape (clearly suggested by Michiel), which would otherwise detract from Morelli’s presentation of the painting as Giorgione’s masterpiece. The separation of Michiel and Ridolfi also serves to obscure the discrepancies between the two descriptions: “This therefore was the traditional appellation [*immer die Tradition*] in the Casa Marcella, but the picture came to Dresden, as Dr. Hübner’s stated in his catalogue, as the work of Titian”. The pivotal information is that on arrival in Dresden the cupid was so badly damaged it was painted over.¹ Here, in his most famous attribution, Morelli has based his argument on the twin evils of documents and tradition.

This painting serves as evidence for Morelli to place Giorgione on the highest artistic level; he invents a genre by offering the most perfect example:

This “Venus” became the prototype, among painters of Venetian school, for all other pictures of the class, but Giorgione far surpassed all his imitators in refinement of feeling and nobility of conception. A comparison with Titian’s celebrated representations of Venus and Danae strikingly prove this.

The qualities of the painting are consistent with the qualities of his personality, *refinement* [*Feinheit*] and *nobility* [*Abel*], a characterisation that is not dissimilar to Crowe’s or Pater’s. Again, following the antithetical pattern, Titian is coarse as Giorgione is refined, the former’s nudes being “so realistic” and “so degraded in feeling” [*so niedrig gedact*] that the old woman in *Danaë* (Fig.R21) suggests “a woman of the lowest class” [*Kupplerin*]. Again this recalls Rio, who when mentioning the Marcello “Venus” defends Giorgione in comparison to Titian’s “accentuation lubrique”.² Morelli makes Giorgione moral – “*harmlose*” – arguing

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.223-224; 1891, pp.290-291

² Rio, 1867, p.140

that this *Venus* “shows a tendency to realism, although in the highest and noblest sense of the word” [*schönsten, edelsten*]. Here material “realism” is redeemed by spiritual nobility. Morelli develops his characterisation through a further comparison: “Giorgione was by nature more vigorous, healthy, and joyous than Correggio”.¹ In 1880 the attribution of the *Venus* was supported by some specious “Morellian” details contained in a footnote; in 1891 the main justification is Morelli’s *idea* of the artist’s *Geist*, but supported by documentary traditions.

Richter wrote to Morelli (20 October 1880), reporting the comments of a Mr. Graham: “When I was younger critics used to speak about the forms of hands. Now here at Venice I always hear mentioned the form of the ears. This must be a more advanced state of criticism!”² The joke the two friends share concerns the reductive interpretations of Morellian method. It has been argued that the line between Morellian and traditional connoisseurship is not clear cut; however, in “Principles and Method” the reader is given an art historiographical analysis that seems to define Morelli’s significance. Lermolieff interprets the old Italian as concentrating on “art morphology” [*formalen Kunst*], or “the understanding of the outward forms”; he then argues that:

...a German art-philosopher would tell you that the idea [*Idee*] existed in the mind of the artist long before the visible part of his work [*formalen Kunstwerk*] took shape; that the task of the art-historian [*echten Kunsthistoriker*] is to grasp, fathom, and explain this idea – the main problem he has to solve being, how to attain a fundamental understanding [*innere oder ‘centrale’ Verständniss*] of a work of art. The historian himself [*Kunstgeschichtshreiber*] would tell you that the history of art should direct attention, not so much to the works of art themselves, as to the culture of the

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.222-223; 1891, pp.289-290

² Richter and Richter, 1960, pp.130-131

people under whose influences and auspices these works originated. [...*die Cultur des Volkes, aus der diese Kunstwerke hervorgegangen und von der sie bedingt wurden*]

The first tradition Lermolieff refers to is Hegelian, art being a sensual manifestation of absolute subjectivity; the second is *Kunstgeschichte* and exemplified by Burckhardt. The old Italian insists that to know the “inward” [*innerlich*] we must study the “outward” [*äusserlich*], and argues that:

...the history of art may be said to resolve itself into a physiological treatise on art [sic. *eine Kunstpsychologie*] on the one hand, and a history of civilisation on the other; both excellent branches of philosophy in their way, but scarcely adapted to promote a taste for art, or to further its knowledge. [*allein wenig geeignet, das Kunstverständniss und somit den wahren Kunstgenuss zu fördern.*]¹

Crucially, the old Italian does not dismiss these traditions, but instead changes Hegelian art history into a science by referring to it as psychology. It is important that *Geist* can always be interpreted as *spirit* or *mind*, allowing for the connection with Freudian psychoanalysis. However, *Geist* was the key word in idealist critical theory, and so the author seems to play with this dual meaning. I would argue that Morelli’s conception of Giorgione is traditional, almost clichéd, being similar to Lübke’s, Crowe’s and Pater’s.

Morelli’s idea of formal expression can even seem authentically Hegelian, locating the spirit of a painter, or the history of a society, in the shape of the hand. He insists that we must be well-read in Italian history to study portraits because “some portion of the history of the period is always written in those faces, if only we know how to read it”.² In Titian’s portraits of Philip II “the refined [*aristokratisch*] hands alone seem to tell the whole history of the

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.9-10; 1890, pp.11-12

² *Ibid*, 1892, p.56; 1890, p.70

man,” [*eine ganze Biographie*] and even “bring before us an epoch of history – the whole moral atmosphere of his age” [*sie geben auch seine ganze Umgebung, die moralische Atmosphäre, in der er lebte, kurz seine ganze Zeit*].¹ Despite the popular understanding that Morellian method is “ahistorical” and represents a departure from Hegel or Burckhardt, the actual relationship is closer and more problematic; Morelli’s “new” Giorgione is not simply a material construction.

The dominant impression received from *Italian Painters* is that Morelli advocates scientific method; however, the author’s duplicity produces doubt and uncertainty. The method is built on a central paradox in which a stress on objective verifiable evidence in the shape of naturalist morphology is combined with an emphasis on idealist expression of an artist’s personality and the connoisseur’s connection with *Geist*. Morelli’s connoisseurship is both positivist science and aesthetic analysis, an incongruous yet ironically appropriate combination. However, the problems which result from this approach can be seen in the stylistic inconsistencies shown by Morelli’s “new” Giorgione

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.310-311; 1890, p.408

Morellian Rhetoric: Text as Competition

The duplicity of Morellian method is matched by Morelli's rhetoric. I will discuss the way *Italian Painters* is based on intertextual competition. Morelli attacks the art historical establishment and ostracises large sections of his readership. This enables him to isolate an ideal reader for his text, to whom he constantly appeals for arbitration in the connoisseurial conflict. An important aspect of Morellian rhetoric is its disrupting patterns of accountability, consequently aggravating and intensifying the competition. The character Lermolieff is not only designed to annoy, irritate and evade responsibility, but simultaneously to perform the opposite function, establishing empathy in the author-reader relationship. This creates a cult of personality around Lermolieff, the Russian becoming the leader of a student revolution. Morelli's last Giorgione attribution, the *Portrait of a Lady* (Fig.A46), combines scientific and mystical rhetoric, which is then dramatised, casting Lermolieff in an incongruous role: the prophet of scientific connoisseurship.

Morelli's Ideal Reader

Within *Italian Painters* the correct attribution of paintings is a serious business. There should be a clear quality distinction between masters and imitators because confusing them degrades Italian cultural heritage. Poor paintings attributed to great painters, Morelli writes:

...seem like so many country tramps [*heimatlosen Landstreichern*] who should have pushed their way unbidden into the society of the high dignitaries of the Crown, and

presumptuously taken [*prahlerisch sich niedergelassen*] and insisted on maintaining a place, for which they are by no means fitted, on the gilt and velveted chairs of State.¹

Morelli raises the stakes, hyperbolically casting connoisseurial discourse as war. The retrospective and political *Italian Painters* narrates the controversy it created:

The results of these critical studies greatly irritated the orthodox, who discharged their harmless missiles against those who propagated these new theories [*gegen die ketzerischen Neuerer*]. But the storm gradually abated, and the truth was triumphant [*Ihre Nothschüsse verhallten indessen und die Göttin der Wahrheit schritt auf ihrem Siegeswagen sicher und unbehindert vorwärts*], regardless of the havoc she had wrought among cherished traditions [*unbekümmert um die Zöpfe, die sie unterwegs mit ihrer Fackel in Brand gesetzt hatte*]. As to the public, it made merry [*lachte laut auf*] over the discomfiture of the gallery-directors and others, and was disposed to doubt their infallibility and fitness for their posts. As new combatants are constantly entering the lists [*Inzwischen haben sich jüngere Kräfte in die Streitfragen gemischt*], it is to be hoped that these vexed questions may ere long be satisfactorily settled.²

Through his sustained use of a battle metaphor, ironically a “paper war” [*Federkriege*],³ Morelli shows that he understood competition as the catalyst for progress in connoisseurship. About this he is explicit: “I hold that under the current circumstances, writings on art which do not raise a storm of opposition [*nicht leidenschaftlichen Widerspruch hervorrufen*] can have little real merit”.⁴

Morelli’s competitive rhetoric is belligerent, the criticisms of his opponents offensive and dismissive: “the loudest protests are made by those who have neither the disposition, nor the

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.100; 1891, p.130

² Morelli, 1892, p.233; 1890, p.302

³ *Ibid*, 1892, p.4; 1890, p.5

⁴ *Ibid*, 1892, p.[46]; 1890, p.x

capacity [*weder Anlage noch Lust*], for studying anything thoroughly”.¹ Morelli’s disciples followed his example, entering the discourse with a view to challenge and contravene; in periodicals of the time, explicit corrections and personal battles became common.² The English reviews of *Italian Painters* present one-sided accounts of this competitive rhetoric, because Morelli “saw the ludicrous so keenly that it is impossible not to sympathise in the zest with which he thus defeated the object of his adversaries”.³ This bias was the inevitable result of a text which left no room for a middle-ground, the reviewer echoing Morelli’s own language. The critical ambivalence around *Italian Painters* is caused by the deliberate provocations; this makes a balanced reading, even today, almost unthinkable. Nevertheless, this rhetorical design was central to Morelli’s success, a design that works by engineering divisions among the readership.

The most obvious division is nationality. In one of Morelli’s imaginary dialogues, caricatures inhabit the Doria Pamphilj gallery: Lermolieff meets a supercilious French couple, a German and an Austrian argue, and nodding, gullible, American tourists are led along by “wretched ignorant Italian cicerones”. Following his art history, these characters are regionally specific, the *römischer Cicerone*, the *Norddeutscher*, the *Wiener*, “to judge by his accent”.⁴ Bode complained that *Italian Painters* was written in “the crudest manner” and “makes fun of us Germans on nearly every page”.⁵ Even Italian art-historians and galleries are mocked, since they “cling to tradition with the most dogged pertinacity [*mit strenger, ja peinlicher Gewissenhaftigkeit*], no matter how puerile and absurd it may be [*läppisch und abgeschmackt*]”.⁶ Morelli’s principle of regionalism has an emphasis on racial purity, Venice

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.19; 1890, p.23; see also, Pope-Hennessy, 1980, p.14

² Graham, 2001, p.495

³ *Quarterly Review*, 1891, p.243

⁴ Morelli, 1892, pp.316-317; 1890, pp.414-415

⁵ Bode, 1891, p.509

⁶ Morelli, 1892, p.16; 1890, p.19

being especially important because the “indigenous art-language” had, apparently, never been “perverted and denationalised, by the foreign domination of the Spaniard”.¹ Nationality becomes a defining factor in art criticism: “a German sees things differently from a Frenchman, a Russian, or an Italian”.²

Morelli separates himself from the professional institutionalised art world, a division also shaped by nationality: “No! no! I am too old to be taken in by the baseless, arbitrary assertions [*aus der Luft gegriffen, ganz willkürlichen Behauptungen*] of some muddle-headed foreign professor”.³ Instead he presents himself as an amateur who is in competition with university professors and gallery directors.⁴ Another key division is between *Kunsthistoriker* and *Kunstkenner*, again presented as a battle, the two parties being described as bitter enemies. They are diametrically opposite; the connoisseur studying art works, the art historian reading books. Ironically for the art historian, “even to look at pictures irritates them [*Bilderbegucken*’ *ist ihnen geradezu ein Dorn im Auge*]”.⁵ This change in translation from a mild itch to a stabbing pain conveys clearly the different quality of irony at work in the English and German texts.

This battle with bookish pedantic historians is laid out in “Principles and Method”, where the connoisseurial old Italian argues for extensive studies in “conception, representation, and technic”; Lermolieff replies: “the elaborate and tedious course of study which you appear to think incumbent on an art-historian would end by turning him into a mere connoisseur”. The Italian answers with a typical naturalist metaphor, arguing that art historians “will gradually disappear (no great loss either, you will admit)” and that in time, “as the larva develops into

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.4; 1891, p.8

² *Ibid*, 1893, p.9; 1891, p.14

³ Morelli, 1892, p.53; 1890, p.66

⁴ *Ibid*, 1892, p.317; 1890, p.417

⁵ *Ibid*, 1892, p.15; 1890, p.17

the butterfly, the connoisseur will emerge from his chrysalis state”. After some more discussion the Italian explains:

‘[...] All I wish to contend is that the germ of the art-historian, if it exists at all, can only develop and ripen in the brain of the connoisseur; in other words, it is absolutely necessary for a man to be a connoisseur before he can become an art-historian, and to lay the foundations of his history in the gallery and not in the library.’¹

Aside from art historians, there are even lower forms of life within the art world. Restorers are depicted as “barbarians” and competent ones “as rare as white flies”.² Catalogue compilers “are often highly impressionable” [*sehr sanguinischem Temperament*], and they “devote themselves to the cultus [*so scheint in ihnen eine Art platonischer Liebe*] of some great master”.³ Finally the general public, “resembling a peasant”, believe whatever they are told, having “the greatest respect for everything in print”.⁴ In fact, every imaginable demographic is criticised, the old Italian explaining that “the full enjoyment of art [*der süssen Frucht der Kunst*] is reserved only for a select few [*von Gott Begnadigten*], and that the many cannot be expected to enter into all the subtleties”.⁵

Who then are these few “God pardoned” people? Morelli, by ostracising large sections of his potential audience, necessarily calls forth an ideal reader. In the preface to the first volume of *Italian Painters*, Morelli explains that his early articles were favourably received “by the younger, and consequently less biased, students of art”. This is because, as he writes, “it was

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.14-15; 1890, p.117

² *Ibid*, 1892, pp.292, 32; 1890, p.383

³ *Ibid*, 1892, p.306; 1890, p.402

⁴ *Ibid*, 1892, p.34; 1890, p.42

⁵ *Ibid*, 1892, p.25; 1890, pp.30-31

to the younger generation of art-students, Russian, German, and English, that I hoped to appeal in these essays". Morelli instigates a generation gap; "Principles and Methods" is written for students and "is not intended for persons well-versed in the history of art, and may be omitted by them". Throughout his writing Morelli speaks directly to his ideal-student readers, his *Kunstfreunden*, or *Kunstgenossen*.¹

These readers then take on a function in the competition, the author constantly appealing to them as the final judge of attributions: "my readers, who have a more refined feeling for art, will be disposed to accept my views".² Morelli actively encourages his "*gutwilligen jungen Freunde*" to examine the works for themselves: "I do not doubt they will agree with me".³ These *Kunstgenossen* play an active part in the text, Morelli even suggesting projects for them, for instance tracing the development of Garofalo.⁴ With regard to Giorgione, Morelli assumes his "young friends" will draw the same conclusions about the state of scholarship from his disattribution of Dresden's five Giorgiones (this is not translated in 1893).⁵ In these repeated appeals Morelli's *Kunstfreunden* are characterised as young, intelligent, and independent, with a sensibility marking them as capable of connoisseurship. The ideal reader of *Italian Painters* is personified by Karl Woermann (1844-1933), who became the director of the Dresden Gallery in 1882. After his appointment, Woermann accepted forty-six of fifty-six of the 1880 reattributions, and published a new catalogue which in 1891 is praised for having been compiled "on logical and scientific principles". In Morelli's view Woermann had "shown himself to be a man of liberal and impartial judgement" so that his reforms at

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.[41-43]; 1890, pp.v-vii

² Morelli, 1893, p.84; 1891, p.110

³ Morelli, 1892, p.115; 1890, p.145

⁴ *Ibid*, 1892, p.208; 1890, p.269

⁵ Morelli, 1883, p.154; 1891, p.273

Dresden “cannot fail to meet the approval of all intelligent students of art [*verständigen Kunstfreunde*]”.¹

This was empowering for the younger generation, students acting as arbitrators of their professors’ disputes. The ideal reader is therefore an anti-authoritarian rhetorical device. The old Italian insists that Lermolieff should not think of him as “an authority” [*einen Mann des Faches*], but still claims the right to express an opinion, “especially when I see how many charlatans [*Tölpel*] manage to pass themselves off as critical judges”.² Morelli is in competition with “the most eminent critics and connoisseurs of recent times”, and he names them: Rumohr, Waagen, Mündler, Crowe and Cavalcaselle.³ By appealing to his ideal reader to choose, Morelli takes away these great connoisseurs’ prerogative to pass judgement. The aggressive rhetoric creates contrasting readers; one sympathetic and supportive of the anti-authoritarian agenda, the other understandably antagonistic.

Central to understanding *Italian Painters* is the way Morelli has employed irony to allow for this dual reception. Every statement might be interpreted as ironic, the text possessing the potential for at least two conflicting interpretations. This can clearly be seen in a novel written by one of Morelli’s followers, Carlo Placci (1861-1941); *Un Furto* (1892) “dramatises the experience of being a Morellian pupil”.⁴ In chapter thirteen the novel’s protagonist Piero Tavolino reads Morelli’s book, before seeking out the author, Lermolieff himself becoming a character in Placci’s novel. Just as Morellian rhetorical structures imply an ideal and antagonistic reader, Tavolino experiences two distinct reactions to the work, “non sapeva bene persuadersi se ne era contento o dispiacente”, an emotion that continues

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.119-120; 1891, p.157-158

² Morelli, 1892, p.33; 1890, p.40

³ Morelli, 1893, p.10; 1891, p.16

⁴ Anderson, 1999, pp.58-61

when he rereads the book “con amore e dispetto”.¹ Tavolino represents the ideal reader of *Italian Painters*, being himself young, intelligent and open-minded; in his final response, his almost religious devotion to Lermolieff, we can see the desired effect of Morellian rhetoric.

Lermolieff and the Reader

The presence of a strong authorial voice is central to the rhetorical effect of *Italian Painters*. Anderson reached the conclusion that the pseudonym concealed a complex, many-sided individual, but she dismisses the eccentric form of *Italian Painters* as just bad comedy.² The question for anyone wishing to write about Morelli is how do you define the relationship between author and character? Do you hold Morelli or Lermolieff responsible for the generalisations and personal attacks? What about the argumentation supporting this “new” Giorgione: minimal, contradictory, evasive – is Morelli liable for this? Was Lermolieff just a mouthpiece for Morelli, or is the art history itself that of an “ignorant Russian”? This relationship has never been satisfactorily defined but at the same time is crucial. It is a deliberate uncertainty which causes confusion in the competition with other texts.

The problematic issue of nationality and patriotism, a persistent theme of *Italian Painters*, is displaced by the imagined Russian voice. Morelli himself was born in Verona to a protestant family possibly of French Huguenot descent. Raised in Bergamo, he went to school at Aarau in Switzerland, before attending university in Germany at Munich and then Erlangen. He is often referred to as an Italian patriot because of his role in the Risorgimento, but as a protestant – the only one elected to the 1861 parliament – he was always something of an

¹ Placci, 1892, p.105

² Anderson, 1991, p.578

outsider. Without wanting to doubt the sincerity of Morelli's patriotism, there will always be a shadow over his national status, a cloud he did nothing to dispel by writing and publishing in German, the language of his education. Finally, Giovanni Morelli was not even his original name, having been christened Johannes Morell;¹ we may therefore ask to what extent this man lived his entire life under a national-pseudonym?

Why did Morelli choose to write in German when his subject and politics were Italian? According to Layard this was because in Germany, Morelli believed, art scholarship was more seriously studied than in Italy,² and certainly in this period it was in Germany that art history as a discipline proper was forged. Anderson reasonably suggests that maybe Morelli wrote in German because it was the language most familiar to him, and/or, that he wanted to be recognised intellectually in Germany.³ However, this must be squared with letters she cites in which Morelli refers to his German opponents as ignorant charlatans.⁴ It would not be unfair, therefore, to perceive ambivalence in Morelli's attitudes to Germany, yet also to understand why some scholars have doubted his Italian patriotism. Again, we are left with problems. What significance is carried in the old Italian's statement: "National prejudices affect our mental vision as well as our physical sight"?⁵ Why this strange repetition in one of the dialogues: "you appear to be a foreigner [...] I am a foreigner [...]" The next question was as to my nationality"?⁶ How does this ambivalent patriotism relate to an "organic" race-based art history, and most of all, to Morelli himself?

¹ Anderson, 2000, p.7

² Morelli, 1892, p.[29]

³ Anderson, 1991, p.553

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.556

⁵ Morelli, 1892, p.24; 1890, p.29

⁶ Morelli, 1893, p.159; 1892, p.210

Lermolieff's double role of irritating and inspiring the reader can be heard in the strange mix of self-assurance and self-effacement. For instance, after reminding the reader of his eighty-five per cent success rate in the Dresden gallery, Lermolieff subjugates himself to the impersonal method:

Unprejudiced observers might be led to infer from this that either Lermolieff was wiser than other students of art, or that the method pursued by him was superior to theirs. The first assumption would, of course, be ridiculous on my part, and even my bitterest opponents will agree with me. We are, therefore, driven to the conclusion that these highly satisfactory results are due to the experimental method, which at present is still regarded by many with suspicion.¹

This passage contains concurrent rhetorical strategies, signalled by reference to *unprejudiced* readers. The two groups are made to relate not to Morelli but Lermolieff who, referring to himself in the third person, supplies possible interpretations. A similar tactic is used in the preface to the first volume; if Morelli's attributions are shown to be incorrect "the blame will attach to me alone", but if they are proven, "the merit will be due to me – that is to say, to the experimental method which I recommend".² Again the authorial voice asks the reader to hold it responsible, accepting any negative consequences, yet disavowing personal credit for any achievements, apart from having recommended the method. The text works both ways, allowing the ideal reader to praise Lermolieff, while also frustrating his enemies with a theatrical entreaty.

Although this rhetoric seems contrived, it strengthens the author-reader relationship when combined with the narrative of "Principles and Method" in which Lermolieff's experiences the desired reader response. The Russian arrives in Italy, after having travelled through

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.120; 1891, p.159

² Morelli, 1892, p.[43]; 1890, pp.vii-viii

France and German; he has read much unsatisfactory art history before the old Italian introduces him to the experimental method. However, Lermolieff remains unconvinced, forwarding the antagonistic reader's interpretation:

I soon came to the conclusion, however, that such a dry, uninteresting, and even pedantic, study may be all very well for a "former student of medicine", and might even be of service to experts and dealers, but in the end must prove detrimental to the truer and more elevated conception of art.

The narrative continues with Lermolieff returning to Russia where he hears that the art collection, in which he first studied painting, was to be sold. Remembering six Raphaels in particular, Lermolieff decides to see them "before they were scattered to the four winds".

This is not related in an academic way, and instead the text conveys poetic feeling: "One bright December morning", Lermolieff emotionally "could not refrain from testing these works of art by the method the Italian in Florence had taught me". In the gallery itself he finds "rooms swarming with Russians and foreigners – dealers, art-connoisseurs, and directors of galleries", who are all "going into raptures" while attributing pictures to Leonardo "at first glance". The process of actually testing the pictures is omitted, and instead the narrative moves straight on to the emotional reaction to the experiment: "I could hardly believe my eyes" [*eine Binde mir von den Augen gefallen wäre*]. So that the Madonnas "one and all, now appeared to me equally stiff and uninteresting [*abgeschmackt*], the children feeble if not positively absurd [*lächerlich*]; as to the forms, they had not a trace of Raphael [*unraffaelisch*"]". The change in the assumption of authorship has had an immediate and dramatic effect on the perception of quality; this reaction mirrors the ideal reading of *Italian Painters*. Therefore, after coming to terms with this shock, Lermolieff experiences a quite different emotional reaction:

I was overjoyed to find how satisfactory were the results of my hitherto short and superficial studies, even though the knowledge I had gained was so far of a negative character. As I drove home, I determined to leave Gorlaw and return as speedily as possible to Germany, Paris, and Italy, in order to study the galleries with renewed zeal...¹

The method finds its best justification not in a complicated theoretical explanation, but a practical implementation, a point that *Italian Painters* makes repeatedly. Therefore, the appropriate rhetoric is a story that focuses on the emotional reaction to the experiment.

As we will see, dramatisation is crucial in the rhetoric that accompanies the attribution of the Borghese *Portrait of a Lady* (Fig.A46). Contemporary reviews commented that the central character was a focal point of the text; however, they replaced Lermolieff with Morelli. One reviewer comments that normally “the intrusion of the personality of the author, especially of the author of a critical volume, weakens the force with which his judgements appeal to us; but it is not so in the present case.” This “intrusion” is a central rhetorical strategy; however, the reviewer does not acknowledge the fictionalisation, and instead suggests that Morelli in a “fatherly manner” takes the reader by the hand.² For the sympathetic reader this is true, Lermolieff and the old Italian being designed as mentors, yet for the antagonistic reader they are infuriating. The character of Lermolieff also allows the ideal reader to empathise because of his persistent self-characterisation as a beginner, student and non-professional. He is the readers’ guide and teacher, yet he constantly refers to himself as a novice student, ironically demanding greater rigour and professionalism.

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.59-61; 1890, pp.74-76

² *The Edinburgh Review*, 1892, p.349

Morelli wanted his reader to believe his Giorgione was “new” and that his entire approach was original, supported by the attribution of the Dresden *Venus* (Fig.A2). *Italian Painters* is often described as “revolutionary”, yet this was a self-representation. When disattributing from Correggio the then famous *Reading Magdalene* (lost) in Dresden, a young lady called Elise with “gold-rimmed eye-glasses” accuses Lermolieff of Russian Nihilism, and claims that “such pernicious and revolutionary [*giftige und pifide*] attempts will soon be stamped out”.¹ A similar characterisation is offered at the end of “Principles and Method”, when the old Italian is described as an anarchist, “devoid of religion and of veneration for the powers that be [*ohne alle Pietät vor dem Bestehenden und ohne Religion*]”.² This rhetoric changes *Italian Painters* into a political manifesto, helping ferment a student revolution.

Morelli creates a cult of personality around his fictional characters; “cult” is the appropriate word because through the religious language, I would argue, Lermolieff becomes at points messianic. He refers to incorrect Giorgione attributions as *eine wahre Häresie* and poor restoration as *einem wahren Martyrium*.³ He also dramatises an act of conversion: Lermolieff’s by the old Italian.⁴ Inversely, when agreeing with Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Lermolieff writes of “being able to confess myself a convert”.⁵ This characterisation of Lermolieff as a prophet suggests he has an innate connoisseurial intuition, a God-given talent; in this way Morellian connoisseurship might be thought of as a belief system.

Lermolieff is the central focus of the text. His experience is what matters, not demonstrating systematic analysis. He inspires faith in his students; it is almost an irrational devotion.

¹ Morelli, 1893 pp.158-163; 1891, pp.209-215

² Morelli, 1892, p.62; 1890, p.77

³ Morelli, 1891, pp.282, 4

⁴ See Morelli, 1892, p.33; 1890, p.40; similarly, Tavolino, by reading Morelli’s book, also undergoes a spiritual-intellectual conversion – Placci, 1892, pp.106-107

⁵ Morelli, 1892, p.108; 1890, p.141

Despite the call for systematic study, Morelli's rhetoric contributes to the mystique of connoisseurship, since Lermolieff's authority is based on the reader's faith in him, inspired by his charismatic authority. The focus on an authorial-character, the dialogue form, the staging in the galleries, all this gives a literary equivalent for accompanying Morelli, helping the reader *believe* in his surrogate. The metaphor of a religious revolution is most clearly expressed in the final moments of "Principles and Method". Lermolieff returns to Florence seeking out the nameless Italian; first he approaches "the inspector of the gallery":

I was much amazed when this Government official [*königlich Beamte*] met my question with the cold rejoinder, that he had a great antipathy for this old heretic [*Wiedertäufer*] with his mania for renaming pictures, and had nothing whatever to do with him. 'Moreover,' he added, 'he is a declared enemy of liberty'.

This presentation makes a clear connection between heresy (Anabaptism), radicalism, and Morellian connoisseurship. The old Italian is presented as politically anti-authoritarian, his connoisseurship being an attack on cultural heritage and the politics of Risorgimento Italy; this becomes figuratively theological. The failed search leaves Lermolieff empty, directionless and contemplative: "I fell to meditating upon the transitoriness of all our joys and sorrows in this world". However, after two years he "reached the Eternal City at last", and there prepared to publish his gospel.¹

This rhetoric can be found in Morelli's earliest articles where traditional authority is personified. Discussing received attributions from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Lermolieff describes a time when art-criticism was reserved for "a few academicians and picture-collecting prelates". Their attributions "delivered between two pinches of snuff, were regarded as final and indisputable" and ever since "have been piously upheld by the easy-

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.61-63; 1890, pp.76-78

going public, and even by the majority of art historians”. Lermolieff therefore considers his attributions as “sacrilege in the eyes of the orthodox” because they “dispel the cherished illusions of many aesthetic dreamers”.¹ In this way Morelli instigates an art historical reformation; we cannot underestimate how attractive this must have been to his ideal student readership.

Induction as Divination and Revelation: *A Portrait of a Lady*

The duplicity and incongruity of Morellian method and rhetoric is made manifest in the attribution to Giorgione of *A Portrait of a Lady* (Fig.A46). Here we find the material and spiritual methods in perfect balance; Lermolieff revelling in his ironic role as the prophet of scientific connoisseurship.

We will omit some more or less unimportant pictures, and, in conclusion, devote a little more time to a wonderful portrait (No.143) which long attracted my attention, and is catalogued as the work of an “unknown master”.²

Morelli delays the disclosure of authorship, creating tension, aiming at a climactic effect. Today, the attribution to Giorgione is not consensus opinion; instead, the *Portrait* is given to Licinio on the basis of “the attention to the facial features of the sitter” which is seen as being “typical of the artist’s late portraits”.³ Even so, for Morelli and *Italian Painters*, this attribution was very significant. Consequently it is given an elaborate rhetorical treatment. Having never appeared in print before, it provided a new ending to the Borghese study. I

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.67; 1890, pp.84-85; 1874, p.3

² *Ibid*, 1892, p.248; 1890, p.323

³ Moreno and Stefani, 2000, p.275

would like to suggest, therefore, that *A Portrait of a Lady* functions as a denouement of Morellian connoisseurship.

Gibson-Wood understood this attribution as a “vivid illustration” that Morelli, even at the end of his career, was not attributing paintings through the observation of formal details, that he did not use “Morellian method”.¹ However, this interpretation ignores the methodological importance of *Geist* and the significant rhetoric of Lermolieff as prophet. I argue that to comprehend this attribution we must interpret *divination* and *revelation* as metaphors for *induction*. To understand this incongruous experimentation, I would like to re-examine the analogies with Freud and Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), before providing a close reading of Morelli’s argumentation. From this emerges a central metaphor: asking the painting a question. In this image Morelli can synthesise spiritual and material methods, scientific and religious rhetoric; the reader can then interpret the attribution, ironically, as both induction and divination.

In Morelli’s writing, *Kunstwissenschaft* might be understood as an example of the image knowledge gives of itself.² However, what has not been considered is that Morelli offers an alternative, seemingly contradictory set of images: the rhetoric of divination and revelation. It is on this level that Freud made the connection between his method and Morellian connoisseurship. “Lange bevor ich etwas von der Psychoanalyse hören konnte”, he wrote in his Michelangelo essay of 1914, “erfuhr ich, daß ein russischer Kunstkenner, Ivan Lermolieff, [...] eine Umwälzung in den Galerien Europas hervorgerufen hatte”. In one sentence Freud draws a comparison between the two methods: “Auch diese ist gewöhnt, aus gering geschätzten oder nicht beachteten Zügen, aus dem Abhub – dem “refuse” – der

¹ Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.234

² Griener, 2004, p.43

Beobachtung, Geheimes und Verborgenes zu erraten”.¹ The operative word is “erraten”, meaning to *guess* or *divine*. This verb refers not to a systematic process of enquiry but a psychological moment of inspiration or intuition.

Challenging Wind’s comment on the aesthetics of Morelli’s method, Ginzburg suggests that Morellian connoisseurship should be related to Freudian psychoanalysis and the detective stories of Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes. All three writers are seen as trained doctors who employed “the model of medical semiotics, or symptomatology”. In *The Cardboard Box* (1892), Holmes solves a crime using a “Morellian” argument:

Each ear is as a rule quite distinctive, and differs from all other ones. In last year’s Anthropological Journal you will find two short monographs from my pen upon the subject [...] I perceived that her ear corresponded exactly with the female ear which I had just inspected. The matter was entirely beyond coincidence.²

Ginzburg concludes with a post-structuralist analysis: “Morelli’s idea was to trace out within a culturally determined sign-system the conventions of painting”. The method has therefore been conflated with twentieth-century intellectual trends, this time allowing for a discussion of the “conjectural paradigm” of semiotics around 1870-1880.³ However, Freud makes the point of comparison not the object but the subject. Morelli, like Freud, discusses taboos: “unsightly things” [*garstigen, unästhetischen*];⁴ both connoisseur and psychoanalyst focus on despised, forgotten, unbeautiful things, rejecting the authority that has designated them as such. This subversion has the effect of a revelation.

¹ Freud, 1914, pp.23-24

² Ginzburg, 1980 pp.8-9

³ *Ibid.*, p.15; for arguments against the comparison with Freud and Conan Doyle see Vakkari, 2001 p.50; Anderson, 1991, p.493; Spector, 1969, p.68-69

⁴ Morelli, 1892, p.37; 1890, p.46

The revelatory function of these unnoticed features takes on great rhetorical significance for Morelli:

For years I thus groped around in the dark, trusting solely to intuition [*Und so tappte auch ich jahrelang, mich auf die blosse Intuition verlassend, im Nebel herum*] [...] repeated failure ended by discouraging me, and I then began to examine pictures more carefully, and to compare the painters one with another, with the result that I believe I have at length found a path which, if rightly pursued, will eventually lead us to the truth. [...*und endlich glaube ich einen Weg gefunden zu haben, der, richtig verfolgt, uns aus dem Nebel heraus in eine reinere Luft bringen dürfte.*]¹

The old Italian narrates his discovery of the method as itself a revelation, consciously taking on the role of mentor, offering his reader a path to enlightenment:

You must not lose patience, if I detain you with what may appear to you trivial even absurd. It is my object to make you notice everything in a work of art, and in time you will come to see that even details, in themselves insignificant, may lead us to the truth [*für sich geringfügigsten Dinge Ihr Auge zu richten; denn Sie werden mit der Zeit einsehen lernen, dass oft sogar ein einfacher sogenannter Schnörkel dazu dienen kann, Sie auf die rechte Fährte zu leiten*]²

This metamorphosis from insignificance to significance acts like a revelation. We lived in darkness (stumbled around in the fog), blind to the truth because of its simplicity and familiarity, but in this new light (clear air), what was ordinary becomes exceptional. The revelation of induction was also exploited by Conan Doyle within the conventions of the detective genre. The author explained that scientific method has its own literary quality, and gives “results more remarkable than any of the arbitrary and inexplicable triumphs” of other

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.21; 1890, pp.25-26

² *Ibid*, 1892, pp.46-47; 1890, p.58

detective stories.¹ In this way, Sherlock Holmes and Ivan Lermolieff are literary equivalents, inductive method having a revelatory, narrative effect.

Returning to the attribution of *A Portrait of a Lady*; Morelli begins by explaining:

It represents a woman of about twenty-eight; her dark eyes, full of fire and passion [*schwarze Augen von leidenschaftlich feurigem Blick*], are overshadowed by a low and intelligent forehead; the arrangement of the dark brown hair on the temples recalls in a measure that of the Knight of Malta in the Uffizi; there are hard long folds in the sleeves of her sombre dress.

Morelli makes a specific comparison, drawing attention to characteristic details – the keen glance, the low-forehead, the hair – which are mentioned in his treatment of Giorgione. Most importantly, however, the description evokes Giorgione’s *Geist*. The text reproduces the application of the method, taking the reader through two hypotheses which are tested and modified. At first Morelli thinks it may be by Dosso Dossi, but tells us he had not examined the painting critically, and that the background, parapet and “simplicity of treatment [*die Einfachheit der Darstellung*] did not appear to me to show the hand of this master [*scheinen mir den ferraresisch-venetianischen Maler auszuschliessen*]”. A second attribution is proposed with a description of an anatomical detail: “it occurred to me it might be of Sebastiano del Piombo’s early period; but for him also the conception appeared too profound [*tiefsinnig aufgefasst*], and the form of the hand too nearly akin to the *quattrocento*”. The shape of the hand is described as being characteristic of a period, rather than an individual artist, yet accords with Giorgione’s position as a bridge from the fifteenth to sixteenth century. Both these hypotheses fail the test, Sebastiano being not as “profound” and Dossi not as “simple” as Morelli’s Giorgione.

¹ Conan Doyle, 1903, p.vii

In Morelli's justification for the attribution, the perception of the artist's personality has attributive value; Giorgione *Geist* can be read in the description of the subject matter:

She stands at a window holding a white handkerchief, and gazing out with a dreamy yearning expression [*sehnsuchtsvoll träumerischem Blick*], as if seeking to descry one whom she waits. [*gleich als ob sie jemand, den sie erwartet, zu erspähen trachtete.*] The simple treatment of this mysterious figure reveals [*verräth*] a great artist – but whom? [*wer kann es sein?*]

The question is of course rhetorical, the answer having been implied by the description that “reveals” Giorgione's authorship, Morelli offering an ekphrasis that is permeated by the artist's “original and intense poetic feeling”.¹ This is the same romantic justification as is used for the Budapest *Portrait of a Young Man* (Fig.A45), who is “about to confide to us the secret of his life”.

After having evoked Giorgione's *Geist*, Morelli narrates the moment of attribution, the text becoming an expression of his immediate experience:

One day, as I stood before this mysterious portrait, entranced, and questioning, the spirit of the master met mine and the truth flashed upon me. “Giorgione, thou alone’ I cried in my excitement; and the picture answered, ‘Even so.’ [*Eines Tages jedoch, als ich wieder fragend und entzückt vor dem mysteriösen Bilde stande, begegnete mein eigener Geist dem des Künstlers, welcher aus diesen weiblichen Zügen herausah, und siehe da, in der gegenseitigen Berührung zündete es plötzlich wie ein Funken und ich rief in meiner Freude aus: Nur du, mein Freund, Giorgione kannst es sein, und das Bild antwortete: Ja, ich bin's.*]

¹ The question is also comic given Giorgione's name is used to head the page – Morelli, 1890, p.323

The attribution is turned into a moment of spiritual revelation; the language and drama of the translation are biblical. It could have been translated differently: “*ich bin’s*” is informal, and the conversational familiarity of the phrase “*mein Freund*” has been omitted. Ffoulkes’ decision to translate in this way displays her own interpretation, providing the language to match Lermolieff’s messianic characterisation. However, the English translation also plays down the spiritual aspect, losing the idea of the artist’s and connoisseur’s “reciprocal touch” [*gegenseitigen Berührung*] and the “sparks” [*Funken*] of this interaction.

The text continues by reinforcing the attribution with an escalating list of Morellian details: “Those eyes, with their profound yearning expression beneath slightly arched brows, that low straight forehead, that refined mouth, all testify to [*alle sprechen für*] Giorgione”.¹ Interestingly, this means that instead of imposing a name upon the painting, the painting has *spoken* for itself. This is the perfect metaphor for how Morelli wants his method to be understood, in the scientific and aesthetic sense. It is a metaphor for the relationship of critic and artist through the image, Morelli emphasising the synthesis of material and spiritual in his bilateral connoisseurship.

The attribution of *A Portrait of a Lady* revolves around Lermolieff literally asking the picture a question: *Nur du, mein Freund, Giorgione kannst es sein, und das Bild antwortete: Ja, ich bin’s*”. This metaphor is scientific; Liebig also used it to describe experimental method: “Wenn der Naturforscher unserer Zeit eine Naturerscheinung [...] erklären will, so stellt er die Frage nicht an sich selbst, an seinen Geist, sondern an die Erscheinung, an den Zustand selbst.”² For Morelli, when applied to art history, this metaphor becomes strangely actual.³

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.248-249; 1890, pp.323-324

² Liebig, 1852, pp.14, 17

³ The metaphor of *questioning* is also found in the novel *Un Furto*: “‘Interrogate e ri-interrogate, tutto occhi, il quadro di dubbio autore’, insegnava il maestro, ‘finchè egli non vi risponda: son io’” – Placci, 1892, p.107

The idea of *questioning* represents Morellian connoisseurship, and it can be found elsewhere in *Italian Painters*:

...the scholar is apt to relapse into the old error of approaching a work of art with preconceived notions, of seeing in it his own ideas, instead of allowing it to speak for itself. [*die eigenen Gedanken in das Object hineinzulegen, statt die das Object belebenden Gedanken aus demselben herauszulocken.*] A question earnestly and intelligently asked of a painting or statue will undoubtedly evoke an answer. The first thing, therefore, for a scholar to learn is, how to put that question with intelligence. [*das Kunstwerk so vernünftig und zugleich so liebevoll zu befragen, bis das Bild oder Statue, durch seine einsichtsvolle Liebe erwärmt, ihm Antwort gibt*]¹

This shows that the “experimental method” can be understood as a process of accusation and response. However, in translation the value of the question is “intelligence”, whereas in the original German the question should be put with “insightful love”, including therefore a romantic, spiritual aspect. This metaphor can also be found in Morelli’s 1870s articles:

“Every genuine work of a painter,” says an Indian art-critic, “will answer thee if thou comprehendest how to question it. If it give thee no answer, then know that the question was either without intelligence, or the soul, the spirit, the being of the master dwelleth not in that work.” [*oder aber dass die Seele, der Geist, das Wesen des Meisters nicht in jenem Werke lebt.*]²

This methodological emphasis on “the soul, the spirit/mind, the essence” of the painter, Morelli synthesises with an idea of material experimentation. The metaphor allows positivism and idealism, induction and divination, to be united in one trope. Morelli urges his ideal reader, almost literally, to speak to the paintings.

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.10-11; 1890, pp.12-13

² *Ibid*, 1892, pp.71-72; 1890, p.90; 1874, p.6

The attribution of the *Portrait of a Lady* is highly rhetorical, mixing deduction and divination in a narration of the connoisseur's spiritual connection with the artist. The ultimate justification for the attribution is that *only* Giorgione could “produce portraits of such astonishing simplicity, yet so deeply significant and profound.”¹ Through the metaphor of *questioning*, induction and divination become identical, allowing the reader access to the moment of revelation. In this way, Morellian rhetoric replicates the incongruity of Morellian method.

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.249; 1890, p.324

Morelli, Crowe and Cavalcaselle

Morellian rhetoric is avowedly anti-authoritarian; it is therefore easy to see why Crowe and Cavalcaselle were regarded as a major target for Morelli. In this context Giorgione became especially significant, the artist playing a central role in the competition between the *New History* and *Italian Painters*. To discuss this I will first look at Morelli's satiric practice and then at the "Vorwort" to the 1880 German galleries book, which begins by caricaturing Crowe and Cavalcaselle, analysing their *New History*, and defining its scientific authority. Following this I would like to examine the methodological distinction that Morelli proposes, and then the role the two connoisseurs play in his rhetorical design. Finally, the way Morelli's writing functions as an attack on Crowe and Cavalcaselle's authority can be seen clearly in the rhetoric which accompanies the attribution of the *Sleeping Venus* (Fig.A2). To understand Morelli's most important contribution to the "new" Giorgione, I will compare the 1880 and 1891 versions of the attribution, showing the developments in this competition with authority.

Satire and the "Vorwort"

Morelli wrote satires his entire adult life, from the 1830s to 1891. From this Gibson-Wood concludes that Morellian parody was "a form of writing that he eventually incorporated into his art-critical works", while Anderson argues the Morelli developed a way to present his

critical ideas in the form of a comic dialogue.¹ They do not, however, draw the conclusion that *Italian Painters* is a satire of connoisseurship. These early satires demonstrate that defamiliarisation and the displacement of authorship were Morelli's fundamental satiric strategies. The consistent use of authorial-character is found alongside the recurring themes of incongruous interdisciplinarity, and anti-authoritarian, anti-academic agendas. These techniques and intentions are evident in *Italian Painters*, and can help us to begin to understand why it remains such a problematic text.

Morelli's earliest satire attacks the archaeology department at Munich; Anderson has shown that the importance of this is the author's consistent position against the historiography of art. Published in 1836, the *Balvi magnus* is written under Morelli's first alias, "Nicholaus Schäffer", for his first ideal readers, the *Kneipgenossen*, a drinking group the author attended and whose meetings were called "Masses". With this pseudonym, "Nicholas Shepherd", Morelli begins a theme of inappropriate religiosity, as with Lermolieff, adopting the role of absurd spiritual leader. Although attacking Winckelmann and Richardson, classical iconography, not connoisseurship, is the focus of the satire.² From this text we can see Morelli's early concern is not with parodying any specific discipline, but the reverence of academic authority. This pattern was continued with "Das Miasma diabolicum" or "An Appeal to the German Christian" (1839), complete with frame narrator and parody of academic texts. Written in the self-righteous and condemnatory style of a fundamentalist protestant vicar, Morelli mocks an actual sect in Erlangen.³ As Anderson suggests, this characterised voice does sound indeed like a precursor to Lermolieff. I would add that the interdisciplinary clash of religious and scientific writing (for instance forwarding an

¹ Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.175; Anderson, 1991, p.569; Anderson, 1993, p.84

² Anderson, 1993, pp.85-87

³ Anderson, 1991, pp.516-518, 558

axiomatic relationship between sanctity and the respiratory system), also seems to pre-empt the clash of science with connoisseurial mysticism in *Italian Painters*.

In a letter to Layard (29 November 1880), Morelli wrote: “Jusqu’à present il me semble, que persone parmi ces bons Allemands ait aperçu le poison qui se trouve caché dans la préface du livre avant tout. Tant mieux pour moi!”¹ I argue that this *hidden poison* is irony; as in Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*, where “la vorace Ironie” is described as “ce poison noir!” polluting every word: “Elle est dans ma voix”.² The “Vorwort” to Morelli’s 1880 book can be divided in two, but only the second half was translated into English in 1883. The first part provides a characterisation of Lermolieff, including a dialogue with caricatures of Crowe and Cavalcaselle. As with Morelli’s own alter ego, the connoisseurial partnership has been defamiliarised by making them Russians, beginning their collaboration, unsure about how to commence. The second part outlines directly the relationship of the current book to Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s *New History* and *Titian*. As Morelli was to do over a decade later, the preface is signed *Ivan Lermolieff, Gorlaw, den 20. Juli 1877*.

The “Vorwort” must therefore be read as characterised and so ironic. This is signalled by the engraving which heads the first page. Drawing on Ancient Roman sarcophagus iconography, the image shows two figures balancing on garlands suspended in the middle by the winged child Eros. The two pan-like figures, one playing music, the other in an attitude of Bacchus holding a pine-cone tipped staff (*thyrsos*), signify humour and licence; this should be compared to the inconsequential header of the English edition (Figs.R22, R23). In other words, the text is headed by an image whose iconography suggests deviance, showing the reader that this is a mischievous, “poisonous” text.

¹ Qtd. in Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.205

² Baudelaire, 2008, p.156

In the “Vorwort” Lermolieff receives an unexpected visit from two older gentlemen: “der eine gross und blondhaarig mit starken Backenknochen, der andre klein, schwarzhaarig und zahnlos”.¹ The blond man (Crowe) explains that he had previously been a political and literary correspondent, but now wants to write the history of civilisation. In a much more cutting characterisation, the dark-haired man (Cavalcaselle) is presented as a failed artist. He has written on Michelangelo, and wants to write on Leonardo and Raphael, before attempting a whole history of Italian painting – the reverse, of course, of what Crowe and Cavalcaselle actually did. They explain “in für mich sehr schmeichelhaften Ausdrücken” how they heard of Lermolieff’s studies and his return to Russia, and so particularly wanted to ask his advice. Lermolieff, typically, protests that he does not feel in a position to do so but will try. The caricature of Crowe asks to be recommended some sources which would assist his bizarre task of proving that “die ganze Kultur des modernen Europa von der slavischen Race ausgegangen sei”. Lermolieff asks the caricature of Cavalcaselle if he can speak Italian: “Nein, antwortete er mir, etwas betroffen über diese Frage, italienisch verstehe ich nicht, doch deutsch, finnisch und auch etwas französisch”. This causes Lermolieff to “innerlichen lachen”, shrug his shoulders and let the badly prepared partnership leave. Morelli is exceptionally harsh, ridiculing the fact that Crowe was considered the writer; Cavalcaselle’s caricature is “toothless”, and illiterate in Italian.²

We can return to the English translation with the second half of the “Vorwort”, which explains the repudiation of Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s *New History*, Lermolieff describing this work “as regards content and compass” the most meaningful publication on Italian painting.³ Lermolieff at first praises its authors, writing that it contains “the results of the latest

¹ Morelli, 1880, pp.v-vi

² *Ibid.*, pp.vi-vii

³ *Ibid.*, 1880, p.viii; 1883, p.v

researches by specialists” and also a “most praiseworthy knowledge of existing records”. Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s history, he argues, has the advantage that “it is the work of not one man alone, which is sure to make a book on art one-sided”. He also attributes their success to race, one being Teutonic, the other Latin; therefore: “The judgements and opinions laid down in the work have by that means acquired a solidity which puts all national prejudice out of the question”. Lermolieff apologises, however, writing that “this could not prevent me from being in not a few instances of a different opinion” and that “to maintain and prove these adverse opinions, is one of the principal aims [*der Hauptzweck*] of these critical studies”.¹

Method is cited as the cause of the difference in opinion. The expressly inter-textual origin of the German galleries book is, however, undermined by Lermolieff’s claim that, with the exception of “historical data”, he has learnt very little from books.² The “Vorwort” ends with an appeal to Crowe and Cavalcaselle, asking them not to resent these “modest” studies, and to grant their author “freedom in the republic of thought”. Lermolieff then makes a claim that led Pope-Hennessy to accuse Morelli of “astounding disingenuousness”:³ “To bickering and strife [*Rechthaberei und Polemik*] I am a declared enemy. Life is too short and time too precious to waste on the weary [*unerquickliche*] polemics daily waged by art-critics”. Next comes the typical appeal to an ideal reader, combined with the messianic religious rhetoric: “Whoever is not opposed to my experimental method, but sees in it a way to get out of dreary dilettantism, and attain to a real Science of Art, let him take up the cross and follow me [*der nehme das Kreuz auf seine Schulter und folge mir nach*]”. Lermolieff ends with an attack on those critics who consider the experimental method “too materialistic and unworthy of a lofty mind”. They are told to “soar to higher spheres in the balloon of fancy. He is sure to have the

¹ Morelli, 1880, p.viii; 1883, pp.v-vi

² *Ibid.*, 1880, pp.viii-ix; 1883, p.vi

³ Pope-Hennessy, 1980, pp.13-14

applause of the gaping multitude” [*Des Beifalls der staunenden Menge wird er um so sicherer sein*].¹

What then is the “hidden poison” Morelli claims can be found in this “Vorwort”? The satire of Crowe and Cavalcaselle is hardly concealed, while his desire to correct their history is stated openly. Morelli characterises the two-connoisseurs as *beiderseitigen*, claiming the work of one man “is sure to make a book on art one-sided”. However, Lermolieff is “inwardly laughing” because it is he, Morelli, who is duplicitous. There is a further epistemological irony that defines *Kunstwissenschaft*: “Ich halte es mit dem Grundsatz, dass der Zweifel der Grund aller Erkenntniss ist” [*I have a principle that doubt is the basis of all knowledge*].² This is a truly positivist position, starting from a radical empiricist scepticism; however, it is also clearly ironic, *knowledge* and *doubt* are incompatible. In the “Vorwort” the reader is told that Lermolieff’s notes are simply “Auslassungen” and that *Kunstwissenschaft* will always be an incomplete, imperfect science, since “am Ende all unser Wissen und Können doch nur Stückwerk sei und bleibe”.³

Crowe and Cavalcaselle and Morellian Method

Morelli’s success depended upon the methodological polemic he created between himself and Crowe and Cavalcaselle; in a footnote from the German galleries book, Morelli criticises their history of technique, before arguing that:

¹ Morelli, 1880, pp.ix-x; 1883, pp.vi-vii

² Morelli, 1880, pp.vii-viii [my translation]

³ *Ibid.*, p.iv

1880:

Wenn ich nicht müde werde, diese Anschauung als von principieller Wichtigkeit zu betonen, so geschieht es nur, weil ich die Kunstjünger Russlands, die meiner Führung sich zu überlassen geneigt wären, von dem Abwege fern halten möchte, auf dem die Kunstgeschichte von Vasari an, und zwar hauptsächlich durch ihn, bis auf die neuesten Zeiten sich bewegt hat, was sicher den wahren Fortschritt und Gedeihen der Kunstforschung nur gehemmt hat.

[1891: It appears to me that the principles upon which the study of art is and has been conducted ever since the days of Vasari are radically wrong, and calculated to impede any real progress. I have reverted to this fact several times, as I think it desirable to warn students against teaching so misleading.]¹

It is very attractive to believe that art historians for three hundred years actually worked against the advancement of the subject. However, it has been suggested that Morelli's approach was not radically different from Crowe and Cavalcaselle's. Gibson-Wood argues that he nowhere defines their method and that Morelli did not have "a profound grasp" of art historiography.² From the evidence of the reductive and distorting criticism quoted above, this might appear to be the case; however, this seems designed primarily to irritate. Although in *Italian Painters* Morelli never explicitly characterises Crowe and Cavalcaselle's connoisseurship, he does discuss their historical method, while other criticisms of the partnership are implicit.

In "Principles and Method", Lermolieff and the old Italian discuss the connoisseurship of technique:

"You must allow, however, that the technic may be of great service to a trained eye in distinguishing one master from another. In Germany there is a school of connoisseurs

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.125, n.1; 1891, p.167, n.1; 1880, p.126, n.1

² Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.218, 210

who consider a knowledge of the technical qualities of painting a most important, if indeed it is not the chief guide in determining authorship.”

“It is rather a bold venture,” said the Italian with a laugh, “to pretend to recognise the technical qualities, such as the several pigments employed, in pictures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which for the most part are entirely disfigured by repainting. Since the days of the French artist Largillière, however, it has become the fashion to do so with many painters and connoisseurs, and even some art-historians. No wonder that the more sensible among modern painters should ridicule the pretensions of some recent writers on art. All these gratuitous suppositions as to method only serve to throw dust in the eyes of a credulous public.”¹

By linking the invention of the connoisseurship of technique to Largillière, Lermolieff makes Crowe and Cavalcaselle seem out-dated. The old Italian insinuates they are derivative, employing a rhetoric of technical expertise: a sophistic device designed to impress the reader and serving no practical purpose. But although Morelli ridicules them, elsewhere he appropriates their technical arguments, writing that: “About 1516 or 1517, as Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle have observed, Cariani’s technic underwent another change. He laid on his colours in a thin and liquid manner, grounding his pictures in tempera of a grey tone, and finishing them with thin glazes of oil”.²

Surprisingly, in distancing himself from Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Morelli does not make the difference between technical and morphological comparisons the central point of distinction. Instead, it is their art historical structure which comes under the greatest scrutiny, characterised as a “theory of influences”. Morelli argues that this should be replaced by his “organic” model: a race-orientated history of regional schools based on Darwinist principles. Morelli foregrounds this issue, arguing that Crowe and Cavalcaselle have little understanding of natural determination in Italian painting. Discussing Andrea Solario’s (1460-1524) *Virgin*

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.32; 1890, pp.38-39

² Morelli, 1893, p.24; 1891, p.34-35

and Child with Saints Joseph and Simeon (Fig.R24), Morelli digresses to explain that Crowe and Cavalcaselle's describe it as "a mixture [*ein Conglomerat*] of influences – Lombard, Florentine, Venetian, and even Bergamesque". From this he draws the conclusion: "Such theories [*schlüpfrigen Wege*] of analogy and influence are fatal to progress, and I shall not follow these critics further on such slippery ground [*ein Dornestrüpp oder in einen Morast zu führen*]"¹ The implication is that Crowe and Cavalcaselle are not "connoisseurs" in the Morellian sense, their failed attributions leading to a confused art history based on a nexus of imagined and impossible influences.

Considering Crowe and Cavalcaselle's "*Beeinflussungstheorie*", Morelli suggests that many foreign critics and dilettantes "after taking a hasty survey [*in der Eile zwischen dem ersten und zweiten Frühstück*]" of the Venetian colourists see their influence in all painters of local schools connected with Venice. However:

An outward show of learning attaches [*sehr geistreich und gelehrt klingenden*] to these theories, but in reality they are mischievous and misleading [*so grossen Unfug treibt*], tending to paralyse our intelligence [*geistlähmenden*] and to cause the greatest confusion. I cannot sufficiently warn our students against such teaching. It may be compared to the glistening line marking the path of the snail, which shortsighted persons might mistake for silver, though a sound eye at once perceives its true nature [*er für die Sehenden nichts anders als Schleim ist*].²

Placing the emphasis on "foreign critics" gives the criticism a political edge, sharpened by the trope of myopic connoisseurship, and the description of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's history as "slime".

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.173; 1890, p.220 [Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Vol.2, 1871, p.52]

² *Ibid*, 1892, p.286; 1890, p.375

A key Morellian principle is that “the phraseology of form and colour” [*Formen- und Farben-sprache*] can only be understood “in the land of its birth”.¹ The language of form and colour are environmentally and racially determined; for instance, Cariani is Begamasque, “a mountain race” which is “energetic and earnest” but “without grace” [*ist stets ernst, derb und energisch*]. This is compared to Bonifazio of “the Venetian stock” [*der venetianischen Rasse*], who is “graceful and attractive” [*lieblich und anmuthig*] and whose “slender, easy, and refined” [*schlank und edel und bewegen sich mit Leichtigkeit*] figures are differentiated from Cariani’s “coarse and robust saints” [*derben und vierschrötigen Heiligen*].² The reader is told that to understand an Italian school “it is necessary to consider it as an organic whole, which, like a living being [*Organismus*] passes through successive stages of development and decay [*welcher vom Keime an bis zu seinem Ersterben seine Entwicklung hat, von Stufe zu Stufe steigt, um dann von Stufe zu Stufe sinken*]”. In a footnote Morelli clarifies that “the conception and feeling in a work of art are inherent and vital qualities belonging, like speech, to each individual, to each nationality and race”. However, he also places destabilising conditions on this, acknowledging “that a Tuscan painter may at times have influenced [*äussern Einfluss*] a Lombard or a Lombard a Venetian”, but such exchanges could never have “interrupted” [*gestört*] the development of a whole school.³

Morelli’s repeats his theory a few pages later:

Art, as already observed, is a living organism [*das Leben der Kunst*] exercising its faculties within given limits and regulating its development by stated laws [*organischen Gesetze*]. Unfortunately this fact is constantly overlooked, and the art of painting is regarded as a mere outward and accidental manifestation [*Zufälliges*,

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.24; 1890, p.29

² Morelli, 1893, pp.23-24; 1891, pp.33-34

³ Morelli, 1893, pp.123-124; 1891, pp.166

Aeusserliches], standing in no relation to the distinctive character of the people among whom it flourishes.¹

Gibson-Wood argues that Morelli “never really explains his ‘organic’ theory”, but considers similarities to the ideas of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), and also the friction produced by a dual emphasis on individuals and groups.² Morelli’s thinking does become problematic with the assertion that the biology of art is more than figurative. I would argue, however, that this biological determinism demonstrates that Morelli was influenced by Taine’s *Philosophie de l’art* (1865), the opening chapter of which is also entitled “Principles and Method”.³ This philosophy is based on the scientific principle which “imposes no precepts, but ascertains and verifies laws”. Taine then defines a series of laws governing the development of art, showing it to be determined by social influences and natural causes. Art works in galleries should therefore be “arranged in families”, like “plants in a herbarium”.⁴ Taine bases his art historical model on the principle of natural selection, explaining the workings of this system in the laws like “milieu”.⁵ However, Morelli’s originality lies in his political localisation and the connoisseurial application. While Taine regards the Italian Renaissance as a whole, “the brutality, sensuality, and vigour of society”,⁶ Morelli foregrounds regionalism.

Many of the chapters in the *New History* are organised by regional schools, but Morelli’s complaint is that Crowe and Cavalcaselle lack an intimate knowledge of their visual expression of racial characteristics. However, there are similarities between the “organic” and “influence” models, both exhibiting the same problems in the description of objects. The

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.127; 1891, p.169

² Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.207-218

³ I will follow the author’s own 1865 translation

⁴ Taine, 1865, pp.18-23

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.84-86

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.18

complex and indefinite relationships between painters and/or their place of origin is apparent in a confusion of adjectives, both personal and geographical nouns being used as signifiers of artistic trends. We can hear this in Morelli's description of Cariani, in who the "Venetian element [*Anflug*] gradually disappeared" and "his Bergamasque nature [*Charakter*] reasserted itself [*unverhüllt zum Vorschein*]" after which "he expressed himself, so to speak, in the dialect of his native province".¹ Although seeming to reject the use of artist-adjective in practice Morelli does not; for instance attributing *The Three Ages of Man* (Fig.A43) on the basis that it is "thoroughly Giorgionesque" [*durch und durch Giorgionesk*], despite describing Giorgionesque as a "stereotyped term". Elsewhere he discusses the influence of Giorgione in Lotto's "Giorgionesque colouring", and also in Catena's paintings, which are "wholly Giorgionesque in feeling" [*ganze im Giorgionischen Sinne aufgefasstes*].² Nevertheless, Morelli repeatedly warns his reader not to trust Crowe and Cavalcaselle; the primary purpose of this theoretical separation being to discredit the *New History* and accentuate *Italian Painters'* novelty.

Crowe and Cavalcaselle and Morellian Rhetoric

Previtali has argued that Morelli's discussion of method and "organic" history functioned as a point of distinction, marking him as superior to Crowe and Cavalcaselle,³ but Morelli's attacks on the two connoisseurs were so unrestrained the antipathy created lasted years.⁴ Layard in his introduction to *Italian Painters* attempted an explanation, suggesting that Morelli "fully recognised their industry in collecting facts" but disagreed with them on their

¹ Morelli, 1893, p. 25; 1891, p.36

² Morelli, 1892, p.304; 1890, p.398; Morelli, 1893, pp. 44, 204; 1891, p.59, 267

³ Previtali, 1984, p.28

⁴ Graham, 2001, p.494 – Crowe's family refused to allow Roger Fry to work on the second edition of the *New History* for having once been considered Morellian.

use of this information, so that “when in a joking mood” he would say that Crowe and Cavalcaselle “are like truffle-dogs, which found the truffles, but did not know how to make use of them”.¹ In the same way, the contemporary English reviews pointed out Morelli’s “anxious courtesy” in expressing differences of opinion and “the self-gratulation with which he announced his entire agreement with them on various occasions”.²

Crowe reacted badly to the 1880 book; Layard wrote to Morelli (7 June 1881) relating how the Englishman had expressed his anger to Queen Victoria. Layard, however, wondered why considering the real venom had been aimed at Cavalcaselle.³ It is true that although *Italian Painters* attacks the partnership, the primary target is clearly the Italian. For instance, in the opening of the Borghese study Morelli refers to paintings which have been “most unscrupulously ‘restored’, that is *disfigured* [...] under the auspices of the Government Inspector-General, Signor G.B Cavalcaselle”.⁴ By referring to Cavalcaselle’s official title, Morelli makes the criticism professional, a tactic he repeats when criticising the Inspector-General’s “restoration” of Mantegna’s frescoes in Mantua, considered to be “irreparably damaged” [*eine schmachvolle „Restauration“*].⁵ There can be no doubt however that the animosity was personal as well, stemming from disagreements on a trip in 1861 when Morelli and Cavalcaselle travelled together on a government commission, cataloguing works from religious institutions in Umbria and the Marches.⁶

Throughout *Italian Painters* Morelli’s criticisms continue, repeatedly questioning the two connoisseurs’ authority. They are made to seem derivative and uncritical, as when Morelli

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.[30]

² *Quarterly Review*, 1891, p.243

³ Anderson, 1991, p.560

⁴ Morelli, 1892, p.82; 1890, p.104

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1892, p.273, n.9; 1890, p.359, n.2

⁶ For debate about the nature of this disagreement see Previtali, 1984, p.28; Anderson, 2000, p.19, 28; Levi, 1993, p.138

argues that Crowe and Cavalcaselle “formed no very clear conception” of Francesco del Cossa, having based their attributions on “the authority of the guide-books”.¹ Morelli phrases his opinion as contradiction rather than assertion, often adding a note of derision:

I have examined this date in a good light and in company of several intelligent art-critics [*einsichtigen Kunstfreunden*] [...] and we all agreed that it was genuine and had not been tampered with, as Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle affirm. As these writers hold that in studying art four eyes are better than two, they will, I doubt not, acknowledge that the testimony of eight eyes must therefore be more worthy of credence than that of four.²

On the important question of quality judgements Crowe and Cavalcaselle again fall short, drawing one of Morelli’s harshest condemnations. Regarding a Madonna in Dresden that they believe is a genuine Moretto, but which Morelli considers “the mere signboard figure of a vapid and hysterical nun”:

I am, indeed, quite ready to acknowledge a good copy may deceive even the most acute connoisseur; but that such a miserably feeble and clumsy production as this picture should have duped men who have made the study of art the business of their lives, and who passed judgement on innumerable works by the old masters, is altogether incredible.³

Whatever his motivation, we can see that the primary task of Morelli’s writing was to destroy confidence in the *New History*.

Surprisingly, given the ubiquity of the names Crowe and Cavalcaselle throughout *Italian Painters*, in Morelli’s study of Giorgione they are mentioned relatively little. Instead, Morelli

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.130; 1891, pp.173-174

² *Ibid.*, 1893, p.45, n.1; 1891, p.61, n.1

³ *Ibid.*, 1893, p.227; 1891, p.295; the Dresden picture is a version of Moretto’s *Apparition of the Virgin to the Deaf Mute Filippo Viotti* (1533-1534, Paitone)

discredits their entire understanding of this period in Venetian history; first in the Munich study, next with the reattribution of *Jacob and Rachel* (Fig.A26), and finally with the attribution of *Venus*. In between, Morelli can be seen as ignoring, misrepresenting and yet following the *New History*. Despite Crowe and Cavalcaselle's self-conscious problematisation of Giorgione, in 1880 Morelli complains that "no painter has ever been, and still is, so entirely misunderstood". To construct this problem situation involved ignoring the recent historiography; however, both the *New History* and *Italian Painters* offer limited catalogues and therefore Morelli, like Crowe and Cavalcaselle, was building on the revisionist trend. Even so, Morelli outlines the issue of the pan-Giorgionesque as if there had never been any challenge to the status-quo. The consistency with Crowe and Cavalcaselle is minimised, as can be seen in Morelli's discussion of the *Dead Christ* (Fig.A11), a picture already comprehensively disattributed in the *New History*. Morelli explains that "almost all the modern critics insist" on attributing this painting to Giorgione, but concedes that this is with the exception of Crowe and Cavalcaselle. Nevertheless, this is cited as "further proof that the great painter of Castelfranco is still anything but rightly understood, even by the greatest authorities".¹ Ironically, this is exactly the same rhetoric that the two connoisseurs had used in 1871 to demonstrate the shift to a "new" Giorgione.

Despite constantly referencing the *New History*, Morelli consistently misrepresents it. For instance, with the positive attribution of *The Knight of Malta* (Fig.A32) he registers his agreement with Crowe and Cavalcaselle; in fact, they had refrained from ascribing the picture to Giorgione.² The most obvious misrepresentation, however, is the lack of acknowledgement whenever *Italian Painters* follows the *New History*. For instance, in the discussion of Giorgione's relation to Giovanni Bellini: like Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Morelli denies the

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.220; 1891, p.287

² Morelli, 1893, p.216

idea that the younger man influenced the elder in his *San Zaccaria Altarpiece* (Fig.R6). Both *Italian Painters* and the *New History* see Bellini as therefore having an important influence in the Giorgionesque development of Venetian painting, although from the evidence of Morelli's text, the reader might believe this was his original idea.¹ The treatment of *The Castelfranco Altarpiece* continues this pattern, Morelli suggesting, as Crowe and Cavalcaselle had done, that we might conclude the model "was the woman beloved by Giorgione".² This is followed by a brief description of the scene, which Carrier has described as "not un-Pateresque";³ however, as we have seen, Pater was actually echoing Crowe and Cavalcaselle. Morelli too emphasises the tranquil light effects, considering them "of indescribable charm" [*bezaubernd Schön*] and arguing that painting "has a hallowing effect and awakens devotional feeling".⁴

Morelli's Giorgione is similar to Crowe and Cavalcaselle's; the artist is a "problem", and so the attributions are based on Michiel, Vasari and Ridolfi. Visually, however, Morelli's Giorgione seems a very different artist. Particularly noticeable is the absence of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (Fig.A15), and the disattribution of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's only new attribution, the *Adoration of the Magi* (Fig.A33), reattributed to Catena with no explanation.⁵ Morelli therefore disregards Giorgione's early career as constructed in the *New History*. However, he had already discredited the connoisseurs' history by reattributing the *Jacob and Rachel* (Fig.A26). In 1871 the painting had been attributed by Crowe and Cavalcaselle to Cariani; Morelli offers a stylistic analysis and argues that "G.B.F." cannot mean "Giovanni Busi Fecit" but was in fact an attempt to pass the picture off as by "Giorgione Barbarelli". This provides yet another opportunity to undermine Crowe and

¹ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Vol.1, 1871, p.173, n.2; Morelli, 1893, pp.212-213

² *Ibid*, p.130; *Ibid*, p.215; 1891, p.281

³ Carrier, 1991, p.131

⁴ Morelli, 1893, p.215; 1891, p.281

⁵ *Ibid*, 1893, p.205; 1891, p.269

Cavalcaselle who “are apt to confuse Palma’s two pupils”.¹ What Morelli does not tell his reader is that the *New History* describes the painting as entirely Palmesque, but due to the signature is forced to attribute it to Cariani.

We have heard how Crowe and Cavalcaselle raise Palma’s status; in the Munich study Morelli makes this issue pivotal. One disputed attribution swells into a critique of the *New History*’s entire presentation of early cinquecento Venetian painting. For Morelli, the debate about the extent of Palma’s influence over the Giorgionesque becomes a question “of some importance in the history of Venetian painting”.² His argument is long and comprehensive. Morelli persistently questions why Crowe and Cavalcaselle disbelieve Vasari, “this was evidently the account of the matter current in Venice and why should we doubt it?” He doubts the accuracy of their observations, asking in which works of Palma’s contemporaries they have seen his influence. “They must, I think, have confounded him with Giorgione.” On the idea that Pellegrino, Morto, and Pordenone were all directly affected by Palma, Morelli asks: “are we to accept this as a recognised fact?”³ After disputing each relationship in turn, he finally reduces the reader’s decision to a single climactic issue:

...for should the *cartellino* prove genuine, then Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle will be right in their conclusions, and the development of painting in the first twenty years of the sixteenth century must have been much as they represent it. If, on the other hand, it can be proved that the inscription was added after the death of Palma by some picture-dealer (which I am quite convinced was the case), then their theory breaks down [*so fällt ihre ganze Theorie wie ein Kartenhaus zusammen*], and Palma’s place among his renowned contemporaries will be a much lower one than that hitherto assigned to him. [*auf den die Verfasser der neuen italienischen Kunstgeschichte*]⁴

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.206-207 and n.2; 1891, pp.270-271 and n.2

² *Ibid.*, 1893, p.28 (pp.28-33); 1891, pp.39-40 (pp.39-46)

³ *Ibid.*, 1893, pp.29-32; 1891, pp.40-45

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1893, p.40; 1891, pp.54-55

Morelli overthrows Crowe and Cavalcaselle's "new" history by concentrating on their negotiation of Palma and Giorgione.

The relationship is complicated; on one hand Morelli questions the partnership's authority, on the other he builds on their research. This duplicity is unambiguous; directly after his refutation of the *New History's* judgement on Palma, Morelli writes: "Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle enumerate about fifty-three or fifty-four as authentic. I think the following should be omitted from their list". He then cites four works, before adding another ten.¹ While managing to discredit the *New History* and to make Crowe and Cavalcaselle appear repeatedly misled by their false assumptions, almost unashamedly, Morelli is complicit with their work.

The Sleeping Venus

In Morelli's 1880 German galleries book, the climax of the competition with Crowe and Cavalcaselle arrives in the attribution of the Dresden *Sleeping Venus* (Fig.A2). The "Vorwort" is dated 1877, yet Morelli claims to have attributed the painting in 1879. If we take him at his word, the significance of this discovery for the connoisseur's confidence must have been dramatic, the attribution providing a tangible justification for Lermolieff's authority. Morelli was then able to use the *Venus* as his personal masterpiece of connoisseurship, shaping it into the defining moment of his condemnation of the *New History*. I have already discussed Morelli's documentary and visual justifications for

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.41; 1891, pp.56-57

Giorgione's authorship; however, these arguments are secondary to the anti-authoritarian rhetoric which adorns the attribution.

Morelli begins by quoting Michiel in full and with a translation, but then moves suddenly away: "I shall return to this remarkable picture [*merkwürdige, ganz verschollene Bild*], but first..." The reader is then given the disattribution of the *Dead Christ*, which acts as "further proof of what I have already pointed out [*ein weiterer Beweis für die Richtigkeit meiner Behauptung*], that the principal authorities [*grössten Autoritäten*] on art still know and understand little of this great master".¹ The remainder of Morelli's treatment of the *Venus*, besides justifying its authenticity, serves to reinforce this point. The text continues [*Nach dieser langen Digression*] referring back to the "Venere" mentioned in the *Notizia*, before finally offering the reader his glorious object:

This exquisite picture is generally supposed to be no longer in existence [*ganz verschollen*]. Whether this be really the case is another question, and one which I think I may answer in the negative, for I believe the student [*meine jungen Freunde*] has but to seek for it in the Dresden Gallery.

Employing a much more direct style than elsewhere in *Italian Painters*, Morelli makes the *Venus* a gift for his ideal reader. This is a more subtle formulation than in the 1880 version, where Morelli metaphorically opens the eyes of the establishment: "This glorious picture, hitherto veiled from the eyes of art critics, is to be found at the Dresden Gallery".²

The assumption is that an attribution to Giorgione means this *Venus* is a great work of the Venetian Renaissance. Morelli attempts to situate the object aesthetically, with hyperbolic but

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.220; 1891, pp.286-287; 1880, pp.192-193; 1883, pp.163-164

² *Ibid.*, 1893, pp.221; 1891, pp.287-288; 1880, pp.193-194; 1883, p.164

brief praise (often repeated) for the linear quality: “What other artist, even among the Greeks, [*Hat Raffael oder irgendein Künstler, selbst unter den Greichen,*] ever displayed a more refined feeling for line [*feineres Liniengefühl*] than Giorgione has shown in this picture?” Morelli then compares the *Sleeping Venus* to other masterpieces of the genre and period: Palma’s *Venus* in the same gallery (Fig.R25) becomes “coarse and unrefined” [*klotzig und bäuerisch*], while Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (Fig.R26) seems “commonplace and devoid of all inward grace”. These descriptions are designed to be antithetical with Morelli’s ekphrasis of the *Sleeping Venus*, continuing the pattern established by the characterisations of the artists. Typically, Morelli ends his exaltation with a strangely contradictory assessment: “If the dirt and the repaints [*der Farbenmaske des Restaurators*] at present disfiguring the picture were carefully removed [*befreit*], it would, I think, prove to be one of the greatest art-treasures in existence”.¹

The anti-authoritarian function of the *Venus* attribution is clear; Morelli’s writes more about the failure of art history than about the picture itself:

It is incomprehensible to me [*für mich geradezu ein Räthsel*] that such a work, the quintessence of Venetian art, should not have been recognised by critics. Long experience, however, has taught me that the most incredible things are possible where art is concerned.²

Morelli compares the situation with that of the “vapid and hysterical nun”, which had been praised by “critics of the learning and authority of Von Quandt and Rio”, before writing of how “few see the value of this ‘Venus’ – the most perfect and beautiful of all representations

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.222; 1891, pp.288-289; 1880, pp.194-195; 1883, pp.165-166

² *Ibid*, 1893, p.221; 1891, p.288; 1880, p.194; 1883, p.165

of the kind”. This praise is dampened by the normal assessment that the light which “shines forth” is “dimmed by restoration”, before Morelli again digresses into a lament:

Such a state of things is indeed deplorable and disheartening, for of what avail is the culture we hear so much of in these days, and of what use our annual exhibitions of pictures, of the lectures and countless publications on art, if we are wholly unmoved by one of the most sublime works of art ever produced, unless it be specially brought to our notice? [...*wenn ich dieses bedenke, so befällt mich ein trauriges Gefühl, eine tiefe Entmuthigung, und ich muß mir selbst sagen: was nützt alle unsere gepriesene Bildung, was frommen die Tausende von Büchern über Aesthetik und Kunst, was helfen unsere öffentlichen Vorlesungen, was unsere jährlichen Kunstausstellungen, wenn wir, ohne besondere Fingerzeige, stumpf und gefühllos vorbeigehen können an einem der herrlichsten, vollkommensten Werke, das die Kunst aller Zeiten je ans Licht gebracht hat?!]*¹

What use are exhibitions, education, “the thousands of sanctimonious books on aesthetics”? (We can see how much more passionate the original German denunciation was.) That this *Venus* has gone unnoticed, Morelli argues, discredits not merely the gallery, but everyone connected with the art world. The clause “*ohne besondere Fingerzeige*” emphasises the author’s role as one who transcends culture, undermines authority, and calls the reader’s attention to what is authentically *herrlich, vollkommen*.

The 1883 translation accentuates the biblical language, carrying the lament to epic proportions: “Poor, great Giorgione! how little art thou understood by this modern world!” [*Armer grosser Giorgione, wie wenig versteht dich doch diese moderne Welt*]. Morelli, it seems, is the only person to have truly known the artist, and so he ends with an unrestrained attack on his opponents:

¹ Morelli, 1893, p.221; 1891, p.288; 1880, p.194; 1883, p.165

The greatness of Giorgione has been little understood in the present day, and even shortly after his death how few were capable of comprehending him! How many pictures have been recognised as specimens of his brilliant genius which are in reality but caricatures. Those who are incapable of seeing the beauty of this “Venus” by him can have no true appreciation of the art of Raphael, Leonardo, Correggio, or Titian.¹

The final sentence aims directly at the antagonistic reader, denying them knowledge of all the great Italian Renaissance painters.

In the 1880 reference to Crowe and Cavalcaselle, relegated to a footnote in 1891,² Morelli expresses his surprise that the two connoisseurs accept the gallery’s attribution to Sassoferrato. He ridicules their claim to have found the original Titian in Darmstadt, describing this painting as “a free and most inferior copy [...] executed by some feeble German painter of the eighteenth century”.³ To clarify, in *Titian*, Crowe and Cavalcaselle had positively attributed the *Sleeping Venus* in Darmstadt (Fig.R27), and listed five paintings they believed to be copies of this original. This list includes Morelli’s *Venus*, which the connoisseurs describe as “assigned dubiously to Sassoferrato”.⁴ Cavalcaselle’s sketch and Crowe’s notes on the Dresden painting (Fig.R28) show that the connoisseurs made the connection to Giorgione and were aware the cupid had been removed; unlike Morelli, however, they did not make the connection to Ridolfi and Michiel. This failure meant the attribution of the *Venus* could act as a weapon in the competition with the *New History*.

There are two different versions of the final paragraph of Morelli’s *Venus* attribution; the 1880 ending emphasises the disparity between the Dresden and Darmstadt paintings, while

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.221-222; 1891, pp.288-289; 1880, p.194; 1883, p.165

² This replaces a footnote in the 1880 edition that offered an elaborate narrative whereby Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* is painted on request as a copy of the Dresden *Venus*, and contains a portrait of Eleonora Gonzaga (1493-1570) – Morelli, 1880, p.167, n.1

³ Morelli, 1893, p.224, n.1; 1891, p.291, n.1

⁴ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Vol.1, 1877, p.275

the 1891 conclusion offers a retrospective evaluation; both however serve the same anti-authoritarian function. The first edition follows directly from the mention of Crowe and Cavalcaselle and has been said to evoke the “vituperative style” with which Morelli denounced their judgment:¹

Let true lovers of Italian art decide between these two antagonistic judgements! My words are not at all addressed to those who take pleasure in copies after Holbein, Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, and Moretto, and who are wont to gaze at and admire them as originals; may they quietly continue to solace themselves with sham art [*Scheinkunst*], provided they leave me undisturbed [*ungestört*] to my admiration of this Venus of Giorgione.²

Morelli issues an ultimatum; he is directly addressing the ideal reader, while indirectly ridiculing the antagonistic establishment; the attribution becomes a blunt object with which to batter Crowe and Cavalcaselle *quietly* over the head.

By 1891 this passage has changed significantly, becoming less overtly confrontational and, with the relegation of Crowe and Cavalcaselle to a footnote, more self-centred:

After the lapse of ten years I may be permitted to express my satisfaction at seeing this glorious work of Giorgione now accepted as an undoubted original, not only by Dr. Woermann but by the majority of art-critics in Europe. This one fortunate discovery, which in a propitious moment I was enabled to make, will perhaps atone in some degree for my many other shortcomings and mistakes. [*Dieser einzig glückliche Griff, den in einer guten Stunde mir zu thun beschieden war, möge in den Augen meiner freundlichen Leser die vielen Unarten und Fehltritte, die ich mir sonst zu Schulden kommen liess, aufwiegen!*]³

¹ Graham, 2001, p.495

² Morelli, 1883, p.168; 1880, p.197

³ Morelli, 1893, p.224; 1891, p.291

Here Morelli is gracious in victory, supplicating and effacing himself in front of the reader, yet also basking in the glow of his triumph. The attribution serves as the ultimate by proxy justification for Morellian method, and it is still used to validate him today. The modest protestations, the way Lermolieff asks his “friendly reader” to forgive his “bad habits and slips”, do not detract from Morelli’s victory; however, the *Venus* also functions as an apology, for all the aggression and irony, the author’s “guilt” [*Schulden*] having been redeemed by this one true insight.

Morellian Irony: Problematisation and Giorgione

In attempting to gain a deeper understanding of Morelli's text I have come to the conclusion that irony is absolutely fundamental to the way it operates. To treat this subject fully has necessarily led me away from a narrow focus on Giorgione to a discussion of irony within Morellian connoisseurship as a whole; to a consideration of his attitude to art history writing, to the idea of *parabasis*, and finally, to argue that irony is a problematisation which functions as a negative justification for this "new" Giorgione.

Art History Writing

The primary function of Morellian connoisseurship was ironic; his contribution to the discipline was secondary. This can be seen especially clearly in the correspondence with Layard during the 1880s. Layard was a committed disciple of *Kunstwissenschaft*, but in a letter to Morelli (23 October 1883) he suggests the publication of a new, more systematic edition of the German galleries book, including greater clarity in the explanation of method. The reason given is that Lermolieff does not do the author justice.¹ This shows that Layard located the value of Morelli's work in his contribution to the discipline, not his satire of it; however, the Englishman must have been disappointed with the reply (26 December 1885). Morelli insisted that "il semble qu'il n'en vaut pas la peine", principally because "Mon but est atteint même sous la forme baroque sous laquelle j'ai présenté mon livre au public". This "baroque form" was Lermolieff, but what was this "aim"? And why was style so important in achieving it? Morelli continued by listing Morellian principles; teaching amateurs that current

¹ Anderson, 1991, p.567

histories of art are unreliable, that the general impression is not sufficient to attribute paintings with certainty, and that one must learn “la grammaire du langage artistique”. In conclusion, he explains that: “Ce but que je m’étais proposé je crois de l’avoir atteint – bien ou mal que ce soit – avec le livre du Lermolieff”.¹ Morelli goes on to refer to “la method de Lermolieff”, distancing himself from what Layard had called *his* method. In this way, strangely, Morelli dismisses his friend’s concerns, and even *Kunstwissenschaft* itself.

In the preface to the 1887 edition of Kugler’s *Handbuch*, Layard describes the 1880 German galleries book as “the most important contribution ever made to the study of art”; however, he also publicly states that: “It is to be wished that Signor Morelli would publish a work containing so rich a mine of information in a different and more methodical form”.² Again, however, the Englishman cannot have been pleased with the response. In a letter (20 May 1888), Morelli explains that ““J’ai écrit une espèce de satyre” and that he will send it to Layard. In the following letter (29 May 1888), Morelli refers to this satire as “une sottise”, but nevertheless proceeds to summarise the contents: divided in two, the first part described “la vieille Europe” as it appears to a “Yankee de Chicago”; the second part contained the theory for a new, American art. Morelli sent Layard the first half, asking his friend to take “la decision finale”, and insisting that if he were to publish, he would do so anonymously.³

Layard’s refusal to sanction the text leaves no doubts about his opinion (4 June 1888): he argues that to publish would harm Morelli’s reputation, and that the style of Lermolieff was easily recognisable.⁴ It almost seems as if Morelli was trying to provoke Layard. By the close of the nineteenth century satiric irony, especially *roman à clefs*, had come to be seen as

¹ Qtd. in Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.280-281

² Kugler, 1887, pp.xv, xvi,

³ Qtd. in Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.282-284

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.284-285

“cheap and vulgar”,¹ an opinion Layard seems to represent. Morelli’s writing is vicious; the irony often being a “closed, purely negative, satirical laugh” which is “not a laughing laugh”.² Even Morelli’s friends were not immune, Layard having recognised himself in the character of an old diplomat who becomes a collector, judging this “trop méchant”.³

In his reply (9 June 1888), Morelli graciously accepted Layard’s decision, which had surely not come as a surprise. He then explained that he did not place much value on the authority which Layard stresses: “Vanitas vanitas totum vanitas”. It is not worth speaking seriously: everything he has written was “avec toute la sincérité de mon âme et de mon esprit”. The immediate question presents itself: how *sincere* was Morelli’s mind and soul? He goes on to depreciate his work, referring to it as “divertissement intellectuel”; crucially, he expresses that he never dreamed of contributing to “la soi-disante vérité”. I feel that the connoisseur had wanted to demonstrate to Layard how distant their concerns were; Morelli was being *ironic*, as can be heard in the concluding “Amen!”⁴

Anderson argues that Morelli believed “la plus frappante de presenter une vérité passait par l’ironie”; Carrier reads Morellian irony as a post-modern linguistic critique.⁵ Although the use of irony might lead to the idea that Morelli considered *language* suspect, I would argue that it is the author’s attitude to *writing* which is fundamental. In the dialogue with the old Italian, Lermolieff maligns the literature of art; these generalisations can be seen to include works like Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s *New History* and Pater’s *The Renaissance*. The reader:

¹ Meucke, 1982, p.19

² Bakhtin, 1986, p.135

³ Qtd. in Gibson-Wood, 1982, p.284

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.286-287

⁵ Anderson, 1987b, p.54; Carrier, 1991, p.138

...may have revelled in the fine writing, and no doubt may have acquired quite a stock of new painters' names, and a string of the latest and most approved art-terms, [*heerliche Phrasen und ästhetische Maximen zu lesen bekommen, die seine Ohren berauschten und seinen Geist kitzelten, und hat dabei vielleicht zugleich auch ein paar Dutzend nagelneuer Künstlernamen und Kunstwörter*] with which to do great execution at the next social gathering; but, beyond that, all these names and dates, these well-turned sentences and fine theories, are mere empty nothings [*leerer Schall*], and practically worthless.¹

Morelli's targets are ideas like Pater's "musical law" and vocabulary such as Crowe and Cavalcaselle's "masks" and "glazes". Evaluating *writing* necessarily includes notions of *language*; however, Morelli's epistemology is not post-structuralist. Both Anderson and Wind draw an analogy between the plain argumentation of Morellian and Socratic dialogue, and indeed Morelli himself references Socrates; however, following Kierkegaard, we must view dialogue not as a matter of knowledge but irony.² Morelli's writing should therefore be interpreted as an ironic reflection on scientific rhetoric.

Morelli's own contribution to art historiography was a fragmented and chaotic text in an aggressive and sarcastic style. Read as a conscious literary exercise, *Italian Painters'* intentionally digressive and tangential structure disrupts the authority of professional, institutionalised history. The systematic intertextuality functions as an ironic negation of other connoisseurs' work, extended to a criticism of art literature in general, becoming finally a self-referential evaluation of connoisseurship itself.

The dialogue of "Principles and Method" begins with a negative assessment of the state of scholarship. Gibson-Wood outlines some of the contradictions contained in this analysis,

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.6-9; 1890, p.7-11

² Kierkegaard, 2001, p.5

especially Morelli's decision to publish while claiming that knowledge of art could never be gained from reading books. But this interpretation rests on the belief that the two characters' ideas are interchangeable with Morelli's. This may be, but it may not. Consequently, Gibson-Wood's fine analysis struggles with the defamiliarisation. Either, Morelli's "pattern of thinking" paraded his own ideas as Lermolieff's, or, Morelli "deluded himself" and regarded his character's "ideas as belonging to the realm of factual truth".¹ Accrediting the contradictions in *Italian Painters* to Morelli involves ignoring the distance created between author and character, and therefore the possibility the uncertainty was intentional.

"...I must plead that the endless books on art and aesthetics, which I read in Germany and Paris, had given me such a positive distaste for the subject and all connected with it, that I came to Italy vowing not to visit a single church or picture gallery. Florence, however, soon forced me to abandon this resolution."

"Then you were formerly an admirer of art, and it was your sojourn in Germany and Paris which gave rise to this aversion to it? [*wie Sie sagen, ein Feind derselben geworden?*]"

"Distaste, perhaps, but scarcely aversion. [*Ich darf meine Abneigung nicht Feindschaft nennen, wol aber Ueberdruss.*]"²

Morellian irony works both ways, denigrating art history writing, and yet creating a demand for a new species of literature. However, adding further complexity, this literature is based on an empiricist scepticism that reduces knowledge to sense perceptions, making text paradoxically extraneous.

Gibson-Wood continues her analysis by arguing that Lermolieff's reductive presentation of the variety of nineteenth-century art historical methods facilitated his own lack of attention to

¹ Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.199-200

² Morelli, 1892, p.2; 1890, p.3

historiography.¹ Yet this must be squared with the intense intertextuality; from the beginning of “Principles and Method” we have art history writing as the principal subject, yet one that is devalued to create uncertainty: “‘Guide-books,’ he said in a slightly ironical tone [*nicht ohne einen leichten ironischen Ton*], ‘are written for the great body of tourists’”. The dialogue continues with the old Italian observing that Lermolieff’s apathy was “bought on probably by too much reading”, concluding triumphantly “the truth is, art must be seen”. Predictably, it is in Germany where:

“... people will only read, and art must be brought to public notice, not through the medium of brush or chisel, but through that of the printing press. [*die Kunst nicht gemalt oder gemeisselt, sondern schwarz und weiss gedruckt vor sich sehen*]”

“Unhappily,” resumed the Italian, “we live in an age when writing and publishing are epidemic in Europe; when every one appears to think it is his bounden duty to proclaim his own ignorance in this manner.”

“Yes,” I said, “these unfortunate people [*albernen Leute*] ruin their eyesight and fritter away the best part of their time in reading and writing, and how few among them understand the art of living!”²

How are we to interpret this conversation? Both writer and complicit reader are trapped in a paradox of condemnation. Reading and writing negate writing and reading, the text is anti-text.

Throughout *Italian Painters*, literature is held responsible for the multiple errors which Lermolieff is cursed to correct. For instance, the reason Sodoma is completely misunderstood and underrated is that most writers “derived all their knowledge from books”.³ Books are based on other books, history on history, and Morelli offers the *New History* as the exemplum of flawed art literature. Lermolieff fears for Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s readers, claiming that

¹ Gibson-Wood, 1982, pp.219-220

² Morelli, 1892, pp.2-3; 1890, p.3

³ Morelli, 1893, p.81; 1891, p.107

“the teacher himself is ignorant of the language of art” [*der Lehrer, selbst der Sprache der Kunst unkundig*].¹

But what is the “language of art”? Is it the aesthetic and technical rhetoric that Morelli seems to condemn, or his own naturalist, morphological vocabulary? Within *Italian Painters* there are multiple references to the language or grammar of art, and comparisons of *form* to dialectic and hand writing.² Wollheim considers that Morelli’s failure to clarify these linguistic analogies show “a weakness in his overall theory”.³ However, we have seen that when Morelli republished his connoisseurship he introduced two new references to *Schnörkel*; calligraphic flourishes are both indicators of authorship, and yet highly problematic.⁴ Here the author is not trying to clarify his ideas, but intentionally introducing ambiguities; the linguistic analogies are ironic, functioning to assert the primacy of *looking*; the language of art is not *text* but *form*.

A popular conception of Morelli’s comment on the language of art history writing is illustrated by Placci’s novel *Un Furto*. Lermolieff is represented as instigating a rhetorical competition between science and aesthetics:

Il Russo non ammettava la critica d’arte in voga, critica immaginativa, poetica, descrittiva, letteraria, pittoresca, graziosa, ingegnosa, tutto quel che volete, d’un Ruskin o d’ un Gauthier, d’ un Taine o d’ un Pater. [...] Finchè, a similitudine dei musei di storia naturale, non si è preparato un ordinamento su base scientifica, anche per la Gallerie, noi, chiacchieroni estetici, dobbiamo chiudere bocca.

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.7; 1890, p.9

² *Ibid*, 1892, p.24; 1890, p.29

³ Wollheim, 1973, p.200

⁴ Morelli, 1893, p.4, n.1; 1891, p.7, n.1; Morelli, 1892, pp. 75; 1890, p. 95

The reader can sense Tavolino's ambivalent commitment to the new language in his long, positive list of adjectives describing these rejected writers, and also in the communal "we". Placci's list of authors suggests that French and English (as much as German) art criticism was a foil for Morelli's new scientific language. Although Tavolino sides with Pater, he accepts the necessity of this new literature, and so rather than the "elegante parolario che si diletta di *esteticherie*", Lermolieff "dando il palma invece a chi espone importanti conclusioni pratiche, in pochi disadorni, chiari periodi da manuale di Geologia".¹

However, as we have seen, "unadorned, clear sentences" is not an accurate description of Lermolieff's style, nor is "logical and simple" a fair representation of his mode of argument. While his texts may be littered with precise anatomical terminology, this is set in the context of an irreverent, chatty, comic style. In Morelli's early articles, Lermolieff contrasts prosaic objective science with poetic subjective aestheticism (helpfully conflated with a nationalist stereotype): "as the Germans would put it, that it causes the tenderest chords and fibres of my soul to vibrate". Lermolieff then claims that attribution is unimportant as long as art gives pleasure, which it does, "in spite of the many mistakes which pedantic art-critics strive to discover". Of course Morelli himself is just such a pedantic critic whose task is unnecessary, while Lermolieff creates further uncertainty about the language of both aestheticism *and* science: "A painting, once said a professor of aesthetics, is like a flower of the field – pure and refined natures delight in it, and care not whether the learned botanists classify it among the Rosaceae or the Malvaceae". Lermolieff's dismissive retort to the idea that scientific taxonomy denies aesthetic uniqueness suggests that both languages are extraneous to art

¹ Placci, 1892, pp.105-107

appreciation: “And now, without wasting further words...”¹ In “Principles and Method” Lermolieff initially resists the old Italian’s new language:

“My dear sir,” I exclaimed, “spare me these details of hands and ears before such a picture. In the presence of art like this it is utterly impossible to think of these things. Raphael’s spirit [*Raffael’s göttlicher Geist*] has cast its magic spell over me, and I cannot descend to that prosaic level [*Nüchternheit des Geistes*] requisite for studying form.”²

Carrier has used this to argue that Morelli believed in the indescribability of the organic whole.³ It is true that the English translation implies a level of linguistic critique with the word “prosaic”; however, the original German concentrates on the denial of subjectivity, not language. Morellian irony here reflects on the material and spiritual duality of his method.

Edgar Wind concentrated on the nature of Morelli’s aesthetic, connecting him to Schlegel and Romanticism; Ginzburg challenged this view, and returned to a scientific interpretation of the artist’s spirit/mind.⁴ There can, though, be no doubt that Morelli’s writing was deeply engaged with ideas of artistic inception and aesthetic reaction. As we have seen, the description of Morellian method as a “matter-of-fact way” is in fact *unästhetische Art*, the emphasis being on the opposition between *aesthetic* and *scientific*. However, Lermolieff defines the process of his scientific method as being *durch die Form in den Geist dringen*. This is the route to *wahren Erkenntniss*, and Lermolieff considers that this sounds like *eine philosophische Phrase*, which of course it does. Again, in his explanation of formal categories, *Charakter oder Stil* is understood as a relationship between *Idee* and *Form*.⁵

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.68; 1890, p.86; 1874, p.3

² Morelli, 1892, p.55; 1890, p.68

³ Carrier, 1991, p.138

⁴ Wind, 1985, pp.36-39; Ginzburg, 1980 pp.8-9

⁵ Morelli, 1890, pp.93-94

These are not sentences taken from the geology textbook, but represent instead the language of Hegelian idealism; in fact, Morelli's notions of artistic expression might be seen as parallel with Pater's "*the condition of music*". This can be heard in his differentiation between "physical" and "mental" vision, demonstrating the combination of sense and intellect, of positivism and idealism: *mental-sight*.

Although Morelli explicitly questions art history writing, he is not making a negative comment on language itself. Instead language is very important:

"Why," returned the Italian, "of what use are lectures on the history of art if not to make us think and see for ourselves; to teach us how to distinguish true from false, important from worthless? Why do we go to school? Not merely to be told word of mouth what we could read for ourselves at home with infinitely less trouble; but in order that the stirring and suggestive words of the teacher may inspire us..."¹

The Italian calls for an education in *thinking* and *seeing*; the function of Morellian irony is to deny the authority of *writing*, to teach his students *to doubt*. However, ironies like "reading ruins eyesight" create a continual negativity. If the reader attempts to construct or deconstruct Lermolieff's thinking about connoisseurial rhetoric, the result will be, perhaps intentionally, irresolvable paradox.

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.12; 1890, p.14

The Preface as Parabasis

A problem with Morellian irony is that it is not “classical”. There is no key by which the satire becomes comprehensible, no mirror in which to read the text in reverse, it is not “simple” irony. It is not honestly disingenuous; this can be seen in the two prefaces from *Italian Painters* (dated 1889 and 1890). These prefaces aggravate Morelli’s ambiguous reputation by reflecting on Lermolieff’s controversial writings, generating contradictions that create an ironic context which undermines any definitive interpretation.

Morelli has been specifically connected to Schlegel’s *Fragments*; in this work irony is defined as “permanent parabasis”.¹ Parabasis is an element in the structure of Classical Greek Comedy in which the Chorus abandoned its dramatic role and addressed the audience.² For example in Aristophanes’ *The Clouds* (423 BC, and 420-417 BC), which (like *Italian Painters*) is a revision. Morelli’s prefaces perform the same function as Aristophanes’ parabasis, allowing the writer to question his audience’s interpretation. In *The Clouds* the chorus promises to “tell you now the frank and simple truth”, which is plainly, “I don’t think my audience consists of clever men”.³ The preface to *Italian Painters* achieves “permanent parabasis” by creating a reasonable doubt about the author’s intention. In this way, Morellian irony revolves around the question: what is being said?

Anderson has intriguingly suggested that the pseudonym Lermolieff may derive from the name Lermontov. The romantic poet Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1841) is cited as a forefather of the Russian prose novel for his *A Hero of Our Time*, written in 1839 and revised

¹ Wind, 1985, pp.36-39; Schlegel, 1971, p.29

² Sommerstein, 1973, pp.26-27

³ Aristophanes, 1973, p.134

in 1841. Anderson mentions that the novel's protagonist Grigoriy Aleksandrovich Pechorin is "presented ironically as the incarnation of the vices of his generation".¹ I would argue that Lermolieff performs the same function for connoisseurship. It has been claimed that *A Hero* has suffered from a history of interpretations that "both dismisses and admits the possibility of irony".² Again, the same is true for *Italian Painters*. In *A Hero* the retrospective preface also functions as a parabasis, creating a surreptitious dialogue between author and reader. Lermontov complains that his novel "had the misfortune to be taken literally" and that his audience "cannot understand a fable unless the moral is given at the end", having "no sense of irony".³ Both Morelli's and Lermontov's aim is to teach the reader a lesson; however, if the moral of the fable is not included neatly at the end of their texts, there is an immediate question: what lesson are we being taught? The answer, inevitably, is not going to be simple.

The preface to the 1890 book opens with a scholarly introduction to the immediate volume. Lermolieff then moves into a discussion of the division between *die Schar des jüngern Nachwuchses* and *der meisten ältern Fachgelehrten*. He tells us that the conflicting reception of his studies was intended, that he never doubted the older critics would "dismiss them with an incredulous smile" [*mistrauischem Lächeln*], and that he hoped to appeal to those who wished "their judgement to be free and independent". The ideal reader is then given the role of arbitrator, Lermolieff demanding they test his opinions, insisting hypocritically that the responsibility *auf mich falle*.⁴

The source of his authority, Lermolieff explains, is the experimental method; however, he then equivocates in response to the accusation that Morellian method "is by no means new".

¹ Anderson, 1991, p.553

² Gilroy, 1989, p.11

³ Lermontov, 1977, pp.19-20

⁴ Morelli, 1892, pp.[41-43]; 1890, pp.v-vii

The initial answer is: “I will not question this statement, as there is nothing new under the sun”. However, he then poses two rhetorical questions; the first asks why there are still so many erroneous attributions, the second enquires why his opponents try to make “this method for the decisive identification of the author of a picture appear ridiculous” by proclaiming it superficial and materialistic. We have seen that the materialist view is a distortion, and Lermolieff seemingly clarifies this with the passage on *physical* and *mental* sight, arguing that it is in outward appearance that the connoisseur perceives “the deeper qualities of the mind”. He then claims that *mannerisms* are chance occurrences, while *forms* are determined “by inward conditions” [*hängt von geistigen Ursachen ab*].¹ Strangely, this suggests that a purely material analysis is deceptive.

The 1880 “Vorwort” instigates a competition with Crowe and Cavalcaselle; in the 1890 preface the primary target is Bode. (The unfinished third volume of *Italian Painters* was focused entirely on Bode’s Berlin gallery; we can only image how Lermolieff’s war might have concluded). The analysis of this polemic underlines the ultimate subjectivity of connoisseurship by representing this relationship with Bode as a binary opposition: what “appears black to me is white to him”. This is not caused by partisanship, he argues, but by “the love of truth”. Lermolieff concludes with the English proverb: *Every one has his fancy*.²

The second preface of 1891 begins in a similar academic vein, mentioning a “little-known painter of Bergamo” (Cariani), and highlighting an issue “not without importance in the history of Italian painting”, Flemish copies being accepted as Italian originals. Lermolieff then states: “I take this opportunity of briefly noticing [*mich zu vertheidigen*] some adverse

¹ Morelli, 1892, pp.[43-45]; 1890, pp.vii-ix

² *Ibid*, 1892, pp.[46-47]; 1890, pp.xi

criticism [*Vorwurf*] directed towards me”.¹ I will consider each accusation, seeing how Morelli agrees with all the negative judgements.

The first criticism concerns the language and quality of the text: “it has been said that my writings lacked that grave and learned tone [*jene gelehrte Gravität*] which alone is calculated to impress the reader [*die allein dem Lesepublikum die gebührende Achtung einflösse*]”. Lermolieff replies: “This is very possible” but that “many persons say the most foolish things with an air of the greatest solemnity [*ernsthaftesten Miene*], while others treat very important subjects in a light and playful [*lächelnd und scherzend*] manner”. Ironically, he suggests the voice of academic authority is itself an absurd rhetorical strategy, because “nothing appears to me more ludicrous [*komischer*] than that self-complacent assurance and pretentious gravity [*aufgeblasene Ernsthaftigkeit und selbstgefällige Sicherheit des Auftretens*]”. Lermolieff’s analysis relates to Schlegel’s definition of Socratic irony in his “Über die Unverständlichkeit” (“On Incomprehensibility”, 1800): as “playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden”.² This is confirmed by Morelli writing that the rhetoric of authority, “according to Socrates, moved even the gods to laughter”.³

Poor writing is also a calculated part of Lermolieff’s satire of connoisseurship: “It has also been said that my books are badly written. This I willingly admit”. He continues by renouncing any claim to “special gifts of style or rhetoric” [*ich gebe mich ja keineswegs für einen Rhetor oder Stilisten aus*], admitting that his writing is “without form” [*formlos*] and “lacking the systematic treatment [*nicht nach den Regeln gemacht*] essential to a book of any pretensions”. Instead, he explains that his aim was not to produce a beautiful book, but one

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.[5-6]; 1891, pp.v-vi

² Schlegel, 1971, p.265

³ Morelli, 1893, p.[6]; 1891, pp.vi-vii

that is best read in front of the pictures themselves: “This object, I think, I have attained”.¹ Morelli created an unpredictable text, with a chatty opinionated central character, that almost randomly jumps from picture to picture like the walls of the disorganised galleries which are the stage and focus for his criticism. The poor style and chaotic structure function to achieve the anti-text agenda, foregrounding the works themselves.

The preface continues with the assertion that, along with “all my other shortcomings [Mängeln]”, *Italian Painters* is guilty of “having only touched upon subjects that were deserving of fuller treatment.” Again, rather than negate the negative, the author affirms it as a positive, arguing this would be counter-productive and would have “deprived my readers of the pleasure of thinking and studying for themselves [den Genuss des Mitarbeitens und Schaffens]”. *Italian Painters* educates ironically; Lermolieff teaches freedom of thought. This is exactly opposite to professors and gallery directors who believe they have nothing more to discover and “should lay down the law to others”. Morelli-Lermolieff, even in his old age, is still learning; as it says in the German text: “solange mir die Augen offen blieben”.²

The next criticisms regard the intentionally antagonistic design: “I must not omit to notice a few words of censure courteously expressed [eines freundlichen Tadels] by an English art-critic”. This is Claude Phillips (1846-1924) critic for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Manchester Guardian* who, Lermolieff writes, “considers that my writings are too controversial [viel zu viel polemisieren], and would gain from being modified in this respect [das meine Arbeiten nur gewinnen dürften, wenn ich die Polemik gegen meine Gegner beiseite liesse]”. The theatrical civility rhetorically implies the nature of the national bias, and strangely seems to

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.[6-7]; 1891, p.vii

² *Ibid*, 1893, p.[7]; 1891, pp.vii-viii

respond to Layard's concerns. Lermolieff again insists on the criticism's justness "*gewiss mit vollem Recht*", but with the proviso that this is from "an English point of view".¹

The final criticism is also the most significant; Lermolieff's "interpretation of the history of Italian art" and also his "experimental method" are "unscientific". His response is to claim that none of his opponents were "capable of proving, by arguments to the contrary, that the conclusions to which my researches had led me were erroneous". Then, in a moment of quiet hypocrisy, he writes: "To deny the opinions of others, and yet be incapable of producing any well-founded reason for doing so, is simply childish [*Blosses Verneinen, ohne seine Gegenansicht zu begründen, zeigt aber nur von ohnmächtiger Schelsucht*]". Lermolieff admits that he had made mistakes, but explains there are two types of error in attributing pictures. Keeping with the religious rhetoric, they are distinguished as venial and deadly sins. Lermolieff's are forgivable, unlike Mündler's attribution of the *Knight of Malta* to Pietro della Vecchia which is *eine wahre Häresie*.² We are then given the exasperating proviso: "in nearly every instance where I have been misled in forming a judgement upon a picture, I had either misapplied the method or not made use of it at all [*entweder ganz ausser Acht liess oder aber dieselbe unrichtig anwandte*]"³

Lermolieff refers to one unnamed opponent who argues that "every art-critic will have his own method" but who considers Morellian method "far too material" [*die Experimentalmethode viel zu materiell und seines erhabenen Geistes unwürdig erscheint*]. Predictably Lermolieff agrees with this: *Ganz gut, antworte ich ihm*. Finally, the same anonymous critic also believes that art history and connoisseurship cannot yet be considered

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.[7-8]; 1891, pp.viii-ix

² Morelli, 1891, p.282; Burkhardt, 1855, pp.185-186

³ Morelli, 1893, pp.[8-9]; 1891, pp.ix-x

a science, which leads into Lermolieff's infuriating assertion that *Italian Painters* is not "scientific" and that this interpretation is "ludicrous".

Why then is the "ludicrous" interpretation that Morelli was the inventor of a scientific connoisseurship still published today? Like Lermontov, Lermolieff blames his readers, finishing with the Italian proverb: "'Non v'ha peggior sordo di chi non vuol sentire' ('There are none so deaf as those who won't hear')".¹ What is it that those who consider *Italian Painters* to be scientific have not heard? I would argue that it is the true, ironic intention. Morelli repeatedly tells his reader, it is "more or less" scientific connoisseurship. Therefore the reader has failed to understand the meaning of Morelli's words. The prefaces from Morelli's books provide an alternative context for interpretation. All the critical condemnations are accepted by Lermolieff, and this therefore disrupts any stable interpretation.

Morellian Irony as a Problematisation: The "New" Giorgione

It has been said that "the truly ironic is the ambiguously ironic";² this is painfully true of *Italian Painters*. It simply does not allow for a single, rational response. The primary function of the text is to undermine the discourse it enters into, becoming therefore "counter-discourse"; however, the problem arises that the text is complicit with "the dominant discourse it contests".³ This complicity is particularly disturbing because Morelli sometimes makes important contributions to connoisseurship. Morellian irony is one that both asserts

¹ Morelli, 1893, pp.[9-10]; 1891, pp.x-xi

² Meucke, 1982, p.8

³ Hutcheon, 1994, p.30

and negates, and this type of “hypocritically affirmative” irony is especially in danger of being read literally, making *Italian Painters* susceptible to the accusation of self-contradiction.¹ I argue that while it is impossible to know the *meaning* of Morellian irony, its *function* should be understood as a problematisation, introducing doubt and uncertainty into the methods and rhetoric of connoisseurship.

Writing to Morelli (29 November 1881), Richter quotes from a letter he had received from Carl Justi (1832-1912), in which the art historian reacted to the 1880 German galleries book, appreciating Lermolieff’s insights, yet denouncing his rhetoric.² Morelli’s response (10 December 1881) is intriguing. At first he complains that Cavalcaselle’s knowledge is insufficient to justify his opinions on various artists including Giorgione. He then asks if it is not his “heilige Pflicht” to warn the public of this “arroganten Spiegelfechtereien”? Citing a particular example of Cavalcaselle’s terrible connoisseurship, he asks whether such “Frechheit” by “der Charlatanerie” cannot be exposed “mit einem andern Worte”?³ The operative word is *Spiegelfechtereien*; literally mirror-fencing, or fighting in the mirror with one’s own image, but more generally “heuchlerisches” [*dissembling*] or “zu täuschen” [*to deceive*].⁴ But it is Morelli’s *Spiegelfechtereien*;⁵ Lermolieff is hypocritically cast in his opponent’s own image, the ironic attitude to the dispute shown by the typical use of religious language (“holy duty”). In the sense that Lermolieff is a reflection or exaggeration of a connoisseur, Morelli’s criticism of his opponents should be understood as reflexive; it is *Italian Painters* that is “mischievous and misleading”, that seeks “to paralyse our

¹ Hutcheon, 1994, p.27 and p.16

² Richter and Richter, 1960, pp.132-134

³ *Ibid.*, pp.135-136

⁴ *Duden deutsches Universalwörterbuch*, Dudenverlag, 1989

⁵ Morelli refers to Crowe and Cavalcasselle’s “alberne Beeinflussungstheorie” as nothing but “gelehrte Spiegelfechtereien” – Morelli, 1880, pp.124-127; 1883, pp.102-105; 1891, pp.164-169; 1893, pp.124-127

intelligence”.¹ Morelli was engaged in what Bakhtin has called a rhetorical dispute, “in which it is important to gain victory over opponent, not to approach the truth”.²

In Morelli’s 1874 article, Lermolieff closes the opening paragraph by telling his reader that, to combat the *Kunsthistoriker und Kunstphilosophen* who “soar unfettered”, he has overcome his “natural diffidence” and let his “vanity have full play”. He then offers this prayer: “May the Gods preserve this audacious venture from the fate of the frog in the fable!”³ Lermolieff equates himself with Aesop’s frog, who tried to grow as big as the farmer’s ox: “So the Frog took a deep breath, and blew and blew and blew, and swelled and swelled and swelled. And then he said: ‘I’m sure the Ox is not as big as...’ But at this moment he burst.” This frog teaches us: “*Self-conceit may lead to self-destruction*”.⁴ The irony is that Lermolieff’s conceitedness did not lead to his downfall, but ensured his success. I would argue *Italian Painters* is also a fable, one that remains ironically open to interpretation, free from a single message.

Morelli can be linked with Kierkegaard’s interpretation of the Socratic campaign against inflated pomposity; as Wind argued, he sought to undermine the “inflated language of his opponents”.⁵ However, this is achieved with a knowing self-aggrandisement, what Schlegel called “the half self-conscious hypocrisy towards ourselves”.⁶ Morellian irony follows a specific pattern; to adopt Kierkegaard’s words: “it does not destroy the vanity [...] but instead reinforces vanity in its vanity”. Morelli uses Lermolieff to discipline “a silly, inflated, know-it-all knowledge” by encouraging it “to ever greater lunacy”. The author’s “joy is to seem to

¹ Morelli, 1892, p.286; 1890, p.375

² Bakhtin, 1986, p.152

³ Morelli, 1892, p.65; 1890, p.82; 1874, p.2

⁴ Aesop, 1922, p.58

⁵ Kierkegaard, 2001, p.6; Wind, 1985, p.35

⁶ Meucke, 1982, p.21

be caught in the same noose”.¹ Strangely, *Italian Painters* therefore has the same function as Gombrich’s “A Cautionary Tale”, problematising the rhetoric of connoisseurship by adopting its methods, insisting on “the need for criteria more objective than plausible rhetoric”.² However, Morelli is caught in a hypocritical paradox; unlike Gombrich, he does not maintain an ironic distance from his work.

Since irony was such an active concept in Morelli’s art history, his “new” Giorgione is much more complex than a series of attributions. He offers his reader a strong image of the artist’s *Geist*: a melancholy, mysterious, romantic poet whose sensual and realist art is nonetheless ethical and noble, as seen in his “new” masterpiece the *Sleeping Venus* (Fig.A2). Morelli’s Giorgione found many supporters; but in essence it was a clichéd idea which, according to the author’s principles, is not “scientific”. I would argue that if this image of the artist is justified, then it is a negative, self-deprecating justification; if Giorgione is “entirely misunderstood”, then Morelli cannot be more wrong than any other connoisseur. In the end, Morellian irony problematises everything, even his “new” Giorgione. In the closing lines of the Doria Pamphilj study Lermolieff meets a “young lady with a very intelligent expression”, but who treats the Russian with “distrust”:

“What would these wise Venetians think,” she added with a smile, as she prepared to depart, “if they could hear all the different opinions and learned remarks that are passed on them every week!”

And with a slight bow she disappeared.³

¹ Kierkegaard pp.256-257, 249-250

² Gombrich, 1987, p.91

³ Morelli, 1892, pp.320-323; 1890, pp.418-423

CONCLUSIONS ON THE “NEW” GIORGIONE

Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Pater, and Morelli, all produced original images of the artist; as a group, in competition, they created a “new” Giorgione. Although they were not consciously working to the same end, the communal and unintended consequence of their work was to fundamentally problematise the discourse.

Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s success can be seen by the re-publication of *A History of Painting in North Italy* in 1912, edited by Tancred Borenius (1885-1948); forty years after the original publication this volume was still considered an authority. Borenius praises the authors for “their unique combination of broadness of outlook with the most patient finish in every detail”; he also comments that despite the “ceaseless labour” of art historians, Crowe and Cavalcaselle were “still constantly in demand”.¹

Within this 1912 edition, however, we can see Morelli’s legacy, the way he successfully undermined the two connoisseurs, and especially their image of the artist. Towards the end of the chapter on Giorgione the editor adds a footnote: “We have still to mention a few pictures which, since the authors wrote their account of Giorgione’s life and work, have been identified as being by him”. These were the Berlin *Portrait of a Young Man*, the *Judith*, the *Sleeping Venus*, and the *Madonna and Child with Saints* (Figs.A47, A49, A2, A42). Borenius gives as “probably by Giorgione”, the Budapest *Portrait of a Young Man*, the Borghese *Portrait of a Lady*, and the *Apollo and Daphne* (Figs.A45, A46, A38). To substantiate these attributions the footnote makes only one reference: “Cf. Morelli”. Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s nemesis has infiltrated their text, making their work seem incomplete and incoherent. This is

¹ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Vol.1, 1912, p.v

compounded when Borenius repeats Morelli's arguments against the attribution of the Pitti *Concert* (Fig.A12), effectively invalidating Crowe and Cavalcaselle's argument.¹

Regardless of attribution, Pater continued to influence the way art historians looked at Giorgione's paintings well into the twentieth century. "The School of Giorgione" also had wider implications, the "*condition of music*" influencing the development of modernist literature and art criticism. Pater's essay, on its own terms, was an effective justification for the artistic and ethical value of the *Concert Champêtre* (Fig.A1), while the *paragone* interpretation of Giorgionesque subject matter, reconciling synchronicity with temporality, was also undeniably compelling. However, the most important achievement of Pater's essay was the way it exposed the deficiency of "scientific" knowledge.

Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Pater, and Morelli, all aspired to a "true" understanding, but they differed as to the means of achieving this end. Even so, all three methods can be termed scientific: Crowe and Cavalcaselle are validated by their materialism, Pater by his empiricism, and Morelli by observation. The circular, relative truth is that scientific knowledge has authority simply because it is "scientific", while science itself is defined by cultural conventions.² Judged by Popper's standards, we can see that all these writers were "guided by truth as a *regulative principle*"; however, their *scientificness* is not found in the appeal to empirical evidence, "but solely in the *critical approach*".³ The "new" Giorgione is a manifestation of scientific scepticism.

¹ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Vol.3, 1912, p.37

² Gower, 1997, pp.6, 19

³ Popper, 1969, pp.226, 229

Carrier argues that although Pater's and Morelli's approaches were different, their "rhetoric is similar".¹ This is a surprising interpretation; firstly, since what could be more different than the styles of these two writers? Secondly, Morelli and Pater have usually been seen to represent opposing traditions. In 1894, in his volume on Giorgione, Conti took Pater as a model for an art history that replaced *scientific* with *poetic* criticism, thereby resisting the positivist tendencies of the nineteenth century.² In 1948, Luigi Grassi defined Pater's subjective and idealist criticism as the direct opposite of the positivistic school of Morelli.³ Finally, in *On Art and the Mind* of 1972, Wollheim considers Pater and Morelli in consecutive chapters that, no doubt intentionally, sit uncomfortably next to one another, his discussion of Pater's "technique of association" being in sharp contrast to the explanation of Morelli's "tool of scientific research".⁴

Nevertheless, I have also been led to the opinion that Pater and Morelli were strangely similar. For instance, both writers impacted the development of formalism.⁵ This shows in Adrian Stokes' (1902-1972) *Art and Science* of 1949. Stokes' discussion of Giorgione is still, after seventy years, avowedly influenced by Pater's essay, analysing a fusion of form and content that is demonstrated by "an attitude to subject-matter which itself reflected the formal aim". This formalist, psychoanalytical study considers pyramid or bell-like shapes to be "a constituent unit in Giorgione's and Giorgionesque paintings", and also "indistinguishable from the needs of his imagination". Although not mentioning Morelli, in an appendix on "Giorgione's Preferred Shapes", Stokes suggests that these forms, "as much as anything else

¹ Carrier, 1991, p.132

² Ascari, 2004, pp.36-37

³ Bizzotto, 2004, p.74

⁴ Wollheim, 1973, pp.171, 198

⁵ Barolsky, 2010; Zerner, 1978

of which they are more aware has caused experts to attribute pictures of the period to Giorgione or Giorgione's influence".¹

Carrier connects Morelli to Pater on the basis that they both employed synecdoche; metonyms like "hand" being "emplotted" within larger narratives of the artist's "personality" or "romantic art".² For Pater, "romantic art" was interchangeable with the individual Giorgione, and both writers therefore understood their metonymic observations as expressive of the artist's *spirit*. It is the combination of positivism and idealism, or sense and intellect, which really supports the comparison. Both Pater and Morelli, like traditional scientists, start from a theoretical position of empiricist scepticism, doubting everything except their own sense perceptions. However, this makes their work radically subjective. It is anachronistic to argue that Morelli's irony shows an awareness of the futility of linguistic characterisation, and that he therefore shared with Pater "a belief in the indescribable spirit of the whole".³ For these two writers to have genuinely held these opinions, in the form Carrier suggests, they would have pre-empted the history of western thought and especially White's postmodern historiography.

Instead, Pater's and Morelli's questioning of language relates to Crowe and Cavalcaselle's rhetoric of authority, to the institutionalisation and professionalisation of art history at the end of the nineteenth century. This can be seen in their deliberate misrepresentation of the *New History*, and their disregard for the conventions of academic discourse. Any denial of the efficacy of language functions to validate the subjective stance. This can be seen by the way both Pater and Morelli suppress visual analysis. Pater could easily have pointed his reader to the fact that the *Concert Champêtre* is the ideal example of Giorgionesque *pause*, but he

¹ Stokes, 1949, pp.37, 45, 61

² Carrier, 1991, pp.131-132

³ *Ibid.*, p.138

chooses not to; similarly, Morelli chooses not to repeat his description of the Pitti *Concert* found in his letters. Instead, the reader is enabled to make the discovery for themselves, subjectively, their own experience functioning as retrospective evidence for Pater's or Morelli's interpretation.

The fact that Pater and Morelli concentrate their analysis on anatomical details is only one element in a set of far-reaching correspondences. These can be detected in their treatment of Giorgione. Importantly, both define their approach in relation to Crowe and Cavalcaselle, emphasising the *spiritual* aspect necessary to any "true" appreciation. In reacting to the *New History*, Morelli and Pater advocate traditional images of the artist, defending romantic, sensualist Venetian painting against Rio's Christian history of art. It would also seem that their shared interest in Giorgione arises from their mutual love of the *Concert Champêtre*; for both writers this painting is the archetypal expression of the artist's *spirit*. To justify this interpretation, Morelli employed the usual *Ut pictura poesis* argument, describing the image as "hochpoetische" and characterising Giorgione as "ein Lyriker"; Pater is more original, judging the painting and the painter according to the "musical law", although he also reverts to the traditional description of Giorgione as a lyric poet.

In "L'art du dire-vrai", Foucault comments that *problematization* should be understood "comme interrogation par le philosophe de cette actualité dont il fait partie".¹ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Pater, and Morelli, all do this; they criticise not the truth of the past but our understanding in the present. This problematisation of current practices can again be seen in their writing on Giorgione. Crowe and Cavalcaselle pointed to a reasonable doubt about all attributions, responding with a rigorous, material method. Pater then problematises this

¹ Foucault, May 1984b, p.36

“accomplished science”, seeking to move beyond “strictly deducible facts”. He returned to the romantic Giorgione, locating the artist’s significance in his “influence” on the *Concert Champêtre*. Morelli problematises the *New History’s* scientific study, and also implicitly Pater’s “aesthetic” impression. The “new” Giorgione was a product of problematisation within the discipline of art history.

The *truth* of the “new” Giorgione was therefore negative: the artist became a problem. The positive aspect remained the myth. Science does not provide value: political, cultural, or emotional. Myth is necessary if the art of the past is to mean something in the present. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Pater, and Morelli, all attempted to supply this human capital. The irony of science is clear; the *New History* demonstrates that Giorgione will never emerge into clear historical definition, that our experience of his art is uncertain. From Pater and Morelli we learn, as Schlegel wrote, that “the basis of the incomprehensible is to be found in incomprehension”, and we are reminded, as Popper wrote, of “the unavoidable uncertainty and incompleteness of all our endeavours”.¹ These are the *facts* of the “new” Giorgione.

¹ Schlegel, 1971, p.260; Popper, 1974, p.1025

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¹ These bibliographies only contain works that are specifically referenced within this thesis, and do not represent the entirety of my reading.

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