

D'Annunzio, Libreria Editrice Lombarda and *Il Rinascimento* (1905-1906)

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This paper examines the periodical *Il Rinascimento*, published in 17 issues between 15 November 1905 and 20 July 1906, within its publishing and historical context. *Il Rinascimento* served as the periodical of the short-lived publishing house, Libreria Editrice Lombarda, owned by Tom Antongini and Arnaldo De Mohr, which is a crucial element for understanding its agenda. In the first part, I discuss the foundation and decline of Libreria Editrice Lombarda, focusing specifically on D'Annunzio's involvement. The birth of the publishing house was closely linked to Antongini's friendship with D'Annunzio and the author's dissatisfaction with his collaboration with Fratelli Treves. The subsequent sections focus on *Il Rinascimento*'s discourse on 'Renaissance'. This discourse was deeply rooted in the post-Risorgimento crisis of values and tried to go beyond both art for art's sake and naturalism in favor of a new nationalist engagement of literature and the arts. The embodiment of this nationalism was the periodical's favorite author, Gabriele D'Annunzio.

Keywords: Libreria Editrice Lombarda; *Il Rinascimento*; D'Annunzio; Metaphorization of Renaissance; Giolittian Italy

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Italy underwent a significant shift in politics and culture. With the failure of Francesco Crispi's imperialist vision for Italy after the nation's defeat in Adwa in 1896, the governments led by Giovanni Giolitti adopted a more restrained foreign policy (Duggan, 2007: 323-390). Critics of Giolitti's approach argued that he lacked ambition and idealism and fueled the idea that the government failed to lead the nation to the national greatness envisioned during the unification process (Cangiano, 2018). In this context, the Italian cultural field witnessed the emergence of a number of magazines, primarily based in Florence, such as *Il Regno* (1903-1905) and *Leonardo* (1903-1907), that responded to the post-Risorgimento crisis of values in Italy under Giolitti's leadership (Adamson, 1993). Promoted by younger intellectuals such as Giovanni Papini (1881-1956), Ardengo Soffici (1879-1964) and Giuseppe Prezzolini (1882-1982), these periodicals advocated a discourse of moral and national regeneration. They rejected the political values of Giolitti and the artistic

practices of the previous generation, specifically the decadence and aestheticism linked to Gabriele D'Annunzio (Adamson, 1993: 7).

This paper focuses on another periodical published in the same period, namely the Milan-based *Il Rinascimento*, which was published in 17 issues from 15 November 1905 to 20 July 1906. In 1985, Aurelio Accame Bobbio presented this periodical under the same banner of *antidannunzianesimo* as the Florentines magazines, i.e., as a counterpoint to D'Annunzio's aestheticism and (cross-)generational influence (159). Exactly twenty years later, Pietro Gibellini (2005) revisited the question and arrived at a significantly different conclusion: he argued that the periodical celebrated D'Annunzio's ideas and ideals. Additionally, Gibellini called for a more thorough exploration of the periodical, a task that this paper aims to undertake. My goal is to resolve the critical ambiguity deriving from Accame Bobbio and Gibellini's accounts by examining the periodical in relation to its institutional origin story and historical context. *Il Rinascimento* was the official periodical of Tom Antongini and Arnaldo De Mohr's short-lived publishing house, Libreria Editrice Lombarda, which is a crucial aspect for understanding its cultural agenda.

In the first part, I will discuss the foundation and decline of Libreria Editrice Lombarda, with a specific focus on D'Annunzio's involvement. My aim is to show that the publishing house's origin story was closely linked to Antongini's friendship with D'Annunzio and the author's dissatisfaction with his collaboration with the Treves publishing house, where he felt his literary work to be undervalued financially. This discussion will enrich existing scholarship on D'Annunzio's relationship with his publishers, which has been investigated in Vito Salierno's monograph *D'Annunzio e i suoi editori* (1987) and Ilvano Caliaro's *L'amorosa guerra. Aspetti e momenti del rapporto Gabriele D'Annunzio-Emilio Treves* (2001). However, these studies insufficiently address D'Annunzio's ambiguous collaboration with Libreria Editrice Lombarda, thereby neglecting its potential contribution to a comprehensive

understanding of *Il Rinascimento*. The subsequent sections focus on the cultural program of *Il Rinascimento*, particularly on how the periodical developed a discourse of ‘Renaissance’. In these parts, I will contribute to the growing body of scholarship examining the metaphorical use of ‘Renaissance’ beyond the historical period conventionally identified as ‘the’ Renaissance (Schildgen, Zhou, and Gilman, 2006; Gamsa, 2013; Campagnola, 2023). Furthermore, I will contribute to scholarship focusing on the connection between Italian modernist magazines and moral or national regeneration. I will show that *Il Rinascimento*’s discourse on a new ‘Renaissance’ was deeply rooted in the post-Risorgimento crisis of values and relied on a renewed national(ist) engagement of literature and the arts. The embodiment of this new artistic, mainly literary nationalism was the periodical’s favorite author: Gabriele D’Annunzio.

D’Annunzio, Fratelli Treves and Libreria Editrice Lombarda

In 1889, Gabriele D’Annunzio became associated with the Fratelli Treves publishing house, based in Milan, which was Italy’s economic and publishing capital during that era (while Florence was its cultural capital) (Harris, 2010). Prior to this, the author had been steadily building his reputation for over a decade through works like *Primo Vere*, *Canto Novo*, and *Terra Vergine*, which were funded by the author’s father or published by publishing houses in Rome and Florence. After an initial, unsuccessful round of negotiations with Fratelli Treves in 1885 (Salierno, 1987: 18-21), D’Annunzio thought the time was right for him to be supported by a publisher with national and international recognition. It seemed only natural to consider working with Fratelli Treves, as it was one of the leading publishers in post-unification Italy (Harris, 2010). Notably, Fratelli Treves had previously published Giovanni Verga’s *I Malavoglia* in 1881 and had achieved considerable commercial success with Edmondo De Amicis’ *Cuore* in 1886. D’Annunzio wanted to publish his works with Fratelli Treves, attracted not only by its prestige but also by the publisher’s extensive promotional support network. For instance, Emilio Treves used his influential periodicals such as *L’Illustrazione italiana* (1875-

1962) and *Il Secolo XX* (1902-1933) to market the works he published. D'Annunzio explicitly expressed his preference for Fratelli Treves in a letter dated 17 January 1889, which discussed his novel *Il piacere*. He stated that the publishing house was the most capable of successfully launching and distributing literary works, in contrast to what he perceived as the inertia of other publishers (D'Annunzio, 1999: 61).

A common thread throughout D'Annunzio's collaboration with Fratelli Treves was the publisher's reluctance (in D'Annunzio's opinion) to provide adequate economic remuneration for the literary value of his works. Indeed, the author consistently attempted to negotiate higher shares on the earnings of his work. For instance, D'Annunzio initially asked for a 25% royalty on the gross price of each copy printed of *Il piacere*, but eventually he had to settle for 15% on each copy sold (D'Annunzio, 1999: 58-63). Although the author did not succeed in negotiating his desired royalties, his collaboration with Fratelli Treves in publishing the novel proved to be a success: it secured D'Annunzio's position in the Italian canon of the fin de siècle, and generated wide attention abroad, mainly in France (Nemegeer, 2022a). This international appeal offered opportunities to negotiate more lucrative deals. D'Annunzio aimed to get 20% for his subsequent works, but Fratelli Treves stood firm. D'Annunzio's persistent efforts to negotiate higher percentages on sales point to the difficulty of making a living from literature, which was a recurring theme of authorial and literary modernity when literature became a commodity on the marketplace (Turnovsky, 2007). As Ilvano Caliaro (2001: 35-36) has noted, the topic of literary earning was also a subject of extensive discussion and frustration among Italian writers during the fin de siècle. Specifically, Caliaro mentioned interviews of Luigi Capuana, and Ruggiero Bonghi in Ugo Ojetti's *enquête* on the state of modern Italian literature, *Alla scoperta dei letterati* (1895). Capuana noted that Fratelli Treves, one of the most affluent publishers, offered a maximum payment of 2000 lire for a novel written by already established authors, while Bonghi argued that writers in Italy faced challenges in earning substantial

incomes due to the lack of sizable readership (Caliaro, 2001: 38-39). In this context, D'Annunzio was not the only author published by Fratelli Treves who requested advance payments and loans. Indeed, authors like Verga, Capuana and De Amicis made similar requests, albeit for smaller amounts and less frequently (Caliaro, 1999: 788). However, D'Annunzio was certainly the most persistent, partially because of his extravagant spending habits, but also because of his belief that high-quality work had to be adequately compensated. All of these authors incurred considerable interest charges on the advance payments, at a rate of 6%, which was one percentage point higher than the common bank interest rate at the time (Caliaro, 1999: 788).

Over the years, D'Annunzio grew increasingly dissatisfied with the terms offered by Fratelli Treves. Between 1895 and 1905, he became an internationally recognized literary author and public figure. His works were translated and commented upon in France, Germany, Poland, Russia and the United States, among others (Segnini and Subialka, 2023). In this context, D'Annunzio felt that his rising reputation was not adequately rewarded. This dissatisfaction led him to consider joining a new publishing venture led by Tom Antongini (1877-1967) in 1905. D'Annunzio and Antongini had first crossed paths in 1897, when Marquess Pietro D'Ajeta Lanza di Trabia introduced them to each other in Florence (Ruga, 2013: 22). At the time, Antongini was still a law student, but he soon began contemplating the idea of launching a publishing house with D'Annunzio as its poster boy. This idea was partially inspired by D'Annunzio's dissatisfaction with Fratelli Treves. Indeed, Antongini recalled that during their discussions, the author frequently expressed his frustration with the editorial and economic constraints imposed on him by Fratelli Treves (Antongini, 1957: 42). According to Antongini, Emilio Treves, being a shrewd custodian of his finances, had early on understood the financial risks associated with an extravagant author like D'Annunzio and had, therefore, bound him tightly through strict contractual clauses and substantial advance payments on

royalties. This financial security made Treves confident that he would not lose D'Annunzio to another publisher (42-43). However, Antongini believed in his idea, which gained some traction when he contacted advocate Carlo Canetta in 1903, though it did not materialize at that point (32).

The transformation of Fratelli into a joint-stock company in December 1904, following Giuseppe Treves' death, offered new momentum to negotiate. At this time, D'Annunzio had accumulated a substantial debt of around 20.000 lire with Fratelli Treves (Caliaro, 2001: 42). For this reason, the author was obligated to publish his future works with the publishing house until his debt was settled, yet he desired better terms. If Fratelli Treves did not agree to these improved conditions, he intended to repay his debt to regain his freedom. Here Antongini came into play: in early January 1905, he communicated to D'Annunzio that he would aim to clear his debt with Fratelli Treves, legally freeing him to negotiate with a new publisher for his future works (Antongini, 1957: 41-43). The publisher in question was to be Libreria Editrice Lombarda, which Antongini planned to establish in collaboration with Arnaldo De Mohr (49-50). De Mohr had access to funds after the passing of his father, who had financed the Milan-based Libreria Editrice Nazionale (1902-1905) (Caccia, 2013: 43).

D'Annunzio was immediately enthusiastic about this plan, as it would provide him with the opportunity to secure higher short-term earnings. This was also due to the increased public attention generated in the short run by the move of one of Italy's most renowned authors from a prestigious publisher to an unknown newcomer in the cultural field. However, in the long term, returning to Fratelli Treves was almost inevitable due to economic considerations. The connection between literature and finances played a significant role in D'Annunzio's career, with the literary market serving as his primary source of income for most of his career. In this context, a temporary move to another publishing house also presented him with a strategic opportunity to strengthen his position in future negotiations with Fratelli Treves. Such

negotiations were unavoidable, and D'Annunzio was well aware of this. Fratelli Treves could not afford to lose his most prestigious, albeit controversial, author, and D'Annunzio himself, despite his dissatisfaction, knew the advantages of working with the publishing house. Therefore, instead of being only an opportunistic interlude, D'Annunzio's move to Libreria Editrice Lombarda also pointed to his astuteness in pursuing the most favorable terms possible. This is also confirmed by the fact that the terms negotiated with Antongini did not prevent the author from working with other publishers (see below).

On 2 February 1905, D'Annunzio wrote to Pasquale Masciantonio (a lawyer and one of his closest friends) informing him of a meeting he had with Antongini and of the terms he negotiated (D'Annunzio, 2001: 325-326). The letter in question reveals that Libreria Editrice Lombarda agreed to settle D'Annunzio's debt to Fratelli Treves and secured the rights to republish his previously released works once the five-year embargo stipulated in D'Annunzio's contract with Fratelli Treves had passed, offering the author a 30% share of the earnings. Additionally, Antongini obtained the rights to publish D'Annunzio's next (and unwritten) novel for 10.000 lire with the same 30% share, a deal that was also valid for all his future literary works. D'Annunzio deemed these terms excellent, as he felt they aligned with the commercial and literary value of his work, which he believed had been exploited greedily for many years (D'Annunzio, 2001: 325-326). Nevertheless, he stressed his preference for continuing to work with Fratelli Treves if the publisher was willing to provide similar terms. On 6 February, D'Annunzio wrote to Emilio Treves to express once again his discontent with the terms offered by Fratelli Treves for the commercialization of his work. He expressed disappointment that no improvement or commitment had been made for the future. In addition, he mentioned that a new publisher, namely Libreria Editrice Lombarda, had extended an offer with terms so advantageous that it would be unwise to decline them (D'Annunzio, 1999: 259).

On 11 February, D'Annunzio formally signed his contract with Libreria Editrice Lombarda. However, this did not stop him from renegotiating his terms with Fratelli Treves. Indeed, on 20 June 1905, D'Annunzio entered into a new contract with Fratelli Treves, retroactively effective from the beginning of 1905. The new contract stipulated that his royalties for his existing works increased to 20%, while for new titles, he was entitled to 25% of each copy sold (Caliaro, 2001: 48). This agreement made D'Annunzio's collaboration with Libreria Editrice Lombarda unnecessary. Even though his share was lower with Fratelli Treves, his earnings were anticipated to be higher because of the superior marketing strategies used by the publisher. The publication and reissues of D'Annunzio's works between 1905 and 1906 evidence the redundancy of Antongini's publishing house. During this period, Fratelli Treves published *La fiaccola sotto il moggio*, an anthology of D'Annunzio's prose writing titled *Prose scelte*, as well as reissues of works such as *Il piacere*, *La chimera* and *La città morta*. In contrast, Libreria Editrice Lombarda published only one work by D'Annunzio, namely Cesare De Titta's Latin translation of *Elegie romane*. On 19 March 1906, D'Annunzio wrote a letter to Emilio Treves, expressing his need to find a way out of his involvement with the Libreria Editrice Lombarda (D'Annunzio, 1999: 299). During this time, Antongini's publishing house was already facing financial difficulties. Although D'Annunzio was not particularly loyal in his professional commitments to Antongini, he nonetheless assisted his friend in searching for new investors, reaching out to individuals such as Giovanni Battista Alberto Pirelli, Luigi Albertini, Clemente Origo, the sculptor Hendrik Christian Andersen, and Giuseppe Fiamingo. None of these options proved successful (Antongini, 1957: 101-108). Because of these setbacks, D'Annunzio turned to Emilio Treves and arranged a meeting on March 25 to discuss a new contract. In this agreement, the poet agreed to offer Fratelli Treves all of his future works in exchange for the publishing house taking over Antongini's Libreria Editrice Lombarda. On 5 May, D'Annunzio asked Emilio Treves if the merger had been finalized and encouraged him to

reach a decision within the upcoming week (D'Annunzio, 1999: 301-302). However, two months later, no resolution had been reached, prompting D'Annunzio to question again when the compromise would be signed (304). Finally, on 5 August, the *Giornale della libreria della tipografia e delle arti e industrie affini* reported that the Libreria Editrice Lombarda had entered into an agreement to transfer its business to Fratelli Treves, and that the latter would acquire all the publications and contracts of the former publisher (Notizie commerciali e personali, 1906a: 346). Two weeks later, the same journal announced that the Libreria Editrice Lombarda had gone into liquidation and had become a thing of the past. (Movimento delle ditte, 1906: 355). When the *Giornale della libreria* disclosed the publishing house's liquidation, it suggested that Fratelli Treves had also acquired the publisher's periodical *Il Rinascimento* (Notizie commerciali e personali, 1906a: 346). This periodical had been suspended since 20 July, and according to the *Giornale della libreria*, Fratelli Treves intended to resume its publication. However, this never happened, likely because Fratelli Treves already had more popular avenues to showcase its authors to the Italian public (as mentioned earlier). Consequently, the periodical's publication ceased with the liquidation of the publishing house, contrary to Gibellini's argument (2005: 168) that it ended for unknown reasons.

***Il Rinascimento* and its Discourse of 'Renaissance'**

In his *Quarant'anni con D'Annunzio* (1957), a memoir of his forty-year-long friendship with D'Annunzio, Antongini affirmed that the idea of publishing a periodical had come into his mind simultaneously with the idea of founding a publishing house (54-55). This periodical was titled *Il Rinascimento* and Antongini maintained that D'Annunzio immediately supported this project and that he guaranteed his active and regular contribution (54-55). The title of the periodical was highly symbolic: although a perception of the period from the late 14th to early 17th century as a period of *rinascita* was shared by many European thinkers at least since Giorgio Vasari's time, the historiographic concept of the Renaissance was mainly an invention

of nineteenth-century thinkers, such as Jules Michelet (Febvre, 1992), Jacob Burckhardt (Ruehl, 2019), and the later Friedrich Nietzsche (Ruehl, 2008). During the same period, the myth of the Renaissance as a historical period of rebirth also took on symbolic significance in the debates on the renewal of cultures and nations worldwide, from Japan to the USA (Hutchinson, 2007; Campagnola, 2018). Consequently, ‘Renaissance’ became a category employed to discuss periods of literary, cultural, and political rejuvenation that not always had a direct relation to the historical period known as the Renaissance. Indeed, intellectuals worldwide capitalized on the symbolic capital of the Renaissance as an archetype of rebirth, using the term, both capitalized and uncapitalized, either as a metaphor or as a rhetorical framework to respond to crises. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, this discourse was particularly prominent in France, where intellectuals like Charles Maurras, Jules Lemaitre, and Eugène-Melchior De Vogüé debated concepts such as ‘Renaissance classique’ and ‘Renaissance latine’ to advocate a return of French culture to its national and ‘Latin’ traditions (Salvat, 2014),¹ albeit with varying interpretations of what these traditions entailed. This discourse also made its way to Italy in 1895, when Eugène-Melchior De Vogüé declared Gabriele D’Annunzio a key figure in the ‘Renaissance latine’ (De Vogüé, 1895). This marked the moment when the author’s ideological self-fashioning started to revolve around his identity as the leader of a new Renaissance in Italian modernity that aimed to overcome the post-Risorgimento crisis of values (Nemegeer 2022b). Throughout his career, D’Annunzio would come to play a significant role in the positive reintegration of the Renaissance into Italian identity in the wake of the Risorgimento. Indeed, Risorgimento historiography had viewed the Renaissance as a problem due to the simultaneous existence of political decadence and cultural flourishing (Cotugno, 2017). Hence, the periodical aimed to position itself within the broader

¹ It is worth noting that *Il Rinascimento* also included two fixed sections on *Il Rinascimento in Spagna* and *Il Rinascimento in Francia*, which discussed the literary, artistic and political landscape in France and Spain. Although Pietro Gibellini (2005) has briefly discussed these sections, they still offer material for future studies.

European symbolization of the Renaissance and align itself with D'Annunzio's ideology. Furthermore, the periodical adopted the motto 'Celeriter Floreo', which D'Annunzio had probably found in Giovanni Ferro's *Teatro d'impresie* (1623), a known early-modern source of the author (Giammei, 2017: 44) that mentioned the *impresa* in relation to the almond tree as a symbol of flowering in the myth of Phyllis and Demophon (Ferro, 1623: 469).

On 11 July 1905, the *Giornale d'Italia* announced the upcoming launch of a new periodical, *Il Risorgimento*, with the first issue scheduled for November (La rivista di Gabriele D'Annunzio, 1905: 10). As per the announcement, Gabriele D'Annunzio was writing the periodical's program and would be a regular contributor, alongside other prominent Italian and foreign writers. Four days later, D'Annunzio wrote to Antongini, expressing his frustration with inaccuracies circulating in Italian newspapers. He noted that *Il Rinascimento* had become *Il Risorgimento* and he ironically added that it had become mistakenly associated with references to Austrian bullets and burned uniforms. He observed that this title mix-up had even made its way into foreign newspapers (D'Annunzio in Antongini, 1957: 51). On 10 August, D'Annunzio responded to a letter from Emilio Treves, who wanted more information about the new periodical. D'Annunzio explained that the project was still in the process of being defined, and no concrete decisions had been made. Nevertheless he added that he cherished the idea of creating a "grande organo di cultura latina" (D'Annunzio, 1999: 279), drawing a parallel with *Nuova Antologia*, one of Italy's most prestigious periodicals, which, D'Annunzio felt, had become the voice of the "Movimento dei Forestieri" (279). It should be noted that D'Annunzio appeared to overlook the existence of a similar periodical. Three years earlier, in 1902, Angelo De Gubernatis had established in Rome the Società Internazionale Elleno-Latina and the periodical *Cronache della civiltà elleno-latina*, which continued to be in print until 1907 (Ida Villa, 1999). D'Annunzio's omission might be explained by the fact that the *Cronache* advocated pacifism, which did not align with the author's imperialistic vision for Italy, and that

the Roman publication was not particularly supportive of his work (Nemegeer, forthcoming). As a result, D'Annunzio professed the necessity of establishing a periodical dedicated to the promotion of Latin culture. He stressed, however, that such an undertaking would demand significant financial backing, to the extent of around seven to eight hundred thousand lire during the initial three years (D'Annunzio, 1999: 279). He was not interested in creating another one of the typical French-style “*petites revues*” (279), a term that had been coined by Remy De Gourmont a few years earlier to describe periodicals produced by young authors with a brief existence and limited print runs (De Gourmont, 1900). On the very same day, D'Annunzio also wrote in similar terms to Antongini, arguing that it would not benefit either him or the Libreria Editrice Lombarda to publish one of the usual French-style “*petites revues*” (D'Annunzio in Antongini, 1957: 56) and that he envisioned a modern, independent and ambitious periodical built on a strong economic foundation. In this letter, D'Annunzio responded to an idea presented by Antongini and his business partner, De Mohr. They had suggested closing a deal with the widely-read *Giornale d'Italia*, which involved offering the periodical at a reduced price to the newspaper's readership (Antongini, 1957: 56). This idea was motivated by financial considerations and the aim of establishing and expanding *Il Rinascimento*'s readership, yet D'Annunzio did not support it.

On 12 August, D'Annunzio affirmed in a letter to Emilio Treves that he had not yet received any offer of a salary and expressed his ambition to personally oversee the direction of the periodical (D'Annunzio, 1999: 281). Nonetheless, this commitment is questionable. As I showed in the previous section, just two months prior, the author had signed a new contract with Fratelli Treves, securing the royalty increase that was among the implied objectives behind his move to the Libreria Editrice Lombarda. In the same period, as attested by the reference to the French *petites revues* and D'Annunzio's rejection of a collaboration with the *Giornale d'Italia*, it became clear that the author and Antongini had different visions of the periodical,

mainly driven by financial considerations. It could be argued that D'Annunzio's active engagement with the new periodical was contingent on its ability to achieve wide readership and establish its independent and authoritative presence within the intellectual landscape of early twentieth-century Italy. However, this aspiration proved unattainable before the publication of the very first issue of the periodical, as Antongini and De Mohr lacked the financial resources and intellectual connections necessary to support such an influential periodical.

Consequently, D'Annunzio's willingness to actively collaborate with *Il Rinascimento* was limited and hinged on the right compensation. In a letter to Antongini, written between September and October 1905, D'Annunzio declined the request to compose a circular for the new periodical, expressing his belief that he was not suited for such a task. Instead, he recommended Antongini to approach Ettore Moschino, *Il Rinascimento*'s director, and request him to draft a brief note on his behalf (D'Annunzio in Antongini, 1957: 60-61). Furthermore, if Antongini had expected to secure D'Annunzio as an affordable supporter for his periodical, he may have found himself disappointed. Regarding his compensation, D'Annunzio made, in the same letter, a comparison to what he had received as a contributor to *Nuova Antologia* during the last decade of the nineteenth century. He noted that for his *Giovanni Episcopo*, published in *Nuova Antologia* in 1891, at a time when his reputation was not at its peak, he had received 3500 lire. D'Annunzio suggested that he could accept a fee of a thousand lire per contribution, with the flexibility to provide more or less significant works for balance. He also emphasized that his involvement held commercial significance for the periodical and, with fair compensation, he would not only collaborate but also provide the kind of active "cooperazione" that Antongini had mentioned in various newspapers to promote his periodical (61). Lastly, D'Annunzio provided some structural advice for the inaugural issue of the periodical, advising

against the customary program statement, which often led to confusion. Instead, he suggested focusing on the “Notiziario” and “Cronache” sections (61).

In the following months, preparations continued for the launch of the periodical. On 5 October, Antongini wrote to Adolfo De Carolis to inform him of the upcoming publication and request him to design the cover, providing sketches to suggest its layout (Antongini, 1905). On 12 November 1905, the *Giornale della libreria* announced the imminent publication of the “Rivista di Lettere e d’Arte Il Rinascimento”, highlighting the “collaborazione costante di Gabriele D’Annunzio e dei più illustri scrittori d’Italia” (1905: 513). When *Il Rinascimento* published its debut issue on 15 November 1905, it became evident that Antongini and Moschino had only partially adhered to D’Annunzio’s recommendations. On the one hand, *Il Rinascimento* was a relatively substantial review, consisting of approximately 95 pages in each number, and it was priced at 70 cents of a lira per issue in Italy and 1 lira abroad. Subsequently, it was released twice a month, totaling 17 issues. Although there is no available data on its circulation, I hypothesize that it was consistent with other contemporary reviews, such as *Il Marzocco* and *Il Regno* likely reaching around 500 or even fewer readers. On the other hand, contrary to D’Annunzio’s advice, the inaugural issue opened with a program statement, probably authored by Ettore Moschino. This program revolved around a commitment to Italy’s cultural heritage and a desire for renewal and emphasized the Italic essence of the associations evoked by the term ‘Rinascimento’. As such, it connected the periodical’s mission to a historical period that was mythicized in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century European culture and highlighted its deep connection to Italy and its history:

Con la grande parola, essenzialmente e luminosamente italica del *Rinascimento*, s’inizia oggi questa Rivista che chiama a raccolta intorno a sé tutte le energie e tutti gli intelletti accesi da un sogno di perfezione e di vittoria. Nell’impetuoso rifiorire dei molteplici elementi dello spirito moderno italiano, cresce e si diffonde, ne’ domini del pensiero e della vita intellettuale, una novella barbarie tra seducente e raffinata, la quale, traendo profitto da certa sua facile e flessibile facoltà di produzione, troppo appare sollecita di grandezza e di lucri. Contro tale avida tendenza,

peggiore forse dell'ignavia e delle aberrazioni spirituali, e per ricondurre la funzione delle lettere e delle arti alle lor più nobili origini, il Rinascimento s'affaccia alla vita, nella certezza che le giovani e libere coscienze de' poeti e prosatori d'Italia riempiano di luce e di canti il solco ch'ei s'accinge ad aprire accanto a' suoi confratelli di fede (Editoriale, 1905: 3).

So, the periodical aimed to gather individuals with a dream of perfection and victory, suggesting that these aspirations towards higher goals were inherent characteristics of Italian identity. The program also revolved around the opposition between the noble ideals of the Renaissance (and the eponymous periodical) and the perceived materialism and shallowness of modernity. This opposition created a rhetorical dichotomy that accentuated the need for change, a concept further sustained by the metaphor “novella barbarie tra seducente e raffinata” (3). This division emphasized a sense of cultural decay, as well as a longing for rebirth and a return to higher values. In doing so, the program harkened back to the Renaissance, suggesting that the periodical aimed to continue the Renaissance's greatness. In the remainder of this article, I will use the term ‘renaissance’ instead of the more generic term ‘rebirth’ to discuss the periodical's cultural discourse. This choice aligns with *Il Rinascimento*'s deliberate attempt to place itself under the banner of a rhetorical ‘rinascimento’, which capitalized on the symbolic capital of the Renaissance as a modern myth and archetype of rebirth.

Additionally, the program implicitly incorporated another metaphorical opposition, which had been used by Renaissance humanists such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Filippo Villani and Lorenzo Ghiberti, and recurred throughout history when discussing decay and renaissance: the contrast between ages of light and ages of darkness (Mommsen, 1942; Simone, 1949). This contrast implied a resolute stance against the values of an earlier ‘dark’ age of decadence, which the new renaissance period aimed to overturn. In this sense, the program ended with a sense of optimism, portraying a belief in the power of younger generations to shape a brighter future. The ending is in line with what Antongini identified as the periodical's initial goal, namely to

provide a platform for new voices that could not express themselves in more established periodicals (Antongini, 1957: 54-55).

Pietro Gibellini has interpreted the contrast between the culture of the new age of light or 'renaissance' and the 'barbaric' culture of the age of darkness in ethnic terms, namely as an opposition to Northern culture and Wagnerism (2005: 163). Yet, while the ethnic component was definitely present in the program, I argue that there were at least two further elements. On the one hand, it revealed the positioning of the Libreria Editrice Lombarda with regard to the Fratelli Treves. The latter, next to its publication of 'high' literary works, also published a large body of so-called *letteratura amena*, and tried to publish economic editions of the works of D'Annunzio, of which the author thought that they would strip his work of its aura (D'Annunzio, 1999: 184). On the other hand, the program expressed a critique of the condition of the modern artist and art as a whole, of modernity as a dark age for artists, and opposed the economic logic of bourgeois modernity. It is important to note that despite the periodical's goal of establishing itself as an elitist publication and its opposition to bourgeois capitalism, it was entwined within the very system it opposed. This paradox is evident when we consider that the periodical's price, set at 70 cents of a lira, positioned *Il Rinascimento* at the higher end of the cultural field. For comparison, during the same period, *Il Marzocco* was available for just 10 cents of a lira. *Il Rinascimento* aimed to assert its cultural prestige and its standing among the intellectual elite by improving its material quality and pricing it accordingly, in keeping with the vision of the Renaissance as a period of high aesthetics. This approach aligned with D'Annunzio's belief that literary and cultural excellence should be appropriately compensated. In this context, rather than rejecting capitalism and market values, the periodical's strategy can be seen as another way of capitalizing on them, although this approach ultimately proved unsuccessful, given the brevity of its existence.

Nevertheless, the periodical positioned itself within anti-materialist debates, as well as debates on decadence and regeneration that permeated Italian culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially among periodicals of Florentine modernism that tried to dominate the cultural field in Giolittian Italy, such as *Il Marzocco*, *Il Regno* and *Leonardo*. These periodicals responded to the post-Risorgimento crisis of values and participated in a discourse of cultural and national regeneration, as well as in the pursuit of new values (Adamson, 1993; Billiani, 2013). Hence, *Il Rinascimento* appeared to be in line with the prevailing cultural mood of the time, but this integration also presented challenges in terms of gaining recognition within both the Italian and broader European cultural field. While the periodical did receive some positive attention in Italian and French publications such as *Corriere della sera*, *Giornale d'Italia*, *Emporium*, *Mercure de France* and *Gil Blas*, it struggled to establish itself among its direct competitors. An illustrative example can be found in *Leonardo*. In each of its issues, the periodical featured a section titled “Alleati e Nemici”, which discussed ideas, periodicals, and monographs and evaluated them in relation to *Leonardo*’s ideology (Baldini, 2018). In the August 1906 issue, the “Alleati e Nemici” section opened with a discussion of the final number of *Hermes*, directed by Giuseppe Antonio Borgese. During this discussion, Giovanni Papini seized the opportunity to critique the lack of originality in *Il Rinascimento* (252-253). He argued that *Hermes* was less innovative compared to *Leonardo* and *Il Regno*, as its purpose lacked clarity and distinctiveness. In contrast, *Leonardo* and *Il Regno* had well-defined and unique missions within the early twentieth-century intellectual landscape. The former, he argued, focused on philosophical antipositivism and pragmatism, while the latter was dedicated to political antisocialism and imperialism. Papini suggested that *Hermes*’ focus on literature could have been more intriguing if it had a clear guiding vision of its own. He believed that values at the core of *Hermes*, such as respect for art, concern for style, and love for tradition and the patria, were already well represented in Italy. He added that the same held true for *Il*

Rinascimento, which had even less to offer, or, as he put it: “*Hermes* era un *Marzocco* migliorato come *Il Rinascimento* è un *Hermes* peggiorato ma fra le tre riviste c’è più differenza di *valore* che di *fisionomia*” (253). This position should come as no surprise, as Papini usually positioned himself against the perceived decadence and aestheticism linked to D’Annunzio. Instead, he sought to develop his own discourse of regeneration through the concept of a spiritual revolution that challenged the cultural and political crisis (Adamson, 1993: 7).

Papini’s value judgment does hold a degree of truth, as *Il Rinascimento* frequently seemed to be presenting an incoherent mix of fictional works and poetry. This mix comprised a diverse assortment of works published by Libreria Editrice Lombarda or those that the publishing house intended to publish, including Enrico Annibale Butti’s religious-inspired novel *L’ombra della croce* and a series of sonnets on Napoleon by Arturo Colautti. Although this variety is part of the very nature of any periodical, D’Annunzio voiced disapproval of this lack of a strong overarching idea, as he was concerned that any negative judgment on *Il Rinascimento* could have repercussions on his own reputation. On 20 December 1905, he wrote to Antongini to express his belief that some perceived the periodical as outdated (“senile”) and he advocated making room for younger, more gifted writers (D’Annunzio in Antongini, 1957: 84). This suggestion was rooted in an underlying self-fashioning strategy. In the Italian discourse on regeneration, younger writers – ideally those under thirty, even twenty-five – fashioned themselves as the leaders of a literary revival, often in opposition to D’Annunzio. D’Annunzio himself suggested that *Il Rinascimento* had to give more space to younger writers to contribute more actively to the renaissance discourse. This implied that the periodical would focus at the same time on young, promising writers and D’Annunzio himself. In doing so, his name would be integrated into a group of younger writers, suggesting his own role as a key leader in literary renewal.

To translate these words into action, D'Annunzio mentioned his intention to submit a piece by Maffio Maffii (1881-1957) (D'Annunzio in Antongini, 1957: 84), a young nationalist activist who, through his articles in *Il Regno* and *Hermes*, had established himself as an upcoming voice in the Florentine discourses on regeneration. The piece in question was Maffii's article "Il valore dello stile" (20 January 1906), which discussed the positivistic approach to literary stylistics that became popular in the last decades of the nineteenth century (36-51). As Gibellini has shown, Maffii criticized literary critics, such as Rémy de Gourmont, who reduced stylistics to the mere identification and classification of neologisms, archaisms and rhetorical figures (2005: 166). Instead, he proposed a more open-minded and creative approach that recognized both a writer's distinct stylistic characteristics and discussed how this style related to a certain poetics and ideology. However, Gibellini did not point out that Maffii employed a rhetoric of renaissance throughout his article, highlighting the decline of an old system of criticism, the emergence of an inadequate new approach, and the future prospect of its renewal. The beginning of his article signaled the "tramonto" or sunset of an entire approach to literary criticism, one that judged literary works based on moral considerations (Maffii, 1906: 36). The transformation of literary criticism was depicted through three metaphors: the critic removing blindfolds, letting down his hair, and discarding crutches into the open sea (36). These metaphors conveyed the idea that critics had liberated themselves from moral constraints and had gained newfound freedom in their approach to literature. This rejection of utilitarianism had inaugurated a shift towards a purer, untainted appreciation of literature, unburdened by external factors and practical considerations. While Maffii applauded this shift towards a more internal, formal and stylistic appreciation of literature, he also acknowledged its pitfalls, as it often proposed a mere "inventario del bagaglio linguistico, melodico, sintattico d'un poeta" (44). According to Maffii, such an approach did not advance the understanding of the "ragione intima della sua espressione poetica", i.e., the poet's style, which revealed the

“carattere individuale della sua anima” (44-45). He provocatively concluded with the statement that if such formal critics had existed in Dante’s time, they would have condemned the *Divina Commedia* to “l’ergastolo letterario” (48). Maffii made a plea for a renewed engagement with literature that moved beyond this unproductive, formal approach. Towards the end of his article, he outlined the task of what he termed “il critico nuovo, illuminato e fervente” (43). In addition to highlighting the critic’s reemergence into light (after removing his blindfold), Maffii used the anaphora of “bisogna che” and verbs of regeneration like ‘rivendicare’, ‘riscattare’, and ‘risollevarsi’ to emphasize the crucial role of these new critics in the literary field (43). His language of regeneration (and elevation) conveyed a desire to rescue literary authors from the degrading influence of uninspired inventory makers and to foster a new critical focus on the relationship between style and the ideas expressed in literature, i.e., the interplay between form and content.

Maffii’s article is significant because it revealed some of the guiding principles that underpinned *Il Rinascimento*. These elements are particularly evident in the non-fictional and essayistic contributions to the periodical and concern the discursive construction of the present as a dark age that preceded and prepared for an imminent renaissance. This construction revolved around the idea that the democratic present was a period of transition towards a better future. For instance, in his article, “Verso l’alba” (1 December 1905), the aestheticist philosopher Angelo Conti argued that a new era was on the horizon (37-41). Conti highlighted the tension between individuality and homogenization in the age of democracy, noting that in modernity, culture was becoming increasingly uniform. Moreover, he believed that the modern world’s fixation on external analysis had eroded art’s deeper and more profound understanding of life. In this context, he underscored the significance of art as a vehicle for aspiring towards the eternal. However, modern art, characterized by positivism and naturalism, failed to achieve this, generating an acute sense of crisis and an urgent need for renewal. He concluded by

pondering whether art was in a period of eternal dormancy or if the present contained seeds of an imminent renewal. In this regard, Conti remained optimistic, as he believed that new gifted artists would emerge from the crowd, destined to rejuvenate and elevate art (41). Hence, Conti detected a crisis of values in modern art and society, corrupted by positivism and naturalism, and longed for the revival of individuality and art in the face of growing homogenization.

The focus on art and new values was also discussed in the article “Arte nuova” (15 December 1905) by Alessandro Chiappelli (52-57), a philosopher, expert of Catholicism and protagonist of debates on socialism and the labor movement during the fin de siècle. He focused on the role of contemporary artists, the challenges they confronted in modernity, and the potential renaissance of art. He argued that artists had a crucial duty in society or a social function, i.e., to decipher the essence of life through artistic expression. In this context, Chiappelli implicitly applauded the progressive downfall of art for art’s sake movements, which he identified in French literary tendencies such as Parnassianism, Symbolism and Decadentism. According to Chiappelli, the first years of the twentieth century were characterized by the need for a new kind of art that served as “una delle forze necessarie, e uno dei vincoli più benefici della società umana” (55). He observed that the current period of artistic crisis and the restlessness of artists to seek new directions exemplified their struggle to find a socially relevant artform in modernity. Indeed, he argued that the modern tendency to break free from tradition had led to a form of “follia creatrice” and that only a few impressionists had been able to overcome the decline of harmony as a value (56). He contended that the renewal of modern art had to establish an open relationship with tradition, yet this task was not without pitfalls, as only the literary works of D’Annunzio and, to some extent, Pascoli had been able to successfully incorporate traditional elements in modern works, thereby enriching Italy’s literary heritage (56-57). These two authors demonstrated the possibility of infusing new content into classical or classically inspired forms of art, while uniting artistic instinct with

evolutionary continuity. In Chiappelli's view, the modern renaissance of art further hinged on the emergence of a new universally valid idea, akin to religion in earlier eras. He expressed uncertainty on whether this renaissance could be inspired by the "idea sociale" and whether this idea would independently be able to direct art towards a new idealism (57). However, he was hopeful that something inspiring would emerge from the present, as he felt that periods of "decomposizione" often provided fertile ground for artistic renewal (57). Hence, Chiappelli maintained that it was undeniable that the future of Italian art hinged on the development of a shared belief and a higher ideal. He felt that throughout history, truly significant periods of renewal had consistently drawn inspiration from such higher sources.

While Chiappelli implicitly pointed towards a form of social art that drew on Socialism and Catholicism to renew naturalism, the general tone of *Il Rinascimento* took a different direction. To find sources of higher inspiration and new values, the periodical turned towards the ideal of *patria* and Italy's cultural and historical traditions, mainly the Renaissance and the Risorgimento. Much like how Renaissance intellectuals molded classical antiquity into a past that could be harnessed for renaissance in the present, *Il Rinascimento* crafted an idealized past that was meant to serve as an inspiration for the present. In the case of *Il Rinascimento*, the Risorgimento and the Renaissance were directly or indirectly mobilized to critique signs of contemporary decadence that had to be eliminated. One of these signs was the government's insufficient attention to the preservation of the nation's artistic heritage. Among the many examples, it is worth to mention Pompeo Molmenti, who, when discussing sixteenth-century Italian art in December 1905, represented the Renaissance as an age of extreme contrasts and as a historical alternative to the homogeneous values promoted by bourgeois culture and the grey reality of modern Italy: "Uomini di straordinaria virtù di contro ad esseri abietti, macchiati d'ogni delitto, magnanime geste a stragi crudeli, fervori religiosi a sentimenti pagani, e il culto purissimo dell'arte contrapposto a basse cupidigie – Raffaello Sanzio di fronte a Cesare

Borgia!” (35). In the same article, Molmenti also seized the opportunity to criticize the current Italian government, as he applauded the monograph *Raffaello* (1885) of former Prime Minister of Italy, Marco Minghetti, of whom he lauded his ability to efficiently combine “le cure dello Stato” with “il fino senso dell’arte”. This example, he felt, was “non troppo imitato dagli odierni maggiorenti della politica” (35-36). Another example is the anonymous article “I Vandali in Italia”, which specifically addressed the neglect afflicting Italy’s cultural patrimony. The article’s main argument was that compiling a comprehensive inventory of acts of vandalism against artworks in Italy, perpetrated by the government, municipalities, and private individuals, would be an edifying initiative (“I Vandali in Italia”, 1905: 82). It proceeded to enumerate a lengthy catalogue of destruction and neglect, which was mainly centered around Florence and was crafted to evoke a sense of loss, appealing directly to the readers’ emotions. The demolition of historical houses, including those of the Davanzati, Serzelli, Erri, Pilli and Malagonnelle, for the construction of Palazzo delle Poste was highlighted, as well as the degradation of Santa Maria Novella, the Green Cloisters, and the main chapel by Domenico del Ghirlandaio. Finally, it also referred to the pervasive decay of the Rucellai Chapel and the Strozzi Chapel. The list concluded with three rhetorical questions that challenged the sincerity of those professing love for Italian art and criticized the government’s deficiency in matters of cultural and artistic preservation: “Chi se ne occupa? Chi provvede? E si ha ancora l’ardire di parlare d’amore per le opere d’arte in Italia?” (84).

The periodical did not limit itself to criticizing signs of decadence, but also delineated a program of renaissance through its celebration of the more or less recent past. In this sense, it is useful to briefly discuss two articles devoted to heroes of the Risorgimento, namely Giuseppe Verdi and Vittorio Alfieri, authored by Ettore Moschino (20 January 1906) and Giuseppe Lisio (5 March 1906) respectively. Moschino and Lisio delineated, within the broader context of the periodical, a convergence of literature, political engagement, aspirations for a

better future, and a criticism of the present. On the one hand, their articles attest to the fact that *Il Rinascimento* proposed a renewed nationalist engagement with literature to overcome the literary crisis of values and outlined the role of a nationalist intellectual devoted to Italy's renaissance, which, as I will discuss in the next section, found its main example in Gabriele D'Annunzio. On the other hand, they reveal that the concept of a new *Renaissance* also manifested itself as a new *Risorgimento*, as it was connected to the political continuation of the Italian unification process, particularly *irredentismo* and the unrealized dream of national greatness.

Ettore Moschino's article on Giuseppe Verdi was a commemoration written on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the composer's death (1906: 23-33). The director of *Il Rinascimento* depicted Verdi as a national hero and dedicated patriot who had channeled all his energies towards the conflation of two ideals: *patria* and art. He emphasized Verdi's role as a symbol of renaissance, as he viewed his works as powerful forces intertwined with the nation's reawakening. Indeed, he presented Verdi as a musical beacon that fueled Italy's spirit during crucial moments of the *Risorgimento*. Moschino argued that Verdi's works accompanied the tumultuous events of the national revolution and resonated alongside the heroic efforts of figures like Giuseppe Garibaldi and Goffredo Mameli. Furthermore, Moschino painted an image of Rome opening its gates to Italy, guided by Giuseppe Verdi's music. This image further highlighted Verdi's significance as a symbol of national pride: "Roma augusta spalancava la sua porta trionfale all'Italia, e la musa di Giuseppe Verdi cantava raggiava inebriava col suo terribile impeto, con la voce dei suoi guerrieri, dei suoi amanti, delle sue eroine che simboleggiavano l'anima, i sogni e la grandezza degli eroi e delle donne d'Italia" (33). The article concluded with the image of Verdi's magnificence, with a silent sparkle in his eyes and a smile even in the face of death, which showed him as an eternal optimist and a harbinger of future victories (33). It reinforced the idea that Verdi's legacy went beyond his death ("il

crepuscolo è più che mai raggiante come un'*aurora*" (23)), as he would continue to inspire Italy's consciousness toward future triumphs. In other words, Moschino used Verdi as an example to delineate a new role for contemporary Italian artists. His main argument was that culture had been a determining force during the Risorgimento and that this role had to be rediscovered in the twentieth century. Much like Verdi's melodies had driven the political renaissance of Italy during the Risorgimento, contemporary artists had to use their melodies and verses to influence and shape the destiny of the nation.

Moschino's observations on art and the nation gained more depth in Giuseppe Lisio's article titled "La figurazione ideale dell'Alfieri" (5 March 1906), which discussed Vittorio Alfieri's legacy and cultural impact as a writer symbolizing freedom and nationalism, dedicated to "nobili fini civili" (34). Lisio, professor of Italian literature at the Liceo Manzoni in Milan, invited readers of *Il Rinascimento* to contemplate Alfieri's significance in Italian history, asking: "Che cosa rappresenta Vittorio Alfieri nella storia del nostro pensiero, dell'arte nostra? Qual è l'essenza della sua grandezza?" (39). In response to this question, the critic presented a heroic image of Alfieri, emphasizing the admiration he received from intellectuals and politicians such as Giuseppe Parini, Alessandro Manzoni, Giacomo Leopardi, Giosuè Carducci, Vincenzo Gioberti, Massimo D'Azeglio, and Cesare Balbo. In doing so, Lisio suggested that Alfieri's influence extended beyond literature into the realm of politics and morality. According to Lisio, Alfieri had not only contributed to modern Italian literature, but also laid the foundation for Italy's unification. He argued that Alfieri's primary accomplishment was his contribution to shaping a prophetic future for Italy. Indeed, he believed that the author possessed a very clear and precise intuition of Italian society and the nation ("luminosissima, precisa di una precisione plastica, l'intuizione") during a time when concepts like nationalism and unity were still germinal and *obscure* (39). Hence, Lisio relied on the rhetorical system of light and darkness to portray Alfieri as a symbol of Italy's cultural and political reawakening.

He further argued that Alfieri's work revolved around two main concepts that nurtured the political *Risorgimento*, namely the “desio alla rigenerazione della coscienza civile negli Italiani” and “l'ideale dell'uomo nuovo, del moderno italiano” (39). These concepts underpinned Alfieri's vision for a new and modern Italy rising above oppression. Lisio's attention to Alfieri's role in political and civil rejuvenation underscored the interconnectedness of art and political and societal progress. He emphasized this connection even further by referring to the sonnet “Giorno verrà, tornerà il giorno”, where Alfieri delineated his prophetic vision for the future. Lisio used this sonnet to shift his exposé from retrospective analysis to a critique of the present, highlighting the disparity between the ideals Alfieri envisioned and post-1870 Italian literature and politics: “Si corra ora con la memoria a quel che furono ed operarono gli Italiani di ogni ordine nelle ‘sublimi età’ da lui profetate, su cui egli a sua volta operò con tanta forza. Le sublimi età non vanno oltre il 1870!” (43). Specifically, he noted that not all of Alfieri's ideals had materialized, as the nation was not fully united due to the unrealized annexation of some *terre irredente*, such as Trento and Trieste. In this context, Lisio concluded his article with a critique of literature's indifference to the unfulfilled political goals of the *Risorgimento*. He speculated on what Alfieri might have thought if he were to rise from his grave at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Lisio, Alfieri would have lamented the crisis of values permeating the literary field and criticized authors who pursued purely aesthetic beauty without genuine civil and human goals: “Oh! La sterile miseria de' ricercatori di una bellezza puramente estetica; di chi si vanta o realista puro, o idealista puro, o simbolista, o parnassiano, o decadente, o palpatore di carni, o scovitore di sensazioni novissime: e non sente e non comprende la grande voce dell'umanità che chiama e attende il suo poeta” (44).

Hence, just as Moschino, Lisio argued for a reconnection between literature and politics to overcome the post-*Risorgimento* crisis of values. In doing so, both critics relied on the idea

that the political Risorgimento directly derived from artistic activism and artists' engagement in shaping national consciousness, an idea that has recently been termed as *Risorgimento delle lettere* (Gendrat-Claudiel, Lanfranchi, Musitelli et al., 2013). This idea permeated literary criticism in post-Risorgimento Italy, as it is attested by Ambrogio Boschetti's (1868) *La letteratura italiana ad uso della studiosa gioventù* and Giuseppe Finzi's (1888) *Lezioni di Storia della letteratura italiana dettate ad uso delle scuole e delle colte persone*. In this sense, Alberto Mario Banti (2000 and 2011) has identified a Risorgimento canon, including works by Ugo Foscolo, Giuseppe Verdi, among others, which has laid the foundations of Italian nationalist storytelling between the Risorgimento and Fascism.

Il Rinascimento's Favorite Author: Gabriele D'Annunzio

The specific embodiment of *Il Rinascimento's* renaissance intellectual was D'Annunzio. At this point, it should come as no surprise that the poet was the periodical's main reference point, given his active role in the origin story of the Libreria Editrice Lombarda and his involvement behind the scenes in *Il Rinascimento*. D'Annunzio was *Il Rinascimento's* favorite author, and the periodical set itself a founding example in the themes addressed in his work. For instance, Giuseppe Lando Passerini, the director of the *Giornale Dantesco* (1893-1915), fashioned, in his article "Per Dante e contro i dantomani" (*Il Rinascimento*, 20 May 1906), D'Annunzio as the epitome of a modern intellectual's fruitful approach to tradition, specifically in relation to Dante Alighieri. Passerini's article was part of the ongoing debate among critics, such as Corrado Ricci, Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Papini on the consequences of the modern obsession with Dante's work, or *Dantomania*, which had allegedly saturated the literary market with publications that were deemed trivial and erudite and offered little valuable insight into the author's work and life (see Jossa, 2019). This oversaturation of the literary market was a consequence of the renewed recognition of Dante as both a political figure and the foundational poet of Italian identity, which was a characteristic aspect of nineteenth-century literary

historiography (Quondam, 2004; Conti, 2012). In this context, Passerini turned to the efforts of the Società Dantesca Italiana, established in 1889, to revive the *Lectura Dantis* in Florence. The primary purpose of these lectures was pedagogical, driven by the belief that Dante's work could guide Italians toward moral and civil virtues crucial for national greatness (Cerasi, 1996: 207). Hence, the Dante lectures were envisioned as a catalyst for national renaissance, yet Passerini noted a discrepancy between their intended impact and actual influence: “La *Lectura Dantis* che si è sparsa rapidamente [...] in tutta l'Italia e per le sue isole, non è stata la grande spinta a un salutare risveglio dell'anima nazionale verso il suo poeta magnanimo” (Passerini, 1906: 42). However, Passerini highlighted D'Annunzio as an exception who, during his *Lectura Dantis* in Florence in January 1900 (D'Annunzio, 2005: 2212-2223), had perfectly articulated the intentions and hopes of the organizers, i.e., the need for a more patriotic and vital engagement with Dante. Passerini quoted a substantial paragraph from D'Annunzio's lecture, where he outlined the cultural and national mission of intellectuals to reconnect with tradition and rectify a perceived deviation from the true essence of the nation. D'Annunzio advocated the restoration of the distorted image of the *patria* through the influential power of Dante's work, stating:

E io penso che i promotori di queste letture per il popolo [...] abbiano voluto principalmente istituire una tribuna libera ove gli uomini di intelletto, a contatto con il terribile spirito di Dante, mostrino la lor potenza vitale, la forza viva del loro pensiero, la sincerità del loro nutrimento, la lor facoltà di risonare nell'anima della moltitudine, e con l'aiuto del Libro portentoso cerchino di ristabilire ne' suoi lineamenti essenziali l'immagine difformata della Patria (41).

Hence, for Passerini, D'Annunzio emerged as an example of a dynamic and transformative engagement with tradition, highlighting his pivotal role in the nation's imminent renaissance. D'Annunzio's transformative engagement with the national tradition and language was also a crucial theme of Orazio Bacci's lecture, “Gabriele D'Annunzio prosatore”, delivered at the Circolo Filologico in Livorno on 10 March and in Florence on 12 March 1906 and published in *Il Rinascimento* soon after. Bacci was an Italianist from the Regio Istituto Superiore di

Magistero Femminile in Florence and an acquaintance of D'Annunzio. This explains why the latter took the initiative to publish the critic's lecture in *Il Rinascimento*. Indeed, D'Annunzio himself requested Antongini to send Ettore Moschino the manuscript of Bacci's lecture (D'Annunzio in Antongini, 1957: 106), which focused on his prose anthology *Prose scelte* (1906). In his lecture, Bacci placed the author within a canon of engaged Italian literary figures, alongside Ugo Foscolo, Giacomo Leopardi and Giosuè Carducci. In doing so, he critiqued critics who falsely portrayed D'Annunzio as a "poeta mero" devoted to the unworldly worship of beauty (6). Instead, Bacci praised D'Annunzio's advocacy for the "dignità civile delle lettere" and highlighted his role as a cultural leader (7). He lauded D'Annunzio for celebrating protagonists of Italian culture, including Claudio Monteverdi, the Camerata de' Bardi (in *Il fuoco*) and Giuseppe Verdi (in his 1901 commemoration of the composer). Furthermore, Bacci highlighted D'Annunzio's identity as an artist who, drawing inspiration from traditional sources such as Benvenuto Cellini and Leonardo Da Vinci, crafted modern works that not only continued the national tradition but also brought glory to the nation (17-18). Through this, Bacci implicitly suggested that D'Annunzio's *modus operandi* of 'Renaissance' should be understood as a practice involving the reception and creation of tradition. Additionally, as a philologist of the *scuola storica*, Bacci mainly focused on what could be termed D'Annunzio's linguistic nationalism. He underscored D'Annunzio's insatiable love for the Italian language, positioning him as a linguistic champion who reclaimed and celebrated the purity of Italian (7). Bacci encouraged readers who shared D'Annunzio's belief in the sanctity of the national language to promote respect and reverence for it. He suggested that a commendable and practical way to embrace "dannunzianismo" (the style or ideals associated with D'Annunzio) was to acquire a broad knowledge of the Italian language (7). At the core of this invitation to embrace *dannunzianesimo* was the theme of cultural preservation and restoration. Bacci felt that by following D'Annunzio's example and cultivating a profound understanding of the

Italian language, intellectuals could contribute to the culture and heritage of the nation and express its spirit.

D'Annunzio's role as an intellectual of renaissance was most explicitly articulated in the article "Carducci e D'Annunzio", in which Silvio Benco, a journalist and convinced irredentist, delineated the intellectual profiles of Giosuè Carducci and D'Annunzio, emphasizing in particular their differences. Benco's argument revolved around the idea that the distinct worldviews and personal temperaments of these writers determined the historical periods they used as the foundation for their nationalist mythography. He argued that Carducci primarily focused on the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages and the Risorgimento (57), while D'Annunzio, as an "Italiota of the Mezzogiorno" and an exponent of the "Rinascimento latino" drew inspiration not only from Rome, but above all from Greece and the Renaissance (57). Benco's observations are significant, as he displayed an implicit preference for D'Annunzio, which could be interpreted as a clear programmatic statement for the ideology of the periodical itself. In his text, Benco referred to Eugène-Melchior De Vogüé, who, as early as 1895, had lauded D'Annunzio as one of the central figures in the ongoing Latin Renaissance, namely the literary, cultural and political renaissance of Europe's neo-Latin nations (De Vogüé, 1895). In this context, De Vogüé depicted D'Annunzio as the embodiment of the cosmopolitan intellectual of Latinity, whose literary works engaged both with Italy's national tradition and topical trends in European literature. D'Annunzio himself capitalized on De Vogüé's article to bolster his intellectual standing in Italy, where he was seen as the poet symbolizing Italy's moral decline (Nemegeer 2022a and 2022b). In doing so, he put forth a more nationalist and ultimately imperialist interpretation of this emerging Renaissance. D'Annunzio's perspective was deeply rooted in the celebration of violence and imperial expansion as transformative and era-defining forces, of which *Il Rinascimento* definitely bears traces. This perspective is evident in the first issue of the periodical, which opened with excerpts from D'Annunzio's

upcoming tragedy *La nave* (D'Annunzio, 1905a). This tragedy showcased the author's fascination with the Mediterranean, the Venetian Empire and their role in shaping Italian identity. The play, set in 553 CE, often termed an Adriatic tragedy (Valentini, 1992: 62), celebrated the Venetians' journey from their humble beginnings on the lagoon islands to becoming Mediterranean rulers. In the play, D'Annunzio symbolically linked the concept of patria to the ship, creating a connection between contemporary Italy's maritime and imperial ambitions, the historical foundation of Venice and its empire, which reached its zenith during the Renaissance. Hence, as the inaugural text of *Il Rinascimento*, *La Nave* highlighted D'Annunzio's interest in imperialism, as he advocated for Italy to acquire a Mediterranean colony, a so-called *quarta sponda* (Fogu, 2020: 134-135).

Dreams of restoring an ancient Italic glory are also addressed in *La vita di Cola di Rienzo*, published in three instalments in *Il Rinascimento* (D'Annunzio 1905b, 1905c and 1906). In this biography, D'Annunzio aimed to innovate what he termed the Latin art of biography, and, in doing so, he projected Italy's contemporary political landscape onto the late medieval and early Renaissance world. As Barberi Squarotti (2014) has noted, D'Annunzio essentially used the distant past to reflect on contemporary problems in Italian politics. The *Vita* explored and symbolized revolts, party struggles, and the poverty of a people enslaved by servile labor in the capitalist world (258). However, D'Annunzio also projected his own nationalist mission onto the narration, specifically focusing on Cola di Rienzo and Petrarch. In his lifetime, Petrarch ardently worked towards restoring Rome's ancient glory, and for a moment, this dream seemed to materialize in the figure of Cola di Rienzo. Amid the upheaval in Rome in 1347, Cola assumed the title of Tribune of Rome with the aim of reinstating Rome as the world's capital, but he ultimately failed (see Falkeid, 2017: 95-120). D'Annunzio's *Vita* thematized precisely this expectation and hope for an unrealized renaissance. In this context, D'Annunzio portrayed Petrarch as an intellectual cultivating a "gran sogno romano" and

embodying the “antica e vera romana grandezza” (D’Annunzio, 1905c: 12-13). He argued that in Petrarch’s eyes, Cola appeared as the idealized redeemer, the “redentore ideale che il poeta s’era foggato nel fuoco della sua mente” (8). However, D’Annunzio also emphasized that Cola was an ambiguous figure: he was a learned humanist and demagogue aspiring to redeem Rome’s past glories but limited by plebeian birth, which made him an eloquent speaker without political acumen. Cola held great promise but fell short due to his plebeian and barbaric nature, which made him a leader of destruction rather than resurrection. Instead, the hero envisioned by D’Annunzio for the modern Renaissance needed to combine noble values, wisdom and action. Despite aspiring to renew the world, Cola lacked the capacity to actualize his vision. What emerged from D’Annunzio’s biography of Cola di Rienzo was the contrast between the renaissance Petrarch envisioned and Cola’s failed utopia, which deferred the desired renewal into an uncertain future. This liminal moment, situated between a dark age and the age of renaissance, became the historical analogy to express the transitional phase between the Risorgimento and a new period of renaissance, during which *Il Rinascimento* was published. A decade later, during the First World War, D’Annunzio would attempt to surpass Cola, embodying the noble aesthetic values (which he felt Cola lacked) and merging them with politics to inaugurate a new era. However, at this juncture, between 1905 and 1906, as outlined in *Il Rinascimento*, he primarily embodied the role of the nationalist intellectual, akin to Petrarch, awaiting and preparing to achieve Italy’s dream of renaissance.

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