

The Italian Renaissance in the 19th Century: Revision, Revival, and Return.

Edited by *Lina Bolzoni* and *Alina Payne*

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The Italian Renaissance in the 19th Century adopts an impressively interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to the highly debated topic of the interpretations of the Italian Renaissance during the 19th century. The volume represents the outcome of a 2013 conference, but the editors Lina Bolzoni and Alina Payne ensure coherence across its twenty-two chapters, written both in Italian and in English. The collection makes important contributions to the growing literature on the topic, presenting the Italian Renaissance as a “pan-European phenomenon of critique, commentary and re-shaping of a nineteenth century present perceived as deeply problematic” (9). Opening a dialogue between scholars of the Renaissance and experts of the nineteenth century, the book aims at retaining two different perspectives: on one side the myth of Italy and of the Renaissance elaborated by the foreigners observers, on the other side Italians’ complex relationship with the re-elaboration of their past.

Stephen Bann begins the first section by outlining the creation of the myth of the Renaissance in the early nineteenth-century France by looking at its literary origins, tracing the increasing richness of associations that accrued to the concept of the Renaissance from ‘the general terminology of periodization’ (32) during the French Restoration to the affirmation of the myth. The following chapters elaborate further: Maurizio Ghelardi analyses the shift in the definitions of the Renaissance along Jacob Burckhard’s production, from a historical-cultural meaning to an artistic one. The progress to modernity depicted in the foreigner context finds some similarities in Italy, where, as Francesca Borgo highlights focussing on the legacy of the Renaissance in Risorgimento battle paintings, it serves as legitimization of Risorgimento wars. The way in which the political and ethical issues related to the construction of a national identity during the Risorgimento is also at the centre of Emma Giammatei’s contribution. By looking in particular at De Sanctis portrait of the Renaissance

she identifies an anti-Renaissance line of thought in Risorgimento literature because of the political decadence of the period in contrast with the flourishing arts. The second section focuses on the institutions and patrons involved in the artistic productions and how they shaped the definition of the Renaissance as a period of modernity by exploring, for example, the role of museums. Eva-Maria Troelenberg looks in particular at the figure of Wilhelm Von Bode and how he moved nineteenth-century art museum beyond the Greco-Roman European past by opening to Islamic art objects that had association with the Italian Renaissance. Cara Rachele focuses instead on the construction of corpuses of Renaissance architectural drawings at the Uffizi in early nineteenth century as part of the attempts to achieve and define modernity. Marc Gotlieb analyses the peculiar literary genre of the artistic biography and its education role, while Maria Loha highlights how this role is fulfilled also by the weight of the memory of the *uomini illustri* and the dark sides of those effigies. The definition of modernity and its complex relationship with the understanding of the Renaissance is also at the centre of Christian Rivoletti's chapter, that explores nineteenth century German literature, Schiller and Schlegel in particular, and how they saw in Ariosto and Tasso the representative figures of the modern poet. The meaning of the Renaissance as the mark of modernity appears in its clarity in David Sadighain's work that examines the buildings that were the origins and symbols of Rothschilds' financial power.

The third section explores the way in which paradigmatic artistic figures of the Renaissance are rediscovered and their work re-elaborated during the nineteenth century: the Romantic myth of Torquato Tasso, brought to light in Donizetti's opera, is the centre of Giuseppe Gerbino's work, while Cordula Grewe looks at the fusion of literature and Renaissance poetry in the paintings of the German Nazarens. Ida Campeggiani's chapter focuses on nineteenth-century literary rediscovery of Michelangelo's work while Daniel M. Zolli examines Medardo Rosso and his fascination with Donatello's sculpture. Part four focuses on Renaissance women and how there were portrayed by nineteenth-century intellectuals, often projecting onto Renaissance female characters modern ideas

and stereotypes. As Lina Bolzoni demonstrates the popular culture was influenced by a sensationalized representation of the Renaissance. The popularity of those figures, such as Caterina Cornaro or Lucrezia Borgia, appears clear also in Candida Syndikus' analysis of the paintings representing powerful and tragic women. The invention of Renaissance myths in nineteenth-century was quite common, as proved by the analysis of Jane Tylus and Veronica Andreani of the interpretations of the work of Gaspara Stampa.

The last section deals with the architecture and the way in which Renaissance urban space has been reshaped during the nineteenth century: Nadja Aksamjia focuses on the work of the nineteenth-century architect from Bologna Alfonso Rubbiani, who was inspired by the Renaissance city as a rejection of the present. The direct relation with the present that Italian architects found in the architectural imaginary of the Renaissance emerges also in Claudia Conforti's study of the main Florentine construction projects during the years in which it was the capital of Italy. French architects instead, as maintained by Neil Levine, look at the architectural language of the Italian Renaissance as related to a different period that is not connected to the present. The volume closes with Alina Payne's work on the modernist architecture, going beyond the nineteenth century and opening to the question on the legacy of the Renaissance architecture in the coming century.

This book contributes greatly to enrich the fragmented, multiform and contradictory image of the Renaissance presented in the different artistic nineteenth-century productions. Notwithstanding it does not deal with historiography *in strictu sensu*, as clearly argued by the editors, thus nineteenth-century scholars and intellectuals' works are left aside, rendering this study less relevant for intellectual historians and nineteenth-century historians in general. The collaborative, interdisciplinary, and international approach to the analysis of the Renaissance adopted by this study provide however an excellent model of work.

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