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THE CRITIC “THEOLOGIST”: AN EXAM OF GIANFRANCO CONTINI’S EARLY WRITINGS ON «RIVISTA ROSMINIANA»

This paper is devoted to some early critical writings by Gianfranco Contini, an extremely influent 20<sup>th</sup> century philologist, critic and scholar in both ancient and modern Italian Literature and Romance Languages. In 1930 Gianfranco Contini, still a university student, started his career as a “militant” critic – where “militant” means “devoted to contemporary literature” – publishing his first review on «Rivista Rosminiana». Showing a remarkable methodological complexity, the early militant writings Contini published on «Rivista Rosminiana» are crucial to understanding his methodological framework, which is often concealed by the assertiveness of his style. Indeed, the analysis of these reviews and essays shows that Contini originally combined Crocean aesthetics with the theology of Antonio Rosmini – a prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century thinker – and its aesthetical implications, which he had probably absorbed as a college student. «Rivista Rosminiana» itself was the official journal of the Rosminians, the religious order founded by Antonio Rosmini which run the college Contini attended in the 1920s.

I will start this paper from a brief description of the writings published on «Rivista Rosminiana»; then, focusing on several major reviews, like the ones devoted to Ungaretti’s *L’Allegria* and Montale’s *Ossi di Seppia*, I will highlight the main rhetorical moves Contini uses to build his critical argument. In order to analyse these moves, I will rely on a framework I developed in a previous paper devoted to modelling the main strategies deployed in critical texts based on the scrutiny of Adriano Tilgher’s reviews to Pirandello’s dramas. I will mainly focus on Contini’s comparative-evaluative strategies which aim to construct a composite image of the text (or the texts) presented in the review. His tendency to shift between the general and the specific and to extract a semantic-linguistic nucleus from the text will be also taken into account. In conclusion, I will connect the aforementioned critical strategies with theological and aesthetical positions debated on «Rivista Rosminiana», which may have influenced Contini’s seminal and sophisticated method.

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