

RECENSIONE

***Miei piccoli lettori... Letteratura e scienza nel libro per ragazzi tra XIX e XX secolo [My little readers... Literature and science in books for children in the 19th and 20th centuries].* Ed. Elisa Marazzi. Milan: Angelo Guerini e Associati, 2016. 225 pages.**

Italian Unification in 1861 was a genuine turning point for Italian children's literature. Politicians responsible for the development of society realised how important education was in forming a new Italian society, and, indeed, it was common schooling that brought the various parts of the United Kingdom of Italy closer together linguistically and culturally. The challenging process of unification was greatly facilitated by authors, journalists and publishers. The latter's ventures revolutionised the Italian publishing market and triggered its dynamic development, beginning with the rich northern regions. Publishers aimed to 'shape the personalities of young Italians' (E. Marazzi, *Libri per diventare italiani*, Milano 2014, p. 13) and provide a sound education for young people by offering moral instruction and inculcating social norms.

When unification began, the landscape of available literature for a young readership was effectively a desert, comprising a small number of 'stylistically paltry and boring' texts by Francesco Soave, Giuseppe Taverna, Cesare Cantù, Pietro Thouar and Luigi Parravicini" (G. Marrone, *Storie e generi della letteratura per l'infanzia*, Roma 2002, p. 82). After unification, the 'young' Italian children's literature turned to other European literatures for models, drawing first of all on French, English and German achievements. The urgent need to provide Italy's youngest citizens with quality literature in the national language bred such works as Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1883) and Edmondo De Amicis's sentimental *Heart* (1886). However, the market acutely lacked popular science books for juveniles that could develop their academic and research interests.

This volume edited by Marazzi is intended for children's literature scholars and includes eight essays. The contributors address what they consider the most important changes in post-unification Italy that fostered the intertwining of literature and science in children's books published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Featuring a quote ('my little readers') from the Italian masterpiece of children's literature *Pinocchio*, the book's title clearly indicates that the contributors have focused specifically on works addressed to children. The volume has been given coherence by Marazzi's comprehensive introduction.

Marazzi is also responsible for chapter 1, titled 'To teach and to delight: editorial strategies in didactic and educational books in the second half of the nineteenth century', which shows how science found its way into children's literature in the aftermath of unification. She depicts publishers who effectively met their obligation of *docere et delectare* (to teach, to delight and to move) by borrowing abundantly, first of all from French literature, whose imports formed the core of the body of books released by Italian publishers directly after unification.

In chapter 2, Elisa Rebellato focuses on the publishing series *La Scala d'Oro*, published by the Turin-based publisher Utet in the twentieth century. Intended for various age groups, the series offered Italian children the most valuable works of local and foreign literature, as well as texts disseminating the basics of science, history and religion.

In the third chapter, 'Just So Stories', Anna Antoniazzi addresses Rudyard Kipling's literary texts for children. Antoniazzi points to their artistic value, fantastic elements and innovativeness. As she emphasises, Kipling's way of writing about animals proved absorbing to child readers though a combination of fiction and popular science. He is therefore regarded as a pioneer of modern ethology and founded a trend in literature for a young readership that was to be picked up and developed by

Konrad Lorenz many years later.

The next contribution is by Alberto Carli, who explores the figure of the 'orco' (ogre in children's literature). That is followed by Francesca Orestano's discussion of *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* [The diary of Johnny Tempest] (1907–8) by Vamba (Luigi Bertelli), which relates how nine-year-old Johnny Tempest found out about the world around him in the early twentieth century by playing at being a chemist (Orestano notes that in Europe and the US children's scientific interest was often awakened by toys such as chemistry sets). This chapter also evokes several French books that found their way to post-unification Italy and augmented the Italian publishing market with precious popular-science resources.

Chapters Five and Six are devoted to illustrations in children's books. Marta Sironi analyses illustrations presenting the animal world and published in children's books and magazines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. First giving credit to the efforts undertaken by the journal *Il Giornale per i Bambini* edited by Ferdinando Martini, Sironi then goes on to outline the accomplishments of distinguished artist Carlo Chiostri and discusses the work of Antonio Rubino, Bruno Angoletta and Attilio Mussino. She highlights the important impact of the journal *Corriere dei Piccoli*, an innovative magazine for children published in Italy since 1907, and the experimental illustrations of Bruno Munari and Enzo and Iela Mari.

This contribution is followed by Walter Fochesato's chapter titled 'Uncle Louis's lessons', which refers to Paul Hazard's *Les livres, les enfants et les hommes* [Books, children and men] and surveys the work of the Italian author Gustavo Milani, pointing out its successful combination of popular science literature and brilliant illustrations by Enrico Mazzanti. Fochesato goes on to discuss books by Jules Verne, whose beautifully illustrated science-fiction novels were very popular with Italian readers.

In the final contribution, 'The readers of *Corriere dei Piccoli* between education and medicine', Sabrina Fava attends to the important pursuits of *Corriere dei Piccoli*. Fava analyses the magazine's model based on the original works of Italian authors, journalists and illustrators. She also presents examples showing how medical issues were brought to the attention of young readers and how their consciousness of health- and hygiene-related issues was raised.

The book concludes with an afterword by the eminent Italian children's literature scholar Pino Boero, who sees the volume as exceptional in the way it brings together contributions originating in diverse research frameworks. Questions about the ways science trickled down into adult literature have been addressed in *La scienza nella letteratura italiana* [Science in Italian literature], edited by Stefano Redaelli. *Miei piccoli lettori...* offers much valuable information on how literature and science interlace and coalesce in texts for children. The book has a lucid structure and includes many interesting details. The illustrations makes the volume even more informative. It is good news that scholarly reflection on the position and impact of popular-science literature in united Italy has been given a thorough appraisal.

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DOI: 10.3366/ircl.2018.0258

Da International Research in Children's Literature, 11, 1, July 2018, pp. 95-97.

[8 settembre 2018]