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# Tradition or revolution? The difficult "turning point" in Italian Children's Literature

Anna Antoniazzi

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- 1 There are dates that history identifies as crucial reference points, and that remain in the collective memory as repositories of events, situations and fundamental changes. One of these dates is undoubtedly 1968. In Italy those who participated, directly or indirectly, in the sweeping transformations that occurred in the political, social and cultural fields between the 1960s and 1970s often attribute events to 1968 that were, in fact, forerunners or consequences. Therefore, when we reflect on 1968, including when we consider children and young people, this means taking into consideration at least a decade of events, filled with often contrasting stimuli from different directions.
- 2 The analysis of narrative sources – by narrative we mean not only book publishing, but all media of that period that were accessible to children – reveals a pronounced ambiguity in what was on offer. On the one hand there was a vast array of writers, artists and thinkers (who will be discussed extensively later) who were placing childhood at the very center of educational processes, attributing to it a heretofore unthinkable autonomy and dignity: Gianni Rodari, Mario Lodi, Alberto Manzi, but also Bruno Munari, Leo Lionni, Rosellina Archinto and Donatella Ziliotto, to cite but a few significant examples. In this period they sought and found new language and concepts to address children, to widen their cognitive horizons and to break the imaginative and behavioural restrictions that all too often “imprisoned” them in rigid, preordained patterns. On the other hand, however, the publishing market continued to offer children stories based on “fine sentiments”, filial love, containment of emotions, and the containment of individuals within social class divisions. “The children’s books being printed here were such sad little things”, Rosellina Archinto<sup>1</sup> recalled during an interview, in which she also underlined that “There was Fabbri - really traditional. Mondadori was focused on Walt Disney as they had acquired the rights. Einaudi had tried the *Tanti bambini* series which folded quickly. Mursia also did something. The rest were average and mediocre publishing houses: La Sorgente, AMZ or

Piccoli who produced books for stationery stores. Dami had an important readership but its books were sold in stationery stores and were very traditional<sup>2</sup>". Many of those who dealt with children's education, especially institutionally and mainly in schools, had deep misgivings about the innovative books that young authors were proposing to child readers. For this reason they continued to rely on publications that guaranteed continuity with a well-disciplined and predictable narrative tradition.

- 3 In particular, Catholic publishing houses continued to have a firm hold on the "moral reins" in books for children and young people. Sidelined during the Fascist period, on their return in the post-World War II period they swiftly dominated the publishing market for young people. The example of the SEI publishing house in Turin is significant. As Francesca Davida Pizzigoni observes in her PhD thesis, the 1960s opened up for the Salesian publisher, in terms of what the role of the Catholic publishing industry should be and on what it meant to be Christian in post-war Italy<sup>3</sup>. The management wanted to intervene in the profound changes they felt were underway (at the social, political and cultural levels), their editorial policies tended towards conservatism, even to the "restoration" of the traditional values, which was especially evident especially in series such as *Le Lucciole* (1961-1966), aimed at girls.
- 4 The *Lucciole* series was a response to the concern that the Catholic press lacked a true literary genre, and was addressed to "young ladies between 12 and 16 years [...], to defend with good readings, suited to their purity and sensitivity<sup>4</sup>". The young heroines in these stories overcome, through a journey of righteousness and faith, the adversities of life, ending with the inevitable victory of good over evil. Theirs seemed to be an "apocalyptic and anti-modern" position, as Boero and De Luca<sup>5</sup> define it - in line with that of Emilia Salvioni who, in the pages of the magazine *Schedario*, stated: "The modern novel, European and American, is generally introspective, and likes to penetrate the psychological labyrinth of sexual relations, under the influence of Proust and Freud. Hence the care of educators to preserve the young readers from insidious revelations and the need recognized everywhere, of a narrative suitable for this audience was favored by publishers because, more than any other, it was the most avid readership<sup>6</sup>".
- 5 In addition, the study and criticism relating to children's literature, underwent a profound transformation in the 1960s. Apart from the more conservative fringes, who were still very much present and active, the new scholars took a multitude of different approaches, primarily the pedagogical approach that saw the children's book as "an essential *situation*", in which the plan of the *possible* was represented in all directions by the human imagination, a situation that can be turned into an *educational situation* for the reader should they choose the author to be their interlocutor<sup>7</sup>". It was the publication, in 1972, of the volume *Guardare le figure* by Antonio Faeti<sup>8</sup>, however, that led to a real change in the discipline<sup>9</sup>, as he situated children's literature on the border between a variety of different disciplinary fields - literature, history, anthropology, pedagogy, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and freed it from the exclusive pedagogical-educational components, or merely literary ones, by opening it to a hermeneutics of the imaginary centered entirely on the interpretation of the texts, starting with the examples based on the pedagogy of "problematicism" [*Problematicismo pedagogico*] "pedagogical problematicism". At the heart of Antonio Faeti's study was a respect for children's world, through examples of the finest storytelling for children and teenagers. All areas of the study of children's imagination - and of the study of infantile imagination - that characterized the 1960s and 70s, therefore, were also marked by the ambiguities and

contradictions of an era characterized, at all levels, by promising and vital leaps towards the future and the reactionary response.

- 6 Rather than cancelling each other out, these paradoxical and contrasting currents fueled one another, enriching and stimulating continuous changes of perspective. It was, in fact, the continuous mix and comparison of images of childhood and different incongruous educational models (from art, literature, cinema, TV programmes, music, advertising...), that enabled them to ignite new curiosities, to suggest new existential questions and open original interpretative perspectives.
- 7 To fully understand the era in question, we must remember the extraordinary economic vitality that characterised it. What is called the "economic boom" brought with it the discovery by the Italian population of a type of product that was hitherto unknown, that is, the superfluous. And with the superfluous the market opened the doors to new customers: children and teenagers became target consumers for the creation of specific products and their promotion. Indeed, children and adolescents were the means through which sales of products for adults were stimulated.
- 8 Thus, it was no accident that as early as 1957 *Carosello* (Carousel) was featured in the schedule of the National TV channel (then Rete 1) and remained there for about twenty years. *Carosello* was an absolute novelty in the context of television programmes, and was at the same time an interesting and profitable occasion for narrative experimentation: for every minute of entertainment there were twenty five seconds of advertising. Animated puppets, cartoons, stop-motion, mixed media etc, were used along with often cutting edge narrative techniques, to populate the programme's time slot between the end of the news and the start of the evening schedule.



ILL. 1: Osvaldo Cavandoli, *Linea*, 1969 - Courtesy of Archivio storico Lagostina S.p.A. Omega (VB).

- 9 With the exception of extraordinary work like *La Linea* by Osvaldo Cavandoli<sup>10</sup>, which was able to enchant spectators with its irresistible comic verve, the programme's content often referenced genre stereotypes, as in the case of Carmencita and Caballero (alias

Paulista), characters created by the Armando Testa agency for the Lavazza<sup>11</sup> coffee advert.



**ILL. 2:** Armando Testa, *Maquette per Carmencita e Caballero Lavazza*, 1964 – Courtesy of CSAC (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione), Università di Parma and Agenzia Armando Testa.

- 10 Although brilliant and very effective from a narrative point of view, animated with the stop-motion technique, Carmencita and Caballero rehashed the recurring theme of the hero seeking his maiden to charm. When the gun fighter finds his lover at the end of every advert, the refrain is always the same:
- Caballero: "Baby, you're already mine. Step on the gas and come away."  
 Carmencita: "Madman! The man I love has a very high profile. He is strong, he is swarthy and has a moustache that charms".  
 Caballero: "Baby, that man is me... Oh yeah yeah yeah yeah, oh yeah!"  
 Carmencita: "Paulista! My love..."
- 11 Regarding social prejudices and racial discrimination, the case of another protagonist of *Carousel*, Calimero<sup>12</sup>, the black chick, is resounding. Anyone who was a child in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s was led to associate the figure of Calimero with the tender and sweet characteristics of a child, almost a victim – of circumstance but more often of petty and obtuse adults – on closer examination of the first episode of the advert the harshness of the message conveyed becomes clear<sup>13</sup>.



ILL. 3: Nino Pagot e Tony Pagot, *Calimero*, 1963 - Courtesy of Archivio iconografico di stato.

- 12 In this episode, the mother hen is brooding five eggs but one of them is taking a long time to hatch so she leaves it in the nest. From this egg a white chick is born but he turns black after falling into a puddle. Calimero immediately begin looking for his mother but he has never seen her before and he does not know what she looks like. Thus, testing the Pavlovian theory of imprinting, he questions everyone he meets and learns that neither the dog, the mouse, or the cat are his mother. Even the hen says she is not his mother.
- Calimero: "Are you my mother?"  
 Mamma: "No, you're mistaken, you know, I don't have black chicks"  
 Calimero: "But if I were white, would you want me?"  
 Mamma: "Of course I would little one"
- 13 Upon uttering these words the mother hen goes on her way followed by her offspring, all perfectly white. At this point Calimero meets the little Dutch girl who washes him with a well-known detergent and restores him to his natural colour that is accepted by everyone.
- 14 Alongside the consumerist dimension and commercial drive, however, TV scheduling played an important social function in those years, including combatting adult illiteracy (the TV programme *It's never too late*<sup>14</sup>, directed by Alberto Manzi is an example of this) and stimulating the cultural curiosity of children through specific scheduling that paid attention to both entertainment and education. In these years the so-called "kids' TV" that contained cartoons, quizzes, drama, documentaries and in-depth programmes, was an important reference point for all of Europe. As Roberto Farné argues, "the capacity to reflect and promote innovative teaching and, in some ways, to anticipate it, finds a significant reference point in TV programmes addressed to the public of kids between 3-4 and 6-7 years old<sup>15</sup>".

- 15 Ultimately this drive towards a massive cultural enrichment of (not just) younger generations came from all available media, not only television programmes but also books, radio programmes (for example *Il ponte d'oro* - *The Golden Bridge* and *Il mondo è la mia patria* - *The World is my Nation* by Alberto Manzi), Vinyl Records (*Le fiabe sonore* - *Audio Fairy Tales* published by Fratelli Fabbri Editori), etc.



ILL. 4: *Fiabe sonore*, Milano, Fratelli Fabbri Editori, 1970. Cover. Private Collection.

- 16 It is not a coincidence then that between the 1960s and 1970s in Italy there was a widespread dissemination of encyclopaedias for children, “often sold door to door like *Conoscere*<sup>16</sup> - *Knowing*, *Vita Meravigliosa*<sup>17</sup> - *Wonderful Life*, the beautiful *Quindici. I libri del Come e del Perché* - *Fifteen. The Books of How and Why*, which reproduced the American *Childcraft*<sup>18</sup> from 1965”. The most important innovations, however, were in children’s literature. Books became an area of experimentation beginning with structure and function. Bruno Munari’s work is a striking example of this current:

As you know, Bruno Munari is the one who wrote *Green Riding Hood* and *Yellow Riding Hood*. He is also the one who wrote *Alfabetiere*. He invented useless machines many years ago and now he is studying waterproof towels and sponges. He has invented illegible books and now he is making almost mute musical instruments. He has not yet been able to design them to be almost mute but I think he’ll manage it. He is also the author of a book of fog and a book of stones. He has even written a book with words. He looks for roses in salad and pentagons in pears and he finds them. Once he found an equilateral triangle in a banana<sup>19</sup>.

- 17 In these words, written by the author himself, we can see the curiosity, inventive spirit and the penchant for experimentation that underpinned his entire artistic activity. Munari’s approach to books for children, was predicated on the idea that “reading, long before the ABCs, means to experience, to touch like in *Prebooks*, a set of small square books, 10x10, without words or illustrations and made from different materials that can

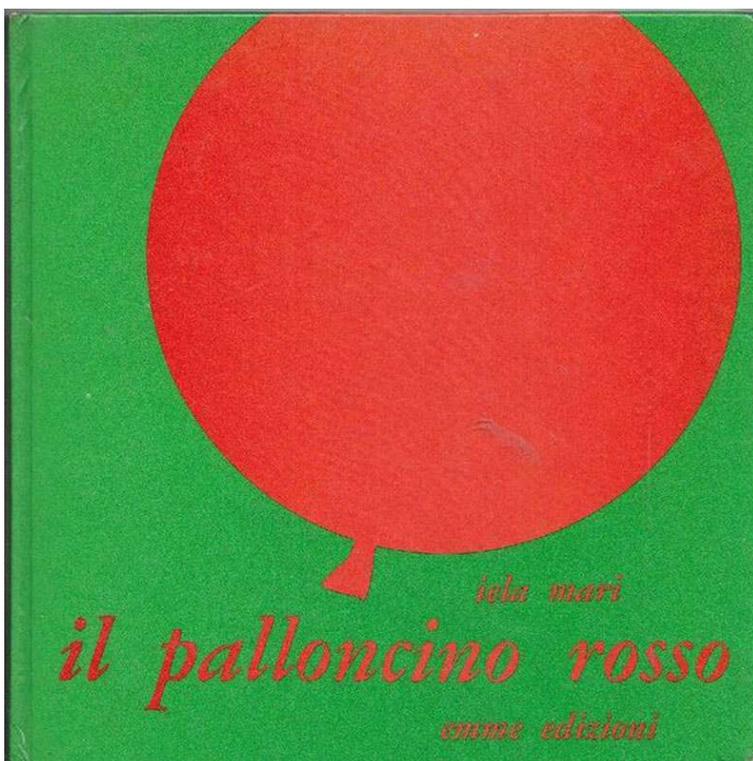
be touched; or as in the case of the *Bed book*, a modular story narrated by pillows that can be assembled so you can actually sleep on them<sup>20</sup>».

- 18 Apparent in the work of this artist for children is a deep respect for childhood, for that age of life which is so close to creativity, art, experimentation and philosophy. Indeed, Munari did not stop at evoking children's questions or anticipating their "whys?" (which was already unusual), but he suggested they go further, beyond first impressions to continue their research.
- 19 Several authors and thinkers who were active in this period moved in this direction, albeit with different characteristics. First and foremost there was Gianni Rodari, a veritable theorist and advocate of an antiauthoritarian pedagogy based on creativity, words and democracy. He wrote: "All uses of words for everyone' seems to be a good motto, with a lovely democratic sound. Not because everyone is an artist but because no one should be a slave<sup>21</sup>".
- 20 Here, it would appear that his ideas were in tune with Marcuse's call for "power to the imagination" made popular by the student movements of 1968. But only apparently so, because Rodari's thinking, like that of other Italian authors of the period, perhaps because of their focus on childhood, replaced the need to refute contingent reality, to tearing it down from the foundations, with that of observing from other perspectives and modifying reality beginning with daily experience of peaceful and non violent educational action. That transformation, for Rodari, is inseparably connected to fairy tales. For him, indeed,
- Fairy tales are not useful for raising diligent and limited executors, docile and trusting consumers, satisfied and efficient subordinates, that is, men necessary to a world infused with the myth of productivity. In this sense, fairy tales are highly unproductive, like poetry, art and music. But man must also be able to imagine a different and better world, and live to create it. [...] Fairy tales [...] are allies of utopia, not conservatism. And so [...] we defend them: because we believe in the educational value of utopia, an obligatory transition from a passive acceptance of the world, to the ability to criticise it, to a commitment to transform it<sup>22</sup>.
- 21 Thus, fairy tales do not serve power, rather they are subversive by their very nature, and in many ways, the new literature for children seemed to be based on the same assumption.
- 22 At this point, before describing some of the influential publishing experiments of the period such as Rosellina Archinto's Emme Edizioni, I would like to underline how the inclination to conciliate childhood and democratic participation also began to emerge in schools. Mario Lodi's experience as a primary school teacher and active protagonist of the Movement for Educational Cooperation (MCE) in which "the adoption of techniques à la *Frénet* was combined with a rejection of a consumeristic culture<sup>23</sup>", is paradigmatic. In Lodi's experiences as a teacher, "school children's verbal productions were transcribed into texts to socialise beyond the perimeter of the classroom also. Important themes were the phenomena of nature, issues of justice and social history in which children spoke about from their own personal experiences and existential events so as to build another culture vis-à-vis traditional school life, which was inaccessible to the experience of childhood [...] Lodi's child-centredness is expressed in its most constructive form and reveals a purely pedagogical meaning<sup>24</sup>" in the need to "begin with the baby", with his ideas, his cognitive needs, his curiosities, his unusual but highly interesting point of view.

If children are silent in school, the teacher asked himself rhetorically, how can they possibly become capable of communicating their ideas?<sup>25</sup>

- 23 From the experiences described above, it can almost be ventured that perhaps for the first time in Italy, children were being placed at the centre of their education in a systematic and "democratic" way. No longer – or not only – was a child to be taught for the good of the nation and to conform to the ideals of the nation of origin, as had been the case since the Renaissance through the twenty years of fascism until the 1950s, nor was a child to be guided towards a predetermined membership of a social class. In 1962 the establishment of a unified middle school – considered not coincidentally to be the most important reform of the educational system after the Second World War – called for the beginning of a new era of the emancipation of the more humble classes and social mobility. Before, not only did compulsory schooling end at 11 years of age, it also divided children, at a young age, into students who would continue their studies in high school and those who were directed to the world of work. Law no. 1859 of 31 December 1962 greatly undermined the elitist structure of previous Italian middle schools. The great themes of accessible culture and social equality thus began to loom on the horizon of the younger generations through the renewal of the educational system, the economic boom and a heated cultural debate.
- 24 "At the same time child labour was outlawed even under the guise of apprenticeships for minors under 14 years of age<sup>26</sup>" which marked, at least "on paper"<sup>27</sup>, another fundamental victory for the social progress of Republican Italy.
- 25 The establishment of optional, but free of charge state schools (Law 18 March 1968, no. 444) for children between the ages of 3 and 6, was indicative of the significant attention directed to childhood and education. And yet, underlining the ambivalence and ambiguity of the era in relation to socio-cultural changes occurring in Italy they were called "scuola materna - maternal school" which was chosen instead of "scuola dell'infanzia - kindergarten" – suggested by the world of pedagogical research and which became established only in 2003 with the "Moratti law". This name suggests the aim was for them to be caring institutions, rather than with the potential to educate.
- 26 Despite this "technicality", attention to the "man cubs", to borrow Kipling's term, was also evident in a new generation of children's publishing houses. The case of Emme Edizioni, founded by Rosellina Archinto in 1967 is emblematic of this movement. A determined, resourceful and enthusiastic woman, Rosellina Archinto, as she explained in an interview, wanted to change the world of children's publishing. "Then again the publishing house had a very difficult time in the sense that nobody took me seriously, everyone thought I was a 'good lady' with children's literature for a hobby, which used to drive me crazy with rage. Today after fifty years it has been demonstrated that those books worked very well. As I always say, if I had had a beard and a moustache I would have been taken more seriously. I took myself seriously but others didn't<sup>28</sup>".
- 27 Despite the difficulties inherent in the novelty of its approach, as well as the prejudices surrounding female entrepreneurship, Emme Edizioni soon became a reference point for international publishing houses, who were enjoying the new possibilities for communication and exchange afforded by the new Children's Book Fair in Bologna (the first fair was held in 1964). Indeed from the very outset, with publications such as *Piccolo blu e piccolo giallo* by Leo Lionni<sup>29</sup> published in 1967, *Il palloncino rosso* by Iela Mari published in 1968, or *Nella nebbia di Milano* by Bruno Munari published in 1968, to cite but a few, "the house of Wonders", as the publishing house founded by Rosellina Archinto is

often called, broke with the formal, expressive and narrative structures that had previously characterised Italian publishing for children.

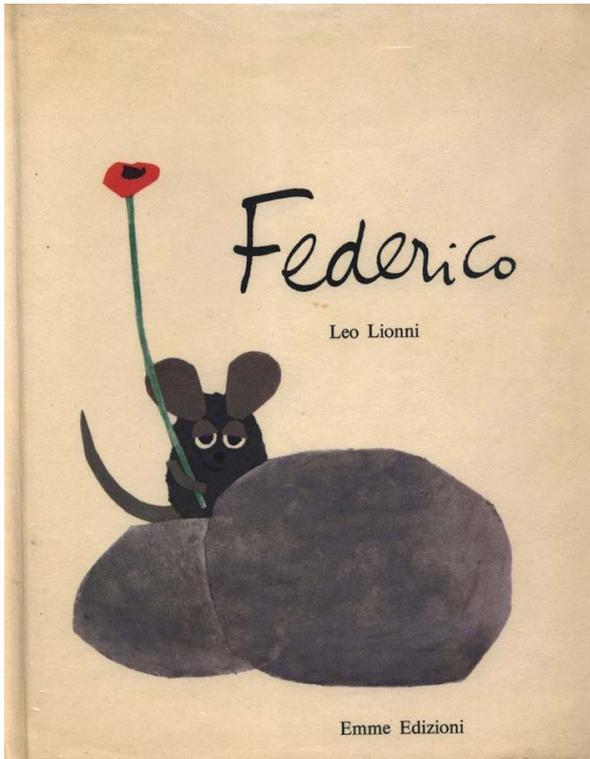


ILL. 5: Iela Mari, *Il palloncino rosso*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1968. Cover. Private Collection.



ILL. 6: Bruno Munari, *Nella nebbia di Milano*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1968. Cover. Private Collection.

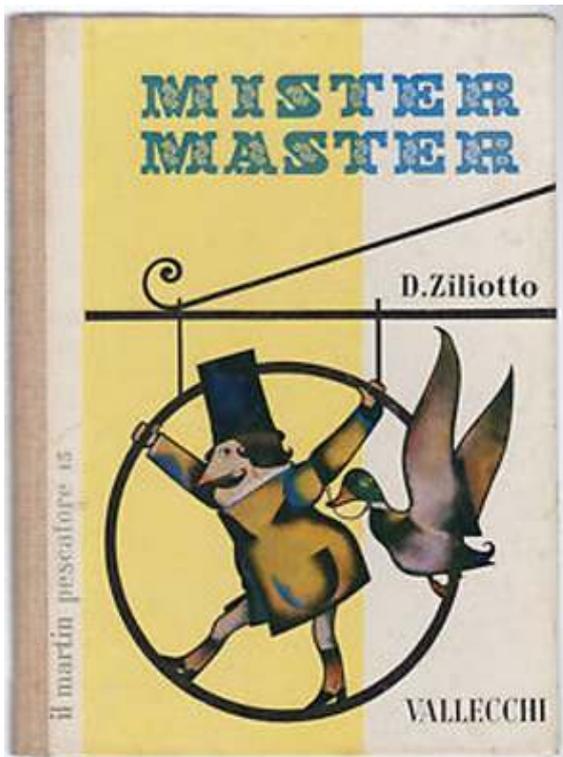
- 28 What the authors published by Rosellina Archinto had in common besides the ability to tell stories in new ways, was once again a profound respect for and interest in the world of children and their ability to read and interpret reality originally and authentically.



ILL. 7: Leo Lionni, *Federico*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1967. Cover. Private Collection.

- 29 In *Federico*<sup>30</sup> by Leo Lionni, for example, children – but people of all ages really – are invited to exercise autonomy of thought, to follow their own aptitudes and passions going beyond public opinion and easy consensus, to recover the poetic dimension. While all the other mice are busy gathering food for the winter, Federico gathers “rays of sun for the icy winter days”, he puts “colours” aside to survive its greyness, and he gathers “words” to cheer up winter days. These are new characters but the story is still the metaphor of the ant and the cricket. What changes is the moral, a moral in keeping with the new times, that can be summarised in Gianni Rodari’s verses: “I apologise to the old fable / because I don’t like the mean ant. / I’m on the side of the cricket / whose lovely song, not for sale, is a present<sup>31</sup>”.
- 30 In another interesting picture book published by Emme Edizioni, *Il riccio di mare - The Sea Urchin* (1974), in which Iela Mari’s curved and sharp image of the sea creature invites readers to go beyond appearances and try their hand at observing things more carefully:
- 31 “Once upon a time there was a sea urchin [...] that was a hedgehog [...] that was the head of a child [...] that was a turnip [...] that was an orange [...]”<sup>32</sup>. As Walter Fochesato underlined, this was a “perfectly ‘circular’ book with transformations accompanied by words. A lesson in style and a profound respect for and interest in the world of children [...] They know that, as Gianni Rodari wrote when talking about Mari in 1969, ‘a piece of wood can from time to time become a ship or a house, an airplane or a train, a man or a woman<sup>33</sup>’; and they also know that, as Munari suggested, even a simple stone can contain a world full of fantastic stories that it is ready to tell us if we pick it up<sup>34</sup>”.

- 32 In the context of Italian children's literature, Rosellina Archinto is not the only example of "female" excellence during the long sixties. Another interesting personality is Donatella Ziliotto. Antonio Faeti said of her: "[her] character is so elusive, contradictory, full of issues, contents, choices that they disorient, they stagger. [...] a great 20th century woman, one of those people that have really counted, an authentic protagonist even though by choice she often remained on the sidelines, behind the curtains<sup>35</sup>".
- 33 Author, translator, TV director and screenwriter, as well as the director of prestigious editorial series, Donatella Ziliotto "held a role of primary importance in the evolution of [Italian] children's literature from the post-war period to today<sup>36</sup>", beginning in 1958 when the Vallecchi publishing house asked her to manage the children's series *Il Martin Pescatore. I classici di domani per la gioventù* (*The Kingfisher. Tomorrow's classics for young people*). Donatella Ziliotto included, *inter alia*, Astrid Lindgren, Tove Jansson, Michael Ende and Mary Norton in this series. These foreign writers had not yet been translated in Italy and were far removed from the Italian cultural and literary tradition. This was a watershed: despite numerous criticisms from the more conservative fringes of society, it was a resounding success. Beyond the choices and successes of "The Kingfisher" Donatella Ziliotto "combin[ed] the activity of publishing consultant with that of author, the results were equally significant; from the debut books in the Vallecchi series, *Mister Master* and *Tea Patata* to the more recent ones (...), it is possible to derive the portrait of an author who in the name of a narrative vocation, the pleasure of storytelling, and the intensity of memory, masters the quality of writing like few others<sup>37</sup>".



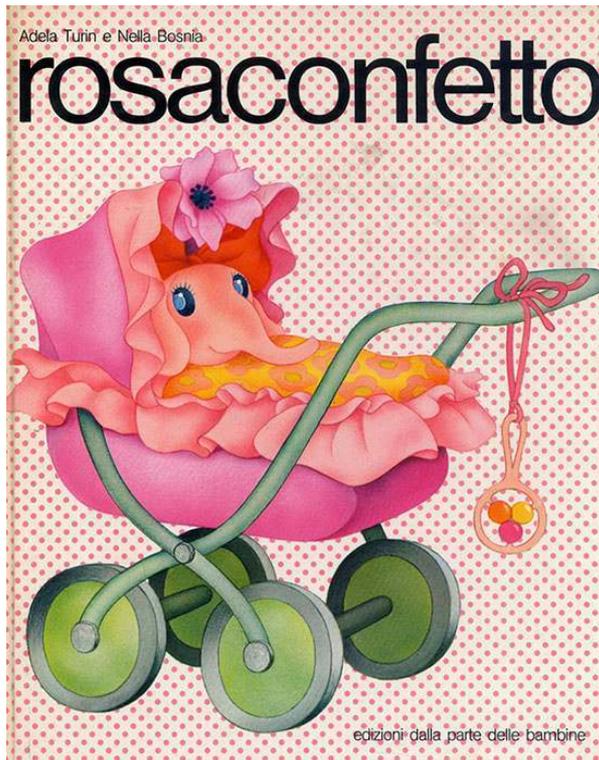
ILL. 8: Donatella Ziliotto, *Mister Master*, Milano, Vallecchi, 1962. Cover. Private Collection.

- 34 Whatever activity she was undertaking, Donatella Ziliotto advanced the idea of a particular, anti conformist childhood, different from adult thinking, even when adults perfectly embody the "spirit" of '68 as in her book *Tea Patata*<sup>38</sup>. The protagonist, Teodora whom everyone calls Tea Patata is 5 years old and observes the grown up world of

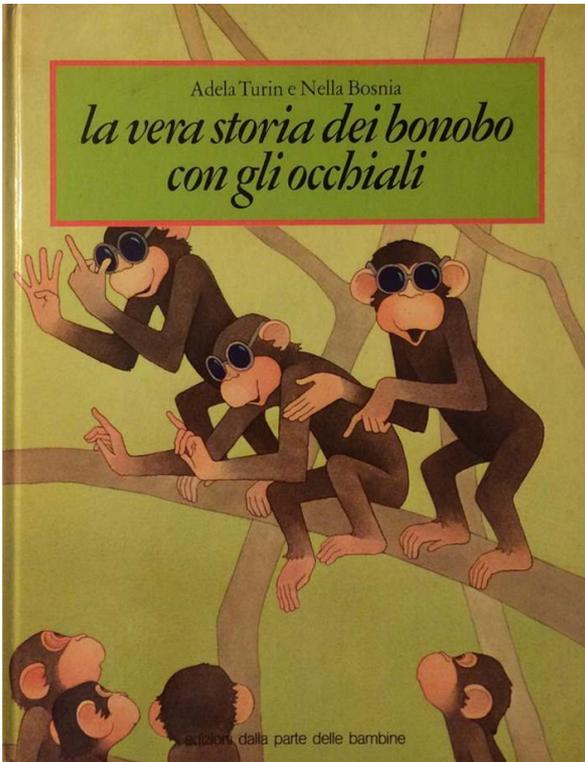
siblings and parents from her perspective. These are modern, open, free and frantic people perfectly in line with the times, but Tea is ill-fitted to that situation. "In this lively family environment Tea is misunderstood because she is considered too boring, set in her ways and traditional. She wants everything to be in its place, to enable traditions, to live with a slow, calm quiet pace. [...] In this general framework of misunderstanding – Ziliotto writes – try to speak from the point of view of the little girl, to reveal her hidden reasons that adults don't seem to know or take into consideration. Because one of the tyrannies of the adults is to expect children to follow their hectic pace while some children have a sort of cult of slowness<sup>39</sup>".

- 35 Once again childhood was placed at the centre of educational reflection also and especially when the point of view is that of narration and the models it transmits. A child's gaze unhinges reality, it deconstructs it, enabling adults to see it differently, if they are willing.
- 36 Before concluding this contribution and in the full knowledge of having only scratched the surface of what the long sixties were for children in Italy, and of having made limited and partial choices vis-à-vis its protagonists, I wish to point out another far from marginal aspect, that is, the birth of literature "for girls".
- 37 As underlined above, although in Italy there was great renewal in the education and imaginative field, Elena Gianini Belotti exposed the persistence of gender stereotypes that were difficult to dismantle in school books, children's literature and more generally in the images of childhood.
- 38 It was not only the female characters proposed by Catholic publishing that, as we have seen in the series of *Le lucciole* (SEI, Turin), continued to publish edifying stories for girls, and explicitly aimed at promoting a feminine model for taking care of others, for moderation, for maintaining behaviors appropriate for the future role of wives and mothers. "If you compare female figures from contemporary children's literature with those of traditional fairy tales, very little has changed. The old fairy tales propose mild, passive, inexpressive women solely concerned with their beauty who are decidedly incapable and inept. By contrast, male figures are active, strong, courageous, loyal, intelligent<sup>40</sup>". But it did not stop there. Gianini Belotti continued: "Female figures from fairy tales belong to two fundamental categories: good and inept on the one hand and wicked on the other [...] No matter how hard you look for one there is no intelligent, courageous, active, loyal female figure<sup>41</sup>". This portrait is certainly excessive and exasperated – especially when bearing in mind what the cutting edge authors and publishing houses for children were doing between the 1960s and 1970s to renew the imaginary – but it was a response to the firm need to expose the limits of proposals that struggled to break free from traditional educational and imaginary models. Elena Gianini Belotti's warning was in line with the feminist movement which sought to emphasise the age-old problems of sexual discrimination and to suggest effective solutions to combat gender prejudice starting in childhood. As Simone De Beauvoir knew well, if a young girl precociously shows evident signs of gender differentiation, sometimes from infancy "we should not attribute it to mysterious instincts destined to make her a passive, maternal coquette, but we should remember that the action of others around her in childhood is the origin and that from the very beginning her vocation is imposed preemptorily on her<sup>42</sup>". On Simone De Beauvoir, Elena Gianini Belotti and other important feminist and gender education theorists' suggestions, a small publishing house was established in Milan in 1975 and was called not surprisingly *From a girl's point of view*, and it soon become

a leading publisher of "gender literature" dedicated to childhood for the whole of Europe. In its catalogue, the publisher Motta Junior, who has been reprinting its editions since 2000, wrote there are "illustrated volumes that present the issue of the relationship between the sexes in a humorous, yet concrete and intelligent way, thus providing parents and teachers with tools for a dialogue with children on a crucial social problem still today". Titles like *Rosaconfetto*<sup>43</sup>, *La vera storia di un bonobo con gli occhiali - The real story of a bonobo with glasses*<sup>44</sup>, *Arturo e Clementina*<sup>45</sup>, represented a real novelty for Italian publishing and enabled a large public of young female readers to observe reality from a different point of view, presenting true and effective gender equality.



**ILL. 9:** Adela Turin, Nella Bosnia, *Rosaconfetto*, Milano, Edizioni dalla parte delle bambine, 1976. Cover. Private Collection.



**ILL. 10:** Adela Turin, Nella Bosnia, *La vera storia di un bonobo con gli occhiali*, Milano, Edizioni dalla parte delle bambine, 1976. Cover. Private Collection.



**ILL. 11:** Adela Turin, Nella Bosnia, *Arturo e Clementina*, Milano, Edizioni dalla parte delle bambine, 1976. Cover. Private Collection.

- 39 The intention was radical and the books are interesting. Although it is all too easy to judge nearly fifty years later, the problem is that those books were “one way” books,

because the co-protagonists of a possible, true change of perspective, that is to say male children, were excluded from their readership.

- 40 Trying to draw up a provisional and inevitably partial balance sheet of what has been said so far, it should be noted that, fifty years later, the children of 1968 represent, at least regarding the Italian context, a missed opportunity, or at least, not a fully centered one.
- 41 If many clues, in the Sixties, led to think of the possibility that an effective paradigm shift could be achieved in the perception of childhood and in its education, the conservative drives and a failure to pay attention to the younger population led, in the following decades, to lose sight of, or to misrepresent, the intuitions of the great innovators (authors, thinkers, illustrators, editors, ...) cited above. Without the profoundly revolutionary charge of which they were bearers, in fact, not only the works of Gianni Rodari and Bruno Munari or the pedagogical intuitions of Mario Lodi, but even the new scholastic institutions – the single middle school and the nursery school – the opportunity to be interpreters of a true and effective social transformation faded away. The most disregarded of the intuitions of the period in question is, to date, that of having placed childhood itself at the center not only of the educational-imaginative processes, but of a social thought aimed at the design of a different society. So, today more than ever, we need the courage to look back and start from what was best produced in the years around '68, not to emulate or anchor nostalgically to a myth, but to have certain bases from which to start to bring childhood back to the very center of educational interest; and more besides.

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## NOTES

1. L. Farina, *La casa delle meraviglie. La Emme Edizioni di Rosellina Archinto*, Milano, Topipittori, 2013, p. 32.
2. *ibid*, pp. 32-41.
3. F.D. Pizzigoni, *Le catalogue perdu: la reconstruction de la production pour l'enfance de la maison d'édition catholique SEI de Turin*, thèse de doctorat, Université de Caen Basse-Normandie (Ecole Doctorale n. 558 Histoire, Mémoire, Patrimoine, Langage. Spécialité : Langues et Littératures romanes : Italien) en cotutelle internationale avec l'Université de Gênes, présentée et soutenue le : 06/12/2014, p. 224.
4. *Ibid*, p. 231.
5. P. Boero P., C. De Luca, *La letteratura per l'infanzia*, Rome-Bari, Laterza Publishers, 2009 (Orig. ed. 1995), p. 252.
6. E. Salvioni, "Le collane per GiovINETTE", in *Schedario*, n. 24th February 1957.
7. Cfr. A.M. Bernardinis, in A. Ascenzi (a cura di), *La letteratura per l'infanzia oggi*, Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 2002, p.60. See also, with regards to this, the volume: G. Zago, (ed) *L'educazione extrascolastica nella seconda metà del Novecento. Tra espansione e rinnovamento (1945-1975)*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2017 (Particularly the paper of M. Campagnaro, *A immagine e somiglianza di bambino. La trasformazione dell'editoria per ragazzi e della pedagogia della letteratura per l'infanzia negli anni Sessanta e Settanta*, pp.147-167).
8. A. Faeti *Guardare le figure*, Turin, Einaudi, 1972.

9. cfr. P. Boero, "I favolosi anni Settanta. Fantasia e impegno nella letteratura per l'infanzia", in *Transalpina. Études italiennes*, n.14/2011, pp. 117-130.
10. For *Lagostina*, a well-known producer of crockery, Osvaldo Cavandoli created 35 adverts with the protagonist *La Linea* from 1969. The character was subsequently used in comic strips, animated series, ...
11. Adverts were transmitted during *Carousel* from 1965.
12. Created by the brothers Nino e Toni Pagot, *Calimero* appeared on TV for the first time on 14 July 1963.
13. Anna Antoniazzi, *Dal brutto anatroccolo ad Angry Birds. Il pulcino nell'immaginario*, in Andrea Traverso (ed), *Bambini pensati, infanzie vissute*, Pisa, ETS, 2016, pp. 105-123.
14. *Non è mai troppo tardi. Corso di istruzione popolare per il recupero dell'adulto analfabeta*, was a television programme by Oreste Gasperini, Alberto Manzi and Carlo Piantoni with the contribution of the Ministry of Education; on the air from 1960 on the National TV Channel. Cfr. Roberto Farné, *Alberto Manzi. L'avventura di un maestro*, Bologna, BUP, 2011.
15. R. Farné, *Iconologia didattica. Le immagini per l'educazione: dall'Orbis Pictus a Sesame Street*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 2002, p. 388.
16. Published by Fratelli Fabbri from 1958.
17. Published by Confalonieri from 1957.
18. Hamelin, *I libri per ragazzi che hanno fatto l'Italia*, Bologna, Hamelin Associazione culturale, 2011, p. 117.
19. B. Munari, *Rose nell'insalata*, Torino, Einaudi, 1974.
20. Hamelin, *I libri per ragazzi che hanno fatto l'Italia*, Bologna, Hamelin Associazione culturale, 2011, p. 130.
21. G. Rodari, *Grammatica della fantasia. Introduzione all'arte di inventare storie*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001, p. 6.
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25. A Surian, D. Di Masi, S. Boselli, *Mario Lodi. Pratiche di libertà nel paese sbagliato*, Padova, BeccoGiallo, 2015.
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27. D.a Bertoni Jovine, *L'alienazione dell'infanzia: il lavoro minorile nella società moderna*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1963.
28. Cfr. L. Farina, *La casa delle meraviglie*, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.
29. Born in Holland but Italian "by choice".
30. L. Lionni, *Federico*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1967. In 1970 the director Giulio Gianini based a short movie on the picture book, with the author's supervision. It is online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFCLWytjcUY>
31. G. Rodari, *I libri della fantasia*, San Dorligo della Valle (TS), Einaudi ragazzi, 2009, p. 149.
32. I. Mari, *Il riccio di mare*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1974.
33. W. Fochesato, "Tela Mari", *Andersen*, n.311, aprile 2014, pp. 28-29.
34. B. Munari, *Da lontano era un'isola*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1971.
35. A. Faeti, "Prefazione", in Claudia Reggiani, *Il volo di un Martin Pescatore. Ritratto di Donatella Ziliotto, un'intellettuale per l'infanzia dalla televisione all'editoria, alla narrativa*, Trieste, Einaudi Ragazzi, 1998, pp. 9-10.
36. C. Reggiani, *Il volo di un Martin Pescatore*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
37. P. Boero, C. De Luca, *La letteratura per l'infanzia*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2009, p. 251.
38. D. Ziliotto, *Tea Patata*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1968.

39. D. Ziliotto, "La rivolta del bambino di plastica", in Silvia Blezza Picherle (ed), *Raccontare ancora. La scrittura e l'editoria per ragazzi*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2007, pp. 173-174.
40. E. Gianini Belotti, *Dalla parte delle bambine. L'influenza dei condizionamenti sociali nella formazione del ruolo femminile nei primi anni di vita*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1973, p. 119.
41. Ivi.
42. S. De Beauvoir, *Il secondo sesso*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2008 (orig. ed. 1949), pp. 271-272.
43. A. Turin, N. Bosnia, *Rosacofetto*, Milano, Edizioni dalla parte delle bambine, 1976.
44. A. T., N. Bosnia, *La vera storia di un bonobo con gli occhiali*, Milano, Edizioni dalla parte delle bambine, 1976.
45. A. T., N. Bosnia, *Arturo e Clementina*, Milano, Edizioni dalla parte delle bambine, 1976.
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## ABSTRACTS

The 1960s and 1970s in Italy was a complex period, full of often contrasting stimuli from different directions. The imaginary worlds of children participated in what was happening at a social and cultural level, albeit in a more muted way. By analysing sources from the publishing world, TV programmes for children and other mass media, it is possible to identify a profound ambiguity and ambivalence in the material proposed. On the one hand there was an abundance of writers, artists and thinkers ready to place childhood at the very centre of educational processes, attributing to it a heretofore unthinkable autonomy and dignity. On the other, it is possible to sense in many narrators a firm retreat into tradition, conservatism and the maintenance of a *status quo* based on stories of "fine sentiments", filial love and containment of emotions...Even though there was much distance between these contradictory visions, their incongruity was able to spark new curiosities in (perhaps not only) children, to suggest new existential questions and open up new interpretive perspectives.

Gli anni Sessanta e Settanta del secolo scorso rappresentano, per l'Italia, un periodo complesso, ricco di stimoli provenienti da direzioni diverse, spesso tra loro contrastanti. Anche l'immaginario infantile, sebbene, apparentemente, più in sordina, è partecipe di quanto accade a livello sociale e culturale. Analizzando fonti provenienti dall'editoria, dalla programmazione televisiva rivolta ai bambini e da altri mass-media, si scorge una profonda ambiguità e ambivalenza nelle proposte. Da un lato troviamo una copiosa schiera di scrittori, artisti, pensatori pronta a porre l'infanzia al centro stesso dei processi educativi, riconoscendole un'autonomia e una dignità fino ad allora impensabili; dall'altro lato, invece, si avverte da parte di molti narratori, un profondo ripiegamento sulla tradizione, sulla conservazione, sul mantenimento di uno status quo basato sul racconto dei "buoni sentimenti", della devozione filiale, del contenimento delle emozioni, ... Benché si tratti di visioni quasi ossimoriche, tanto sono distanti una dall'altra, la loro incongruità è stata in grado di accendere nei bambini (e, forse, non solo in loro) nuove curiosità, di suggerire nuove domande esistenziali, di aprire nuove prospettive interpretative.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Italian children's literature, educational models, innovative teaching, experimentation, antiauthoritarian pedagogy

**Geographical index:** Italy

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