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“THE COUNTRY OF A DISTANT AND
MYSTERIOUS TRIBE”: RUSSIA AND RUSSIAN
LITERATURE IN ITALIAN JOURNALS AND
BOOKS FOR CHILDREN (1920–1940S)

This article examines translations and adaptations of Russian literature in Italian periodicals and book series for children in the fascist period (1921–1945). By analyzing the repertoire of publications translated from Russian and other languages and comparing it with the repertoire of translations from other foreign literatures, the share of Russian authors is established, the most popular genres and narrative characteristics of Russian texts are identified, the cultural and pedagogical aims of publishing Russian books and what factors influenced the selection of works for translation are clarified if possible. Special attention is paid to the cooperation between Russian emigrants and Italian editors and illustrators, as well as to the perception of Russian literature by Italian educational critics. The analysis offers an essential contribution to the study of Italian-Russian cultural and literary relations in the first half of the twentieth century and sheds light on hitherto little-studied publishing practices that after World War II would allow Russian classics to reach an increasingly diverse audience in Italy.

Keywords: Russian-Italian cultural relations in the first half of the 20th century, children’s literature, children’s magazines, book series, translation, adaptation, illustration of children’s book

Until the early 1920s, Italian translations of Russian literature were published primarily in book series aimed at an adult audience, and mainly by those publishers who were particularly attentive to the new political and social order of post-revolutionary Russia [Mazzucchelli

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2006; Mazzucchelli 2009]. In contrast, Russian literature was long absent from publications intended for young people, unlike the works of other foreign literatures. The reasons for this are cultural rather than political¹. Italian children's literature, which emerged in the second half of the 19th century after the unification of Italy, responded to the need to spread literacy among the masses. Thus, at least until the end of the 19th century, books and periodicals for children retained a strong instructive connotation, remaining closely linked to the world of school. Only at the beginning of the 20th century did entertaining books find their place among school textbooks and morally edifying books for reading, prompting, however, a reaction of detractors who denied any merit or meaning in the existence of children's literature [Turi 2004, 20–21]. For a long time children's literature in Italy was considered the poor relation to adult literature, which was given much more space in publishing catalogs and in the magazine sections on new books. Nevertheless, publishing for children and young people gradually developed into an independent field, thanks not only to the educational potential of children's books, but also to the economic profits made by publishers and authors alike, including those of "high" genres. While at first the array of publications for children was dominated by books by Italian authors, foreign classics soon began to circulate in various series. For example, the Modena-based publisher A.F. Formiggini, in his illustrated *Classici del ridere* (Laughing Classics) series for an adult audience, also printed translations of works included in children's reading, such as Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" (1913) or Oscar Wilde's "The Canterville Ghost" (1914). Beginning in the late 1910s, many publishers produced adaptations of foreign works in series intended for children, and a few years later there even appeared separate series devoted entirely to masterpieces of foreign children's literature. But Russian children's literature hardly found a place in this series.

Partly due to the practice of translating into Italian not from the Russian originals, but from French and German translations [Scandura 2002, 14], for a considerable part of the Italian public of the early 20th century Russia remained, in the words of the Italian educator Olindo Giacobbe, a country of "a distant and mysterious tribe" [Giacobbe 1934, 379]. Its main features were a "complex and gloomy psychology" [Giacobbe 1934, 379], a "resigned fatalism" [Fanciulli, Monaci Guidotti 1926, 150], sadness [Battistelli 1923, 98], and a generally introspective attitude that took painful pleasure in analyzing the human "underworld". It is no coincidence that the Russian author most represented in Italian editions for the adult public was Fyodor Dostoyevsky, "the most Russian

of Russians,” the embodiment of “Slavic primordiality” as opposed to European rationalism (see Adamo 1998, 19–62). In the early twenties Italian publishers had an extremely limited idea of what Russian literature had to offer in the field of educating and entertaining young readers. Only through the mediation of representatives of the Russian emigration — translators, artists, and cultural figures — did they gradually begin to offer young readers the works of some Russian authors, first in magazines and then in book series. It should be made clear that it is impossible to reconstruct an exhaustive picture of the translation practices used, mainly because of the complete absence at the time of a generally accepted and scientifically valid methodology. With a few exceptions, the texts were abridged and adapted; moreover, it can be assumed that in those cases where the translator was an Italian, the translation/adaptation was not from the Russian original, but from a translation (most often French). In the present paper an attempt is made to identify the composition of Russian authors, the genres and narrative characteristics of “Russian” texts in Italian periodicals and in Italian book series for children during the Fascist period (1921–1945)², and, if possible, to clarify the cultural and pedagogical aims which determined the choice of this or that work for translation. Such an analysis will be carried out by comparing the proportion of works of Russian literature with works of other foreign literature in the magazines and book series for children. On the basis of the analysis of the paratext (prefaces, illustrations) and critical reviews, we will also try to establish whether and to what extent Russian translations and adaptations corresponded to the conventional image of Russia or, on the contrary, detached from it, calling the young Italian public to a deeper knowledge of Russian culture and literature.

THE IMAGE OF RUSSIA IN TWO FAMOUS ITALIAN CHILDREN’S MAGAZINES

Magazines for children in Italy appeared relatively late compared to other European countries. The heyday of the genre in Italy was in the so-called Giolittian era (1901–1914), when a new legislative policy in favour of the working class and the poorest social classes led to a re-assessment of popular culture [Genovesi 1972, 27–31]³. With the new children’s periodicals, it was intended to reach the poorest strata of the population, not retreating from educational goals, but embodying them in the form of a catchy and engaging publishing product. It was at this time that two periodicals appeared, which we will focus on. The first was

«Il giornalino della Domenica» (Sunday magazine), founded in 1906 in Florence by the writer and journalist Vamba (pseudonym of Luigi Bertelli) and published until 1927. The second was «Il Corriere dei piccoli» (Little children magazine), founded by the novelist and journalist Silvio Spaventa Filippi in 1908, as a supplement to the Milan-based newspaper *Il Corriere della sera* and printed almost without interruption until 1995.

«Il giornalino della Domenica» and «Il Corriere dei piccoli» were far ahead of the 19th century children's periodicals in both style and content. The pedantic and paternalistic tone of the adult tutor was replaced by the light and playful language of a world, in which the protagonist was a child. The boring textbook on literature was suddenly enriched by interesting rubrics: charades, games, short biographies of writers, articles on art, geography, news and excellent illustrations. Each of the aforementioned periodicals had its own style and purpose: «Il giornalino della Domenica» shows attempts to foster in the young generation a sense of respect and love for the homeland, as well as to establish a sincere and constructive dialogue with the children of the bourgeois class, as can be seen in the correspondence between the young readers and the writer Vamba. On the other hand, the main characteristic of «Il Corriere dei piccoli» is an ideal of education based not on sermons and/or touching stories, but on the funny and paradoxical — that is, on what can really entertain and delight a child of any social background. (These two approaches also accounted for the considerable difference in cost: 25 cents for the didactic «Il giornalino della Domenica» compared to 10 cents for the entertaining «Il Corriere dei piccoli».)

With the onset of Fascism, children's publishing was forced to conform to the directives of the regime, issuing mostly anthology excerpts and adaptations, as well as original stories that reflected the spirit of the times. Nevertheless, the children's press and children's literature were able to maintain a measure of independence from Fascism, at least initially. This was probably because the authorities themselves did not consider children's books to be powerful instruments for the education of young people in a Fascist spirit, relying more on schools in this respect [Scotto di Luzio 1996, 81–83, 253–267]. All this made it possible to publish novels and stories from foreign literature, including Russian literature, in the pages of «Il giornalino della Domenica» and «Il Corriere dei piccoli». When comparing translations from Russian with translations from other foreign languages, a certain balance is observed: there are no significant differences in the number of Russian authors and other foreign authors (mostly French and English). Rather, there is a difference

in genre preferences: while the translations from French and English, in addition to short stories, have novels published in parts, the translations from Russian deal only with short forms: short stories and fairy tales, literary and folk. However, poetry is almost entirely absent — this is probably because the genre of poems for children had entered Russian literature relatively recently, and by the 1920s had become very popular in the Soviet Union. The repertoire of Russian translations in «Il Corriere dei piccoli» and «Il giornalino della Domenica» partly reflected the tastes of the Russian émigré staff, who probably played an important role in the selection of texts. Among the Russian collaborators of «Il Corriere dei piccoli» are the writer, poet and translator Rinaldo Küfferle, the translator and teacher Nina Romanovskaya, the translators Iris Feline (pseudonym of E. O. Blinderman) and Marussia Grigorieva, the artist Lilia Slutskaya, while «Il giornalino della Domenica» gave preference to Italians who translated from Russian, such as Erme Cadei, Alberto Cecchi, Giuseppina Spezia, perhaps with the sole exception of Raia Pirola Pomeranz and Lilia Slutskaya⁴. The presence of Russian émigré collaborators partly explains why preference was given to the classics, such as A. S. Pushkin, L. N. Tolstoy and I. S. Turgenev. Alongside the classics, the name of A. P. Chekhov is found, as well as contemporary writers from the Russian abroad (such as A. I. Kuprin, E. A. Elachich, A. T. Averchenko and M. A. Osorgin). The only Soviet writer was P. S. Sukhotin as an author of fairy tales. Although some of the authors named were not children’s writers, they had long been part of the circle of children’s reading in Russia, and therefore emigrant translators could consider them suitable for the young Italian reader.

Chekhov’s stories “The Tutor” (1884) and “Who is to blame?” (1886) appeared on the pages of «Il Corriere dei piccoli» in 1924, translated by Nina Romanovskaya, who had lived in Italy since the turn of the century and had already published a number of translations of Russian authors, including D. S. Merezhkovsky, A. I. Kuprin and M. Gorky [Chekhov 1924; Chekhov 1924a]. The stories “Kashtanka” (1887) (Fig. 1) and “Grisha” (1886) were published in «Il giornalino della Domenica» in 1925 and 1926, translated by Italians Giuseppina Spezia and Alberto Cecchi [Chekhov 1925; Chekhov 1926]. Chekhov was already quite well known in Italy at this time, but, as far as can be ascertained, his works were never published in the series aimed at young people. Nonetheless, as his contemporaries pointed out, the brevity and simplicity of Chekhov’s prose made it particularly suitable for young readers. The irony and humour of “The Tutor” and “Who’s to Blame?” were in the manner of the cheerful and playful character of «Il Corriere

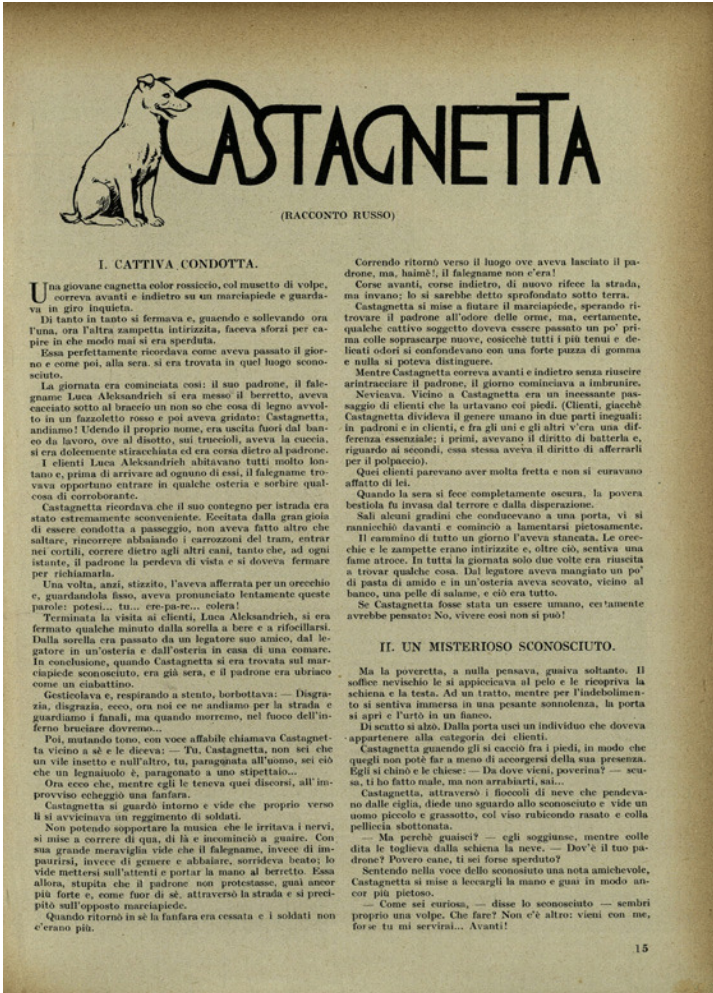


Figure 1. Cecof, A. (1925). Castagnetta (trad. di G. Spezia, disegni di Pinochi). Il giornalino della Domenica, 9, 15 maggio, 15-19

dei piccoli», while the more instructive “Kashtanka” and the charming essay on child psychology titled “Grisha” were more in keeping with the educational ideals of «Il giornalino della Domenica».

In 1925, «Il giornalino della Domenica» published translations of two of Kuprin’s works — the philosophical tale “Happiness” (1906)

and the children's story "The Elephant" (1907) [Kuprin 1925a; Kuprin 1925]. This last story embodies one of the key principles of Kuprin's poetics, namely the special intimacy between children and animals, through which the sick girl regains her health and smile. As for I. S. Turgenev and L. N. Tolstoy, they attracted the attention of Italian young readers more with aspects of their biographies than with specific literary works. In articles about Turgenev published in «Il giornalino della Domenica» in 1923, edited by Erme Cadei [Cadei 1923], and in «Il Corriere dei piccoli» in 1927, edited by the Russian émigré Rinaldo Küfferle [Küfferle 1927a], much attention was given to the kindness and purity of Turgenev's prose, especially his "Sketches from a Hunter's Album". Cadei's article, which preceded his translation of Turgenev's three prose poems [Turgenev 1923], was a critical analysis of Turgenev's literary output. Küfferle's article, on the other hand, was written in a good-humoured tone, not devoid of melodramatic overtones. It shows a great emotional engagement with the object of analysis: born of an Italian father and a Polish-Lithuanian mother, and raised in St Petersburg, Rinaldo Küfferle left Russia in 1917 and moved to Italy, where he became a journalist and translator. In his article, Küfferle dwells on Turgenev's unhappy childhood and how his mother's cruelty and insensitivity had a negative effect on the writer. It also cited some better moments from Turgenev's childhood, including his friendship with an old servant who read him fairy tales and taught the young Turgenev to respect children. Following the example of Turgenev, Küfferle urged the young Italian reader to trust adults and in turn become a patron of the youngest.

Küfferle also wrote an article about Leo Tolstoy, which was published in «Il Corriere dei piccoli» in 1927 [Küfferle 1927]. Comparing Tolstoy to Giuseppe Mazzini for his conception of life as a 'mission', Küfferle gave an overview of Tolstoy's pedagogical activities in Yasnaya Polyana. To the Italian young reader, the Tolstoy school seemed diametrically opposed to the rigid and centralized school system established in Italy after the reform of Minister Giovanni Gentile in 1923. A few years later, the socialist and former director of the Italian Federation of Public Libraries, Ettore Fabietti, held a similar view. His 1931 article on Tolstoy, printed in «Il Corriere dei piccoli» under the title "Tolstoj e la terra" ("Tolstoy and the soil"), described the principles of education at the Yasnaya Polyana school and argued that, 'to such a school, the Italian young reader would go with pleasure and learn much more' [Fabietti 1931].

The most popular genre in the two periodicals examined is the fairy tale, perhaps due to the fact that the fairy tale was still perceived as a space



Figure 2. The illustration by the Russian artist Liliya Slutskaya

of freedom of imagination and escape from everyday life. Moreover, the Russian fairy tale combined the exoticism and mystery that had always shrouded Russia in the collective Italian consciousness. In 1926 the educator Giuseppe Fanciulli noted the only truly clear side of the 'mysterious' character of the Russian people:

fantasy — exuberant, naive, affectionate, often — despite the vividness on the surface — with a tinge of sadness. This fantasy interpreted reality, often terrifying — by the cruelty of the natural elements and humans — by inventing beings with whom one often has to fight and others from whom, less often, one can get help [Fanciulli, Monaci Guidotti 1926, 150–151].

The two magazines in question provided quite a lot of space for fairy tales, both literary and folk. «Il giornalino della Domenica» published in 1921 translations of the tales “The Frog-Traveler” by Vsevolod Garshin and “The Three Bears” by Leo Tolstoy [Cadei 1921; Cadei 1921a], a collection of folktales translated by Cadei was published in 1923 [Cadei 1923a], and in 1926 a rendition of the Russian folktale “Salt” was published by Taulero Zulberti [Zulberti 1926]. In «Il Corriere dei piccoli», the main translator of Russian tales was Küfferle, whose renditions of Pushkin's, P. S. Sukhotin's and Russian folk tales were published from 1928 to 1931. [Sukhotin 1928; Küfferle 1929; Küfferle

1929a; Küfferle 1929b; Küfferle 1930; Küfferle 1931]. Mary Tibaldi Chiesa was also an important populariser of the Russian tale in Italy, editing two renditions for «Il Corriere dei piccoli» in the 1930s [Tibaldi Chiesa 1933; Tibaldi Chiesa 1935]. In her case, it is more appropriate to speak of an adaptation rather than a translation of the tales. Tibaldi Chiesa rewrites Russian fairy tales, replacing their titles, the names of their characters, adding or deleting whole episodes. These changes are primarily driven not so much by a limited knowledge of the sources, but rather by the need to adapt the text to certain pedagogical purposes. For example, translations and adaptations of Russian folk tales eliminate gruesome or bloody details — as in Tibaldi Chiesa’s adaptation of “Ivashko and the Witch”, where it is omitted that the witch and her guests “took a fried Alyonka out of the oven and... ..ate, drank, and went out into the courtyard and began to roll on the grass”, or as in Küfferle’s translation of “The Tale of Ivan Tsarevich, the Firebird and the Grey Wolf”, where Dmitry does not “stab Ivan the Tsarevich and chop him up into little pieces” [Afanas’yev 1984–1985, 336], but Ivan simply “fell asleep” [Küfferle 1929a]. The terrifying element of the Russian tale is embodied rather in the illustrations by the Russian artist Liliya Slutskaya [see Slutskaya 1924; Tibaldi Chiesa 1935; Fabula 1936; Fabula 1936a] (Fig. 2). The elongated and almost stylised forms, the geometry and skillful play of lines, the grotesque monstrous faces with sharp teeth and purple lips, reveal the influence of the avant-garde with which the artist came into contact in Munich and later in Ascona in the Monte Veritas environment.

It is worth mentioning the prominent Italian artists who created illustrations for translations of Russian fairy tales and stories: Mario Pompei, author of stylised drawings in black and red for “Russian Folk Tales” [Cadei 1923a] (Fig. 3); Gustavino (pseudonym of Gustavo Rosso), whose realism is reflected in the illustrations for “The Tale of the Fisherman and Little Fish” [Küfferle 1929b]; Edina Altara, who managed to adapt her elegant manner both to the drama of M. Osorgin’s “Princess Pearl” [Osorgin 1923] as well as to the naiveté of E. A. Elachich’s stories “Reconciliation, Dispute, and Then Reconciliation Again” and “Fyr-fyrka” [Elachich 1923; Elachich 1923a] (Fig. 4); and, finally, Peppino Migneco, whose expressionism fills the stark illustrations for the tale ‘Two Frosts’ in «Il Corriere dei piccoli» [Küfferle 1929] (Fig. 5).

Short comments with autobiographical details at the beginning or at the end of the text are also an important paratextual elements of fairy tales. For example, Küfferle shares with the young reader memories of his grandmother, as well as Marusia Grigorieva in addition to the tale



Figure 3. Fiabe popolari russe. (1923). Adattamento di E. Cadei (ill. Di M. Pompei). Il giornalino della Domenica, 15

“Nadia and the White Mouse” [Grigor’eva 1929] writes an autobiographical story “Polkan” for «Il Corriere dei piccoli» [Grigor’eva 1929a]. The same nostalgic spirit pervades short anonymous stories, such as “Cuore di re”, published in «Il Corriere dei piccoli», which extols the generosity of the deceased Tsar [Cuore di re 1924]. Such details implicitly drew the attention of young readers to the events that had taken place in Russia and pointed to the reasons that forced the emigrants to leave their homeland. It is interesting to note that the dramatic situation in post-revolutionary Russia and the tragedy of Russian exiles was not concealed from children. In addition to chronicles, these events were reflected in articles



Figure 5. Migneco, P. (1929). I due geli (R. Küfferle, trad.). Il Corriere dei piccoli, 3. 20 gennaio, 4

old days. The moral of the story emerges at the end, where the author, turning to Martinella, writes: “Good night: the nightmare is over, the pen rebellion is a fait accompli. And tomorrow, if indeed in their quest for rebellion they go blunt, do you know what we will do? Since blunt pens are useless... let’s throw them in the rubbish!” [Fiducia 1921]

It can be concluded that the young subscribers to «Il giornalino della Domenica» and «Il Corriere dei piccoli» involuntarily associated their ideas about Russian everyday life with the magic of illustrated Russian fairy tales, and such ideas acquired specific features in the biographical sketches of Russian writers and the memories of Russian

emigrants. The articles about Russia sometimes expressed political views, which probably aroused sincere sympathy among young Italians for their Russian peers who were suffering under the Soviet regime⁵.

RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN BOOK SERIES FOR CHILDREN

The large-scale industrialisation of post-war Italy put an end to the many small publishers who had produced literature for an upscale audience. Cheap series began to appear, offering classics of Italian and foreign literature at very low prices, and often including illustrations by talented artists. In this context, we can consider the increase in the number of children's book series, which originated at the end of the 19th century but spread exponentially in the 1920s and 1930s [Turi 2004, 17–18]. The gradual proliferation of children's series had a significant impact on the editorial policies and mechanisms that regulated the book market. While the periodicity of children's magazines plays a very important role in shaping a child's expectations and desires, the serialization of book publications allows a particular text to stand out and connect it with other texts, making it recognizable and appealing. In short, serial publishing faces the challenge of not only identifying the audience the text was originally aimed at, but also of creating a new one. This is revealed when comparing the Russian translations published in the Italian children's book series of the 1920s and 1930s. While in the beginning publishers limited themselves to reprints of those works which had already been published in «Il giornalino della Domenica» or «Il Corriere dei piccoli», over the years they expanded the range of authors and texts. Various political and cultural factors contributed to this. First of all, new directives for the reformed primary school curricula suggested a reliance on the “folk tradition” and “the great literature that gave birth to wonderful works... accessible to the simplest people precisely because they are great” [Catarsi 1990, 313]. This allowed publishers of children's books to focus increasingly on 'adult' classics adapted for young people, although not always according to consistent and philologically rigorous criteria. Furthermore, despite all the Fascist regime's attempts to make children's literature a vehicle for the construction of a new Italy, the Fascists succeeded in achieving only 'partial appropriation' [Scotto di Luzio 1996; Colin 2012]. The reasons for this partial failure lay in widespread 'passive resistance', which could not be eliminated by circulars and decrees. Above all, there was a lack of school libraries or youth departments in rural people's libraries [Scotto di Luzio 1996, 95–133]. The family continued to be the place where

a child's world-view was shaped, and the family represented a separate space, partly inaccessible to political power. Parents offered their children works that they themselves loved as children and which continued to form a significant part of their libraries and publishing range. Equally important was the intuition and experience of editors and translators, as well as the growing interest of Italian pedagogical critics in Russian literature, which starting from the late 1920s found its place in children's literature manuals and in lists of recommended books [Battistelli 1923; Fanciulli, Monaci Guidotti 1926; Bersani 1930; Giacobbe 1934; Visentini 1940; Tibaldi Chiesa 1944].

The number of works in Russian literature varies from series to series, and the criteria that guided publishers are not always clear: after all, even Italian critics were not always aware of the reasons for including a particular work for adults in editions for children. In this paper we have decided to divide the material into three categories: short stories, literary fairy tales, and adaptations of novels. Leo Tolstoy's didactic tales have an important place in our analysis. In fact, the deep connection between the history of children's literature and the social history of childhood in Italy explains the interest in Tolstoy and his pioneering pedagogical experiments. To this is added the respect for the religious feeling that permeates some of the later Tolstoy stories, thanks to which they were included in the list of books recommended for reading to young Italians [see Battistelli 1923, 149; Bersani 1930, 48]. In 1924, the publisher E.S.T., in the "Series of readings for children and young people in Italian and in French" (*Collana di letture per ragazzi e giovinetti in italiano e in francese*) under the direction of Rosa Errera and Maria Mariani, publishes "Simple Stories", translated by Nina Romanovskaya [Tolstoy 1924]. These are nine tales taken from Tolstoy's first and second "Reading Books", which by that time had not yet been translated into Italian⁶. Their content is in line with the educational aim of the series, which, for a modest price (0.80 lire), offers young readers inspiring works by Italian and foreign authors. The series presents the works of two Russian writers — Tolstoy and Kuprin; the other authors are mostly French (J. F. Guichard, A. Balzac, P. Corneille, J. La Fontaine, etc.), followed by the German F. Schiller and the English W. Shakespeare. When the E.S.T. publishes Tolstoy again in the same series in 1933 [Tolstoy 1933], the selection is more varied, though still inextricably linked to Tolstoy's pedagogical activities. It includes parables and stories with religious content, such as "Two Old Men", "How Much Land does a Man Need", "Three Elders", "Where love is, God is", "Ilyas", and the short novel "The Prisoner of the Caucasus". The collection was approved by one of

the main critics of the time, Emilio Formiggini Santamaria, who wrote in the magazine "L'Italia che scrive. Rivista per coloro che leggono": "This reading can be offered to young people who are mature enough to follow and understand moral teachings. They could scarcely find so much sweet inspiration as in a simple, human story composed by a Russian writer" [Formiggini Santamaria 1935, 13]. Similar educational principles underpinned the publication of Tolstoy's tale "The Righteous Judge", published in 1930 by La Nuova Italia in the "Fireflies" (Lucciole) series [Tolstoy 1930]. Less clear criteria underlie another Tolstoy's collection published in 1932 by the Paravia publishing house of Turin, in a series edited by Maria Bersani, *La piccola ghirlanda* ("The Little Garland") [Tolstoy 1932]. This series was intended for "class libraries" of primary schools, both urban and rural, and included short stories by both Italian and foreign writers. Of the Russians, only Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Dmitriev are present, while the number of other foreign authors (including women) is quite large: there are the French (Madame Veillet, G. Sand, A. Daudet, R. Bazin, F. Mistral, J. Maset, H. Lefebvre), the English (Hesba Stretton, J. H. Ewing, Ouida, F. H. Burnett, C. Dickens, J. Ruskin), the Americans (M. Mapes Dodge), the Germans (C. Von Schmid), the Danes (H. Andersen). Tolstoy's translation, in particular, was included in "Series B", intended for children over third grade. The book is decorated with black and white illustrations by Fabio Fabbi, an artist known for the oriental atmosphere of his drawings. In the preface "To Little Readers", the author of the revisions, Rosa Fumagalli, wrote that the collected texts "reflect the pure faith which [Tolstoy] espoused and which he gradually revived by the light of his elevated mind, tempered in the pain and struggle of his life, which was a long service of good" [Tolstoy 1932, 3]. The book's contents, however, cause some consternation: along with a selection of parables and byliny such as "The Master and the Worker", "A Grain as a Hen Egg", and "Svyatogor the Bogatyr", it also contains parts of "Childhood" and "Adolescence", which are carelessly assorted. The same impression of carelessness is given by the brief biography of Tolstoy, compiled by Maria Bersani, in which there are several mistakes (for example, the writer's death is dated November 20, 1900).

As already mentioned, in addition to Tolstoy's works, the book series for children of the 1920s and 1930s contain texts by other Russian authors who had already been published in magazines. For example, in 1924 the publishing house E.S.T. published A. Kuprin's story "Tapeur", in the aforementioned "Series C" of readings for children and adolescents [Kuprin 1924]. A new adaptation of his story "The Elephant" [Kuprin

1932] appeared in the Paravia publisher's series "The Little Flowers" (Fiorellini), which Maria Bersani described in 1930 as follows: "it was conceived for very young children who had just learned to read with the syllables; it includes easy, lively stories that children can read and understand without help" [Bersani 1930, 13]. In 1931 Paravia also published Chekhov's stories "Kashtanka" and "Kids" in the "Little Garland" series, translated by Erme Cadei and with exquisite 'nursery-decò' drawings by Edina Altara [Chekhov 1931].

One of the most active Italian publishing houses in distributing Russian literary works to young Italian readers was the Venetian publishing house La Nuova Italia. La Nuova Italia did not offer a traditional repertoire, but sought to publish novelties, which was made possible primarily by the intuition of the writer Elda Bossi, who was the editor of the "Fireflies" (Lucciole) and "Children's Book" series (Il libro dei ragazzi) from 1929 to 1930. These series included works by both Italian and foreign authors: French writers (W. Hugo, C. Nodier, J. Maset, F. Mistral), German writers (E. T. A. Hoffmann, E. Bergmann, the Grimm brothers), the Belgian M. Maeterlinck, the Englishman O. Wilde, the American H. W. Longfellow, the Portuguese J. M. de Eça de Queiroz, and the Russian writers D. N. Mamin-Sibiriyak, F. M. Dostoevsky, and L. N. Tolstoy. The series published five collections of tales and stories by D. Mamin-Sibiriyak [Mamin-Sibiriyak 1929; 1929a; 1929b; 1929c; 1929d]. The four volumes were translated by Stefania Quadrio and lavishly illustrated in the Art Nouveau style by the Russian artist Irina Khrushka, who emigrated to Venice after the October Revolution. For all the elegance of the graphic design, Mamin-Sibiriyak's stories have received mixed reviews: while "Il giornale della libreria" described him as an excellent representative of the genre of the moralistic fable [Il giornale della libreria 1930], in "L'Italia che scrive" the critic Formiggini Santamaria pointed out the inadequacy of his work for children because of its "background of veiled sadness" and "morbid scepticism" [Formiggini Santamaria 1930, 320].

Adaptations of works aimed at an adult audience have also aroused mixed reactions. An excerpt from Brothers Karamazov by Dostoevsky, whose stories and excerpts the publisher Carabba boldly included in the Classics for Children series as early as 1920⁷, was published in 1929 in La Nuova Italia's Lucciole series [Dostoevskiy 1929]. Although the excerpt from Book X of the novel had entered the canon of Russian children's readings as early as the end of the 19th century [Vassena 2021], the volume published by La Nuova Italia went completely unnoticed, while the complete translation by the Brothers Karamazov, issued by the



Figure 6. Guerra e pace. (1935). Narrato da Giuseppe Morpurgo (ill. da Carlo Parmeggiani). Torino: UTET. (La scala d'oro VIII)

publisher Slavia that same year, won the praise of “adult” critics [Vita Finzi 1929]. Very severely assessed was another edition, published in 1926 by the Florentine publisher Vallecchi in the series for children and adolescents “Fontana viva” (“Living fountain”), which included four stories by Korolenko (“The old bell ringer”, “The night before Christmas”, “Makar’s Dream” and “In a bad company”) in a translation by Boris Yakovenko [Korolenko 1926]. The author of the review in “L’Italia che scrive” magazine expressed his fear that the misfortune and suffering of Korolenko’s characters would leave a deep, painful impression in children’s soul, and suggested removing the edition from the children’s series and addressing it to “those who can understand, love, suffer” [W. Korolienko. Il vecchio campanaro... 1927].

Finally, worth mentioning is the 1935 publication of the adaptation of Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” in the famous illustrated series for children called La Scala d’Oro (“The Golden Staircase”) by the Turin publisher UTET [Tolstoy 1935] (Fig. 6). “La Scala d’oro”, the first ‘graded’

series for children, founded in 1932 by Vincenzo Errante and Fernando Palazzi, offered increasingly complex texts divided into eight series. However, the texts were not printed in the original, but paraphrased by other writers or educators. The novel “War and Peace”, retold by Giuseppe Morpurgo and illustrated by Carlo Parmeggiani, was included in the eighth series, which was aimed at children aged 13 and over, and was reprinted several times until 1987. The elegant graphics and noble pedagogical intent, however, failed to dispel the bewilderment of some contemporaries. They felt that by offering retellings of literary works, the *La Scala d’oro* series inevitably discouraged young readers from reading the full versions [see Tibaldi Chiesa 1944, 165–168].

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this review of the presence of Russian literature in Italian book series for children shows that the most popular genres in the 1920s were the didactic tale and the literary fairy tale. Between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, some adaptations/reductions of short stories and novels for adults also appeared. Although often perplexing to critics, these early experiments marked the beginning of an important process that, after the Second World War, would allow the Russian classics to expand beyond their “theoretical audience” [Escarpit 1971, 56, 68] and reach an increasingly diverse Italian public [De Florio 2017].

FINAL REMARKS

The materials analyzed in this article, although limited to children’s magazines and book series for children, lay the foundations for more extensive research, both from a thematic and chronological point of view, on the history of the translation and reception of Russian literature for children in Italy. As we have seen, the original repertoire of Russian translations on the two main Italian children’s magazines of the twenties converges on the book series of the thirties, gradually becoming more varied and also welcoming adaptations of works intended for adults. The proportion of works by Russian authors in comparison with other foreign authors seems fairly balanced, at least until the early 1930s. With the tightening of fascist censorship in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the presence of translated foreign literature in Italian magazines and book series for children was drastically reduced. As far as Russian literature is concerned, during the war years one can observe an increase in the number of remakes/retellings by Italian authors, on the one hand, and an increase in the popularity of the fairy-tale genre, on the other. Starting from the late thirties, large publishing houses, such as Hoepli and Italego,

published separate collections of Russian folktales and fables, illustrated by Russian émigré artists L. Slutskaya and V. Nikulin [Tibaldi Chiesa 1937a; Tibaldi Chiesa 1945; Krylov 1945]. The reasons for the growing popularity of Russian folktales were various: first, the genre of fairy tale met the need for imagination and fiction, which could somehow alleviate the horrors and deprivations caused by war and the political instability associated with it; moreover, the fairy-tale, even if not belonging to the native tradition of readers, managed to escape the close net of Fascist censorship because of its universality, which deprived it of any political or ideological overtones. Thanks to their rich paratext, the collections of Russian fairy tales in the forties mark a crucial phase in the history of Italian reception of Russian culture. Especially in Nikulin’s illustrations, Russia loses that mysterious aura that for years made it a distant and impenetrable country, and turns into an enchanted but good-natured and hospitable world, able to attract both children and adults [see Vassena 2012; Vassena 2015].

This article leaves open several questions worthy of further investigation. We intend to draw attention to two of them in particular. Firstly, the dissemination of Russian children’s literature in Italy was the result of a fruitful cultural exchange not only between representatives of the Russian emigration and publishers, but also some of the Italian artists. Further research in the archives of publishing houses and in the personal fonds of Italian translators, publishers and artists could shed new light on the history of Italian-Russian cultural relations in the first half of the 20th century. Secondly, the gradual entry of the names of some ‘adult’ Russian authors into the Italian literary canon for children reveals an important evolution in Italian publishing policy. Extending the chronological scope of this study would allow a more accurate reconstruction of a process that continues up to the present day. Interestingly enough, among the children’s publishing novelties in Italy, three books issued by the Roman publisher Atmosphere libri stand out: “My First Dostoevsky”, “My First Chekhov” and “My First Gogol” [Dostoevskiy 2017; Chekhov 2017; Gogol’ 2018].

Translated by Yana Timkova

Notes

- ¹ An important exception is the publication in 1920 of translations of Dostoevsky, Mamin-Sibiriyak, and Tolstoy in two children’s series [see Dostoevskiy 1920; Mamin Sibiriyak 1920; Tolstoy 1920]. The situation was

- different in children's periodicals, where, beginning in the 1910s, Russian stories and fairy tales appeared in translation. See, for instance, the magazine "Primavera", published by Vittorio Podrecca in Rome from 1911, where translations of works by L. N. Tolstoy, Vasilij Morozov, M. Osorgin, and Maxim Gorky appeared [see Vagliani 2014, 53–54].
- ² The years of the emergence of the National Fascist Party and the end of World War II are taken as the basis. The National Fascist Party came to power after the march on Rome (26–28 October 1922).
- ³ Between 1901 and 1914. Giovanni Giolitti was Minister of the Interior and then Prime Minister. He launched a series of school reforms which raised the age of compulsory education to 12 and placed primary school under state control.
- ⁴ For more information on the lives and activities of the Russian translators and artists mentioned in this article, see the dictionary "Russians in Italy" <http://www.russinitalia.it/dizionario.php>
- ⁵ Many Italian magazines and newspapers of the time appealed to their readers for sympathy for street Russian children [see e.g. Cadei 1921b].
- ⁶ Only a few years later, in 1928, on the centenary of Tolstoy's birth, an Italian translation (from French) of all four reading books was published by the Milanese publisher Monanni, edited by Angelo Treves.
- ⁷ The collection included: «La piccola Netotschka senza nome (episodi da un romanzo non finito); Il piccolo eroe (dalle memorie di uno sconosciuto); Il Muzik Marej; Il piccino povero da Gesù per l'albero di Natale; Le birichinate del piccolo Kolia (dal romanzo «I fratelli Karamasoff»)».

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«СТРАНА ДАЛЕКОГО И ТАИНСТВЕННОГО ПЛЕМЕНИ»:
РОССИЯ И РУССКАЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРА В ИТАЛЬЯНСКИХ
ИЗДАНИЯХ ДЛЯ ДЕТЕЙ (1920–1940-Е ГГ.)

В статье рассматриваются переводы и обработки произведений русской литературы в итальянских периодических изданиях и книжных сериях для детей в фашистский период (1921–1945 гг.). Путем анализа русского репертуара и сопоставления с репертуаром из других зарубежных литератур, предполагается определить долю русских авторов, установить самые популярные жанры и сюжетно-тематические характеристики русских текстов, а также по возможности прояснить культурно-педагогические цели, которые обуславливали выбор того или иного произведения для перевода. Особое внимание уделяется плодотворному сотрудничеству представителей русской эмиграции с итальянскими редакторами и иллюстраторами, а также восприятию русской литературы итальянской педагогической критикой. Статья вносит свой вклад в изучение итальянско-русских культурных и литературных связей в первой половине двадцатого века и проливает свет на издательские практики, которые после Второй мировой войны позволят русским классикам войти в чтение все более разнообразных слоев итальянской публики.

Keywords: русско-итальянские связи в первой половине XX века, детская литература, детские журналы, книжные серии, перевод, адаптация, иллюстрация детской книги