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## BORDERS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: THE RECEPTION OF PICTURE BOOKS IN ITALY AND THE QUESTION OF READING ALOUD

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**Abstract:** This article opens with the concept of the “world republic of childhood” without geographical and political borders, as conceived by Hazard and promoted after the Second World War. According to O’Sullivan (2004, 2005), this concept of childhood, and consequently of children’s literature, is idealistic and does not address real problems connected with the process of translation. As a matter of fact, translating a book for children from one language into another is not as easy as it might seem: frontiers and custom houses do exist (Berteia 2000: 94). A peculiar *cas limite* is the reception of the picture book in Italy. Introduced thanks to the pioneering work of the Emme Edizioni publishing house and its translators, the genre was later rejected. Italy had to wait a decade to see the same and similar picture books republished, but it is still paying the price for having initially closed its borders, despite the fact that the translators had paid customs- and import duties. These were determined not only by the child image dominant in the Italian society, but also by the different image of the adult, who was meant to read picture books aloud and who was ready to put on a performance for the child recipient (Oittinen 2000). In particular, the article investigates examples of the discrepancy between the adult and child images of the source and target texts selected from American and English picture books and their Italian translations.

**Keywords:** children’s literature in Italy, picture book, reading aloud, translation

### The republic of childhood

The conviction that children’s literature was comprehensible to every citizen of the “world republic of childhood” (Hazard 1944: 145), and thus could easily cross borders, not only geographical but also ideological, cul-

tural and political,<sup>1</sup> spread widely in Europe after the Second World War. On the one hand, this utopian vision reflected an essential feature of books for children and teenagers, which, while keeping “alive a sense of nationality (...) also keep alive a sense of humanity” (Hazard 1944: 146); on the other hand, however, it rested on the assumption that there existed a universal, international, “monolingual, monocultural” children’s culture, “in which the international understanding is the order of the day” (O’Sullivan 2004: 146).

Although the notion of the “republic of childhood” reflects in part the “tremendous translation activity” (O’Connell 1999: 208) that has so far characterised literature – as early as in the 1930s Hazard pointed out that “every country gives and every country receives – innumerable are the exchanges” (1944: 146) – yet such an idea remains a “Romantic abstraction” (O’Sullivan 2005: 8), which not only fails to reflect the situation of, e.g., developing countries,<sup>2</sup> but first and foremost “ignores the real conditions of children’s communication across borders” (O’Sullivan 2005: 8).

In fact, the emphasis on the internationality of children’s literature, and of the child image itself, neglects significant cultural aspects of translation and the movement of books across borders. Thus, one may well claim that children’s literature is like “a messenger that goes beyond mountains and rivers, beyond the seas, to the very ends of the world in search of new friendships” (Hazard 1944: 146), but one should not forget about the limitations and norms the translator should obey, especially in the case of children’s literature: “translating a book for children from one language into another is not as self-evident and spontaneous as it might seem, and the frontiers and custom houses do exist,” emphasizes Berteau, analyzing the English translations of Rodari (2000: 94; trans. M.B.).

And where there are frontiers and custom houses, one has to pay customs duties.

## Open and closed borders: the picture book in Italy

The reception of the picture book in Italy has been quite special, since while initially this genre was allowed to cross the border freely, after some time it was “sent back.”

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<sup>1</sup> “although Hazard recognizes national features in the literatures of various groups and ascribes significances to them, he imagines a place of childhood which transcends all political and linguistic boundaries” (O’Sullivan 2004: 8).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. O’Sullivan (2004) and O’Sullivan (2005).

The picture book can be defined as follows:

a book in which the words and pictures are inseparable. It is almost always based on a narrative consisting of both words and pictures. The text is usually short and the pictures appear on every page; sometimes there are a few pictures on one page or there is one large illustration on the double-spread (Dal Gobbo 2007: 42; trans. M.B.).

The picture book is, thus, a publishing product based on the mutual relationship between the image and the word,<sup>3</sup> meant to be read aloud by an adult, who dramatizes the story in the course of reading. The genre achieved its full artistic expression in the 1960s and 1970s in the USA and Great Britain (see Anstey and Bull 2004). That is when the picture book reached Italy as well, mainly thanks to the “archaeological”<sup>4</sup> and pioneering efforts of Rosellina Archinto and her Emme Edizioni publishing house. In that period children's literature in Italy was outdated, trite and conventional, because it had not experienced the revival that had occurred in other countries. Rosellina Archinto, the “lady of the Italian publishing market,” revitalised the genre:

It seemed that in post-war Italy children's literature – that Great Exile – was denied the right to partake of cultural revivals, which had earlier been so beneficial for it (...) The walls, ideologies, and cold wars, however, imposed on children's books a bloodless caution of “musical fables,” a covert censorship (Faeti 2005: 9; trans. M.B.).

Books for the youngest readers had been characterised by aesthetic poverty until, in the 1960s, the Emme publishing house was founded (cf. Pallotino 1988: 343). The event was welcomed as a “Copernican revolution” (Fochesato 2000: 17). It was inspired by Rosellina Archinto's trip to the USA, during which she came across Leo Lionni's *Little Blue and Little Yellow* (1959), the first abstract picture book about the friendship of two coloured spots. Archinto noticed the divide between American children's literature and its Italian counterpart. She realized that there was nothing similar she could read to her five children, so she decided to open her own publishing house in Milan:

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<sup>3</sup> See also Dal Gobbo (2004), Doonan (1993), Lewis (1995), Nodelman (1988), Schwarcz (1982), Schwarcz J.H., Schwarcz C. (1984), Spitz (2001), Sipe (1998), Shulevitz (1985).

<sup>4</sup> See Beseghi (2005: 24).

The history of Rosallina Archinto is unusual: born in Genoa in 1933, she graduates in Economics from the Catholic University in Milan, goes on to study at Columbia University in New York, and gives birth to five children: it all must have contributed to her decision to become a publisher in the 1960s (Finocchi 2004: 29; trans. M.B.).

Therefore, in 1966 Archinto opened the Emme publishing house to wage war against stereotypical Italian picture books. However, she met with a lot of difficulties and criticism; at times her ideas were even ridiculed as lunatic.<sup>5</sup>

Her publishing policy developed in three directions (Faeti 2005: 18). The “Pomeriggi” series, edited by Natalia Ginzburg, included children’s classics, e.g. Leo Tolstoy’s *Hadji Murat*. The “Punto Emme” series included works in experimental pedagogy and teaching, which made Emme Edizioni

an extremely dynamic pedagogical space which differed from the academic circles in its strong, inseparable and openly declared bond with the present, as well as its originality and interest in everything that had a youthful, revolutionary, reviving power, referring to the ideas and tendencies dominant in the culture of those times (Faeti qtd in Massi 2004: 41; trans. M.B.).

The third, “historical,” series opened Italian borders for the picture book, thanks to over three hundred translations<sup>6</sup> of, e.g., *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) by Eric Carle (*Un baco molto affamato* 1969), *Little Blue and Little Yellow* (1959) by Leo Lionni (*Piccolo Blu e Piccolo Giallo*, 1967), *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) and *In the Night Kitchen* (1970) by Maurice Sendak (*Nel paese dei mostri selvaggi*, 1969 and *Luca, la luna e il latte*, 1970/71), *War and Peas* (1974) by Michael Foreman (*Guerra e pasta*, 1975) and books by Jean Brunhoff, Tomi Ungerer and David McKee. Archinto was the first in Italy to publish *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter, in Giulia Niccolai’s translation – in the Italian version Peter Rabbit changed his name to a more homely Ludovico (*Le favole di Ludovico coniglio*, 1981).

Rosellina Archinto was aware of the value of the books she introduced onto the Italian market, as well as of the risk involved in her decision, for they were works transcending the traditional aesthetic norms and for this

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication, 6 May 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Emme Edizioni also published books by such Italian authors as Bruno Munari, Maria Enrica Agostinelli, Emanuele Luzzati, Altan, Nico Orengo as well as Iela and Enzo Mari.

reason regarded as elitist. Sometimes she translated those strange “books for architects’ children” herself, and sometimes she commissioned translations, selecting the translators as carefully as the books.

However, all these strategies turned out to be insufficient, and in 1984 Emme Edizioni, “too innovative for its times” (Vassalli 2005: 47; trans. M.B.), had to close down.

## Customs duties: translation problems

### Visual and performative elements in translation of children's picture books

As mentioned before, Archinto did some translations herself; she also entrusted them to such writers as Antonio Porta or Giulia Niccolai. The task was not easy. Picture books belong to multimodal texts,<sup>7</sup> which use various sign systems, mainly verbal and visual, to tell the story. Because they are addressed to preschool children, who cannot read or write, they are meant to be read aloud and often create an opportunity for recitation or performance. Hence they have been variously compared to screenplays or musical scores. Schwarcz notices that the two semiotic systems which constitute a picture book create a musical score (1982: 14), and Spitz extends this concept to theatre performances, commenting also on the adult who reads the text aloud and in this way becomes a mediator between the book and the child recipient: “Like musical or other theatre performers, you, the adult reader, are a mediator between your child and a cultural object” (Spitz 2001: 16; trans. M.B.). Shulevitz also claims that picture books are inspiration for theatre experiences, as “the picture book is closer to theatre and film” (1985: 16). It is easy to guess, then, that translating these true works of art is not easy.

Oittinen is one of the few scholars to have studied this specific literary genre. She highlights the fact that picture books are meant to be read aloud, but the “‘oral context’ is often forgotten”<sup>8</sup> (Oittinen 2000: 32). Reading

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<sup>7</sup> “multimodal texts: photographs and their captions, diagrams and their verbal glosses, stories and their illustrations” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 76). See also Stöckl: “multimodal refers to communicative artifacts and processes which combine various sign systems (modes) and whose production and reception calls upon the communicators to semantically and formally interrelate all sign repertoires present” (2004: 9).

<sup>8</sup> “So far there have been few analyses of translation for children investigating its specific stylistic acceptability to children and its suitability for reading aloud” (O’Sullivan 2005: 24).

aloud has a great importance in translating not only picture books but also other genres of children's literature, for often it is the only form of contact with the text on the part of a child who has not learnt to read yet.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, translators cannot forget that the text they are translating "should live, roll, taste good on the reading aloud's tongue (Oittinen 2000: 32). What is more, Oittinen merits attention because she points out the link between reading aloud and performance: when adults read aloud to a child, they do it in a theatrical way, dramatizing the text:

The problem of reading goes together with the problem of performance. The translator translating for children needs to pay attention to the use of children's literature: pre-literate children listen to texts mediated and read aloud by adults. Through various means – repetition, sentence structure, line breaks, rhythm, and punctuation – the translator makes her or his text live on the aloud-reader's tongue. The translator should also be aware of the different potential of expression – intonation, tone, tempo, pauses, stress, rhythm, duration – and contribute in every way possible to the aloud-reader's enjoyment of the story (Oittinen 2006: 39).

Oittinen emphasizes the relation between translating picture books and translating theatrical texts, since in both cases these are texts meant for recitation:

Illustrations are a kind of set design for the text: as in the theatre, they have an effect on the audience, the listening child. In translating illustrated texts, as in theatre translation, "the problems of translating literary texts take on a new dimension of complexity, for the text is only one element in the totality of discourse," as Susan Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 131) says, describing translating for theatre (Oittinen 1990: 50).

Translating a picture book also bears some similarity to audio-visual translation. All three kinds of art refer to visual and oral elements: "As art forms, then, theatre and film share many features with picture books; translating texts for a small child is not far removed from translating for the theatre and film" (Oittinen 2000: 111). "Recitability," sometimes even "melodiousness" of the text, is a challenge all film and theatre translators have to face; so do they need to negotiate the limits imposed by images, which in picture books play the role of both the set design and kinesic

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<sup>9</sup> "Shared reception, performance, and reading aloud are also characteristic of children's books and their translations. The human voice is a powerful tool, and reading aloud is the only way for an illiterate child to enter the world of literature" (Oittinen 1995: 60).

element, for they can be used to represent movement. Thus, it can be concluded that all three types of translation<sup>10</sup> are connected with movement, sound, and the totality of not only the text, but also the situation.

Translators of this specific literary genre, therefore, have to be able to decipher the different languages used in picture books: "to be successful, translators need knowledge about how to interpret the whole that is 'written' in all these different languages" (Oittinen 2000: 113). And this is not just about the visual code, for – as Oittinen claims – "an illustrated text, like a picture book, is not just a combination of words and illustration: it has both sound and rhythm, which can be also heard" (Oittinen 2000: 109).

The only example Oittinen (2003) gives to prove her claims is her analysis of the German, Finnish, and Swedish translations of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. Oittinen focuses on the meaning carried by punctuation, even though, according to her, reading aloud depends on many other features as well, such as the layout of the page, the size and shape of the font, which "may give the aloud-reader hints or even instructions about how to use one's voice and perform the text" (Oittinen 2003: 132).

This kind of instructions, or "stage directions,"<sup>11</sup> is of great significance, for it suggests to the adult reader how to read the text to a child. Illustrations should be mentioned here as well, since they act as guidelines for reciting. Because of the characteristic interaction between the images and words, picture books require "a high semantic or semiotic capacity" (Landes 1985: 53) and their translators, similarly to translators of comics, must turn into "semiotic detectives" (Celotti 2008: 47).

### **Border duties: implications of the differing images of the child and the adult reader**

For the reasons stated above, the Italian translators of the first English and American picture books had to deal with a demanding task. It led to surprising results, sometimes to peculiar translation decisions, which, no doubt, resulted from insufficient familiarity with this literary genre and from the differences between the images of a child as the recipient of the text and of an adult as the mediator between the text and the child.

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<sup>10</sup> Naturally, a translation of a picture book is not subject to time limits, as it happens in audiovisual and theatre translation, since the reader can stop in the middle of reading, make pauses or read the book anew.

<sup>11</sup> This topic and the examples provided are discussed in Sezzi (2009a) and Sezzi (2009b).

Oittinen claims: “Child image is a complex issue: on the one hand, it is something unique, based on each individual personal history; on the other hand, it is something collectivized in all society” (Oittinen 2000: 4). Translating for children is never neutral and always related to ideology and ethics. Translation strategies, in turn, depend on the adults’ conception of children, and on what they deem “proper” for them; hence “translating for children is no innocent act” (Oittinen 2006: 42).

In the case of translating picture books we have to consider also the translator’s (and society’s) idea of adults who are to read to the pre-school child: of their skills as regards reading, interpretation and mediating in reception of content (Sezzi 2008; 2009; 2009a; 2009b). Differing ideas about the child and adult in the source and target cultures lead to changes in translation, not only in the content, but also in the “instructions” directed at the reading-aloud adult.

An example of such changes can be found in the Italian translation of *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) by Maurice Sendak, prepared in 1969 for Emme Edizioni by Antonio Porta. The Italian title itself, *Nel paese dei mostri selvaggi* (In the Country of Wild Monsters) indicates the problem mentioned by Christiane Nord, who discusses its Spanish version (*Donde viven los monstruos*). Rendering the English word *things* as *mostri* (monsters) in the title, and then in the text, changed its expressive function by endowing it with negative connotations:

Maurice Sendak’s title refers to a passage in the book where an angry mother calls her son a *wild thing*. In his dream, the little boy visits the *Wild Things* and finally becomes their king. They certainly look quite wild in the illustrations, but they are in no way monstrous (that is, “enormous,” “ugly,” “cruel,” or even “perverse”) as the Spanish version suggests (Nord 1995: 277).

Interestingly, the Italian title of a film based on Sendak’s book (directed by Spike Jonze, written by Dave Eggers, 2009) contains the word “creatures” instead of “monsters” (*Nel paese delle creature selvagge*).

Still, the translation of the text carries a lot of interesting guidelines for the read-aloud adult. The book is a story of Max, called by his mother a *wild thing*, because he misbehaves all the time. It shows a transformation of his anger towards his parents into a fantastic journey<sup>12</sup> beyond the

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<sup>12</sup> As Sendak explains, his books are “all variations on the same theme: how children master various feelings – anger, boredom, fear, frustration, jealousy and manage to come to grips with the realities of their lives” (qtd in Lanes 1980: 227).



borders of his room and into a country where the *wild things* live. The pictures in the book grow bigger to match the protagonist's growing anger: the white rims framing the illustrations disappear, and – as Moebius points out – “Max’ universe expands from the small framed picture of himself in a room to the unframed double-spread of the place where the wild things live” (Moebius 1986: 150). The climax of the story, and explosion of Max’ anger, is presented only visually, on three double-spreads in the middle of the book. It is assumed that reaching this point of the story, the adult will start dancing with the listening child, since the illustrations create a dynamic mini-scene. The word *rumpus* from the previous page is “translated” (in this case, it is a genuine intersemiotic translation) into a series of pictures, which activates its full semantic potential. In the Italian version the word *rumpus* was rendered as *ridda*. This term denotes a type of traditional dance in which “the participants danced in a circle, holding hands and singing,” but metaphorically it refers to a “crazy, chaotic spin, stupefying and intoxicating.”<sup>13</sup> Phonologically, the word resembles the English term, and at the same time, it activates semantically the illustrations which make the adult reader start dancing.<sup>14</sup>

Another characteristic example is the Italian translation of Bob Gill's *Ups and Downs* (1974). The decision to translate this book is another proof of the long-sighted and innovative publishing policy of Rosellina Archinto: the book toys with visual perspectives, which enables the child to identify with two societies presented in the story and to learn that differences between people depend solely on one's point of view. The book features two peoples: the Downs, who live in a village at the foot of a mountain, and the Ups, who live at the mountain top. A black cloud makes it impossible for them to see each other, and they know nothing about each other's existence until the cloud drifts away. Not only the illustrations, but also the interaction between the words and the images and the whole architecture of the book reflect its theme: when the story focuses on the Downs, the text is situated at the bottom of the page, and when it focuses on the Ups, the text moves to the top. Extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator often adds his/her own commentary directed at the reader, which helps the adult create a proper mood while reading aloud. In the original, the metanarrative

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Dizionario Inglese Devoto Oli*.

<sup>14</sup> The actress Flavia De Lucis encourages the participants of the *Corso di formazione per lettori volontari nell'ambito del progetto Nati per Leggere* to start dancing with children on reaching that point of the story.

asides are incorporated in the text, while in the Italian translation, entitled *I Su e i Giù*, the translator moved them into parentheses, thus suggesting where the adult reader should change tone or make a pause so that the child can notice the different narrative level (for instance, “If you want to know what the party was like, turn the page”).

Sometimes, however, adding punctuation marks which are meant to help adult readers perform the text may alter the character’s features, e.g. an exclamation mark may encourage adult readers to raise their voice to embellish the story, but it will remain at odds with the illustrations. An example can be found in *Look What I’ve Got* (1980) by Anthony Browne. A story of two boys, Jeremy and Sam, is a pretext for presenting the opposition between material and non-material spheres. Jeremy has lots of toys and material goods he boasts of, saying to his friend Sam: *Look what I’ve got!*, but Sam does not care, as for him the true wealth is his inner world. Sam’s indifference towards the wealth is signalled by the graphics: the boy is always presented with his hands in his pockets and his look directed straight ahead. In the text, he never responds to Jeremy’s provocations (*I bet you wish you had one*). Only at the end of the story, after rescuing his friend from various oppressions brought on by his own toys, Sam responds calmly: *No, not really*. This answer agrees with his personality. In the Italian translation by Adriana Rossi Stoffel *Guarda che cosa ho!* (1980), Sam’s final response, accompanied by an exclamation mark which makes adults raise their voice, comes across as ironic and rather aggressive: *Mica vero!* (Not true at all!).

The metalepses<sup>15</sup> frequently used by Anthony Browne, which strengthen the orality of his stories, were omitted in Italian translations, perhaps because in Italy the adult reader is viewed as less ready to play with the child. *Through the Magic Mirror* is an example of a text for a double reader<sup>16</sup> – a lot of intertextual allusions to Magritte’s paintings can be deciphered only by the adult. The story describes a fantastic journey of a bored child neglected by his parents. The magic mirror takes the boy to his own, but changed, town, and the narrator often invites the child reader to find strange details in the pictures (e.g. flying priests) by asking direct questions. In one illustration we can see Toby in the street in which his house stands, but there is a rainbow coming out of the wall of the house, a fish swimming in a window, a tree growing on the roof and a lot of other un-

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Genette (1976).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Shavit (1986) and O’Sullivan (2004).

usual details. The English text insists that the street “seemed like the same old street” and concludes with the question: “but was it?,” which the child should answer by pointing at the unusual elements. The Italian translation (published without the translator's name), entitled *Lo specchio magico* (1976), not only “domesticated” the layout, moving the text from right to left, in accordance with the traditional layout of illustrated books, but it also replaced the question with an assertion: *Sembrava la solita vecchia strada, ma forse non lo era* (It seemed the same old street, but maybe it wasn't).

Other changes were also introduced into the translation of this book, probably to help the read-aloud adult. On the double-spread showing Toby's return to everyday reality we can see a child looking for and eventually finding the mirror. The original deictic *Of course, there it was, right behind him* becomes in Italian an expression of surprise: *ah eccolo! Proprio dietro di lui*. The wording and the exclamation mark should make the adult point at the object: “Ah, there it is! Right behind him!”.

Another strategy to facilitate reading aloud consists in translating the characters' names. As Dollerup notes, “Names in children's books are frequently changed – sometimes one fails to see why. (...) but perhaps it has to do with readability in some subtle way” (2003: 94). Translators choose different solutions: in *Where the Wild Things Are*, Porta keeps the name of the character – Max – which is easy for an Italian reader to pronounce; in *Look What I've Got!* Sam remains Sam, but Jeremy changes into Tom; also Toby from *Through the Magic Mirror* becomes Tom in Italian. Translators either keep the original names or replace them with other English names which are easier to pronounce. The case of Bob Gill's *Ups and Downs* is particularly interesting: in the original, all residents of Ups are called “something Up,” for example, Cynthia Up or George Up or Terry Up or Elizabeth Up or Allison Up or Frank Up. In the translation, all the names were italianised: *Tutti i suoi abitanti, di cognome si chiamavano Su, come per esempio: Piero Su, Ugo Su o Raffaella Su*. The same happened to the people of Down/Giù. In this context, it seems even more unusual that the translator added a cultural reference to northern England: *Se non riesci a credere che una grossa e gonfia nuvolaccia nera possa stare tanto a lungo immobile nello stesso posto, non hai che da chiederlo a un qualsiasi abitante dell'Inghilterra del Nord* (If you can't imagine that an enormous fuzzy black cloud could hang around in one place for so long, just ask about this any citizen of northern England). Perhaps in this way she wanted

to compensate for the loss of the original cultural connotations the names introduced.

Another element that promotes reading aloud and shared fun while reading is onomatopoeia, in translation usually replaced by equivalents in the target language, even though – as Lathey asserts – the exoticising strategy might, in this case, stimulate the child’s interest and imagination: “it is common translation practice to use the conventional equivalent in the target language. I can’t help wondering, however, whether a more playful approach might catch children’s imaginations” (Lathey 2006: 183).

According to this general tendency, most of the Italian translations for the Emme publishing house replace the original onomatopoeias with their Italian counterparts. A characteristic example of the influence the image of the child reader has on the translator’s decisions is Michael Foreman’s *War and Peas* (1974), which, more directly than *Ups and Downs*, touches upon the subject of war.<sup>17</sup> It tells a story of a Lion King and his animal subjects, who are dying of hunger because of a long drought. The nearby territories, inhabited by people, abound in food. The Lion King decides to go with his Minister of Food and ask the rich human king for help, but the king orders to arrest them. They manage to escape from prison, but people chase them by tanks. Finally, the two heroes are saved by other animals’ cunning: through the use of peas (hence the pun between *peace* and *peas* in the title), and thanks to a providential rain, the animals gain victory over the army of men.

Not by accident the rich king is called *Fat King*. The illustrations show a fat man with a chubby face. In the text, his tendency to binge-eat and his frequent indigestion is signalled by an onomatopoeic *burrrp!* – Fat King suffers from a persistent (indicated by the three “r’s”) and loud (emphasized by the exclamation mark) hiccup. What is more, the onomatopoeic *burp* makes the child laugh: humour associated with human physiology is particularly favoured by children; moreover, it contributes to Bakhtin’s carnivalisation, the concept analysed by Oittinen (2000) in relation to children’s literature. The “indecent” laughter – to use Rodari’s modifier – has a liberating function and allows the child to “exorcise guilt” (1997: 132), “ease the tension, find balance with respect to the topic, break free from distressing experiences and neurotic theorisations” (1997: 129), because it springs from a genuine anxiety. However, as O’Sullivan writes, “it is those

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<sup>17</sup> “War was an area largely avoided by publishers around 1945 and for some time after. Modern picture books have broken this taboo” (Graham 1998: 78).

very depictions, and mention of parts of the body or physical actions which are considered improper, that are often cut in translation” (2004: 85). The Italian translation, entitled *Guerra e pasta* (War and pasta) did not differ in this respect: the original onomatopoeia was replaced by a more “becoming” *Ohibò*, indicating disgust and disapproval.

It can be concluded that the translations of picture books create not only a different image of the child recipient, but also a different image of the mediating adult reader, who needs help with the performance assumed in reading aloud. This phenomenon is typical of not only the first Italian translations of picture books published by Emme, but also the few translations produced by other publishers.

## Conclusions

In the 1980s, the Italian borders closed to the import of foreign productions and reopened only much later: it took about ten years for picture books and similar publications to reappear in Italy (often as reprints of earlier translations) – published by Babalibri, Rosellina Archinto's new publishing house, by Edizioni EL and the Einaudi publishing house, in the “Tantibambini” series. However, the negative effects of the initial rejection, probably caused by the fact that reading aloud was not a common practice and that more than half of the Italians above the age of six were illiterate even in the 1950s and 1960s (Boero, De Luca, 1995: 244–245), can still be felt. In 2004, Valentino Merletti wrote an article entitled *Il picture book, questo sconosciuto* (The Picture Book: An Unknown Species) highlighting the typical Italian ignorance of this literary genre. There are not many Italian versions of picture books: even such classics as *Rosie's Walk* and *Come Away From the Water, Shirley* have not been translated yet. Moreover, many of those rendered into Italian have disappeared from library catalogues:

The gap between the international production of quality picture books and their dissemination in Italy is still growing. Many titles and authors have never even been suggested to the Italian reader, the classics are disappearing from the directories, for no one has recognized them, others are maltreated and deprived of originality through improper printing procedures changing the layout: unfortunately, it is widely accepted to publish pocket-size, poor-quality paperbacks which, as a result, flit through the Italian market and have no chance to

stay there for good. Perhaps the reason for the slow popularization of picture books in Italy is precisely the lack of respect, attention, and habit to search for interesting and intellectually stimulating elements in children's books, too (Valentino Merletti 2004: 21).

The condition of translated children's literature, therefore, undermines the vision of the "republic of childhood" with no borders or customs duties. Transferring children's books to other languages turns out a complicated journey: here the image of childhood in a given society as well as the assumptions about the child's cognitive abilities and about "appropriateness" play a fundamental role. In the case of picture books, one more important factor has to be added – the adult who reads to the child and acts as the only mediator between the child and the book.

**trans. Magdalena Buchta**

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