

# Margherita Zoebeli from Zurich to Rimini. A life devoted to childhood

Edited by

Dorena Caroli, Tiziana Pironi, Ilaria Bellucci,  
Monica Maioli, Mara Sorrentino



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# Transnational History of Education and Civilizations

directed by Dorena Caroli

Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna

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This series of volumes aims to publish monographs or collective volumes, both in Italian and other languages, concerning the history of pedagogy as widely understood within the Italian university field M-Ped/02. The studies will address issues that include the history of pedagogical ideas, education and educational institutions in general, and, in particular, preschool institutions and children's literature. Particular attention will be devoted to transnational and comparative dimensions of the educational problems and to pedagogical transfers of the past, which allows us to grasp the circulation of educational models and reciprocal influences at an institutional and cultural level. The multiple approaches of cultural history will also be adopted for the interpretation of the educational reforms and institutions of the different historical periods.

*The volumes are subjected to double-blind review.*

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AFP</b>	Archivio Fotografico dei Positivi della Raccolta storica della Biblioteca civica Gambalunga di Rimini (Photographic Archive of the Positive of the Historical Collection of the Gambalunga Public Library of Rimini)
<b>AMG</b>	Allied Military Government
<b>AMZ</b>	Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive)
<b>BGR</b>	Biblioteca civica Gambalunga, Rimini (Gambalunga Public Library)
<b>CEIS</b>	Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre)
<b>CEMB</b>	Centro Educazione Musicale di Base, Rimini (Basic Music Education Centre)
<b>CEMEA</b>	Centri di Esercitazione ai Metodi dell' Educazione Attiva (Active Education Methods Training Centres)
<b>CEPAS</b>	Centro di Educazione Professionale per Assistenti Sociali (Centre for Professional Education for Social Workers)
<b>CIDEF</b>	Centro di Innovazione, di Documentazione Educativa e di Formazione (Centre for Innovation, Educational Documentation and Training)
<b>CIRSE</b>	Centro Italiano per la Ricerca Storico-Educativa (Italian Centre for Historical Research in Education)
<b>CLN</b>	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (National Liberation Committee)
<b>CTS</b>	Cooperativa della Tipografia a Scuola (Typography at School Cooperative)
<b>DSS</b>	Dizionario Storico della Svizzera (Historical Dictionary of Switzerland)
<b>ECA</b>	Ente Comunale di Assistenza (Municipal Assistance Agency)
<b>ENAOLI</b>	Ente Nazionale Assistenza Orfani dei Lavoratori Italiani (National Board of Orphan Assistance for Italian Workers)
<b>ETH</b>	Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology)
<b>FICE</b>	Fédération Internationale des Communautés d' Enfants (International Federation of Children's Communities)
<b>FIER</b>	Fédération Internationale des Enseignants de Rythmique (International Federation of Eurhythmics Teachers)
<b>ICEM</b>	Institut Coopératif de l' École Moderne (Cooperative Institute of the Modern School)

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<b>IRPA</b>	Istituto Regionale per l'Apprendimento (Regional Institute for Learning)
<b>IRRSAE</b>	Istituto Regionale di Ricerca e Sperimentazione e Aggiornamento Educativi (Regional Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation and Update)
<b>ISF</b>	Internationale Socialiste des Femmes (Socialist International Women)
<b>ISME</b>	International Society for Music Education
<b>JLR</b>	Jeunesse Laïque Républicaine (Republican Lay Youth)
<b>MCE</b>	Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (Movement of Cooperative Education)
<b>MZ</b>	Margherita Zoebeli
<b>ONAIR</b>	Opera Nazionale di Assistenza all'Italia Redenta (National Work of Assistance to Redeemed Italy)
<b>ONMI</b>	Opera Nazionale per la protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia (National Maternity and Child Protection Organisation)
<b>OSEO</b>	Oeuvre Suisse d'Entraide Ouvrière (Swiss Workers' Mutual Aid Society)
<b>SAH/SOS</b>	Schweizerisches Arbeiterhilfswerk / Soccorso Operaio Svizzero (Swiss Worker's Relief Organisation)
<b>SCI</b>	Servizio Civile Internazionale (International Civil Service)
<b>SEPEG</b>	Semaines Internationales d'Études pour l'enfance victime de la Guerre (International Weeks of Study for Children Victims of War)
<b>SIA</b>	Solidarité Internationale Antifasciste (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity)
<b>SIEM</b>	Società Italiana per l'Educazione Musicale (Italian Society for Music Education)
<b>SIFF</b>	Switzerland International Film Festival
<b>SOS/SAH</b>	Soccorso Operaio Svizzero / Schweizerisches Arbeiterhilfswerk (Swiss Worker's Relief Organisation)
<b>SSK</b>	Schweizer Spende an die Kriegsgeschädigten (Swiss Donation for the Victims of War)
<b>UDI</b>	Unione Donne in Italia (Italian Women's Union)
<b>UIPE</b>	Union Internationale de Protection de l'Enfance (International Union for Child Protection)
<b>UISE</b>	Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants (International Union for Child Relief)
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNRRA</b>	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
<b>USPD</b>	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)

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## We renew our greetings... a few months later

Maurizio Fabbri and Ira Vannini

With the Conference *Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996). One hundred and ten years after her birth. A life for active pedagogy at the service of childhood*, a new season of collaboration opened between the Department of Educational Sciences “Giovanni Maria Bertin” of the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, CEIS – Italian-Swiss Educational Centre and the Zoebeli Foundation of Rimini.

We are pleased to bring our greetings to the Conference, on the Rimini Campus, and we again thank the promoters Dorena Caroli and Tiziana Pironi, who masterfully organized the days of study dedicated to the figure of Margherita Zoebeli, a very significant Italian pedagogist in the history of post-World War II Italian pedagogy, who can also be considered one of the main female figures of twentieth-century pedagogy.

Already in the past, thanks to various professors of our Department of Educational Sciences – deeply committed and involved in the CEIS and Foundation project – and thanks to the intense activity of Andrea Canevaro, the collaboration with the Italian-Swiss Educational Centre had been significant and fruitful. We are convinced that such collaboration can still find energies for shared planning today, in the dual perspective of contributing to the educational quality of the territory and to the quality of the training of future educators and designers of Rimini curricula. In this direction, it is worth mentioning the start of a new phase, with the establishment of a working group, composed of faculty members from the Department of Educational Sciences “Giovanni Maria Bertin” and teachers and educators from CEIS, aimed at revitalizing the traditional relationships of dialogue, collaboration and planning: relationships formalized by the renewal of the agreement between CEIS and the Department.

The special institutional attention with which the conference was surrounded fills us with confidence for the development of our Department within the Rimini Campus. Again, we want to thank the Mayor of Rimini Jamil Sadegholvaad, the Magnificent Rector Giovanni Molari, and the Vice

Rector for Teaching and Education Roberto Vecchi for the words they dedicated during the Conference to a common project within the educational system and services of the Romagna territory. A heartfelt thank you to Alessia Mariotti, President of the Rimini Campus Board, for supporting this conference with particular organizational efficiency and care in relationships. We are still grateful to our colleagues Roberta Biolcati and Dario Tuorto, directors, respectively, of the Second Cycle Degree in *Planning and managing of educational intervention in social distress* and of the First Cycle Degree in *Expert in Social and Cultural Education*, for their commitment in this part of Romagna, distant only geographically from the Bologna Department. The active participation and interest of the students made all of us confident of the development and professional potential they themselves will benefit from within the vibrant and supportive territory of Romagna.

Margherita Zoebeli's ideas and pedagogical practices can, even more so today, be considered an important source of inspiration for all those who work in the field of education: educators and planners, trainers, teachers, territorial actors, policy makers and the civil community, who are facing the challenges of a complex and problematic present for children and young people, especially where there are conditions of inequality and social hardship. We have a very strong responsibility to guide educational policies and practices in our territories, in order to accompany all young people towards balanced paths of growth, development of critical awareness, and experiences oriented towards respect for others, democratic citizenship and active participation.

Just as Marguerite Zoebeli was able to deal with the problems of children affected by the traumas of war, educators today unfortunately also face dramatic problems that primarily affect the younger generation. Educational poverty, migration of minors, flight from wars, domestic and gender-based violence are huge issues that afflict us and urge us to deploy all our planning energies and pedagogical skills to identify some, small but invaluable, way out, even more so by looking to the example of the great women of our history, their strength, courage and political and social commitment.

We hope that, thanks to this Conference, the work of Margherita Zoebeli, who arrived in Rimini on December 17, 1945, and founded a Children's Village that was and still is a model of educational commitment, will be increasingly analyzed, studied, and deepened with critical awareness and historical intelligence, so as to offer a reference model for the educational professions. Our best wishes go to the Students who have chosen this difficult and beautiful profession, both challenging and generous, which is constantly confronted with a reality that changes abruptly and tends to get ahead of the times with the commitment gathered in projects of transformation and growth.

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# Narrative horizons at the CEIS in Rimini: a long history of books, stories, active teaching and young authors

William Grandi

## 1. Finding a treasure map in the archives: the 1947 list of CEIS books

This contribution offers only a partial presentation of a broader topic, and here we investigate just a few of the potential elements of the very complex issue of the relationship between children's literature and the educational model fostered by Margherita Zoebeli. Here, priority has been given to "seminal" factors, in the sense that these points can lead to broader and more in-depth research in future.

It should be noted that the historical and pedagogic research methodology adopted is linked to narrative analysis, according to Antonio Faeti's hermeneutic lesson: this investigative approach invites us to cross-reference archive documents and historical sources with children's narrative texts in order to identify a framework of significant pedagogic meanings.

The first element on which we should focus our attention is the presence of children's literature at the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre, CEIS) right from the outset, as demonstrated by a precious archive document of the Italian-Swiss Centre dated 1947, just after its foundation<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, the second element to be tackled concerns the stories and fables produced directly by teachers and children at the CEIS, later published in pamphlets and small volumes. In this case, the topics, pathways and origins of a special teaching method for narrative texts and stories for children are described.

The two focuses of this contribution therefore concern both the origins of the CEIS and its past and present educational pathways.

<sup>1</sup> In this regard, I would like to thank my colleague Dorena Caroli, who generously indicated the above-mentioned documentation, thus facilitating my investigation of its contents.

We will start from the first part of this research, the eight-page CEIS list of children's books, contained in a specific folder in the Margherita Zoebeli Archive<sup>2</sup>. This list, entitled «Books for children and adolescents» is given in a precious, ordered and meticulous type-written report. The book titles are grouped into six categories: the first five correspond to the related primary school classes, while the last has the generic title of "Adolescence". Each group lists the related books in alphabetical order according to the surname of the author, in line with the conventional bibliographical system. The list for year-1 primary classes has 18 books, year-2 has 26, year-3 50 books, year-4 42, year-5 64 and, finally, there is a list of 60 books for adolescent readers, a total of exactly 260 books. Considering the state of the city of Rimini after the terrible Second World War bombings, the number of books the CEIS put at the disposal of children can be deemed impressive.

Browsing through the list, it is clear that most books are by national authors, although there is a considerable and significant presence of foreign classic writers, including Jules Verne and Mark Twain.

The list does not give the year of publication of the books, merely their author, title and publisher. To generically understand the period in which these books were published, we therefore have to use bibliographical research methods. First of all, it should be noted that many of the books were published by Marzocco, along with the famous UTET children's series "La scala d'oro" (The Golden Staircase) and the Paravia collection "I bei libri" (Nice Books). Precisely in this regard, therefore, it is worth giving some other publishing data which can more accurately date the CEIS book collection. First of all, the Marzocco publishers rose from the ashes of Bemporad (which had to change its company organisation following the Italian racial laws of 1938) and this dates a significant number of the books published just before the start of World War II. The "La scala d'oro" books were published from the start of the collection itself, in 1932, and many of them were reprinted in the early Forties. Similarly, the books in the Paravia "I bei libri" series were also reprinted in the early Forties. Based on this evidence, we can reasonably state that a significant part of the CEIS book collection was fairly recent in those years, and therefore, quite modern for the times. Furthermore, the presence of many Marzocco, Utet and Paravia editions (as well as some from Mondadori, Vallecchi and SEI) allow us to understand the very high quality of the printing, graphics and contents of these books. At the time, these publishers were among the best in the children's narrative sector; the price of the Utet "La scala d'oro" and Paravia "I bei libri" book collections were not for every pocket, as the quality of the paper, the illus-

<sup>2</sup> *Libri per l'infanzia e per l'adolescenza*, 1947, book catalogue (unknown recipient), in *Atti e carteggi relativi al Ceis*, AMZ, file 18.

trations and even the book binding, with rigid covers, were obviously intended for a wealthy clientèle. In fact, these collections were for upper class children, as Antonio Faeti remarks, for example, in relation to “La scala d’oro”<sup>3</sup>. The idea that these lovely books – lovely still today, according to our modern criteria – could finally also reach a broader audience of children through small school libraries is something that touches deep pedagogic chords, especially if we think of the widespread poverty in Rimini after the war.

This thus pushes our hypothesis to bolder fields, trying to understand the provenance of these books. It is difficult – though not impossible – to image the books being purchased, but it is more likely that they were donated or recovered from private or public collections that were perhaps lost or dispersed as a result of the war. This theory may be supported by the fact that, out of the 260 books, at least 13 (5% of the total) have no indication of the publisher, as if they had no cover, and so this was assumed merely from the contents of the surviving pages. The lack of an indication of the publisher cannot be due merely to an oversight of the person drafting the list; as we have said, the list was drafted meticulously and always precisely indicates the name of the publisher. If a book has been printed by more than one publisher, this information is given faithfully in the list. The fact that several books have no indication of the publisher makes us think of recovered copies, with incomplete layouts and no bindings. And this is quite understandable: in emergency situations – and Rimini was in just that in 1947 – even partial or slightly damaged books could easily have been accepted for the school shelves in order to offer children interesting books to read. But the matter in any case deserves further investigation.

Now let’s take a look at the quality of the narrative choices for each age group. The books proposed to year-1 children are mostly poetry collections or short stories and fairy tales. The most represented authors are Milly Dandolo – stories – and Lina Schwarz – poetry, with three books each. But other important children’s authors of the time were also well represented on the shelves, including Maria Tibaldi Chiesa and Gherardo Ugolini (along with a classic like *La Fontaine*). One thing is striking: as children’s literature scholars well know, the “La scala d’oro” collection meticulously indicated the target age of each publication in the series. Curiously, the person who drafted this catalogue didn’t always follow the publishers’ suggestions: *Piccoli racconti* by Milly Dandolo and *Le storie meravigliose* by Mary Tibaldi Chiesa were recommended by the curators of the collection for seven-year-

<sup>3</sup> A. Faeti, *L’oasi nel salotto, iconografia e industria culturale negli anni Trenta*, in R. Barilli (ed.), *Gli Anni Trenta. Arte e cultura in Italia*, Milano, Mazzotta, 1982, pp. 435-440.

olds, while in this list the two books are intended for year-1 children, so younger. What could have pushed them to make a different choice to the publisher's recommendation? It was probably due to a lack of specific books for the six-year age group. After all, these books were not impossible for a child who has just begun to read to use, perhaps accompanied by an adult. This divergence, perhaps due to the lack of available texts, is also confirmed by the fact that the two books mentioned are also in the list for year-2 readers.

With regard to the list of books for year-2, it should be noted that these also include *Pinocchio* by Collodi, a few books of poems set in nature by the writer and translator Rosa Fumagalli and a couple of books by the canon Christoph von Schmid, offering a selection of his short stories written specifically for schools. This is particularly interesting, as the Bavarian priest was a key figure across Europe for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with his books for primary school readers. With specific pedagogic intentions, von Schmid<sup>4</sup> had structured his own narrative genre for children based on encouraging, curious and therefore stimulating short stories with an explicit ethical and educational lesson or moral at the end. Incidentally, the Bavarian canon's literary and educational action was clearly influenced by the pedagogic thought of Pestalozzi. While today von Schmid has been – perhaps too superficially and hastily – forgotten, it should be noted that his works were commonly featured in school reading lists at least up to the 1950s. It is equally important to note that – as explained – von Schmid was in many aspects one of the most important authors of short stories for schools. His stories were renowned for their lightning-fast plots and often disconcerting, yet educational, conclusions; the origins of this children's genre lie in Enlightenment, with some even older roots, but this narrative form has in any case undergone significant changes over time, as far as Gianni Rodari's *Telephone Tales*. But we also find traces of this touching and concise narrative form in the children's literature productions of the CEIS in recent years, bearing witness to the interesting continuity between educational practices and the history of children's narrative genres.

Returning to our typed lists, we see that year-3 pupils are offered many of the great classics, including Andersen's fairy tales, novels by Maeterlinck and Vamba, as well as the fables of Capuana, Paola Lombroso Carrara, the Brothers Grimm, Perrault and Gozzano. Without however forgetting that the list also contained a mythological adaptation for children of Hawthorne, Ki-

<sup>4</sup> W. Grandi, *Prima dei Grimm, per madri e per bambini. Il romanzo "Genoveffa di Brabante" (1810) del canonico Christoph von Schmid (1768-1854) tra fiaba, leggenda, scuola e letteratura per l'infanzia*, in «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 27 (2020), pp. 208-222.

pling's animal stories and, once again, another book by von Schmid. All in all, a selection composed mainly of fantastic stories and fairy tales by famous and important authors.

The list for year-4 pupils includes a few popular science books such as those by Pierina Boranga<sup>5</sup>, an authentic pioneer of this genre at the time, and *Ciondolino [The Prince and his Ants]* by Vamba. Also in this case, there are other great classics, including Alcott's *Little Women*, Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and De Amicis's *Cuore [Heart]*<sup>6</sup>. There are also several collections of fairy tales, including some from foreign (Finnish, Russian and Indian) traditions. Elements of fantasy still prevail, but realistic and popular readings also begin to be proposed.

The collection of books for year-5 pupils includes interesting adaptations of mythology for children, by authors including Laura Cantoni Orvieto, Giannino Marescalchi and Olga Visentini. This was probably to comply with a tradition that was very common in Italian schools from 1923 (the year of the Gentile school reform) and supported by the pedagogue Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, who thought it necessary to offer children Greek and Roman myths in primary school with a view to the potential access by some of these pupils to the grammar schools<sup>7</sup>. The list also includes a limited yet important collection of popular science books. But for the last year of primary school, the list also has a significant number of classic children's literature books, including *The Paul Street Boys* by Molnar, *Misunderstood* by Montgomery, *Captains Courageous* by Kipling, *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* by Lagerlof, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Twain and many others besides. This presence of classics seems to mark a moment of passage: the child-reader is no longer merely the recipient of light, curious, entertaining or educational stories but – on the threshold of adolescence – also becomes the recipient of complex plots, engagingly emotional twists and narrative viewpoints that are not always comforting.

Again, to confirm this, the list for adolescent readers has many interesting classic titles, including the novels by Dickens, London, Stevenson, Malot, Kipling, Vamba and Verne. There is also a significant presence of popular science and technical books, including *Il bel paese (The Beautiful Country)*

<sup>5</sup> L. Todaro, *Bambini e natura nella pedagogia italiana del Novecento: l'opera innovatrice di Pierina Boranga*, in «Pedagogia Oggi», 1 (2018), pp. 229-245.

<sup>6</sup> For a critical, historical and narrative framework of these classics of children's literature and others discussed here – also in relation to their pedagogic and educational impacts – see A. Nobile, *Letteratura giovanile. Da Pinocchio e Peppa Pig*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> G. Lombardo Radice, *Accanto ai maestri. Nuovi saggi di propaganda pedagogica*, Torino, Paravia, 1925, pp. 233-234.

by the priest and scientist Antonio Stoppani, and yet another book by von Schmid. Poetry is almost entirely absent. Finally, it is curious to note, but only up to a point, the presence of classics of Unification of Italy literature including *Ettore Fieramosca* by D'Azeglio and *Da Quarto al Voltorno (From Quarto to Voltorno)* by Giuseppe Cesare Abba: the tragedy of the second world war had not deleted a certain tradition of Italian history and civil education, recovered after the war, with the intention of opposing the fanatic chauvinism of fascism with the popular and liberal patriotism of the democratic Unification.

The choices made in drafting this list of books, grouped together by school years, respond to quite common criteria for the time, such as the inclusion of poems and fairy tales especially for early readers. The impression we have when scrolling through these sheets is the desire to offer stories that are compatible not only with the children's age but also their educational and aesthetic needs: a pedagogic lean to reading that bore witness to the significant educational commitment that still today marks the CEIS's work.

## 2. Active education and narrative creation

Now we come to the second point in this investigation, which is to analyse the narrative products designed and produced by the teachers and children at the CEIS. This is an initial reconnaissance of a field that promises to be very interesting and extensive. The basis for this analysis is a body of texts composed by: *Michka. Una fiaba di Natale (Michka. A Christmas Fairytale)*<sup>8</sup>, freely adapted by the year-3 pupils at the CEIS in 1985; *Il leone e il topo (The Lion and the Mouse)* written by Dalila Iacobucci (teacher at the CEIS) in 1999, as a leitmotiv for the year-1 activities, then illustrated by the pupils; *Il vecchio pioppo (The old Poplar)* written by Francesco Franco and illustrated by Maria Laura Zanzani (both teachers at the CEIS) for year-1 pupils in school year 2001/02; *Margherita. Una storia da raccontare (Margherita. A Story to Tell)* written by teachers and children at the CEIS (and illustrated by the children) in school year 2015/16; finally, *Rimi*, from an English text translated into Italian by teachers and collaborators of the CEIS in 2020 and illustrated by the children at the centre.

These are light books, designed autonomously and printed by small local printers, specifically for a child audience: they are therefore characterised by visual and typographic details suited to this kind of use, including, for

<sup>8</sup> Children from year-3, CEIS, *Michka. Una fiaba di Natale*, Rimini, Maggioli Editore, 1986. It is noted that the book is accompanied by an interesting preface by Flavio Nicolini.

example, large pictures, large, well-defined fonts, short, clear texts, colours and images taken explicitly from children's drawings. It is worth underlining that the genesis – or at least the underlying inspiration – of most of these texts and contents can clearly be traced back to an active and collaborative narrative production based on the model of Freinet, who had demonstrated the limits of textbooks imposed from above, instead opting for the self-production of stories and contents, also using school printing tools for printing them in class for this purpose. The creation and re-working of stories in a collaborative, non-competitive setting, through a “hands-on” approach to the construction not only of the story and related illustrations, but also the actual page layout, paint a picture of the teaching of the approach to children's literature (often actively created by the children themselves) that falls fully within the active teaching and group work climate of Freinet's pedagogy. These CEIS books also appear to always come (in their apparently naïve yet concrete and well-studied form) from group works, collaborative activities in the classroom, where the individual – whether teacher or pupil – does not emerge as such but only in as much as connected to the work of colleagues and classmates in a joint creative act that allows the child to be educated in a spirit of peace and tolerance<sup>9</sup>. Not by chance, Freinet was one of the leading pedagogic lights ministering the CEIS experience from the outset.

In purely literary terms, most of these stories fall in a specific field which has always been very close to the child's imagination, that of the narrative universe of the moral parable derived from fairy tales. In fact, the protagonists of these stories relate to the world of ancient fables and fairy tales, but are not merely relics of the past; the characters created by the children and teachers at the CEIS are interwoven with emotions and intentions that do not fade into manneristic sentimentalism, in a narrative cliché of yesteryear or an astounded yet detached adventure, but instead acquire, throughout the stories, a different, updated, participatory consistency, in line with the imaginative – and often ethical – urgencies of these young, contemporary narrators. And thus, the many animals and plants starring in these stories revised by the CEIS, as well as the children and the toys, the divergent adults and surprising objects crossing and animating these pages of self-produced narrations, have new profiles, able to satisfy the imagination of a child thirsty for goodness, justice and peace. To the disenchanted and perhaps cynical adult gaze, the simple search for love, happiness and generosity that animate these stories may seem naïve: but the CEIS children's books are not made

<sup>9</sup> C. De Maria, *Introduzione. Per una biografia di Margherita Zoebeli*, in De Maria (ed.), *Intervento sociale e azione educativa. Margherita Zoebeli nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, Clueb, 2012, p. 9.

to confirm prejudices, rather to break through the scepticism and let in a ray of sunshine, spring and utopian energy.

These narrations tell of the “untimely”, and pedagogically speaking this category (the “untimely”)<sup>10</sup> leads to all those necessary and very profound acts that can counter the wear of time: and thus, for example, dominating egoism is juxtaposed with the total altruism of the little bear Michka, who in a fairy tale by the children at the CEIS renounces his new-found freedom and returns to being a simple stuffed toy for a poor child to play with.

Similarly, general ingratitude is juxtaposed with the courage of Pasticchia the mouse, who in an explicitly Aesopian fable saves the lion Maone from an attacking gladiator, because years earlier the lion had freed the young mouse. Or again, the contemporary forgetfulness that burns every memory on the altar of ephemeral novelty is juxtaposed with the old poplar tree that stars in another CEIS story: a story in which precisely that tree – which once really existed – reminds of the birth of the Italian-Swiss centre in which it was planted in 1945; and that poplar reminds of the happy cries of both the first children and the more recent pupils; and again, the poplar reminds us of the passing seasons and the cycles of the sun and the moon, up until, with serene calmness, it reminds of the moment in which – sick – it was cut down, only its trunk remaining for the children to embrace and play on. Nothing gets wasted at the CEIS.

These written works of the CEIS also become documentation and testimonial, sharing and dialogue: this is the case of *Margherita. Una storia da raccontare*, the result of the historical reconstruction by teachers and children with a view to caring for the present while recognising the past, embodied by the will, devotion and commitment of Margherita Zoebeli. The book is a charming and accurate mosaic of fragments of the history of the CEIS and its founder: from the tough beginnings to present and future educational horizons. These are fragments of history and of stories that are offered by former teachers and pupils of the CEIS, in an inter-generational dialogue with the new teachers and pupils, seeking to reconstruct an educational path that has challenged time and continues to remain a model today. The crumbs of memory and facts match perfectly, like an ideal mosaic in which, with simple words designed for children and often written by children, we breathe the history of an adventure that, even before pedagogic, is human. It is perhaps not by chance that the children’s drawings accompanying many of the texts were produced using the pointillism technique that creates a complex image from many coloured frag-

<sup>10</sup> G.M. Bertin, *Nietzsche. L'inattuale, idea pedagogica (Nietzsche. The Untimely, a pedagogical Idea)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1977, p. 2.

ments placed alongside each other, charming mosaics composed by the children's hands.

And finally, the both happy and touching story of *Rimi*, the puppet made for the children at the CEIS, but which ended up among the children of a school in Philadelphia, deserves a mention. The story, written by the US children's author Daisy Newman (1905-1994), a Quaker, tells of the adventures of the puppet Rimi (like Rimini) who, after having enjoyed the laughter and attention of the children at the CEIS, was sent overseas as a gift for the Friends' Center School (a Quaker primary school) where some American children, who had been very generous with their Italian peers, were studying. *Rimi* is a modern Pinocchio, less of a mischief-maker but equally enterprising, able to demonstrate universal brotherhood among children who share the same desires for peace, joy and affection. The book shows the English text alongside the Italian adaptation with large, coloured and tidy print, suited for use by children. The words are accompanied by the drawings of the children from the CEIS (from nursery to primary school) who lightly and precisely interpret the different parts of the story. The artisanal graphic layout is easy and pleasantly off-scale, just as happens in the pupils' writing books. We can also see the encounter of narration and creativity, educational presence and children's spontaneity, in this book.

This "artisanal" narrative production, born among the wooden houses of Margherita's school in Rimini, carries our minds to other similar innovative experiences of children's writing in our country. First of all, we need think only of the notebooks of the school in San Gersolè, Tuscany, run by the teacher Maria Maltoni (1890-1964) and, secondly, also the stories produced in the school in Vho, Lombardy, by the teacher Mario Lodi (1922-2014)<sup>11</sup>.

The ideal line joining Maltoni, Lodi and Zoebeli is clearly visible in this pedagogic activism – bound to a perspective of radical renewal in the way of "doing school" – in which the self-production of texts by the pupils is one of its most interesting expressions. On one hand, Maltoni's experience can be considered one of the ideal sources of educational experimentation immediately after the war in the nearby Pestalozzi city-school in Florence (not by chance, this school shares similar educational horizons to those of the CEIS). On the other, Lodi's work in the school in Vho is profoundly linked to the work of the MCE (Educational Cooperation Movement), whose educational offerings have represented and still today continue to represent one of the operational sources of the educational structure founded by Margherita Zoebeli. Both the notebooks in San Gersolè and the books in Vho were published by the prestigious Turin-based publisher Einaudi: there was even an anthology of Maria Maltoni's pupils' notebooks that had the privilege of

<sup>11</sup> M. Lodi e i suoi alunni, *Cipi*, Turin, Einaudi, 1972.

being prefaced by Italo Calvino<sup>12</sup>. Such an important publishing house underlines the interest that not only the school context but more generally the Italian intellectual world paid to this new way of creating books, stories, texts and contents for children, with children and starting from children.

The interesting thing is that this precious education tradition has not been lost. Indeed, these vital methods of connecting children's creativity with narration are still used at the CEIS today. As we have seen browsing the texts of the school in Rimini – but equally easy to understand by reading the books produced in the classrooms in San Gersolè and Vho, – the teacher is not a passive spectator of what the children produce, nor the unseen director of these stories. Adults are rather the connectors of thoughts, those who collect the stories triggered through questions, dialogues, curious facts, gazes, fragments of meanings and memories and feed them back to the groups of children. This is a two-way project between teachers and pupils, a work that seeks its meaning starting from the concrete life of childhood. These simple, original and yet so surprising narrative projects reveal an every-day life made of close observations, imagination, play and, at times, even drama. Emerging from those stories is an image of childhood that is far from superficial and banal: the childhood in the schools of Maltoni, Zoebeli and Lodi is thoughtful, attentive to detail, capable of wonder and the discovery of great knowledge in small things. We can say with some degree of certainty that in the CEIS's short stories – as well as those from San Gersolè, Vho and all the other many Italian schools that have adopted these methods – there is a little of the childhood heart: this is an "Aristotelian" heart, made not only of emotions and sentiment but, as the ancient philosopher stated, composed also of intelligence and soul. Reading these little stories, we discover the tensions, curiosities and reasons that amaze children and which their teachers are able to gather with respectful attention.

This short journey among the children's books of the CEIS offers new possibilities for research: it would in fact be useful to verify – investigating the decades of life of this school – which elements of continuity and discontinuity marked the relationship between educational design and children's narration. That is to say, it would be necessary to survey the bookshelves that the children of the Centre have had at their disposal, and created themselves, during almost eighty years of activity. This mix of children's books and self-produced narration is also worth investigating to see how the former influenced the latter and, obviously, how the latter determined any criteria for selecting the former. The CEIS has shown a strong awareness of its own educational pathways, and this must inevitably have impacted its choice of

<sup>12</sup> I. Calvino, *Prefazione*, in M. Maltoni (ed.), *I quaderni di San Gersolè*, Turin, Einaudi, 1959, pp. 5-8.

children's literature. This research hypothesis deserves to be investigated further, as the work done in this school represents a very precious pedagogic experience also for other schools. Understanding how the approach to children's books and stories has matured in Rimini can help to better design the related educational action elsewhere.

To conclude, it is clear that the CEIS is also a place of tales, stories and narrations, a place of plots and books to be discovered. But above all, it is a place where the narrated stories are created and unfold in the children's hands, for an education that looks to a better tomorrow.

Translated by Julie Woody



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The main objective of the conference (18-19 November 2022) was to study, through archival documents, the valuable work carried out by the Swiss educator and teacher, who moved to Rimini after the Second World War. Thanks to Margherita Zoebeli and her national and international contacts, the Villaggio Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village) she founded, later the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero di Rimini (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS), became a true workshop of active pedagogy in the immediate post-World War II period.

The contributions focus on the pedagogical and educational value of her choices, considered in the context of the time, while also trying to highlight their relevance for today's training of educators and teachers, a training that is becoming increasingly important in view of the new challenges and emergencies that education has to face.

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