

## FROM THE EDITORS

The 21<sup>st</sup> issue of *Children's Readings* is not the first issue of our journal devoted to the links between Russian children's literature and other national children's literature. Studies on Scandinavian children's literature, on Russian-German contacts in the sphere of publishing and literature for children, on Chinese, and more broadly Eastern, literature for children and young people have been presented in the pages of *Children's Readings* in different years. The peculiarity of this issue is that it is entirely devoted to the Russian-Italian relations in children's literature and created jointly with our Italian colleagues. The focus of research interest is the range of works that have managed to cross the borders of national literature, factors influencing their success on a different national ground, processes of cultural transfer and reception of Italian children's literature in Russia and Russian children's literature in Italy.

In contrast to the study of English and German influences on Russian children's literature, Italian connections have rarely come into the focus of research in both Russia and Italy. Meanwhile, cultural contacts between Italy and Russia have developed and strengthened over the past three centuries. One of the most important examples is the success with Russian readers of Edmondo De Amicis' story *Serditse* (*The Heart*) (1886) at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Russian literature at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century entered the circle of books addressed by publishers to Italian young people with works written for adult readers, such as Ivan Krylov's fables, Russian folktales collected and arranged for children's reading by Alexander Afanasiev, and Alexander Pushkin's tales and novels.

Russian classical and Soviet literature gains a new impulse of popularity in Italy in the 1920s, when the first Slavonic chairs were opened at different universities and when Russian emigrants of the "first wave" began to actively cooperate with the Italian cultural figures. During this period the Soviet Union undertook a major translation of world classics into Russian, among which Italian literature featured prominently. One of the most significant phenomena in children's literature is the creation by Aleksey Tolstoy of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, based on Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* — a telling example of the transfer of a children's book hero and his ideological domestication in Soviet culture.

The material presented in the column "Archive" shows exactly which Russian literature crossed the cultural border into Italy in the 1920s,

becoming the subject of reflection by the professional community — children’s writers, educators, translators and publishers. Fragments taken from books by Giuseppe Fanciulli (1881–1951), Olindo Giacobbe (1880–1950), Maria Tibaldi-Chiesa (1896–1968) and Olga Vicentini (1893–1961) provide a cross-section of Russian literature, partly translated and adapted for children by Italian popularizers, with the main focus on folktales and classic authors’ works not originally intended for children (Alexander Pushkin, Vasily Zhukovsky, Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, Fedor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Pavel Melnikov-Pechersky, Anton Chekhov, Ivan Shmelev, Alexander Kuprin and others). Interestingly, this approach coincides with the practice of forming a circle of children’s reading in Russia, where the works of the same writers were actively adapted for children, sometimes to such an extent that the ‘adult’ addressee of the work was at some point lost, as was the case, for example, with Pushkin’s tales, which since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century publishers and teachers have classified as ‘children’s literature’. Children’s literature as such is introduced by a cursory description of popular Russian children’s writers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: from the well-known Lidiya Charskaya and Dmitry Mamin-Sibiriyak to the now forgotten Mikhail Chistyakov, Aleksandra Yefimenko, Petr Krasnov, Tatiana Shchepkina-Kupernik, including authors who wrote for children in exile (Sasha Cherniy, Evgeny Elachich). The material in this section is interesting not only as evidence of the construction of a view on Russian children’s literature in the Italian pedagogical and popularizing discourse of the first half of the twentieth century, but also as a demonstration of the development of expert thought. In this way the authors of Italian textbooks on children’s literature and Russian pre-revolutionary pedagogical criticism conceptually coincide: experts expect children’s literature to have an educational effect, a focus on “moral education”, a narrative which would be written in “simple, lively, and truthful language” [Chiesa]. Giuseppe Fanciulli, one of the first to write about Russian children’s literature, tries to define its national originality, seeing it in the exceptional attention to the educational value of the literary word, in the “abundance of imagination, drama and subtlety of observations, colourful and fascinating style” [Fanciulli].

As we can see, familiarity with the literary process of other national children’s literature is always uneven, influenced by a variety of heterogeneous factors (not the least of which is the role of chance). For example, in Russia in the second half of the twentieth century, the work of Gianni Rodari was more popular, which was due not only to the artistic merits of his prose and poetry, but also to his political position. Cipollino, the

protagonist of the story of the same name, is today the only character of Italian children's literature integrated into the Russian reading culture, known to Russian readers of different generations. The authors whose books became the subjects of cultural transfer (Carlo Collodi, Aleksey Tolstoy, Rodari), the history of their texts ("The Adventures of Pinocchio", "Buratino", "Cipollino"), the history of cultural reception of little-known works (Wamba's story "The Little Tail"), translations, publishing and promotion of Russian books in Italy for children — the range of research questions addressed by this issue. Despite the importance of children's poetry in the literary space of twentieth-century Russia, in Italy this genre is poorly represented and even less well studied. In this context, the analysis devoted to translations of Russian poetry into Italian acquires greater relevance.

Contemporary world children's literature and its trends are described in an article about the Bologna Book Fair. The Bologna Book Fair is the largest international book forum specifically for the presentation of children's books from different countries. The attention of Russian publishers and experts in children's books is traditionally very high (Children's Reading has already published Bologna book fair reviews). The present review is about picture books and graphic novels, called 'silent books', which have gained popularity among the expert community at the Bologna Book Fair, because they show a new language of children's books, allowing to talk about taboo subjects (loss of loved ones, illness, loss of job, etc.) in the era of pandemics. An interview with the author of contemporary bestsellers for children and young people, Guido Sgardoli, conducted by the well-known Russian children's author Anastasia Strokina, complemented the presentation of contemporary Italian children's literature. The dialogue between the two children's writers is devoted to a discussion of the 'eternal questions' facing the creators and critics of children's literature: what exactly are books for children about and how to write them today?

By broadening our understanding of other cultures, in particular by familiarising ourselves with children's literature, we can see the world's culture in stereoscopic terms, as a chain of sustained links and a series of brief encounters. We are convinced that in order to know one's own history and culture, one must turn to the world's. Looking at a different national literature allows us to see features in our own close cultural space that provide new insights into the values of our own culture.