

Nikolaj Guskov

VAMBA'S NOVEL "THE PRINCE AND HIS ANTS" IN A LITERARY CONTEXT

This article deals with the novel "The Prince and his Ants" (1893) by Luigi Bertelli (1860–1920), who wrote under the pseudonym of *Vamba*, who was one of the founders of classical Italian children's literature, and whose work is little known in Russia. The plot about the adventures of a lazy boy turned into an ant is compared with other books about insects. The pretexts of the novel are the works of Alfred Brehm, Jean Henri Fabre, Frances Hubert, Carlo Emery, popular science articles in Italian children's magazines, the novel "The Adventures of a Cricket" (1877) by Ernest Candez. Traditionally ants were portrayed either sympathetically or antipathically in the role of social and moral allegories (Bible, Virgil, Ovid, Aesop and other fabulists, Francis Bacon, and others). Vamba's innovation is that the educational, instructive and entertaining principles are inseparable from each other and are of equal importance. Although there is no direct evidence of the acquaintance of Russian writers with Vamba's novel, a comparison of the texts suggests that this is one of the possible pretexts of famous children's books about insects: "The Adventure of an little Ant" (1935) by Vitaly Bianki, "The Extraordinary Adventures of Karik and Valya" (1937) Jan Larri and "Barankin, be a (hu)man" (1962) Valery Medvedev. While differing in their views on the place of man among other animals, these texts are typologically close to Vamba's creative principles.

Keywords: Vamba, literature for children, Vitaly Bianki, Jan Larri, Valery Medvedev, animal fiction

In 1893 the popular journalist Luigi Bertelli (1860–1920), writing under the pen-name "Vamba", published the novel "Il Ciondolino" ("The Little Tail") with illustrations by the eminent artist Carlo Chiostri¹, in the Florentine publishing house of Enrico Bemporada, which brought

Nikolaj Guskov
Saint Petersburg State University,
Russia
kakto@mail.ru

together talented authors of books for young people². This was one of the turning points in Italian children's literature: in the new field, the former feuilletonist soon became an ideologist and organiser, founding a tradition that is still alive today.

The novel was highly praised by fellow writers: Vamba was congratulated by Gaetano Malenotti, editor of the famous Florentine newspaper "Fieramosca", and Vico Mantegazza, chronicler of colonial expeditions to Africa, thanked him for the fascinating book on behalf of his young son [Santa giovinezza 2008, 131–132]. The success with the public and the critics was exceptional. One of the best children's magazines published a review:

Collodi is not dead! He was resurrected even more alive, even more animated, more charming and more original than ever in that precious type of humorous writer, like Luigi Bertelli, known throughout Italy under the pseudonym of Vamba. And this Vamba, who makes everyone laugh with his hilarious "finds", the same Vamba who knows how to tell so much truth to big and little boys under the guise of a joke, has written a book for children entitled... "The Little Tail". In it, with elegant simplicity of style, with visible purity of language, and with a clearly conscious nobility of purpose, the relationships and customs of ants, bees, and other insects, whose lives are studied truly to the finest detail and reproduced with simple-minded fidelity, with unsophisticated elegance, are told. Oh, lads, buy "The Little Tail"! [Rosso 1895, 103]³

The novel was later praised and recommended by proponents of different pedagogical concepts and authoritative publications. According to "The Italian Almanac" of 1899, it is "a beautiful, but above all a good book, smoothly written, belonging to the best of what can be given to children. / A lot of scientific information is placed there under such a guise that readers are enlightened without noticing it, and on the contrary, amused" [Almanacco italiano 1899, 464]. The Biographical Dictionary of Italians describes the text as pleasant and easy to read, interesting and instructive at the same time [Barsali 1967]. Critics and literary scholars mention Vamba as a classic on a par with Collodi and De Amicis [Santa giovinezza 2008, 19–22]. The reader's appreciation of "The Little Tail" is confirmed by the fact that the 26th edition has already been published in 1953, and the last one in 2017, and judging by the discussions on the Internet, readers like the book: some had it as a child favourite and in some is had awakened a fascination for entomology.

Insects (often as allegorical characters) have long been portrayed in books read by children: fairy tales that trace back to totemic myths, natural history books, popular science books, bestiaries and instructive works. Vamba's innovation is not in the treatment of entomological subjects, but in their interpretation; in the synthesis of entertaining, educational and didactic principles. Being equal and inseparable within the text, they interacted and had formed a qualitatively new work for Italian (and largely European) children's literature of that era, unusual in its semantic versatility which distinguishes, like the originality of manner, any significant artistic work. The best children's authors, while popularising the science, were bent on entreaties and promises:

Ants are your fear and your torment. You cannot afford to lie down on the grass or lean on a tree, for they come to you on your back, penetrate your clothes, bite your hands and palms. You hate them, I know, and if you do not run away you amuse yourself by trampling them with your feet, annoying them in the ant-hills and tormenting them when they parade with their heads up, holding their prey with their claws. / Yet they are animals, if not the most graceful, then certainly the smartest in all of creation. I wish many of you, instead of exterminating them, would study their life: you would, no doubt, gain unspeakable pleasure, for the customs of these particular little beasts are curious and entertaining [Lo Zio 1892, 334].

Vamba, understanding the psychology and taste of the young reader, from the first phrase finds the tone of communication with him — both serious and humorous, trusting without ingratiating and without niceties — a rare in those days manner that ensured success:

Io dovrei cominciare, cari ragazzi, dal descrivervi la villa Almieri vista in una bella giornata di Luglio, verso le due e mezzo, quando tutta la campagna si distende, quasi desiderosa di riposo, in quella gran quiete e in quel gran silenzio che neanche le cicale, le quali sono gli insetti più sfacciati che si conoscano, s'azzardano a disturbare. Ma so, per esperienza, che le descrizioni vo6 ialtri le saltate a pié pari, sicché sarebbe una fatica buttata via: d'altra parte non vi sarà difficile, credo, immaginare una bella casa tutta bianca, con le persiane verdi, sotto le quali sporgeva un bel davanzale di pampini portati fin lassù da due grosse viti d'uva salamanna ch'erano piantate alle due estremità della facciata. <...> Già, questa in Botanica è una cosa più che provata: la vite d'uva salamanna non fa mai grappoli vicino alle finestre... quando ci stanno di casa dei ragazzi. Oh, zitti: eccoli! [Vamba 1926, 3-4]¹⁾

¹⁾"I should have started, dear children, by describing Almieri's cottage on a beautiful summer day around two and a half in the afternoon, when the whole village sleeps so peacefully and soundly that not even the most unscrupulous of insects — the grasshop-

The action begins with two brothers and a sister suffering in a cottage garden, learning lessons at their mother's insistence. The girl dreams of getting rid of her lessons by turning into a butterfly, her older brother into a grasshopper, and the younger one, Gigino (short for Luigi, the author's own name), nicknamed Little Tail because he always has a piece of his shirt peeking out from behind, into an ant, "tutte in fila e che non fanno altro che far passeggiate dalla mattina alla sera"²⁾ [Ibid, 8]. His wish is suddenly fulfilled by a wizard who has overheard the children.

Such transformations in literature have served as a means of punishment, enlightenment or magical assistance to the hero (the Russian reader will remember Prince Gvidon's transformations into a mosquito, a bumblebee and a fly). Ants and bees are especially often likened to humans. Among the pretexts familiar to Vamba are verses 624–658 of Ovid's seventh song of the "Transformations", where, after a prayer by King Aeacus, whose people had died of a plague, the gods, having humanised the ants, created Myrmidons (from the Greek for "ants"), and especially Aesop's Fable, where a character is punished for greed, not for sloth, as Little Tail:

The ant, or pismire, was formerly a husbandman that secretly filch'd away his neighbour's goods and corn and stor'd all up in his own barn. He drew a general curse upon his head for't, and Jupiter, as a punishment, and for the credit of mankind, turn'd him into a pismire; but this change of shape wrought no alteration, either of mind or of manners; for he keeps the same humour and nature to this very day. The fable shows: who is naturally wicked, no punishment can fix him [Fables of Aesop 1968, 112].

The motif of transformation in Vamba is introduced both to punish the hero and to educate him, and most importantly, to playfully defamiliarise the hero with reality. The setting, which makes no stress on plausibility, is contingent not only on its fantasy, but also on the exaggerated naivety of the hero: it is difficult to imagine a boy who is studying Latin grammar and knows the fable "The Dragonfly and the Ant" and lives in the countryside, but is so unobservant and ignorant that he is genuinely convinced of the absolute indolence of ants. Having acquired the appearance and partly the instincts of an insect, he retains his human

pers — dare to break the silence. But I know from experience that you'll just skip over the description, and I don't want to labour in vain. So imagine a white house with green shutters, with lush vines curling underneath from two trunks planted on the sides of the front. <...> But every botanist knows that grapes do not grow under the windows of houses with children. Hush! There they are!"

²⁾ "...because the ant does nothing and wanders around from morning till night"

consciousness, the memory of the past, the beliefs and prejudices already nurtured in him, the ability to move on two legs and even the little “tail”, which almost condemned Gigino to death as an “alien”, but then became a talisman, the only link with his former life. The author plays with the reader, shifting the point of view on the depicted, and the situation of the hero, without losing the drama, is perceived with humour, without doom, and the admonition does not intimidate, but captivates, providing useful information in passing.

Insects, although they talk, are not shown anthropomorphically, as in fables and fairy tales. Vamba tries to maintain a life-like character, leaning on works on zoology (most probably, on Alfred Brehm’s “Animal Life” [Brehm 1873, 229–236], on “Ants” (1880) and other studies by Carlo Emery, Jean Henri Fabre, on “Investigations on the manners of ants in our country” (1810) by Frances Huber, on popular essays, which were often published in Italian children’s magazines [Puydt 1876; Mancini 1884]⁴. The image of the protagonist is ambiguous: his attributes, natural to the ant, are presented from a human point of view, which he himself partly shares, so it is ironically perceived, for example, that that Little Tail expressed amazement “con sessanta punti interrogativi per ciascun occhio composto, e tre punti ammirativi nei tre occhi semplici davanti”³) [Vamba 1926, 26], or how he assesses his surroundings based on his poor cultural experience. When the human and the ant are equated, it seems incongruous, especially with the epic rise of style, amusing zeugmas arise: “Armato delle sue *tanaglie e di pazienza (italics mine — N.G.)*, si appostò al buco e aspettò”⁴) [Ibid, 106].

Being part of civilisation both hinders and helps among the insects. In triumphing over them, the hero effectively operates with concepts unknown to them, as in the scene where Gigino wrestles a bee and, depriving it of its sting, remarks that “Lei non ha il porto d’arme!”⁵) [Ibid, 106]. Situations where the ant and the human are paradoxically inseparable are particularly comical: the reader cannot tell whether the speech before him is reported or the author’s, as in the episode where the wasp is described as a killer on one side and an elegant beauty, with golden wings and slender legs on the other [Ibid, 82].

Vamba’s humorous manner marks the specificity of the two kingdoms, human and animal, exposing their advantages and disadvantages

³)“...with all one hundred and twenty compound eyes and admiration with three simple ones”

⁴)“Armed with *patience and jaws*, he waited. The sun was inclining towards the west, but he, true to his word, waited for the enemy, hoping to take him by surprise”.

⁵)“...it has no right to bear arms”

in juxtaposition and contributing to the formation of moral and social values. "The Little Tail" is collectively a fairy tale, a popular science book and a nurturing novel. Gigino evolves, parting with his former position in life, growing up. The empathetic reader is expected to go through a similar process of identity formation.

The first phase of development — the initiation into the new condition and environment — the boy who has emerged from the cocoon had quickly mastered. Having gained an initial knowledge of his anatomy, he observes the queen ant and the processes of egg development in insects; he is present during the earthworm hunt and the delivery of the prey to the ant-hill, and he familiarizes himself with the structure of the latter. This is where the parallels between insects and humans are particularly frequent.

The ability to see in all directions with 123 eyes and some other properties of ants seemed like a bargain: "Non ci manca altro che averci uno spazzolino per i denti, un fazzoletto da naso e una boccetta di benzina per levar le frittelle dal vestito!" [Ibid, 45]⁶. The protagonist is also impressed by ants' cleverness, persistence, industriousness, kindness and courage, extolled in classical texts (such as familiar to Vamba verses 402–407 of Vergil's Aeneid IV and plots going back to Aesop, where an ant is contrasted with a lazy bug, cicada or dragonfly, a vain, fussy fly). Little Tail in practice becomes convinced of the validity of the textbook allegories by encountering the division of labour in ants, which have "nannies, diggers, engineers, soldiers, masons, architects, shepherds" and even cows. A number of virtues are even more developed than in humans: "How new, insects, it turns out, share their surplus with their fellows. And humans?" [Ibid, 52]⁷.

Unfortunate surprises also arose. The ants are obliged to attend classes, though not in Latin. In addition, the hero in his new state has lost his gender, which terrifies him. However, after learning about the unenviable fate of ants capable of mating, Gigino is reconciled: it is explained to him that the ants of the middle gender are the real masters of the ant-hill, who have not only to work, but also to fight [Ibid, 33].

The expansion of entomological knowledge over the course of the action debunks the myth of man as the pinnacle of creation: he is physically imperfect compared to even primitive and defenceless creatures, often cruel, unreasonable, unjust, violates the immutable laws of nature,

⁶"How many different things we have on the ends of our legs. What's missing are a toothbrush and some petrol to remove stains"

⁷This phrase doesn't appear in the original Italian text.

instinctively observed by all living things, and has no right to despise anyone, much less to judge by his own rules. “Che se l’uomo, questo grosso animale, potesse comprendere che tesoro di costruzione e di vitalità si nasconde negli animalucci piccini come me, porrebbe certo certo più attenzione nel camminare per non schiacciarli”⁸⁾ [Ibid, 114]. Wamba draws a sympathetically ironic picture of the naive character’s empirical embrace of natural morality: Gigino is disgusted by the deadly battles of the ants, exclaiming “heathen customs!”, and the author gently remarks that the boy is apparently not yet aware that “...egli era vissuto tra gli uomini in un’età in cui non poteva ancora sapere come anche in quella società possa accadere che due persone della stessa specie vadano a infilzarsi la pancia per questioni molto più piccole di quelle che armano le api l’una contro l’altra, e spesso magari per una gomitata o pera pestata di piede”⁹⁾ [Ibid, 152]. The naturalist’s observations awaken the young hero’s conscience.

The next stage of his development is to try to assert himself in his new community; through cunning during a war with predatory red ants, he gained an honorary title, but in pursuit of his enemies, he left his own ant-hill undefended and it was invaded. Nearly all the inhabitants perished in front of the shocked hero, and the few survivors, to his indignation, submitted to the invaders. Little Tail’s remorse can no longer change anything. He himself was saved from reprisal by a wasp’s sudden attack on the ant hill, which failed to penetrate the armor made of a hemp seed. Moreover, the hero reminded the wasp of a fact he had accidentally known: both belong to the group of Hymenoptera. The relatives have made peace.

The image of the hero in chapters VIII-XVI goes back to texts about the boastful and ambitious ant — an allegory of self-love: compare the fables “The Ant and the Grain” by Ivan Chemnitzer, “The Ant” by Ivan Krylov, “The Ant” by Charles Villeux. “The ant is a wise creature in itself, but in the garden or vegetable garden it is harmful. In the same way, people who are too selfish are detrimental to society. Choose the sensible middle ground between self-love and public duty; be true to yourself enough not to be treacherous towards others, especially the sovereign and the country. One’s own person is a miserable goal for human aspirations and entirely mundane” [Bacon 1972, 403]. This reasoning of Francis Bacon anticipates the ideological programme of

⁸⁾“Eh, human! If you knew even anything about us, you would walk about more carefully, lest you crush insects that are smarter than you”

⁹⁾“...even men sometimes engage in bloody duels because of an empty conceit, because of a nudge with an elbow, because of an ill-considered word”

Vamba, who sympathises with Little Tail while he is animated by the thirst for adventure inherent in youth: Little Tail imagines sea battles, where he finds himself victorious, walking "sulla coperta" ("on deck")—the back of the bugaboo, crossing the puddle [Vamba 1926, 97]. The lust for power and honour is caricatured in the spirit of the satires that made Vamba famous against political adventurers and careerists who are self-satisfied with their greatness and do not care about the common good. Such is Gigino, addressing the army with a speech in the spirit of militaristic rhetoric and shamelessly proclaiming himself a great general [Ibid, 72]. By denouncing egocentrism, vanity, and power, and expressing democratic sympathies, the writer also strives for civic education of his reader. As a leitmotif, Bonapartist allusions are sarcastically introduced: Gigino is compared to Napoleon, his solitude is that of Napoleon on the island of St. Helena [Ibid, 68, 87].

The third stage consists of wanders and trials, and gaining experience and knowledge. The disaster he has undergone develops a sense of responsibility for his actions and for the fate of his neighbours. Gigino is far from being ideal, but his humanity (in the lofty sense of the word) becomes increasingly apparent, and he sometimes manages to combine the advantages of the human mind and the ant's physiology in a harmonious way.

Little Tail has longed for his mother before, but when he loses his shelter he decides to reach his human home at any cost, without thinking about the consequences of returning there as an ant. His inner evolution compensates for the absurdity of the idea. With touching recklessness ("Io non so se a una formica sia possibile nuotare; ma che m'importa? Io raggiungerò la mia mamma o affogherò pensando a lei!"¹⁰) [Ibid, 96]) the hero twice embarks on a perilous journey (having reached the vestibule the first time, he is accidentally carried outside on Uncle Thomas's hat). Gigino is accompanied by two miraculously rescued admirers: two ants called "Big Head" and "Death to Enemies". Along the way, the hero acquires information about hostile and friendly insects and plants, and performs a number of feats: he saves a cricket from a wasp; drives out a mason bee that has taken over a neighbour's nest; helps bees defeat the Death's Head moth, a butterfly that ruins a hive, whose life he then studies, being a guest of the grateful swarm.

Social insects have traditionally been set as a model for people (recall Book IV of Virgil's "Georgics"). The apostle Paul, affirming

¹⁰"I don't even know if ants can swim. All the same! Either see my mother or perish in the watery abyss"

“The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” [2 Thess. 3:10], was referring to King Solomon: “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” [Proverbs 6:6–8]⁵. It is true that during the Enlightenment era it was common to contrast humans and social insects: “Les hommes ne sont point faits pour être entassés en fourmilières, mais épars sur la terre qu’ils doivent cultiver”¹¹) [Rousseau 1912, 35]. If analogies were drawn, the beehive and the ant-hill appeared as an allegory of social vices and religious prejudices, as in B. de Mandeville’s “Fable of the Bees” (1714) and Feodor Dmitriev-Mamonov’s “The Nobleman Philosopher” (1796). The boom of natural science and collectivist theories in the 19th century actualised the apologetic interpretation of natural communities. Lev Tolstoy noted on September 13, 1890:

What if everything... was done together and shared. It wouldn’t seem difficult: bees and ants and beavers do it. But it is very difficult. Man is very far away from this, precisely because he is a rational, conscious being. <...> A man before the community of bees and ants has yet to consciously reach the cattle; from which he is still so far away: not to fight (battle) over wages, not to glutton, not to fornicate, and then one has to consciously reach bees and ants, as it begins in communities [Tolstoy 1984, 441].

The writer recalled his childhood games of “ant fraternity”, embodying his first utopian dreams [Tolstoy 1964, 466–467].

For example, in the Italian press the problem of the naturalness of celibacy [Osservazioni 1852] was discussed on the basis of entomological material. In the anonymous essay for children “Danniki”, the description of an ant hill is an occasion to raise most pressing social problems:

...insects fight only when they have to do so, but do not know the feeling of triumph for the mere pleasure of triumph. We are far ahead in all such things; we are creatures of refinement, and the influence of our vast civilisation is felt in everything — in peace and in war. We fight not only when others force us to do so, but we fight for glory, for the honour of the banner, for the pleasure of victory, and often, moreover, chronicles say, we take arms without knowing, without asking why [I tributari 1881, 152; see also Rizzatti 1886].

¹¹)“Humans are not created to huddle together in ant-hills, but to live scattered over the land they have to cultivate”

Vamba, an active member of the social movement, expressed his credo in the words of the hero's mother: "...e ricordati che ogni persona che lavora dev'essere sacra... specialmente poi per chi non fa nulla come te!"¹²⁾ [Vamba 1926, 170]. The hive and the ant-hill are therefore represented in utopian terms. Here Little Tail comprehends the basics of social justice. However, the ants are forced to leave the hive, where the population and power have been renewed after the swarming.

At the end of the book, Gigino meets his sister, who has also been turned into a butterfly by her wish. The sister formulates the author's moral by saying that Gigino, who wanted to turn into an ant because of laziness, was forced to become an ant-worker, and she herself, who dreamed of becoming a butterfly because of vanity, has become a caterpillar-moth and is forced to "measure the earth" "misurare" all the time, i.e. to study the hated geometry [Ibid, 173]. She recognises her brother by his "little tail", and she gives herself away by her literacy: in the naturalist's notebook the sketches of the caterpillar's successive positions add up to the word "stupido" ("fool") — in front of Gigino. On the heroine's promise to tell her adventures, the narrative breaks off. The writer has not created a sequel; the ending remains open: it is not known whether the children were able to regain their human form.

Although the author makes no secret of his didactic aims, it is impossible to predict the course of the story until the very end, so the reader's interest is sustained and attention is constantly sharpened. The insect kingdom is presented both as reserved, understood only by a scientist, and as the embodiment of recognisable common places of culture, and in both manifestations it is ambiguous. The playful nature of the narrative makes ample use of entomological topics. Its contradictory nature contributes to the productivity of the reception. Mikhail Gasparov showed that no qualities are assigned to allegorical characters (in different fables one and the same animal can be endowed with opposite traits), and gave an example of ants from the above-mentioned fables [Fables of Aesop 1968, 263]⁶⁾. The ant has often acted as an illustrative argument for relativists. Traditionally it is a symbol of nothingness: "...if a man meditate much upon the universal frame of nature, the earth with men upon it (the divinity of souls excepted) will not seem much different than an ant-hill, whereas some ants carry corn, and some carry their young, and some go empty, and all to and fro a little heap of dust" [Bacon 1971, 140]. The city mouse in the fable of Aesop and his followers,

¹²⁾"Human labour is sacred. Remember this for life. Sacred is the work of all who live on earth."

describing the wretchedness of the existence of the country mouse, does not find a more humiliating comparison than with the ant. However, the well-known scholastic problem: who is stronger and smarter — a horse or an ant — reveals that the last is capable to lift weight, many times exceeding its own, and to carry it for a long time, supporting it by paws, therefore it is the ant that man should imitate on his road to Calvary [Nigrelli 1710, 158–159]. Going back to Aesop, the fable plots about the ant and the dove helping each other, and about the unwise man who grumbled at the destruction of the ship with swimmers, but crushed hundreds of insects for an ant's sting, illustrate the classical topic “the small is a manifestation of the great”, “the insignificant hides an advantage.” Vamba's novel is prefaced with the epigraph: “Ho pensato, bambini, di farvi vedere molte cose grandi negli esseri piccoli... Più tardi, nel mondo, vedrete molte cose piccole negli esseri grandi”¹³ [Vamba 1953, 4]. Little Tail and with him the reader become convinced: nothing should be judged by looks and habitual opinions. Personal experience is the best adviser, and Gigino in the guise of an ant learns a lot of things that, as a boy, he had no idea about [Ibid, 123]. Similar principle of education was portrayed by Hector Malo in “The Adventures of Romain Calbri” (1869): Mr. Bigorel, not wishing to bring up a baron, lawyer or notary, but simply a good man, makes the boy watch the ant-hill and look into the relations of insects, then draws social and political parallels, reinforcing them by his personal experience during Napoleon's campaign in Prussia, and tells the boy to read the work of the entomologist Hubert as a proof [Malo 1959, 43–46]. With Vamba the young observer of the world of small creatures (by the way, Bacon likened the scientist-empiricist exactly to an ant [Bacon 1972, 58]), becomes familiar with the complexity of universal life problems, grasps the relativity of stable ideas about the surrounding reality and at the end of the way is able to judge about it sharply and sensibly, in a spirit of high true humanism.

Outside Italy “The Little Tail” attracted attention after the death of the author [Santa giovinezza 2008, 20]⁷ and was translated by Countess de Gemcé in French — “Gigi parmi les insectes” [Vamba 1922], by Helena Grotowska in Polish — “Cesarz mrówek” [Vamba 1924], by S. F. Woodruff in English — “The sovereign⁸ and his ants” [Vamba 1937], by C. de Castro in Spanish — “Pingajillo, el Muchacho que se volvió hormiga” [Vamba 1943]. The titles emphasize which aspect of the book was brought to the fore: popular science, political or fantasy.

¹³“I thought, children, to show you many great things in small creatures... Later, in the world, you will see many small things in creatures large”

Many of the book's meanings were actualized precisely by the 1920s. It was only the terrible experience of the gas attacks that made us realize the unscrupulousness of the alliance with the bombardier beetles that destroyed an entire army, and appreciate the author's remark: "Gigino voleva replicare: — O se anche gli stessi uomini ammettono in caso di guerra le alleanze tra popoli di diversi ordini e di nature diverse! — Ma si avvide subito che l'esempio dei costumi umani sulle formiche non avrebbe fatto né caldo né freddo"¹⁴⁾ [Vamba 1926, 79]. After the revolutions and the world war, the ant-teacher's calls for peace and unity resounded in a new way:

Forse verrà giorno in cui tutte le formiche del mondo riconoscendo i loro antichi errori e meglio intendendo i loro interessi e la loro missione, uniranno le loro forze, e sparite le assurde inimicizie, diverranno il primo popolo fra gli insetti¹⁵⁾ [Ibid, 53].

– Formiche! Con questo nome, prima di morire, io intendo rivolgermi a tutte le formiche del mondo, di qualunque razza esse sieno. E a tutte io dico: fino a quando dureranno queste stolte lotte tra popoli che la natura ha creato fratelli? Non avete forse abbastanza nemici da combattere tra gli insetti d'altri ordini e perfino tra gli uccelli? Perché vorrete distruggervi tra voi, invece di unire le vostre forze, voi che nei vostri interni ordinamenti civili rappresentate tra gli insetti tutti la grande forza dell'ingegno e del lavoro? Unitevi, o formiche! È l'ultimo grido di un moribondo, il quale ha vissuto abbastanza, e vi lascia per sempre chiamandovi col dolce nome di sorelle, e inviando a tutte voi una parola di pace e di perdono!¹⁶⁾ [Ibid, 76].

Allusions to the swarming bees, which referred to the drama of emigration, were also perceived more sharply than 30 years earlier: "Gigino si ricordava... <...> ...di Stato che moveva uno sciame ad abbandonare l'arnia natia. La popolazione, with le nuove nascite, era via via cresciuta, anzi raddoppiata addirittura; l'alveare era ormai tanto angusto, da non poter contenere tante migliaia di individui... <...> Ed ecco la vecchia Regina, la provvida fondatrice della città, l'antica madre de tutto quel

¹⁴⁾"Gigino wanted to say: 'How are people not shy in the ways of killing in war?', but realised that ants don't care about people"

¹⁵⁾Now we are all hostile and condemn to death any foreign ant that wanders in. But who knows, maybe the day will come when ants, realising their mistakes, will unite and be the strongest people among the insects

¹⁶⁾Before I die, I turn to the ants of the world and ask: Brothers, how long will wars last between you? Don't you have enough other enemies? Insects, birds? Why do you still fight among yourselves, exhausting your strength! Why do you waste them, instead of joining together in common useful work! He who is dying asks you, sisters and brothers, to live in peace!

popolo, dare la suprema prova di tutto il suo amore e di tutta la sua tenerezza per quel popolo e per quella città ch'ella stessa aveva creato. Ella dà il nobile esempio alle giovanii madri che nasceranno, ella si muove per la prima, ella per prima olontariamente si distacca da tutto ciò ha amato, e in uno slancio di sacrifice sublime si esilia dalla patria per salvarla e va a fondare alta colonia"¹⁷⁾ [Ibid, 150–151]. It was not by chance that the Russian translation (under a neutral title close to the original) appeared in the “Smena vekh” milieu⁹⁾: it was done by Nina Petrovskaya, who lived in Rome and was preparing an anthology of contemporary Italian prose, and edited by Aleksey Tolstoy. The book was published in the State Publishing house (series “For youth”) in 1926 with edition of 7000 copies, and was also published in Belarusian [Vamba 1929]. Advertising announcements were printed: “Which of the children, who have been in the village or simply travelled out of town, has not come across annoying little insects — ants. But who among the boys is well acquainted with the life led by these curious toilers? Probably very few. In the story ‘The Little Tail’ you will find a very curious and fascinating description of all ant life” [What to Read 1926, 15]. Mikhail Gershenzon, a graduate and collaborator of the Bryusov Institute, later a well-known children’s prose writer and translator, posted a review in “The Press and the Revolution”:

Fabre, clothed in a highly artistic form; the life of insects, where the reader with unflagging interest follows the adventures of the little boy hero, turned into an ant; where the reader himself, in the fascination, almost turns into an ant, to experience all its joys and anxieties — a book like this is unheard of in children’s literature. The transformation into an ant. Fiction! Fictions that litter children’s brains, taking them away from life, replacing a slice of bread with the glitter of fairy wings! No, here fantasy is far less malevolent and dangerous. There is no shadow of danger here. The author himself every now and then winks at the reader and winks at his character’s transformations. <...> Meanwhile the reader anxiously considers how to drag the earthworm into the ant-hill, miraculously escapes from the dreaded wasp, gains a most intimate acquaintance with the beetle, the bumblebee, the bees, the death’s head moth, and many other winged and wingless strangers. He swallows 170 pages of pure entomology and eagerly awaits the author’s promised sequel to the book. The translation is masterfully done [Gershenzon 1926, 216–217].

¹⁷⁾“Gigino... <...> ...understood why two swarms had left the hive. Its population had doubled, it could no longer fit there. <...> The old queen sacrificed herself and saved the people by leaving her homeland forever”

In the 1920s, "The Little Tail" suited everyone from defenders of animism, fiction and adventure to advocates of popular science editions that instil collective work, but later in Russia, strangely enough, it was neither reprinted nor mentioned, nor was its author's name, which speaks little even to philologists, including after the 2015 publication of Vamba's most famous novel, "Dnevnik Gianni Uragani" ("Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca"). It is possible, however, that "The Little Tail" has left its mark on our children's literature, as it evokes a number of associations with texts that are familiar to the Russian reader.

In his creative style, Vamba resembles Vitaly Bianki. It is not known whether "The Little Tail" is mentioned in his extensive archive, but it is hard to assume that this work would not have attracted attention of someone from the like-minded family of zoologists. The writer's father Valentin Lvovich, Director of the Zoological Museum, was apparently proficient in Italian, which was, if not a native, then a familiar language to his mother, an opera singer who lived in Europe. The scientist successfully inculcated a love of the natural sciences in his sons, including through his fiction, among which might have been a novel that was then sensational in Italy. Vitaly Bianki's diary says that his elder brother Lev Bianki (1884–1936), an entomologist, fascinated by this science since his childhood, helped him when working on "The Adventures of a Little Ant" (1935): "I am beating about the 'insect book'. Nothing works. I went to talk to Lev (...later Vitaly Bianki regretted that he did not dedicate this thing to him.) Then it went swimmingly" [Bianki 1972, 389]. When the translation of "The Little Tail" came out, Bianki was already composing for children and might have been interested in a new "insect" book.

In reflecting on the success of "The Little Forest Houses" (about a swallow looking for its home), the writer decided that the reason was "the great cosiness: all the little houses, and one is better than the other, cosier. The *little* hero is still 'silly', not knowing anything in the big world, poking his nose in everything, — just like the readers (listeners) themselves. <...> Actually, almost on the same theme I have 'The Adventures of a Little Ant', 'Mousey Peek' — too" [Bianki 1972, 387]. Didn't the book give the writer an idea of the plot: an "odyssey" of a naive character and a passing acquaintance with the inhabitants and laws of the animal kingdom? Other authors, such as Seton-Thompson, have similar situations, but animalists of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries avoided anthropomorphism; instinct does not draw heroes (except cats, pigeons, etc.) to their native havens. The professional zoologist Bianki willingly allows, as well as Vamba, those fairy-tale

motives which do not distort the natural essence, but make the narration more fascinating: animals talk, make alliances against enemies, provide each other with lodging and transport services; their dwellings, similar to a human house, protect from the hostile world, create comfort, even correspond to aesthetic tastes of inhabitants. In “The Little Tail”, the theme of home is one of the key ones: the attachment to it, the desire to return is inherent in the hero (like in the swallow and in the ant) not out of anthropomorphism, but because for both writers the concept of home is a necessary condition for normal life of any creature, so Gigino sadly sighs about his homelessness as he passes the wasp’s nest, while the bee that meets him wonders how it is possible that a living being has no home [Ibid, 87, 134].

Both of Bianca’s works about ants are based on motifs of wandering and returning home, and contain echoes of Vamba’s novel. In “The Adventures of a Little Ant”, the protagonist crosses a river on a water bug, Gigino swims across a puddle on a floating beetle, intimidating it with the power of his jaws; Bianca’s character also threatens to bite those who carry him badly. In the posthumously published story “The Ant and the Dragonfly” (1957), the hero sees bees chasing a death’s head moth; Little Tail himself takes part in the battle with it.

Apart from Vamba, Bianki as a creator of scientifically accurate “insect books” had few predecessors (mammals and birds were usually depicted in this way), but there were common, most probably familiar to both writers, potential antecedents: of fiction, the best known is a popular at one time novel by the Belgian entomologist Ernst Candez “The Adventures of the Cricket” (1877), translated both into Italian (Milan, 1879) and into Russian (St. Petersburg, 1885)¹⁰.

Even more than Bianki, the Russian reader of Vamba is reminded of Jan Larri, a postgraduate biologist, who, on the recommendation of his supervisor, the eminent zoologist and geographer Lev Berg, composed the entomological novel “The Extraordinary Adventures of Karik and Valya” (1937) commissioned by Samuil Marshak. It is unlikely that when they were discussing book plans with the wordy customer, they did not touch upon “The Little Tail”, whose translation came out when Marshak was already the head of the children’s department at Gosizdat. At the time, Larri himself, who had printed the first children’s books in Ukraine, had just arrived in Leningrad, become a journalist and could pay attention to a literary novelty.

Unlike Gigino, Karik, Valya and the professor who rescues them retain their human form, but are very much diminished (a motif known from the works of Jonathan Swift, Lewis Carroll, Selma Lagerlöf,

Antony Pogorelsky, Vladimir Odoevsky and others. The best known of these stories is "Doktor Muchołapski: fantastyczne przygody w świecie owadów" (1890, Russian translation — 1899) by the Polish scientist and author Erasm Majewski, with a number of coincidences in the direct artistic context. In the 1920s and '30s, under the influence of Welles and Einstein, the arbitrary transformation of the dimensions of the subject and his environment attracted not only children's authors, and it is only natural that Larri, always interested in fantasy, should turn to current themes. In his novel, as in Vamba's, reduction is neither an abstract scientific-philosophical experiment nor an entertainment device in itself, but above all a means of immersing naive characters in an otherwise inaccessible environment, necessary both for their punishment (for careless pranks), for moral education, and for objective comprehension of reality, acquiring a scientific picture of the world. The latter function clearly predominates in Larri's novel:

Karik stood up and pulled on his forget-me-not shirt. — Ivan Hermogovich... if you want to give each of us a good slap, please feel free. We are ready to pay for our behaviour... We shouldn't have touched anything in your office, of course, but you see... That's the way it happened! <...> <...> The professor waved his hand good-naturedly: <...> You've been punished for disobedience already <...> You've seen a lot these days, but truth be told, you've only looked into one of the tiny corners of the small world. You've only read a few lines from a thick book called Nature. And those lines, I would say, are far from the most interesting. There are other pages in the book of Nature that are simply impossible to tear yourself away from [Larri 2021, 191, 357].

Larri is close to Vamba in dismissing entomological material for the sake of popularizing it in the form of an adventurous narrative, including comic, dramatic and scary episodes, a playful, humorous presentation of serious information. Bianca, though a zoologist, started from humanistic principles, but accepted the laws of the animal kingdom as an unfortunate inevitability. Both Vamba and Larri are humanists, but portray human society and the animal world as parallel and equivalent forms of being, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, and humanity must learn from other creatures in order to improve itself. Of course, Larri's approach, as he was an employee of the Fish-Breeding Institute, is more utilitarian: "You've only seen a tiny slice of the world next to us so far... <...> we often don't pay attention to it. We do not know it well enough. Yet it is an important part of the larger world in which we live. Its life is firmly connected to our life ... At least, much more firmly than many

people think. In this small world, there are our friends and there are our enemies. Both of which we need to know” [Larri 2021, 357].

Larri devoted to ants only a part of chapter IX, where he unexpectedly touched on social problems, poetising, like Vamba, the well-organised peaceful labour of black ants and condemning the invading war and violence (in the guise of red ants) against the weak. It is not by accident that children, driven by noble indignation, recklessly engage in unequal combat.

The novel “Barankin, Be A Human!” by Valery Medvedev is also close in plot to “The Little Tail” (1962)¹¹: two D-students, in order to get rid of the need to study, turn into animals, imagining their life carefree. The author uses the traditional symbolism of the number three, only Vamba has three characters transformed into different insects, and here both characters undergo three identical transformations. Two of the creatures the lazy schoolboys turned into are the same — a butterfly and an ant; first transformation, described by Medvedev, is not into a grasshopper (never described by Vamba), but into a sparrow.

Barankin and Malinin, like Gigino, are convinced of the discrepancy between reality and their ideas and, to their surprise, are also forced to learn, work, fight, get food and shelter, flee danger, acquiring scientific knowledge through their own experience: “Nina Nikolayevna will tell me: ‘Yura Barankin! You know the life of butterflies very well... When you were answering, it even seemed to me that you grew wings behind your back!..’. After these words the whole class will roll round laughing, and only Kostya and I will not smile, and will sit at the desk all serious” [Medvedev 1965, 141–142]; Medvedev’s metamorphosed characters retain, like Little Tail, the features of their individual appearances: “And Kostya opened his blue, like a girl’s, eyes... A sparrow with blue eyes! Great! <...> — Yur-chee-chee-chee-cheek! — he said. — You’ve turned into a sparrow, but your beak is still snub-nosed. Mir-ir-iracle!”; “The blue-eyed ant laughed, wiggled his whiskers and tapped the dark-eyed ant on the shoulder with his paw” [Medvedev 1965, 32–33; 97]; habits and inclinations: “It is very cool that an ant has six paws — I thought, — it is convenient to play football. Especially to hit the goal with all six paws. It is also convenient to stand in goal: you stand on two paws and catch the ball with four of them...” [Medvedev 1965, 101].

Like Vamba and Larri, Medvedev has created a novel of education, but the formation of personality here occurs through overcoming, rather than assimilating, all the experiences of the animal kingdom. This ideological divergence (if not a polemic with an Italian book, which the writer may have known as a child) is particularly noticeable against the back-

ground of the enumerated interchanges. Lev Kassil accurately expressed his humanistic pathos to the utmost, titling the preface to Medvedev's novel: "How good it is that we are human beings!" [Medvedev 1965, 3]. The heroes need to be among the birds and insects (where they still evaluate everything from the point of view of humans) not so much to expand their knowledge, but to realize the greatness of Man and unlock their almost unlimited potential. This is the path to re-education and self-improvement. However misguided human beings may be, they have nothing to learn from other beings: the attempt to change one's nature leads not to happiness but to disaster. It is unacceptable to give up a better lot and a higher destiny — to give up being human. This is why the boys, unlike Gigino, Karik and Valya, are unable to assimilate into an alien environment. The most praiseworthy characteristics of animals (from the ability to fly to industriousness) are only instincts. But humans are endowed with a will that works wonders: the boys are transformed without outside magic — through a passionate effort of will. Their return to being humans is available to them at any moment, and this noticeably weakens the didacticism of the narrative. The characters' actions are more akin to a cautionary creative experiment than to unwitting self-punishment.

The most indicative is the part devoted to ants, whose life did not attract the characters, who are quite inquisitive, despite their laziness and ignorance: instead of lessons they are busy with fantastic inventions, they read serious, addressed not only to children popular science literature, like the book about ants "Crossed Antennas Password" (1962) by Iosif Khalifman [Medvedev 1965, 106], so they know, unlike Little Tail, about the work instinct and collectivism of ants, and turn into them, saving their lives and finding no alternative. The boys are convinced (and with good reason) that they will be able to overcome the insects' inherent instincts. The misfortune that befalls them comes from without: no environment will tolerate those who resist its established order, and a slacker in an ant-hill is doomed to a shameful execution or to a sacrificial death in a confrontation with the enemy. Soviet children are capable of self-sacrifice, unlike Little Tail, who fought for glory and only came to altruism at the cost of his losses: "Kostya was not very brave in life, and no instinct could make him get into a fight. But this time a HUMAN has spoken in Kostya; after all in every person a human being should rise, if in front of him the big ones start to unfairly offend the small ones, and especially such nice and real workers, as the black-bellied ants were" [Medvedev 1965, 121]. The salvation of the heroes is not a reason to doubt the greatness of the feat and contrast it with the instinct of self-

preservation as a natural impulse, but it is the evidence that Barankin and Malinin are ready to carry out their intended purpose among the people, where their true place is.

Thus, although there is no information about Vamba's direct influence on Soviet prose, writers' familiarity with his novel is not excluded, and "The Little Tail" should be considered one of the probable potential pretexts for a number of books about insects. Even more important are the typological similarities noted above. They point to the similarity between the creative attitudes of the school of Italian literature for young people which developed around Vamba, above all in "The Sunday paper" (*Giornalino della domenica*, 1906–1911, 1918–1927) [Santa giovinezza 2008, 22–45; Faeti 2011, 238–258] and the children's literature which developed in Russia in the 1920s–1930s.

Translated by Yana Timkova

Notes

- ¹ See about him: [Faeti 2011, 60–71].
- ² The year 1895 is usually mistakenly cited, but this is refuted by documentary material [Santa giovinezza 2008, 19–20, 131–132].
- ³ *Marinella del Rosso* is the pen name of the popular Italian children writer Ida Baccini (1850–1911).
- ⁴ The reference to the influence of Maeterlinck's books [Santa giovinezza 2008, 20] is erroneous, as they were written later: *Life of Bees* in 1901, *Life of Termites* in 1922, *Life of Ants* in 1830.
- ⁵ There is another translation that mentions a bee instead of an ant [Or, go to the bee and learn how diligent she is and how seriously she does her work — her products kings and private persons use for health — she is desired and respected by all — though feeble in body, by honoring wisdom she obtains distinction].
- ⁶ The reasons for the dual treatment were explained by Gottfried Keller in his monograph "The Ancient World of Animals" (Leipzig, 1913): "Despite the wonder aroused by their merits, above all their intelligence and diligence, ants were severely persecuted by man. They devoured everything the farmer did, no grain was safe from them either in the field or on the threshing floor" [Cited from: *Fables of Aesop* 1968, 290].
- ⁷ Although the influence of Vamba's novel on the famous Czech writer and artist Ondřej Sekora's cycle of the ant *Ferda* with its entirely anthropomorphic characters (begun in 1936) cannot be ruled out, it is unlikely to have been significant.
- ⁸ The title 'prince' refers to the title of Machiavelli's famous treatise "Il principe" ("Prince").

- ⁹ "Smena vekh" is an ideological and political movement that emerged in the ranks of the Russian emigration in the 1920s. Its representatives advocated reconciliation and collaboration with Soviet Russia. The movement was named after a collection of articles entitled "Smena vekh" (The Change of Milestones) (Prague, 1921).
- ¹⁰ Bianca also had domestic pretexts, the best known being Vladimir Odoevsky's "Anecdotes of Ants" (1835), Vasiliy Avenarius's "The Tale of the Shaggy Bee" (1879) and "The Tale of the Mighty Ant" (1885), "Amazing Adventures of an Ant" (1894) by Feodor Skvortsov, "The Adventures of the Red Ant" (1930) by Grigory Bruk, and a Ukrainian story, "The Amazing Adventures of Ant Sangvin, Told by Himself" ("Дивні пригоди комахи Сагвіна", 1901) by Gnat Hotkevich, whose translation was published in 1902 by the "Children's Reading" magazine.
- ¹¹ An animated film, based on the book, was awarded the bronze medal at the XV Festival of Films for Children and Young People in Venice in 1963.

Bibliography

Sources

- Bacon 1971* — Bacon, F. (1971). O dostoinstve i priumnozhenii nauk [On the dignity and multiplication of science]. In *Sochineniya: v 2 t. T. 1.* [Works: in 2 vol.] (Vol. 1, pp. 85–546). Moscow: Mysl'. (In Russian).
- Bacon 1972* — Bacon, F. (1972). On self-loving wisdom [O sebyalyubivoy mudrosti]. In *Sochineniya: v 2 t. T. 2.* [Works: in 2 vol.] (Vol. 2, pp. 403–404). Moscow: Mysl'. (In Russian).
- Bianki 1972* — Bianki, V. V. (1972). *Sobranie sochineniy: v 4 t. T.1.* [Collected Works: in 4 vols.] (Vol. 1). Leningrad: Detskaya literatura. (In Russian).
- Brehm 1873* — Brehm, A. E. (1873). *La vita degli animali: Descrizione generale del regno animale* (Vol. 6). Roma, Napoli: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese.
- Fables of Aesop 1968* — *Basni Ezopa* [Fables of Aesop]. (1968). Moscow: Nauka. (In Russian).
- Franciosi 1886* — Franciosi, E. (1886). Formiche! Cordelia, 38 (18 luglio), 297–299.
- I tributari 1881* — *I tributari* (1881). *La ricreazione. La ricreazione del sacerdote: periodico bimensile religioso, morale, ameno ed istruttivo, serio*, IV, 151–152, 175–176.
- Larri 2021* — Larri, Ya. L. (2021). *Neobyknovennye priklyucheniya Karika i Vali* [The Extraordinary Adventures of Karik and Valya]. Moscow: AST. (In Russian).
- Lo Zio 1892* — *Lo Zio* (1892). *Le formiche. Frugolino*, 42 (30 luglio), 334–335.

- Malo 1959* — Malo, G. (1959). Romen Kal'abri [Romain Calabri]. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo detskoj literatury. (In Russian).
- Mancini 1884* — Mancini, E. (1884). L'udito e l'odorato nelle formiche. L'amico dei fanciulli, 1 (gennaio), 7–8.
- Medvedev 1965* — Medvedev, V. V. (1965). Barankin, bud' chelovekom! [Barankin, be a man!]. Moscow: Detskaya literatura. (In Russian).
- Nigrelli 1710* — Nigrelli, S. (1710). Prediche morali sopra gli argomenti, soliti trattarsi, ne' giorni quaresimali. Opera del padre Sigismondo Nigrelli della Compagnia di Ges. Venezia: presso Andrea Poletti.
- Osservazioni 1852* — Osservazioni fisico-morali intorno al celibate. (1852). Civiltà Cattolica, 11, 143–155.
- Puydt 1876* — Puydt, L. de (1876). Diletto della scienza. Cornelia. Rivista letteraria educative, 2 (26 dicembre), 10–13.
- Rizzatti 1886* — Rizzatti, F. (1886). Istoria d'una repubblica (Vita e costume delle formiche). Letture per le giovinelle, 7, 115–123.
- Rosso 1895* — Rosso del, M. (1895). [Recensio]. Cordelia, 9 (22 dicembre), 103–104.
- Rousseau 1912* — Rousseau, J.-J. (1912). Emil', ili O vospitanii [Émile ou De l'éducation] (transl. by M.A. Engel'gardt). St. Petersburg: Gaz. "Shk. i zhizn'". (In Russian).
- Tolstoy 1983* — Tolstoy, L. N. (1983). Sobranie sochineniy: v 22 t. T. 14 [Collected Works: in 22 vol.] (Vol. 14). Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura. (In Russian).
- Tolstoy 1964* — Tolstoy, L. N. (1964). Fanfaronova gora [Mountain of Fanfaron]. In L.N. Tolstoy, Sobranie sochineniy: v 20 t. T. 14. [Collected Works: in 22 vol.] (Vol. 14, pp. 465–467). Moscow. (In Russian).
- Tolstoy 1984* — Tolstoy, L. N. (1984). Dnevnik 1890 goda [Diary of 1890]. In L.N. Tolstoy, Sobranie sochineniy: v 22 t. T. 21. [Collected Works: in 22 vols.] (Vol. 21). Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura. (In Russian).
- Vamba 1922* — Vamba (1922). Gigi parmi les insects (trad. par. comtesse de Gemcé). Paris : M. Albin.
- Vamba 1924* — Vamba (1924). Cesarz mrówek (tłum. pol. H. Grotowska). Lwów: Książnica Polska Towarzystwa Naucz. Szkół Średnich i Wyższych.
- Vamba 1926* — Vamba. (1926). Khvostik: Povest' iz zhizni murav'ev [Tail: A tale from the life of ants]. Moscow; Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo. (In Russian).
- Vamba 1929* — Вамба. (1929). Хвосьцік. Менск, 1929.
- Vamba 1937* — Vamba (1937). The Prince and his Ants (transl. by S. F. Woodroof). New York: Kellog Holt and Company.

Vamba 1943 — Vamba (1943). *Pingajillo, el Muchacho que se volvió hormiga* (trad. de C. de Castro). Barcelona: Hyssa.

Vamba 1953 — Vamba (1953). *Il Ciondolino*. Firenze: Casa editrice Marzocco.

References

Almanacco italiano 1899 — Il Ciondolino. (1899). In *Almanacco italiano*. (Vol. 4, pp. 465a-465b). Firenze: R. Bemporad e Figlio.

Barsali 1967 — Barsali, M. (1967). Bertelli L. In *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Vol. 9). Roma: Istituto della storia italiana. Retrieved from: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-bertelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-bertelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

Gershenzon 1926 — Gershenzon, M. A. (1926). Vamba. Khvostik... [Review of the book *The Prince and his Ants*] *Pechat' i revolyutsiya*, 8, 216-217. (In Russian).

Faeti 2011 — Faeti, A. (2011). *Guardare le figure: Gli illustratori italiani dei libri per infanzia*. Roma: Donzelli editore.

Santa giovinezza 2008 — Vabma, Ascenzi, A., Feluce, M. di, Tumino, R. (Eds.). (2008). *Santa giovinezza!/: lettere di Luigi Bertelli e dei suoi corrispondenti (1883-1920)*. Macerata: Alfabetuca.

What to read 1926 — Chto chitat' (1926). [What to read?] *Pioner*, 10, 15.

Николай Гуськов

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет

РОМАН ВАМБЫ «ХВОСТИК» В ЛИТЕРАТУРНОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ

Статья посвящена роману «Хвостик» (1893) Луиджи Бертелли (1860–1920), писавшего под псевдонимом Вамба, одного из создателей классической итальянской детской литературы, творчество которого мало известно в России. Сюжет о приключениях ленивого мальчика, превращенного в муравья, сопоставляется с другими произведениями о насекомых. Претекстами романа являются труды натуралистов А. Э. Брэма, Ж. А. Фабра, П. Юбера, К. Эмери, научно-популярные статьи в итальянских детских журналах, роман «Приключения сверчка» (1877) Э. Кандеза. Традиционно муравьев выводили то с симпатией, то с антипатией в роли социальных и нравственных аллегорий (Библия, Вергилий, Овидий, Эзоп и др. баснописцы, Ф. Бэкон и др.). Новаторство Вамбы состоит в том, что просветительное, поучительное и развлекательное начало присутствуют в его книге нераздельно друг от друга и равноценны. Хотя нет прямых данных о знакомстве русских писателей с романом Вамбы, сопоставление текстов позволяет предположить, что это один из возможных претекстов известных детских книг о насекомых: «Приключение муравьишки» (1935) В. В. Бианки, «Необыкновенные приключения Карика и Вали» (1937) Я. Л. Ларри и «Баранкин, будь человеком» (1962) В. В. Медведева. Различаясь во взглядах на место человека среди других животных, эти тексты типологически близки творческим принципам Вамбы.

Keywords: Вамба, детская литература, Виталий Бианки, Ян Ларри, Валерий Медведев, зообеллетристика