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THE GREAT ABSENTEE:  
NOTES ON THE ITALIAN RECEPTION OF  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY RUSSIAN POETRY  
FOR CHILDREN

The article offers a review of 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian children's poetry translated into Italian. Despite the fact that Russia can boast a great tradition of children's literature in verse, the number of existing Italian translations is not very large and the authors translated are only some happy few. They are Vladimir Mayakovskiy, Osip Mandel'shtam, Boris Pasternak, Korney Chukovskiy and Samuil Marshak. Their not very many texts have mostly appeared for little publishers with scarce circulation. Attention to formal aspects has also not always been impeccable, and no Italian poet has systematically devoted himself to elaborate Italian versions that could aspire to true aesthetic autonomy. This is why, in spite of some notable translations in recent times, we must continue to speak of Russian poetry for children as the great absentee on the Italian cultural scene.

*Keywords:* Russian literature for children (20<sup>th</sup> century), reception of Russian literature in Italy, poetic translation, compared metrics, Vladimir Mayakovskiy, Osip Mandel'shtam, Boris Pasternak, Korney Chukovskiy, Samuil Marshak

Twentieth-century Russian poetry for children has not been much translated into Italian. To the contrary, several fairy tales in verse (Afnas'ev) and those written by nineteenth-century famous authors (mainly Krylov, Pushkin and Ershov) are quite well-known in Italy (at present this vast subject is being explored by Giulia De Florio<sup>1</sup>). The causes for this neglect are hard to identify. Arguably, one of the reasons might be a prejudice towards children's literature, which is considered

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ancillary to classic Russian literature “for grown-ups”; moreover, these texts are rather difficult to translate, due to formal issues such as rhyme and rhythm. Whatever the reason, it must be acknowledged that, unfortunately, the number of works translated into Italian can be counted on one hand.

To begin my investigation, I would like to recall one of my works [Niero 2019, 326–334], which deals with the translation of Russian poetry. The essay I am quoting does not focus on children’s literature, but some of those considerations may be fruitfully applied to this field as well. In one of the chapters I highlighted how, in the last thirty years, translators have started to pay more attention to formal aspects of poems, such as meter and rhyme. However, on the whole, the choice of free verse continues to dominate in translation (it would be more precise to define it a “liberated” verse, more than a free one: but this question is too complex to be examined here).

Why then is free verse still predominant? In my view, the problem lies in the fact that when the translator of poetry chooses certain meters (especially the more obvious and “monotonous” ones) and opts for full rhymes (worse if grammatical), s/he is always afraid, and rightly so, of slipping into dolled up tones and childish cadences. However, when we are dealing with Russian children’s literature in verse, this potential flaw — if handled with care — could be turned into a quality. Nonetheless, it is clearly the difficulty of the operation that — numbers in hand — seems to discourage even the most zealous translators. There are, of course, some examples of translations carried out with conviction, which have produced very interesting results.

1. I would like to start from what was done in 1969 by scholar and translator Gabriella Schiaffino, who decided to translate Vladimir Mayakovsky’s *Kon’ ogon’* [The fire horse / Il cavallino di fuoco]<sup>2</sup> into Italian. To carry out this task, she asked for the support of the Italian poet Antonio Porta (1935–1989). Porta, one of the protagonists of the Italian Neo-avant-garde, was thus involved in the translation of the work of the Cubo-futurist poet, who himself belonged to the historical avant-gardes. As we understand from the introduction written by Maurizio Spatola [Spatola 2006], who speaks of a “veiled socialist message”, that specific historical moment favored the dissemination of an increasingly multi-faceted Mayakovsky into Italian culture. However, free verse remained the prevailing instrument used by the translators<sup>3</sup>.

This option was opportunely discarded for *Il cavallino di fuoco*. Schiaffino and Porta decided to use an eight-syllable verse, stressed on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> syllables. This is a sort of “trochaic octosyllable”,

which is grafted onto the already firm tradition of the Italian octosyllable with accents on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> syllables (an example is «Sul castello di Verona / batte il sole a mezzogiorno» from *La leggenda di Re Teodorico*, by Giosuè Carducci [Beltrami 1996, 67]). By doing this, the two translators try to echo the dominant rhythmic pattern of the original, which, although fragmented due to the famous *lesenka*, is easily reassembled in a sequence of trochaic tetrapodies, sometimes interspersed with groups of iambic tetrapodies and some sporadic verses of uncertain metrics. To a certain extent, therefore, the translation homogenizes the metric variety of the original. The two translators, dealing with a mostly uneven rhyme scheme (although the AABB and ABAB schemes prevail), choose to respond with rhymes which lack regularity; as a matter of fact, the rhymes are used in conjunction with the segmentation of the text, which is, in turn, subordinated to the rhythm of the illustrations. As a result, the text is characterized by Italian “stanzas” sealed by rhymes (*cavalcare: incominciare; andare: approntare; ossatura: cura; spal-mare: saldare; aiutare: colorare; dorso: morso; pittore: splendore; occhi: ginocchi; bardatura: ventura*) or by assonance (*donare: quanti-tà, serve: compiacente*).

The two translators often opt for grammatical rhymes, which seems to be an appropriate choice in this context. As it was foreseeable, the choice to keep the meter and the rhyme scheme forces the translators to employ substitutions (the Russian word *bok*, [fianco, side], just to give an example, becomes, for reasons of rhyme, *ginocchi* [knees]), which in some cases are consistent; however, the structure and the content of the original are fundamentally respected. The clearest difference between the original and the translation concerns the ending, where the reference to Semen Budenny, whose army on horseback was immortalized by Isaak Babel’ only a year before Mayakovsky composed his poem, disappears:

Here is the original poem:

Взнуздан  
и оседлан он,  
крепко сбруей оплетен.  
На спину сплетенному —  
помогай Буденному!

[Mayakovskiy 1958, 256]

[trad. lett.: «È imbrigliato e sellato, / è saldamente intrecciato alla sua bardatura. / Sali in groppa al cavallo bardato, / aiuta Budënnj»]

This is the translation:

Con l'incedere marziale,  
 con la sella di gran pregio,  
 con la ricca bardatura,  
 va col bimbo alla ventura.

[Mayakovskiy 1970, [32]]

Mayakovsky is the protagonist of two other volumes: *Chto takoe khorosho i chto takoe plokho* (What is good and what is bad)<sup>4</sup>, translated by Aldo Canestri as *Questo è bene e questo è male* [Mayakovskiy 1978], and *Chto ni stranitsa, — to slon to l'vitsa* [Every page is an elephant, then a lioness], which has become, in the translation by Saverio Reggio, *Immagina: un animale ad ogni pagina* [Mayakovskiy 1979].

In this case, the translators try to offer formal solutions which can be suitable for a product conceived for children, but this time rhyme is predominant, while the meter remains rather varied. Reggio moves away from the trochaic rhythm of the original text and opts for traditional, full rhymes, which are not particularly creative (*perché: re; attentamente: presidente; lama: lama, pellicano: strano; etc.*). Canestri, instead, chooses a trochaic octosyllable (with frequent infractions) which echoes the meter of the original text. As a consequence, he re-creates a fragmentation close to that of Mayakovsky and, above all, offers a brilliant variety of phonic responses which, to some extent, allude to the stylistic richness of the Russian Cubo-Futurist poet. We thus find true rhymes (*viene: bene; interrogando: quando; ventosa: cosa; scheggiata: passeggiata; sapone: oppone; ometto: metto; spersi: vedersi; pezzi: apprezzati; ditino: bambino; bambino: beniamino; piccino: maialino; maiale: male; soddisfatto: benfatto*), slant rhymes (*pupo: saputo; igiene: genio; ieri: cattività; confermare: male*), compound rhymes (*giovane: giova, no; studio: tu ed io; uccello: ce l'ho: stivali: tu vali*), sight rhymes (*néra: ténera*), consonances (*impicciona: piccino: decine: sudicione; lavandino: ad uno*), assonances (*intorno: genitore; arco: codardo; frugolo: fuga; razzola: razza*) and paronomastic solutions such as *libro: libero, libro: brr (!)* and *guai: guardarsi*.

It is, on closer inspection, a two-faced Mayakovsky: the text is suitable for children in terms of content (despite the inevitable semantic adjustments), but, perhaps, a little too “grown-up” in form: the pyrotechnic choices of the translator are not easy to convey to a small listener, even when one reads the text aloud.

2. In light of what was previously done in the rendition of Mayakovskiy's *Il cavallino di fuoco*, the Italian edition of Pasternak's *Zverinec* (Menagerie) [Pasternak 1973], also carried out by Gabriella

Schiaffino, appears to be a missed opportunity. Once again, the scholar was assisted by a poet, indeed a poetess, Giulia Niccolai (1934), who is active in the field of experimentalism (might this be an encrypted homage to the avant-garde Pasternak of «Centrifuga»? ). The translation, however, seems to be following the usual path of free verse and consists of segmented prose with rare metric cues. We find assonances and consonances here and there, and sometimes even full rhymes (many of them are identical rhymes *indietro: indietro; tram: tram*; a few verses later we find *gabbia: gabbia*), which, however, do not constitute a scheme. Some solutions appear to be very interesting, such as *verso: Golfo Persico* and *voliera: serra*, but, unfortunately, they are very few in number.

3. The remaining translations in verse — with one small exception — concern two Russian classics of the second half of the twentieth century: Korney Chukovskiy and Samuil Marshak.

Margherita Cozza-Zoubok (1971, 1974) offers a good rendition of Chukovskiy's *Telefon*<sup>5</sup> (The Telephone / Il telefono), *Ajbolit*<sup>6</sup> (Ow-it-hurts / Mifamale), *Mojdodyr*<sup>7</sup> (Wash-'em-clean / Mangiasporco) and *Kradenoe solnce*<sup>8</sup> (The stolen sun / Il sole rubato). The translator employs intelligent strategies, and the formal strength of the text is mainly made of rhymes and rhythm.

The most musically problematic of the four texts written by Chukovskiy is *Il telefono*, where the rhythm of the Russian original changes from stanza to stanza (and even within the same stanza) and does not always flow in clearly recognizable metric figures. The choice of maintaining the rhyme scheme in Italian forces the translator to many “changes of gear” and to a frequent reshaping of the number of stanzas. An example of the freedom with which the translator works can be found in the second verse of *Il telefono*:

А потом позвонил  
Крокодил  
И со слезами просил:  
— Мой милый, хороший,  
Пришли мне калоши,  
И мне, и жене, и Тотоше.  
— Постой, не тебе ли  
На прошлой неделе  
Я выслал две пары  
Отличных калош?  
— Ах, те, что ты выслал  
На прошлой неделе,

Мы давно уже съели  
 И ждем, не дождемся,  
 Когда же ты снова пришьлешь.  
 К нашему ужину  
 Дюжину  
 Новых и сладких калош!

[Chukovskiy 2013, 83–84]

Poi si è udito un altro trillo.  
 Questa volta è il coccodrillo.  
 — Amico mio diletto, —  
 sospira il poveretto.  
 — Mandami delle galosce,  
 ti prego, morbide e flosce,  
 per me, mia moglie e Totò...  
 — Ehi, aspetta un po'!  
 Te ne ho spedite, la settimana passata.  
 due magnifiche paia, di gomma felpata.  
 — Quelle che hai mandate  
 le abbiamo già mangiate  
 e non vediamo l'ora  
 che tu spedisca ancora,  
 per la nostra cena,  
 una dozzina appena  
 di nuove galosce  
 morbide e flosce.

[Chukovskiy 1974, [3]]

Chukovskiy uses a ternary foot: he starts with an anapestic sequence (vv. 1–2), which he “breaks” in verse 3; subsequently, he maintains an amphibrachic rhythm from verses 4 to 12; he then returns to the anapest (v. 13), to the amphibrach (v. 14–15) and closes with a trio of dactyls (16–18).

Cozza-Zoubok begins with a pair of octosyllables with accents on the 3rd and 7th syllables (vv. 1–2), continues with two septenaries with accents on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> syllables (vv. 3–4), three octosyllables with accents on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> syllables (vv. 5–7), a senary (v. 8), two tridecasyllables (vv. 9–10) and concludes with four septenaries stressed on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> syllables (vv. 11–14, the first with a dialefe between ‘che’ and ‘hai’), a senary (v. 15), a septenary (v. 16), a senary (v. 17) and a quinary (v. 18).

Considering that almost half century has passed, the lexicon (I am referring only to *Il telefono*) has not particularly aged, with the exception of few words such as *figlietto*, *bertucce*, *babbucce*, *accorare*, *carosello*, *vanerelle* (which for various reasons would perhaps require some footnotes so that children could understand them) and *demodé* truncations such as “domandan”, “ver”, “girar”, “vadan”, “dan”. Similar observations on lexicon can also be made for *Mifamale*, *Mangiasporco* (which has also been published as a single volume with the same translation: see [Chukovskiy 1978]) and *Il sole rubato*.

As far as meter is concerned, in her rendering of *Mojdodyr* Cozza-Zoubok massively adopts a trochaic octosyllable, which takes up the trochaic rhythm created by Chukovskiy throughout the text. However, in the last eleven verses the original text suddenly deviates towards ternary figures: here Chukovskiy alternates amphibrachs and anapests and closes with dactyls. In the Italian version we find no trace of the “metric island” that is so evident in *Mojodyr*: the translator, probably due to some sort of rhythmic inertia, concludes her work in octosyllables and with a solemn closing line: «*E sia all’acqua fresca e pura / gloria lunga e imperitura*» [Chukovskiy 1974, [38]].

To make the text more understandable for Italian children, the translation is frequently domesticated: while in the original *Mangiasporco* threatens the filthy child that he will throw him into the Мойка («Прямо в Мойку, / Прямо в Мойку, / С головою окунут!» [Chukovskiy 2013, 33]), in the Italian version the child only risks to end up «dritto nella saponata / per i piedi a testa in giù» [Chukovskiy 1974, [33]]. Similarly, the streets Sadovaya and Sennaya and the Tauride Garden disappear («А от бешеной мочалки / Я помчался, как от палки, / А она за мной, за мной / По Садовой, по Сенной. / Я к Таврическому саду, / Перепрыгнул через ограду, / А она за мною мчится / И кусает, как волчица» [Chukovskiy 2013, 34]), becoming, respectively, «stradine e vicoletti» and, more prosaically, «giardinetti». Finally, the scene in which pies and sandwiches fly right into the child’s mouth is particularly enjoyable; however, the Italian translation of Russian *pirozhek* is rather unconvincing: «e mi salta dritto in bocca / il gelato d’albicocca» [Chukovskiy 1974, [35]].

As for *Ajbolit*, the translator does not reproduce its rhythmic variety and decides to make the text uniform mainly by exploiting the octosyllable or, in part 8, by adopting a rhythmically trochaic senary, but with infractions (see the quinary of the exclamation in capital letters): «Ma ecco, guardate, / sull’ale spiegate, / d’un grosso uccello, / agitando il cappello, / gridare cordiale / il buon Mifamale: / “EVVIVA L’AFRICA”»

[Chukovskiy 1974, [24]]. In short, a “trochaic structure” acts as the rhythmic leitmotif of the *Mifamale* translation.

In *Kradenoe solnce* as well, Chukovskiy embraces variations in meter and rhythm, but, in this case too, the work of the translator tends to uniformity: the octosyllable used in *Il sole rubato* is maintained constantly (despite some infractions), even when it is apparently fragmented in shorter lines. See the following sequence: «L’orso s’alza / e con baldanza / verso il grande fiume / avanza. / Nel Gran Fiume / il coccodrillo / sguazza ilare e tranquillo / e fra i denti ben serrato / tiene il sole trafugato» [Chukovskiy 1974, [47]]. Of these nine verses, the first six can be recomposed into three octosyllables, which organically join the next three lines.

The Italian translations by Cozza-Zoubok, which are rather admirable, deserved better luck. It is possible that the publishing circuit in which they entered — Russian editions conceived in Italian and mainly distributed in the bookstores of Italy-USSR associations — did not help their diffusion. If they had been published by some major publishing house specialized in children’s literature, we would now probably have access to an “Italian Chukovskiy”.

Quite surprisingly, a second Italian version of *Il sole rubato* exists, edited by Reggio and published a few years after the first one [Chukovskiy 1985]. This translation allows us to make some initial comparisons:

Солнце по́ небу гуляло  
И за тучу забежало.  
Глянул зайнька в окно,  
Стало зайньке темно.

А сороки-  
Белобоки  
Поскакали по полям,  
Закричали журавлям:  
«Горе! Горе! Крокодил  
Солнце в небе проглотил!»

[Chukovskiy 2013, 76]

Esce il sole a passeggiare:  
una nuvola, e scompare.  
Il leprotto, senza fiato,  
fissa il buio trasecolato.

E la gazza fa uno strillo  
 «Oh sventura! Il coccodrillo,  
 s'è ingollato, quel cialtrone,  
 tutto il sole in un boccone!»

[Chukovskiy 1974, [41]]

Passeggia il sole nel cielo lassù:  
 Va dietro le nubi non lo vedi più!  
 Dalla finestra guarda il leprotto  
 Tutto buio s'è fatto di botto.

E le gazze  
 Che sui fianchi han bianche chiazze  
 Per i campi saltellando  
 Alle cicogne van gridando:  
 «Un coccodrillo, — disperazione! —  
 Del sole intero ha fatto un boccone!»

[Chukovskiy 1985, [1]]

Compared to Cozza-Zoubok's version, Saverio Reggio's translation is definitely less disciplined on the metric front: there is a clear propensity towards a decasyllable (devoid, however, of the fixed accents on the 3rd and 6<sup>th</sup> syllables, which are firmly attested in the Italian tradition) and the rhymes are the sole indicator of a "poetic environment". This translation is also a little more modern on the lexical level, but, on the other hand, it overflows with end and grammatical rhymes.

On the other hand, the version of *Telefon* carried out Mauro Di Leo [Chukovskiy 2007] cannot be compared with the one realized by Cozza-Zoubok, because, as it is stated on the title page, Di Leo's version is more an adaptation than a translation. If we juxtapose the memorable beginning of Chukovskiy's text with Di Leo's rendition, the degree of recreation to which the text is subjected immediately stands out:

У меня зазвонил телефон.  
 — Кто говорит?  
 — Слон.  
 — Откуда?  
 — От верблюда.  
 — Что вам надо?  
 — Шоколада.  
 — Для кого?  
 — Для сына моего.

— А много ли прислать?  
 — Да пудов этак пять  
 Или шесть:  
 Больше ему не съесть,  
 Он у меня ещё маленький!

[Chukovskiy 2013, 83]

Driing Driing.  
 Il telefono squilla.  
 «Ciao! Chi è la?»  
 L'orso bianco strilla:  
 «Sto chiamando per l'elefante.  
 Vuole un po' di croccante».  
 «E per i figli?»  
 «Cosa mi consigli,  
 cinque o sei tonnellate?»  
 «Di certo non sbagli,  
 si faranno,  
 delle belle abbuffate!»

[Chukovskiy 2007, [4, 8, 10]]

Leaving aside a few substitutions — in the fragment cited above the white bear (actually in Russian only *medved'*, 'orso') appears much earlier than in the original text, and inexplicably replaces *verblyud* (cammello) — the zoo set up by Chukovskiy becomes rather smaller in translation: for example, there is no mention of the 'leverets' (*zaychatki*), of the 'nightingale' (*solovey*), of the 'crow' (*vorona*), of the 'vice' (*morzh*), of the 'sea urchin' (*morskoy ezh*), of the 'sea lion' (*tyulen'*), of the 'deer' (*olen'*) and of 'gazelles' (*gazeli*). On the other hand, a 'dove' [Chukovskiy 2007, [12]] and a 'stork' [Chukovskiy 2007, [22]] are added to the text. At one point of the original text a plantigrade appears, as if it were a zoological synecdoche representing Russia as a whole: in translation, it is rendered with «l'orso Grizzly» [Chukovskiy 2007, [20]], an animal that has more to do with North America than Russia. The de-russification of the text is completed when a "classic" of Italian advertising from the 1960s is unexpectedly introduced into the Italian text: *il pulcino Calimero*. Finally, the rhymes are not used systematically and follow no guiding principle.

Di Leo is also the author of *Tarakan's* [The monstrous cockroach / Il gran scarafaggio] «prose adaptation» (as in the colophon of the

volume), which has become, with a clear regionalization of the lexicon [Chukovskiy 2019a], instead of ‘lo scarafaggio’, *Lo scarrafone*. The colophon, however, also mentions something else, namely that the prose adaptation was preceded by a «translation of the poem Tarakanishche (sic)» by Mario Caramitti. The latter, consulted on the subject, revealed to me that, in essence, very little of his initial version, which was in verse, was maintained as it was. To confirm this, he kindly provided his earlier translation to me, to show the painful (and paradoxical) transformation of his work, which not only preserved the texture of the rhymes, but also maintained (I am referring only to the section that I mention below) a recognizable meter: a septenary with a trochaic trend, which reproduces the trochaic tripod of the original text.

Ехали медведи  
 На велосипеде.  
 А за ними кот  
 Задом наперёд.  
 А за ним комарики  
 На воздушном шарике.  
 А за ними раки  
 На хромой собаке.  
 Волки на кобыле.  
 Львы в автомобиле.  
 Зайчики  
 В трамвайчике.

[Chukovskiy 2013, 22]

Tre orsi in bicicletta  
 pedalan di gran fretta.  
 Dietro viene il gatto,  
 gira come un matto.  
 Su nel ciel leggera  
 zanzara in mongolfiera.  
 I granchi senza intoppo  
 in groppa a un cane zoppo.  
 I lupi sul vagone  
 sul Suv ci sta un leone.  
 Leprotto e lepreto  
 sul loro tranvetto.

[Chukovskiy 2019b]

In its published version, Chukovskiy's poem sounds like this (I quote it in prose, but I follow the segmentation of the text produced by the presence of illustrations): «Tre orsi andavano in bicicletta, / dietro di loro arrivò il gatto / guidando all'indietro la sua bici. // Nei cieli volavano dei moscerini sul pallone. // E poi c'erano dei granchi / trainati da un cane zoppo e dei lupi su una cavalla, / dei leoni in macchina, dei conigli in un tram» [Chukovskiy 2019b, [2]]. Even though the disposition of the text recalls versification, the flatness of the prose is easily recognizable: this rendition is thus totally different from the creative work of Caramitti, which hopefully will be published elsewhere and bodes well for an increasingly conscious approach to the translation of the classics of Russian poetry for children.

Daniela Almansi also moved in this promising direction with *Crocodilo*, translation of Chukovskiy's *Krokodil* (The crocodile)<sup>9</sup> [Chukovskiy 2021], which was published by a specialized and respectable publishing house such as Orecchio Acerbo.

Жил да был  
Крокодил.  
Он по улицам ходил,  
Папиросы курил,  
По турецки говорил, —  
Крокодил, Крокодил Крокодилович!  
А за ним то народ  
И поёт и орёт:  
— Вот урод так урод!  
Что за нос, что за рот!  
И откуда такое чудовище?

[Chukovskiy 2013, 94]

Un tranquillo  
Coccodrillo  
Con l'accento d'Istanbullo,  
Passeggiava a Leningrado  
Sfumacchiando un sigarillo.  
Si chiamava Crocodilo!  
Si stupiscono i passanti  
Strepitanti e canzonanti:  
«Va' che muso! Va' che denti!  
Va' che zampe repellenti!  
Ma da dove salta fuori:

Dalla casa degli orrori?»

[Chukovskiy 2021, [4]]

Almansi's very interesting and fluent rendition, which avoids both a mortifying literality and an annihilating rewriting, demonstrates how Chukovskiy can be convincingly translated as a modern author. Almansi's approach is thus very valuable and hopefully will be embraced by other translators.

4. The work of Samuil Marshak was briefly introduced in Italy in the early 1980s (thus almost 40 years ago!). Only *Skazka o glupom myshonke* (The tale of the silly little mouse), translated as *Favola del topino sciocco*<sup>10</sup> [Marshak 1980] and *Detki v kletke* (Kids in a cage), which became *Animali in gabbia* [Marshak 1983], have found the path of the Italian reader. Unfortunately, these two works did not reach a wide public due to the limited resources of the Malysh — Edest publishing house.

In these two volumes, the translator, Saverio Reggio, behaved in two different ways. In *Animali in gabbia*, which only shows a selection of the animals which inhabit the large zoological garden set up by the Russian poet [Marshak 1968, 37–67], both the rhymes and the meter are diligently adopted (a hendecasyllable, even if not always impeccable, acts as a counterpart to the trochaic tetrapody of the original, although this choice is rather infrequent in the Italian translation tradition<sup>11</sup>). However, here the text seems ancillary to the drawings and, in this case in particular, appears to be of secondary importance due to the effervescence of the pop-up edition. One example may be the following:

ЖИРАФ

Рвать цветы легко и просто  
 Детям маленького роста,  
 Но тому, кто так высок,  
 Нелегко сорвать цветок!

[Marshak 1980, [2]]

LA GIRAFFA

Cogliere fiori è solo un giochetto  
 per un bambino ancor piccoletto.  
 Per chi è così alto sono dolori  
 chinarsi a terra a raccogliere fiori.

[Marshak 1968, 40]

As for *Favola del topino sciocco*, the pressing trochaic rhythm and the strict alternation of ABAB and AABB rhyming concatenations of the original dissolve in a verse oriented on eight or nine syllables, which lack a regular rhythmic articulation and with *impromptu* rhymes. The jaunty freshness of the Marshakian text is largely compromised. The encounter between Marshak and the Italian public was essentially unsuccessful.

5. Chukovskiy and Marshak aside, the Italian reader is almost entirely unaware of the literary works written for children which belong to the Silver Age of Russian poetry, the so called *Serebryany vek*. We have already mentioned Mayakovsky and Pasternak, but these are not the only authors to have written poetry for children. For example, we can mention Osip Mandel'shtam, who wrote, among other things, the poem *Dva tramvaja* (Two trams)<sup>12</sup>. This poem was published in a truly delightful little volume, illustrated by Boris Ėnder [Mandel'shtam 1925]. In 2014, a small but courageous publishing house from Bologna gave me the opportunity to translate the text [Mandel'shtam 2014].

In my rendition, I avoided deviating too much from the semantics of the text while trying to employ rhymes which would not result too obvious. I was unable to avoid grammatical rhymes completely, but I am still modestly proud of solutions such as *deposito: riposo; luci: lucido; fabbro: fabbrica; trottano: semplicitto*. I must say that I feel particularly attached to this translation — the quality of which, of course, is not for me to judge. In my mind, it is associated with a circumstance that undoubtedly sharpened my sensitivity for children's literature: my daughter's ninth birthday. After all, I owe my foray into a wonderful territory such as children's literature to her.

In conclusion, it is my belief that courageous and sensitive translators are needed to keep exploring the fascinating field of Russian poetry for children. Its dissemination will certainly be appreciated by the Italian public, which is already accustomed to children's literature of many different cultures and times.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I take this opportunity to thank Giulia De Florio for having made available to me the bibliography that she is tenaciously collecting in view of a forthcoming volume. A first result of this patient work is a survey of Russian children's literature in Italy [cf. De Florio 2017] to which a first bibliographic systematization of the phenomenon is attached [cf. De Florio, Niero 2017, 437–447].

<sup>2</sup> In *Il cavallino di fuoco*, a little boy, who is eager to become a rider, asks his father to practice with a toy horse. Not finding the toy in the shops, he

decides to turn to a craftsman, who will turn to as many of his colleagues to assemble the horse. This becomes an opportunity to meet a whole series of humble workers who, with a spirit of collaboration, give their contribution so that the horse can be built.

- <sup>3</sup> The exception to the rule had been, two years earlier, Lenin [Mayakovskiy 1967], translated, albeit with some reticence, by Angelo Maria Ripellino, who employed a vast rhetorical orchestration including meter, rhymes, assonances, consonances etc. In this regard, I refer to [Niero 2019, 185–244].
- <sup>4</sup> The poem is constructed around oppositions: good weather *versus* bad weather; cleansing of the body *versus* dirt of the body; arrogance towards the weak *versus* defense of the weak; courage *versus* pusillanimity; neglect towards books *versus* love for books; clean clothes *versus* unkempt clothes. The aim of the poem is illustrating what is good and what is bad.
- <sup>5</sup> In the poem, the protagonist receives phone calls from various animals that express the most varied needs. The last one, the most important, is the request for help in extracting a hippo from a swamp.
- <sup>6</sup> The story is that of a generous veterinarian who, having received a telegram with a request for help, must go to Africa to treat animals. The very adventurous journey is successful thanks to some animals, who help the doctor at a difficult time, bringing him to Limpopo River to carry out his mission.
- <sup>7</sup> *Mojdodyr* is the name of a strange washstand that comes to life and forces a dirty kid to take care of his body and be cleaner.
- <sup>8</sup> *Il sole rubato* tells the story of a crocodile that is about to swallow the sun. Only a bear is brave enough to face him and tear the sun from out of his mouth.
- <sup>9</sup> In Chukovskiy's tale, a crocodile appears in Petrograd and begins to swallow people, but is stopped by the brave Vanya Vasil'chikov who makes him spit them out and drives him back to Egypt. There, the crocodile tells the other animals how sad life is for caged animals at the zoo and they all decide to go to Petrograd to free them. The result is a battle between humans and animals. Little Lyalechka is taken hostage, but is immediately freed by an army of humans led by Vanya Vasil'chikov. The man, however, understands the tragedy of animals in captivity and decides to free them as long as humans and animals agree to live in peace.
- <sup>10</sup> The story is that of a mouse that does not like his mother's voice when she tries to make him fall asleep. The mouse then discards one by one a whole series of animal-nurses and finds satisfaction only in the voice of a cat. The cat, however, ends up eating the mouse.
- <sup>11</sup> In this regard, I rely on my analysis see: [Niero 2019, 126–127] of the meters used by Renato Poggioli for his anthology *Il fiore del verso russo* [Poggioli 1949]. It should also be noted that in the systematization of the possible "correspondences" between Russian and Italian meters proposed almost thirty years ago by Michele Colucci, the hendecasyllable is proposed

for the rendition of the iambic tetrapody, for the iambic pentapody and for tripodies with ternary feet (anapest, amphibrach, dactyl) [Colucci 1993, 116–118].

- <sup>12</sup> The protagonists of this tale are two trams. One is wiser and prudent, the other is more reckless. At the end of the day, the wiser tram will tow the other tram to the depot.

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## ВЕЛИКОЕ ОТСУТСТВИЕ: ЗАМЕТКИ О РЕЦЕПЦИИ РУССКОЙ ПОЭЗИИ ДЛЯ ДЕТЕЙ XX ВЕКА В ИТАЛИИ

В статье предлагается обзор русской детской поэзии XX в., переведенной на итальянский язык. Несмотря на то, что в России традиция детской поэзии весьма обильна и разнообразна, количество существующих итальянских переводов не очень велико. В числе авторов, чьи произведения были переведены на итальянский язык — Владимир Маяковский, Осип Мандельштам, Борис Пастернак, Корней Чуковский и Самуил Маршак. Немногочисленные издания их стихов выходили в основном в небольших издательствах, небольшими тиражами и широко не распространялись. В качестве одной из возможных причин низкого интереса автор указывает предубеждение к детской литературе, которая относительно классической русской литературы «для взрослых» считалась факультативной и даже маргинальной; кроме того, поэтические тексты сложно переводить из-за формальных параметров, таких как рифма и ритм. В статье отмечается, что переводчики не всегда тщательно передавали формальные свойства оригиналов, и что ни один итальянский поэт не ставил перед собой задачи по систематическому созданию переводов русских детских стихов, которое могло бы претендовать на подлинную эстетическую автономию. Все это позволяет, несмотря на некоторые заметные переводы, появившиеся в последнее время, охарактеризовать русскую поэзию для детей на итальянской культурной сцене, как «великую отсутствующую».

*Keywords:* русская литература для детей XX века, восприятие русской литературы в Италии, поэтический перевод, сравнительный подход, В. Маяковский, О. Мандельштам, Б. Пастернак, К. Чуковский, С. Маршак