

РЕЦЕНЗИИ

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GIANNI RODARI IN THE UK AND IN THE US:
A COMPLEX RECEPTION STORY. REVIEW OF
C. ALBORGHETTI *GIANNI RODARI AND HIS
ENGLISH READERS. A DIALOGICAL
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The review of *Gianni Rodari and His English Readers. A Dialogical Perspective* by Claudia Alborghetti highlights the main steps in the translation and reception of Gianni Rodari's works in the English-speaking countries. The comprehensive historical, paratextual, and translational analysis follows the evolution of Rodari's books in English from the first UK translation back in 1965 to contemporary US ones. By adopting a translational and pedagogical perspective focussed on empathy, the study reveals how translation affects the empathising process in children's literature and the role played by translators and other mediators. The empathy building process can be manipulated to adapt to the target cultural context and value system, and the empathic charge of books can be limited or diminished. However, the empathic dialogue of the author with their readers can also be retained in translation, allowing children to connect with a different culture and children's literature to liberate its unique potential.

Keywords: Gianni Rodari, children's literature translation, empathy, dialogic translation, paratext, reception, US publishing context, UK publishing context

Gianni Rodari and His English Readers. A Dialogical Perspective offers an in-depth analysis of the translation and reception in English-speaking countries, namely in the UK and in the US, of one of the key

figures of Italian children's literature in the 20th century, Gianni Rodari. Moving from an interdisciplinary approach that acknowledges the multidisciplinary nature of children's literature, Alborghetti's scrutiny focuses on the potential of books (and authors) for children to foster empathy in young readers. Translation is thus explored from this very specific pedagogical angle, investigating the dialogic relationship among the author, the translator, and the reader, as well as the possibilities that children's literature can open in translation. Rodari's translation(s) into English prove to be a particularly effective and suitable case study. Not only is Rodari "one of the most translated Italian authors for children into English" (p. 12), but ethical, social, political, civil issues imbued his whole production and make his texts still resonates with contemporary readers. Last but not least, words with their imaginative potential are paramount to Rodari and his creative dialogue with children. Using a wide range of narrative strategies, such as rhetorical questions, open endings, cultural references, inventive language, character names and their descriptions, the writer engages with his readers and builds empathy with them.

The descriptive analysis of Rodari's translations is carefully theoretically framed, starting from the key, multidisciplinary notion of empathy, explored from a developmental viewpoint in its interplay with children's literature and reading. In particular, the narrative dialogue between the writer and their reader(s) is where empathy can be built through literature: in the safe, fictional worlds of literature, by empathising with characters, children can experience everything (pp. 17–22). In the case of translated books, as the author underlines, other people (translators, editors, publishers, illustrators) step in and their presence, along with cultural, economic, social, and ethical elements, can affect this narrative dialogue. Drawing on established research in Translation Studies (Even-Zohar, Toury, Venuti), the translation of children's literature is presented in its fundamental mediating function, highlighting the role played by translators and publishers as well as by the other professionals involved in the process (pp. 28–34), especially when culture-specific items and references are at stake. With domestication and foreignisation being the overall guiding framework for the analysis carried out in the study, the mediation occurring when translating books for children is further explored bringing up the key issue of the voice and presence of the translator(s) in children's literature, with particular reference to O'Sullivan's dialogic translation (pp. 38–43).

To complete the theoretical premises for the analysis of examples of dialogical narrative in Rodari's books translated into English, chapter

2 outlines the historical, literary, and editorial context of translated children's literature in the US and the UK from the 1950s to today. This time frame encompasses both Rodari's activity as a writer for children and his translation in the English-speaking world. The contextual and historical overview is essential to contextualise Rodari's importation and reception in both countries, while also revealing the plurality of mediators at play. Both countries are widely known for their lack of translation and their resistance to it, a situation that mainly stems from the peripheral position of translation and children's literature in the polysystems of the US and the UK and results in a still limited number of translated children's books.

Before delving into the status of translation and translators on both sides of the ocean, the author discusses the main literary prizes and awards in children's literature and their history, again with a specific focus on translation. National and international prizes play a crucial mediating role in legitimising the selection of books — and authors — to be translated, as their awarding stands for literary value. This insight is all the more necessary if we consider that Rodari won the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1970. The prestige of the award made him internationally known and served as a catalyst for his translation in the UK. Moreover, — and perhaps more importantly for the research purposes, as the analysis shows — this is often mentioned and underlined in paratextual material to reassure about the quality of Rodari's work, thus justifying his translation.

Although the development of children's literature followed different paths and rhythms in the US and the UK, the two countries share some common features and some parallels can be drawn, allowing the author to identify three different periods (1950s–1979; 1980s–1995; 1996–today) in the evolution of the children's literature market, with corresponding major trends in translation. After the Second World War, internationalism in children's literature and the underlying idea that books for children could foster international mutual understanding lead to a rise in translation and foreign authors did reach the English-speaking market. However, this “golden age” was not going to last: in the following years, a difficult economic and political situation negatively affected the publishing market, that was to undergo major transformations, resulting in a reduction in translated works.

In the US, the drop in funding forced many publishing houses to merge under the umbrella of bigger publishing companies or to focus on “selling”, marketable books, or to join co-publishing projects. Also due to the saturation of the market caused by the massive production

of books in the previous years, translation became a risky business in which publishing houses were reluctant to invest, a downturn that were to isolate the US. The birth of conglomerates in publishing houses and the establishment of specialised bookstores brought about the commodification of children's literature, a new trend directly linked to consumerism and poor quality, that would have endured.

The UK experienced a similar decline due to a lack of funding, fast-growing chain bookstores, the crisis of librarians as mediators, and new typologies of books thought for children as consumers. While the general trend pointed to a drop in translated books, some publishers and editors kept promoting foreign authors and books, like Klaus Flugge who inspired Aiden Chambers in creating his own imprint devoted to offering translated books to children and young readers.

The new millennium, and especially the second decade of the 21st century, would slowly move towards a "more inclusive literature in the US and the UK" (p. 74). Children's publishing will still be dominated by globalisation and its homogenisation of a literature giving up originality and (cultural) difference, by a small number of huge conglomerates, and by Anglocentrism. However, thanks to the commitment of small independent publishers and the effort of other specialists, translators, and scholars, there has been an upsurge in translated books as a way to increase quality and promote diversity in children's books. Moreover, thanks to projects, debates and initiatives, translation and translators are gaining visibility in English-speaking countries, which could lead to a greater awareness of this crucial mediating process also among readers.

Having laid down the theoretical framework of the research, chapters 3 and 4 move on to the textual analysis of excerpts of Rodari's works translated into English from 1965 — when the first translation of *Telephone Tales* appeared in the UK — to today. The aim is to determine whether the narrative dialogue that Rodari built with his readers survived in translation. Acknowledging translation as the result of a process involving different book professionals (translators, publishers, editors, illustrators), the analysis is not limited to a commentary of the translation strategies adopted. Paratextual materials — both peritextual and epitextual (reviews, advertisements, blogs, interviews, etc.) — are considered so as to recreate the historical and publishing context in which each translation originated, and to better understand its position and reception within the target social, cultural, literary, and editorial environment. By paying attention to the "agents" of translation and by providing specific background information on translators and publishers, this broader perspective reveals how extra-textual, contextual elements

are paramount to a thorough investigation of the empathising process in Rodari's books translated in English and, more generally, in translated children's literature. For analysis purposes, books are grouped by genre (tales and short stories, novels, adapted picturebooks) and discussed separately, before drawing some final remarks on the whole importing process in each country.

Since Rodari was first translated in English in the UK, mostly during the 1970s, and only later in the US, by adopting a chronological criterion, chapter 3 follows the steps of Gianni Rodari's translations and their dialogue with readers in the UK between 1965 and 1976. Rodari was introduced to British readers back in 1965, when Harrap & Co. first published *Telephone Tales: Bedtime Stories by Gianni Rodari*, a selection of short stories from his collection *Favole al telefono* published by Einaudi in 1962. Four more books were to be translated by the end of the 1970s, mainly thanks to the awarding of the Hans Christian Andersen Award: the novels *The Befana's Toyshop: A Twelfth Night Story* (1970) and *A Pie in the Sky* (1971), the short story *Mr. Cat in Business* (1975), and the (selected) collection *Tales told by a Machine* (1976). Publishers shifted from Harrap & Co. to J. M. Dent & Sons, to Abelard Schuman, and while the first three books were all translated by Patrick Creagh, he was replaced by Sue Newson-Smith for *Tales told by a Machine* and by an anonymous translator for *Mr. Cat in Business*. The analysis reveals the major mediating and advertising role played by paratexts in introducing and promoting Rodari and his work, which were still unknown in the UK at the time. Particular emphasis was often laid on the Andersen Prize to reassure adult mediators about the quality and the literary value of the books. Translation strategies vary across the books, from more domesticating choices to a stronger foreignising approach, due to changes in the narrator's voice and in the narrative strategies as well as to cultural reasons. The in-depth investigation of these strategies, by grounding them in their original cultural, editorial, and historical background, shows how they affect the empathising process and reveals that "the empathic charge of some [books] was limited in translation, compared to the original intentions of the author" (p. 167). Moreover, despite a closeness in time with the original books, intertextual and contextual references were generally adapted in order to give target readers a more familiar environment.

Chapter 4 retraces Rodari's path in the US, from the first sporadic translation of a short story in 1973 to 2022. Rodari's political ideas and his affiliation with the Communist Party long prevented his work to cross the ocean and reach US readers, with the only exception being

three short stories published in the magazine “Cricket” in 1973, 1979 and 1987. It was not until the mid-90s that his work was finally imported and his fame as a renowned children’s writer was recognised and began to flourish. As the study points out, this late reception was possible thanks to two prominent, key figures in the US academia and literary world, Jack Zipes and Anthony Shugaar respectively. If Zipes is to be credited with introducing Rodari to the US public through his translation of *The Grammar of Fantasy* in 1996, Shugaar has played — and still plays — a crucial role in the translation and dissemination of Rodari’s work, in particular thanks to his collaboration with the publishing house Enchanted Lion Books, which is fully invested in this cultural and editorial project, with new translations on their way. Even though it is a manual for adults, Alborghetti briefly considers also *The Grammar of Fantasy* in her analysis. By marking a turning point in the importation and reception of Rodari in the US, it is essential to a comprehensive overview of the target cultural and literary environment. Similar theoretical and methodological standpoints account for and move the analysis of three picturebooks based on Rodari’s short stories and illustrated by Beatrice Alemagna (*One and Seven*, 2003, translated by David Anglin; *Telling Stories Wrong*, 2022, translated by Antony Shugaar; *The Moon of Kyiv*, 2022). All these works are complementary to the translations that represent the true focus of the study, i.e., the collection *Tales to Change the World* (2008), translated and adapted by Jack Zipes, the novel *Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto* (2011), and the collection *Telephone Tales* (2020), both translated by Antony Shugaar and published by Melville House Publishing and Enchanted Lion Books respectively.

The analysis of paratextual material highlights the crucial role played by the translators as the initiators of the different translation projects, as well as the responsiveness of Enchanted Lion Books as a publisher and of its editor Claudia Bedrick. The examples from Rodari’s translation discussed in the chapter reveal how the bond with the reader(s) and empathy are built through different translation strategies, also depending on the target readership, whether children or adults as in Shugaar’s translation of *Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto*. If in *Tales to Change the World*, Zipes adopted a domesticating strategy aimed at making young readers empathise with characters and understand the deeper meaning of each story, in his translation of *Telephone Tales*, Shugaar chose a consistent foreignising approach that did not undermine the empathising process. The translator’s approach to the text and his careful work on Rodari’s language, his competence and stylistic resources succeed in recreating the writer’s language and imagination for foreign readers along

with his empathic dialogue with children. The advertising campaign and the other initiatives that surrounded the book promotion (interviews, videos, blogs, etc.) also made it possible to opt for such an approach in translation.

Spanning over 70 years and combining different perspectives, Alborghetti's study of the translation and reception of Rodari's works in Anglophone countries fills a void. Unlike his translation into other languages, such as Russian or French, which have attracted greater scholarly attention, Rodari's translations in English had not been systematically investigated, either in the UK and the US, prior to Alborghetti's monograph. The path of Rodari's reception in the English-speaking world illustrates how the translation and importation of an author often requires a long process of sedimentation of habits, language, and traditions. It also demonstrates, should it still be necessary, that translation is a complex process involving different "agents," all able not only to be its tireless initiators but also to affect its reception.

By adopting a translational and pedagogical point of view in the study of translated children's literature, Alborghetti chooses an original perspective — empathy and its narrative strategies — for the historical, paratextual, and translational analysis of Rodari's translations in English-speaking countries. The multi-layered analysis reveals that, just like other aspects, the process of building empathy can be manipulated in translation to adapt to and fit into the target culture's ideology and values by erasing those elements that adults deem unsuitable for young readers. Studying translations and their "empathic potential" represents an interesting perspective, one that opens up other possibilities and falls in line with the increasing attention that Translation Studies is devoting to the reception of translated texts.

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ДЖАННИ РОДАРИ В ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИИ И США: СЛОЖНАЯ
ИСТОРИЯ ВОСПРИЯТИЯ. РЕЦ. НА КН.: АЛЬБОРГЕТТИ
К. ДЖАННИ РОДАРИ И ЕГО АНГЛИЙСКИЕ ЧИТАТЕЛИ.
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В рецензии на книгу «Джанни Родари и его английские читатели. Диалогическая перспектива» Клаудии Альборгетти описаны основные этапы перевода текстов Джанни Родари и их рецепция в англоязычных странах. Комплексный анализ исторического, паратекстуального и переводческого аспектов позволяет реконструировать историю издания книг Родари на английском языке, с первой публикации в Великобритании в 1965 году — до современных американских переводов. С точки зрения эволюции переводов и педагогических идей, основанных на детском восприятии, исследование показывает, как перевод и фигура переводчика влияют на рецепцию текста. С учетом восприятия текста книга может быть адаптирована под культурный и ценностный контекст, а эмоциональный аспект усилен или наоборот уменьшен. В то же время при переводе не теряется эмоциональный контакт автора с читателями, который позволяет приобщить ребенка к другой культуре и раскрыть уникальность текста.

Keywords: Джанни Родари, перевод детской литературы, эмпатия, диалогический перевод, паратекст, рецепция, книгоиздание в США, книгоиздание в Великобритании