

Reviews

Emilio Salgari. Una mitologia moderna tra letteratura, politica, società. Volume I. Fine secolo 1883–1915. La verità di una vita letteraria [Emilio Salgari: a modern mythology between literature, politics, society, vol. 1, fin de siècle 1883–1915. The truth of a literary life]. Ann Lawson Lucas. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki editore, 'Biblioteca dell'Archivum Romanicum' (456), 2017. 441 pages.

This volume by Ann Lawson Lucas, a British scholar and translator, is a continuation and the culmination of her previous studies of Emilio Salgari (1862–1911) and the extraordinary phenomenon of his reception in various political periods. It is also an expansion of Lucas's previous monograph, *La ricerca dell'ignoto. I romanzi d'avventura di Emilio Salgari* [Emilio Salgari's adventure novels], published by Olschki in the same series in 2000. The outline of the ambitious project, planned to be a four-volume publication, is presented in the detailed index at the end of the book. *Fine secolo 1883–1915. La verità di una vita letteraria* focuses on the period of Salgari's professional activity in its literary, social and political context, including the reception of his work in the aftermath of the writer's death in 1911. The second volume will analyse the ideological appropriation of the writer's work in the fascist period. The third will deal with the reception of his work in the second half of the twentieth century. Finally, the fourth will bring an overview of recent scholarship on Salgari and much needed bibliographies of his works, as well as, interestingly, a bibliographical list of works by other authors inspired by Salgari. It is a scholarly tribute not all writers could dream of, especially those who, like Salgari, have enjoyed a somehow ambiguous status in Italian literature.

Salgari, known in Italy as 'the father of the heroes', was the inventor of Italian adventure literature, whose influence on popular culture and the collective imaginary was immense and long-lasting. His two most famous novel series, the adventures of merciless pirate Sandokan and the swashbuckling revenge saga of Black Corsair, captured the hearts of many generations of young readers, became inspirations for several cinematographic adaptations, and remain recognisable features of mass imagination even today. On the other hand, literary criticism snubbed Salgari's work for a long time, considering it

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devoid of any artistic value. It is only in the last few decades that this situation has been slowly changing. Nevertheless, the criticism is still limited mostly to occasional studies and essays. Moreover, both the life and works of Salgari have always been entangled in a dense net of manipulations, mythologies and half-truths, destined to be, as one of his biographers wrote, 'a continuous falsification' (Arpino 26). From this point of view, Lawson Lucas, who, as she herself states in the preface to the book, 'has lived all her life with Emilio Salgari' (4), is most competent to undertake the ambitious task of creating a comprehensive historical-literary synthesis that can rectify misunderstandings and academic bias against the writer.

The first reaction to the book is that of an almost sensual pleasure: it is a sumptuous volume, printed on high quality paper and enriched with eighty-three illustrations in black and white as well as forty-two colour plates. The images reproduce mainly the illustrations that accompanied Salgari's books, providing readers with a deeper knowledge of the editorial art of the time. Similarly, the immense archival research that emerges from the pages is truly impressive. Lawson Lucas has accumulated an incredible amount of data concerning the literary activities, professional relationships and correspondence of Salgari, as well as the critical testimonies of his work that appeared at the turn of the century. The author quotes little-known or previously unpublished archive sources, aiming at a reconstruction of all the editorial vicissitudes of the Salgarian texts, including prices and other technical data of all editions of his books, as well as the legal agreements with his publishers. She also analyses the writing of Salgari in a wider context, including the general situation of Italian publishing for children in the period and the literary production of the writer's rivals and emulators.

Lawson Lucas' philological precision is matched by a passionate approach to the subject. As a consequence, she does not limit herself to rectifying errors concerning the writings themselves but becomes the champion of the good name of the writer and of his work, exonerating even some of his debatable practices. For example, while recognising the incontestable fact that quite a few of Salgari's novels were plagiarised from Verne, May, or Haggard, she points out that the 'Salgarian narrative has a certain literary dignity not present in translations or modern adaptations of Karl May' (162). Whereas many observations made by Lawson Lucas appear reasonable, this excessive zeal in finding excuses for all shadowy aspects of Salgari's work can be detrimental to the author's purpose and raises doubts about the objectivity of her critical judgements.

Another aspect of the book that makes it less satisfactory is that Lawson Lucas seems to take for granted the reader's detailed knowledge of Salgari's novels and stories and, therefore, often talks about their plots very vaguely. For readers who are not acquainted with the texts, this approach may leave them with the impression that, while they have learnt a great deal of technical details about the publishing practices related to Salgari's works, they have been given little insight into the actual texts. It is possible, however, that the volumes

mentioned above will embrace the aspects of critical analysis glossed over in this book and therefore change its reception.

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Złota różdżka – od książki dla dzieci po dreszczowiec raczej dla dorosłych [The Golden Rod – from a children’s book to a thriller rather for adults]. Joanna Dybiec-Gajer. Kraków: Tertium, 2017. 214 pages.

Heinrich Hoffman’s *Struwwelpeter* (1845), one of the most famous children’s books ever, has been translated into more than 45 languages, and as both a text and a publishing phenomenon, it has been studied in hundreds of publications and analysed from multiple perspectives. Perhaps surprisingly, Hoffmann’s seminal work is relatively little known in Poland, Germany’s neighbouring country. Dybiec-Gajer’s monograph, commemorating the 160th anniversary of the first publication of *Struwwelpeter* in Polish (under the title *Złota Różdżka*), is the first dedicated contribution to the publishing history of *Struwwelpeter*’s Polish translation.

Despite its obvious links with Polish translation history, the book under review may be of interest to the wider public for the way it exemplifies a children’s classic’s journey ‘through various culture, languages and times, in which publishers, translators and illustrators jointly played the key role’ (12).¹ Unusually for an academic monograph, both adults and children are able to enjoy this book. Younger readers will appreciate the poems and accompanying illustrations, as the book involves an extensive source-text section. Translation studies scholars, children’s literature specialists, or lovers of Hoffmann’s work will find abundant food for thought, tracing the interlingual and intersemiotic transformations of Hoffmann’s book.

For a long time, *Złota Różdżka* was not associated with the world-famous *Struwwelpeter* – Hoffmann’s name only appeared on its cover in 2003, 158 years after its first edition. Dybiec-Gajer provides a fascinating account of why this happened and explains other riddles connected with the work including the dubious attribution of the translation and its origins as an indirect rendering via Russian. It is also interesting to note that the drawings in the Russian version inspired Hoffmann to introduce changes to his own illustrations, influencing their final form.

Dybiec-Gajer combines an edition of relevant source texts in Polish (the first complete version of *Złota Różdżka*), German (*Struwwelpeter*), and Russian (*Stepka*