

Reviews

Emilio Salgari: una mitologia moderna tra letteratura, politica, società. Vol. I: *Fine secolo 1883-1915: la verità di una vita letteraria*; vol. II: *Fascismo 1916-1943. lo sfruttamento personale e politico*. By ANN LAWSON LUCAS. (Biblioteca dell'Archivum Romanicum', Serie I: Storia, Letteratura, Paleografia) Florence: Olschki. 2017. 441 pp. (vol. I); 500 pp. (vol. II). €29 (vol. I); €35 (vol. II). ISBN 978-88-222-6469-5 (vol. I); 978-88-222-6555-5 (vol. II).

- R06024** The first two volumes of Ann Lawson Lucas's vast study unveil the fascinating, complex, and intricate history of Emilio Salgari's works and reception from the end of the nineteenth century to the Fascist period. The meaningful interplay with cinematic adaptations and translations of Salgari's works abroad is also included in the analysis, broadening the scope of the work and pointing to other aspects of Salgari's transnational reception. Two further volumes will be published by Olschki in future years: the third will be on Salgari's fortune from the Second World War to the end of the twentieth century, while the fourth will be devoted to the creation of a comprehensive catalogue of Salgari's editions and bibliography.

The value of Lawson Lucas's study is twofold. On the one hand, this work is a precious source for Salgari scholars, as it brings to light fragments of a less familiar history. The meticulous research aims to dispel the mythology created around Salgari and reveals extremely complex relations between the author (and posthumously his family) and his publishers. On the other hand, these two volumes serve as a remarkable contribution for every scholar of the history of Italian publishing. While detailing the works of Salgari, they trace the history of some of the most important Italian publishers (mostly Bemporad, but also Paravia and Vallardi, to name just three), as well as their working practices and commercial strategies to target adult and young audiences. To unravel this history, Salgari's editions are closely scrutinized in all their paratextual features.

The work adopts a chronological approach. The first volume traces the history of Salgari's life, intertwined with analysis of his extensive literary production of adventure tales and novels. Lawson Lucas guides the reader through the maze of the writer's literary works, from his beginnings in *La Nuova Arena* of Verona to the last years of his life and literary consecration. She locates the genesis of his cultural reception through archival sources, interviews, and critical appraisals of Salgari's production, as well as by systematically reviewing his works published in newspapers and in book format, including works published anonymously or under different pseudonyms. She signals two key issues in Salgari's reception. First, she traces the difficulties over the attribution of his works, which was to lead to a confused authorial situation, one that was further complicated by the completion and revision of works started by Salgari and assigned by publishers to ghost writers after his death. Second, the tragic death of the writer was to enshrine myths that were built around Salgari, the most famous being the question of the veracity of the travels he recounts in his writings. The truthfulness of his journeys was validated by journalists and—towards the end of his life, for commercial reasons—also by

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himself. With his death, all obituaries described him as a ‘captain of the merchant navy’ and ‘presented him above all as a writer for the young’ (I, 366). QUERY [1]

The second volume focuses on the vicissitudes of Salgari’s authorial legacy and the appropriation of his works by the Fascist regime. As Lawson Lucas points out, ‘under Fascism the most disastrous part of Salgari’s fortune began to reveal itself, that is, the industry of the creation of fake works (II, 64). Not only were post-humous volumes commissioned by Salgari’s sons, but new novels were published as authored by Salgari (for example, between 1921 and 1927 Luigi Motta published new novels with the combined signature ‘Motta—Salgari’). Salgari also became a protagonist in the fight between the journal *Il Raduno* and Italian publishers, especially Bemporad, blamed both for having exploited the writer and for his eventual suicide. The so-called *caso Salgari*, which ended up pitting the Fascist press against press and publishers which adhered to more neutral positions, opened the way to the Fascist reinterpretation of the writer’s work. Salgari’s novels began to be considered as illustrations of Fascist ideals such as courage and heroism, as well as being pressed into service in the justification of colonialism, anti-Britishness, and, importantly, in the promotion of a literature in which the young could find the ‘intrepid impulse that form the masculine strength of the people’ (II, 405). QUERY [2]

Lawson Lucas’s main driving force, the restoration of the truth about Salgari’s life and production, produces valuable results. Her enthusiasm is evident in the style and register of these volumes, which at times lead to an imbalanced and somewhat unacademic tone. However, the work is enriched by meticulous research and a remarkable attention to detail. This is vital to accomplish the aim of dispelling the myths that surround Salgari, and the result is an invaluable overview of his production and reception until 1943. At the same time, a more theoretical approach would have tied the case of Salgari more effectively to the broader context of research on publishing history in modern Italy, thus highlighting more of the undeniable interest of the work for non-Salgari scholars. QUERY [3]

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Below you should find the contact details (postal and email addresses) that are on file. If the information is not there, please write it in if you are sending the proof back to the editor, or else email it to the assistant editor John Waś (johnoxuk@gmail.com). The details should be correct and valid at least until July 2019. (Note that sometimes an item has to be postponed to a later issue if the volume in preparation proves to be over-long: please advise of any change of contact details up till the actual publication of your contribution.)

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