“Grandi Autori” and “Al Cuore”. Ettore Fabietti, Bemporad Editions and the Evolution of Educational Paraliterature in Italy (1919-1935).

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Résumé
En retraçant les vicissitudes de deux collections, à partir de la correspondance entre le directeur Ettore Fabietti et son éditeur Bemporad et avec l’aide des paratextes des éditions, l’article offre un étude de cas visant à illustrer le processus d’évolution de la littérature pour la jeunesse italienne, encore influencé, dans les années 1920, de la paralittérature éducative de la fin du XIXe siècle.

Mots-clé
Adaptation, Éducation, Édition, Littérature enfantine italienne, Années 1920 et 1930

Abstract (English)
The article retraces the history of two children’s book series through the analysis of the correspondence between the series director, Ettore Fabietti and the publisher, Bemporad, as well as the exam of the volumes from the series. This case of study aims at enlightening the evolution process of children’s literature in Italy. In the 1920’s and 1930’s it was namely still influenced by educational and moralising purposes dating back to the previous century.

Keywords
Adaptations, Children’s literature, Materiality, Publishing history, Italy, 1920’s and 1930’s

Abstract (Italian)
L’articolo ricostruisce la storia di due collezioni di libri per ragazzi sulla base della corrispondenza tra l’editore Bemporad e il direttore Ettore Fabietti e dell’analisi della materialità delle edizioni. Viene così presentato uno studio di caso volto a illustrare l’evoluzione della letteratura per l’infanzia italiana che, ancora negli anni Venti e Trenta del Novecento, era spesso influenzata da preoccupazioni di carattere educativo-moraleggianti.

Keywords (Italian)
Adattamenti, Editoria, Ettore Fabietti, Letteratura per l’infanzia, Materialità, Anni Venti e Trenta

This article focuses on two book series whose subtitles are worthwhile being mentioned from the beginning, since they shed light on educational paraliterature1 and on its survival in the Italian book market at the beginning of the 20th century. The first series, “Grandi Autori” [Great Authors], was presented as “Biblioteca della gioventù e del popolo italiano” [Library For The Young and the Italian People]; the latter, “Al Cuore” [To the Heart], as “Bibliotechina per le scuole popolari” [Small Library for Primary Schools]. Some information on the series’ director will be useful to

better understand such choices, made by Ettore Fabietti (1876-1962), who is known as the promoter and director of the first popular libraries consortium in Italy, that came into being as the result of the Milanese socialist reform activities in the first decades of the 20th century; but Fabietti is also known for his manifold cooperation activities with the top publishers of the time: Bemporad, Mondadori and Paravia. Due to his interest in popular literacy and acculturation, his aims could not have been promoted without contemplating educational purposes. Fabietti’s activity in publishing increased after he was dismissed by the Milan library federation in 1926-1927, due to a change in political orientation. Bemporad archives, the richest Italian treasure trove for what concerns children’s literature and schoolbooks publishing – the Archivio storico Giunti in Florence preserves archival materials from the different publishing enterprises later flown together into Giunti Editore group, some of which date back to the 19th century, namely Barbèra and Bemporad – allow us to retrace his first steps in the book market as the creator and promoter of the two collections in focus. Such publications must have represented to him a supplementary way for books to reach common people.

But why still publish such “popular collections” at the end of the era defined the “Golden Age” of children’s literature in Italy (1880-1920)? Mariella Colin’s works have shown to the French and international scholarly community that, in post-unification Italy, children had been viewed as the ideal target of the motto “making the Italians”: school and books were excellent tools in the hands of the ruling classes. Such aims, boosted by old-fashioned pedagogic ideas, indebted with ancient Rome rather than with the modern approach of positivism, determined the quality of post-unification children’s book, that, at least for two decades after 1861, were influenced, almost overwhelmed, by educational paraliterature. Finally, the decades 1880-1920 indicate that a new concern for children was growing, thanks to the involvement of publishing industry. As a matter of fact the first Italian best-sellers selling more than 300,000 copies were - not by chance - two books for children: Collodi’s Pinocchio and De Amicis’s Cuore, published in the 1880’s and achieving great success at the end of the 19th century. Public education was an important factor in an area where the literacy rate was still one of the lowest, and it is easy to understand why publishers counted on young readers in order to increase their business. Nonetheless, even though new orientations in children’s literature had come to light – besides Collodi’s masterpiece let us think to the innovative square books of the series “Bibliotechina della Lampada” by Mondadori should be mentioned –, the two series in focus show us that even in the first decades of the 20th century educational books crowded the offer of children’s literature, and by Bemporad, the publisher of Pinocchio, as well. But let us describe the collections and retrace their origins before suggesting a hypothesis on the reasons of their creation.

“Grandi Autori” opens Fabietti the doors of Enrico Bemporad’s firm, after he had been engaged in translation and popularisation of texts for several minor publishers. Actually, it is through Arnoldo Mondadori, whom he must have got to know through his contacts within the Milanese cultural and

\[\text{See also Paolo M. Galimberti, Walter Manfredini (ed.), Ettore Fabietti e le biblioteche popolari. Atti del convegno di Studi, Milano, Aib/Società umanitaria, 1994.}\]

\[\text{On Fabietti’s activity within the popular libraries federation see Maria Luisa Betri, Leggere, obbedire, combattere. Le biblioteche popolari durante il fascismo, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1991, p. 25-41. On his successor Leo Pollini and the change of direction see ibid., p. 47-54.}\]

\[\text{The latter is made up of 180 cases and contains, besides financial statements, etc., correspondence with authors (1898 files), collaborators (162 files), publishing houses based in Italy and abroad (97+157 files).}\]

\[\text{On 1860-1880 see also ibid., p. 39-54.}\]

political milieu\(^7\), that Fabietti came into contact with “sor Enrico”\(^8\) at the end of the 1910s. Even though Italian historians have not yet been able to shed light on the attempted trade agreement between Bemporad and Mondadori, probably proposed by the latter’s investors at the end of the 20’s\(^9\), we can argue that “Grandi Autori” was part of that project, since it was formerly proposed as a co-edition between the two publishers: “I agree with your idea of letting Mondadori take care of the editing and the printing, and of giving to your firm publishing and distribution duties”\(^10\), wrote Fabietti to Bemporad in 1917. But Mondadori, after Bemporad himself, “shilly-shallied”\(^11\), even if he was already holding four manuscripts by as many editors/popularisers. Fabietti felt embarrassed for commissioning those authors works without giving any news on the outcome\(^12\). As a matter of fact, the first round of publications was originally previewed for the beginning of 1918, and the first volume seems to have been already composed before Mondadori’s exit from the project\(^13\). A couple of months later, in October 1918, Fabietti expressed his concern for the success of such a series to Bemporad, who by then was the exclusive publisher\(^14\):  

If you really feel it, and you aim at publishing at least 6 volumes per year; if you really see – as much as I do – the possibility, or, better, the guarantee of increasing activities for your firm, please, throw yourself headlong in it and let us give to the Italian common people, now that the Italian nation is heading towards new routes, a collection of readings that educate both soul and will; a simple collection, sober, clear, honest in its intentions and realisation: a collection that gathers the best results of the human understanding in every time and in every country, adapting them to the common people’s mind.\(^15\)  

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\(^7\) On the relationship with Arnoldo Mondadori see Carlo Pagetti, “Ettore Fabietti e la sua famiglia nella testimonianza inedita della figlia Clara”, in *Ettore Fabietti e le biblioteche popolari*, op. cit., p. 9-16.


\(^10\) “Approvo la sua idea di attribuire a Mondadori il lavoro di preparazione e stampa dei volumi e alla sua ditta il compito d’esser l’editore e spacciatore della collezione”. Firenze, Archivio Storico Giunti, Fondo Bemporad, Corrispondenza con autori, Ettore Fabietti, file 53.5.2, Ettore Fabietti [EF] to Enrico Bemporad [EB], October 17\(^\text{th}\), 1917. From now on this archival unit will be quoted as ASG, followed by the file’s call number.


\(^13\) ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB, September 1\(^\text{st}\), 1918.

\(^14\) “Grandi Autori” volumes that were printed up to 1921 carry the double mark Bemporad-Mondadori on the title page: some sort of agreement must have persisted, but it does not emerge from the documents, while it is clear that Bemporad was exclusively responsible for the series production and distribution. On the contrary, the first contract draft preserved in the archive envisages Mondadori’s participation, but it was corrected in a second time by striking through the investors. As a matter of fact, the first contract draft preserved in the archive envisages Mondadori’s participation, but it was corrected in a second time by striking through the investors. The contract signed by Fabietti corresponds to this amended version. Cfr. ASG, f. 53.5.1 (contract) and 53.5.2 (draft).

\(^15\) “Se lei sente veramente la cosa, e si propone di pubblicare almeno sei volumi all’anno; se lei ci vede – come io ci vedo – la possibilità, anzi, la certezza, di un incremento cospico per la sua Ditta, vi si metta dentro a capo perduto e vediamo di dare insieme al popolo italiano, ora che l’Italia s’incammina per vie nuove, una collezione di letture educatrici dell’animo e della volontà; una collezione semplice, sobria, chiara, onesta nelle intenzioni, e nell’esecuzione: che raccolga – adattata alla mentalità del popolo – quanto di meglio il genio umano ha prodotto in ogni tempo e in ogni paese”. ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB, November 16\(^\text{th}\), 1918. (Underlining in the document. Translation mine for all quotations).
Fabietti insisted on the new era opening with the end of the war – the WWI armistice had been signed two weeks before – but we can also infer a concern towards the democratic turmoil that characterised that period of the Italian history (the catholic Popular Party would come to light the month after and the so-called Biennio Rosso [Two Red Years] – 1919-1920 – was around the corner). As a matter of fact, in his letter, Fabietti mentioned a meeting, held in Milan city hall on 6th November (i.e. ten days before his letter) at the suggestion of the Popular Libraries Federation that he directed. The aim of the meeting was to reflect on the future of popular readings in a period where the publishing industry had to face major difficulties, such as the increased price of paper. A sort of clairvoyance can be retraced in the purposes of such event, where the problem of the veterans being reintegrated into the society was hinted at: in that delicate moment, when soldiers were coming back from the front and consequently strayed from the “intensive work by the civil propaganda among our soldiers”17, there ought to be no lack of popular readings.

Why did Fabietti mention such initiative? We find the answer in his letter: Bemporad had to be aware that other publishers were concerned by that kind of publications: “and please, tell me, isn’t it necessary to get to work in order to be the first ones?”18. Fabietti insisted on the lack, in the Italian book market of the time, of cheap adaptations and popularisations of the classics that he judged essential for popular acculturation. For instance, he mentioned the works of Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Giandomenico Guerrazzi and Alexandre Dumas. “Think, it is impossible to find a copy of Les Misérables in good conditions for less than 20 liras!”19

As a matter of fact, the declaration of intent20 of “Grandi Autori”, signed by Fabietti and published in each volume of the series, insisted on the fact that no new original works were to be included, “because masterpieces of popular culture come to light only generations after”21. The series was going to collect “popularisations and adaptations”22 – Tolstoj, Verne, Lamartine, Dumas, Defoe, Dickens, Goethe were some of the authors listed under the programme – in order to encounter the needs of the youth for “adventure and heroism”. Such needs, argued Fabietti, were disappointed by the existing “rough concoctions of naval terrestrial, aerial deeds”, while adventure and heroism could easily be found in literature, myth and tradition. That is why the collection would contain classics “narrated to the youth and the common people”, as the subtitle maintained, but also “works of genial science popularisation […] , commemorations of distinguished personalities […] , explorations and discoveries […] , reprints of excellent Italian works out of stock or existing in uncommendable editions”23.

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17 “[…] l’intensa opera di propaganda civile condotta fra i nostri soldati”. Ibid.
18 “[…] e mi dica se non è il caso e non v’è urgenza di mettersi al lavoro per arrivare i primi”. ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB, November 16th, 1918.
19 “[…] penso che non si trova una copia de ‘I Miserabili’ integra a meno di venti lire!”  Ibid.
21 “[…] perché i capolavori della letteratura popolare non vengono al mondo che a distanza di generazioni”. Mistral, Mirella, a cura di Ettore Fabietti, Firenze, Bemporad, 1919. Page without number at the end of the text.
22 “Essa comprenderà: vulgarizzazioni e riduzioni”. Ibid.
23 “[…] i grandi classici narrati al popolo ed alla gioventù […] ; opere di geniale vulgarizzazione scientifica […] ; rievocazioni di grandi figure […] ; viaggi di esplorazioni e scoperte […] ; ristampe di ottimi libri italiani esauriti o esistenti in commercio in edizioni poco degne”. Ibid.
As far as the edition is concerned, “Grandi Autori” was presented as “soberly elegant in its materiality”; the volumes contained “artistic illustrations” and were “bound with care”: “book are supposed to educate through their appearance, and survive to injury, so that they can be greeted as ornaments for the house”\textsuperscript{24} [Illustrations 1-2]. Indeed, Fabietti personally cared for the material realisation of the volumes. The exam of the first types proofs gave him the opportunity to discuss, in a dense postcard sent to Bemporad on the eve of the series’ real launch in 1919, the features of each part of the paratext: from the types to the paper, that had to be thicker or thinner according to the length of the book. Fabietti proposed to adopt an “English binding” as well, with a flat spine\textsuperscript{25}, and a bicolour title page. Actually, the volumes are particularly fine, if compared with popular collections of the time; they even had, in the first phase (1919-1920), decorated \textit{Art Nouveau} guards by Ezio Anichini, one of the most renowned illustrators working for Bemporad at that time [Illustration 3]. The second phase, from 1921 onwards, adopted monochrome cover and guards, but still appeared finer than average. In his postcard, the series’ director proposed the use of plates\textsuperscript{26}: (4 to 10) by major illustrators (Fabio Fabbi, Aleardo Terzi, Ezio Anichini) [Illustrations 4-5]. Besides such features, in line with the average children’s book of the time, Fabietti also insisted on some points that seem to conform more to popular editions, published back in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century: the series’ prospectus (declaration of intent and programme) had to be printed in each volume; moreover, discounts for purchasing groups of 6-10-12 volumes were envisaged\textsuperscript{27}. As a matter of fact, young and common people as the envisaged audience were not only combined in the series’ subtitle, but also the programme and even the materiality of the volumes hinted at this sort of dual target; prefaces and introduction represent further hints in this direction. Such paratextual elements were written, and signed, by the editor/translator/adapter of the work (that, in some cases, corresponded to the series director’s Fabietti, as stated by the contract) and presented the author and his or her work in light of the series programme. For instance \textit{The Adventures of Telemachus} by Fénelon (1919) is introduced by Guido Santini as a book of “instruction and education”; however, it soon looked “too boring to the young, that only see moral reprimands in it, too long and too far from our times”\textsuperscript{28}. Therefore the solution for divulging it in spite of such opinions was a method, similar to the one adopted by Fénelon himself, i.e. “preserving the situation, the sentence, the classic image but expressing a modern intent […] with the aim that common people learn to know and love issues from ancient times […] and to contemplate the perennial unity of the human soul, that gets enriched throughout history by the means of experience and mistakes”\textsuperscript{29} [Illustrations 6-7]

\textsuperscript{24} “[...] in veste tipografica di sobria eleganza, sarà illustrato artisticamente e rilegato con cura. Il libro deve educare anche col suo aspetto esteriore e resistere alle ingiurie dell’uso, perché sia accolto come uno dei più belli ornamenti della casa.” \textit{Ibid.} (Italics in the document).

\textsuperscript{25} “Per la rilegatura veda se può fare un tipo all’inglese, che in Italia è stato molto ben imitato da Carabba e che è caratterizzata dal dorso piatto invece che rotondo”. ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB, Postcard, May 1919.

\textsuperscript{26} “[...] proporre – di inserire il cliché su foglietti fuori testo, magari montati in carta scura e sostenuta, come si usa in molte edizioni migliori illustrate”. \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{27} “Quanto al prezzo, preferirei le 4 lire uniformemente: ciò le darebbe il modo di lanciare la collezione anche in abbonamento a gruppi di 6-10-12 volumi, ecc.” \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{28} “E’ un libro d’istruzione e d’educazione [...]. Ora, da un pezzo, non lo si legge più [...] sembra noioso ai ragazzi, che lo vedono pieno di prediche morali troppo lunghe e lontane dalla realtà del nostro tempo”. Fénelon, \textit{Le avventure di Telemaco}. Riduzione a cura di Guido Santini, Firenze, Bemporad, 1919, p. XV.

\textsuperscript{29} “[...] conservare la situazione, la frase e l’immagine classica, pur esprimendo un’intenzione moderna. […]Vorremmo che il popolo imparasse a conoscere e ad amare anche le cose del nostro tempo antico, e a contemplare, nella prospettiva dei secoli e nella diversità delle idee e dei costumi, la perenne unità dell’anima umana, che s’arricchisce nella storia con le proprie esperienze e i propri errori”. \textit{Ibid.}, p. XVI.
Luigi Settembrini’s memoir, annotated by Fabietti and published in 1921 with a circulation of 2000 copies (and then reprinted in 1925), represented for the director a further opportunity to show “great models to the young and the common people”, at a moment when, he argued, Italian woes were due to the “lack of noble and strong characters that direct the moral life of the Nation”\textsuperscript{30}. The foreword concluded: “To the Italian young and common people [...] we offer this new edition of a really celebrated book, in order to let them think back to the heroes among their ancestors”\textsuperscript{31}. It is no use to insist further on the contents and perspectives of such volumes, that remind 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries series called “Biblioteche” [Libraries], issued from philanthropic and early socialist initiatives, offering guided libraries to those people that did not have the cultural tools to build up their own library\textsuperscript{32}. As a matter of fact it was from such popular collections that the publisher’s series drew its success in Italy, thanks to both intellectuals and publishers, such as the Milanese Emilio Treves and Edoardo Sonzogno. While in France the “Invention” of the publisher’s series has been retraced in popular readings by Isabelle Olivero\textsuperscript{33}, in Italy, the already mentioned concern for “fare gli Italiani” [making the Italians] led to the success of “Biblioteche” that often contained translations and adaptations of self-help best-sellers, science popularisation and precepts of hygiene. As argued by Jean-Yves Mollier, all countries were invaded by publisher’s series after 1850\textsuperscript{34} and Italy was not an exception; on the contrary, a great number of firms, having started in the less competitive market of the popular print under the Restoration, were trying to make a leap towards modern business and looked at the collection as a new means to increase their business. Publishers were persistently experimenting new strategies for reaching and luring the new emerging audiences. Not always such activities had a proper outcome: it was not infrequent that previously published books were collected under a generic title as if they were a collection, but without any project subtended. The result were hybrid series that did not even meet the criteria singled out by John Spiers in his definition of publisher’s series\textsuperscript{35}. Only the “Biblioteche” seemed to offer to publishers a solid framework that allowed them to conceive and put into practice proper series. And the need of such framework seems to persist in Bemporad’s catalogue in the new century as well. Pinocchio’s first publication as a book dates back to 1883 (it had first appeared in 1881 in instalments in a children’s periodical); at that point Paggi publishers – the predecessors of Bemporad – decided to place the book in a series called “Biblioteca scolastica” [School Library], already started before the unification. Such decision is not strange, I should argue, for different reasons: the first, and already mentioned, is that school books and children’s literature often shared the same fate, especially in the Italian culture, where, even after

\textsuperscript{30} “Alla gioventù e al popolo è tempo che si ricomincia a mostrare grandi esempi [...] nell’assenza di alti e forti caratteri individuali che dirigano la vita morale della Nazione”. Luigi Settembrini, Ricordanze della mia vita. Seconda edizione con note a cura di E. Fabietti, p. III.

\textsuperscript{31} “E alla gioventù e al popolo italiano, che ora innalza ben altri idoli all’onor degli altari, offriamo questa nuova edizione del libro tanto celebrato, perché ritorni col pensiero agli eroi della sua stirpe”, \textit{Ibid.}, p. VI.


\textsuperscript{33} Isabelle Olivero has argued that the collection “Bibliothèque Charpentier” can be considered the first example of a modern collection in 19th century France. Isabelle Olivero, \textit{L’Invention de la collection}, Paris, Imec-Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1999.

\textsuperscript{34} Jean-Yves Mollier, “Introduction”, in \textit{La collection. Éssor et affirmation d’un objet éditorial, op. cit.}, p. 7. In this work see also section 2, “De la circulation des premiers modèles” for a comparative approach.

\textsuperscript{35} John Spiers, “Introduction: Wondering about ‘the Causes of Causes’: The Publisher’s Series, Its Cultural Work and Meaning”, in \textit{The Culture of the Publisher’s Series}, vol. I, ed. John Spiers, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p. 1-61. For a definition of collection see p. 23. We can argue that just one of the features ascertained by the recent studies on the publisher’s series drove the work of such publishers: the fact that advertising book as if they were part of a series represented a supplementary trade mark/loyalty element, even when a proper collection did not exist. \textit{Ibid.}, and p.18.
the beginning of the 20th century, common opinion held that books for children had to “docere et
delectare”, teach and delight, and teaching often played the biggest part. Secondly, it is a matter of
fact that, for a great number of children, school was the only place where they would ever get to
see, touch and read a book, that is to say that schoolmasters and pupils represented an interesting
market for children’s literature publishers. Thirdly, a real strategy of the publishing series was still
to be defined. *Pinocchio* was not the only best-seller to be published in a schoolbooks series: Ida
Baccini’s *Memorie di un pulcino* [Memoir of a chick], another great success of Italian children’s
literature at its outset, mentioned by Paul Hazard as the book that everybody had read at the dawn
of WWI36, was published in the same “Biblioteca scolastica”37.

Within the history of Bemporad publishing house, the decade 1915-1925 is defined by Silvia
Assirelli as the culminating point of its publishing activity38. During WWI Bemporad’s catalogue
showed major interest for current events; such “war publications” helped reaching the highest
profits in 191939. In the post-war period a strong concern for innovative promotion strategies led to
further success. The publication of series eventually characterised by a shared format is one of the
achievement of this period, so that also old collections, such as the already mentioned “Biblioteca
scolastica”, for the first time acquired defined decoration paradigms. Nonetheless, in spite of the
fact that adventure and fairy tale stepped triumphantly into the catalogue in big format editions,
richly illustrated, educational publications persisted as a “stronghold of tradition”40. Such situation
was helped by the fact that adaptations and translations of literary works from abroad were still
quite affordable at that point41 and could justify the choice of publishing a series of “great classics”.
As far as copyright is concerned, some letters from Fabietti to Bemporad are an important evidence
that the opportunity to include in “Grandi Autori” some Italian works whose literary property was
about to expire42, was taken into serious consideration.

A final element that can help us understand why to a series that seems at least old-fashioned in its
project and contents (besides what we have called “a solid framework” offered by a collection that
echoes self-help themes43) would be published, is the concept of “popolo bambino” proposed by

36 M. Colin, *L’Âge d’or*, op. cit., p. 48
Baccini”, *Chroniques italiennes*, 39-40 (1944), p. 33-44 and a recent Ph.D. dissertation by Karin Bloom, who has
handled with Baccini as far as her direction of the young women’s journal “Cordelia” is concerned: *Cordelia, 1881-
1942 profilo storico di una rivista per ragazzine*, Stockholm: Department of Romance Studies and Classics, Stockholm
University, 2015. It is true that, as run over before, such books also represented *libri di lettura*, i.e. books read at school
for practising reading skills; moreover, as pointed out by Colin, the story of the chick can better fit the definition of
educational paraliterature. Nonetheless, an exam of other 19th century collection can shed light on the uncertain
phenomenology of the series, as I have argued in Elisa Marazzi, *Libri per diventare italiani*, Milan, FrancoAngeli,
42 The reference law was at that point R.D. n. 1012, 1882, allowing Fabietti to envisage and propose to Bemporad the
publication of De Amicis’s *Cuore*: he wrongly thought the work being published in 1883. See ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB,
December, 31st, 1923. At the same another work, Antonio Stoppani’s *Bel Paese*, even though prepared, could not come
out due to a later change of the law (R.D. 1925, n. 1950, that sanctioned the term of 50 years after the death of the
author). See ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB, January 5th, 1927 and EB to EF, January 7th, 1927.
43 As far as the spirit of self-help is concerned, a good example persisting in the series “Grandi autori” is the adaptation
of Jean-Henri Fabre *Mœurs des insectes*, translated and edited by Fabietti together with his wife Maria, a professional
translator: not only the choice of a science popularisation work is meaningful, but also the author’s short biography
opening the volume. Namely, Fabre is presented in his winding way towards culture, from shepherd to professor and
Firenze, Bemporad, 1923, p. 5-6.
Antonio Gibelli. Such metaphor, used in Gibelli’s study on childhood and nation in the first decades of 20th century Italy, can only roughly be translated into “childish common people”; it defines common people as children in a double acceptation: on the one hand young children were the target of cultural activities as an important part of the population, on which it is worthwhile investing, on the other hand, children represented not only a part, but also a sort of prototype of the population, meaning that common people were intended and treated as children, and therefore are targets of education and seduction by press, publishing industry and propaganda44. Indeed, in his study on popular libraries, Fabietti himself adopted such approach: “it is useful to proceed with the uncultivated in the same way we proceed with children, since, in the end, both are primitives and notions can worm their way in by the means of amusement and delight”45.

Nevertheless, the emphasis upon such pedagogic approach must have been in decline, inasmuch as the collection seems to face big difficulties a few years after its launch: up to 1924, only 15 titles were published (Table I). That is to say that the plan presented in the volumes and in the exchanges between publisher and director had been only partially accomplished. Fabietti had to remind his publisher that they should go ahead with the publication46. One more volume was published in 1925 (together with a reprint), but a letter from Bemporad, dated 1926, must have sounded like alarm bells to Fabietti: the new edition of Massimo D’Azeglio’s memoir by Fabietti himself would be published as a schoolbook instead of being included in “Grandi Autori”; the reason was that the series “costs too much and sells too little”47. From that point onward, the relationship between Bemporad and Fabietti seems to wear out: besides feeling embarrassed in front of the colleagues who have already worked for translations and adaptations that Bemporad doesn’t seem willing to publish, Fabietti alludes to a lack of consideration for his own work and expertise. Surprised by such claims, Bemporad answers that the problem is exclusively of economic nature: after having examined the financial cycle of 1926, Bemporad’s board of directors had forbidden the launch of new activities48. The last book in the series was published in 1925, in spite of Fabietti’s insistence and programmes for new publications, and in 1927 Bemporad let Fabietti share in his decision of dismembering the collection into two more profitable series: “Jules Verne’s novels” (three adaptations of Verne’s novels had already been published in the series49, moreover Bemporad declared to be in possession of four more manuscripts of Verne’s adaptations50) and “Science Popularisation”, including six titles, the one of which was still unpublished. The rest of the titles was going to be abandoned51. Fabietti was not offered the chance to discuss such decision,

45 “Del resto, come si procede coi bambini, si procede con le persone incolte, poiché, in fondo, sono dei primitivi gli uni e gli altri; e l’insegnamento infantile cerca d’insinuarsi per vie del diletto”. Ettore Fabietti, La biblioteca popolare moderna. Manuale per le biblioteche pubbliche, popolari, scolastiche, per fanciulli, ambulanti, autoubiblioteche, ecc., Quarta edizione interamente rifatta con illustrazioni e schemi, Milano, A. Vallardi, 1933, p. 17.
46 ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB, November 25th, 1924.
47 “[…] costa troppo e si vende poco”. ASG, f. 53.5.2, EB to EF, Firenze, December 27th, 1926.
48 ASG, f. 53.5.2, EB to EF, April 12th, 1927.
49 See list of titles at the end of this article.
50 ASG, f. 53.5.2, EB to EF, February 25th, 1927.
51 “Science popularisation” was supposed to include: Il libro del popolo di Dio, Le avventure di Enea, Le avventure di Ulisse, I costumi degli insetti, La vita delle api and one more work by Maeterlinck: the adaptation of L’intelligence des fleurs. Ibid., EB to EF, February 25th, 1927.
nevertheless this would have been useless, since, a couple of months later, the publisher announced his intention to definitively stop the collection.

Fabietti’s attempt to convince Bemporad of the necessity of keeping such series alive provides some further hints on his ideas, and helps us mapping out what we have defined a paraliterary series. Already in 1919 the director had envisaged that Milan schools could adopt his volumes for the fifth and sixth grade of primary schools; in 1925-1926 a connection with schools seemed again a viable solution, and Fabietti proposed to publish within “Grandi Autori” drama works by authors such as Shakespeare, Molière, Goldoni, Alfieri “all prescribed in secondary schools”. Some months after, he even advised to “introduce books normally used in schools and among the public, starting with "I Promessi Sposi [The Betrothed] (how can a publishing house like yours do without that book?)”

Such statements allow us to suggest that school market still represented a relief valve for publishers, which also explains the persisting presence in the market of a number of paraliterary educational works. Of course such arguments were also aimed at strengthening Fabietti’s position: namely, when the State book for primary schools became more than a hypothesis, Fabietti suggested to Bemporad that he had to increase the collection in order to be ready for “struggling on the field of books for the young, common people and popular libraries – the latter are soon going to be mandatory in each municipality”. In the end, we can argue that Fabietti’s attempts to present his books as didactic or not in relation to different circumstances reflect the publishing strategies that still relied on such duality.

At the same time such hint to popular libraries leads to the analysis of another series: “Al Cuore. Bibliotechina per le scuole elementari”, launched in 1920. The subtitle reveals that the series was born and conceived as a didactic tool, benefitting from the interest in school libraries, on which pedagogues and intellectuals had insisted since the previous century. A study on the subsidiary activities for primary teaching in 1910, insisted on how each classroom should be equipped with a small library, its books being purchased by the pupils themselves (when possible), combined with a central school library financed by the municipality. As a matter of fact, in this case, the word Bibliotechina [Small library], not only alludes to a metaphoric library given to the pupils, but proposes a complete collection to be offered to teachers and school administrations, so that they could feel guided in their purchase for school libraries. Schools and school libraries were meant as a potential and useful customer for such volumes. And who better than Ettore Fabietti could conceive, for Bemporad, a collection responding to such expectations? The project dates back to 1918, when Fabietti examined the first manuscripts – “Al Cuore” was composed of new and unpublished texts –

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52 Ibid. EB to EF, Firenze, July 18th, 1927. A further project of dismembering (series “Capolavori” [Masterpieces] and “Opere di volgarizzazione” [Popularisation]) was proposed the year after. Cfr. ASG, f. 53.5.2, EB to Ferruccio Boscatò, March 17th, 1928.
54 “Tutte queste opere sono prescritte nelle scuole secondarie, a cominciare dall’Istituto tecnico inferiore”. Ibid., EF to EB, June 9th, 1925.
55 “Come può una casa come la sua fare a meno di questo libro?”. Ibid., EF to EB, March 9th, 1926.
56 “Nell’ipotesi che il libro di testo venga avocato a sé dallo stato, non è male prepararsi sempre meglio a lottare sul campo delle edizioni di libera lettura per la gioventù, il popolo e le biblioteche popolari che si avviano con certezza a diventare obbligatorie in ogni Comune”. Ibid., EF to EB, July 20th, 1927.
57 19th and 20th century publishers extensively rode such need: the pages of publishers catalogues advertised dozens of series called “Bibliotechina, etc.”, often presented as “responding to the laws on class libraries”. For an example see “Il pensiero dei maestri”, journal published by Trevisini (Milan) and advertising Trevisini’s editions, 5 (1902), n. 31, p. 42-43.
and started to draw the outline of the series, still mentioned as “Bibliotechina per le scuole elementari”. In fact, Fabietti was “still thinking of an appealing title". In 1919 the title was still to be decided, if Bemporad stated “We haven’t found a title, yet. You proposed some, but no one of them met my satisfaction. Please, try to find a title which is [again] appealing and not too common”.

A new successful proposal was to come soon, in fact Fabietti wrote: “The title ‘fior da fiore’ would be beautiful, still from Dante (‘iscegliendo fior da fiore’), if it hadn’t been used by Pascoli for an anthology of his poems. ‘Al Cuore’, in the sense of ‘speaking to the heart’ also sounds meaningful”. The latter, as we know, was accepted by Bemporad. Nonetheless, it was time to get to work, since the threat of competitors was around the corner: in 1918 Fabietti informed Bemporad that the Turinese Paravia had 30 volumes of a similar collection in course of publication.

The series would contain some short, apt to involve the reader’s interest. There would be no didactic purpose, even though the stories would inevitably contain examples of morality, edifying maxims, etc. Actually the title pages contained a reading suggestion, i.e. whether the text was suitable for the second grade or the third, not related to the didactics of the different grades, but offering a text fitting the reader’s proficiency. Fabietti had actually expressed a doubt on giving such indication, since he had noticed that some texts were fitting various grades; at the same time, it was easier to find materials for the third than for the second grade. Bemporad, however, decided to keep such distinction. Some texts were actually rejected because unfitting either grade, as in the following opinion by Fabietti: “the tale is very well written, as far as style and language are concerned, but it doesn’t fit the series “Al Cuore”, which is addressed to children in second and third grade, to whom it is appropriate to speak with a more simple language, I would say almost childish, handling with facts that belong to their small world”.

The opportunity to give moral precepts through delightful stories, always present in the history of children’s literature and particularly evident in such paraliterature, comes to light in some other statements by Fabietti, who, as the director, was in charge of examining all the manuscripts submitted for publication in the collection. For example, the story by Ettore Vieri, Una burla finita male [A Joke Ended up Badly], was rejected as “not appropriate. […] Children don’t have anything to learn from it. On the contrary, characters are all mean subjects and the story is the one of a misdeed. Vieri – and that is strange! – has in his nature to enact evil, as though children weren’t

59 ASG, f. 53.5.1, EF to EB, Milan, September 9th, 1918.
60 “Sto anche pensando a un titolo suggestivo per la collezioncina”. Ibid.
61 “Non abbiamo fissato ancora il titolo di questa collezione; ella me ne propose diversi, ma nessuno era di mia soddisfazione. Veda di trovarne uno che sia suggestivo e non troppo comune” ASG, f. 53.5.1, EB to EF, March 14th, 1919. Proposals were: “Intime voci, Verdi fronde, Vaghe letture, Albori” See ASG, f. 53.5.1 EF to EB, September 20th, 1918.
63 ASG, f. 53.5.1, EF to EB, August 5th, 1918.
64 Ibid., EF to EB, December 1st, 1918.
65 Ibid., EF to EB, September 16th, 1918
66 “Il racconto è scritto molto bene, come stile e come lingua, ma non è adatto alla Bibliotechina “Al cuore”, che è per ragazzi di seconda e terza classe, ai quali bisogna rivolgersi con un linguaggio più semplice e direi quasi puerile, parlando di cose che sieno [sic] del loro piccolo mondo”. The note, without any hint to the manuscript’s title or its author, is preserved in ASG, f. 53.5.2.
already too inclined to that”67. In another occasion, the opinion is the same: “there are two bandit assaults! Young people do not have to get to know evil too early”68.

Besides a few less known personalities, some important author gave their contribution. Among them, Giuseppe Ernesto Nuccio, Lucia Maggia, Rina Paltrinieri and the already-mentioned Ida Baccini. Arpalice Cuman Pertile, whose success is mainly connected with Bemporad, but who also cooperated with other publishers, owing to her being particularly prolific, is well represented in this series, probably because she met Fabietti’s appreciation: “I don’t hesitate to have Cuman in the highest consideration as our best writer for young children: she has great insight into their psychology. She knows how to teach by amusing”69. Fabietti was happy to let Bemporad know that, in his opinion, the series was going to overcome the one launched by the competitor Paravia70. But the material aspect also had to be cared for. Therefore he insisted that each volume had to contain two plates71, while Bemporad had previously proposed one72, that must have seemed appropriate for very thin volumes of 20-24, maximum 36 pages. Paravia’s volumes were thinner and without any cardboard binding, furthermore the illustration were rated “mediocre”, as well as the paper used, “worse than mediocre”73. This is why Fabietti’s opinion was that to overcome the competitor it was necessary to “make an effort and have at least two plates in each volume”74. The series had to come out “in a form as fine as possible, so that it would be adopted blindly by the most scrupulous and hard to please schoolmaster75”. Bemporad himself had proposed a cardboard binding76 and the result is particularly fine volumes, in spite of their thinness. The cover was designed by Ezio Anichini in Art Nouveau style (a second version, with a freize-like decoration on the cover, was designed by Marina Battigelli77), as well as the opening freize on the first page; internal plates were by Fabio Fabbri. The price varied from 60 to 80 liras depending on the thickness of the volume [Illustrations 8-9-10].

The cardboard binding has probably helped preservation, so that nowadays it is not difficult – surprisingly – to find intact volumes in libraries. From such sources we learn, thanks to old stamps on the title page, that popular libraries as well as educational institutions were the main purchasers of the volumes; this is valid for the “Grandi Autori” series as well. As a matter of fact, even though, according to Fabietti, at that point “everyone had figured out that common people had started to read and buy books”, it seems that publishers still had to rely on educational institutions to sell part of their products.

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67 “[...] non è adatto. I ragazzi non han nulla da imparare, tutt’altro. I personaggi son tutti cattivi soggetti e il racconto è la narrazione di un delitto. Il Vieri- strano! – ha la specialità di mettere in scena il male, come se i ragazzi non vi fossero di per sé già fin troppo propensi!”. Ibid., EF to EB, September 9th, 1918.

68 “Qui ci sono due aggressioni brigantesche! I piccoli non devono avere la nozione del male troppo presto”. Same note quoted before.

69 “Non esito a stimare la Cuman come la prima scrittrice nostra per i bambini piccoli. Ha un’intuizione felicissima della loro psicologia. Sa insegnare divertendo”. ASG, f. 53.5.1, EF to EB, December 1st, 1918.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., EF to EB, September, 9th and 20th, 1918.

72 Ibid., EF to EB, August 22nd, 1918.

73 “Con illustrazioncine mediocri e su carta meno che mediocre”. Ibid., EF to EB, September 16th, 1918.

74 “Sarà proprio necessario fare un sacrificio e mettere in ogni volumetto almeno due clichés”. Ibid., EF to EB, September, 9th 1918

75 “La collezioncina deve riuscire veramente buona e tale da essere adottata ad occhi chiusi dal più esigente e scrupoloso insegnante”. Ibid.

76 Ibid., EB to EF, August 22nd, 1918.

77 Fabietti marginally mentioned this new version in ASG, f. 53.5.2, EF to EB, March 9th, 1926.
Incidentally, Fabietti expressed this opinion while announcing to Bemporad that his competitor Paravia had contacted him, in order to propose him to direct some series or a part of their catalogue. At this point Fabietti did not accept, but later he would leave Bemporad for Paravia, in 1927, after the cessation of “Grandi Autori”. It is worth remembering that at that point Fabietti had been ousted from his position at the Popular Libraries Federation, so he needed to work in the publishing industry, and the direction of a series of “Travels and Explorations” for Paravia was quite desirable, especially as he was aware of Bemporad’s financial situation. Nonetheless, “Al Cuore” must have had some success (59 titles published under the direction of Fabietti) if it was carried and even revived later, from 1935, under the direction of Ornella (Orazina Quercia Tanzarella)

This further evolution falls outside the limit of my contribution, but indeed it represents a supplementary evidence to the persistence of a subgenre. Educational paraliterature wasn’t just a leftover that still was to be sold in spite of the rise of a canon for children’s literature. On the contrary, such publications were conceived by experts employed by publishers, as the correspondence between these two protagonists of the publishing industry can attest. Nonetheless, such collections of educational paraliterature dating back to the “Golden Age” of the Italian children’s literature would evolve toward a more systematic direction, based on a stronger project and on greater attention to materiality. Books not only had to meet the gatekeeper’s interest, but also the child’s liking, as witnessed by the best-known graduated series for children published in the following decade: “La Scala d’Oro”, by Utet.

Table I – “Grandi Autori” – List of titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Adapted/Translated by</th>
<th>Year of Publication</th>
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<tr>
<td>Frédéric Mistral</td>
<td>Mirella</td>
<td>Ettore Fabietti</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev Tolstoi</td>
<td>Storie inedite</td>
<td>Angelo Colombo</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Il libro del popolo di Dio</td>
<td>Angelo Colombo</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>François Fénelon</td>
<td>Le avventure di Telemaco</td>
<td>Guido Santini</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jules Verne</td>
<td>Ventimila leghe sotto i mari</td>
<td>Ettore Fabietti</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le avventure di Enea</td>
<td>Giovanni Vaccari</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<tr>
<td>Émile Erckmann, Alexandre Chatrian</td>
<td>Storia di un uomo del popolo</td>
<td>C.A. Blanche</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<tr>
<td>Florence Montgomery</td>
<td>Vocazione contrastata</td>
<td>A. Sigurtà</td>
<td>1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigi Settembrini</td>
<td>Ricordanze della mia</td>
<td>Ettore Fabietti</td>
<td>1921</td>
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78 ASG, f. 53.5.1, EF to EB, January 3rd, 1928.
79 For a complete list see S. Assirelli, Paradigma Bemporad, op. cit., 222-224.
81 On this series and the subtended project see the recent contribution by Elisa Rebellato “Vincenzo Errante, Fernando Palazzi e “La Scala d’Oro”. Due letterati editori all’origine di una collana per ragazzi negli anni Trenta”, Società e storia, 135 (2012), p. 89-118.
<table>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>La vita delle api</td>
<td>Maurice Maeterlinck</td>
<td>S. Sottile</td>
<td>[1922?]</td>
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<td>I figli del capitano Grant</td>
<td>Jules Verne</td>
<td>C.A. Blanche</td>
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<td>L’isola misteriosa</td>
<td>Jules Verne</td>
<td>A. Falchetto</td>
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<td>Graziella</td>
<td>Alphonse de Lamartine</td>
<td>Alfredo Fabietti</td>
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<td>Le avventure di Ulisse</td>
<td>Jean-Henri Fabre</td>
<td>Maria e Ettore Fabietti</td>
<td>1923</td>
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<td>Incompreso</td>
<td>Florence Montgomery</td>
<td>R: Rusca</td>
<td>1925</td>
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Illustrations:

8. Lucilla Antonelli, *Bebè, Bobino e il sillabario*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1920, “Al Cuore” – Cover

Credits:

All pictures are courtesy of Biblioteca Comunale Centrale “Palazzo Sormani”, Milano (Milan Municipal Library “Palazzo Sormani).

Sources
Firenze, Archivio storico Giunti, fondo Bemporad, Corrispondenza con autori [ASG in the article]:

- file 53.5.1 Fabietti Ettore (11 aprile 1913-12 maggio 1954): 182 documents. Correspondence (letters and some postcards) between Enrico Bemporad [EB in the article] and Ettore Fabietti [EF]
- file 53.5.2 Fabietti Ettore (17 ottobre 1917-1 aprile 1933): 254 documents (as above).