



BOLOGNA: FIFTY YEARS OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

History, highlights, and personalities: reliving the Children's Book Fair

The first edition of the CHILDREN'S BOOK FAIR opened on 4 April 1964 at Palazzo Re Enzo, launching an event without equal anywhere in the world. This year, the Fair celebrates its 50th anniversary: an opportunity to reflect on its history by remembering its highlights and the people who have helped make it – and continue to make it - the world's foremost event for children's books.

In addition to describing the beginnings and development of this 50-year story, the book written by BolognaFiere in cooperation with the Education Science Department of Bologna University and published by Bononia University Press is a unique contribution to the study of children's literature and illustration.

THE BEGINNINGS - Carla Poesio

From the book **BOLOGNA: FIFTY YEARS OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD**

The founding of the Bologna Children's Book Fair in 1964-1968 and its rapid rise to success can be attributed to a number of factors that came together almost instantly and helped to define the Fair's identity as a well-managed trade event capable of generating consistently significant cultural impacts across many different domains.

Early in 1963 the organizers of the Book Fair Project approached the Centro Didattico Nazionale di Studi e Documentazione (CDNSD – National Educational Centre for Studies and Documentation, housed in Florence's Palazzo Gerini). A government institution managed by Professor Enzo Petrini, the Centre's Italian and foreign language children's literature division was already thriving under Coordinator Maria Bartolozzi, a key personality for anyone venturing into the realm of children's literature. It was Maria that had spearheaded the creation and management of this spacious research and consultation facility.

The Centre's activities ranged from supporting librarians, teachers, parents, journalists, writers and illustrators to providing advisory services on books presented on the radio or television, and bringing together experts in children's literature to discuss new releases and draft book reviews. The reviews were then published in Schedario, a magazine founded and edited by Prof. Petrini, which was the first Italian publication entirely devoted to children's literature and featured reviews, critiques, and pedagogical and didactic articles focusing on children's books, but also on events such as exhibitions, awards, conferences, seminars and workshops in Italy and abroad. The division also included an extensive collection of children's fiction and non-fiction that the library kept up to date with the latest releases in literary essays and histories of books for children and young adults.

To ensure that the Centre was constantly abreast of developments, it maintained regular and frequent contacts with publishers, and encouraged sharing ideas about publishing strategies and trends.

The CDNSD was thus well placed to supply the organizers of the Bologna Fair with a detailed map of Italy's children's book publishing scene, together with plenty of information about what was happening overseas. The organizers were also able to witness rising interest in illustrations for children's books, partly because the CDNSD periodically staged exhibitions of original artwork by high-profile artists of the calibre of Ugo Fontana, Leo Mattioli, Vinicio Berti, Roberto Sgrilli, Eugenio Carmi and Emanuele Luzzati. Marcella Fusi, an illustrator herself, also lent a valuable hand on the organizational side; Prof. Petrini offered to second her to Bologna as a consultant, and the offer was taken up with pleasure for the first Illustrators Exhibition that took place at the Fair in 1967.

In 1963 the Bologna organizers asked Prof. Petrini to allow the head of the international children's literature section, Carla Poesio, a teacher seconded to the CDNSD, to accompany them to the Frankfurt Book Fair: they were keen to see how that event was staged, especially the children's book section. By the end of the trip, the consensus was that Frankfurt tended to sideline children's literature, which did not resonate anywhere near as much as other sectors of the publishing industry.

One of the first and most prominent exhibitors to sign up for the Bologna Fair was the Italian publisher Renato Giunti. Well aware and rightly proud of Florence's rich publishing tradition prior to and following the city's shortlived stint as Italy's capital city, Renato Giunti had come up with the idea of a Children's Book Fair based in Florence. However, once he realized that his plan would not work in Florence, he contacted the organizers in Bologna and generously offered them his expert advice on staging the event in Bologna. He was instrumental in garnering the participation of the Barbera/Marzocco/Giunti publishing house for the 1964 fair, with a display that was visually spectacular and no less impressive in terms of content.

The Bologna Fair made its debut at the Palazzo di Re Enzo from 4-12 April 1964. The United Kingdom signed up a record number of participants, which pleased the organizers no end, partly because at the time Britain was widely recognized as one of the leading nations in publishing children's and young adult literature. The same could be said of France. The same year, the organizers also attracted a major name in American publishing, Franklin Watts, whose participation served as a magnet for other US exhibitors.

The 1967 Fair was in fact attended by such well known publishers as Little Brown, Holt, Seabury Press and Walck.

The following year, 1968, a remarkable 44 new American exhibitors found their way to Bologna.

Starting in 1965, a steadily growing stream of publishers began arriving from Germany and Austria, countries which until then had for the most part taken their children's books to the Frankfurt Book Fair. Countries farther afield then began to sign up: in 1965 Japan's top level participation triggered widespread interest across the West, and a few years later, in 1968, Australia also took part, displaying exciting new publishing trends. The organizers wasted no time in seeking and defining the support and participation of major international landmarks in the world of children's and young adult books. First and foremost, the Internationale Jugendbibliothek (IJB), formerly known as the International Youth Library (IYL). The Library was founded in 1951 by Jella Lepman, who had fled Nazi Germany for London, and returned to her homeland after the War determined to help German children and young people overcome the horrors of war and boost their education through reading. Her work formed the basis for the establishment in 1953 of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY). The Italian division was initially located in Florence, at the Centro Didattico di Studi e Documentazione headed by Prof. Enzo Petrini, who organized an international congress there in May 1958, the proceedings of which can be viewed at IBBY's Italian Section in Bologna. The proceedings include presentations by internationally prominent personalities, and reveal the depth and breadth of the studies and research undertaken by the Board since its very inception. One of IBBY's most commendable initiatives was to come up with a plan to award particularly outstanding writers (and later illustrators) of books for children and young people with a prize awarded every other year for their enduring contribution to children's literature. The award soon came to be known as the "Nobel prize for children's literature". Gianni Rodari was the recipient of the award in 1970. Equally important internationally is the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava (BIB), this large and vibrant institution has been instrumental in shining the spotlight on artists from all over the world: every two years it stages an exhibition, congress and prizes. To its credit, the Bologna Fair also boasts a number of highly successful initiatives that date back to its early years and are still thriving to this day. For instance, since 1991 the cover of every one of the Fair's Annuals has featured an illustration by the last illustrator to win the IBBY Hans Christian Andersen Award, and the following year, by the winner of the last BIB Grand Prix. Partnerships with other prestigious international prizes have blossomed over recent years, including the organizers of Sweden's Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award and Spain's Fundacion SM. The winners of these two prizes are announced during the Bologna Fair, underscoring its high international standing and resonance.

Right from the start, there was a clear realization of the importance of illustrations in children's books. Since 1964, the Bologna Fair has welcomed throngs of illustrators – already famous, emerging and new – easily recognized by the huge portfolios tucked under their arms. However, while not all the publishers on hand were overly eager to receive them, most were happy to sit them down in their stands and weigh up the pros and cons of signing them up. This marked the start of relationships that have become crucial for publishers and artists alike, and was one of the reasons why the Bologna organizers decided to stage an Illustrators Exhibition during every Fair. The first Illustrators Exhibition was staged in 1967 and by 1971 it was already putting out a catalogue that included reproductions of noteworthy illustrations chosen by an international jury, together with details concerning the drawings and the artists.

Those watching the Fair spread its wings and venture into new horizons were quick to sense that although the event was making an understated start, it promised to turn into something very important

indeed. Initially, small groups of three or four people came together to brainstorm; soon the small groups swelled into larger ones. I can't explain exactly how these groups took shape, but I can speculate: people would come together to welcome publishers in their stands, arrange and participate in pre-Fair appointments, ponder the most effective stand layouts, or discuss the materials showcased in the exhibits. Often groups coalesced around writers, illustrators, critics, researchers, or teachers of greater or lesser renown, who would then "get the ball rolling" with insights, news or expertise. They would offer up ideas, contributing first-hand experience within a general atmosphere that lent itself to breaking new ground, inspiring new initiatives, and firing up the creative spirit, be it in publishing or education, with a view to encouraging children to read more, and assessing the quality of the resources on offer. It was still early days, but this is when the roots were planted that eventually blossomed into conferences, workshops, exhibitions, and the many and varied associations that owe their very existence to the Bologna Children's Book Fair.

These multifarious groups left an indelible mark, and one of their most prominent members was Giuseppe Bufalari, already a well-known author at the time (his books include *La masseria* (The Farmhouse) and *La barca gialla* (The Yellow Boat). The former is a novel for adult readers, the second for children; both recounted his experiences at Florence's *Scuola-Città Pestalozzi*, where he would meet with students. The *Pestalozzi* was a full-time school that opened on 15 January 1945, soon after Italy's Liberation from fascism. Its purpose was to instill free citizens with a strong sense of self-control, and it was organized along the lines of a small city. In the early years of the Fair, *Scuola-Città Pestalozzi* was already urging students to read books freely. Two of the best known Italian children's book authors, Gianni Rodari and Marcello Argilli, even visited the school to meet the pupils and discuss their books with them. I have a very clear recollection of one particular illustrator, Paola Pallottino, who would go on to become a prominent critic and writer. In 1978 she began publishing a collection called *Cento anni di Illustratori* (A Hundred Years of Illustrators) and in 1988, the *Storia dell'Illustrazione italiana* (The History of Italian Illustration) appeared. In the early years of the Fair, that she never failed to attend, she called insistently and memorably for the organizers to create an Illustrators Exhibition. To this very day, she delights in having been one of the first and most strenuous supporters of this initiative.

Another key personality was Mafra Gagliardi, today one of Italy's foremost experts in children's theatre. Visiting the Fair early on, in her erstwhile capacity as a journalist, Mafra came up with the idea of developing books into scripts for performing on the stage, a topic she later explored in her own book entitled *Nella bocca dell'immaginazione. La scena teatrale e lo spettatore bambino* (In the mouth of the imagination: theatrical performance and the child audience).

Gualtiero Schiaffino was another early visitor to the Bologna Fair in the period 1964-1968; in 1982 he and Ferruccio Giromini founded the magazine *Andersen*, an Italian monthly reporting on the latest developments in children's literature. At the time much of the Italian education system frowned on comic books; Gualtiero Schiaffino was instrumental in raising awareness and supporting a more positive attitude towards them. He was indeed a pioneer during those years, and went on to provide extensive much needed and constructive advice to the Bologna Fair organizers for exhibits and initiatives focusing on comics and illustration in general. Overseas visitors gradually began drifting towards the Fair, including Carmen Bravo Villasante from Spain; she is largely responsible for bringing about a wider appreciation of children's books in that country, from their most distant origins to the modern era, speaking engagingly at events with the support of her *Historia de la literatura infantil española* (History of Spanish Children's Literature).

From Russia came Ella Gankina, an expert in Russian and Soviet illustration (*Russkie chudojniki detskoi knigi* and *Chudojnik v sovremennoi detskoi knigi* (published into English as *Russian Artists of Children's Books* and *Contemporary Children's Book Illustrators*, respectively), and *Detskaja kniga vchera i segodnja* (The Book for Children Yesterday and Today). Sent to the Bologna Fair by the USSR Artists' Union, she returned home with glowing reports which eventually not only fostered the participation of numerous USSR publishing houses, starting in 1965 with *Mezhdunarodnaja knjiga*, but following lengthy negotiations conducted by Gankina herself, also secured the attendance of the well-known graphic artist and illustrator, Vitalij Gorjaev. In 1969 he headed a select group of artists who have continued coming to the Bologna Fair ever since.

When I arrived in Bologna – writes Gankina in a letter she sent me in November 2012 – it was in the April of 1968. The University was celebrating its anniversary and the whole city seemed to be pulsing in sync with the students who were dashing joyfully in every direction. This unique sensation came to a head at the Palazzo del Potestà, where panels had been erected bearing illustrations from children's books. Spring had barely begun in Moscow at the time, it was still overcast and quite cold there, and I delighted in the warm hospitality extended by the Fair's organizers, and the fairy-tale atmosphere. The Union of Artists of the USSR knew little or nothing about the Bologna Fair, but the Soviet Union

Friendship Circle put on a small display of Soviet children's books – undoubtedly featuring neither the latest nor the best. However, people showed much interest in that little Russian corner, and I was on hand to provide information to the many visitors who stopped by. This is how I eventually started negotiating with the Fair's organizers to have Soviet artists attend the Bologna Fairs on a regular basis, starting in 1969. I found them to be incredibly kind-hearted and understanding. An agreement was signed, and I headed back to Moscow carrying an official invitation for us to attend the Fair in 1969.

*Another faithful participant was Walter Scherf, about whom we received extensive valuable documentation from Jutta Reusch, Head of the Library Service at the Internationale Jugendbibliothek (International Youth Library) in Munich. Between 1957 and 1982, Walter Scherf became the Director of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek after Jella Lepman. An expert in children's literature and an author himself, Scherf's best known publications are: *Das Märchenlexikon* (The Lexicon of Fairy Tales) and *Die Herausforderung des Dämons: Form und Funktion grausiger Kindermärchen* (The challenge of the demon: the form and function of gruesome fairy tales). Walter Scherf's reports on the Fair, along with an article he penned that the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* published on 5 May 1969, can be found in the archives of the International Youth Library, now housed at Munich's Schloss Blumenburg. The Library is still a regular and valuable participant in the Bologna Fair. In the article, Scherf uses these words to describe the Bologna event: "It was at last a Fair for people whose main focus was children's publishing, a Fair where you could meet the movers and shakers of the publishing world. Where East and West come together face to face and in harmony." The same article then goes on to tell readers how the Library was contributing to the Fair, a contribution that is still ongoing. The Library gives publishers and experts searching for works to translate or acquire the rights of, the best children's books on the international market, which appear in an annual book review Catalogue entitled *White Ravens*. In this article, and in his yearly reports, Walter Scherf declared that the organizers of the Bologna Fair had invariably expressed their gratitude towards the International Youth Library, which they viewed as a pioneering establishment that could rightly claim to have made a significant contribution towards the Fair's success. In one of his 1969 reports, talking about the decision to move the Fair from Palazzo di Re Enzo to the new trade fair precinct, Walter Scherf speculates that after seeing the participant list mushroom in 1968, the Fair would sooner or later outgrow its venue.*

Apart from the fancy displays put on by the Italian publishing houses – he writes – the exhibitors from the United States, the United Kingdom and France occupy quite a lot of space; and the Soviet Union, Sweden and the Federal Republic of Germany spare no expense for their exhibits [...] There are individual stands alongside collective ones, a motley crew of exhibitors indeed, and roaming among them, a multitude of "explorers", especially from The Netherlands, who to start with, call on friends to lend them a table where they can put down their suitcases, samples and brochures. But what really sets this Fair apart is the hustle and bustle of busy people speaking innumerable languages, all eager to hook up with the world's most eminent experts to publicize the unique features of their children's books on the international stage.

*One name that stands out among the many foreigners who began attending the Fair back in 1964 is Dušan Roll, the founder of the Biennial of Illustration of Bratislava (BIB), which made its debut in 1965. Like a magnet, Dušan Roll would draw people to him as he strolled around the venue, not only to share the experiences, plans and problems of the world's largest exhibition of illustrators, and discuss possible prize winners, but also to talk with him about the latest plans and ambitions for the popular Symposium that continues to bring critics and experts in illustration to the BIB. Another prominent personality of the time was Klaus Doderer, Professor Emeritus at the University of Frankfurt, and the author of many essays and articles including *Die Entdeckung der Kinder- und Jugendliteraturforschung. Autobiographische Reflexionen* (Discovery of children's and youth literature as research. Autobiographical reflections). He was quick to sign up for the new Fair, which made its debut the same year (1963) that Doderer founded the *Institut für Jugendbuchforschung* (Institute for Children's Literature Research).*

It was not by accident – he wrote to me in a letter dated 11 November 2012 – but rather an historical consequence of many cultural and social developments on the international scene, that the Bologna Children's Book Fair in Italy and the first Institute for research into children's literature in Germany both materialized at roughly the same time. I came to Bologna keen to see how a literary fair specializing in books for children and young people might carve out a space for itself and thrive. On the way back to my University from Bologna I realized that the tasks and responsibilities pertaining to this field of literature had to have an international perspective and that, in reality, this was indeed happening. My visits to the Bologna Fair were not just an invaluable opportunity to find new books, but also to meet people whose lives were devoted to children's literature, catch up with the latest news and listen to different opinions.

Prof. Doderer goes on to mention an evening spent at the Fair one year in the company of Gianni Rodari, Sergej Michailkov and James Krüss, immersed in a deep and meaningful conversation. The letter mentions another rather startling detail: "The Bologna Fair was definitely burgeoning during the years that I visited it. Also thriving at that time was children's literature (national? European? Global?): it was clear that the era of specialized academic research had made a start and that the public and social focus on children's literature was becoming sharper". His letter tells us that the Bologna Fair earned its spurs and reputation in the Sixties, which Italians generally regard as the "golden years" of children's literature, from fiction to non-fiction, from graphic art to illustration, and from literary studies to pedagogic and psychological research into the sector. The Fair's international appeal soon enabled it to embark on real-time experimentation. Indeed, the event attracted all the leading writers, illustrators, graphic artists and researchers, if not in person, at the very least with their works. Suffice it to mention a few more names here, although it would be wonderful to be able to list them all, along with an account of their experiences: Maurice Sendak, John Alcorn and Milton Glaser from the United States, Heinz Edelmann and James Krüss from Germany, Gianni Rodari from Italy, Marc Soriano from France, Bob Gill, Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake from the UK... a veritable who's who of children's literature experts who have attended either in person or indirectly, and identify the Bologna Fair as it was at the time: a wellspring of innovation, commitment and creativity, on a fearless foray into uncharted territory. By the end of those first five years, the city of Bologna had taken the Fair to its heart, perhaps a little tentatively at first, then wholeheartedly. As we have already stated, the Fair worked relentlessly to keep up the momentum driving the initiatives first promoted between 1964 and 1968, and indeed they have flourished, bringing the book fair into the city's streets, squares and neighbourhoods, even outside the trade fair precinct. In fact, starting with the very first Fair the city has honored many eminent personalities from the world of books for their deep and sincere interest not only in the event, but also in the city that hosts it. In 1966, we started hearing people who clearly planned to return to the Fair the following year, call out: "To Bologna!" "To Bologna!" just as Chekhov's "Three Sisters" ends with the line "To Moscow! To Moscow!". In calling out the name of the city, they were obviously referring to the Fair and the sheer pleasure of anticipating their return.

Bologna, March 2013