

From *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi* to *Gl'Istrici*.

Salani's popular series of books for children

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Abstract

This article traces the history of the Salani publishing house, focusing in particular on two famous series of the 20th century conceived for a young audience: *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi* (1931-1955) and *Gl'Istrici* (1987). Though different from each other and coming from different historical periods, both series, which were very popular and appreciated by Italian readers, have been able to rethink children's literature and to evolve according to the readers' needs. In fact, *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi* and *Gl'Istrici* have based their bibliographical selection not only on aesthetic and literary quality, but also on new proposals, new unconventional stories, frequently of international nature. The series are therefore composed of books for boys and girls, teenagers and children, which are able to modernize the role of the reader and give a new literary and educational value to Italian children's literature through different editorial phases related to the historical moment of reference.

Il presente articolo ripercorre la storia della casa editrice Salani, soffermandosi in particolar modo su due celebri collane del Novecento pensate per un giovane pubblico: *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi* (1931-1955) e *Gl'Istrici* (1987). Pur molto diverse tra loro e figlie di diverse epoche storiche, entrambe le collane, molto popolari e apprezzate dal pubblico italiano, hanno saputo riconsiderare la letteratura rivolta all'infanzia ed evolversi a seconda dei bisogni dei lettori. *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi* e *Gl'Istrici* hanno infatti basato la propria selezione bibliografica, oltre che sulla qualità estetica e letteraria, su nuove proposte, nuove storie controcorrente, spesso di carattere internazionale. Le collane sono quindi costituite da libri per bambini e bambine, ragazze e ragazzi, in grado di modernizzare il ruolo del lettore e di dare un nuovo valore, letterario e formativo, alla letteratura per l'infanzia pubblicata in Italia attraverso diverse fasi editoriali legate al momento storico di riferimento.

Keywords: Salani; *Gl'Istrici*; *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*; Italian children's literature; Italian publishing industry

Parole chiave: Salani; *Gl'Istrici*; *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*; letteratura per l'infanzia italiana; editoria italiana

Dalila Forni – *From Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi to Gl'Istrici. Salani's popular series of books for children*

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1. Salani: a historical introduction

In 1862, Adriano Salani (1834-1904) established a publishing house in Florence called Salani. Adriano was born in a peasant family and at the age of fourteen started to work as a typographer in a print house. At the beginning of his career, he immediately understood some of the main problems of the publishing industry: books were extremely low-quality and bad-printed. Therefore, in the Sixties, he decided to rent a building and print his own products. His first publications were a wide selection of *fogli volanti*, sheets illustrated with images about songs and rhymed stories. Although rates of illiteracy were still high and dialects were the most common languages used by Italians, his market was immediately flourishing and Adriano Salani had to employ several assistants to help him (Murru, 2009). He was also supported by Cesare Causa, who worked as an editorial director: he revised books, wrote songs and tales, and mainly helped Salani sharing his knowledge on the topic. In order to expand his business, Salani chose to buy a new machine that could print postcards, little paper toys, business cards, manuals, calendars, and other similar goods. The first volume published by Salani was printed in 1864 and was titled *I casi della toscana nel 1859 e 1860 narrati al popolo da una compagnia di toscani*, by Augusto Guerrini, a book that costed Adriano a process (Marchetti, 2011; Levi, 2012).

Adriano Salani was not a cultured man, but he was particularly creative, industrious, and brave. In that period, two prestigious publishers were set in Florence: Le Monnier and Barbèra. For this reason, Adriano's dream to open a new publisher was particularly compelling. Therefore, he decided to publish works mainly directed to 'low-class' readers. His first *fogli volanti* were sold by town criers and circulated all around Tuscany. Salani supported lower classes through his books' content as well: his publications often criticized the new-born state of Italy and, adopting rebellious tones, tried to offer a challenging political point of view to his readers (Marchetti, 2011; Levi, 2012).

In the Eighties, Salani created his first series of books: *Biblioteca economica* (1880), featuring classics and historical books, which was followed by *Biblioteca illustrata Salani* (1894). In 1888, Salani bought a new typographical factory, where fifty-four workers were employed. This new building was constantly equipped with brand new machines, as Linotype, that further widened Salani's production. Despite Salani's interest for lower classes, in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century his works addressed different social classes due to the editorial boom of those years: on the one hand, he published folkloric stories, plays, Italian and international novels – mostly best-sellers – for a popular, not instructed audience; on the other hand, he also selected classic texts, such as works by Giacomo Leopardi and Dante, for cultured readers. For instance, Salani published a double-version of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: the first one was a critical edition for well-educated audiences; the second one had a fluid, simpler text and was created for popular sales (Strickner, 2019).

Moreover, the Coppino Law of 1877 imposed compulsory schooling up to the age of nine, and this created a new branch in the publishing market. Thus, Salani addressed young readers as well: these works aimed to be educational tools, but also to catch the readers' interest. From Carlo Collodi to Jules Verne, Salani offered fascinating covers that directly involved young audiences' fantasy and distributed classics of children's fiction (Faeti, 1995; Boero, De Luca, 1997; Hunt, 2009; Grilli, 2012; Bacchetti, 2013). Salani had to compete with different publishing houses addressing the same target, such as Bemporad and its *Biblioteca Bemporad per ragazzi*; Donath and its *Biblioteca illustrata per la gioventù*; Paravia, which published in 1900 the weekly illus-

trated magazine *La Domenica dei fanciulli*; the Swiss publisher Hoepli, the first to use colors and images; Treves, which published one of the first bestsellers of that time, the book *Cuore* by Edmondo De Amicis (Boero, De Luca, 1997; Strickner, 2019).

In the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century, Salani totally affirmed its presence in the publishing industry following Italian cultural, educational, and editorial growth. The presence of schools in Italy increased and more and more people had the competencies to read, and, consequently, to buy a higher number of books. However, a flourishing market also meant more and more competition, a factor that encouraged Salani to further widen his target audience. Middle-class readers were offered popular novels, often written by foreign – and mostly French – authors, such as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas or, considering Italian writers, Francesco Mastriani. Popular novels fascinated female readers as well: literature became a spare-time activity that could also offer a precious moral (Beseghi, 1987; Beseghi, 1994; Ulivieri, 2007; Ulivieri, Pace, 2012). For example, Carolina Invernizio was an extremely popular writer among female and male audiences: her books – mainly detective stories based on real facts – were not particularly cultured, but attracted a great number of readers from different classes. Furthermore, her books were extremely popular in America as well, as Italian migrants brought her books with them. In addition, Salani also worked on religious and musical literature for a cultured audience (Marchetti, 2011).

When Adriano died in 1904, his son, Ettore Salani, initially followed his father's path and decided to continue his successful business. He was particularly familiar with his father's activity since he started working in his father's typography as a young boy. In 1900, he created the series *Biblioteca illustrata Salani*, whose works were divided into six categories, and one of them specifically presented books for young readers. Ettore Salani was strongly influenced by Albertina Palau, a writer that had many contacts with artists all over the world and convinced him to try new solutions for his business, considering for example foreign authors and new printing machines. Despite the literary crisis brought by World War I, Salani's books were sent to the front and, for this reason, never faced a real economic recession. In the Twenties, Salani was particularly famous for its well-finished but economic editions (Levi, 2012).

In order to expand his business, Ettore tried to further address young audiences and worked with well-known translators and illustrators to offer high-quality works. However, Ettore did not want to embark on a risky activity and for this reason the first texts published by Salani were already-known works, like fairy-tales or Italian and international classics for children. For instance, Salani published works such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne, *No family* by Hector Malot, *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri, *Tonino in calzoni lunghi* by Ida Baccini, *I viaggi di un soldatino di piombo* by Anna Franchi, and Grimm's fairy tales (Marchetti, 2011). In the Thirties, Ettore, with the help of his son Mario, created some series of books that addressed a specific audience. The first one is *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*, which offered books for children and teenagers, followed by *La biblioteca delle signorine*, which was based on novels by Delly that became particularly famous for their pink cover and their sentimental overtones (Levi, 2012).

Delly's works were written by two French authors – Jeanne Marie e Frédéric Petit-Jean de la Rosière – whose identity is still mysterious: Salani showed the signature of Frédéric Petit-Jean de la Rosière, an unknown figure who was never seen in person by Salani's employers as Albertina Palau, his translator, kept the contacts. The

two authors were siblings and both died at the end of the Forties (Sensique, 1994; Levi, 2013). Delyly has been considered the prototype of the popular romance novel: Delyly's books were based on recurrent structures and themes, simple language, and a strong opposition between a pure, gentle protagonist in search of love and 'villains' that tried to corrupt her. Many critics considered Delyly ridiculous, simplistic, and in some cases pitiful fiction, but their influence on young readers carried on until the Fifties.

Before dying in 1937, Ettore asked his son, Mario, to produce honest and safe books, a statement that was strongly considered by the new Salani businessman. Mario Salani had to face World War II and the consequent lack of employers and raw materials, but when the war was over, he further widened his industry, expanding it to cities like Milan. Mario brought Salani to a religious reform, a topic that was particularly new for the publishing house, which had long been considered anticlerical and somehow rebellious. Mario eliminated those books or passages that did not adhere to catholic values and inserted in some catalogues a priest's opinion about the readings. He also produced books regarding Saints' lives, prayers, different versions of The Bible, and so on, offering more than hundreds of religious titles (Levi, 2012, pp. 37-38).

Moreover, Mario was influenced by fascist ideology¹. From the Twenties, different books and series followed fascist ideals, such as the series *Piccoli libri della patria*, and starting from 1938, more and more books – brand new works of art directed to different readers – addressed fascist topics. For example, the series *I romanzi delle signorine*, *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi* or *I libri della gioventù* offered works dedicated to female and young audiences presenting strong political overtones. Salani also denied the publishing of Jewish works, such as *I ragazzi della via Pal*. Mario also introduced Latin dictionaries to be sold to students and works on a project regarding encyclopedias (Marchetti, 2011). After World War II, readers wanted to deal with escape literature: Mondadori, for instance, relied on *Topolino* and detective fiction (Levi, 2012, pp. 39-40; Farina, 2013, pp.32-41), while Salani addressed a restricted audience and selected a strong educative perspective. Mario Salani was forced to close down different branches and to print his works in external typographies.

The Sixties were a complex and contrasting period of time considering Italian publishing industry. On the one hand, several books built on traditional models and ideals, as recalled by Rosellina Archinto: «The children's books being printed here were such sad little things» (Farina, 2013, p.32). On the other hand, many authors considered childhood as a key element in educational and literary debates. Young readers were given a new dignity and an active role through works of fiction based on new styles, languages, ideas. These two different trends of thought generated a strong, dynamic debate:

«Rather than cancelling each other out, these paradoxical and contrasting currents fuelled one another, enriching and stimulating continuous changes of perspective. It was, in fact, the continuous mix and comparison of images of childhood and different incongruous educational models (from art, literature, cinema, TV programmes, music, advertising...), that enabled them to ignite new curiosities, to suggest new existential questions and open original interpretative perspectives» (Antoniazzi, 2018, p. 6).

The Sixties were a particularly hard period for Salani: Mario Salani died in 1964, in 1966 Florence was hit by a strong flood and the popular spread of TV seemed to distract audiences from literary entertainment and to set new moral standards. As highlighted by Anna Levi, Italians preferred to watch *Lascia o raddoppia* on the TV

rather than spend their time reading the extremely moral and religious works selected by the publisher (Levi, 2012, pp.39-40). So, Salani opted for selling gadgets and toys in order to expand its business and following a new trend that saw children and teenagers as target consumers for specific products in an ‘economic boom’ that led to a reconsideration of the superfluous (Antoniazzi, 2018). This choice had been already considered in the Twenties, but the Sixties saw a growing business in new toys related to figures such as Topo Gigio, Calciomercato, and TV programs. Television had a great influence on Salani’s works and sellings: thanks to TV programs such as *Ape Maia*, the publisher encountered an increasing economic and cultural success (Marchetti, 2011).

In the Eighties, Salani faced a severe crisis and in 1986 was bought by Mario Spagnol with Longanesi, that wished to help a renowned brand. Its first series was called *Nostalgia* and directly aimed to evoke longing feelings, offering a selection of fifteen books from *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*. However, selling old books was not sufficient to reach the apogee of Salani’s career again (Marchetti, 2011; Levi, 2012, pp. 42-44). Consequently, Donatella Ziliotto created and directed the series *Gl’Istrici, I libri che pungono la fantasia*. This series presents international literature for young readers: modern, non-traditional, compelling books that directly address young readers avoiding adult intermediation. The series had incredible success and comprehended works by authors such as Roald Dahl, Astrid Lindgren, and Michael Ende (Boero, 2017).

2. *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*

The magazine *La semaine de Suzette*, although not known in Italy, is the primary source of inspiration for *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*. *La semaine* was founded in 1905 by Henri Eugene Gautier and its production continued until the Sixties. Gautier was a French catholic publisher that wanted to offer young girls an intelligent, moral source of entertainment. *La semaine* could be compared to Italian *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* for its popularity, but contents differed. Every edition had two novels published in episodes, short stories and plays, poems and columns focusing on plays, recipes, mails, and so on. Girls used to write to the magazine to ask for advice about topics such as style and good manners. *Suzette* was the potential reader the magazine wanted to address. The magazine also offered educational articles on its second page, usually written by Tante, the editor-in-chief.

The values promoted by the French magazine – mainly related to patriotism, religion and moral – influenced different generations of readers. Since in 1870 the Third Republic opted for laic schools in France, many editors tried to promote catholic values through literature. So, *La semaine* selected a series of religious authors that could convey their values to new generations. In 1919, the magazine’s success led to the creation of a book series called *Bibliothèque de Suzette*, where the most appreciated novels of the magazine were published, and some of them were published by Ettore Salani as well. The series offered 249 titles in less than fifty years and constantly evolved, facing not simply World War II and several crises, but also a changing popular moral. However, in 1960, the series was considered obsolete and had to resign for good.

In 1931, Salani launched a series clearly inspired by *Bibliothèque de Suzette*, called *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*. The series was acclaimed by many critics, for instance, Umberto Eco recalls its influence on different generations of young readers: «I believe that, for those of us whose taste for mystery and labyrinthic imagination is

associated by malevolent critics with Russian narrators, la Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi was the source of the formation of our imagination. » (Eco, 1988, p. 98, *TdA*). The series initially published three books from *Suzette* and the novel *Il fanciullo che venne dal mare* (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Manfredo Giannini, *Il fanciullo che venne dal mare*, copertina di Alberto Zardo

This work was originally thought to be written by a Tuscan writer, Manfredo Giannini, but in 2002 its real author was discovered: Everett Green, an English writer. The book's original title was *A child without a name* (1887), and Giannini adapted it for Italian readers and for schools. Giannini sent his book to Salani, and it is still not clear if the editor knew about it being an adaptation. The book mixes adventure and moral values in a direct, fluid text that was particularly appreciated by Salani's readers.

Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi differs from other series of books for children as it was the first one to introduce a great number of foreign, and mostly French, texts. Moreover, it renewed editorial canons through a new graphic style and themes that could easily catch young readers' attention, such as adventurous, dreadful and funny experiences (Faeti, 1979). The series immediately gained popular approval and Salani decided to publish other books from Suzette's library. Even if the works came from a foreign country, they managed to represent Italian culture as well, discussing themes such as war, education, migrations, politics, and so on. Moreover, French texts were strongly adapted during the translation process in order to directly involve Italian readers. For instance, the novels told the stories of Italian cities and political events. In *L'erede di Ferralba* (Ferlac in the original version), all French names were literally translated and all references to Paris eliminated. Similarly, in *Un Pierrot e tre bambine* every reference to Russia was avoided, referring to it as an Asian country and substituting Russian Revolution with a simple, general war. Again, in *Lupo ci sei?*, the young protagonist flees from France to the United Kingdom by sea. In the Italian version, the girl runs from Italy to Spain, transforming English names in Spanish names. These extremely adapting translations were not well-finished: several errors can still be found in the texts as not all the city names were translated or translated following the same

choices. Moreover, for what concerns covers, Salani worked on new pictures by Italian authors, even if the illustrations presented inside the original book were kept (Levi, 2012, p.396; Lepri, 2016b)ⁱⁱ.

Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi was published from 1931 until 1955, with an interruption from 1943 to 1947, and counted 98 titles, plus 8 titles that adhered to fascist ideals and were successively eliminated and substituted by foreign works. The format of the books was 13x19cm and their price was three lire: a price that was not so expensive if compared to other publishing houses that offered series for children. The end-papers presented a list of the published titles, where readers could mark those books they had not read yet, and at the end of the books readers could find new titles and reviews.

The novels addressed themes such as adventure, mystery, moral education, and, for the very first time, they considered female identity (Ulivieri, 2007; Fochesato, 2012). Girls were not merely secondary, flat characters, but they demonstrated to have specific qualities that had been long considered exclusively male, as the capacity to be autonomous or clever. In 1953, new editions of the series' books came out to address a different, modern audience. To do it, Salani selected new foreign authors, worked on the format of the books, and changed the series name, called *Nuova biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*. However, this new editorial project did not register the same success of its predecessor and in the Sixties the series totally collapsed because of new entertainment standards.

Considering the works published in the series, it must be underlined that most of them were international. Despite the adapting translations in the fascist period, the series comprehended works for children from different countries: French was the most prominent language in the collection, with 57 translated books; Italy followed, with 38 titles; 9 titles came from England, and one from Hungary.

Considering authors, Salani selected 27 French authors, 20 Italian writers, 4 authors from the US, a Belgian writer, one from Hungary, one from Australia, and one from England. One of the most prolific authors in the series was Gino Chelazzi, who published 27 books for Salani. His works dealt with history, religion, and geography. The main aim of his novels was to entertain and instruct at the same time. Andrè Buyere was another important writer for the series. She used to work for *Suzette* and eight of her titles were translated into Italian and published by Salani in *La biblioteca* series. Buyere as well had a particularly moral approach, investigating themes such as values and good manners. The Hungarian author chosen by Salani was Ferenc Molnár and its well-known work *I ragazzi della via Pal* was selected for the series (n.29) (Levi, 2012).

3. *Gl'Istrici*

During the Eighties, soon after Longanesi bought Salani, a new editorial project aimed to renew literary proposals for young audiences. Therefore, in 1987 Mario Spagnol and Donatella Ziliotto founded the series *Gl'Istrici*, where she tried to select the highest-quality books of the international panorama. Ziliotto was born in 1932 in Trieste, a city in the middle of cultural interchange that strongly influenced her non-conservative approach to children's books. She works as a writer, a translator, and with TV programs.

The TV experience opened her mind regarding what children really appreciate in stories, bringing to *Gl'Istrici* collection new literary genres. Many critics agree on the importance of Ziliotto in Salani's revitalization (Lazarato, Ziliotto, 1987; Beseghi, 1994; Guerrini, 2006; Bacchetti, 2013; Lepri, 2016^o, Barsotti, Cantatore,

2019). Ziliotto had previous experience with publisher Vallecchi, with whom she introduced *Pippi Calzelunghe* to Italy. Ziliotto recalls her decision stating that:

«I published it as the opening volume of the series “Il Martin Pescatore” [...] in this way, Italian girls knew they could become strong and independent and aspire, as grown-ups, to lift up and throw away everything that bullied them, just as Pippi does with thieves» (Lepri, 2016a, p. 333, *TdA*).

With Vallecchi, she worked on the series *Martin Pescatore* during the Sixties, even if it was not completely successful because of its progressive view regarding young readers. As a matter of fact, Ziliotto wanted to train children to be critical thinkers, to teach them how to react and not to accept passively something they considered wrong. The same approach was followed years later in *Gl'Istrici* collection. In the works selected by Ziliotto, young readers are considered active, intelligent, open-minded. Themes such as divorce, loss, death or loss (Grilli, 2017) were presented to young audiences, with a simple – but not simplistic – style, characterized by a dynamic language and constant dialogues.

Since Italian children's literature had few precious works to offer to young readers, Ziliotto had to pick new, modern stories from international contemporary literature, for example from Sweden, Norway, England, Netherlands, Germany, and Australia (Guerrini, 2006; Lepri, 2016a).

The series presented a new approach towards young readers and re-evaluated the role of children's literature, which was considered as a key tool in children's growth, presenting modern, fascinating *bildungsroman* (Bernardi, 2011; Grandi, 2017). Thus, besides offering brand-new titles, there are several reasons why *Gl'Istrici* Salani became so popular and appreciated by children. First of all, *Gl'Istrici* offered new literary genres usually thought to be adult-oriented: noir, gothic, science fiction, fantasy, love stories, poems, satire, and so on. Children had a wide variety of titles and genres that could appeal to them, following their personal taste in literature and, for this reason, the series attracted an extremely wide audience.

For instance, the first author to be published in *Gl'Istrici* was Roald Dahl, whose works are characterized by intense use of ironic, grotesque and rebellious style and content, something that was missing in books published in Italy in those years (Grandi, 2016a; 2016b; Strickner, 2019; Forni, 2020).

Secondly, their format was appreciated by children: *Gl'Istrici* were small pocketbooks, with coloured covers in a framework and black and white images through the text, with classic fonts and light paper (Trisciuzzi, 2017). *Gl'Istrici*'s peculiar design was created by American artist John Alcorn, it was renewed in 2008 by English designer Will Web and in 2017, for the series 30th anniversary, by Italian-American designer Nicholas Misiani (Figure 2).

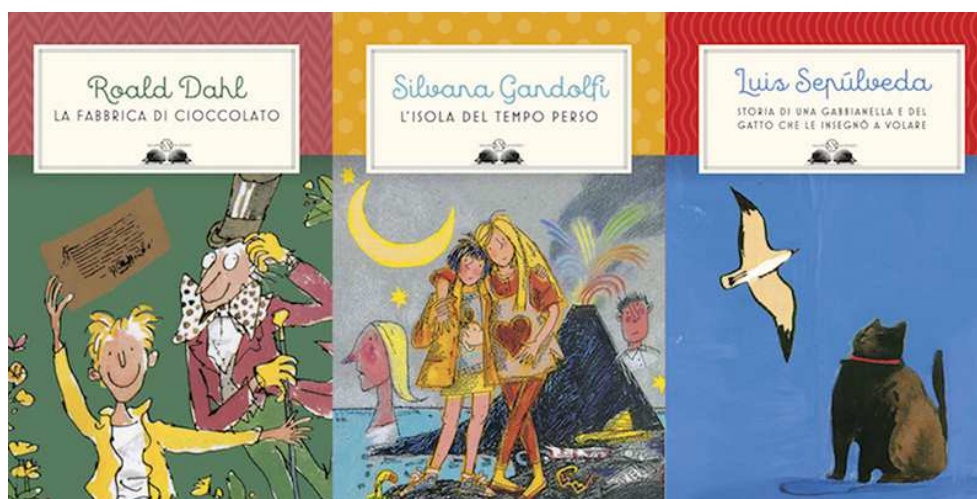


Figure 2: *Gl'Istrici* covers by Nicholas Misiani

On the frontispiece, readers could find few lines regarding the author's life and their native country, a small critical apparatus directly thought for young readers, who were considered the main target, forgetting adult mediation. Thirdly, *Gl'Istrici* did not consider a specific target age. In the beginning, the series assumed the books could be read from 3 to 80 years-old readers. Successively, the catalogue was divided considering target age, but categories were particularly wide and encouraged children to choose books beyond age standards. Finally, *Gl'Istrici* became so popular because of the lack of a strong moral. The main goal of the books was to tell interesting stories and catch readers' attention and stimulate their fantasy. Some of the books offered by the series may have educational undertones, but presented modern, complex values that differed from traditional standards. Moreover, as Pino Boero points out:

«[...] not many would have bet on the result of texts that were not very 'educational' in the most traditional sense of the term, texts capable of using narrative modes linked to a humorous and grotesque dimension, yet the choices of young readers went precisely in that direction and the many foreign authors in the series [...] served to make them understand that it was necessary to continue to look at foreign realities, taking a step forward in terms of stylistic quality and narrative modes (from the realistic to the grotesque dimension)» (Boero, 2017, p. 55, *TdA*).

Lately, *Gl'Istrici* was divided into different sub-categories, focusing on specific formats or topics. *Gl'Istrici d'oro* proposed classics and best-sellers, such as Roald Dahl's or Daniel Pennac's books, while *Istrice sapiens* dealt with science and contemporary events that could teach children the most relevant discoveries of the time. Moreover, *Grand'Istrici* focused on more mature themes based on entertainment but also hard issues. As the series' catalogue explains:

«A legend says that porcupines shoot their quills, like arrows, at those who tickle them. Try to tickle our porcupines and they will sting you: they will strike your imagination and your heart, amusing, fascinating and frightening you. We have looked for them all over the world and now they are here to sting you, sting you!ⁱⁱⁱⁱ (*TdA*)».

Gl'Istrici offers a catching graphic, colorful covers, a small format, and modern, untraditional issues, with complex characters and thorny but captivating problems. In addition, the series brought to Italy new authors that will be strongly appreciated by Italian readers over decades, such as Michale Ende, Roald Dahl, Jacqueline Wilson, Anna Fine, and Christine Nöstlinger. *Gl'Istrici* contributed to change children's literary canon and widened Italian standards to new authors and topics which were usually not considered in books for young audiences. *Gl'Istrici's* books also had a new focus on female identity in children's fiction: girls started to be active protagonists, with multifaceted personalities and new dreams to follow (Barsotti, 2017). Thus, in order to be part of *Gl'Istrici* collection, a book had to be original, to move beyond stereotypes and clichés, to encourage readers to think critically, to present 'hot' topics, and to offer a peculiar style. *Gl'Istrici's* high-quality selection of captivating, modern, rebellious books influenced Italian publishing industry and introduced to Italy a new approach to children's literature. The novels offered a complex, fantastic language and content, working on an innovative perspective on children's literature. Ziliotto explains that

«Again, I thought about children's defense through reading. In my series there are no fairy tales and warnings, but books that are meant to entertain and at the same time accustom readers to becoming more critical of a reality that attempts to suffocate them, also through the media. [...] To "*Gl'Istrici*"'s children, nothing is censored, because I have great esteem for my readers» (Lepri, 2016a, p.335, *TdA*).

4. Conclusions

The history of Salani encourages us to examine the social, ideological and literary changes that took place in Italy from the mid-18th century to the end of the 20th century. Beginning with a courageous and admirable experience – Formiggini writes on this subject: «When I was a boy, to despise a book, one would say 'Salami' editions, because this house began with little books and songs» (Bacci, 2012) – the publisher, generation after generation, established itself on the Italian scene, influencing the literary canon and the perception of the child reader at the end of the 20th century. From little books to the publication of the world-famous series *Harry Potter*, Salani has been able to evolve and distinguish itself for seriousness and quality, offering an admirable model of publishing based on graphic accuracy, affordable prices, and carefully selected stories for a specific target audience. In particular, Salani managed to capture the opportunities of a new field, children's literature, and to understand the needs of a young audience, laying the groundwork for a national reform of children's literature canon. The two series analysed in the essay, *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi* (1931-1955) and *Gl'Istrici* (1987), both specifically dedicated to a young audience, demonstrate Salani's evolution over the 20th century. This evolution was mainly due to the impact of international publishing and the key role of influential and innovative figures such as Ziliotto. Therefore, the two series shaped different generations of readers and offered stories, authors and characters who were able to subvert the canon and introduce into literature new themes, new identities and new sensibilities that now characterise contemporary fiction for young readers.

ⁱ Two main series became particularly popular during fascist era. Utet published the series *La scala d'oro*, which consisted of 99 books published in two years and divided into eight series for 6-13 years-old readers. These books present an elegant and detailed graphic and fascinating pictures that were particularly big. Secondly, Salani created *Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi*, which

was not as elegant as *La scala d'oro* from a graphic perspective, but Salani had a great experience in publishing business and offered lower prices that captured a larger audience (see A. G. Marchetti, 2011).

ⁱⁱ For a complete list of illustrators (see A. Levi, cit., 2012, p. 396).

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.salani.it/collane/gli-istrici> (last visited: 04/08/2021).

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