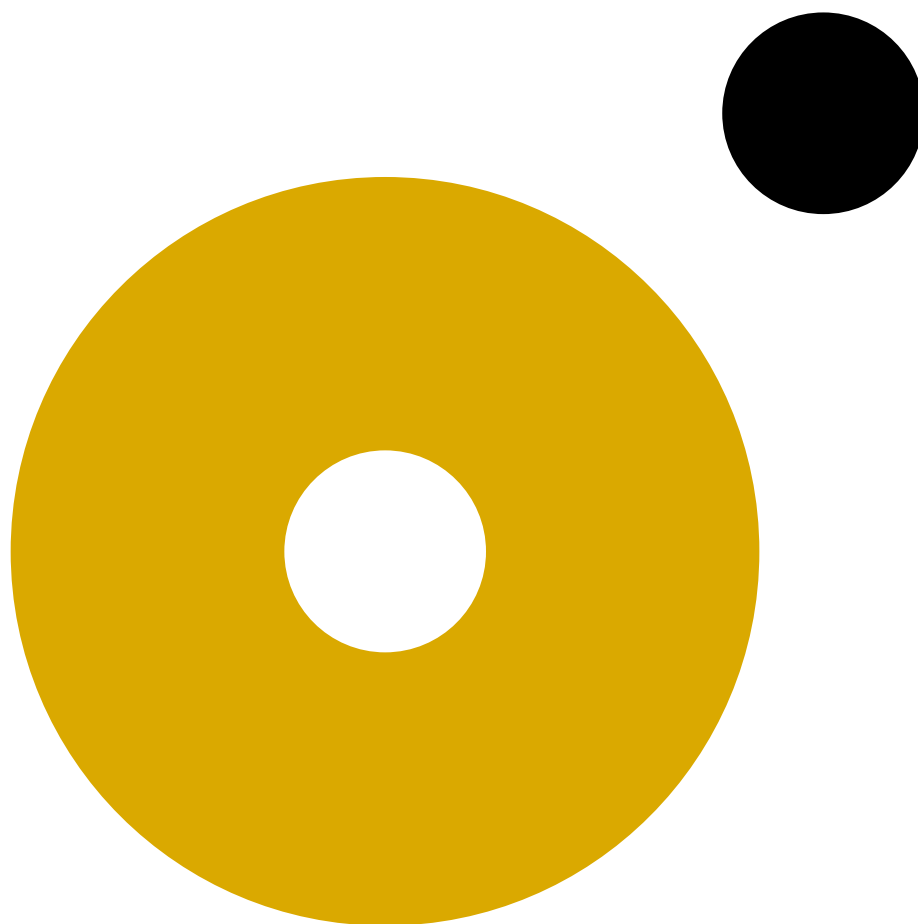


MEMORIA **SCOLASTICA**



The School and Its Many Pasts

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani



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Between School Memory and Historical-Educational Heritage: the Library of the “Giacomo Leopardi” National Boarding School in Macerata*

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Introduction

Among the latest frontiers of historical research in education we can certainly include two fields of studies that are proving to be quite fruitful and harbingers of further developments, relating to school memory and historical-educational heritage¹. Two areas of investigation that have their specific coordinates, but which in our opinion also show numerous points of contact that deserve to be highlighted. Hence our desire to approach a multifaceted study object with a high heuristic potential such as school libraries of historical value, to try to bring these two perspectives of investigation into dialogue².

As far as the Italian context is concerned, an organic legislative framework on school libraries has never existed and in part still does not exist, and although their history has long been intertwined, almost to the point of confusion, with that of popular libraries, note that the first normative references date back to the founding law of the Italian national school system, the Casati Law of 1859. At the beginning of the 20th century, the first provisions on the establishment and functioning of school and class libraries were introduced, even

* The article is the result of close collaboration between the authors. However, it should be noted that Anna Ascenzi is responsible for writing the *Introduction* and the *Conclusions*, while Elisabetta Patrizi is responsible for writing paragraphs 2 and 3.

¹ On the latest addresses relating to the field of studies on school memory see C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017 e J. Meda, L. Pomante, M. Brunelli (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019. On the developments of studies on historical-educational heritage, please refer to the two volumes of the proceedings of the first two congresses of the Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (SIPSE): A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria, patrimonio*, Macerata, EUM, 2020; A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, Macerata, eum, 2021.

² With the expression “school libraries of historical value” we mean libraries with a book heritage acquired during a certain historical period and therefore worthy of specific attention from the point of view of the history of education.

if much was left to the free initiative of teachers, pupils and local authorities, against a backdrop of a lack of state funding³. Despite the fact that several circulars were issued during the Fascist period, which had the aim of placing school libraries under government control, culminating in the establishment of the National Authority for Popular and School Libraries (ENBPS) in 1932, in general it never arrived at «particularly significant measures that allow us to glimpse the effective development of school libraries» within an organic project⁴. Changes were only made after the Second World War and, in particular after the delegated decrees of 1974. Despite the lights and shadows of many initiatives promoted even in recent times, school libraries as a whole have finally begun to be conceived and valued as educational resources that are capable of profitably stimulating the growth of students and supporting the professional development of teachers.

The tortuous, and in some ways troubled, story of school libraries in Italy often hides pages of great interest – above all if one focuses on school libraries founded centuries ago, i.e. endowed with a significant historical content both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view – which deserves to be explored both as a place of individual and collective memory, a repository of precise educational canons applied to a specific educational reality, and as a cultural asset for the school to be conserved, protected but also to be valued because it is part of a community's identity. This dual interpretative key which – as far as we know is completely new in terms of historical-educational research – had already been highlighted in the memorandum between the Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Environmental Heritage and Cultural Activities on 23 October 2000, where it was stated that:

the cultural asset constitutes an active element of the country's cultural growth and, in particular, libraries represent the place of historical memory, as well as being an infrastructure for accessing information and knowledge as a support for education, research, training and the dissemination of culture and, as such, complementary to the basic purposes of schools of all levels⁵.

Convinced of the fact that school libraries present themselves as one of the most suitable fields of investigation for exploring the strong link between school memory and historical-educational heritage, we aim to test their potential by examining a specific case study, that of the “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school library in Macerata, which has peculiar characteristics in terms of history, consistency and relevance of the heritage preserved therein.

³ A brief overview of the normative references relating to Italian school libraries is in A. Ascenzi, E. Patrizi, *The school library as an educational device. The case of the Giacomo Leopardi National Boarding School Library in Macerata*, in A. Debè, S. Polenghi (edd.), *Histories of Educational Technologies. Cultural and Social Dimensions of Pedagogical Objects. Book of Abstract*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2022, p. 405. For further information on this subject, see E. Colombo, A. Rosetti, *La biblioteca nella scuola*, Roma, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1986, pp. 13-33; M. Fiore, *La storia delle biblioteche scolastiche italiane dall'unità ai nostri giorni. Analisi storico-normativa delle leggi e delle iniziative sulle biblioteche scolastiche italiane*, Verona, Zettadue, 2005; D. Lombello, *Dalle «bibliotechine di classe» alla biblioteca scolastica nella rete nazionale*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. I, n. 2, 2006, pp. 249-281.

⁴ Lombello, *Dalle «bibliotechine di classe» alla biblioteca scolastica*, cit., p. 269.

⁵ https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/news/2000/prot_intesa_mbc.shtml (last access: 24.01.2023).

1. *The “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school library in Macerata*

The library of the “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school in Macerata was officially established in 1915, even though a first nucleus of volumes for the use of the students and teachers of the school had already been set up in the boarding school’s early years, whose origins date back to the very early post-unification period (1862). We stand before a library of great value, which has an important history behind it, as it belongs to a prestigious, ancient and still existing institution. This history is reflected in the volumes kept in the library, which allow you to travel through different eras, from the post-unification period to the post-WWII period⁶.

Currently, the school’s library is housed in the Center for Documentation and Research on the History of School Books and Children’s Literature (CESCO), following a loan for use contract entered into between Macerata University and the boarding school in 2008. It is of a significant size, which corresponds to almost 2000 books, making a total of 1319 works and 27 periodical publications⁷. These data are obtained from examining the library inventory. This document was drawn up, presumably, during the Fascist period and then updated over time, until after the post-WWII period. It contains only a small amount of essential information: inventory number, author, title and reference shelf (marked with a letter of the alphabet)⁸.

⁶ The “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school in Macerata, initially established under the provincial government, was nationalized in 1886. In the first period of activity, the institute housed students between the ages of 6 and 12, but soon opened its doors to students from the secondary school, who became the privileged users of the boarding school. We find confirmation of the fact that the institute began to acquire books right away from the analysis of the stamps affixed to the volumes, many of which have the wording “Provincial Boarding school in Macerata”. For a first approach to the historical history of this institute, see A. Avesani, *Le scuole pubbliche nel medioevo e nella età moderna*, in *Storia di Macerata*, Macerata, Grafica Maceratese, 1988, vol. III, pp. 3-76. On the foundation of the boarding schools in Italy and on their first period of activity, see P. Pavesio, *I convitti nazionali dalle origini ai nostri giorni. Cenni storici con note e appendici*, Avellino, Tipografia Tulumiero, 1885, in part. parte IV. For an update on the current situation of boarding schools in Italy, see the Dossier by UIL (Italian Labor Union) in 2008 https://uilsuola.it/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/dossier_convitti_testo.pdf (last access: 02.02.2023).

⁷ In general, there are few journals preserved in the Macerata library, however they are striking in their great diversity. They range from popular science journals (e.g. «La Natura. Rivista delle scienze e delle loro applicazioni alle industrie e alle arti» edited by Paolo Mantegazza and published by Treves) to travel (such as the monthly journals promoted by Touring Club Italiano «Le vie d’Italia» and «Le vie del mondo»), history topic («Atti e memorie» edited by R. Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche) and those devoted to teachers (eg. «Rivista dell’Istruzione», published by Maggioli, and «Scuola e insegnanti», published by B.M. italiana). There is only one journal intended for the young boys, i.e. «Ranch», of which only one issue remains (n.1 of 1st year, 1951). The presence of the first issue of the first year (1875) of the «Giornale del museo d’istruzione e di educazione» is remarkable.

⁸ The inventory presents a large division. There is a first part ordered alphabetically based on the author’s surname, which corresponds to the oldest and most substantial nucleus of the library (1171 inventory numbers), and there is a more recent and less substantial second part (825 inventory numbers), which appears organized on the basis of the order of acquisition and which would seem to have been left out of the first reorganization of the library (this part mostly contains twentieth-century texts, but there are also texts published previously, which perhaps remained out of the first reorganization of the library).

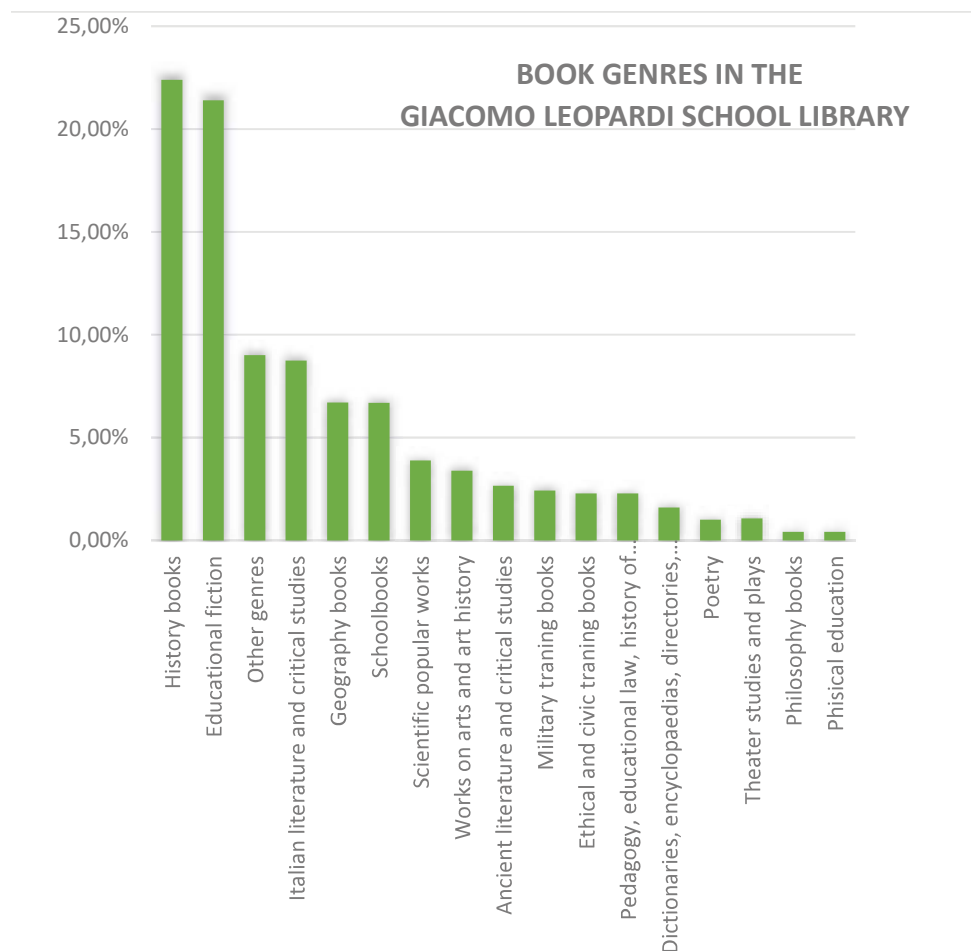


Fig. 1. Table about the book genres in the “Giacomo Leopardi” School Library

We proceeded to create a catalog of all the inventory units in the library, to further and clarify this initial picture. This work has allowed us to take hold of every single volume in the boarding school’s old repository and to appreciate its particularities, in many cases. Cataloging was followed by an analysis, which we conducted taking into account some specific elements: the title, to evaluate the literary genres represented in the library; the author, to understand the type of authors most present; the typographical data, to reconstruct the varying relevance of the publishers and the “chronological extent/connotation” of the library; finally, the extra-textual elements (ownership notes, dedications, student annotations, etc.), to understand the specific history of the specimens and intercept information on its readers and on the approach to the text.

The analysis of the titles returns the image of a library designed mainly for students (a particular aspect of all school libraries)⁹ and in the second instance as a support to teaching work (Figure 1).

The most represented works are those of a historical nature, above all texts dedicated to characters and episodes of the Risorgimento period, biographies, documentary and epistolary collections of illustrious characters such as Cavour, Vittorio Emanuele II and Garibaldi, which cover 22.39% of the works in the Macerata library. This is followed by works attributable to children's and youth literature, a category in which we can also include texts intended for the education of the people, published above all in the 19th century and to a lesser extent in the first half of the 20th century, periods in which – as is known – the boundary between literature aimed at young readers and that for the adult public appears rather fluid¹⁰. The presence of the most important works in the history of Italian literature which, together with critical studies, is also interesting and represent almost 9% of the library's content. The geographical works also stand out, covering almost 7% of the library and range from travel narratives to treatises with a more rigorous scientific approach, many of which are dedicated to Abyssinia. An almost similar percentage can also be found of textbooks, mostly intended for secondary school and dedicated to humanities subjects (history of Italian literature, anthologies, history textbooks). Works on art and art history, as well as popular scientific works, especially concerning animal biology, physics and astronomical geography, amount to around 4%. There are various sectors of the library representing between 2% and 3%: the great classics of Greek and Latin literature and related critical studies, publications for military training (which reveal the military imprint of the boarding school which remained in vogue until the first half of 20th century), educational literature for the development of character (behavioral treatises and etiquette in particular) and texts on pedagogical and historical-pedagogical topics (concerning the history of children's literature and school legislation). There are also smaller amount of several works, still significant as a reflection of a library aimed at contemplating many educational dimensions, such as theatrical works, those on religious subjects (hagiographies, biblical commentaries, etc.) and those focused on physical education. These types of texts clearly reflect the traces of an educational project aimed at enhancing, on the one hand, the religious education of the boarders, through morning and evening prayers, Sunday catechism and mass on holidays and, on the other, also attentive to physical exercise and theatrical performances included in normal teaching activity and also among the recreational initiatives offered to students in extra-curricular hours¹¹.

From the analysis of the titles, the presence of numerous collections also emerges, even quite prestigious ones. In fact, there are 115 of them, making a total of 308 works. Among the most relevant we can mention: *L'edizione nazionale degli scritti di Giuseppe*

⁹ Lombello, *Dalle «bibliotechine di classe» alla biblioteca scolastica*, cit., p. 268.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Storia e antologia della letteratura per l'infanzia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, vol. I, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017.

¹¹ Cf. *Regolamento del Convitto provinciale di Macerata*, Macerata, Tipografia Cortesi, 1865.

Mazzini (Imola, Cooperativa tipografico-editrice Paolo Galeati, 1901-1961), *L'arte per tutti* (Bergamo, Istituto nazionale LUCE – Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1930), *L'opera del genio italiano* (Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1932-1951), *Commentari dell'impero* (Roma, Unione Editoriale Italiana, 1937-1939) and the *Collezione di capolavori stranieri tradotti per la gioventù italiana* dell'editore fiorentino Bemporad (1929-1936)¹².

The presence of major works, the result of impressive publishing initiatives, is also significant. Among those with a historical subject (the most numerous), we can name: the *Storia universale illustrata* edited by Wilhelm Oncken (Napoli-Milano, Vallardi-Società Editrice Libreria, 1831-1910), of which 47 out of 50 volumes are preserved; the *Storia universale* by Cesare Cantù (Torino, Unione Tipografica Editrice, 1884-1890), the *Storia del consolato e dell'impero* by Marie-Joseph-Louis-Adolfe Thiers (Firenze, Fontana e Le Monnier, 1845-1864) and the *Storia della monarchia piemontese* by Ercole Ricotti (Firenze, Barbera, 1861-1869), all owned in full. The *Nuovo dizionario geografico universale* (Venezia, Antonelli, 1827-1836), of which 12 out of 19 volumes are preserved, and the *Nuova geografia universale* by Élisée Reclus (Napoli-Milano, Vallardi-Società Editrice Libreria, 1884-1904), fully owned, stand out among the works with a geographical subject. Encyclopedic works, such as *Lexicon Vallardi. Enciclopedia universale illustrata* (Milano, Vallardi, 188?-1907), are also included, as well as great literary works that are an absolute must. These include: *I secoli della letteratura italiana dopo il Risorgimento* by Gianbattista Corniani (Torino, Pomba, 1854-1856) and *Opere* by Niccolò Macchiavelli (Palermo, Fratelli Pedone Lauriel, 1819), of which all volumes are preserved; *Opere* by Pietro Giordani (Milano, Borroni e Scotti, 1854-1862), of which 12 volumes out of 14 volumes are preserved; *Opere edite e postume* by Ugo Foscolo (Firenze, Le Monnier, 1850-1859), of which 7 volumes out 11 are preserved and *Ricordi e scritti* by Aurelio Saffi (Firenze, Barbera, 1878-1905), received almost entirely (14 volumes out of 15 owned).

In terms of authors, the Convitto “G. Leopardi” library confirms the profile of a book collection primarily aimed at students. In fact, there are two most frequently found authors, each with 12 titles: one is an internationally renowned author of fairy tales, Hans Christin Andersen and the other is one of the best known exponents of popular science literature, Louis Figuier. Following them, with 11 titles, are two authorities of the Italian 19th century cultural panorama, Cesare Cantù, present in the Macerata library above all as an author of historical essays, and Edmondo De Amicis, valued in particular as the author of travel reports¹³. In third position, with 9 texts, we find the father of the Italian language, Dante Alighieri, and after him an exponent of historical writing and one of

¹² The Macerata Library owns: 89 volumes out of 97 of the *L'Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Giuseppe Mazzini*, 42 volumes of the collection *L'arte per tutti*, 19 volumes of *L'opera del genio italiano*, 17 volumes of the *Commentari dell'impero* and 10 volumes of the *Collezione di capolavori stranieri tradotti per la gioventù italiana*.

¹³ For an analysis of the travel works by De Amicis preserved in “G. Leopardi” library, see A. Ascenzi, E. Patrizi, «Lector in fabula». *Las obras de viaje de Edmondo De Amicis a través de los ojos de los estudiantes*, in E. Ortiz García (coord.), J.A. González de la Torre, J.M. Sáiz Gómez, L.M. Naya Garmendia, P. Dávila Balsera (edd.), *Nuevas miradas sobre el patrimonio histórico-educativo: audiencias, narrativas y objetos educativos*. *X Jornadas SEPHE (Santander, 22-24 de marzo de 2023)*, Polanco, Centro de Recursos, Interpretación y Estudios de la Escuela, 2023, pp. 424-448.

Italian literature from the late 19th century, namely Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi and Giovanni Pascoli. In a subsequent position, with 7 books, one of the best-known writers of US literature, Mark Twain. Following him, with 6 and 5 works respectively, we find heterogeneous groups of authors, which are a reflection of the different faces of the library, from the historical one with Massimo D’Azeglio and Ernesto Masi to the pedagogical one with Maria Montessori, moving on to the literary one with Carlo Goldoni, Giacomo Leopardi and Luigi Capuana, without forgetting children’s literature and self-help literature represented by Charles Dickens and Samuel Simes respectively. There is no lack of other areas, such as Latin literature represented by Cicero, colonial literature through the works of Arnaldo Cipolla, scientific fiction by Camille Flammarion, even an author like Niccolò Tommaseo with his dictionary of aesthetics *Dizionario d’estetica* (3rd edition, Milano, Fortunato Perelli, 1860) and the *Dizionario dei sinonimi della lingua italiana* (7th edition, Milano, Vallardi, 1884). Finally, if we examine the authors present in the library with 4, 3 and 2 titles, we find confirmation of the two predominant strands, namely that of historical works and that of children’s and youth literature (Figure 2).

The presence of foreign authors, 228 in total, is also interesting. A number certainly lower than the Italian authors (593), but still significant, with respect to which we can detect a majority of French-speaking authors (75) and a significant presence of German-speaking (45) and English-speaking (44) authors. In terms of works in a foreign language, however, there are only 25 and they are all in French, in line with the importance assigned by the Italian school to the French language and culture until relatively recent times.

If we move on to examine the publishers represented in the Macerata library, it is not surprising to find the prominent position occupied by Treves, who is by far the most present publisher, thanks to the versatility of its editorial offer and the absolute leading role occupied by this publisher in the context of the «renewal of Italian publishing in the second half of the 19th century», together with other Milanese publishers, such as Sonzogno and Hoepli, also present in the Macerata library, albeit in smaller percentages¹⁴.

Although with a notable gap, second place in the ranking of publishers of the volumes found in the library of “G. Leopardi” boarding school is occupied by the Istituto d’arti grafiche of Bergamo, known in the field of publications of art books and art history. Long-standing publishers active in the field of education and school publishing such as Zanichelli, Vallardi, Barbera, Le Monnier, Bemporad and Paravia also have a very respectable position¹⁵, as well as early 20th century publishers very active in the school sector, such as S.E.I (Società Editrice Internazionale) of Turin, and in the field of children’s and young people’s literature such as Barion Edizioni (later Casa per Edizioni Popolari) of Sesto S. Giovanni (Milan)¹⁶. In any case, the lion’s share goes to publishers in the Milan

¹⁴ G. Chiosso (edd.), *Teseo. Tipografi e editori scolastico-educativi dell’Ottocento*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2003, p. 597 (quotation) and pp. 597-600 (for the sheet on Treves by R. Sani).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-47 (sheet on Barbera by G. Di Bello), 65-68 (sheet on Bemporad by F. Bacchetti), 318-323 (sheet on Le Monnier by C. Betti), 614-620 (sheet on Vallardi by F. Caringi and M.C. Morandini), 641-647 (sheet on Zanichelli by M. D’Ascenzo) and 423-430 (sheet on Paravia by G. Chiosso).

¹⁶ G. Chiosso (ed.), *Teseo ’900. Editori scolastico-educativi del primo Novecento*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2008, pp. 53-55 (sheet on Barion by L. Lombardi) and 493-500 (sheet on S.E.I by F. Targhetta).

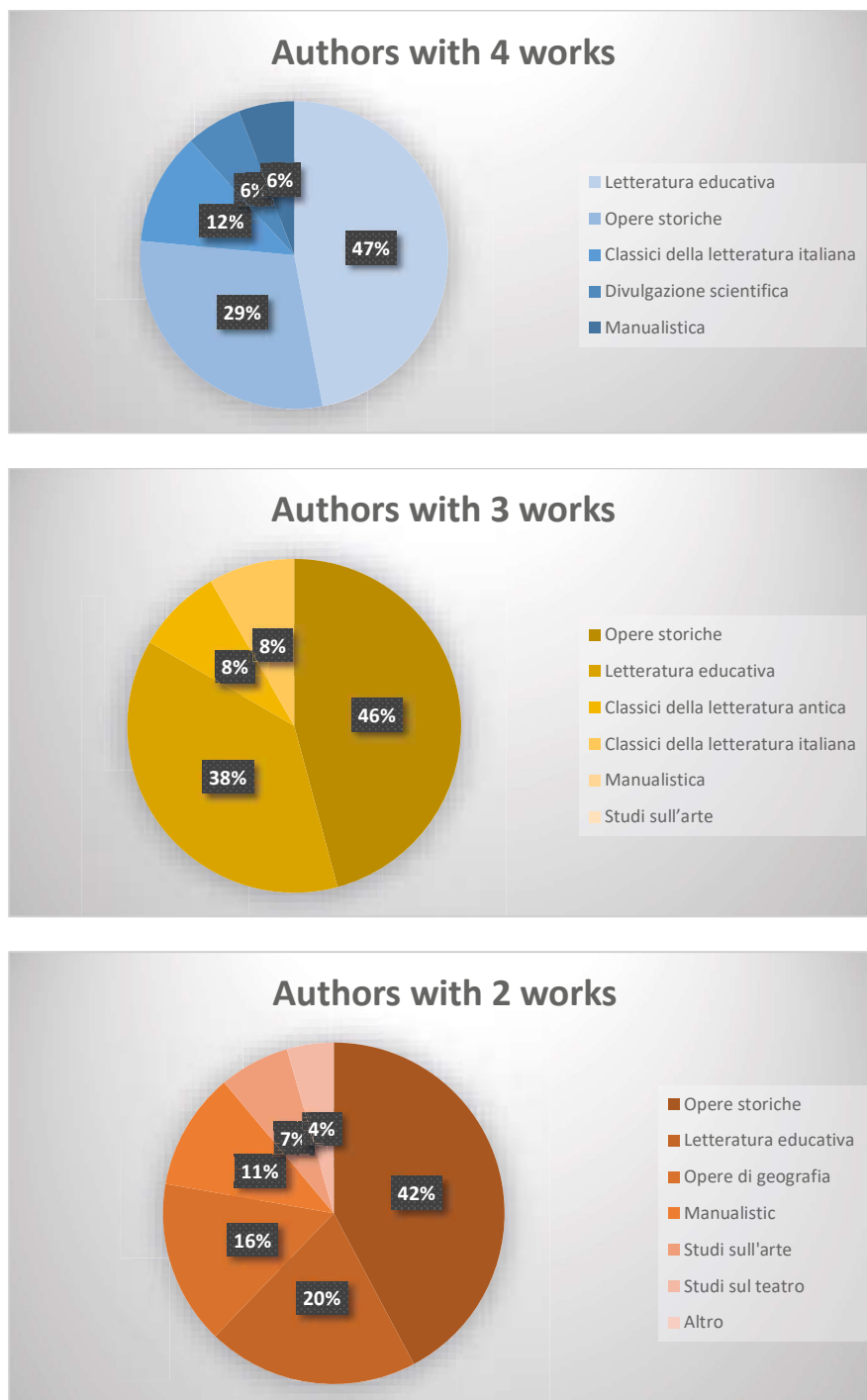


Fig. 2. Tables about the authors with 2, 3 and 4 works housed in the "Giacomo Leopardi" School Library

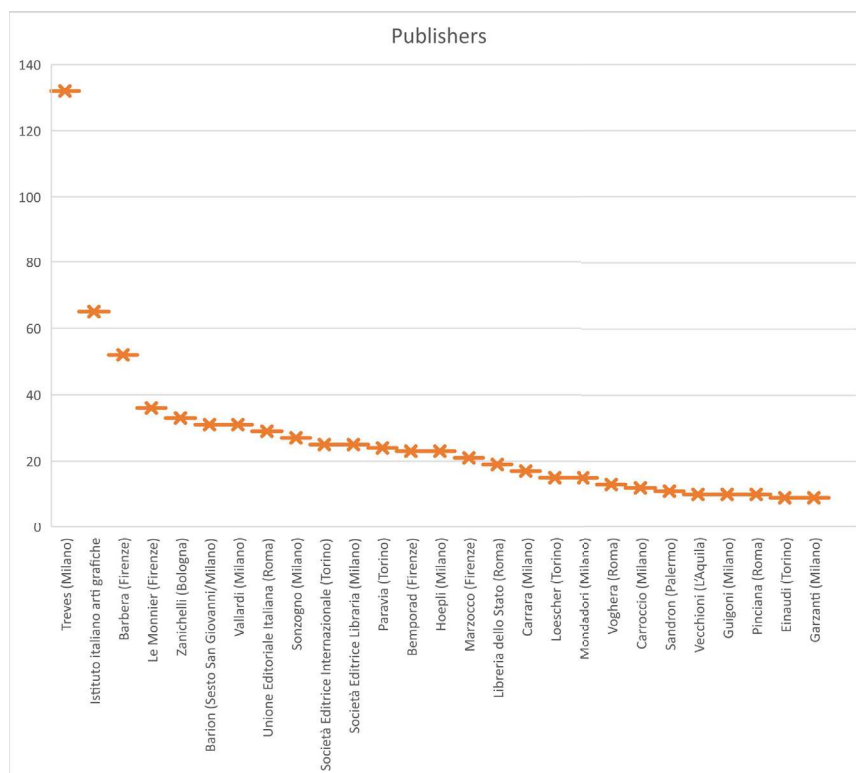


Fig. 3. Table about the publishers of the books housed in the “Giacomo Leopardi” School Library

area, followed by editors in Florence and Turin, which are in fact the cities with the greatest editorial density on the Italian scene (Figure 3).

In terms of the years in which books were published, it should be noted that the oldest book dates back to the 17th century and is *Il Malmantile racquistato* by Perlone Zipoli (pseudonym of Lorenzo Lippi, Puccio Lamoni di Paolo Minucci), published in Venice at the printing house of Stefano Orlandini in 1748, while the most recent work dates back to the end of the 20th century and corresponds to the work in 5 volumes *Atti della Conferenza Nazionale sulla Scuola*, published in Palermo by Salvatore Sciascia in 1991-1992. There are only 4 works published in the 18th century found in the library of Macerata boarding school and the most conspicuous part of all the texts is printed in the 19th century and, although to a slightly lesser extent, in the early 20th century (Figure 4). The presence of a certain number of works, over one hundred, which are devoid of typographical data, as they lack paper covers and title pages is worth noting. These are works that we could define as “damaged by use”, mostly texts attributable to the sector of literature for children and young people, fiction books in general, evidently subject to intense reading by boarders.

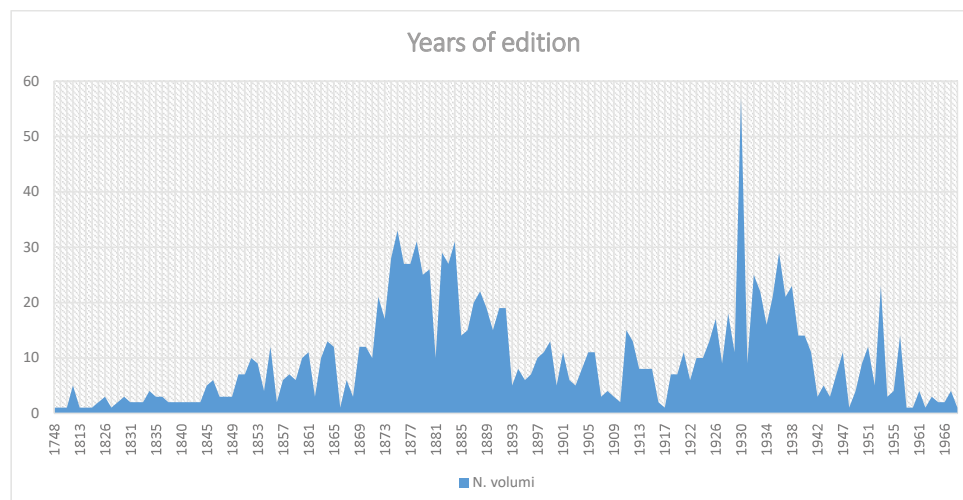


Fig. 4. Table about the years of edition of the books housed in the “Giacomo Leopardi” School Library

By examining the specimens in the “G. Leopardi” library we can also deduce data relating to book donations. The most important is the one left by the rector, probably of the boarding school, Francesco de H[...], who made a donation to the Macerata library on 27 December 1931 consisting of 40 volumes of general culture, many of which are untouched, testifying to the irrelevance of these texts to the library’s “practical purposes”¹⁷. There are another two important donations, more closely related to the mission of the library: the one by the literature professor Cipriano Ferreri, consisting of 20 volumes, mostly manuals, and all pertaining to the sphere of Italian literature, and one by the Latin professor Augusto Corradi, consisting of 6 volumes, mostly Latin classics commented by Corradi himself.

We have found two types of dedications. One consists of dedications left by parents of boarding pupils. Among these, the one that accompanies the two-volume work *Lettere di combattenti italiani nella grande guerra* by Antonio Monti (Roma, Edizioni Roma, 1935) is written by a father of two boarders as a tribute to the boarding school and in permanent memory of the excellent education provided for his sons:

Giuseppe de Gennaro
to Leopardi National boarding school in Macerata, where my sons Gian Francesco and Alessandro, boarders, during eight years of stay, they completed splendidly their classical studies, and learned what a very high duty love of Country is. – Capocalenda (Campobasso), 29 Oct. 1935. XIV.

¹⁷ Archival research has not yet produced a result on this figure. However, we hope to find other research paths that allow us to obtain information on this rector.

The dedication that appears on the guard page of the children's literature classic *Peter Pan* by James Matthew Barrie (Milano, Ed. Carroccio, 1951), is more intimate and direct in the simplicity of its content which reads: «To Paul so that he may be instructed in reading. 12/7/1953. The father».

Instead, the other type of dedications found in the books of the Macerata school library has the boys as protagonists. They are dedications of boarders to other boarders, left in memory of a very intense school and life experience. These are mostly a few words, short sentences, but nonetheless worthy of a certain interest as they often allow us to grasp aspects of the relational life of the students inside and outside the boarding school. Thus, in the book *I ragazzi della via Pal* by Molnár Ferencz (Firenze, Marzocco, 1953) we read: «To dear Emilio, this little reminder from his friends Ninni and Luca Chinni. Porto S. Giorgio 15.8.1954». While in the half-title of the volume of short stories *Tre stelle e un lume spento* by Amelia Tondini Melgari (alias Fiammetta Lombarda) is written: «To my dear friend Giuliana so that you always remember your classmate Pollig and learn to live according to the laws of God. With tenderness Ludovin Paola».

There are also several volumes, mostly reading texts, which reveal that they originally belonged to a class library, a clear testimony of the coexistence of two types of library, those intended for use in the classroom and the one of a general, more cultural nature, into the classroom libraries later converged. We also have volumes such as: *L'allegro terzetto* by Eleonora Torrossi (Firenze, Marzocco, 1948) which on the handcrafted dust jacket bears the indication «book from class library of middle school section A», or the book *Niko. Il piccolo Leone. Racconto per ragazzi* by Eugenio Fornasari (Roma, Società Apostolato, 1946), which on the front facing page bears the indication «I B», or the work *I Pignoni* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (Firenze, Marzocco, 1953), on whose dust jacket the writing «Class library book, I middle school, section A, National boarding school» is found.

Finally, we should also pay specific attention to all those extra-textual elements, which, for a large group of works – just over 400, above all reading books and in some cases also school manuals – allow us to appreciate notes made by different types of readers. In several cases we have very succinct annotations (name and surname, sometimes even a chronological indication), but in some cases we also have comments that often take the form of real reviews that leave room for cross-referenced comments between various generations of readers, from which personal opinions on the content of the work emerge. We are facing an unexplored field of investigation, as for the first time we have the possibility of applying the paradigm of juvenile writings¹⁸, explored with respect to school notebooks, in the volumes of a school library. In this way, we can place ourselves on the reader's side and penetrate the individual memory “deposited” by them in a place of collective school memory, deduce elements that allow us to penetrate that completely unique and personal space of interaction that each reader interweaves with the work, acquire aspects of the reader's psychology and his approach to the text¹⁹. These elements

¹⁸ On this topic, please refer to the essays included in the work that opened this line of research in Italy: E. Becchi, Q. Antonelli (edd.), *Scritture bambine: testi infantili tra passato e presente*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1995.

¹⁹ Cf. U. Eco, *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*, Milano, Bompiani, 1979.



Fig. 5. Ink stains on a page of *La vita militare* by E. De Amicis (n.d.)

have an undoubted charm, but also a big heuristic potential, which allow another dimension of the school library – intended as a place of memory and as a cultural asset of the school – to be enhanced. This investigative perspective has enormous research potential and, in order to offer a small sample of the possibilities of this perspective, we will examine a text preserved in the “G. Leopardi” library, which appears largely annotated: *La vita militare* by Edmondo De Amicis.

2. «Military life is beautiful»: the extra-textual notes in a work by De Amicis

As we have anticipated, De Amicis is one of the most represented authors in the “G. Leopardi” library. One of the works by De Amicis preserved in the Macerata library is his first great publishing success: *La vita militare*²⁰. This “good book of popular educational

²⁰ On this best seller by De Amicis, see S. Jacomuzzi, «Cittadini forti ... soldati intrepidi». *L'epica del quotidiano e la pedagogia dei buoni sentimenti nella Vita militare*, in F. Contorbia (ed.), *Edmondo De Amicis. Atti del convegno nazionale di studi (Imperia, 30 aprile - 3 maggio 1981)*, Milano, Garzanti, 1985, pp. 41-54; M.

literature», as it is known, was written in the first decade post-unification and is the result of De Amicis' military journalistic activity, nourished by suggestions deriving from the close links with the Florentine salon held by Emilia Peruzzi Toscanelli²¹. The specimen of the work held in the boarding school library is very well used²². It has been trimmed and bound, therefore some readers' notes are not legible and there are no front guard page, preface, index, paper title page and also a significant part of the text (from p. 163 to p. 194, which corresponds to the beginning of the *Carmela* tale). In general, the pages are worn and, in many cases, damaged with ink stains (Figure 5). We do not have precise indications on the year of the edition, but it is certainly a copy of the work published before 1904²³, a date written in the oldest legible notation in the text, and after 1880, the year of the 3rd edition of work, in which De Amicis chose to remove some tales present in the first two editions.

The specimen examined by us is literally peppered with annotations of different types, which offer concrete evidence of the strong impact generated on the reading public by De Amicis' writing, already characterized in this first literary experience by a strong, enveloping and at the same time reassuring pedagogical *vis*, capable of establishing a direct line of communication with the text's users²⁴. There are several extra-textual notes that appear in the form of a simple signature, perhaps accompanied by a date, as in the case of the one left by Massimo Lanari, who three times says he read the book on 7 October 1929 («Lanari Massimo read 7-10-29»)²⁵. The annotations in the form of short comments, often anonymous, are equally well represented: «Nice, beautiful (book)»²⁶, «Military life is beautiful»²⁷, sometimes also with multiple signatures «Beautiful. Santuzzi Angelo, Barnabi Aldo, Properzi Benedetto, Mari Ninni, Fermo Permontagni»²⁸. For the most part they are short judgments with a positive sign, but among these – as was inevitable – there is also the negative annotation of those who say: «very ugly on my opinion»²⁹.

The presence of “cultured” notes, expressed in Latin («Hoc liber est multus pulcher»)³⁰, French («Ce livre est beau», «Ce livre est tres bel, Isaia Biribe, Macerata 5-3-1904»)³¹ or containing Latinisms («Letto da Barbanè Alio. Pulcherrimo»)³² is striking. Among these, an anonymous note in French stands out, as it reveals a genuine attachment to the

Dota, *La vita militare di Edmondo De Amicis: storia linguistico-editoriale di un best-seller postunitario*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017, in particular chapter 2.

²¹ Cf. Dota, *La vita militare di Edmondo De Amicis*, cit., p. 243.

²² E. De Amicis, *La vita militare*, s.l., s.n, n.d.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁴ Jacomuzzi, «*Cittadini forti ... soldati intrepidi*», cit., pp. 13-14.

²⁵ De Amicis, *La vita militare*, cit., p. 60.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, inside side of the cover.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, inside side of the cover.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 19.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

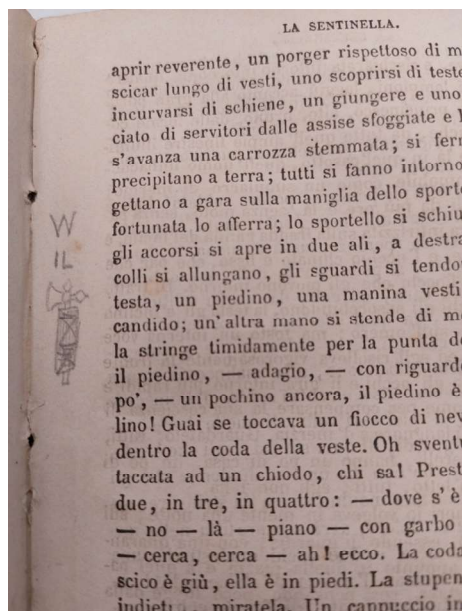


Fig. 6. Children writings praising fascism in *La vita militare* by E. De Amicis (n.d.)

mother country and to the family: «Je ne suis encore qu'un enfant mais j'aime de tout mon cher ma patrie»³³.

Playful annotations were also to be expected, which go well with the young age of the readers and from which the “comradely” atmosphere that accompanies the letter of the text shines through. They range from the classic «My name is me, your name is you, who is more of a donkey, me or you?», very frequent in the annotated copies preserved in the Macerata library, to extemporaneous comments, which translate the thoughts of a moment into words, without any filter: «Read by Manuele Mercurio. Maybe it's nice but who knows, when I read it I'll tell you the result. You see what I wrote is nonsense»³⁴. Other annotations interact directly with the text in order to elicit a smile. So, following the header of the story *Una sassata* (*Hit with a stone*) a reader adds: «in head, well done»³⁵.

In one case a sort of question and answer is sketched out between two readers, whereby where one student writes «Beautiful», another, with a touch of irreverence typical of young boys, adds «a little bit» in front of «Beautiful» and specifies «in my opinion this story (referring to the *Carmela* tale) is very bad, especially since De Amicis's novels are copied all from my grandfather. Pignà»³⁶. The frequent treasure hunt for a name was inevitable, («This book is beautiful, do you want to know my name? Go to page 9»), which in the case of this book seems interminable, there are so many cross-references between the pages, and in the end there is no solution, i.e. we do not get to discover the name of this bold rascal³⁷.

We also have readers who intervene in the text trying to integrate it, as happens in the inaugural tale *Una marcia d'estate* (*A summer march*), where at the point where De Amicis states «Good! And we went, and we went...», a reader adds «there towards the distant...» and further on in the passage where the author notes «Oh you see how that tail goes! Body of...», the same hand cannot avoid adding «body of a thousand whales»³⁸. But there are also interventions which provide indications for the readers who will follow. So, in the first page of the volume we read «*Carmela* is the most beautiful story», a judgment

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 19, 89, 29, 16, 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

that is confirmed later on by another reader with a personal affirmation of disarming spontaneity: «The most beautiful story in this book is *Carmela*. Read it and you will be happy!!!???? Unfortunately, it's true! I thought it was bad and instead I was amazed»³⁹. We can imagine that the surprise of this reader to discover the beauty of the tale lies in the fact that, as can already be inferred in some way from the title, it has nothing but a tenuous link to the military life that the work promises to sketch⁴⁰.

Other extra-textual interventions are symptomatic of the historical period in which they were written. Here in the heart of the text, we find a part of the anthem of the Italian popular party founded by Don Sturzo: «White flag, beautiful flag / you are the star, you are the star / white flag, star flag / you are the star of society / shield crusader will protect us»; which is followed by the unsettling comment of a reader, probably from the Fascist era, who recites: «verses by Don Sturzo that imbecile»⁴¹. The squadrism attitude typical of the Fascist period emerges preponderantly in other notes too, which follow the regime's slogan rhetoric, emphasized by the use of capital letters: «Hurray the DUCE, Hurray THE KING, Hurray ITALY», «The nerves in place, the KING cannot be touched», «Nerves in order, the Duce cannot be touched»⁴². In this context, the symbol par excellence of Fascism, the fasces, could not be left out, which appears three times in the volume, in one of which it is preceded by an abbreviated form of Hurray (W) (Figure 6)⁴³. But the comments resulting from the Fascism era do not stop there and in one specific case, the full force of an ideology descended from on high in a non-critical way, permeating minds and hearts, appears. Thus, in the tale *Una sassata* (*Hit with a stone*), where De Amicis describes the moment in which a sentry is hit by a stone on the forehead by a scoundrel who has sprung up from a “shapeless crowd” of cocky villagers intent on insulting and provoking the soldiers of the guardhouse, a reader angered by the story comments solemnly:

It used to be like this, but now... now that we are in 1928 and the March on Rome has taken place, led by Mussolini... now everything has changed and even the soldier, and perhaps most of all, is considered according to his merit!⁴⁴

The annotations that refer to the boarders and the reading practices adopted in the boarding school are particularly interesting. In the first pages of the work, a reader reveals that: «This book was seized and not returned to Leto Pietro»⁴⁵, while further on another states: «This book is very beautiful and my brother has it. Montesi Salvatore»⁴⁶. These notes, on the one hand, confirm that the books passed from hand to hand between boarders, who at times came from the same family, and on the other, reveal to us that in particular situations, these same books were confiscated by the educators, due to, we

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 46.

⁴⁰ Cf. Jacomuzzi, «*Cittadini forti ... soldati intrepidi*», cit., p. 49.

⁴¹ De Amicis, *La vita militare*, cit., p. 283.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 28, 60.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 231, 234, 239.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

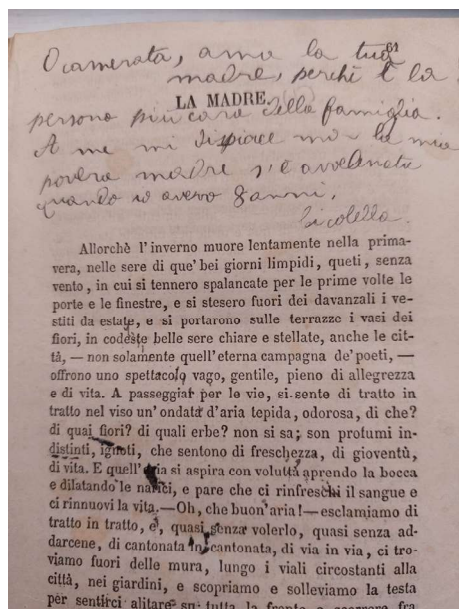


Fig. 7. Children writings in *La vita militare* by E. De Amicis (n.d.)

note, which he shares with his companions and future users of the book, delivering a profound message of care and attention towards dearest loved ones: «Oh comrade, love your mother, because she is the dearest person in the family. I'm sorry but my poor mother poisoned herself when I was 8 years old. Cicolella»⁴⁸ (Figure 7).

This represents one of the many surprises that can be discovered by leafing through the pages of annotated texts conserved in the “G. Leopardi” library in Macerata, from which the echoes of the voices that resounded through the classrooms, corridors and rooms of a long-lived educational institution often emerge, where generations and generations of students were welcomed, all animated by the hope of building a better future through education.

Conclusions

The story of the “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school library in Macerata reconstructed here constitutes an exemplary case study, which allows us to highlight the multiple possibilities of analysis offered by a “polysemic” and versatile object of study such as school libraries. We started from the typological study, regarding literary genres,

imagine, valid reasons. Another student, alongside a frequent positive judgment on the text, name and the date on which he finished reading it, also tells us one more detail: «This book is very beautiful and this is assured by Bicolella Ferdinando born in Foggia on 2 November 1914, who finished reading the *Military Life* on 23-7-1927 in Fontespina»⁴⁷. The locality of Fontespina, in Civitanova Marche, appears, which is where the boarders used to spend the summer period in a villa lent to the boarding school. We often find this fact in the extra-textual notes left on specimens in the Macerata library, as proof of the fact that the warmer months included reading among the recreational activities.

However, the personal annotation that more than any other causes surprise due to the intensity of the emotions it arouses is the one that appears at the start of the tale *The Mother*. This word evidently evokes a painful memory in the reader signing the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

then moving on to the authorial one, focusing on the most frequently found authors, reaching the analysis of typographical data, developing reflections regarding the years of edition and the publishers. We also examined donations and the indications related to class libraries inside the boarding school library. Finally, we concluded our analysis path with ideas and suggestions deriving from a completely new field of study in the historical-educational field, the extra-textual elements. We thus intended to show some of the various facets that characterize a school library, the ones that in our opinion are most significant and capable of restoring the image of a precious and unique place of memory, as it tells many stories, which we can read as part of a cultural heritage waiting to be revealed, understood and shared.

In this direction, historical analysis is assigned the essential task of stimulating processes of re-discovery and re-appropriation of that heritage, capable of promoting the perception of that school library as a cultural asset belonging to a community, not just a school one, but also civil, as it brings together different generations and helps to determine the identity of a place. And then, the school library becomes that “deposit” of school memories, where the personal experiences of those who attended that school are intertwined with the processes of transmission of cultural and educational canons, which the catalogs of that library allow to be reconstructed, thus revealing the complex web of individual and collective variables that a school institution welcomes and that a school library bring to light. As we have tried to demonstrate here, through the study of the books of a specific school library, one can make the leap that leads from the great scenarios of a national nature on school history to local realities. It is that passage that allows us to explore cross-sections of micro-history, from which it is possible to understand the ways in which educational practices have been translated into specific geographical and socio-cultural contexts, and more. As both a source and heritage, these “school books” in some cases allow the recovery of individual, collective and even public memories⁴⁹. In fact, we find ourselves faced with objects that shed glimpses of light on slices of real scholastic and non-scholastic life, concerning individuals, but which – through historical research – can become part of the heritage of a community. This heritage has a tangible side, made up of concrete physical objects, but also contains intangible elements of unparalleled value, textures of memories, sensations, experiences and personal opinions, which are waiting to be rediscovered and enhanced⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ In this case, we want to refer to the concept of school memory, which – as noted by Antonio Viñao and Juri Meda – can be declined in an individual form, which pertains to one’s scholastic experience and how it is reconstructed personally by the individual, and in an individual, collective and/or public form that implies a shared school background. We intend to refer to the latter meaning. Cf. J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory. Historiographical Balance and Heuristic Perspectives*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit., pp. 1-9.

⁵⁰ Cf. C. Yanes Cabrera, J.M. Somoza Rodríguez, *Museos escolares: el patrimonio material e inmaterial de la educación como conciencia crítica*, in A. Mayordomo Pérez, M. del Carmen Agulló Díaz, G. Garcia Frasquet (edd.), *El patrimoni historico-educatiu valencià. V Jornades d’Història de l’Educació Valenciana (Gandia, 30 i 31 d’octubre de 2009)*, València, Universitat de València – Departamento de Educación Comparada e Historia de la Educación – Centre de Estudis i Investigacions Comarcals Alfons el Vell, 2011, pp. 97-111.

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ABSTRACTS

- 1047 Abstracts of the contributions to the 1st volume *The School and Its Many Pasts: The Different Types of School Memory*, edited by Lucia Paciaroni
- 1055 Abstracts of the contributions to the 2nd volume *The School and Its Many Pasts: Official and Public Memories of School*, edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani
- 1067 Abstracts of the contributions to the 3rd volume *The School and Its Many Pasts: Collective Memories of School*, edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani
- 1075 Abstracts of the contributions to the 4th volume *The School and Its Many Pasts: Individual Memories of School*, edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani

The School and Its Many Pasts

History is not memory; both, however, affect the way we perceive the past. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on memory in order to critically analyze shared narratives of the past and their implications. Memory studies not only allow us to expand our knowledge about the past, but also help us to define the way in which today's people, social groups and public bodies look at it and interpret or re-interpret it. In this sense, school memory is not only of interest as a gateway to the school's past but also as a tool to understand what they know or believe they know about the school of the past and how much what they know corresponds to reality or is influenced by prejudices and stereotypes deeply rooted in common sense. These volumes aim to address these complex issues and broaden the perspective from which the schooling phenomenon is analyzed to better understand the school and its many pasts.

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