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# Photography in Children's Literature in the 1960s and 1970s. A bibliographic review of Italian publishing houses and projects

Lucia Paciaroni  
Department of Education, Cultural  
Heritage and Tourism  
University of Macerata (Italy)  
l.paciaroni2@unimc.it

**ABSTRACT:** The article aims to explore the Italian editorial landscape related to photographic books for children, with particular reference to the period between the sixties and seventies. In fact, after having presented the major changes that have taken place since the 1960s in the world of children's publishing, with the birth of publishing houses such as Emme Edizioni, an in-depth discussion on the use of photography as a narrative language for children is presented. The innovative proposals of Bruno Munari, Giovanni Belgrano and Mario Mariotti and other authors and artists will be illustrated, as well as the use that Mario Lodi made of photography through the serial publication «Biblioteca di lavoro». Finally, will be proposed a reflection on photo books in the current publishing market in Italy.

**EET/TEE KEYWORDS:** Photographic Books; Children's Literature; Mario Lodi; Italy; XX Century.

## *Introduction*

As it is known, between the 1960s and 1970s, we witnessed a period of deep cultural, social and political renewal, which also affected the world of children's publishing. In fact, new proposals, which marked a real editorial revolution, were appearing on the market. New images and contents came on the scene, including the ones, which were proposed by publishing houses, such as Emme Edizioni by Rosellina Archinto, Dalla parte delle bambine, La Coccinella by Loredana Farina and other courageous choices, which were committed to defend the idea of publishing with a deep care in seeking out authors and illustrators and, therefore, artistic and literary quality, as well as thematic depth.

Other publishing adventures started, such as those proposed by Armando, publishing house born in Rome in 1949, which was specialized in pedagogical and didactic texts and decided to expand the area for children's books in the early 1970s; thus, the collection «Biblioteca per genitori e per bambini» was born and later was entitled «Biblioteca di casa e di classe», which was directed by Gabriella Armando from 1972 to 1977<sup>1</sup>. However, Gabriella decided to start a new business together with her brother Luigi Antonello in 1977: this is how Nuove Edizioni Romane was born, a publishing house, which chose a little boat as its logo and was ready to sail that creative and innovative season of the Italian children's market with great attention towards foreign publishing<sup>2</sup>. Nuove Edizioni Romane intended to give its contribution to children's literature, which was considered an inferior genre too often and «not a precious art with which adults communicate with children»<sup>3</sup>. The children to whom NER was addressed were modern, playful, clever, active and autonomous and the choices of the publishing house were inspired by a positive, serene and creative vision of childhood<sup>4</sup>. They were characterized by happy intuitions and a selection of quality writing and illustrations.

As Paola Vassalli clearly highlighted, the 1970s were the

years when a graphic and content revolution took place in the books for our young readers thanks to the 'ladies of the Italian children's publishing', the effervescent climate and the 'open borders'. The happiest expression of the *picture book* was also consolidated in Italy during an age of aesthetic provocations and, as an apprentice reader, the child lost the status of 'minor' to acquire equal dignity as an adult reader<sup>5</sup>.

Stories also changed because they were the same ones which «mom and dad read in their books and on the pages of newspapers»<sup>6</sup>. Thus, there were ecological stories, stories about diversity, solidarity and friendship in search of identity, in short, stories of life<sup>7</sup>. Those were the years of three milestones in the history of children's publishing: in the early 1970s, Einaudi published *La grammatica della fantasia* by Gianni Rodari, *Guardare le figure* by Antonio Faeti and the editorial series «Tantibambini» by Bruno Munari, as Vassalli points out. In that period, the first children's bookshops were born and precious collections were also published, such as «L'arte per i bambini», edited by

<sup>1</sup> S. Sola, P. Vassalli, *I nostri anni '70. Libri per ragazzi in Italia*, Mantova, Corraini, 2014, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> See: C.I. Salviati, *Nuove Edizioni Romane: libri che continuano a fare storia*, Firenze-Milano, Giunti, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Sola, Vassalli, *I nostri anni '70. Libri per ragazzi in Italia*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Pinin Carpi, and the pedagogical «Biblioteca del lavoro»<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, 1964 was the year when the Bologna Children's Book Fair was born<sup>9</sup>.

Among the publishing houses, which mostly introduced «new signs of graphic designers, painters, great artists and extravagant stories»<sup>10</sup>, we remember the above-mentioned Emme Edizioni by Rosellina Archinto, which was founded in Milan in 1966. Archinto, who was defined by Emy Beseghi as a «courageous pioneer of children's books»<sup>11</sup>, visually revolutionised them thanks to her «almost prophetic intuition and elaborate graphic research»<sup>12</sup> and «unsettling and original attention»<sup>13</sup>. She collaborated with names, who gave rise to innovative experimentations in children's books, such as Iela and Enzo Mari, Bruno Munari – who had already anticipated that wave of renewal with the books, which were published by Einaudi and Mondadori in the 1940s –, Emanuele Luzzati, Giovanni Belgrano, but also Leo Lionni, Maurice Sendak, Maria Enrica Agostinelli and many others<sup>14</sup>.

Archinto said in an interview with Marcella Terrusi: «In my head, I was convinced that children's literature had to be a series A literature, edited with the same attention and love, which are necessary in publishing in general<sup>15</sup>», but the books from Emme Edizioni had to firstly deal with those who considered them too sophisticated and expensive<sup>16</sup>. In fact, as Paolo Canton also highlights,

[...] Emme Edizioni ends up placing itself in an uncomfortable position: its books are perceived as strange and cold by the most conservative part of the public, who used to think about ornaments and flourishes as elements denoting a beauty out of any narrative function [...], on the one hand, and as snobbish and uselessly aestheticizing by a progressive avant-garde, who wanted only products, which programmatically renounced any claim to beauty and value, to be destined for people's education due to a misunderstood pauperism (they called them books 'for architects' children'), on the other hand<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> M. Terrusi, *Il mestiere dell'editore: conversazioni con Rosellina Archinto*, in *alla lettera emme: Rosellina Archinto editrice*, Bologna, Giannino Stoppioni edizioni, 2005, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> E. Beseghi, *Rosellina Archinto: pioniera e archeologa*, in *alla lettera emme: Rosellina Archinto editrice*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> About Emme Edizioni see: *alla lettera emme: Rosellina Archinto editrice*, cit.; L. Farina (ed.), *La casa delle meraviglie. La Emme Edizioni di Rosellina Archinto*, Milano, Topipittori, 2013; Hamelin (ed.), *Ad occhi aperti. Leggere l'albo illustrato*, Roma, Donzelli, 2012; M. Terrusi, *Albi illustrati. Leggere, guardare, nominare il mondo nei libri per l'infanzia*, Roma, Carocci, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Terrusi, *Il mestiere dell'editore: conversazioni con Rosellina Archinto*, cit., p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Ead., *Albi illustrati*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> P. Canton, *Progettazione grafica e realizzazione tecnica: una straordinaria longevità*, in Farina (ed.), *La casa delle meraviglie. La Emme Edizioni di Rosellina Archinto*, cit., p. 113.

Archinto says she wanted to «change the world of children's publishing, but the publishing house had a very hard life in the sense that no one took me seriously, everyone considered me a 'good' lady, who had the hobby of writing children's books, which drove me crazy with rage. Today, after fifty years, it is demonstrated that these books work very well. As I always say, if I had had beard and moustache, they would have taken me more seriously. I took myself seriously, the others didn't»<sup>18</sup>. To demonstrate that these were – and are – books, which work very well, it is enough to mention two titles from the publishing house's catalogue, which were respectively published in 1967 and 1969: *Piccolo blu e piccolo giallo* by Leo Lionni and *Nel Paese dei mostri selvaggi* by Maurice Sendak, which are considered real masterpieces today.

### 1. *Photography in Children's Books in the 1960s and 1970s*

The book from Emme Edizioni was «an 'object' book or, rather, a 'project' book in which a lot of people took part: not only publishers, writers and illustrators, but also graphic designers and photographers»<sup>19</sup>. In fact, Emme Edizioni chose to communicate through a new language: language was renewed in methods and contents of narration, but also in graphics and illustrations. In fact, if until then it was common to include photographs in encyclopaedic and popular science books, it was not so frequent in children's books. However, the collaborators from Emme Edizioni loved experimenting and also used photographic language. This was nothing new for Bruno Munari, who had always expressed his creative activity in various forms of experimentation ranging from painting, sculpture, design, photography and teaching. In fact, photography had always played a significant role in Munari's artistic production and critical thinking. He had often made photography the protagonist of his projects: he created his *Supplemento al dizionario italiano*, which was published for the first time in 1958 with a photographic language where the author examined various ways of expressing without speaking, not only with hands, but also with facial expressions and personal attitudes<sup>20</sup>, or *Da lontano era un'isola*, edited by Emme Edizioni in 1971, where we can find several photographs of stones, leading us to discover «a world behind the folds of stones, which suddenly fill up with characters, who are drawn following the lines and veins of the stones»<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Farina, *La casa delle meraviglie. La Emme Edizioni di Rosellina Archinto*, cit., pp. 31-32.

<sup>19</sup> Sola, Vassalli, *I nostri anni '70*, cit., p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> See: <<https://corrains.com/it/supplemento-al-dizionario-italiano.html>> (last access: 17.02.2025).

<sup>21</sup> See: <<https://corrains.com/it/da-lontano-era-un-isola.html>> (last access: 17.02.2025).

In 1973, Munari published *Un fiore con amore* with Emme Edizioni, a photographic book, which illustrated to children the practice of *ikebana*, that is, the art of creating a floral composition because, as the Milanese artist explained, every occasion is a good one to give a flower, from Mother or Father's Day to the long-awaited arrival of spring, from a little brother's birthday to a neighbour's wedding<sup>22</sup>.

Between 1972 and 1978, Munari was the creator and the editor of the collection «Tantibambini», which was published by Einaudi with over sixty titles and an almost square format (24x23) and characterised by staple stitching and a story, which directly started from the cover. Furthermore, «the sequence of the story almost always followed a cinematographic style, which could be easily understood by children»<sup>23</sup>. In that project, Munari involved not only artists, poets, designers, architects and educators, but also art directors and photographers as authors and illustrators. In fact, among many prestigious names, there was also Mario De Biasi, a photojournalist from «Epoca», who collaborated in the creation of the issue *Mamme favole e bambini* «where intense photographs, which told stories about motherhood, were accompanied by fairy tales and legends from all over the world and the reproduction of typical decorative motifs»<sup>24</sup>. Photographs were also in other issues, such as *Il palazzo di gelato e altre otto favole al telefono* containing eight telephone fairy tales by Gianni Rodari, which were accompanied by a colour photographic sequence by Alberto Munari<sup>25</sup>. Images showed a little girl in her bedroom, which was filled up with soft toys, while she was on the phone with her father.

Munari also used photography in another project he shared with another collaborator from Emme Edizioni, the pedagogist and teacher Giovanni Belgrano, who was known for having published *Giochi di terra*, *Giochi d'acqua* and *Giochi d'aria*<sup>26</sup> with this publishing house in the early 1970s. In fact, both of them designed and created a series of visual games for Danese, including *Immagini della realtà*, that is, forty photographic images representing some subjects from various points of view and with different forms:

A shoe, a hand, a fish or a light bulb can seem like very different objects if they are seen from different perspectives or if they are described as evolving objects where the name is only one of many possible representations. By comparing a realistic colour photograph with a black and white one, a photographic negative or, even a written word (in six

<sup>22</sup> B. Munari, *Un fiore con amore*, Trieste, Einaudi, 1997, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sola, Vassalli, *I nostri anni '70. Libri per ragazzi in Italia*, cit., p. 95. See also: A. Rauch, *Il mondo come design e rappresentazione. Ritratti d'occasione per ventisette maestri dell'illustrazione e della grafica: Altan, Seymour Chwast, Alan Fletcher...*, s.l., Usher Arte, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Sola, Vassalli, *I nostri anni '70*, cit., p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> G. Rodari, *Il palazzo di gelato e altre otto favole al telefono*, «Tantibambini», n. 5, 1972.

<sup>26</sup> It is a «book-workshop» in which some games are proposed to be made involving the three elements, earth, water and air and in which the author inserts texts, drawings and black and white photographs and invites readers to observe, build and play.

languages: Italian, English, French, German, Spanish and Japanese), the game stimulates and facilitates how to learn differences between real objects and their representations<sup>27</sup>.

Munari is also known for the poetic book *Cicci Coccò* where the designer's words were accompanied by Enzo Arnone's photos. The book, which was published by Fotoselex in the 1980s and now republished by Corraini, has evocative black and white images telling a story of childhood, games and discoveries, which were accompanied by simple sentences representing the words and thoughts of children, who were portrayed in the photos<sup>28</sup>.

In the Emme Edizioni catalogue, there are other books telling stories through photographic language. Consider, for example, *Ariele. Un bambino e il mare* from Collettivo Tre, which was published in 1976, a story of discovery and friendship where black and white photography welcomed the incursion of colour illustrations and which told us about the child Ariele's day. Ants, little crabs, a grumpy octopus, a sea urchin, the fish Alfonsino and even fearful snails are colour illustrations. These illustrations "entered" the photograph portraying Ariele at the seaside among the cliffs of a beach, while he met these little friends.

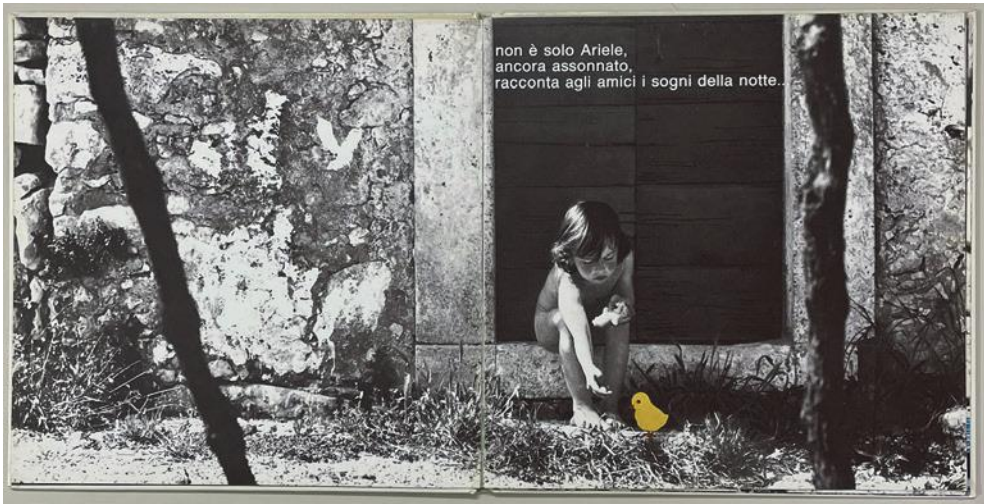
The use of photography can be also found in other books from the Milanese publishing house, which distinguished for its strength and variety of iconographic proposals, consulting «graphic designers, painters, illustrators, photographers, visual communication experts, professionals or promising amateurs»<sup>29</sup>, as we have seen. This is the case of proposals by Ermanno Cristini and Luigi Puricelli, Nico Orenco, Maurice Maeterlink, Paola Calvetti and Nicoletta Ramorino<sup>30</sup>. Cristini and Puricelli proposed images, which were cre-

<sup>27</sup> See: <<https://corraini.com/it/immagini-della-realta.html>> (last access: 17.02.2025).

<sup>28</sup> About the relationship of Bruno Munari with photography, see: M. Campagnaro, "A successful photograph is worth as much as a story". *The influence of Photography on Bruno Munari's picturebooks*, in E. Druker, B. Kümmerling-Meibauer (edd.), *Photography in Children's Literature*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2023, pp. 144-167. And again, for a deeper look at the work of Bruno Munari, see: M. Campagnaro, *The Function of Play in Bruno Munari's Children's Books. A Historical Overview*, «Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica», vol. 11, n. 3, 2016, pp. 105-111; Ead., *Bruno Munari's Visual Mapping of the City of Milan: An Historical Analysis of the Picturebook Nella nebbia di Milano*, in N. Goga, B. Kümmerling-Meibauer (edd.), *Maps and Mapping in Children's Literature: Landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017, pp. 147-163; Ead., *Do touch! How Bruno Munari's Picturebooks work*, «Rivista di storia dell'educazione», vol. 6, n. 1, 2019, pp. 81-96; L. Cantatore, *Il libro per bambini come opera d'arte totale: Bruno Munari, Lele Luzzati, Maria Lai*, in A. Antoniazzi (ed.), *Scrivere, leggere, raccontare... La letteratura per l'infanzia tra passato e futuro. Studi in onore di Pino Boero*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2019, pp. 159-170; L. Cantatore, *Dismantle and rebuild the house in the Italian picture books of the 1940s. Mario Sturani, Elsa Morante, Bruno Munari*, «EDUCAZIONE. Giornale di Pedagogia critica», vol. 7, n. 1, 2018, pp. 97-116.

<sup>29</sup> I. Tontardini, *Senza parole: il respiro delle immagini*, in Farina, *La casa delle meraviglie. La Emme Edizioni di Rosellina Archinto*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>30</sup> About photography books, see the recognition by Giuseppe Garrera and Sebastiano Tri-



Pic. 1. *Arielle. Un bambino e il mare* by Collettivo Tre (Emme Edizioni, 1976)

ated with the use of photography and then integrated with graphics in wordless books, *Il fiume scende scende...*<sup>31</sup>, *Il ragno e la sua tela*<sup>32</sup> and *Il papavero*<sup>33</sup>. As Ilaria Tontardini rightly points out, these are «real documentaries in the form of picture books»<sup>34</sup> where photography was used because «it allowed for a more detailed representation of reality and produced more stimulating images for children's observation skills»<sup>35</sup>. Those were books where «colour – a few primary tones redrew photographic images – acted as a supporting structure»<sup>36</sup>.

In 1974, Emme Edizioni published *La leggenda del paradiso* by Lies Wiegman and Margareta Strömstedt, a picture story about the topic of creation with black and white photographs, which was translated by Rosellina Marconi, and, in 1975, *Andare per mare, storia del capitano Rebissu e della sua barca Gianchettu* by Nico Orengo with illustrations by Franco Mello and photographs by Paolo Persano. The collaboration between this graphic designer and this photographer allowed to propose a mix between drawing and photography.

ulzi: *Il libro dei libri per bambini. Gli anni Sessanta e Settanta: la rivoluzione*, Roma, Diacritica edizioni, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> E. Cristini, L. Puricelli, *Il fiume scende scende...*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1974.

<sup>32</sup> Idd., *Il ragno e la sua tela*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1975.

<sup>33</sup> Idd., *Il papavero*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1977.

<sup>34</sup> Tontardini, *Senza parole: il respiro delle immagini*, in Farina, *La casa delle meraviglie. La Emme Edizioni di Rosellina Archinto*, cit., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



Pic. 2. *Andare per mare, storia del capitan Rebissu e della sua barca Gianchettu* by Nico Orengo (Emme Edizioni, 1975)

The project by Paola Calvetti and Nicoletta Ramorino was also interesting: in 1980, Emme published a manual about mime and the relationship with body with the title *Lo spazio fantastico. Mimo e danza come gioco*, which used various photographs to give young readers instructions on how to start expressing with their own body,

or better, embodying nature, animals, fairy tales and their own myths, representing with their own body the life of a tree from birth to death through the cycle of the four seasons, imitating fire or sea waves, having fun writing letters with their own body, learning to disguise themselves, performing shadow puppetry with their hands and, finally, the instructions for setting up a small show<sup>37</sup>.

Finally, the publishing houses La Nuova Italia and Fatatrac allowed us to know the amusing volumes by Mario Mariotti, which were published between the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Animani e Umani*, which showed splitting and multiplying painted hands – belonging to the artist –, giving life to ever new characters, who were photographed by Roberto Marchiori. As Giulia Mirandola points out, in the case of *Animani*, for example, Mariotti «just needed a pair of hands to draw cocks, elephants, zebras, octopuses, doves, dogs, crocodiles, panthers, flamingos and white rabbits with his body and to provoke the

<sup>37</sup> Garrera, Triulzi, *Il libro dei libri per bambini. Gli anni Sessanta e Sessanta: la rivoluzione*, cit., pp. 276-277.

game of reading»<sup>38</sup>. Mariotti proposed wordless stories and also created other playful books, such as *Fallo di mano* where painted hands changed into football players<sup>39</sup>, and *Inganni* where the artist painted his face and the parts of his body to create new images and shapes.

## 2. Mario Lodi and photography: the experience of the serial publication «Biblioteca di lavoro»

Photography played a significant role in the serial publication «Biblioteca di Lavoro», which was conceived as an alternative to the traditional textbook. This initiative, which was promoted by Mario Lodi and an experimental group he coordinated, was published from 1971 to 1979. In this case, photography was used not only as a historical testimony of a collective school image with the intent of revealing the pedagogical and social climate during that period<sup>40</sup> or as a photo accompanying a historical, social, scientific or cultural text, but also to plunge the reader in children's stories where photography mixes with drawing, sometimes using the collage technique.

Photography was a real passion for Mario Lodi<sup>41</sup>. Photographer Luigi Briselli with whom Lodi collaborated in the creation of exhibitions and photographic books remembers it:

I was a young self-taught man with a burning passion for photography to which I devoted every moment in my free time. For several years, I have experimented, read and observed the great photographers' images to identify myself with, to understand their shots, to

<sup>38</sup> G. Mirandola, *Libri senza parole? Li voglio subito*, in Hamelin (ed.), *Ad occhi aperti. Leggere l'albo illustrato*, cit., pp. 125-126.

<sup>39</sup> The exhibition *Animani*, a tribute to Mariotti, held in the exhibition spaces of the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence from 29 November 2009 to 11 April 2010 and curated by Stefano Filippini, Francesca Mariotti, Gianni Pozzi and Andrea Rauch. The exhibition presented a hundred works of «painting on the body» made by the artist in the Eighties and Nineties and reproduced through media and languages of great circulation as the photography, the book, the video and the advertising (<<https://www.istitutodeglinnocenti.it/it/foto/mario-mariotti-animani>>, last access: 07.03.2025).

<sup>40</sup> V. Valecchi, S. Pacelli, *School Life Representation in the Photographic Images of the Dossier Series "Biblioteca di Lavoro" by Mario Lodi*, in L. Paciaroni (ed.), *The School and Its Many Pasts. I. The Different Types of School Memory*, vol. I, Macerata, eum, 2024, pp. 67-76, in partic. p. 68. For more details, see: S. Pacelli, *Una scuola per leggere la vita: il mondo del lavoro nella collana Biblioteca di lavoro e nei giornali di classe di Mario Lodi*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIX, n. 1, 2024, pp. 377-393; M.R. Di Santo, *Mario Lodi e la "Biblioteca di Lavoro". Una proposta didattica alternativa ancora attuale*, Reggio Emilia, Edizioni Junior, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> About Mario Lodi, see: L. Cantatore, J. Meda, F. Tonucci (edd.), *Mario Lodi: maestro, intellettuale, scrittore*, Roma, Carocci, 2024; Associazione 25 aprile (ed.), *Pedagogia e Costituzione. Riflessioni su Mario Lodi, Gianni Rodari e Paulo Freire*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2022.

learn and to find my way. I felt that this lens offered me the possibility to express; it was becoming day by day an indispensable appendix of my body, which allowed me to see and to represent the world through myself with a language words could not have replaced. [...] I was looking for someone who understood and gave me the opportunity for a comparison and I found Mario Lodi in 1980, the year of my first publication<sup>42</sup>.

In fact, Briselli intended to publish a photographic book about the old crafts in the Po Valley, but he was looking for someone who wrote the text in order to contextualise the story through images:

Mario listened to me, looked at my photos, was amazed and became passionate about the work of documenting the last gestures of a rural world, which my lens captured and fixed, while it was quickly disappearing. The peasant world had long been one of his great interests. He did not hesitate to offer me his availability<sup>43</sup>.

Thus, a long friendship was born, which allowed Briselli to trace a clear and sincere image of the relationship between Mario Lodi and photography:

Mario loved photography very much. He liked walking in the countryside and photographing what he met in its natural reality, without any aesthetic selection. He loved countryside and life on the farm and he often took his students there for unforgettable outdoor experiential lessons. [...] He was fascinated by trees. He photographed them in any way and condition. One day, I saw the children's drawings with poems and stories about trees near him. I was struck by the magic and freshness they expressed. So, we decided to publish a volume about trees and poems: drawings, photographs and poetic texts. We composed it in three parts: the children's poetic and fascinated gaze, which was commented by Mario Lodi; the photographs of the trees, which were the protagonists of our landscape, commented by Edo Ronchi and placed next to the great poets' verses; the monumental trees, which were photographed between the north and the centre of Italy and accompanied by Riccardo Groppali's descriptions and reflections. It was published by Persico in 1998<sup>44</sup>.

Black and white photography was often chosen in the issues of the serial publication «Biblioteca di Lavoro» to tell the story of teachers and students' daily school life. Consider the issue with the title *Mangiamo insieme* where the authors, the teachers Ornella Landucci and Fiorenzo Alfieri, introduced one of the activities, which was carried out during the year, that is, cooking, addressing to the «child, who was reading». The authors clarified that school was full-time and they had lunch together every day: this very important moment was made “monotonous” by the weekly menu:

Since we got tired of always eating the same things, we decided to prepare some food we liked. For this reason, a working group (also made up of children from other full-time third-year classes) has been preparing the 10.30 breakfast and, sometimes, even desserts

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Website Casa delle Arti e del Gioco: <<https://www.casadelleartiedelgioco.it/un-maestro-per-amico-luigi-briselli-per-mario-lodi/>> (last access: 17.02.2025).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

for several months. (The group members changed every month). We want to tell you about our experience because we think you could do it together with your classmates, too<sup>45</sup>.

The issue includes instructions on how to set up the cooking laboratory, which is illustrated through photographs. Images also show the children, who were engaged in various activities, such as removing crust from bread, slicing mozzarella or beating eggs. Below were photos of the dishes prepared, which were accompanied by the relative recipes, and an invitation to involve parents collecting traditional recipes from their home country.

There are also various issues portraying through photography not only scenes of daily school life with images of children drawing, painting and collaborating in the creation of a journal or taking part in the school party<sup>46</sup>, but also those relating to crafts and activities, such as making bread or spinning flax. Many current and historical topics are then discussed, such as Matteotti's murder or the sentences of the Italian military law courts during the First World War.

As well highlighted by Silvia Pacelli, the issues *Documenti*<sup>47</sup>

mainly aimed at restoring testimonies and experiences in the past where traditional crafts were also portrayed in their difficulties and a wide space was given to workers' protests leading to the conquest of important rights<sup>48</sup>, unlike the homologating and simplistic representations, which were transmitted in school textbooks.

Pacelli always highlights how in this editorial project

the basic purpose remained stimulating discussion, discovery, cooperation among students and awareness of social dynamics to understand their own time and to start feeling protagonists of history, while, in traditional schools, they 'do not learn to know current society, that is, what a factory, a farm, a union, a law court or a party is. They do not study those things of the past, which are useful for understanding the present'<sup>49</sup>.

In numbers 70-71, we find a series of memories by elderly people coming from the village of Cervara in the municipality of Pontremoli, which was inhabited by 400 people at that time. The issue *Vecchi a Cervara* contains a mosaic of memories – enriched by photographs – which allows us to retrace the

<sup>45</sup> O. Landucci, F. Alfieri, *Mangiano insieme*, «Biblioteca di lavoro», n. 24, 1974.

<sup>46</sup> For example, in the dossier *Prima dell'ABC* (n. 56, 1976) curated by Francesco Tonucci and Tullio De Mauro, on the cover there is a photograph of a child drawing with a marker while inside there are other black and white photographs showing children engaged in painting.

<sup>47</sup> «Biblioteca di Lavoro» was divided into *Documenti*, *Lecture* and *Guide*. In fact, «the series' papers are divided into three main categories: *Lecture*, short stories that offer ideas for reflection on social and environmental issues; *Guide*, examples of educational paths made by MCE educators; *Documenti*, real sources and testimonials for school research» (Cf. Pacelli, *Una scuola per leggere la vita: il mondo del lavoro nella collana Biblioteca di lavoro e nei giornali di classe di Mario Lodi*, cit., p. 384).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 383-384.

history of old games, food, traditions, religious ceremonies and much more. The issue was edited by Francesco Tonucci, who reiterated the importance of these memories of the past for kids, who went to school, because «old people are important for the years they lived, the things they saw, their history and their culture, especially today in the midst of very rapid changes, which make us lose the sense of what there was and there had been»<sup>50</sup>.

Then, a playful and funny mix of visual representations can be found in some issues where photography and illustrations combine together in order to become a single image, as in *Giovannino senza paura*, edited by Caterina Foschi Pini. The issue tells the story of Giovannino, a six-year-old boy, who left home and rode his bicycle till Cathedral Square in Milan. The illustrations the children made and black and white photographs came into contact, complemented one another and overlapped on the pages. On the cover, we see a photograph of a large city with the addition of a small illustration representing the child and his bicycle. The story begins this way: after playing at home with his sisters, Giovannino, who is portrayed in a black and white photograph, asked his mother to use his new bicycle in the courtyard. On the next page, there is a photo of a street with buildings and cars. Immediately after, there is a mix of drawings and photos. The – photographed – silhouette of Giovannino on his bike mixes with the drawing of a road with cars and buses. On the next page, Giovannino has finally arrived at Cathedral Square: the scene is represented by a mix of photos and drawings of pigeons, cars, traffic lights and architectural elements belonging to the Cathedral, which mix together to create a single large image. As explained on the last page, this story wanted to tell

the real story of a child, who «runs away», because «he's somewhat tight», he wants to see the world, he wants to prove to himself and other people that he is able to do things on his own. Therefore, it is an invitation to all the children to reflect on their big problems: why are children «somewhat tight»? perhaps, not only those who have a small house, but also those who do not have a place to play or an adult to talk to or... are somewhat tight<sup>51</sup>.

Therefore, the issues of «Biblioteca di Lavoro» were also precious resources for making adults and children reflect on pedagogical, cultural and social questions. For example, in the issue with the title *L'alfabeto*, edited by Mario Lodi, the teacher emphasized that «all the children are different, because they are the result of the experiences they have made in the socio-cultural environment where they have lived since birth»<sup>52</sup> and they «are curious. Since they were born, they have touched, put in their mouth, observed, dismantled and destroyed to see how things are made, therefore to know»<sup>53</sup>. In this number,

<sup>50</sup> F. Tonucci, *Vecchi a Cervara*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», nn. 70-71, 1977.

<sup>51</sup> C. Foschi Pini, *Giovannino senza paura*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 69, 1977.

<sup>52</sup> M. Lodi, *L'alfabeto*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», nn. 92-93, 1979.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

there are some photographs, which reproduce many small simple things surrounding us, but we do not always notice them: a small plant, which trims from the asphalt, grass on the wall, a fly and a lizard among stones. They are small details, which can be noticed when observation is careful – like children do – and so many discoveries can be made to comment on them together. In fact, there are many things to be discovered in the courtyard, along the walls or in the flowerbeds and «the children's long sight» can precisely discover many small details, as Lodi underlines. Lodi invites us to use a camera to «take colour slides for every [...] significant discovery the children made, without any exception, to then comment on them together when we project them»<sup>54</sup>. Therefore, reality, which is reproduced by a camera, is not static, but a rich reality, which can then become a rich alphabet book, or rather, a logical vocabulary where each word recalls an object and its place and friends, according to Lodi: «Like a *sparrow*, which lives on *grains* and flies in the *sky*»<sup>55</sup>.

Among the issues of the serial publication «Biblioteca di Lavoro», there are also stories, which were told only through images: they are real wordless books, as in the number about the zoo, edited by Caterina Foschi Pini and illustrated by Ivo Sedazzari. The photographs of free-roaming animals are proposed within a comic strip, in contrast with the illustrations on the next page where animals are depicted locked in a cage at the zoo. This proposal demonstrated the effectiveness of photography. In fact, as Foschi Pini points out:

Stories, which are made up of images, only seem effective to us, because images are an essential language, which speaks to children's minds through their eyes. [...] The figurative story becomes a way to read the «reality» represented, which accustoms children to observe, to reflect and to connect facts, contributing to the creation of their critical sense, which will be useful to them to then analyse the «reality» experienced<sup>56</sup>.

The aim was to «stimulate children to reason and to discover that animals can be known only within their natural environment where they were born and grown up. Finally, the discussion extends to children, connecting their situation of repressed people in their deep vital needs with the animals at the zoo, which are deprived of their freedom»<sup>57</sup>.

Stories with only images were not new to «Biblioteca di Lavoro»: in fact, a book with only illustrations is also *Nel fosso*, which deals with the question of men, who break ecological balance<sup>58</sup>.

Photographs were used in *Coniglietto mi piaci e altre poesie di bambini* where we can find a collection of children's poems: each poem was accom-

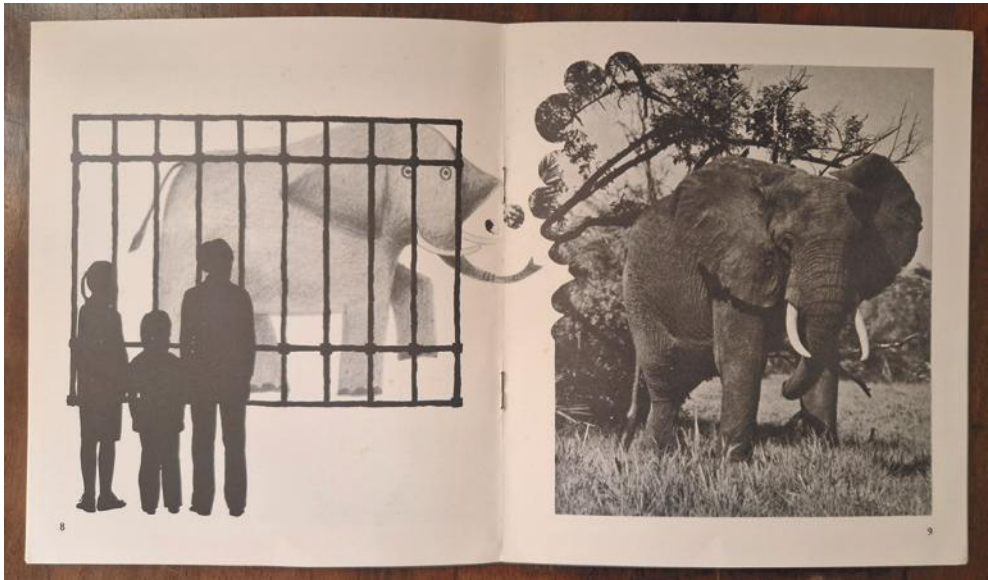
<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> C. Foschi Pini, *Lo zoo*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 37, 1975, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> G. Selvatico, *Nel fosso*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 8, 1973.



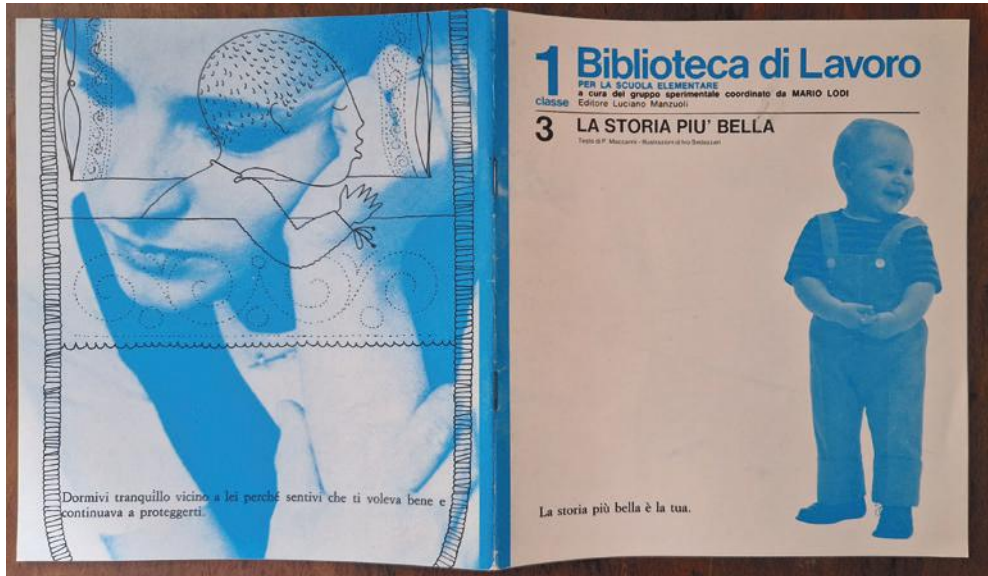
Pic. 3. *Lo zoo*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 37, 1975

panied by a black and white photo. Finally, an innovative and curious use of photography emerges from the issue with the title *La storia più bella*, edited by Palmira Maccarini and illustrated by Ivo Sedazzari<sup>59</sup>. Photographs alternate with drawings throughout the story – a mother told her child about the months of pregnancy from when he was «a tiny egg like a little grain of sugar» until the moment of birth –. Starting from the cover, photographs appear as blue outlined figures showing a smiling child and a pregnant mother. On some pages, photography and illustration became one like in the back cover where the shot representing the mother's face overlaps a drawing, which was only made with a black line and illustrates the child sleeping relaxed in his bed.

Therefore, Lodi considered photography – which was accompanied by comments – as a precious tool. Photography was used as a teaching resource: in fact, the teacher sometimes photographed the children's drawings and then projected those slides, which were accompanied by children's explanations, to the parents since the combined use of slide projector and recorder allowed the creation of suggestive «shows», using the children's expressive and creative observation skills, «a generally wasted heritage»<sup>60</sup>. Consequently, Mario Lodi's children were familiar with the camera as a tool for communicating, expressing and understanding its wide artistic and creative potential.

<sup>59</sup> P. Maccarini, *La storia più bella*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 2, 1973.

<sup>60</sup> *Come nasce una storia*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», 197[?].



Pic. 4. *La storia più bella*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 2, 1973

### Conclusions

Therefore, the 1960s and 1970s in Italy represented an important watershed in the world of children's publishing: in fact, they were the years of great experimentations in the context of children's books not only for the topics dealt with, but also in terms of visual narration, which saw an innovative and expressive use of photography.

In recent times, the topic of photography in children's books has received great attention in Italy. In fact, today there are various opportunities for comparison through examinations<sup>61</sup>, conferences<sup>62</sup>, workshops<sup>63</sup> and exhibi-

<sup>61</sup> See the 125<sup>th</sup> issue of «Liber», published in 2020, which proposed several contributions on the subject *Scatti bambini. Infanzia e fotografia dialogano per costruire nuovi sguardi*.

<sup>62</sup> For example, the conference *Photography in Children's Literature*, organized by the University of Stockholm on 20 and 21 May 2021, whose contributions have conflated into a volume that represents an important international study that examines the wide range of artistic techniques, themes and genres used in children's photo books. Cf. E. Druker, B. Kümmerling-Meibauer (edd.), *Photography in Children's Literature*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2023.

<sup>63</sup> It should be recalled, for example, the conference on image education, held in October 2020 and promoted by the Museum of Contemporary Photography of Cinisello Balsamo whose contributions were then merged into the volume *Immagini come alfabeto. La dimensione pedagogica della fotografia*, curated by Diletta Zannelli, Laura Formenti and Andrea Pinotti. Recently, courses and meetings with experts in visual education, photographers, illustrators and artists have also been proposed: such as those organized by the independent bookshop SpazioB\*\*K

tions<sup>64</sup>, which are promoted by various entities, such as bookshops, associations, photographers, museums, illustrators and experts in visual education and children's literature, in addition to witnessing many considerable publications of quality books and photographic albums.

For a long time, photographs in children's books have been considered unsuitable because they were too realistic, leaving little room for imagination – just to mention one of the reasons for the mistrust towards this language for children –. The perspective has slowly changed – firstly, in countries, such as France – until it has overcome prejudices even in Italy in recent times<sup>65</sup>. As Anna Castagnoli rightly points out,

in fact, the accusation, which is brought against photography in children's books more often, is not to place a filter of personal interpretation, which can be stylised enough to reduce the dramatic components of reality between children and world. This accusation is also brought against drawing less strongly when it is too realistic. Realism always arouses suspicion and fear in children's books as if looking at reality 'as it is' in a two-dimensional reproduction was dangerous or too difficult for children<sup>66</sup>.

This concept is also well explained by Giovanna Zoboli: «The prejudice we have towards photography in children's books depends on stereotypes according to which a narrative for children is a fantastic narrative and an idea of fantasy and fairy tale where the illustration, its imaginative elaboration (in the sense of 'non-objectivity'), enjoys the children's favour»<sup>67</sup>.

In recent times, the Italian publishing context is being enriched with high-quality proposals, which are also using photographic language, sometimes

in Milan and by Irene Greco, creator of the project *Leggimiprima, l'arte di comunicare con i bambini attraverso i libri e le storie*.

<sup>64</sup> For example, the bibliographic exhibition *Libri per bambini con il culto dell'immagine*, organized by the association Cartastraccia in collaboration with photographer Alessandro Dandini de Sylva and inaugurated in 2018 in Rome, at the Fondazione Pastificio Cerere. This is an exhibition of photographic publishing for children with publications from the private collection of Giuseppe Garrera and the Malaspina Foundation's library. In 2020 the association Cartastraccia organized an exhibition of photographic books at the Library of Cisterna di Latina, selecting a bibliography of photographic books available in the online catalog of the library, <[https://opac.regione.lazio.it/SebinaOpac/query/KF\\_SO:%22fi%20libri%20fotografici%20per%20ragazzi%22?sysb=RL1YN&context=catalogo](https://opac.regione.lazio.it/SebinaOpac/query/KF_SO:%22fi%20libri%20fotografici%20per%20ragazzi%22?sysb=RL1YN&context=catalogo)>, (last access: 21.02.2025). About exhibitions and photographic books for children, in 2024, within the international festival of photography *Cortona on the move*, was organized the exhibition *Giro Giro Corpo. Fotolibri per bambini e adulti bambini*, whose editorial research has been curated by the bookshop SpazioB\*\*K and by Kublaiklan collective. And finally, *Focus – Collezione provinciale di libri fotografici per bambini e ragazzi* is a collection kept at the library of the Province of Trento.

<sup>65</sup> See: L. Le Guen, *Cent cinquante ans de photolittérature pour les enfants*, Nantes, MeMo, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> A. Castagnoli, *L'immagine tra realtà e metafora: una breve storia della fotografia nei libri per bambini*, in D. Zannelli, L. Formenti, A. Pinotti (edd.), *Immagini come alfabeto. La dimensione pedagogica della fotografia*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana Editoriale, 2021, p. 173.

<sup>67</sup> E. Grassi, *La parola agli editori*, «Liber», n. 125, 2020, pp. 28-31, in partic. p. 30.

combining it with illustrations<sup>68</sup>. If we look at the publishing market for children and teenagers in Italy today, it is clear how different experimentation into children's books is: several illustrators and authors have made photography their style signature. It is no longer reserved exclusively for classic 'encyclopaedic' volumes, popular science books or books for early childhood where children learn to recognize what surrounds them through highly iconic images – think of “books with faces” or nomenclature books series<sup>69</sup> –, but photography has also become an expressive and illustrative tool in other kinds of books for children and teenagers. For example, think of artist's books and picture books or its innovative and poetic use in hardback books<sup>70</sup> or wordless books where images invite us to read the story through them.

In conclusion, if illustrations traditionally dominated the children's publishing context, photography has been gaining an increasingly important role. In recent years, children's publishing has been experimenting new ways of using photography: some books integrate photography with illustrated elements, also creating an innovative visual mix through the collage technique, other books propose an image, which is often accompanied by verses or rhymes and able to release imagination. In fact, the combination of text and photography creates a dynamic interaction stimulating the young readers' imagination and critical thinking.

Different genres, types and categories of publications demonstrate that it is possible to immerse oneself in an engaging narrative, even through photography. Furthermore, the use of photos in children's books can educate about beauty, observation and attention, as well as it represents a pleasant invitation to slow down, to lower one's gaze and to look around. Photography in children's books can also stimulate a change in our point of view and vision of the world. Therefore, photography is a language, which can speak to children and young people and is also happily crossing the world of Italian publishing.

<sup>68</sup> To cite just a few examples, we recall the illustrator Marianna Balducci (for example, A. Mozzillo, M. Balducci, *Io sono foglia*, Imola, Bacchilega Junior, 2020; M. Balducci, *La vita nascosta delle cose*, Savignano sul Rubicone, Sabir, 2020; M. Balducci, *L'ammiraglio si è preso il cielo*, Firenze, Clichy, 2022) but also *Sonno gigante, sonno piccolo* by Giusi Quarenghi and Giulia Sagromola (Milano, Topipittori, 2014), *Questa notte ha nevicato* by Ninamasina (Milano, Topipittori, 2017) and *come me, come te* by Carolina Zanier (Monselice, Camelozampa, 2024). Finally, consider «the photo raids» in *Un leone a Parigi* by Beatrice Alemagna (Roma, Donzelli, 2009).

<sup>69</sup> As Leyla Vahedi points out, «those who deal with the very small ones know the enormous effectiveness of photographic books: the objectivity and the recognizability of the objects, often outlined on a white background, are magnetic for the eyes of the first readers [...]», in L. Vahedi, *Libri fotografici per ragazzi, una ricognizione*, <<https://www.topipittori.it/topipittori/libri-fotografici-ragazzi-una-ricognizione>>, (last access: 23.02.2025).

<sup>70</sup> For example, consider the work proposed by Chiara Carminati and Massimiliano Tappari (*A fior di pelle*, Roma, Lapis, 2018; *Ninna no*, Roma, Lapis, 2019; *Piccolo verde*, Firenze-Trieste, Editoriale Scienza, 2022; *Cerca cerchi*, Roma, Lapis, 2023; *Batti cuore*, Roma, Lapis, 2024).