

“BOOKS AS MESSENGERS OF PEACE”. JELLA LEPMAN’S TRAVELLING BOOK EXHIBITIONS IN POST-WAR GERMANY*

«Los libros como mensajeros de la paz». Las exposiciones itinerantes de libros de Jella Lepman en la Alemania de posguerra

Cristina Gumirato^a

Reception date: 28/12/2023 • Acceptation date: 20/09/2024

Abstract: In the aftermath of the second world conflict, the Allies’ effort to liberate Western Europe from totalitarianisms relied on weaving a cultural fabric around democratic values and the promotion of reading amongst the wider public proved useful for such task, through the reconstruction of public libraries and the recognition of changes in the habits and needs of European readers. It is on these grounds that Jella Lepman (1891-1970), writer and journalist, set up in Germany her traveling exhibitions of international children’s books, from 1946 to 1949. The propelling visionary force of her project lied in the ability to give concreteness to the effort of educating young Germans to the new democratic and pacifist values: through books as “messengers of peace”, connections among very different cultural experiences could be built. The present research aims to reconstruct the history of Jella Lepman’s exhibitions by analysing the quantitative and qualitative data regarding the works displayed as well as the available information on the impact these endeavours had on young visitors. The archival collection stored at Munich’s Jugendbibliothek shows how extraordinarily modern the choices of the exhibiting materials and of the educational projects were, in order to invite children to engage with the books displayed, in spaces specifically tailored for them, making young readers protagonists in Europe’s process of democratic renewal beyond nationalisms.

Keywords: Book exhibitions; Children’s literature; Jella Lepman; Germany; WWII postwar reconstruction

* This paper was presented at the 2022 ISCHE Congress (Histories of Educational Technologies. Cultural and Social Dimensions of Pedagogical objects) at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, under the title Jella Lepman’s traveling book exhibitions in after World War II Germany (1946-1949).

^a Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan. Edificio Franciscanum Building, Largo Gemelli, 1, 20123 Milan. cristina.gumirato@unicatt.it

Resumen: *Tras la segunda guerra mundial, el esfuerzo de los Aliados por liberar a Europa Occidental de los totalitarismos pasaba por tejer un tejido cultural en torno a los valores democráticos, y la promoción de la lectura entre el gran público resultó útil para tal tarea, mediante la reconstrucción de las bibliotecas públicas y el reconocimiento de los cambios en los hábitos y necesidades de los lectores europeos. Sobre esta base, Jella Lepman (1891-1970), escritora y periodista, organizó en Alemania sus exposiciones itinerantes de libros infantiles internacionales, de 1946 a 1949. La fuerza visionaria impulsora de su proyecto residía en la capacidad de concretar el esfuerzo de educar a los jóvenes alemanes en los nuevos valores democráticos y pacifistas: a través de los libros como «mensajeros de la paz», podían establecerse conexiones entre experiencias culturales muy diferentes. La presente investigación pretende reconstruir la historia de las exposiciones de Jella Lepman analizando los datos cuantitativos y cualitativos relativos a las obras expuestas, así como la información disponible sobre el impacto que estos esfuerzos tuvieron en los jóvenes visitantes. La colección de archivos conservada en la Jugendbibliothek de Múnich muestra la extraordinaria modernidad de las elecciones de los materiales de exposición y de los proyectos pedagógicos, con el fin de invitar a los niños a comprometerse con los libros expuestos, en espacios específicamente adaptados a ellos, haciendo de los jóvenes lectores protagonistas del proceso europeo de renovación democrática más allá de los nacionalismos.*

Palabras clave: *Alemania; Exposiciones de libros; Literatura infantil; Jella Lepman; Reconstrucción de posguerra; Segunda Guerra Mundial*

INTRODUCTION

After the Second World War, the efforts to liberate Western Europe from totalitarian ideologies by the Allied Forces took the form of building a cultural common ground marked by democratic values, and the organisation of exhibitions on children's literature was an ideal solution to accomplish this task. The mixture of visual, textual, material and structural aspects characterised book exhibitions as hybrid events capable of significantly influencing the educational and cultural systems, policies and practices of the context in which they were embedded, defining and modifying the collective imagination of those who enjoyed them. Although the subject of exhibitions is not entirely new in the field of educational history, especially with regard to the link between universal exhibitions and the pedagogical-didactic aspects inherent in the world

of education,¹ the part relating to literary exhibitions and their historical-pedagogical significance remains almost completely unexplored.

It is precisely from this cultural aspect that the writer and journalist Jella Lepman² (1891-1970) in Germany between 1946 and 1949 conceived the idea of organising travelling exhibitions of children’s books from different countries of the world. In this scenario, the promotion of public reading and the reconstruction of libraries intercepted changes in the habits and needs of European readers. The idea of organising exhibitions of children’s books from different countries appeared as a first attempt to organise an international event after the conflict, but it also represented a fertile ground for the birth and development of debates and experiences that in the years to come would foster a more systematic and linear reflection on children’s literature, contribute to the renewal of German and international children’s publishing and stand as an articulate example of the promotion of reading and literature. The driving and visionary force of the project also lay in the possibility of giving concreteness to the effort to educate young Germans in the new democratic and pacifist values through books, the protagonists of the exhibitions as true “messengers of peace”, capable of building bridges between very different cultural experiences. Starting from these convictions, after World War II she succeeded in creating an international “forum” on the problems of young people’s literature, structured around the founding of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek in Munich in 1949. A pioneering resource in the

¹ Joost Cote, “‘To See is to Know’: The Pedagogy of the Colonial Exhibition, Semarang, 1914”, *Paedagogica Historica* 36, no. 1 (2000): 340-366; Patrizia Dogliani, *L’Europa a scuola. Percorsi dell’istruzione tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2002); Natasha Macnab, Ian Grosvenor, Kevin Myers, “Moving frontiers of empire: production, travel and transformation through technologies of display”, *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 6 (2013): 769-795; Margaret H. White, “Exhibiting practices: paper as a site of communication and contested practice”, in *Materialities of schooling: Design, technology, objects, routines*, eds. Martin Lawn, Ian Grosvenor (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2005), 177-200.

² Jella Lepman was born on 15 May 1891 in Stuttgart as the first of three sisters, to Joseph Lehmann (1853-1911) and his wife Flora Lehmann, née Lauchheimer (1867-1941), members of the Jewish-liberal Judaism. Through her mother, she was a cousin of the four-year younger Max Horkheimer. After her schooling at the Königin-Katharina-Stift-Gymnasium in Stuttgart, she spent a year near Lausanne, Switzerland. In 1913 she married Gustav Horace Lepman (1877-1922), the German-American co-owner of a bedspring factory. They had two children: Anne-Marie, born in 1918, Günther, born in 1921. During World War I Gustav Lepman served as an officer and he died after sustaining war injuries in 1922, leaving Jella Lepman widowed at age 31. After the death of her husband, she became editor of the *Stuttgarter Neues Tagblatt*. She wrote socio-political contributions and in 1927 introduced the newspaper supplement for women *The woman in house, profession and society*. In 1929, she ran (together with Theodor Heuss) as leader of the women’s group of the German Democratic Party of Württemberg for the House of Representatives. See Anna Patrucco Becchi, “The Many Lives of Jella Lepman”, *Bookbird* 60, no. 1 (2022): 105-109.

German landscape, it brought together young readers from different cultural and social backgrounds. Books and reading could rebuild what the war and Nazi ideology had destroyed, as they represented a unique opportunity for sharing and overcoming language and cultural barriers, as well as being a tool for inner growth capable of affecting the reader's spirit and thinking. The book qualified, in fact, as a material object, designed to be leafed through, manipulated and read, but at the same time immaterial, as it contained different cultural aspects: the voice and history of the author, the local or national traditions of the country of origin, the characteristics of the era in which it was written.

The unpublished documents consulted at the historical archive of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek³ in Munich were essential to define the methodological approach adopted. The focus was on documentary sources (written and photographic) produced over a period of time ranging from 1946 to 1949 in reference to the travelling exhibitions organised on German territory, which are useful for reconstructing the initiative from a historical, literary and educational point of view, without claiming to exhaust the broader and more articulate discourse developing around the biography of Jella Lepman or the international debate initiated by the aforementioned initiatives.

The analysis of unpublished documents and the careful comparison of data made it possible to reconstruct the history of the exhibitions, highlighting qualitative and quantitative aspects of the exhibited works, as well as information on the educational impact of the initiatives on young readers, but above all bringing to the fore a fundamental piece of the history of children's literature that would make it possible to reconstruct the development of the discipline more comprehensively on an international level.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN POST-WAR GERMANY

At the end of the Second World War, Germany had the highest number of "unaccompanied children",⁴ as most had been deprived of family and safe places to find shelter. When the war ended, fourteen million Germans

³ Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek. From now on it will be referred to as HA IJ.

⁴ Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011); Bruno Maida, *L'infanzia nelle guerre del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2017).

were left homeless, more than half were children.⁵ Separation from parental figures, due to bereavement or deportation, represented an irreversible trauma that could manifest itself not only at the level of individual lives, but also in broader terms, with fatal consequences for the social fabric of the nation. The fear that the physical and mental condition of children would lead to an inevitable collapse of European civilisation prompted philanthropic activities to intervene to meet material needs, but above all psychological and social needs. Precisely for this reason, Lepman realised the need to intervene on the level of essential survival needs, but also and above all on an ethical and moral level, in order to re-establish values such as peace, brotherhood and solidarity. Lepman's mission was therefore part of a range of initiatives activated after the Second World War that aimed to re-establish dignified living conditions, not only physically, but also and above all spiritually, for a childhood that had been tragically bent by the conflict.

It must be remembered that during the Second World War, Jella Lepman had taken refuge in Italy and later in England, where she continued to work as a journalist and writer. During her exile in England, she had managed to fully integrate herself into the new reality,⁶ to the point of constructing a new identity, nourished by her admiration for the British and her new experiences, which would lead her to receive British citizenship in November 1947. However, after the war ended, she returned to her home country on assignment for the US Army as an "adviser on the cultural and educational needs of women and children"⁷ in the American occupation zone at the *Information Control Division* (ICD).⁸ Being

⁵ Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II*.

⁶ In 1938 she helped organise the papers of Arthur Schnitzler which had recently arrived at the University of Cambridge. Later, she worked for the BBC and the American Broadcasting Station in Europe (ABSIE). In 1943, under the pseudonym Katherine Thomas, she published the book *Women in Nazi Germany*. See Anna Patrucco Becchi, "The Many Lives of Jella Lepman".

⁷ See Jella Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2002), 13. For the Italian translation of Lepman's autobiography see Jella Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Anna Patrucco Becchi (Rome: Sinnos, 2018). For the original version of the autobiography, see Jella Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, ed. Anna P. Becchi (Munich: Antje Kunstmann Verlag, 2020).

⁸ The *Information Control Division* (ICD) was a department of the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) during the early part of the American occupation of Germany after the Second World War. Formed on 12 May 1945, its initial task was to control the German media, prohibiting excessively nationalist or militarised content. The following information is taken from Edward C. Breitenkamp, "The U. S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949" (Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1951), 1-4. The author of the dissertation was commissioned as an officer in the *ISD* department from June 1947 to June 1948.

part of *Publications*⁹ specifically, one of Lepman's tasks was to offer "advice" in the pages dedicated to women and children in the first women's newspapers and radio programmes dedicated to them, as well as to grant licences to publishers. In fact, on 12 May 1945, the American occupying forces had closed down all publishing companies, which could only start or resume operations after obtaining a licence from the Allied Forces. When Lepman was able to talk to publishers about the need to publish children's books, most suggested starting with classics from the English and American literary tradition. Clearly, it was not a question of interest in the classics of children's literature, but rather in the literature of the occupying forces, to whom they would demonstrate the sincerity of their anti-Nazi spirit and the breadth of their outlook.

The field of children's literature in Germany, for different reasons before and after the war, was bent to the country's political ends. Already in 1933, with the establishment of Nazism, the cultural and literary world was completely turned upside down, art and culture lost their autonomy and the institution of the "Reichsschrifttumskammer", set up in September 1933 by the Nazis, excluded from publication the works of those who were not or could not associate with it because they were invisible to the regime. Themes such as war, discipline, sacrifice and fulfilment of duty found their way in the pages of books and the imagination of children. Later, with the end of the war, publishing found no possible room for expansion, as the occupying powers established control over publications and literature with national socialist and militarist content was removed from the market and libraries. A total of 60% of the books published were fairy tales, illustrated books or illustrated books about fairy tales. The shortage of manuscripts also led the few remaining publishing houses to republish texts published before 1933 or published by authors in exile. At the same time, the occupying forces attempted to reintroduce translations of children's classics, which had been prohibited during the regime.¹⁰ German children's literature and that of other

⁹ In order to be able to control all media, the *Information Control Division* was divided into several sections: Press (newspapers), Publications (books and magazines), theatre and music, radio, cinema. Edward C. Breitenkamp, "The U. S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949", 1-4.

¹⁰ For an in-depth look at the situation of Children's Literature after World War II in Germany, see the following publications: Renate Raecke-Hauswedell, "How everything began. German children's book production in the post-war period under the influence of British occupation policy", *New*

countries remained completely unexplored. Precisely for this reason, one of Lepman's first goals was to find a way to bring publishers up to date on foreign books.

Munich: intellectual centre of the Federal Republic of Germany

Lepman pursued this goal by creating a travelling exhibition of the best children's books from different countries. Through a letter, she asked twenty countries to contribute to the realisation of her project. Although it has not reached us, in her autobiography Lepman attempts to reconstruct in similar words the letter she sent to the governments of different nations in multiple copies and in different languages:

Dear Sir: This letter contains an unusual request. May we ask for your most special understanding? We are searching for ways to acquaint the children of Germany with children's books from all nations. German children are practically without any books at all, once their literature from the Nazi period has been removed from circulation [...] These children carry no responsibility for this war, and that is why books for them should be the first messengers of peace. They are to be collected into an exhibition which will tour Germany and then, perhaps, other countries as well. We are asking particularly for picture books [...]. The picture will speak an international language and will cheer children everywhere.¹¹

She appealed to national governments to donate books of the best publishing production and immediately received positive feedback: several nations, many of them occupied by Nazi Germany a few years earlier, sent several books.

The first exhibition venue was Munich, at the "Haus der Kunst", a promising meeting point for the city's intellectuals. Besides being the

Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship 1, no. 1 (1995): 105-118; Monika Knaupp, "Children's and Young People's Literature in Germany from 1945 to the Present", in *European lines of children's literature (vol. II)*, ed. Alessandra Avanzini (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015), 15-17; Hans H. Ewers, "Children's Literature Research in Germany", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2002): 158-165.

¹¹ Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick, 35-36.

largest city in the American occupation zone and the cradle of Lepman's visionary project, Munich was also the home of the magazines "Neue Zeitung" and "HEUTE", both published by the American occupation forces. The first, founded on 17 October 1945, was one of the most successful information campaigns promoted by the US military government. The magazine became an extremely influential medium: in January 1946 it reached a circulation of 1.6 million copies with around 8-10 million readers. Initially bi-weekly, it was later published six days a week at a price of 20 cents. The aim of the newspaper was to inform Germans about American politics, views and lifestyle and to present "a model of American journalistic practice". The ICD distributed the newspaper in all four occupation zones (including the Soviet zone) and in Austria. It included sections on business, politics, sports and, above all, a very popular style section. The success of the newspaper was mainly due to the efforts of a unique group of editors, consisting of both German-speaking emigrants and native journalists. These represented the ideal agents for cultural transmission, since, being familiar with German culture, they knew how to present American values to the public. Since few soldiers in the US Army had the intellectual and linguistic skills to run a German-language enterprise, the newspaper was run by Europeans, mostly Jewish emigrants who, like Jella Lepman, had worked for the US Army during their exile or had received American citizenship. Publications ceased on 30 January 1955.¹²

The magazine "HEUTE", on the other hand, was modelled on the American magazine "Life" and was published in Germany every fortnight by the US military government from October 1945 until the final dissolution of the American offices in 1951. Although it started out as a propaganda magazine to inform Germans about American life and institutions (in fact, in every issue there was an article about America, often translated directly from "Life" magazine), almost everything about German life, both in its everyday and exceptional aspects, was not removed from the journal. The reasons behind this particular editorial slant are to be found firstly in the format of the magazine, which from the seventh issue onwards had a larger format, in order to avoid wasting paper, with

¹² Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, "Art is Democracy and Democracy Is Art: Culture, Propaganda, and the Neue Zeitung in Germany, 1944-1947", *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 1 (1999): 21-43.

ample space dedicated to the pictorial and photographic narration of the post-war situation in Germany, but also in the editorial staff, composed, as in the case of "Neue Zeitung", of a good number of Germans who had emigrated during the Nazi regime. Specifically, it appears that on 1 January 1946, nine Americans and five Germans were in charge of "HEUTE", while on 1 September 1947, there were three Americans and 24 Germans in charge of publishing the magazine.¹³ To ensure that the exhibition did not remain an isolated event, propaganda support was organised through the media, such as newspapers and radio. The two publications played a decisive role in this respect, as for several years Lepman collaborated on the editorial project of "HEUTE"¹⁴ and wrote for the "Neue Zeitung". Both magazines published news about the initiatives she organised. A decisive role was played also by the meeting with figures from outside the world of journalism, in particular the writer Erich Kästner (1899-1974) and Professor Hans Ludwig Held (1885-1954). The first never left Germany, even though the Nazis burnt his books and prevented him from publishing after 1936. After the war, he moved from Berlin to Munich, where he was hired as editor of the third page of the "Neue Zeitung", through which he met Jella Lepman and took part in the author's visionary project. He also formed a deep friendship with Lepman, which led to the publication of the book *The Animal Conference* in 1949.¹⁵ In May 1945, Professor Hans Ludwig Held was again appointed director of the Munich library, which he had directed before the Nazi regime. His expertise in education and literature could be traced back to the pre-war years: under his leadership, the largest public music library in Europe had been established and, as popular education was particularly close to his heart, he had founded a travelling

¹³ The following information is taken from James Rolleston, "After Zero Hour: The Visual Texts of Post-War Germany", *South Atlantic Review* 64, no. 2 (1999): 1-19.

¹⁴ Jella Lepman was transferred by the US government on 7 October 1946 to Munich, where she remained until 1958. She initially stayed at the Biederstein boarding house, at that time a cultural meeting place, but was later moved to an American flat in Mühlbauerstraße, where the military government had confiscated housing for its employees. She retired from her military duties and became an American civil servant, hired as deputy editor of the magazine "HEUTE". Eva M. Ledig, *Eine Idee für die Kinder. Die Internationale Jugendbibliothek in München* (Munich: Erasmus-Grasser-Verlag, 1988), 29.

¹⁵ The first Italian edition dates back to 1950. Cf. Erich Kästner, *La conferenza degli animali*, (Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1950). For an in-depth look at the author's life and works, see John Winkelman, "Social Criticism in the early work of Erich Kästner", *The University of Missouri Studies* XXV, no. 4 (1953).

library in a Tram,¹⁶ extended a network of public libraries and set up reading rooms for children.¹⁷

Held would also play a pivotal role in the creation of the exhibitions. In fact, Lepman personally negotiated with the Bavarian authorities and the municipal administration, at that time in the hands of Mayor Karl Scharnagl. Bavaria's Minister of Education and Culture, Franz Fendt, also welcomed the initiative and the possibility of cooperation with the American government, providing a committee of 44 employees under the direction of Professor Held for the realisation of the exhibition. He divided it into several working groups, each with its own area of responsibility: the art council, the pedagogical structure, the decorative arrangement, the lettering, the technical implementation, the secretariat and the opening ceremony.¹⁸ The report compiled by Held himself at the end of the exhibition is a significant source for a better contextualisation of the event, as it allows to assess its cultural, educational and historical significance. In fact, the resulting stimuli gave life to the more general reflection around the project of national re-education through books, for which Lepman and other representatives of the intellectual world took the lead.

“CHILDHOOD AT THE CENTRE”: PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS AND EXHIBITION CHOICES

The set-up work was completed in twelve days and from 3 July 1946 until 3 August of the same year, the International Children's Book Fair opened its doors.¹⁹

¹⁶ The Tram library in Munich was the first urban mobile library service in Germany. Believing that “the book should reach the people, not the other way round”, Professor Held devised a plan to use Munich's Tram network to deliver books to the suburbs. He was assigned a Tram in 1927, which he painted in a blue and white livery, filled it with almost 3,000 books and began his mission on 13 February 1928. The sign on the front of the Tram, “Wanderbücherei” [Travelling Bookshop], soon became a familiar sight on the streets of Munich. For further insights, also see Keith A. Manley, “The Munich Tramcar Library”, *Library History* 10, n.º. 1 (1994): 71-75.

¹⁷ Ledig, *Eine Idee für die Kinder. Die Internationale Jugendbibliothek in München*, 19.

¹⁸ The following information is taken from an interesting typewritten account by Professor Held himself and Dr. Hans Engl at the end of the exhibition. See Hans Engl, Hans L. Held, “Internationale Ausstellung Das Jugendbuch in München, Haus der Kunst”, August 1946, folder 46.0287 (part 1 of 3, doc. 1), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

¹⁹ Information about the exhibition is taken from Hans Engl, Hans L. Held, “Internationale Ausstellung Das Jugendbuch in München, Haus der Kunst”.

The ceremonial opening took place at ten o'clock in the morning in the most representative exhibition hall, the Gobelinsaal, with a musical introduction by the youth choir of the Maria Theresia Institute and the brass quintet of the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra. The opening speeches were delivered by Colonel B. McMahon and Culture Minister Franz Fendt. The international scope of the initiative was immediately apparent thanks to the presence of numerous foreign guests: Colonel Keller, together with other leading figures from the US military government, the French Consul General Jousset and the Swiss Consul General Frei, both with representatives from their respective consulates, and the aforementioned Minister of Culture Franz Fendt, representing Minister President Wilhelm Högner, who was unable to attend on official business.²⁰

The exhibition was opened to the public on the very afternoon of the opening day, and the opening hours were 9am to 12pm and 2pm to 5pm. However, the keen interest shown by the workers and the constant participation of the trade unions made it necessary to open the exhibition from 7pm to 8pm two days a week. The entrance fee was set at RM 0.50 (Reichsmark), with free admission for young people under the age of 12. Some 25,000 entrance tickets were issued and 30% of the adults were accompanied by children of all ages. On some days, the number of visitors reached 1,500,²¹ including administrative advisors from the Ministry of Education and the government, pedagogical experts from all types of schools, in particular graphic designers from the German Book Printing School and their students, teachers from the Teacher Training Institute in Pasing, the "Sozialen Frauenschule" [Women's Social School], the Kindergarten Teacher Training Institute in Munich, as well as groups of graduates from numerous high schools, and finally publishers, booksellers and journalists. The exhibition was also opened to schools and thousands of children visited it under the guidance of their teachers. The unexpected number of visitors testified to the positive impact of children's books on different segments of the population, but also to the effectiveness and modernity of the exhibition choices adopted: hundreds

²⁰ Hans Engl, Hans L. Held, "Internationale Ausstellung Das Jugendbuch in München, Haus der Kunst".

²¹ *Idem.*

of books and magazines were arranged on reading tables and visitors had the opportunity to browse through them until the very last minute before closing time (see Figure 1). In addition, guests had the opportunity, with the use of their exhibition ticket, to purchase a children's book in one of the eleven bookshops in Munich active at the time.²²

The various books received were distributed in the atrium and three rooms, using 69 display cases, four book stands and 23 tables.²³ Alongside the book request, Lepman also solicited drawings made by the children, as they were produced by the real recipients and protagonists of the exhibition. The desire to exhibit the paintings produced by the children themselves was one of the hallmarks of the author, who committed herself over the years to selecting, collecting and enhancing them as sources of significant historical and social value.

Figure 1. "Book showcases and rooms in the first International Children's and Young Adult Book Exhibition at Haus der Kunst Munich", July 1946. From the HA IJ, folder: 46.0988-8 © the I think this part goes above the photo.



The paintings created by the children supported and expanded the cultural capital of the various national sections, creating a bridge between the bibliographic material designed and intended for children and the immediacy of children's expressiveness. The collection presented itself as a

²² Ledig, *Eine Idee für die Kinder. Die Internationale Jugendbibliothek in München*, 23.

²³ The information presented in the text is taken from Hans Engl, Hans L. Held, "Internationale Ausstellung Das Jugendbuch in München, Haus der Kunst", August 1946, folder 46.0287 (part 2 of 3, doc. 1-4), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

source of historical value for obtaining valuable information on the life of real childhoods of the past century, but also as a living testimony of the ability of the youngest to be the spokesperson of a communicative urgency that could finally be taken into account and shared with the entire community, despite the fact that each artefact was traceable to the historical-geographical contingency of the country and society from which it came. This in turn helped to put childhood back at the centre of the democratic renewal process: children appeared as an active and integral part of society and as participating citizens and interpreters of their time.

From a pedagogical point of view, the exhibition management was tasked with making the most of the variety inherent in the cultural life of the different countries, while maintaining a unified methodological approach. It was decided, therefore, to carry out the layout according to the logic of the "supranational psychological progression",²⁴ the books were displayed following the literary development of the child, which was made to correspond to different age groups:

1. The "Struwwelpeter" [Shockheaded Peter] phase corresponded to the early literary period, i.e. the age before compulsory schooling. At the stage of the child's language development, it was noticeable that the extent of objective comprehension was far greater than that of active expression: one understood more than one was able to report. In terms of content, the child-as young as three years old-was able to follow short stories that reflected his/her everyday life (such as, for example, Heinrich Hoffmann's Shockheaded Peter stories).
2. The fairy-tale phase (five to nine years old): the fairy-tale was recognised as having a great affinity with the world of childhood, especially because of its worldwide dissemination. The fairy tale fulfilled all of the child's wishes and, with its unambiguous and clear morals, allowed him/her to exercise his/her own judgement.
3. The Robinson²⁵ phase (nine to eleven years old): the joy of the fairy tale gave way to a search for the real or what seemed to be possible

²⁴ Hans Engl, Hans L. Held, "Internationale Ausstellung Das Jugendbuch in München, Haus der Kunst", August 1946, folder 46.0287 (part 1 of 3), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

²⁵ The reference is most likely to English author Daniel Defoe's 1719 work *Robinson Crusoe* because of its adventurous and reality-adherent content.

(events from the present or the past, sagas and adventure stories). Fantasy was complemented by reason, without the latter being at the expense of the former. This phase was also matched by the emergence of technical interests. The adventure book, in this sense, presented the overcoming of difficult situations through objective observation of the world. Books of handicrafts or pastimes, on the other hand, through the precise observation of something objective allowed the overcoming of technical difficulties.

4. The puberty phase (twelve to fourteen years old): in this age group, topics related to reality were sought out, corresponding with the acquisition of an objective way of thinking and greater self-awareness. This phase differed only in degrees from the previous one. Where before one sought a book close to reality, one now demanded adherence to reality, something that had real life as its subject matter, which already foreshadowed the transition to adult literature.

Each stage corresponded in turn to a conscious use of illustrations: while in the pre-school stage these were primary over letters and words, so that mostly illustrated texts were preferred, in the fairy-tale stage the two components became equal, words came closer to illustrations and vice versa. During the age of the Robinson, on the other hand, text began to take precedence over image, judged by whether or not it represented the reader's imagination. During puberty, the young reader could definitely do without illustrations.

The different phases, as specified by the organisers, were not intended as exclusive categories of thought or rigidly limited, but only as broad indications of trends in the way of experiencing reality and thinking.

The cited approach probably came from Lepman's reading of the work of French historian Paul Hazard, through which children's literature had become an international object of study. The scholar, in addition to having published several essays on children's literature,²⁶ brought out his best-known work, *Les hommes, les enfants et les livres*,²⁷ in 1932. The comparative approach inherent in the book was based on a pedagogical conception

²⁶ Paul Hazard, "La littérature enfantine en Italie", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XIX, 4 (1914): 842-870; Id., "Comment lisent les enfants", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XLII, 4 (1927): 860-882.

²⁷ Paul Hazard, *Les hommes, les enfants et les livres* (Paris: Flammarion, 1932).

of educational internationalism to be sought precisely through books and reading: according to Hazard, reading educated a sense of nationhood, but it also nurtured a sense of humanity that transcended national boundaries, making every reader a participant in the great human sentiments and aware of the importance of respect for universal life.²⁸

The psychological approach, moreover, well reflected the European ferment of the early decades of the twentieth century. The Bureau International d'Éducation, which arose in 1925 and was led by Jean Piaget from 1929, would be one of the first institutions that Lepman would contact with the founding of the Munich library, thus demonstrating knowledge of the scholar's thinking and related publications on the cognitive development of the child. Moreover, Hazard himself on several occasions had also shown that he was thinking about the psychological function of the book, thanks to contacts established with the *Éducation nouvelle* movement. The latter, led by pedagogical publisher Paul Faucher,²⁹ would publish Hazard's book in the *Éducation* series and considered the psychological dimension of bibliology, in which the recipients of the reading process (children and young people) became central. The attention of teachers and librarians, therefore, was not to be directed exclusively to the text in its aesthetic and content dimensions, but also to the effects that the literary work would cause on the young reader.

"STORIES ON SHOW": THE TITLES OF THE EXHIBITED WORKS

The critical comparison carried out between the various sections clearly shows that, despite the attempt to identify spiritual and mental

²⁸ An interesting analysis on the comparative history of children's literature and Paul Hazard in particular was recently published by Dorena Caroli, "La storia della letteratura comparata per l'infanzia da Paul Hazard agli studi recenti: quali prospettive?", in eds. Alessandra Mazzini, Angelo Nobile *Quale letteratura per l'infanzia? Morfologia di una disciplina in trasformazione* (Venice: Marcianum press, 2024), 135-153.

²⁹ Integrated in European intellectual circles, a convinced pacifist and bookseller at the Flammarion publishing house, in 1931 he drew up numerous publishing projects for the latter, publishing the famous *Les albums du Père Castor*: books designed to develop children's manual skills, musical and artistic sensibility, movement and coordination, graphics, logic and taste for reading, following the stages for homogeneous development from early age to preadolescence, according to the influence of the *Éducation nouvelle*. Not surprisingly, with the founding of the Munich International Youth Library, Père Castor's books were among the first to be selected by Lepman for inclusion in the library's catalogue. See Anne-Catherine Faucher, *Paul Faucher. Ou l'aventure du Père Castor. Une révolution éditoriale* (Paris: Flammarion, 2021).

affinities in the stages of growth of the young people and psychological characteristics common to all, each country had different cultural characteristics, which were enhanced by the exhibition.

In terms of quantity, the initial collection consisted of a total of approximately 4,000 titles.³⁰ Information on the exact number of countries that sent children's books free of charge varies. In her autobiography, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, for example, Lepman speaks of 19 out of 20 nations joining the project³¹ and 14 nations actually shipping the volumes for the first exhibition. Many countries had sent the material, but the parcels arrived later due to the numerous interruptions of the postal service when the exhibition was already on display in other cities. In other archival documents kept at the HA IJ, it is claimed that 14 or 15 nations responded positively to the request. In particular, France, Switzerland, America, Holland, Norway, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Poland, Sweden, England, China, Italy and Germany are mentioned.³²

The prevalence of French, English, American and Swiss texts was also evident. The reasons behind this division are easy to deduce: the books mostly came from the nations occupying German territory, probably easier to send the material, and from the only country that remained neutral during the war. Completely absent were books from the Soviet Union³³ and German books published during the Nazi regime.

In qualitative terms, however, the archival documents that have been received and studied so far do not offer precise and systematic information about the titles of the exhibited works; however, thanks to an organic study of the sources at hand, which include photographs, newspaper articles and documents compiled and preserved on the occasion of the

³⁰ This information emerges from various reports on the exhibition written by Jella Lepman herself, presumably for the various departments of the American occupation authorities. Again, the exact number of books received is not specified, but it is assumed to be around 4,000 volumes.

³¹ Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick, 43.

³² See Jella Lepman, "International youth book exhibition", June 1946, folder 46.0281 (doc. 1-2), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

³³ As to why the Russians did not participate in book exhibitions, there is no comprehensive explanation. Lepman herself, in her autobiography, recalls: "I cannot understand to this day why the Russians allowed this opportunity to go by, when they might have paraded the best of children's books [...] Had they been sacrificed to party politics?". Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick, 64.

exhibition, it is possible to trace some of the titles that were sent and exhibited for the occasion. Of course, it was not the entire production of a nation, but rather the selection made by the various governments and the editorial availability of the various countries in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The organising committee of the exhibition, as a proof of the modernity and direct involvement of the public, took advantage of the widespread tendency to submit questionnaires at the end of the experience. The document, specifically, contained seven open-ended questions:

1. What is your impression of the overall picture of the exhibition?
2. The nature of the exhibition clarifies the significance of its task: to show the idea of books for children and young people?
3. Do you have any particular ideas and wishes for the further design of the exhibition?
4. Which of the books on display do you like best? (Please name the author and title of these books).
5. Would you like German translations of the books mentioned?
6. Would you like to reprint books from the "Alte deutsche Kinderbücher" collection?
7. Which books in the collection do you propose to reprint? ³⁴

The results were briefly summarised by Lepman herself in her autobiography and offer us further indications not only about some of the titles on display in the exhibition, but also about the preferences expressed by the visiting children and young people.³⁵

The Munich exhibition was followed by those in Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Berlin and Hamburg. In Stuttgart, Lepman's project won the support of the entire government, including that of American Colonel William W.

³⁴ The following questionnaire, translated from German by the writer of this paper, is kept at the HA IJ: "Einladung und Besucherfragebogen von der Internationalen Ausstellung 'Das Jugendbuch' in München", June-July 1946, folder 46.0285 (doc. 2-3), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

³⁵ Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick, 59.

Dawson. Unlike Munich, however, almost all the buildings had been destroyed by bombing. Despite this, the premises were rebuilt and the exhibition was set up at the Landesbibliothek, thanks to the help and support of library director Wilhelm Hoffmann³⁶ and Theodor Heuss, at that time Minister of Education and Culture for the Württemberg-Baden region. The Heuss family, thanks to its prominent position also in the political arena, was one of the biggest supporters of Lepman's work and ideas.³⁷

The exhibition in Stuttgart is the only one that provides information about some of the book titles that were presumably also exhibited at the other venues, thanks to an anonymous report compiled for the event, which contains part of a list of the works sent in by country.³⁸ Although the document has only survived partially, the report is a unique source for studying and analysing much of the children's literature from different countries, with the possibility of also highlighting the mutual influences and peculiarities of each country.

Significant in this regard was the French collection, which, in addition to the translation of classic works, presented several volumes with a marked international perspective, such as the volume of songs *Les vieilles chansons d'Europe*, in which a rich series of German songs translated

³⁶ Wilhelm Hoffmann (1901-1986) was director of the Württemberg State Library in Stuttgart for almost 25 years from 1945. During the Second World War, Hoffmann made a significant contribution to relocating the valuable holdings of the Württemberg State Library, which could thus be saved from destruction. After the end of the war, the old library management, burdened by the Nazi era, was dismissed and Hoffmann became director of the library. In the post-war years, the library's book collection was successfully rebuilt and Hoffmann integrated the library into Stuttgart's cultural life through lectures and exhibitions, including Lepman's. See Claus-Wilhelm Hoffmann, *Wilhelm Hoffmann. Leben und Wirken* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2021).

³⁷ Theodor's wife, Elly Heuss Knapp (1881-1952), was also a politician, writer, social reformer and a friend of Jella Lepman along with her husband since the 1920s. With the rise of Nazism in 1933, their home became a meeting place for people opposed to the regime. In the final phase of World War II Heuss-Knapp and her husband lived in Heidelberg, and after the war she was elected as member of the Baden-Württemberg state parliament in 1946, as a representative of the People's Democratic Party and its successor Free Democratic Party. In her new role she focused on social policies, particularly the situation of women and children. She ended her parliamentary career when her husband was elected president of Germany in 1949. See Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, ed. Anna P. Becchi, 265-266.

³⁸ The document is kept at the HA IJ and has one part missing. The page numbering, in fact, starts at number 13 and continues until 22. See "Bericht über die Internationale Ausstellung 'Das Jugendbuch' in Stuttgart", September-October 1946, folder 46.0299 (doc. 1-10), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

into French stood out; but also the *Collection des Contes et des Légendes des tous les Pays* by the Parisian publisher Fernand Nathan, whose value lay in the possibility of approaching the spiritual life of various peoples through the reading of popular tales and legends. The illustrated volumes *Paris, Athènes, Le Japon, Rome, Moscou, L'Indochina*, or the presentations of the history of Russia, England and Germany, as well as the series of German and English pamphlets for school use published by the Paris publisher Didiers, also testified to the connection with world literature. The most representative themes of the French section, however, were the depiction of life in the countryside together with the world of animals: the works on display included the necklace of "Père Castor", the stage name of Paul Faucher (*Coucou par Lida, La Ferme du Père Castor, Les Petits et les Grandes, Froux le Lièvre par Lida, Noix de Coco et son Ami*). As far as form, content and typography were concerned, the French book seemed to have little unity. Alongside historical specimens, one could find little-known and cheap booklets of no particular value. After all, valuable books of high artistic value from the pre-war period were sold out and the stock almost all sold during the conflict. Worthy of note, however, was the artistry of the illustrations, which testified to the formal and chromatic richness of the southern countries.

In Poland, Holland and Belgium, the ravages of war had particularly affected the book market. Few books were exhibited, most of them poorly printed. Poland was represented exclusively by textbooks, while the children's books of Holland and Belgium showed many similarities to their French neighbours. The books for girls by Marianne Jurgens published in Antwerp (*Loekie Hoogwaard, Loekie onder de Menschen*) and the family novels by Tine van Berken (*De Berewoudjes, Rudi Willenborg*) were particularly popular. The largest part of the exhibition displayed adventure books of mediocre value.

The books from the northern countries already emphasised in their titles, covers and illustrations the characteristic sharpness of the Nordic landscape, accompanied by the world of trolls, gnomes and mountain spirits. Especially Sweden and Norway were home to the demonic fairy tale (Leif Halse, *Gutane i Trollheimen, Asbjornson-Moe, Soria Moria Slott, Gustav Sandgren Trollsländans Sagor, Einar Norelius, Tre Tropiska Troll, Hildir Lundberg, Nu ska ni få höra*). An edition of the Norwegian writer Barbara Ring's children's story *Peik* was exhibited, while the children's

book *Lappe Lase og Lappe Lise* by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire stood out for the artistic value of the illustrations. Sweden's most famous book, *Wunderbare Reise Nils Holgersson mit den Wildgänsen*, written by Selma Lagerlöf, which was designed as a reading and geography book, was unfortunately only available in a German edition. On the other hand, Elsa Beskow's illustrated books in the original Swedish language were particularly successful among the visitors (*Det Hände en gang, ABC Resan, Resan til landet längesen, Tant Grön, Tant Brun och Tante Gredelin, Olles Skidfärd, Tomtebo barnen*); Birgitta Claesson-Bohman's books were also very popular (*Twivillingarna i skolan, ar vilda, och sniffi*). Along with the American and Swiss children's books, the Norwegian ones seemed particularly inclined to promote peace education for German youth. The Danish section was the richest of the three Nordic countries: the classic Hans Christian Andersen (*Eventyr og Historier, Den standhaftige Tinsoldat*) next to other books of sagas and fairy tales, books of handicrafts and pastimes next to instructive texts, travel descriptions and researchers' stories alongside adventure books, children's books and books for girls (Karin Michaëlis, Hedvig Collin, *Bibi, Bibi og de Sammensvor, Bibi bliver Landmand, Bibi og Valborg, Bibi paa Ferie, Bibi og Ole*; Maria Andersen, *Tude-Marie, Tude-Marie soger Plads*). The picture book occupied a prominent position in all three Nordic countries.

America, whose vast juvenile book production had not been affected by the war events, was able to send a selection of the best and most representative texts (about 400 volumes) to Germany. At first glance, one could see the imposing presence of adventure books with rich drawings, sketches and photographs. Books dedicated to the "fairy tale phase" remained very much in the background, reflecting the American educational approach of treating the child as a young adult. Instead, books from the "Struwwelpeter" phase, such as *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munroe Leaf, were present. Animal stories for children of all ages (Albert P. Terhune, *Lad: A Dog*; Claire T. Newberry, *Pandora*; Golden MacDonald [a pseudonym for Margaret Wise Brown] and Leonard Weisgart, *Little Lost Lamb*; Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*; David Grew, *The Wild Dog of Edmonton*) stood alongside picture books, including Helen Dean Fish's *When the Root Children Wake Up*, an American translation of *Etwas von den Wurzelkindern*, the famous story of the "root children" written by German Sibylle von Olfers. The family saga was represented by

Louisa May Alcott's classic work published in the previous century (*Little Men, Little Women*) and Clarence Day's more recent volumes (*Life with Father* and *Life with Mother*). The young American was introduced at a very early age to political issues and events, as evidenced by Omar and Ryllis Goslin's exhibition books, *Democracy*, or Robert Lawson's, *Watchwords of Liberty*, but also to the history of his own country and the lives of its national heroes. Noteworthy and emulated were the American popular texts: the lightened presentation, rich illustrations and appealing graphics were able to convey teachings in an entertaining manner, thanks to the humorous drawings and photographs that introduced subjects of study generally considered dry and boring. Poetry anthologies (Louis Untermeyer, *Modern American Poetry* and *This Singing World. An Anthology of Modern Poetry for Young People*) and books dedicated to foreign countries and peoples (Marion M. Dilts, *The Pageant of Japanese History*; Cornelia Spencer, *The Land of the Chinese People* in the series "Portraits of the Nations").

The English collection was also particularly rich and diverse. In England, the tradition of children's books was dominant, especially in terms of verse and rhyme. In fact, several new editions of "Nursery Rhymes" were available, which always resonated with their musicality in the rooms of the little ones (*Mother Goose's Book of Nursery Rhymes*, with illustrations by Alfred E. Bestall, and *Uncle Dan's Nursery Rhymes Book*), but also the "Nursery Tales", a collection of fairy tales from all over the world accompanied by decidedly humorous drawings in the typical English spirit (*The Book of favourite Nursery Tales*, illustrated by Muriel Baines). The children's book found in all English households, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, did not achieve the same success in Germany, probably because of its satirical aspects strongly inspired by the English mindset. Worth mentioning, however, are the excellent books on nature (Enid Blyton's *Nature Lovers Book* ; Edwin L. Howard, *Children's Garden*; Jane Lucas, *Mother Nature's Babies* and *Mother Nature's Gardens*) and animals (John W. Ivimey, *Complete Version of the Three Blind Mice*; Isobel St. Vincent, *Lamplighter Joe*; Theresa Kalab, *Kokwa, little Koala Bear*; Alan A. Milne, *The House of Pooh Corner, Winnie the Pooh, The Christopher Robin Story Book*, illustrated by Ernest H. Shepard; J. M. MacDougall Ferguson, *Jesus, Friend of Birds and Beasts*). Female audiences, on the other hand, took a particular interest in Pamela

L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* (*Mary Poppins* and *Mary Poppins Comes Back*). Adventures, travel, foreign countries and peoples were the favourite themes of the male audience: Robert L. Stevenson's classic adventure book, *Treasure Island*, was exhibited in the original English edition, but also in Danish, French and German; Rudyard Kipling's text, *The Jungle Book*, however, was not present, while *Kim*, popular for his adventures with older children, was only available in French. A lot of useful material for teachers and students was represented by reading and study books from different subject areas (grammar, history, poetry, natural sciences, religion, mathematics, art, music, geography). Whereas in the American exhibition the young person was placed at the centre of political life, in the British section the focus was more on the choice of career and lifestyle.

The books exhibited from Switzerland proved particularly attractive, not only because of the variety, the skill of the illustrators and the exemplary typography, but also because their contents in German were easily accessible to visitors. Prominent among the picture books were: *Schellen-Ursli*, a book by Selina Chönz and Alois Carigiet, exhibited with illustrations from the exhibition of children's drawings, primitive in the eyes of the adult public, but particularly suitable to children; *Die Geschichte von der Wiese* (Marianne Scheel), *Das Rösslein Kilian* (Marguerite Paul-Ulrich and Lili Roth-Streiff); the unique flower and animal books by Ernst Kreidolf (*Die Wiesenzwerge*, *Grashüpfer*, *Alpenblumenmärchen*), where delicate representations bordering on the supernatural were the result of an in-depth study of nature; the fairy tales of the Grimm brothers illustrated by Herbert Leupin and Hans Fischer (*Tischlein deck dich*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Hans im Glück*, *Das tapfere Schneiderlein*, *Das Lumpengesindel*, *Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten*). The most popular author for Swiss youth, next to Johanna Spyri, was Olga Meyer (*Leuchtendes Ziel*, *Das Licht im Fenster*, *Marieli bekommt eine Stiefmutter*). Elisabeth Müller's children's books (*Vreneli*, *Theresli*, *Christeli*) were also very popular. On the other hand, the male audience appreciated the books by Jeremias Gotthelfs (*Der Knabe des Tell*, *Der letzte Thorberger*, *Kurt von Koppigen*), René Gardi (*Gericht im Lager*, *Mit Rucksack. Zelt und Kochtopf: Ein Wanderbuch*) and Ernst Balzli (*Meine Buben*). Just as much attention was paid to the practical books dedicated to small handicrafts, those related to the homeland and descriptions of journeys or adventures (Fritz Brunner, *Zwischen Seeräuberturm und Rettungsbake*; Lisa

Tetzner, *Hans Urian oder die Geschichte einer Weltreise*; Kurt Held [pseudonym of Kurt Kläber³⁹], *Die rote Zora*). A sub-section of the exhibition dedicated to pedagogical literature showed visitors that the Swiss were continuing Pestalozzi's work; alongside the work of the classic Swiss pedagogues, numerous modern contributions relating to education were displayed here.

Alongside excellent first editions of children's and young people's books dating from before 1933, Germany exhibited 45 new books published in the first year of the *Information Control Division* (ICD). Of course, these were books without colourful richness, given the situation of German publishing; however, they represented the beginning of a new literature for young people, free of militarism or celebration and nationalism. In this respect, new publications such as *Friedemanns Märchenbuch* by Hans Volkart for the young and *Das goldene Tor* by Josef Eberle for boys eager for adventure, among others, bode well.

Finally, the Italian exhibition route seemed to favour adventure texts published during the fascist regime and translations of classics, combined with the unfailing presence of the most famous Italian text, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, displayed in three different editions. Reference is made also to the texts *Il primo libro di Susanna* and *Il secondo libro di Susanna* written by Colette Rosselli (1912-1996) under the pseudonym "Nicoletta", for the publishing house Mondadori, in 1941 and 1942 respectively.⁴⁰ It was, moreover, one of the first and few examples of picture books published in Italy, following the influence of the American "Golden Books"⁴¹ in which text and image offset each other. Rosselli, known for her popular "Donna Letizia" column in the magazine "Grazia" from 1955, was a painter, illustrator, writer and journalist. She wrote

³⁹ Kurt Kläber (1897-1959) was a communist writer displaced from Germany during the Second World War. In 1924, he had married the German writer Lisa Tetzner, thanks to whom he managed to escape and take refuge in Switzerland in 1933.

⁴⁰ See Nicoletta (Colette Rosselli), *Il primo libro di Susanna* (Milan: Mondadori, 1941); Nicoletta (Colette Rosselli), *Il secondo libro di Susanna* (Milan: Mondadori, 1942).

⁴¹ It was a series of children's books started in America in 1942. The volumes were very colourful, more durable and cheaper than those published at the time (selling for \$2-3), with an attempt to reach a wider audience while respecting textual and illustrative quality. The price was around 0.25 cents each and the genres and topics covered were very diverse: fairy tales, nursery rhymes, Bible stories, but also popular texts about nature or science. Leonard S. Marcus, *Golden Legacy. The Story of Golden Books* (New York: Golden Books, 2007).

several children's books and contributed to foreign magazines, such as "Vogue", "Mademoiselle" and "Harper's Bazaar".⁴² Moreover, although the mention is L. Rinaldini, this could actually be Luigi Rinaldi, author of several texts during the regime dedicated to the great explorers and adventurers of history, including Christopher Columbus, Magellan and Vasco da Gama. As for the reference to G. Marescalchi, this probably referred to Giannino Marescalchi, a writer, journalist and editor-in-chief of important Italian newspapers, including "L'Orto", published in Bologna since 1931 as a monthly magazine on literature and the arts, first for the publishing house L'Orto and later for Nord-Est of Venice, Lombardini of Bologna and Le Monnier of Florence. For Le Monnier he also published the text *Ulisse* in 1943.⁴³ The lack of further texts was probably due, as in the case of Germany, to the political and economic situation following the Second World War.

As revealed by the analysis carried out, the great classics of children's literature were presented in translation from different countries. In some cases, however, the same country presented a classic text translated into several languages, demonstrating a spirit of openness in the face of international proposals. The same happened with fairy tale books, for being the ancient and primordial expression of every people, they found wide resonance in every country and allowed more immediate recognition for visiting young readers. Books with figures were also widely appreciated, giving wide impulse to the spread, even in European contexts, of the best illustrated books of the time. Illustrations, in fact, could bridge the linguistic and cognitive gap between different peoples. Also particularly useful were popular illustrated books devoted to subjects related to science, the arts, history, technology and religion, to which Lepman would always devote special attention.

Finally, what also clearly emerged from the analysis, was the need for young readers to find stories to empathise with. The protagonist in the story reflected the growing path of readers in the complex reality they live in. A reality made of difficulties and boundaries that the protagonist left behind to flee to faraway places, where s/he could face adventures

⁴² For an in-depth study of this figure, see Paola Pallottino, *Le figure per dirlo. Storia delle illustratrici italiane* (Rome: Treccani, 2019), 129-130.

⁴³ See Giannino Marescalchi, *Ulisse* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1943).

and solve conflicts. That is how readers could experience the joy for life in Bibi or Heidi, in Robinson, in Tom Sawyer, David Copperfield or Kim, Mowgli and Gulliver. Each reader could find their own self in those adventures.

CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES: FOR AN ACTIVE VISITOR PARTICIPATION

Photographs show that also during the Stuttgart exhibition, some rooms were used as reading areas for the little ones, with tables and chairs for them (see Figure 2). The aim of the organisers was to recreate real reading rooms for children (Kinderleseestuben). Through guided tours, visitors could learn about this organisational form typical of American library spaces and its pedagogical significance,⁴⁴ from which the conception and importance given to the library in comparison with European countries shone through: it was not just a collection of books, but a place that was open, alive, and ready to host all kinds of events or celebrations. Children could move freely among the shelves, browse through books, and approach the literary world not only through the written word, but also through alternative tools, such as drawing, theatrical performance, and the use of puppets. Young visitors were not just silent spectators, but active participants of the spaces and activities designed by adults to fit their needs. The use of picturebooks also offered the possibility of overcoming language barriers, thanks to the books, which, as "silent educators," showed the way of thinking of other peoples more than a large number of storybooks could have done. Another great success was achieved by rooms devoted to reading aloud, in which an adult narrator read before an audience of young viewers. The involvement of the adult was one of the most important and innovative features of the exhibitions: the idea that the adult, as a librarian, would play an active role in the process of educating the child to read was an uncommon aspect on German territory, viewed almost with suspect by the more traditionalist librarians. In spite of this, the staff realized the additional potential inherent in foreign books, which, unlike grammar

⁴⁴ See Kate McDowell, "Children's voices in librarian's words, 1890-1930", *Libraries and the Cultural Record*, 46, 1(2011): 73-101; Id., "Open wide the doors: The children's room as place in public libraries, 1876-1925", *Library Trends*, 62, 3 (2014): 519-529.

textbooks, allowed the child to use illustrations and words at the same time, speaking vocabulary aloud. After all, it was precisely this opportunity that Lepman seized with the opening of the Munich Library, where foreign books could be used to teach foreign languages as well.

Figure 2. "Photographs of children in the first International Children's and Young Adult Book Exhibition at the Württemberg State Library in Stuttgart", August 1946. From the HA IJ, folder: 46.0991D-2 © the Foundation International Youth Library.



The same happened during the Frankfurt exhibition, held from 1 to 27 October 1946 at the Städel Museum. The latter, destroyed by bombing, was rebuilt with the help of the mayor of Frankfurt, Walter Kolb, and the architect Josseau. The lack of glass to repair the window in the last room forced the staff to use a curtain to divide the room. This unintentionally created a kind of reading room, which was also used as a space for reading aloud fairy tales and stories from different countries. The tables and chairs were provided by a kindergarten in Frankfurt.

The evolution of the project towards an ever-increasing reception of the traits of exhibition modernity and active participation of readers was manifested throughout the exhibition's itinerary, anticipating design choices and educational experiments related to the world of books and reading that Lepman would adopt in the following years in the International Youth Library. In addition to the possibility of using a room

for reading directly or listening to the exhibited works, during the Frankfurt exhibition the Ministry of Culture decided to print and distribute brochures with extracts from some fairy tales to visitors. In addition, as in the case of Munich but in a slightly different way, vouchers were distributed among visitors to be used in one of Frankfurt's bookshops to exchange with a children's book.⁴⁵ The explicit intention to also influence the education of adults on topics concerning childhood, youth and the importance of books and reading was manifested through guided tours, not only for children, but also for parents and experts in the field (booksellers, librarians, publishers, etc.) and through a number of conferences dedicated to these topics.⁴⁶ The various archival documents kept at the HA IJ bear the titles of some of the reports presented during the exhibition itinerary. In Frankfurt, for example, the headlines were about: "How a children's book is produced and made", "The importance of children's books in public libraries", "Children's reading, writing and drawing seen from a father's point of view", "Kindergartens and children's books", "The French children's book", "The book as a friend of our young people", "How Shockheaded Peter was born", "Secondary aspects of the English school system".⁴⁷ During the Hamburg exhibition, the themes addressed were equally varied and with an international perspective: "The Child and the Book, a Modern Issue", "The Picture Book", "Children's Drawings" and "History of Children's Books".⁴⁸ The success of the exhibition was reflected in the number of visitors: 17.851, of which 5272 were children and 4579 students.⁴⁹

The Berlin exhibition, which was opened on 6 December 1946 by Colonel F. N. Leonhard at the US Information Centre, and ended at the

⁴⁵ The following information is taken from "Abschlussbericht über die Internationale Ausstellung 'Das Jugendbuch' in Frankfurt am Main", September-October 1946, folder 46.0306 (doc. 2), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

⁴⁶ "Abschlussbericht über die Internationale Ausstellung 'Das Jugendbuch' in Frankfurt am Main".

⁴⁷ *Idem*.

⁴⁸ Irene Dyhrenfurth Graebisch, "Abschlussbericht von Irene Dyhrenfurth über die Internationale Ausstellung 'Das Jugendbuch' in Hamburg", May 1947, folder 46.0325, Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

⁴⁹ The precise number of visitors to the Frankfurt exhibition was obtained from a document with visitor statistics during the opening period: "Besucherstatistik von der Internationalen Ausstellung 'Das Jugendbuch' in Frankfurt am Main", October 1947, folder 46.0305 (doc. 1-3), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

end of January 1947, also saw the introduction of shows performed with shadow theatre and song recitals with song lyrics from various countries.⁵⁰ The situation in Berlin was particularly critical, the economic emergency was more severe than in other cities, and very often mothers and children were tried by hunger and cold. The exhibition immediately proved to be an important opportunity to introduce the little ones to a new reality, supported in this case also by the Christmas season: the entrance to the exhibition was decorated with a picture of Santa Claus and his reindeer sleigh. The attendance grew very quickly, reaching 28.211 visitors.⁵¹ The occasion of Christmas, combined with the children's wish to be able to take home the books they had read during the exhibition, gave Lepman the opportunity to donate a book to the children of Berlin. The book selected was *Ferdinand the Bull*, written by Munroe Leaf, illustrated by Robert Lawson and published in the USA in 1936. The story tells of a young bull who prefers the scent of a flower to the senseless violence of bullfighting and was translated by Lepman herself and printed in 30.000 copies by the Tempelhof printing house under the title *Ferdinand der Stier*. It was handed out at the entrance to the main hall of the exhibition. It was a print on newspaper that was folded to make it leaf through like a book. It was a real success, and the print run sold out in no time.⁵²

Also during the Berlin exhibition, as proof of the continuous and fruitful dialogue between journalistic career and philanthropic commitment, the magazine "HEUTE", on the recommendation of Lepman, who had meanwhile been appointed Managing Editor, published Clement Clarke Moore's poem *It Was the Night Before Christmas* as a colourful Christmas gift for children. The translation was this time entrusted to Erich Kästner and the illustrations to Emery Gordon.⁵³

During 1947, the "Jugendbuchausstellung" continued its exhibition itinerary in post-war Germany, moving to the British occupation zone. During the exhibition in Hamburg at the Ethnological Museum, the

⁵⁰ «Report International youth book exhibition Berlin», January 1947, folder 46.0313 (doc. 1), Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ).

⁵¹ "Report International youth book exhibition Berlin".

⁵² Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick, 65-66.

⁵³ Lepman, *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick, 66-67.

number of visitors reached 42.233, of which 21.332 were children,⁵⁴ with a bibliographic expansion over time due to the constant sending of material from the various nations involved. The exponential success of the exhibition can be traced not only in the extraordinary modernity of the exhibition choices, again enhanced by the possibility of visiting the event through guided tours or following conferences on topics related to books and childhood, but even more so in the initiatives organised to involve and entertain visitors: puppet shows, shadow puppets and read-alouds. These modern features ensured the success of the project. It is also worth mentioning that the direct involvement of personalities from the educational and library spheres (think, for example, of Hans Ludwig Held in Munich or Irene Dyhrenfurth Graebisch in Hamburg) in the organisation of the exhibition facility, fostered a greater awareness of the choices made, both in structural terms, with regard to the use of space and the distribution of books, as well as from an educational point of view, by offering children the opportunity to feel like active spectators thanks to the availability of books to leaf through, materials tailored to them and initiatives designed especially for them (see Figure 3).

⁵⁴ Jella Lepman, «Korrespondenz zwischen der britischen Kontrollkommission für Deutschland und Jella Lepman», June-July 1947, folder 46.0327B, 1-3, Historisches Archiv der Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (HA IJ). The success of the exhibition in Hamburg can be attributed to the active involvement of Irene Dyhrenfurth-Graebisch in organisational matters concerning the initiative. A literary scholar and translator, she was also the author of *Geschichte des deutschen Jugendbuches*, dedicated to the history of German children's books. Cf. Irene Graebisch, *Geschichte des deutschen Jugendbuches* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1942).

Figure 3. "Photographs of the rooms of the first International Children's and Young Adult Book Exhibition at the Württemberg State Library in Stuttgart", August 1946. From the HA IJ, folder: 46.099C © the Foundation International Youth Library.



CONCLUSIONS

The bibliographical exhibition promoted by Jella Lepman represented an innovative operation in the post-war European context, as it did not limit itself to presenting the book as an object to be respected and

stored behind a showcase, but as a living device capable of affecting the cultural fabric of the time, creating new uses and new users. Furthermore, the choices made with regard to the pedagogical layout of the exhibitions contributed to qualifying the book as a cultural object that was the repository of multiple educational possibilities, related to the content transmitted, the historical and social context of belonging and the creative process implemented by the author. Books represented keys to an "other" world, as they allowed one to cross the boundaries of the mind and pass through the doors of the imagination, but at the same time they were a possibility to cross political and territorial borders. The metaphor of the book as a tool with incredible imaginative potential, capable of nourishing the reader's thoughts, met that of the book as a builder of bridges between countries and people. Lepman's experience was thus a significant example of how it is possible for culture to become a lived experience, a sharing of values and a confrontation with other cultures, allowing childhood readers to be protagonists in the democratic renewal process of Europe beyond the nationalisms of totalitarian regimes. As Erich Kästner argued in a 1949 article,⁵⁵ the possibility of having a multilingual bibliographic holding by the exhibitions could facilitate a comparison of editions in order to assess the process of diffusion of a literary work and the possible influences arising from the translation and transposition of the work into contexts different from those of its origin. In this way, the book could qualify as a living device and as a cultural object, a repository of multiple educational possibilities, related to the content transmitted, the historical and social context to which it belongs, and the creative process enacted by the author. In this sense, the exhibitions became a space for free and democratic discussions about readings and one's own experience as a reader, inevitably referring also to personal history and going beyond the simple and more traditional transmission of knowledge. Real processes of sharing and participation with civic and cultural purposes were initiated. These principles emerge clearly in the effort of Jella Lepman and the staff involved

⁵⁵ "Thus, simply by reading a book of which one does not understand a single syllable, one can learn that the world is very diverse, as colourful as a garden of flowers, and that violets and a people would be equally foolish if they believed they were the only and most beautiful type of flower in the garden or the most beautiful people on the face of the earth. How much one can learn from a book one cannot read; all the more from books one understands!" See Erich Kästner, "Ein Brief an alle Kinder der Welt", *Münchener Merkur*, September 14, 1949. The translation from German is by the writer.

in the exhibitions in implementing an idea of reading education as a democratic value through the promotion of dialogue and confrontation, openness to the local area, and the enhancement of the personal experiences of child readers.

Despite the success of the initiative, Lepman realised the need to preserve and enhance what had been achieved, allowing it to be used over time. In this way, books, as instruments of sharing and knowledge capable of transmitting values such as respect, tolerance and openness to diversity, would have helped overcome the nationalistic and militaristic ideas derived from the regime. In the course of the exhibitions, therefore, the idea of creating a stable and continuous institution that could preserve the work that had been collected and carried out in post-war Germany up to that time and that placed children, reading and books at the centre, soon became a primary goal for the author, which would lead her to found the first International Youth Library in Munich on 14 September 1949. The organisation of the exhibitions and the subsequent opening of the International Youth Library represented a turning point in the German library scene, introducing a new way of thinking about the library and its role within the community, particularly the youth community. It also acted as a nerve centre around which a series of international initiatives would be structured, which in the years to follow would prove to be a driving force for critical analysis of the discipline and for the dissemination of publishing and reading promotion initiatives, creating a veritable international “forum” on the problems of youth literature.

Note about the author

CRISTINA GUMIRATO is a research fellow at the Department of Education of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. She obtained her PhD in 2023 in the same university with a work on Children’s Literature and specifically on the critical evolution of the discipline after World War II. His studies focus on the critical-interpretive debate on children’s literature after World War II and in particular on the figure of Jella Lepman and her relations with Italy. She is the author of the book *La letteratura per l’infanzia nel secondo dopoguerra. Un ponte tra culture europee* (FrancoAngeli 2023). She was a research fellow at the Internationale Jugendbibliothek in Munich in 2021.

REFERENCES

- Breitenkamp, Edward C. "The U. S. Information Control Division and its Effect on German Publishers and Writers 1945 to 1949". Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1951.
- Caroli, Dorena. "La storia della letteratura comparata per l'infanzia da Paul Hazard agli studi recenti: quali prospettive?", in *Quale letteratura per l'infanzia? Morfologia di una disciplina in trasformazione*, edited by Alessandra Mazzini, Angelo Nobile, 135-153. Venice: Marcianum press, 2024.
- Cote, Joost. "'To See is to Know': The Pedagogy of the Colonial Exhibition, Semarang, 1914". *Paedagogica Historica* 36, no. 1 (2000): 340-366.
- Ebbert, Birgit. *Erziehung zu Menschlichkeit und Demokratie. Erich Kästner und seine Zeitschrift 'Pinguin' im Erziehungsgefüge der Nachkriegszeit*. Frankfurt: Lang, 1994.
- Dogliani, Patrizia. *L'Europa a scuola. Percorsi dell'istruzione tra Ottocento e Novecento*. Rome: Carocci, 2002.
- Ewers, Hans H. "Children's Literature Research in Germany". *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2002): 158-165.
- Faucher, Anne-Catherine. *Paul Faucher. Ou l'aventure du Père Castor. Une révolution éditoriale*. Paris: Flammarion, 2021.
- Gienow-Hecht, Jessica C. E. "Art is Democracy and Democracy Is Art: Culture, Propaganda, and the Neue Zeitung in Germany, 1944-1947". *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 1 (1999): 21-43.
- Graebisch, Irene. *Geschichte des deutschen Jugendbuches*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1942.
- Hazard, Paul. "La littérature enfantine en Italie". *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XIX, 4 (1914): 842-870.
- Hazard, Paul. "Comment lisent les enfants". *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XLII, 4 (1927): 860-882.
- Hazard, Paul. *Les hommes, les enfants et les livres*. Paris: Flammarion, 1932.
- Hoffmann, Claus-Wilhelm. *Wilhelm Hoffmann. Leben und Wirken*. Ostfildern: Thorbecke. 2021.
- Kästner, Erich. *La conferenza degli animali*. Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1950.
- Knaupp, Monika. "Children's and Young People's Literature in Germany from 1945 to the Present", in *European lines of children's literature (vol. II)*, edited by Alessandra Avanzini, 15-17. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015.
- Ledig, Eva M. *Eine Idee für die Kinder. Die Internationale Jugendbibliothek in München*. Munich: Erasmus-Grasser-Verlag, 1988.
- Lepman, Jella. *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Edith McCormick. Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2002.

- Lepman, Jella. *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, trans. Anna Patrucco Becchi. Rome: Sin- nos, 2018.
- Lepman, Jella. *Die Kinderbuchbrücke*, edited by A. Patrucco Becchi. Munich: Antje Kunstmann Verlag, 2020.
- Macnab, Natasha, Ian Grosvenor and Kevin Myers. "Moving frontiers of em- pire: production, travel and transformation through technologies of dis- play". *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 6 (2013): 769-795.
- Maida, Bruno. *L'infanzia nelle guerre del Novecento*. Turin: Einaudi, 2017.
- Manley, Keith A. "The Munich Tramcar Library". *Library History* 10, no. 1 (1994): 71-75.
- Marcus, Leonard S. *Golden Legacy. The Story of Golden Books*. New York: Gold- en Books, 2007.
- Marescalchi, Giannino. *Ulisse*. Florence: Le Monnier, 1943.
- McDowell, Kate. "Children's voices in librarian's words, 1890-1930". *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 46, no. 1 (2011): 73-101.
- McDowell, Kate. "Open wide the doors: The children's room as place in public libraries, 1876-1925". *Library Trends* 62, no. 3 (2014): 519-529.
- Nicoletta (Rosselli Colette). *Il primo libro di Susanna*. Milan: Mondadori, 1941.
- Nicoletta (Rosselli Colette). *Il secondo libro di Susanna*. Milan: Mondadori, 1942.
- Pallottino, Paola. *Le figure per dirlo. Storia delle illustratrici italiane*. Rome: Trec- cani, 2019.
- Patrucco Becchi, Anna. "The Many Lives of Jella Lepman". *Bookbird* 60, no. 1 (2022): 105-109.
- Raecke-Hauswedell, Renate. "How everything began. German children's book production in the post-war period under the influence of British occupation policy". *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 1, no. 1 (1995): 105-118.
- Rollestone, James "After Zero Hour: The Visual Texts of Post-War Germany". *South Atlantic Review* 64, no. 2 (1999): 1-19.
- White, Margaret H. "Exhibiting practices: paper as a site of communication and contested practice". In *Materialities of schooling: Design, technology, objects, routines*, edited by Martin Lawn, Ian Grosvenor, 177-200. Oxford: Sympo- sium Books, 2005.
- Winkelman, John. "Social Criticism in the early work of Erich Kästner". *The University of Missouri Studies* XXV, no. 4 (1953).
- Zahra, Tara. *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011.