

The Service group for youth literature in the Salesian University of Rome

From the cultural impulse of volunteers' association, a shared heritage comes to life

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The Service group for youth literature (in Italian: *Gruppo di Servizio per la Letteratura Giovanile*, better known with the acronym GSLG) was established in 1977 by a group of authors, journalists, critics and teachers who aimed at promoting and disseminating knowledge, readings and animation in the field of youth literature, with a critical psycho-pedagogical approach grounded on the basic values for the child education, as expressed in the ONU *Declaration of the rights of the child*. From that distant date, the Group has founded several branches in various Italian cities (Chiavari, Torino, Bari, Treviso and Rome), which have fulfilled – thanks to the work of many competent and enthusiastic members – remarkable results and always in connection with a complex exchange of innovation and creativity, and in a climate of cultural sharing and research. The local initiatives do testify to the important work realized so far, as well as the work which is still being carried out in a spirit of cultural volunteering and social commitment¹.

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¹ The initiatives can be examined on the website <<http://www.gruppoletteraturagiovanile.it>>.

Moreover, over these first 35 years a growing need for memory and preservation has emerged, which stimulated the Group to establish a library collection for preserving and transmitting materials produced by those GSLG members who are writers of books for children and youth. Therefore, in 1997 the Library of the Authors of the Service group for youth literature was born, following the design of founder of the Group Domenico Volpi, and with the support of Prof. Carlo Nanni from the Faculty of Education of Salesian University in Rome. The motivations for this project are manifold, as follows:

- preserve a valuable and indicative experience;
- assign the books for children and for educators, created by the authors-members of the Group, to an organization which can protect them and make them available to all those who wish to examine, study or make them an object of a graduation thesis work etc.;
- leave trace of an epoch and its steps through the evolution of the messages and values offered to the children, of the narrative and popular languages, and finally of the relations between school, books and readers;
- preserve the youth literature texts that represent, ultimately, a genuine form of popular literature close to people's feelings;
- document the evolution of the language as well as of a social and historical time;
- offer the possibility to analyze the creative development of an author.

With the establishment of the Library, the Salesian University has preserved the unity of collections and guaranteed the public access to materials, by placing them in an accessible section of the new university library, i.e. the section dedicated to the historical-pedagogical research on the history of youth, where books can be consulted and borrowed, and new donations be accommodated. Moreover, particularly significant is that the Library accepts a broad range of materials dealing with youth literature, such as personal archives of authors, donations of non-fiction, collections of magazines and so on.

This initiative is important from many viewpoints:

- as material products, books for youth and even more for children are ephemeral in nature and it is rare that such works – even if valuable – arrive to posterity, and even some books published just 10 years ago are true rarities. Consequently, the Library of the GSLG plays a crucial role, i.e. continuing to keep them alive, and offering students and critics a cultural reservoir to draw on. For this reason, each author can reasonably believe that the works he created with love and dedication will not get lost, but will be preserved with care and expertise.
- the GSLG has aroused interest towards youth literature in a prestigious university, where further initiatives of research, analysis and animation will be organised in this field.

- the Library of GSLG is part of a modern university which gathers many nationalities and where a strong tradition has always been nourished which is closely linked to youth culture and all its expressions.

At present more than 140 authors have been catalogued but their number is growing, also because researches for new book collections are constantly under way, especially among the families and heirs of deceased authors. The catalogue includes historical figures such as: Giovanna Righini Ricci, a precious pen broken in the peak of her literary career and whose entire production is present in the library, also translated into foreign languages; Domenico Volpi, an eclectic and prolific author and journalist; Nuccia Resegotti, a fine and balanced narrator; Rossana Guarnieri, a writer whose valuable writing was particularly suited to a younger public; Piera Paltro, a sensitive writer, both in prose and verse; Aldo Zelli, and ironic and playful author of books as well as of plays. The library also contains works of poets, such as Cristanziano Serricchio, Achille Abramo Saporiti, Renato Greco; we should mention, again, illustrators and cartoonists such as Renato Ciavola, Nadia Bertelle, Lucrezia Giarratana.

Even though only literary writers have been mentioned so far, we should not forget all those figures who, emerging for their academic studies in the field of youth literature from a social, pedagogical and anthropological perspective, are researchers as well as promoters of initiatives that have had a significant relapse in education: this is the case of university professors such as Angelo Nobile, Gianna Marrone, Daniele Giancane – only to mention a few ones –; and finally, literary critics such as Ermanno Detti, Mario Pucci, Cosimo Rodia.

In this regard, particularly valuable is the collection of unpublished writings by Giuseppe Fanciulli, which includes autographic letters and diaries and other materials donated by the family, a collection which could represent a unique source for an accurate and well-documented research aimed at finding out the personality of this figure. Worthy of mention is the fact that the Library of the authors of GSLG is being continuously enriched with culturally important legacies, for example the recent one by the famous cartoonist Paolo Del Vaglio: a tangy and sharp social critic as well as a witty and erudite detector of national virtues and vices, who dedicated himself to teaching and to the art of cartoons for more than 50 years, this author has left GSLG all his remarkable artistic production to be consulted by researchers, students and any readers; a first “taste” of this legacy was given by Del Vaglio himself in a recent interview during the Conference *Ridere è una cosa seria: umorismo e ottimismo nella letteratura giovanile* (“Laughing is a serious matter: humour and optimism in youth literature”), which was held on April 15th, 2010 at the Salesian University in Rome².

² An extract of the proceedings of the Conference is accessible on line at the URL: <<http://www.gruppoletteraturagiوانile.it/documenti/pg-2010-4-dossier.pdf>> (last access: June 15th, 2011).

The history of youth literature consists of many facets, and we are honoured that our library, which is full of cultural history and social-anthropological studies as well as a testimony of epochal changes and pedagogical theories evolution (thanks to its newspaper library, preserving several old magazines), can enhance and promote the knowledge also in the field of literature for children and youth and its authors from a broad perspective, both at national and local level.

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