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QUADERNI D'ITALIANISTICA

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Esplorando il Pianeta Buzzati. Dino Buzzati a 50 anni dalla morte

Guest editors, Eloisa Morra e Marco Malvestio

ARTICOLI / ARTICLES

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Subaltern Studies and Ecocriticism in *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* by Dino Buzzati and Lorenzo Mattotti

Roberta Coglitore

Abstract: Lorenzo Mattotti's 2019 adaptation of Dino Buzzati's *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* (1945) deserves special attention for three important reasons. First, Mattotti gives this long-undervalued work the preeminence it deserves as an iconotext that can be read by children and adults alike. Second, the movie introduces narrative elements from other works by Buzzati, ranging from *Il deserto dei Tartari* (1940) to *I Miracoli di Val Morel* (1971). Third, Mattotti's film enhances two themes that were already present in Buzzati's work: the contrast between human and animal perspectives, and the comparison between the city and the mountains. The filmic transposition develops these two themes: the first is transformed into a conflict between social groups, personifying issues that are highly debated today (the subaltern state, migration, postcolonialism); the second can be interpreted as an ecocritical rereading of Buzzati's text. The struggle against social discrimination and the protection of the natural environment make Mattotti's movie highly relevant because it addresses urgent contemporary issues.

So much more than an invasion

The transposition of a literary text conspicuously highlights specific aspects of a hypotext.[1] It magnifies or transforms these aspects, or even omits or conceals them; or it may develop other parallels. As Gérard Genette explains:

[1] See Gérard Genette: "By *hypertextuality* I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that it is not that of commentary […] let us posit the general notion of a text in the second degree […]: i.e, a text derived from another pre-existent text" (5). The translations, where not otherwise indicated, are my own.

> Serious transformation, or *transposition,* is without any doubt the most important of all hypertextual practices, if only because of the historical importance and aesthetic accomplishment of some of the works that fall under its heading. Its claims also come from the scope and variety of the procedures it calls upon […] Transposition can […] give rise to works of vast dimensions, such as *Faust* or *Ulysses*, whose textual amplitude and aesthetic and/or ideological ambition may mask or even completely obfuscate their hypertextual character, and this very productivity is linked to the diversity of the transformational procedures that it brings into play. (212–13)

Unlike playful or satirical transformation, in the act of transposition the hypertextual work is seemingly independent. This is due to the extensive aesthetic and ideological reworking by virtue of which the audience might even lose sight of its hypotextual source; it can also sometimes make it difficult to retrace the origins of the hypotext. This is precisely the case of Lorenzo Mattotti's animated film re-presenting Dino Buzzati's *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* (*The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily)* (1945, hereafter *Bears*). The movie does much more than this, however, by paying homage to the author's writing and painting *tout court*.

Mattotti's filmic transposition deserves special mention for two important reasons. The first reason is that through this film Mattotti gives Buzzati's work the rightful place of honour it deserves in his opus. Buzzati's critics have long considered it to be of lesser importance because it has been erroneously classified as children's literature—and therefore considered to be simpler and less serious—and because it is an iconotextual work and therefore relegated to the margins of canonical literature, despite the fact that Buzzati's double works (i.e., iconotextual works) are widely recognized and appreciated.[2] Closely tied to the first reason, the second reason this film deserves special attention is because it gives the spectator—be they adult, child or adolescent, specialist or beginner—a well-rounded image of Buzzati (Polcini; Terrusi). The film does this by introducing narrative elements from his other works, ranging from *Il deserto dei Tartari* (1940) to *Miracoli di Val Morel* (1971*sh*), just to mention two examples.

[2] It should be remembered that it was only in the last Meridiano dedicated to Dino Buzzati and edited by Giulio Carnazzi (2012) that *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* was republished with colour plates. Numerous other double works shared this same unfortunate outcome.

In this essay I would like to retrace and analyze the creation of the animated film *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* in order to show how Mattotti systematically transforms the narration and the contours of the story. Although at times the film deviates from Buzzati's text, his transposition is faithful (as has been frequently noted), almost as if it were a *forgerie* of Buzzati, rather than a simple adaptation.[3] Indeed, Mattotti imitates Buzzati's artistic mode: the search for mixed forms—from illustrated fairy tales to comics, from manuals to religious paintings—and his ability to rewrite his drawings into words and his stories into paintings, thus breaking down the boundaries between the two arts. Mattotti's "mixed form" of choice is the animated film, and through the use of this form he succeeds in merging Buzzati's genres and forms—namely, short stories, novels, comics, and fairy tales. He thus transforms a single story, that of the bears, into a plot that includes other themes, scenes, and characters from Buzzati's works.

Mattotti's transposition also has the merit of making two themes that were already present in Buzzati's work even more penetrating and topical—namely, the contrast between human and animal perspectives, and the comparison between the city and the mountains (Giannetto; Carnazzi). The filmic transposition develops the two themes of the fairy tale. The first is transformed into a conflict between social groups, personifying issues that are highly debated today such as the subaltern state, migration, and postcolonialism; the second can be interpreted as an eco-critical rereading of Buzzati's text. The struggle against social discrimination and the protection of the natural environment make Mattotti's movie highly relevant because it addresses urgent contemporary issues. At the same time, it provides unusual but privileged access to Buzzati's work.

The rewritings

After the release of the animated movie, Lorenzo Viganò assembled for the first time the various editions of the work in one single large volume along with images from the film and an interview with the director and screenwriter. This volume contained the book, the fairy tale, and even the unpublished drawings

[3] See Linda Hutcheon. Hutcheon examines a variety of genres and media in her comparative analysis of the adaptations. She believes that external cultural contexts govern how the adapter will present the work to an audience.

that Buzzati decided to omit in the final version.[4] These are primarily preparatory studies and small sketches that were used in part to create the intervals in the story in the final page of the magazine *Corriere dei piccoli*, dedicated to the *Bears*. Other documents are still among the author's private papers, such as the cardboard folder that contained the preparatory plates.

Buzzati had already produced many revised editions of the story, radically modifying the relationship between the two components of the iconotext (Coglitore, *Storie dipinte* and "Le Pipe e gli Orsi"). Initially, it was a story about bears told by the author to the family and written to entertain his nieces, accompanied by large pencil drawings with a brief caption on each page. Subsequently, a second version, set in Tuscany, was serialized in the last page of the *Corriere dei piccoli*, from January 7 to 29 April 1945, and divided into two parts: the first part contained seven episodes with the title *La famosa invasione degli orsi*, and the second part contained four episodes entitled *Vecchi orsi addio!* The latter was abruptly interrupted when the *Corriere dei piccoli* halted its publications after the liberation from the Fascist regime on 25 April 1945. It was not to be recommenced, even when the magazine was renamed *Giornale dei piccoli*. On a single page, a large colour drawing illustrated the scene told in prose at the bottom of the page, interspersed with a few small drawings of the bears or details of the scenes being told. The last version, the illustrated books, includes the full title and the specific reference to Sicily, a prose and verse narrative, and an iconotextual composition introducing a new textual rhythm. A first edition was published in 1945 by Rizzoli without the author's name on the cover; a second edition was published by Aldo Martello in 1958; and finally a third edition by Mondadori was published in 1977, which was almost identical.[5]

In Buzzati's work, therefore, the *Bears* is already a stratification and sedimentation of stories and details, settings and landscapes, characters and episodes, and a search for genres and forms; it was this journey that led to the definitive form that we find in the final illustrated book. Mattotti's filmic transposition is also the product of a long process that engaged him as a screenwriter and director, from 2009 to 2019,[6] in a series of eliminations, additions, and condensations that

[4] See Viganò. Based on the rewritings of the book, the special edition in the Baobab series has a fourfold division: the book, the fairy tale, the drawings, and the film.

[5] See the analysis of the variants by Carnazzi in Buzzati, *Opere scelte* 1484–1505. See also Perale.

[6] Mattotti began working on the idea of the transposition as early as 2009, but the actual filmmaking only began in 2012. Damiano Pellegrino describes his search for new forms

allowed him to reconstruct a sort of encyclopedia or "Buzzati album." Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Mattotti rewrites the story starting from a particular perspective, re-evaluating and highlighting the centrality given to a father-son relationship enriched by a range of feelings and emotions.

In Buzzati's work, the scene where the hunters capture Tonio, the little bear, is fundamental for the beginning of the whole story as a "causative" precursor, providing the central motive for the bear to go to the city, in addition to the quest for food. In Mattotti's work, the paternal relationship is much more engaging and moving thanks to an introspective reading of the soul of the king of the bears. The initial scene where Leonzio teaches Tonio salmon fishing welds the mentor-learner relationship and furnishes it with playful and sentimental touches, unprecedented in Buzzati. These are replicated in the second part of the movie, in a similar scene where fishing will serve to reinforce animal instincts, albeit in more artificial conditions within the hyperprotective walls of the royal palace. In addition to the psychological dimension of the father-son relationship, the main changes in the animated movie can be found in the narrative frame, in the narrator's voice and in the perspective of the narrative and, consequently, in the ending of the story. These changes aim at re-evaluating the narrative, according to two hypotheses I have suggested in the analysis indicated in the introduction.

The *cantastorie*

Although the major transformations in the movie appear to concern only formal aspects of the narration, these will nevertheless have intense repercussions on the values of the story (Baglioni; Sebastiani, "Buzzati" and "Variantistica"). In the narrative frame invented by Mattotti, there are three additional characters that are not present in Buzzati's story. The two Sicilian *cantastorie*, Gedeone and Almerina, and the very old bear are in fact seemingly extraneous to the hypotext.

In fact, Buzzati had also included some narrative frames in his story: the presentation of the characters and the scenes, the prequel to the disappearance of the little bear Tonio, son of King Leonzio. These were all told, however, through the voice of the extradiegetic narrator in order to emphasize the intrinsic value of oral narration (Lazzarin; Lepri), a theme that was reiterated in the closing of the

as follows: "The trajectory of his works seems to focus on a central node: transforming the traditional comic strip into a new space which manages to draw on other languages and embrace a longer form, that of the drawn novel" (166).

story (Rizzarelli). Mattotti's solution for the voice of the narrator is much better suited to the filmic version of the story because it makes the opening words of the film more dynamic and dialogic. In the opening theme song, the two *cantastorie* emerge from a dark and dense narrative forest and—not only metaphorically speaking (Eco)—cross the white snowy mountains until they are able to take refuge in a cave. Here they meet the old bear and here starts the narration of the invasion. It is immediately apparent that the depiction of the cave where the two *cantastorie* take refuge is similar to the representation of Milan's Cathedral transformed by Buzzati's painting into the Dolomite Mountains—as told through the voice of Gedeone. Here, we see an example of the author's pictorial representation, which Mattotti deployed with ingenuity and agility.

At the beginning of the story the old bear listens in silence, and in order to please him, the two *cantastorie* begin to tell the story of the famous invasion of bears in Sicily, the same story that they perform in their shows in front of their billboard, throughout the Sicilian valleys. In the second part of the film, that same bear will in turn become a storyteller, and will reveal to the couple his version—or, rather, the sequel to the story—before he goes into hibernation. Finally, he confesses to Almerina a secret about his identity and about the real ending of the story. Thus, he suggests to the two *cantastorie*—and consequently to the viewer—that he is actually the bear Tonio, who is now very old.

In this new narrative frame there are more contrasts between the two groups, the bears and the men. In the story, the two groups are opposed because of their different natures; the bears are valiant and naïve, whereas the humans are bad, vice-ridden, and defensive of their land. However, unlike Buzzati's fairy tale, in which the irreparable conflict ends with the return of the bears to the mountains, Mattotti facilitates dialogue and understanding between the three narrators who take turns in the roles of narrator and listener. In this way they mutually fulfill each other, so that the version of the men continues with that of the bears.

In the first part of the movie, the objective of the human storyline is that King Leonzio finds his son, Tonio, at the theatre and the magician gives him back his life through a magic spell; and in the end, humans and bears live together in harmony. There is a second conclusion revealed by the old bear in the cave that seems to be a continuation of the first. After an idyllic beginning in the "honey age," when Sicily prospered and men and bears lived in complete harmony, King Leonzio had to contend with Salnitro's envy and ambition; plotting against the king he makes him believe that the magician De Ambrosiis is the real conspirator

and the one who made the magic wand disappear and robbed the universal bank. Almerina, Tonio, and the magician manage to quash Salnitro's plan by entreating the Serpenton of the Seas to intervene, but this comes at the price of King Leonzio's death. Tonio, now grown up and the new leader, abandons the city together with the bears and returns to live in the mountains, obeying his father's last words. The double ending of the story is also a way to leave a clue for the viewer about the first and second part of Buzzati's story, published under different titles in *Corriere dei piccoli*.

Mattotti also decides to include a female figure in the narrative frame that is completely non-existent in Buzzati's story; he gives this female protagonist the name of the author's wife, to whom he also dedicates his movie.[7] This allows for a variety of points of view in the filmic version—that of a little girl, an adult and an old bear—while in Buzzati's version the extradiegetic narrator does not differentiate the characters by gender or age; this absence intensifies the sharp contrast between bears and men, the only marked contrast in the story.

Moreover, in order to further elaborate the frame of the story, Mattotti "doubles" the female character: we find Almerina in the guise of storyteller as well as a separate character in the plot who has an important role in Tonio's salvation and in the resolution of the story; Mattotti actually invents a series of new episodes for her.

The other Buzzati

In the animated movie, Mattotti inserts numerous references to other narrative and pictorial works by Buzzati that allow the viewer to become acquainted with much more of the artist's work, not just the tale of the bears. A decisive scene of the movie is the one in the theatre where Tonio is found, and which constitutes the first ending of the story. In fact, here Mattotti distills two episodes into one: on the one hand, the siege of the Cormorano castle and the battle between the bears and the Granduca's soldiers, and on the other hand, the performance at the theatre, the finding of Tonio, and the death of the Granduca. Thanks to a skillful montage of scenes, Mattotti perfectly combines the siege and the clash at

[7] The movie is dedicated to Almerina Buzzati and to Carlo Mazzacurati. Mattotti has the following to say about Almerina: "[S]ince there isn't a female figure in the entire book–unbelievable, right?—we have placed […], as an assistant, […] a little girl inspired, as a character, Gelsomina by Fellini's *Strada*" (qtd. in Viganò 187).

the gates of the castle with the circus show of acrobatic jugglers and dancers that is taking place at the Teatro Excelsior. Each action has a causative moment in the battle, a throw or a shot, which is completed by a culminating moment with spectacular gestures, pirouettes, or acrobatics. Gedeone's voice-off comments that this is simultaneously a tragedy and a comedy because the battle and the show occur at the same time and end with one single finale. In fact, when Leonzio and his bears enter the theatre, they see Almerina and Tonio performing a circus act, thus finding their lost son and healing the wound of separation in the family relationship.

This scene allows Mattotti to insert several references to Buzzati's novel, *Il deserto dei Tartari*. The Bastiani Fortress in *Il deserto dei Tartari* is transposed and becomes the outpost of the Sicilian capital, the Cormorano Castle from *Bears*. Not only is it the background of one of the many battles between bears and men in the film, but Mattotti succeeds—in a conversation held by the soldiers walking on the fortress walls—in finding the key to reading the novel: the eternal wait for nothing. Indeed, the enemy cannot be seen from the Bastiani Fortress where Lieutenant Drogo spends his entire life waiting for something to happen, although nothing does happen until his death. In the movie the soldiers of the Granduca, a transposition of Lieutenant Drogo and his fellow soldiers from *Il deserto dei Tartari*, exchange a few words that simplify that alternation between nothing-and-something. However, unlike the novel where the enemy never arrives, here the bears approach the fortress with the best of intentions and the men—immediately—declare their intention to annihilate them; in other words, to reduce them to nothingness. In the final scene, however, the bears are triumphant.

In other episodes, Mattotti is able to insert yet more pictorial and narrative elements from Buzzati. In one of the numerous episodes invented in the second part of the film, Tonio goes through the rooms of the palace accompanied by Almerina. As Tonio and Almerina walk through the room, the audience can see the enlarged colour plates from the illustrated book on the walls, although only the first three can be clearly distinguished.

The rooms of the king's palace are decorated with other paintings by Buzzati, such as *Ornitophorus* (1958) (0:50:15), immediately transfigured in the following shot in *Il ritratto del califfo Mash er Rum e delle sue 20 mogli* (1958) (0:50:25). In the same way, in the room where the confrontation between Leonzio and Tonio regarding the magician's honesty or guilt takes place ("you would like to be a man and you're not even a bear!"; 0:54:25), we see on the walls other plates taken from *I miracoli di Val Morel* (0:54:04): 12. *Il Serpenton dei mari*, 11. *Attacco al vescovo*,

39. *I marziani*, 2. *La balena volante*, bordered at the base by a decorative element taken from one of them, 15. *Serata asolana*. At the centre of the next scene another enlarged and framed plate can be seen, taken from 18. *I ronfioni* (0:54:27).

Mattotti adds another episode in his movie in which *I Miracoli* takes centre stage. In order to free the magician and Tonio from prison, Almerina follows De Ambrosiis' instructions and goes to the sanctuary of Santa Zara to take the tooth of the Serpenton and pronounce the magic formula that triggers the apocalypse: the sea monster is freed, the two friends escape from prison, and the decisive battle between two hybrid species—the sea monster and the humanized bears—take places. In the shrine, Almerina finds two illustrations on the wall at the end of the sanctuary that correspond to two religious tablets from *Miracoli:* 13. *Il vecchio della montagna* and 2. *La balena volante* (1:06:20), together with others on the side walls that are less visible and erased by time.

Mattotti inserts yet another work by Buzzati in the filmic narration. Again, in the second part of the film, when King Leonzio becomes aware that life in the palace is quite different from life in the mountains, the voice-off of the old bear seems to read the king's loneliness and bitterness in his thoughts. This scene is closely linked to the next one, that of Leonzio's premonitory dream; in this nightmare, the wind and the mountains come alive and say: "Leonzio why have you abandoned us, where are you going, Leonzio? Come back, come back, Leonzio! Your Majesty, Your Majesty!" (0:51:30) and we seem to hear again the magic of the wind in Matteo's advice to the protagonist of *Il segreto del bosco vecchio* (1935).

Colonized vs. migrants

When *LIFE* magazine published some colour plates of *Bears* in 1948, in order to avoid any allusion to the Russian army that was about to win against Germany, it highlighted the episode of the Fascist censorship related to the substitution of a drawing (Schiavon). Years later, Buzzati himself recalls the episode as follows:

> I remember that one day—it was during the Nazi-Fascist period—without any malicious intentions I drew the entrance of the victorious Ursine army in a city that, like all the cities of the old fairy tales, had a Nordic architecture; in short, it looked deucedly like a German city. As I took it to Radius he said, "Are you crazy? Do you want the newspaper to be seized? And just now, when the Russians have advanced into Germany?" This was the reason why, in a few hours,

> I had to improvise another scene to replace the triumphal entrance, which, to tell the truth, did not turn out badly at all: namely the ring dance of bears during the night party in the garden of the palace. (qtd. in Ferrari 53)

There have indeed been many different political readings of the work, several of them recent (Fracassa; Truglio): Are the "rustic bears" a parody of the Russian invasion or the landing of the Allies in Sicily? Are Molfetta's war boars allegories of airships or atomic weapons? Can the Granduca be reread as a Nazi dictator? Is it possible to find analogies between the corruption of the bears and the Italian bourgeoisie, easy prey to luxuries and affluence, in the Fascist era?

Critics have observed that Buzzati keeps his distance in the difficult and changing post-war Italian political scenario, witnessed by the fact that he does not take a stance in the alternating editorships of *Il Corriere*, before and after the Fascist era, where he continued to work without changing political affiliation. It should not be forgotten, however, that Buzzati was a war correspondent for *Il Corriere* between 1939 and 1943 and that one of his tasks was to promote the Italian empire in Africa. Buzzati's strategies were not those of open opposition to the Fascist regime, but rather those of aggrandizing, when possible, the vicissitudes of anti-heroes (Caspar, "Vergani" and *L'Africa*; Schiavon).

Critics have widely emphasized the fairy-tale character of *Bears*, suggesting it was in line with the characteristic mode of escapism during the Second World War. What many have not realized was that Buzzati's characteristic lightness and irony hid some very serious social issues that come into play in this work. The narrative tools that he typically used—fantasy and disengagement—were disliked by certain critics because they were far from the neorealist taste of the 1930s and 1940s in Italy (Caspar, "Vergani" and *L'Africa*; Schiavon). Notwithstanding this critique, Buzzati not only managed to successfully represent the colonial question and racial conflict in a children's story but also alerted the reader of the different dynamics with which one group tends to dominate another, from the violence of battles to deviousness, cunning, and deception.

Moreover, the representation of a conflict between opposing sides (bears vs. men, ghosts, the Gatto Mammone [the Cat Demon], the troll) leads one to think of the last phases of the war. However, this representation was also the fruit of the author's personal experience as a war correspondent: he was sent first to Naples, then to Messina, and even embarked on the cruiser *Fiume* during war expeditions;

he was also sent to the Italian colonies in Ethiopia. It is therefore not surprising or inconsistent that we find warrior and even colonialist inclinations in *Bears* that may today seem anachronistic and reprehensible, but at the same time may be seen as a form of respect for diversity.

The conflict put into play by Buzzati is therefore that between groups of different species (bears and men) who try to live together for reasons of opportunity, but where one species (the bears) ends up adopting the worst habits and vices of the other species (the men). Transformed into men, the bears become bad, vice-ridden, ambitious, envious, and quarrelsome, the worst men imaginable—every possible variety of vice illustrated through the representation of the house of vices.

When Leonzio fights against the Serpenton to face a natural catastrophe that has befallen the capital of the kingdom and to free the city of which he has by now become king, he loses his own life. As his last wish, the dying king summons the bears to return to their dear old mountains. But the Buzzatian ending is not yet complete. On this one occasion only, the two groups are divided internally according to age; another human temptation is invoked and then rejected: as a last attempt to convince the adults to stay, the children appeal to the little bears, a last song of the sirens. The pet bears, born and raised in captivity—one might say, in today's terms, second-generation migrants—resist the lure of play, fun, and treats. Buzzati seems to be suggesting that the best solution to the conflict—once it has become clear that coexistence is impossible—is therefore not the peaceful coexistence between groups of different origins, but rather separation and return to their respective homelands.

Reformulated in modern-day terminology, we could say that it is the story of a community that migrates for reasons of necessity—migrating in search of food and better living conditions—and that tries to cohabit peacefully but, on the contrary, become domesticated. We find here a clear denunciation of the domination and of the subjugation of migrants who become domesticated under the new regime (Guha and Spivak; Said).

Mattotti increases the conflictual dimension and makes it explicit, while continuously encouraging reconciliation and the tolerance of diversity. Beginning with the narrative frame itself, he achieves this by giving all the characters in the story the right to speak. This is precisely the lesson of Subaltern Studies: gaining the right to speak is the first step to be able to tell one's own version, to be part of history, and to free oneself from the condition of subalternity. In fact, in the animated movie, everyone has a voice: the young girls and the migrants,

the dominated, and the subaltern—not only adult men. They are all, equally, protagonists.

Mattotti also increases the number of occasions where there is peaceful co-existence and peaceful encounters between different worlds. For example, when the bears come down to the valley, they encourage each other by saying "Humans are like us, only naked!" or they tell each other that humans are friends because they let their children play with teddy bears; or in the episode of the ghosts at Rocca Demona, when the bears dance with the ghosts, the storyteller Gedeone comments by saying that "the two worlds *can* meet." In Buzzati, the conflict between bears and humans reflects the representations of subaltern cultures, starting with the dominant ones, from the perspective of the sole narrator (Said). Humans fight the bears because they consider them to be subordinate and believe they can easily win the battle. Instead, the bears manage to conquer the city and Leonzio becomes its king, albeit paying a very high price: they have humanized themselves, they have transformed their nature and have become domesticated, living according to the will of humans. The invasion, or rather the migration, of the bears has heavily modified their animal culture to the point that they have become the worst among men.

In the movie, Salnitro is definitively condemned to remain among the humans because he is now irredeemable, but the colony of bears are taken back to the mountains, to their original homeland. The last words of the narrator, the old bear, are spoken: "The bears are where they should be and so are the men," that is, to each his own natural environment. Buzzati condemns the subjugation and the injustices of domination—which leads directly back to Italian colonialism. The only solution he offers is the return to the mountains and the preservation of the identity of the original group. On the contrary, thanks to the multiformity of voices in the narrative frame and to the diversity of the final sanctions, Mattotti does not simply condemn colonialism but also promotes the rights of speech for migrants and subalterns, thus paving the way for a defence of nature.

Ecocriticism

Postcolonial issues and the protection of the environment have much in common. In a book dedicated to the relationship between the environment and literature, Niccolò Scaffai considers the bond between the ecocritical approach to literature and the postcolonial one:

> The postcolonial and the ecocritical approaches risk finding themselves in opposition, since the former conceives of places as spaces of crossing and intersection of cultures, and the latter—at least in its version prior to the material turn—as territories to be preserved in their original characteristics or even celebrated according to a romantic idea of purity. (69)

Scaffai prefers a literary environmental criticism to American ecocriticism (particularly that which primarily encourages a notion of wilderness, as in Thoureau and Emerson; Buell, *Literary* and *Future*; Cronon) and to material ecocriticism (Iovino and Opperman). Differentiating ecological critique from geocriticism and the spatial turn, he points to three macro directions of twentieth-century research: the theme of the subject in relation to nature, the transformation of the landscape and the environment, and the dystopian or apocalyptic that derives from the resulting awareness of environmental risk and the state of crisis that the Earth is currently experiencing.

In Buzzati's and Mattotti's cases, the comparison between mountains and cities can be squarely placed in the first of the above-mentioned directions in which the two environments are presented with their respective characteristics as being suitable for specific inhabitants, as if to preserve an original purity, in accordance with the notion of the defence of traditional wilderness in American ecocriticism.

The comparison between city and mountains is a very common theme in Buzzati's poetics. Nella Giannetto has warned us against simplifying the issue by creating a facile opposition according to which "the same critical commonplace that sees Buzzati's mountains as something perennially positive makes the city a material and symbolic place of the opposite sign" (15). Instead, both should be interpreted as complex places. Indeed, the tendency to see mountains as entirely positive and cities as entirely negative is an oversimplification. In the same way, interpreting the bears' return to the mountains as a serene return to the golden age and to childhood is an oversimplification. In the context of the history of children's literature, Maria Truglio establishes *Bears* as a true literary milestone by providing a nuanced interpretation of this exceptional work.

Bears has changed the vision of a certain kind of childhood literature that celebrates childhood as the age of wonder, spontaneity, and creativity, and as the age that children must leave early to become rational young adults. In order to

grow up, the child must identify with the protagonists of the fairy tales; fairy tales tell the story of the passage from the family home to an unknown elsewhere, a place of adventures, where the child will acquire the skills to be recognized as an adult. In other words, this is yet another strategy of colonization and domestication of the child in specific places. According to Truglio, it was Buzzati who challenged this classic perspective of children's literature, making the passage less clear-cut and introducing situations of conflict:

> Buzzati's inversion of the home-away-home structure, mapped here onto the mountain-city-mountain itinerary of the bears, implies that the book does not convey a conservative or colonizing message to its target audience. Put bluntly, the picturebook does not suggest that the playful freedoms of childhood are temporary indulgences that must be outgrown and tamed. Neither the narrative itinerary, in which the bears leave behind the restrictive spaces of adulthood, nor the imagery, in which tightly squared-in visual fields become arenas for violence, suggest that young people should be walled-in. This refusal to promote the domestication of youthful freedoms does not, however, result in an easy utopian solution. The picturebook, I submit, goes beyond a mere nostalgia for the idealized time-space of a primitive, youthful golden age, just as it goes beyond (and critiques) the formal nostalgia for allegory. (9)

By praising the innovative strategy of speaking to a dual audience made up of adults and children at the same time, Truglio underlines the importance of *Bears* and its ability to overcome simplification; she does not, however, rule out a didactic function that could be linked to the protagonist of the fairy tale. Indeed, the protagonist of *Bears* is not only Tonio, nor is it only the individual children and their educational and personal life journeys of leaving home. Buzzati's fairy tale is much more complex and Mattotti's transformation helps the audience to understand it.

Once again Buzzati is well ahead of his time, as he will be with his other double works *Poema* and *Miracoli*. *Bears* heralds a form of children's literature that encourages its young readers to discuss social themes in ways that they can understand. On the one hand, we find the colonized-colonizers trope represented by the issue of migrants' rights, and, on the other hand, the mountains-city dichotomy

that represents the protection of the environment *tout court*. This interpretation of *Bears* prevails over a narrow reading of classic children's literature—namely, that which is aimed at the growth of young adults, both as individuals and in the family. Fairy tales help educate children to achieve independence from their parents and to be part of a global world where much bigger problems have to be faced. If *Bears* is not to be read as an attempt "to colonize children, ultimately for the benefit of adults" (Truglio 9), it is certainly possible to reread it as a way of proposing the themes of migrants and the protection of the environment to both children and adults.

In this interpretation, places need not be only the allegorical place of "home and elsewhere," the places assigned to children's education, but the places become environments deserving of protection regardless of the individual lives of the characters who inhabit them. In the movie, places are represented in such a disproportionate way with respect to the characters that this gives them added significance and importance in their own right. The choice of the media—the animated film—allows Mattotti to give ample space to the representation of the environment—the mountains, the valleys, the sky, the sea, the cities—which thus becomes the real protagonists of the story.

The process of transposition is thus complete: the number of narrators has redoubled and the environment has become the protagonist of the story. Unlike Buzzati's illustrated book, in Mattotti's animated movie Sicily is re-invented, it comes closer to the spectator and is made more believable. Although the film constantly repeats that Sicily is no longer what it once was, Sicily continues to exist as a generator of stories, even beyond the end of the story. And perhaps it is from the South of the world, as postcolonial theory and eco-criticism teach us, that the attention toward the two great themes that Mattotti has proposed must re-emerge: the discrimination of social groups and the protection of the natural environment.

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