CHAPTER 5

Laura Orvieto and the Classical Heritage in Italy before the Second World War*

Valentina Garulli

To Elda Baldi Montesano, who gently opened my eyes
to the wonderland of literature, to life.

Introduction

Molti e molti anni fa c'era nell'Asia, vicino al mare, una città che si chiamava Troia. Il re di Troia si chiamava Ilo...¹

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Laura Orvieto’s works (ordered by date):

Orvieto, Leo e Lia = Laura Orvieto, Leo e Lia. Storia di due bambini italiani con una governante inglese [Firenze: Bemporad, 1909], illustrazioni di Vanna Vinci (Firenze: Giunti, 2011).


Orvieto, Principesse = Laura Orvieto, Principesse, bambini e bestie (Firenze: Bemporad, 1914).

Orvieto, Fiorenza = Laura Orvieto, Sono la tua serva e tu sei il mio Signore. Così visse Florence Nightingale (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1920).

Orvieto, Beppe racconta = Laura Orvieto, Beppe racconta la guerra (Firenze: Bemporad, 1925).

These words, written more than twenty years ago, introduced me for the first time to a fascinating fantastical world, which would continue to engross me so much that it became my everyday world: the classical world. These words, so maternal and charming, are Laura Orvieto’s, who opens her retelling of the great and spellbinding story of Troy, addressing her children Leo and Lia within the literary fiction and, through them, children all around the world.

All around the world, indeed, because this book—Storie della storia del mondo. Greche e barbari—was immediately and lastingly successful and was translated into several languages. It is known in the English-speaking world as Stories of Greece and the Barbarians (1966), in French as Légendes du monde grec et barbare (1924), and in Dutch as Grieken en Trojanen: De ondergang van Troje (1927).

Orvieto, La forza = Laura Orvieto, Storie della storia del mondo. La forza di Roma (Firenze: Bemporad, 1933).


Orvieto, Storia di Angiolo e Laura = Laura Orvieto, Storia di Angiolo e Laura (Fondazione Carlo Marchi. Quaderni, 11), a c. di Caterina Del Vivo (Città di Castello, PG: Leo S. Olschki, 2001).

Orvieto, Viaggio = Laura Orvieto, Viaggio meraviglioso di Gianni nel paese delle parole. Fantasia grammaticale (Fondazione Carlo Marchi. Quaderni, 32), a c. di Caterina Del Vivo (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2007).

Angiolo Orvieto’s works cited:


In the texts cited below I will use expanded character spacing in order to emphasise some words and concepts.

1 “Ilus was a great builder who, many centuries ago, reigned over Troy which lies in north-west Asia Minor” (Orvieto, Stories, 9).

2 Orvieto, Stories. This translation is quoted in this chapter only when it does not omit anything of the original text.


4 Trans. J. Henzel (Zutphen: W.J. Thieme). A whole list of Laura’s books, including their translations into different languages, is found in Caterina Del Vivo, ed., Fondo Orvieto. Serie 1. Corrispondenza generale. Lettere A–B, premessa di Paolo Bagnoli (Firenze: Polistampa, 1994), 49–50: the papers of the “Fondo Orvieto” (ACGV, Florence) attest that Bemporad publisher sold translation rights into Spanish and Hebrew for Storie greche e barbare in 1928 and 1955, respectively. Del Vivo, ed., Fondo Orvieto, 50, also mentions a translation into Czech. See also Caterina Del Vivo, ‘Educare narrando ‘storie.’ Miti classici, tradizione ebraica, echi del