

|| REVIEW

PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDHOOD

Luiza CARAIVAN

The latest issue of *Alkemie Journal*¹ focuses on the topic of childhood regarded from various perspectives: literary, philosophical, psychological, educational or poetical. The first section includes articles written by researchers and professors who discuss the concept of childhood in connection with different literary works or films whereas the second and the third sections include poems, aphorisms or interviews related to this period of life.

Sophia Mehrbrey opens the gate to this comprehensive study on childhood with the question “How to Access Childhood?”, searching for answers that have as a starting point the fact that in Western societies, the child rarely has a voice, although adult writers produce literary pieces about children or for children. Despite the fact that there are published texts written by children, these are rarely promoted. Authors who produce children’s literature often find themselves in front of a paradox: although childhood is considered to be decisive for the life of an adult, it appears deeply enigmatic when they look back to it. Mehrbrey provides a point of view of how childhood was seen in the Middle Ages, Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the 19th and 20th centuries, only to conclude that children’s literature written by children (or teenagers) does not describe peaceful times, giving the example of Anne Frank’s *Diary* or the more recent *You Don’t Know What War Is: The Diary of a Young Girl From Ukraine* by Yeva Skalietska.

Aline Lebel starts her article, “Confronting Child Suffering. An Analysis of the Experience of Evil, between Literature and Philosophy”, from a famous literary fragment dedicated to the question of childhood suffering: Ivan’s speech in *The Brothers Karamazov*. She analyzes the philosophical and moral legacy left to literature and moves to Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, in order to discuss the same issue of suffering. Dostoevsky’s work can be used as a starting point to address this question not only due

1 Stănișor, Mihaela-Gențiana, Răzvan Enache (eds.). *Alkemie. L’enfance*. 2024/1. No.33. Classiques Garnier: Paris.

to the motif of ill-treatment towards children but also because of the philosophical discourse that allows it to become a representative theoretical model. The author demonstrates that Toni Morrison continues precisely where Dostoevsky stopped, by rereading Ivan's speech in connection with a famous case of the abolitionist cause: the infanticide of the slave Margaret Garner.

Fidji Fournier discusses the works of La Fontaine in "The Child, Unlikely Recipient of La Fontaine's Fables in the 17th Century". The study underlines the fact that the children in La Fontaine's *Fables* are all presented as big ridiculous louts, unbearable due to their faults. The author advises the reader to be aware of the influence of modern representations shaped by a renewed conception of childhood and by the secular reception of the Fables which tend to offer a biased perception. 21st century readers should resist the temptation of applying modern representations to historically incompatible realities and should remember the original 'target readership': aristocratic salons.

Minh Hoang Pham's study "Experimentalism in Naturalist Education of the Book II of *Émile*" discusses the close correlation that Jean-Jacques Rousseau establishes between empiricist epistemology and naturalist education which implies another lesson: human culture must be combined with respect for nature and for humanity. According to Rousseau, in the second book of *Émile*, experience must be the only teacher for a child who grows up receiving wisdom and morality thanks to that teacher's efforts.

Françoise Bombard, in "Perspectives on Childhood in Giraudoux's Theatre", analyses the plays of Jean Giraudoux, concluding that adult characters often have an Edenic image of childhood, whereas children characters in Giraudoux's plays offer contrasting representations: their interest in games starts from mischievousness and ends with challenges. The dialogues where children intervene express a constant demand: that of truth, of the absolute which makes them non-conformists, even potential rebels, while the representations of childhood allow Giraudoux to oppose constraints.

Amélie Goutaudier's study "Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and the Cosmogony of Childhood" focuses on the fact that Saint-Exupéry's texts are neither the work of a pediatrician nor that of a childcare worker, as he explores, through a range of childish figures, his own relationships with childhood in order to revive in adults the feeling of childhood. Goutaudier maps the writer's nostalgic feelings and analyses *The Little Prince*, a work that allows children to have a voice that is cannot be silenced.

Saber Idoudi's "The Prodigal Children" takes a look at Paul Valéry's

and Emil Cioran's works, as they are nihilistic writers traumatized by the early discovery of nothingness, who decide to break definitively with childish naivety.

Édith Perry's article "Patrick Modiano and the Lost Children" examines Patrick Modiano's novels, marked by absence and loss connected to childhood. The child, a victim of parents disappears from the memory of the adult he becomes thanks to the writing of fiction. The world of childhood appears to be a priori happy because its interferences with the adult world are softened by imagination. Illusion makes childhood bearable although the little ones can understand that they have to compromise in order to fit into the adult world. The childhood memory becomes fiction like any other.

In "*Chevreuse* by Modiano, Writing Childhood Beyond Silence and Memory Gaps", Marie Vergnol examines the novel; that tells the story of a childhood perceived through the prism of memory. Childhood is in a troubled and ambivalent relationship with speech, as it is constantly threatened by oblivion and amnesia. In *Chevreuse*, childhood is rediscovered and this offers the opportunity for the present to recover its full value.

In "Poetry or Childhood Rediscovered at Will", Caroline Narracci starts from Baudelaire's definition of genius as "childhood rediscovered at will", and questions the modalities of the resumption of childhood in the poetic work of Yves Bonnefoy in order to show how childhood is related to poetry.

Alberto Russo Previtali's "Milo De Angelis and Childhood. A Poetic Return to Origins" explores the dimension of childhood in the poetry of Milo De Angelis following two directions: childhood as a phase of life dominated by astonishment and affirmative openness to the world, and childhood as the name of the subject's prelinguistic and maternal origin. Firstly, childhood is the name of a temporal and experiential dimension in relation to which the moments lived by the adult are arranged. Secondly, childhood is an unattainable and confusing dimension, outside language, a conjunction with the origins.

Moving from literature to music and cinema, Sébastien Bost analyses the song *Rue Battant*, interpreted by Alex Beaupain based on the Jungian archetype of puer aeternus, Marie-Reine Mouton looks at Tarkovsky's movies to present childhood as an image and Léthicia Obono Ngou-Milama introduces the Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety who drew on a childhood of dreams, hopes, uncertainties, drama, poetry and melancholy to create a new language that challenged the narrative structures of cinema.

The interview section of the journal offers an insight into Michel

Orcel's world, offering the writer's views on the future of literature and translation, France and the world and into Luc-Olivier d'Alange's book *Lucid World. Interviews on Meteorites and the Signs of Time*, published in 2022. Both interviews are conducted by Mihaela-Gențiana Stănișor.

Finally, the creative section of the journal gives the reader the opportunity to enjoy poems, aphorisms, essays, short stories or diary entries by Stéphane Barsacq, Jean Marc Sourdillon, Fabrice Farre, Sylvie Fabre, Pierre Maubé and Ciprian Vălcan.

Notes on the author:

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