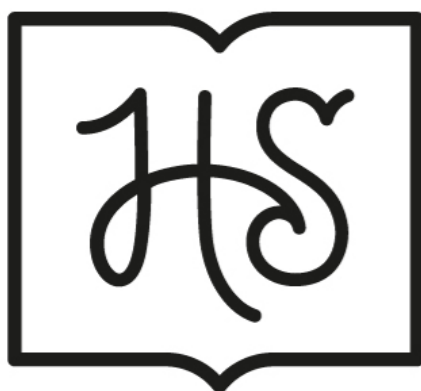


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## BOOK REVIEW:

### Between lights and shadows: European childhood in the Twentieth century.<sup>41</sup>

Anna DEBÈ<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy

The title of the book edited by professors Gecchele, Polenghi and Dal Toso contains a provocative question which points out the main volume's objective, that is to explore from several points of view the idea of childhood developed in the Europe of the Twentieth century. Is it still possible to define the 1900s as the *century of the child*, as the famous Swedish pedagogist Ellen Key did with optimism<sup>42</sup>? Trying to give an answer to this question, the authors of the contributions, Italian and foreign scholars, outline an analysis of the last century with an historical and educational perspective.

“The 1900s: the century of the child” is the first volume of an international book series dedicated to the “History of education in Europe”, directed by Andras Nemeth, Simonetta Polenghi and Cristina Yanes. Promoting an articulated historiographic approach, the collection aims to encourage authors from all Europe to engage with the most important emerging themes, deepened through the use of different and original sources and methodologies.

The volume just published is based on the awareness that the European culture has not always recognized the peculiarities and potentialities of infancy during the past ages. Only in the Twentieth century, that opened with great hopes for childhood, children gained a central position not only inside families but also in the wider social context, in particular thanks to the dissemination of Activism pedagogy, Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Developmental psychology. However, several studies in history of education highlighted the persistence of shadows in the same century, especially related to the criticisms of the world conflicts, to the totalitarianisms, to the institutionalization of people with problematic conditions of life, to the

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<sup>41</sup> In the original: *Il Novecento: il secolo del bambino? [The 1900s: the century of the child?]*, edited by Mario GECHELE, Simonetta POLENGHI and Paola DAL TOSO. Parma (Italy): Junior-Spaggiari Publishing, 2017, pp. 464, ISBN 978-88-8434-805-0.

<sup>42</sup> KEY, E. *Barnets arhundrale*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1900.

still strong presence of violence and abuses, to the contradictions introduced by consumerism and globalization.

After a first part where the recent historiography on childhood and childhood education is outlined (E. Becchi; S. Polenghi), the volume “The 1900s: the century of the child?” reconstructs the articulated European framework of the period. Several countries (UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, USSR, Hungary and Romania) are examined, highlighting how different cultural, economic and political environments have produced different ways to conceive the first stage of human life (H. Cunningham; M. Ostenc; C. Ghizzoni; H. Rosenbaum; G. Trigueros Gordillo and J.L. Rubio Mayoral; D. Caroli; G. Baska and J. Hegedús; O. Pavel; M. Gecchele).

Conversely, in the later chapters of the book an in-depth study of the Italian situation, both in its secular and religious expressions, allows to analyse some topic related to childhood, such as recognitions and preservation of children’s rights, child labor and migratory experience, absence/fragmentation of family and separation from it, parenting support services like kindergarten and infant schools (P. Dal Toso; N. Filippi; P. Alfieri; A. Debè; M. Millo; A. Bobbio; L. Milani).

In addition, particular attention is paid to the relationship between the children of the Twentieth century and the new media (i.e. books, magazines, comics, movies, television and even toys), that have an influence on child, but they are influenced by him as well (I. Mattioni; S. Fava; A. Agosti; A. Carenzio). Overall, these issues are explored in a twofold approach: on one hand, the focus is on the aspects that contributed to create a new and positive representation of childhood; on the other, the authors do not ignore the uncertainties and the antinomies that have continued to mark this process.