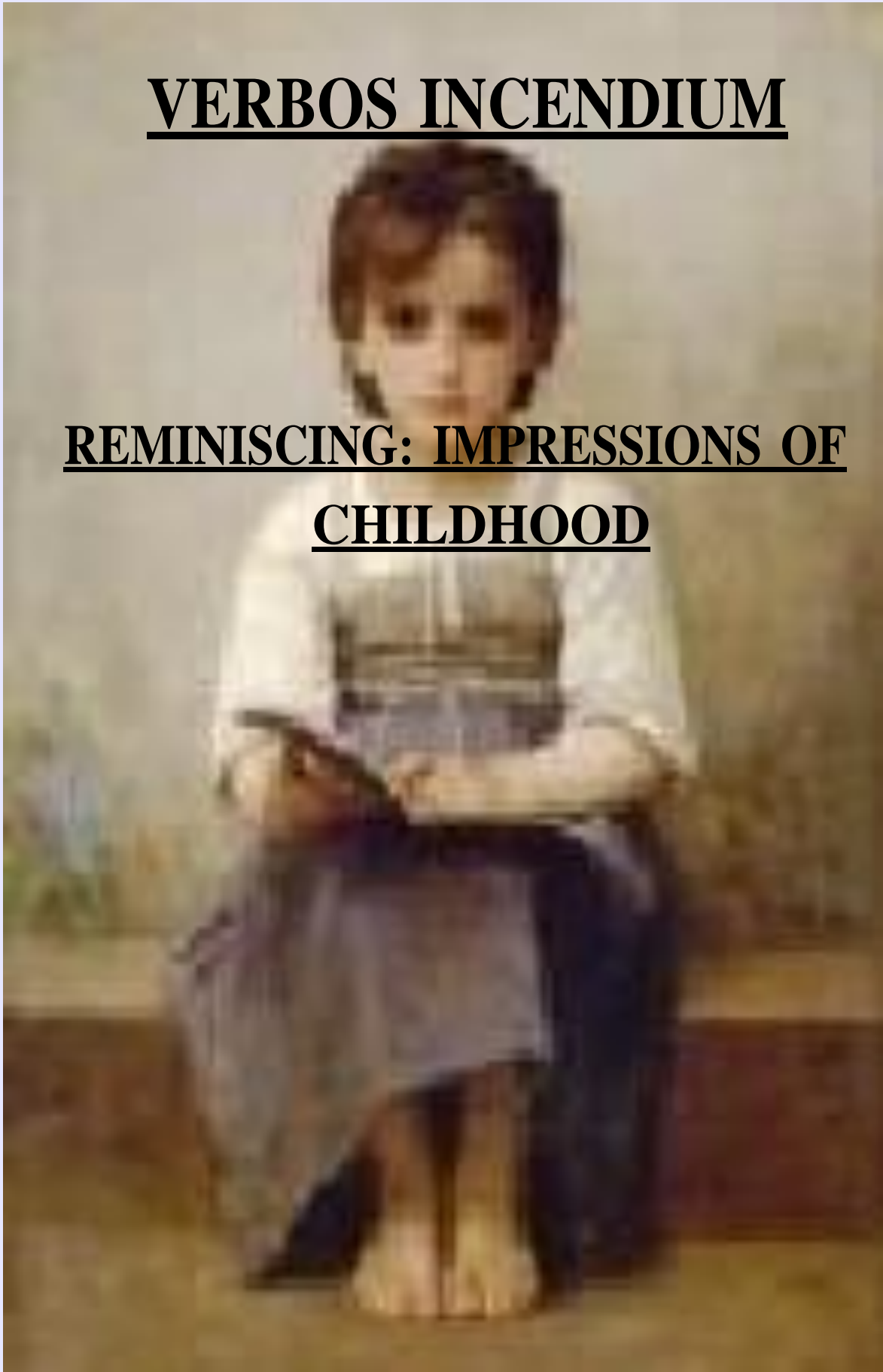


VERBOS INCENDIUM

REMINISCING: IMPRESSIONS OF CHILDHOOD



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THE TINY GHOST OF WREN

On a Friday afternoon, Amelia found herself looking through the bookshelves at the Wren Library, feeling the back covers of different books, looking for the perfect book that she could read over the weekend. She selected *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and was just about to leave the library when she heard a loud crash. *Smash!* She jumped up because of the sound. It was past six and the public library was usually deserted at this hour. She looked around for the old librarian but could not see anyone in sight. She felt conflicted between whether to dash out at the speed of light or to stay and investigate the noise.

Having read three books by the Queen of Crime Fiction, Agatha Christie, over the last few days, she felt her detective streak come alive and chose to probe the matter. She stepped forward in the direction of the noise. Her footsteps echoed. Intent on finding the source of the noise, Amelia did not take notice of when she entered the restricted section. No one was there. The silence was deafening. On the floor was an oil lamp, shattered into pieces. She recognized it as the object that had caused the sudden noise. On touching it, she found that it was still hot, insinuating that the lamp's owner was close by. She called out, "Hello! Is anybody there?" There was no response. She called out again but did not receive an answer. Fear rose within her. It was dark in there and her palms began to feel sweaty. She was pondering on returning when she suddenly heard a sob. Terrified, she began to look around for the source of the sound. She saw a small figure that was slouched in the chair at the far end of the room. It was weeping loudly. Amelia was taken aback. A part of her was scared, but she felt sympathetic at the same time. She decided to look into the matter. Summoning her courage, she tip-toed towards the whimpering figure. "Hello," she said in the sweetest voice she could muster. The small white figure looked up at her with its curious eyes. It shrieked loudly at the sight of the girl and hid under the chair. "Well, well, there's no need to be afraid now. I mean no harm. Come out, and maybe I can help you?" She said affectionately. The eyes peered at her from underneath the chair. She smiled softly, as if to say, "It's okay. You can come out." After a few seconds of stillness, the figure rose and sat on the chair. Its big, beautiful eyes conveyed sadness.

"Who are you?" It asked Amelia.

"I'm Amelia, and you?"

“They call me the tiny ghost of Wren.”

“Oh! Is that so? I never believed that ghosts existed. You seem harmless to me.”

“You see, I am neither evil nor a scary ghost. I am just a spirit. And I stay here, in this section of the library.”

“Oh, I see. But why were you weeping?”

“Well, it is a long story. I am not sure if you would want to listen to it.”

“I do. I do.”

“Alright. I will tell you about it. Have you heard about the story of *La Llorona*?”

“*La Llorona*? What is that? I’ve never heard of this before.”

“*La Llorona* is also known as the weeping ghost. She roams around weeping and mourning the loss of her children whom she drowned in a fit of rage after she saw her husband with another woman. I am the younger of the two children of *La Llorona*. After my mother drowned us, she realized her mistake and tried to save us. After making futile attempts, she drowned herself too.”

“Oh, dear! That is so tragic. I’m so sorry to hear what happened to you.”

“Yes. Now I’m all alone. Neither do I have friends nor family. I have spanned continents in search of a perfect place. It was only after this tough search that I decided to make this place my home. Usually, by this time, everyone leaves and I roam around freely. But today, when I was flying about, I got entangled in a cobweb because of which the lamp that I was carrying fell from my hand and broke. It was my favourite lamp; its size was perfect for me. All the other lamps are either too big or too heavy. As soon as I looked at the shattered lamp, I felt despondent and couldn’t think of anything. So, I broke down crying.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that’s not such a big deal. I have the perfect lamp for you. It is slightly different from your oil lamp. Here, hold this. This is called a searchlight. You switch it on by pressing this button.”

He gazed at her in amazement. This girl had not been scared of him like other people, and, she had just given him a new lamp. He was delighted.

“Thank you so much! It is perfect.”

“You’re welcome. You must remember how to use it. Now that we’re friends, you’re no longer alone. I come to this library every day after school, we can chat and have fun.”

The tiny ghost of Wren had never felt happier.

-Arushi Saran, II Year



Pulitzer Prize Winning feature photography *THE VULTURE AND THE LITTLE GIRL* (1994)
by Kevin Carter

In this picture, a young girl who was trying to make her way to a feeding centre, collapsed and a vulture landed behind her, making it seem like it was waiting for her to die. This deeply affected Kevin Carter who committed suicide a few months after winning the prize. According to the reports, the girl did survive but died fourteen years later due to Malarial fever.

REMINISCING

She started looking for something,
something I am not yet aware of.

She looks for it everywhere,
it seems as if she can't find it.

She tried hard, and at last,
she found it in the bottom corner of her closet.

“A shoebox?” I asked.

“No, not just an ordinary shoebox”, she said.

With a gleam in her eyes, she opened the box,
as if she opened a door to our happy place.

Oh, the pictures, oh the memories!

All took us back to the blissful days of our childhood.

Let's rewind a bit, let's reminisce a little.

With every picture that we went through,

We remembered the beautiful story that it captured.

Pictures of her first day of school,

not wanting mommy to leave.

Daddy took the photo of both the mother and daughter crying.

when she got her first award,

or when I didn't let her play with my toy cars.

When daddy took her to the zoo for the first time,

And mommy did not let her eat the ice-cream saying “You will catch a cold”.

Oh! the angry face you made,

and Daddy took the photo of you.

Remember the time when I broke the vase and mommy scolded you?

and how hard we laughed.

Oh brother, we had the best childhood,

“I wonder why we wanted to grow up back then!” she said.

and now that we are all grown up,

all we wish is to go back.

-Aakanksha Panwar, I Year



BULLYING by Agrata Tiwari, I Year

Childhood overshadowed by bullying leads to an adulthood full of psychological disturbances and deep scars. Research has claimed that individuals who were bullied as a kid were more likely to suffer from a poor physical and psychological health, later in life. Bullying can impact a person's social skills as well as induce insecurities related to self-identity and relationships. It hampers the growth and happiness of a person in ways which the bullies can't even imagine. One must say no to bullying and yes to empathy.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

A bright sunny day,
and a magnificent blue sky,
she comes inside the room,
bolts the door,
and shuts off the window.
Whipping me with a stick,
she asks me to come out.

When I hesitate
she forces me to get down,
holding my hand brutally.

Her nails digging in,
ripping my skin off.
I try not to make a noise,
but am I somebody,
who is devoid of senses?
I'm a child with emotions.

A child whose curiosity
has been murdered brutally.

I want to look pretty.
I want to look healthy.
I crave to see the world,
the way other kids see it.

I wonder, if somebody
will open the doors for me.

To a world where,

I can live freely,
without any fear,
without any doubts,
where I'm loved
and not tyrannized.

-Agrata Tiwari, I Year

LEARNINGS OF MY CHILDHOOD

As a decade comes to an end, I sit back to pen down a few flashbacks of this life of mine filled with stories about mythology, dips in the holy river Ganga, crazy fights for the desserts made from milk and cream and serious learnings that have taken deep roots in my heart. One can guess by my previous statements that I spent my childhood in the surreal town Varanasi.

Starting with my favorite, humorous memories, I would like to say that being the youngest child of a joint family, I was the most adored kid who was full of tantrums. Watching daily soaps with my grandmother and enacting those scenes in front of my junior school teachers earned me the name *Drama Queen*. The teachers too enjoyed my unnecessary innocent babbling.

If one ever has a round table conference about childhood, I bet no one will leave their respective places without discussing their summer vacations. Every summer vacation started with attending swimming classes in the river Ganga itself. I was never a water enthusiast (I still am not!). So swimming was the most annoying part of my vacation. Students make excuses to avoid school, I did the same to avoid these classes.

The famous '*blue lassi*' was my energy drink to survive those disturbing classes. When you come to Varanasi, especially in winters, you can't avoid two things. One, watching sunrise on the boats. Even today when I just gaze at the sky while sitting on the Ganga Ghat, the color changing patterns teaches me so much about human nature and the similarity between our thoughts and the never-ending sky. Second, *Maliyo*, which is a kind of foamed milk. Being a person with great affection for sweets, I think Romeo didn't love Juliet as much as I love *Maliyo*.

I proudly state that I am a literature student. But my fondness for literature didn't develop in the past few years. Rather than listening to lullabies, I always preferred the Indian mythological stories narrated by my mother. So Indian literature was injected into my blood from a very young age.

The period of childhood leaves a deep impression on a human's life. Some people have the most beautiful childhood whereas for others it turns out to be a traumatic experience. So much so that they make it an inspiration to run away and give themselves a better life. This is the time when a child's heart is like wet soil. If it's shaped properly once, it's safely solid forever.

My childhood has given me some lessons that shall remain with me for eternity. Gratitude is and will be the biggest value that my roots have taught me. Every year, my mother made sure to take me to the *Manikarnika Ghat* - the burning ghat of my city. The place where I was taught the connection of life, death and karma at the age of seven. The same place where I was taught how important it is to be grateful about the things we have.

Literature is a part of my life and sometimes I feel my life has become poetry. A poetry which started with an alluring childhood and a poetry that shall continue till I give it a beautiful ending. Between the *Satanic Verses* and the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, between the *Train to Pakistan* and the *End of India*, one ideal which I see repeating throughout; from my writings and from other's is to be a learner, today and forever.

-Aayushi Sharma, I Year

A CALL TO MY CHILDHOOD

Closing my eyes, I reminisce about you.
A wave of NOSTALGIA, runs me through.
Blissful traces of times so GOLDEN.
Oft it feels too good to be true.

Paper planes and boats fluttered our hearts.
Crayon scribblings were pieces of art.
Even with tears, I managed to smile.
Nursery rhymes, were my all-time 'Mozart'.

Scraped knees and elbows; red and blue.
Crooked, chipped teeth... Just one or two.
Blunt hair, like toadstools on heads.
Frocks and headbands with buckled shoes.

The perpetual love for objects unreal,
Gums and sour candies, a big deal!
Mum's make-up... A precious treasure chest.
Just like a princess, it made me feel.

Friends and friendships were kept so close,
our fellowship mattered more than egos.
The 'pinky', though tiny but mighty!
Promises intact... Whether with friends or foes.

The summer sun was a true delight!
The rain and thunder made us squeal with fright.
No duties, no worries... Just plain innocence.
No dark places... But a beacon of light.

I call you back, my beloved Childhood,
If I could turn back time, I certainly would!
To stand in the shoes of a tiny little girl.
To laugh and rejoice where once I stood...

-Hrishita H. Nayal, I Year



THE PAINTER AND THE CHILD (1923) by Pablo Picasso

Like many artists of the 20th century, Pablo Picasso was also obsessed with children's art. He famously said, "*Every child is an artist.*" This painting captures the jubilant mood and an unruly, self-consciously slapdash handling that is deliberately childlike. By the 20th century, the child, once ignored in art, had become a metaphor for the purity and intensity of the artist's vision.

MOMENTS FROM A LIFE LONG FORGOTTEN

I can hear Papa calling me, I think I should open my eyes. Oof, it's time to leave the bed already! I wonder how do they wake up so early? How do they even muster the courage to leave the comfort of this fluffy bed? But wait, who wakes up Papa and Mumma? Or do they just know when to wake up, like Mumma always knows exactly when I'd want to go to the toilet at night? Wow! Is that another superpower adults possess? I wonder when I'll be able to acquire something like this, to be like them. Possibly I'll help them with their work too.

Ohho right now, I need to wake up and brush my teeth. I learnt how to do that recently, all by myself. I don't bother Papa with it anymore, nor do I soil my clothes with water. Apart from the froth and bubbles, the fun part is that I can eat a little toothpaste in the end and no one would know (I'm hoping you won't let my secret out either). It's so minty and fresh, and when I drink water over it later, it feels like I'm drinking an icy cold drink. It gives me the chill but it's worth the thrill.

Mumma says God is watching us, but then where is he and why does he watch us? Does he watch all of our movements? Isn't it unfair that he gets to watch us on his TV all day while I'm allowed only two hours?

It's sad that I have to choose between cartoons. They are all my favourite! If you start watching one, you won't feel like leaving it and the songs are so catchy that I can sing along after listening to them just once. I wonder why the rhymes and lessons at school aren't like these songs! I promise that I can memorize everything then.

Though Bhaiya makes it up by taking me to the park instead and there we play lots of games. I can even cross three bars on the monkey bars now and Bhaiya says, I'll be as tall as him soon if I keep up this good work.

Mumma comes with us too. She shows me all the different types of leaves and shades of green. I can even show you the tallest tree and the shortest bush in the park now! We even befriended the various ladybirds and dogs in the park. Though, I could never befriend the cat. She always seems in a hurry and runs away as soon as I try to reach her.

Mumma sings while she's doing her work. She knows so many songs, it's like the food in our fridge which never runs out! I try to sing with her, I don't understand the meaning, but it feels good to do what she's doing. At night, I always pester her for a new story and she never says no to my wishes.

We travel to Narnia, rescue princes, fight evil forces, and once, I was the one who had the power to save everyone from a deadly disease that caused everyone to stay away from each other and wash their hands again and again. How cool is that!

After the story, Mumma would sing me a lullaby that Granma used to sing to her. Trying hard not to fall asleep, I try to imagine Granma singing like Mumma. Feeling my world at peace, in Mumma's lap, after fighting off diseases and human-shaped monsters, I give away to slumber.

-Nandini Dogra, III Year

THE GOOD OL' DAYS

Those were the days,
when I got up late,
never cared about the day and date,
all I ever did was play,
with building blocks and moulding clay.

Now I keep stumbling, to find a way
to bring back my childhood days.

Used to write the alphabet
with white chalks on a slate.

Waved a silly goodbye every day
to the dog roaming in front of my gate.

Now I keep stumbling to find a way
to bring back my childhood days.

Near the corner of the park, at the end,
we fought tiny wars with our friends,
were so carefree, never had to pretend,
had all the food in lunches our mothers would send.

Now I keep stumbling to find a way,
to bring back my childhood days.

Though it's impossible, I'd like to try,
To press a button and go back in time.
Far from the business of loss and gain,
Away from the feelings of grief and pain.

To be that naughty girl once again,
to live that good life once again.

-Sneha Deshwal, II Year

CHILDHOOD HABITS DIE HARD

I sit on my chair,

staring out at the sky.

It looks like the fire within me

was spread out in the open.

My eyes shift, to the bedside.

There is a picture of me with ma,

a movie plays on my mind.

One, two, three...

.

One.

I'm four, in my house.

I run to ma.

I hug her legs and cry complaining,

“Baba broke my block house”.

She picks me up, gives me treats

and says “Don't cry”.

.

Two.

I am ten.

I trip while running and my knee bleeds.

Surrounded by people all I heard was,

“Don't cry”.

Strong girls don't cry.

They're brave.

Shush, here look at that,

Don't cry.

Three.

I am fourteen.

Heartbroken.

I try not to cry,

but all my eyes know is to

let the anger flow and I,

sit there as he speaks,

“Don’t cry”.

Speak gracefully, or, no one

Would take you seriously.

.

Childhood habits die hard,

the ghost lingers on your shoulder

stabbing you with the nails.

So now when my hands bleed red and blue,

I don’t know

how to ask for help.

Because I am strong.

Strong girls don’t cry.

They suffer in silence.

They take in everything and they smile.

So now,

I don’t know how to tell you,

That inside my ribcage there are tears frozen,

for every time I felt something and I didn’t cry.

When I breathe, it is the smoke of my remains,

and when I write, what comes out are ashes.

-Darshita Sharma, I Year



CPC Portrait Award (July 2018) winning photograph *RED AND GREEN* by Mariola Glajcar

This portrait captures the innocence of a young girl, reminding one of the tales of *The Little Red Riding Hood*, traversing through the treacherous woods. Dipped in nature, it also has echoes of the Rousseauian noble savage.

GOODNIGHT, DEAR!

“Goodnight, dear!”, were the last words that I heard from her before falling asleep.

“Don’t be late for the meeting! And don’t forget to pay Mr. Gold this time!” screamed a familiar voice. I got up and sat on a chair. Caught up in the dream I saw last night, I couldn’t help but think about how every second of it was just beautiful. So, I decided to pen down this experience, and here’s how it began.

Frustrated because of work, I went straight to my room and sat still for an hour staring at the wall. How did I end up here? What went wrong? Why was my life, despite having all the luxuries, so empty? These questions were going in my head when something caught my attention. It was a framed painting that was kept atop the cupboard in my room. I walked towards it and shuffled through some drawers. In the lowermost drawer, I found some art pieces that I had made as a kid. I got so lost in going through those drawings that I didn’t realise when the clock struck two. I decided to sleep when, suddenly, I felt someone grab my hand and the next thing I remember was standing in front of my old house looking at a kid. *Oh, wait! That is me!* I mean me as a kid. I saw my Pop-Pop giving some orange candies to me and my brother. My mom was yelling at us to finish our glass of milk before having the sweets. Initially, I was shocked at what was happening but, when I saw the pure joy on my face after grabbing those candies, I forgot all my confusion and worries. I walked near them to see what would happen next.

The doorbell rang and mom went to open the door. It was my dad who had come back from his office. He held a little bag in his hand. The younger me screamed, “Daddy’s home!”, and went straight to hug him. After having dinner, he opened the bag which he had brought. He drew out a painting that I recognized as being the one that I saw on the cupboard.

To this day, I remember how we used to eat dinner on the terrace in the summers. My mom used to tell me, “Look at the sky, how calm it looks at night.” It didn’t make sense then but now, it does. We all need an inner state of calm to see the beautiful things life has to offer. Just like the children, who possess a peaceful mind and remain far from the storm of complexities, we also need to calm down and find joy in the little things.

Looking at the starry sky lying beside my mom, I felt a bit dizzy and the last thing I remember was her sweet voice, “Goodnight, dear!”. The next morning when I woke up, I found myself lying on the floor with the painting still clutched in my hand.

-Sukhmeet Kaur, III Year



JULIE Le BRUN LOOKING IN A MIRROR (1787) by Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun

Vigée Le Brun represents her only child, Julie, both in profile and full-face through the inclusion of a mirror and impossible perspective. The reality versus illusion play makes this painting all the more interesting. This portrait captures a new appreciation in late eighteenth-century Europe of childhood as a unique, impressionable moment of life distinct from adulthood.

I REMEMBER, I RECALL

I remember, I recall
the day with the dentist.

My aching tooth,
those puffed gums.

I remember, I recall
my close-knit group of friends.

The carelessness,
that wounded knee.

I remember, I recall
the frisking on swings.

Those ring-a-ring,
Those elephant swings.

I remember, I recall
the untroubled running.
The messy frock and shabby hair,
that outraged mother ever so fair.

I remember, I recall
my birthday in school
Those homogeneous feelings,
the day that I felt exceptional.

I remember, I recall
the picnic day in school,

My weightless bag,
and the ponytail that would wag.

I remember, I recall
the youthful credulity.
That cloudy and rainy day,
my fun and frolic.

I remember, I recall
my grandmother's lullabies.
That soft embrace on the head,
the unwinding moment.

I remember, I recall
that tear and smile of reminiscence,
my downhearted front and
the cherishing back.

-Harleen Kaur, III Year

EXPECTATIONS OF CHILDHOOD

Childhood is a widely researched area. From the twentieth century onwards, much research has been done on Childhood not only in the field of literature but also psychology. We do not know for certain what actually goes inside a child's mind. It is all about putting forward hypotheses and trying to reach a conclusion. Childhood is not all flowery and colourful; it carries the heavy and oftentimes confusing burden of societal and familial expectations that aggravate the self-doubt and identity crisis in a child. In a situation where an individual is trying to figure out the meaning of life and discover one's inner self, these pressures from outside act as a hindrance.

From Alice Liddell of the Victorian Age to Greg Hefley of the contemporary era, we can see that the society has tried to confine children within a certain space and encourage their growth only in so far as it is in ways which are deemed appropriate: they are always told what to read, how to sit and eat, how to talk, how to dress et al. This takes a child away from what they want and makes them feel obligated to behave in the way others want them to. Their inner wants and needs are suppressed and they have no one to confide in, other than their peers, who are equally pressured and confused.

This struggle between one's beliefs and other's expectations lead to a state of self-dubity and questioning one's own identity which inhibits personality development. A situation where a child couldn't fulfil their dream or pursue their interest because of parental coercion is a common reality in many societies. The expectations imposed on the child take them away from the innocence and freedom we generally link with childhood.

Everyone wants to raise an inexplicable wonder-child and in order to do so, the fine line between ethics and immorality is often forgotten. Such a scenario can also be seen in the movie *Gifted*, where a little girl is forced to complete her deceased mother's incomplete mathematical problem after she is discovered to be a child prodigy. Her wants are ignored and her talent is exploited in the worst way possible. This is one example amongst infinite, of how a child whose childhood, often perceived as rainbow-like and full of play, is stifled because of exploitation at the hands of selfish and pretentious 'grown ups' who want to be the parents of engineers or doctors and not of singers or painters. Categorising occupations based

on social norms (as worthy or embarrassing) are prejudices that drive parents to often hold their children back from pursuing their interests. Not able to voice their opinions and being forced to suppress them can be extremely detrimental for a child's mental health. Studies have shown that, in extreme cases, this can force them to 'act out' by engaging in acts such as vandalism or running away from home. It can be spotted in Meena, the protagonist of *Anita and Me*, who goes through an arduous childhood because of peer pressure and parental expectations. She is not able to cope with the stark contrast between the private life, where her parents want her to be helpful and studious and her friends who want her to act carelessly. She starts to hate her family and emotionally distances herself from them. Lying to the teacher about some non-existent Indian festival and stealing her mother's diamond necklace are not big issues according to her. All she wanted was to gain some support and warmth, someone to confide in and share her feelings with. Her experiences evolve her into a perceptive child who starts to understand that "*Darkness is not one colour, but there are shades upon shades within black.*"

All the theories and observations about childhood are mapped out by adults. It is how adults have perceived, observed, analysed children, and put forward their interpretations. Not only is the opinion of children not taken into account it is often dismissed as trivial or insignificant. Although after a certain age, one forgets one's own experiences of being a child there is always a possibility that they may have impacted our life in crucial ways. Theories and analyses of any kind cannot account for these lost memories. How a child perceives their childhood is different from how an adult perceives it. To fill the gap and join these two lines is almost impossible until we completely understand child psychology and their cognitive working. Therefore, it becomes difficult to conclude whether writers such as Lewis Carroll are able to bridge this gap in their works. Books such as *Through the Looking Glass* although considered vital under the category of Children's Fiction, contain many ideas that are beyond a child's intellectual. It requires a deep analysis and political knowledge to understand and acknowledge the book in the best way possible.

There would be a difference between what a writer wants to portray, how an adult reader comprehends the text, and how a child would enjoy reading the book. In an essay *Why Studying Children's Literature Isn't Fun Anymore* by Margaret Spufford and John Locke, they state,

"The basic characteristic of 'true children's literature', most assume, is that it is designed to give children pleasure and not to improve them." However, in most of these books the norms

and the idea of a 'perfect' child is often portrayed and the child-reader is expected to replicate that behaviour. The child-character, getting punished for mistakes and awarded for certain 'good' acts, is often internalized by the child-reader. These books, therefore, teach children to act in a way that pleases the society and would *save* them from being *punished*.

Childhood is a very subjective experience and not very easy to comprehend and summarise through theories and stories alone. What the writer conceives of the child is his interpretation and not the child's actuality. Childhood is full of complexities such as family expectations, social norms, and peer pressure which makes it difficult to abridge it within a single hypothesis or text.

-Muskan Bansal, III Year



PORTRAIT OF MADEMOISELLE IRENE CAHEN d'ANVERS (1880) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir

This picture of young girl, the daughter of a Paris banker who commissioned Renoir to paint the portrait in 1880. It came to be regarded as a shining example of child portraiture, in which the artist combines elegant clothes and styled hair with the innocent expression of childhood.

HAPPY RECOLLECTIONS

My mind keeps going back,
to the colourful days of my childhood,
it becomes a nostalgic moment.
When my eyes sparkled with all the tears
of joy, for a rainbow. I journeyed
from the places I spent in winters,
to gazing at the moon and stars in summers.

To a time back when
no tensions and stress made us yell.
Smiling all day like a blooming flower
climbing with a ladder, up the tower.
Sleeping for hours, with no worries,
playing all day with my buddies.
Bicycle rides felt like a fight,
holding on to my dad's hand a little too tight.
Heart shining with a lot of dreams,
walking alone in the dark without any screams.
I wish we could travel to those amazing days
And once again, enjoy all the fun in those ways.

-Khyati Thukral, Ist Year



Pulitzer Prize winning feature photography *CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE: VICTIMS OF GANG VIOLENCE* (2011) by Barbara Davidson

Josue Hercules' mother, Wendoly Andrade, says, 'I do not know what will happen to my son's life.' Six months after the shooting, Josue's father moved out, leaving his mother to balance Josue's increased needs with those of her other four children. In this photo, from left, Josue and his siblings share a one-bedroom apartment with their mother. Childhood is a subjective experience and many a times, completely opposite of the rosy image we associate with this phase of life.

CHILDHOOD IN THE ROMANTIC ERA

Romanticism was a literary movement that began in Britain around the 1770s and went on till 1848. There was a major shift in sensibility which privileged a perspective that did not adhere to Enlightenment rationality. Romanticism is often confused with connotations of love and intimacy which, to some extent is right, but does not do justice to the wide range of ideas that the movement deals with. The term 'Romantic' comes from the genre of the medieval romances where stories about legendary heroes often defied real elements of the material world. The romances did not follow Realism's tenets of time, space, and action. This reason largely contributes to the fact that the term 'Romantic' has come to stand for idealism more than anything else today.

During the Romantic age, scholars were of the opinion that one must not be confined by the limits of rationality. And in order to promote this belief, various artists tried to put light on the uncorrupted virtues of nature and children by romanticising them in their works. This age was therefore said to be challenging some of the central values of the Enlightenment. However, by opposing the regime of rationality, they did not mean to encourage the ignorance. What they wanted to convey was the importance of balance between creative expression and reason.



Rapid industrialization and commercialisation has impacted human relations. Many Romantic poets felt that there was a loss of individualism and hence, felt the need to revive the lost values of the agrarian community of the pre-industrial England.

This entire shift from rationality to romanticism encouraged the scholars to consider children as a subject of their writings because it was felt there was a lot that the adult world could

learn from children at that time. Moreover, nature and children were considered interchangeable because of their pure, uncorrupted, and inspiring virtues. Before the mid-eighteenth century, children were culturally, socially, and legally unimportant. There were no separate laws to protect their rights nor did they have a prominent position in the social order. Upper class parents were not actively engaged in raising their children. Lower class parents, on the other hand, did not have much to offer and had to push their children into factories in order to increase manpower where these children were made to clean narrow, soot-covered chimneys.

Seemingly, there was a major shift in their identity during the mid-eighteenth century and they were no more invisible in the society. It can be said that Romantics transformed the basic notion of childhood. William Wordsworth, John Keats, Rousseau, William Blake and Mary Shelley are few of the famous Romantics who promoted the teachings of nature during the age of dehumanization.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a well-known philosopher of the time, contributed to this shift through his work *Emile, Or Treatise on Education*. He was of an opinion that human beings are good by nature but are rendered corrupt by society. *Emile* revolves around the idea of self-preservation which also directs us to the fact that Rousseau was concerned with the preservation of childlike virtues in the process of adulting. In his work he highlights the concept of child-centred education. His idea of education is to protect and develop a child's natural state of mind. He opposes a heavy-handed domineering approach when it comes to educating a child. According to him, education is a natural process and therefore it must strictly be based on autonomous discoveries by children rather than predetermined curriculums.

Writers and thinkers like William Blake opposed the linear lifestyle of industrialization because it separated people from the natural environment. He was more inclined towards a smooth and natural lifestyle which is also reflected in most of his works. For instance, his book *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is a compilation of various poems that seem extremely simple at the surface but convey important ideologies of Romanticism. While we find certain elements of spirituality and religion in his work, Romantics like him opposed Churches due to their rigidity and corruption. They believed God is in the spirit of enquiry and one doesn't have to visit Churches in order to attain spirituality. In Blake's opinion, self-worshipping, which precisely means worshiping one's soul, leads to harmony. In that way characteristics like curiosity and innocence could remain intact. Blake, and many other Romantic writers, considered childlike virtues as the ideal because they helped them respond to the lost values at the turn of the eighteenth century. In his poem *The Lamb*, he highlights the relationship between children and nature. As mentioned above, the text appears to be a very simple read. Through the visuals portrayed in his poem, Blake suggests that creativity is a natural element. Nature is a creative expression of God and hence it is also a major source of inspiration for all spheres of life. Creativity is the mother of all knowledge and curiosity is one such attribute that leads to man-made creative expressions. The form of his poems embodies the interconnectedness between God, nature and children.



Childhood in the Romantic era was seen as one of the most inspiring states of being because the Romantics valued virtues like imagination and originality as opposed to reason and order. With rapid commercialization, there was a loss of some essential human values which is why we witness a shift of sensibility during this age. The lifestyle of people had transformed into a materialistic one and so to avoid further deterioration of human values, the Romantics rightly pointed out the significance of emotional self-expression in their works.

-Roshni Arora, II Year

NOSTALGIA

How silly was the time
when we wanted to grow up.
It was the age of learning rhymes,
when the seeds of growing up were sowed.

Now we want to go back
to that golden stage of life,
where we had all our fun,
under the bright, yellow sun.

How sweet was the time?
When we used to quarrel,
for toys and sticky slimes

How beautiful was the time?
When our parents dressed us the ugliest,
but still they believed,
we looked the prettiest.

How innocent was the time?
When we used to mimic our elders.
That was the real time,
when our Grandparents became our defenders.

How cute was the time?
When we lied for the first time,
Now we are struggling with our own crimes,
Fabricating our lies all the time.

-Avleen Kaur, II Year

PICTURE CREDITS

COVER IMAGE: *The Difficult Lesson* by William-Adolphe Bouguereau

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