

# Feelings of the Stages of Life

## The Education of Princes in the Modern Era as a Privileged Observation Point

### Abstract

Starting from Philippe Ariès's reflections on the "feeling of childhood" (*sentiment de l'enfance*) and the stages of life as social constructions, which are at the crossroads of various research pathways that reshape the panorama of sources, and considering the extensive debate on the issue, this essay discusses childhood and old age from a privileged observation point, i. e. the education of princes at some European courts. Different types of sources, dating to the time between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, such as *specula* and *institutiones principum*, *fables* and *ad hoc* texts, all of which deal with the education of princes and sovereigns at Italian and French courts, are here analysed. Particular emphasis will be put on the relationships between childhood/youth and old age that can be observed in the pedagogical debates of the specific periods and contexts in question. In the conclusion, some research perspectives that could be conducted with a long-term approach are pointed out: besides the ecologically oriented perspective, these issues concern the interconnections between cultural representations of the princes' life stages, political problems and education in the art of government.

### 1 "Le sentiment de l'enfance". A Problem of Attitude

The feelings regarding the stages of human life are a social construction,<sup>1</sup> which can be circumscribed, with reference to a given era and context, thanks to specific sources,

1 On this matter cf., among others, Heinz Hengst/Helga Zeiher (Eds.), *Per una sociologia dell'infanzia*, Milano 2004 (Condizionamenti educativi 55). For an overview on childhood studies, cf. Jens Qvortrup/William A. Corsaro/Michael-Sebastian Honig (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, New York 2009. Cf. also: Doris Bonnet, *La construction sociale de l'enfance. Une variété de normes et de contextes*, in: *Informations sociales* 4 (2010), pp. 12–18. For information on old age, refer to: Jean Foucart, *La vieillesse. Une construction sociale*, in: *Pensée plurielle* 2 (2003), pp. 7–18; Éric Deschavanne/Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, *Philosophie des âges de la vie*, Paris

identified on a case-by-case basis: we could say it is a question of ‘attitude’ and generations. Philippe Ariès discussed it at length in his well-known if controversial book,<sup>2</sup> entitled “L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime”, published in Paris in 1960.<sup>3</sup> In fact medievalists reproach Ariès above all for the ‘hasty’ (or in any case not supported by an appropriate use of sources) conclusion about a childhood ‘sentiment’ that would not have existed in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the work inaugurated an international branch of studies which are entirely dedicated to the “history of childhood”, a series of researches that is impossible to retrace here in a comprehensive manner.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is worth remembering that the work of Ariès develops during a cultural period particularly attentive to the *histoire des mentalités*.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Ariès himself wrote the chapter dedicated to the history of mentalities in the book edited by Jacques Le Goff (with Roger Chartier et Jacques Revel) entitled “La nouvelle histoire” (1978–1979), translated and published in Italy by Mondadori in 1980. He also wrote the entry “Generations” published in 1979 in the Einaudi Encyclopaedia. With regard to the

2007–2008 (Pluriel); Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, *Le retour des âges de la vie*, in: *Télémaque* 37,1 (2010), pp. 7–10.

2 For a critical analysis on the positions of Ariès in reference to the medieval world, cf. Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children*, New Haven-London 2001; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Medievalist and the Study of Childhood*, in: *Speculum* 77 (2002), pp. 440–460; Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood. Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*, Cambridge 2001; Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Result of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, Berlin-New York 2005; Pierre Riché, *Être enfant au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2010 (*Pédagogues du monde entier*). Also for a bibliography on the subject; Monica Ferrari, *Costrutti euristici e prospettive di ricerca sull’infanzia nella storia*, in: Anna Bondioli / Donatella Savio (Eds.), *Crescere bambini. Immagini d’infanzia in educazione e formazione degli adulti*, Parma 2017 (*La cultura del bambino*), pp. 21–40.

3 English translation: *Centuries of Childhood*, London 1962; Italian translation: *Padri e figli nell’Europa medievale e moderna*, Bari 1968. Here I will refer to: Philippe Ariès, *Padri e figli nell’Europa medievale e moderna*, Roma-Bari 1981 (*Biblioteca Universale Laterza* 13) (Italian translation).

4 For an initial bibliographic reference, cf. Egle Becchi, *Una storiografia dell’infanzia, una storiografia nell’infanzia* and Simonetta Polenghi, *La ricerca storico-educativa sull’infanzia nel XX secolo*, in: Mario Gecchele / Simonetta Polenghi / Paola Dal Toso (Eds.), *Il Novecento. Il secolo del bambino?*, Parma 2017 (*Storia dell’educazione in Europa* 1), pp. 17–49; Ferrari, *Costrutti euristici e prospettive di ricerca* (see note 2). For a bibliography, mainly in English, cf. Reidar Aasgaard / Cornelia Horn, with Oana Maria Cojocaru (Eds.), *Childhood in History. Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, London-New York 2018.

5 Cf. in particular the now classic Jacques Le Goff / Pierre Nora (Eds.), *Faire de l’histoire*, 3 vols., Paris 1974 (*Bibliothèque des histoires*).

history of mentalities, Ariès retraces its history and stresses that such a perspective of analysis emerged after the First World War, thanks to the work of a generation of historians among whom he mentions Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch from France, and Henri Pirenne from Belgium. Moreover, he certainly does not forget to mention geographers (Albert Demangeon) and sociologists (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Maurice Halbwachs and others). Ariès sheds light on that generation of scholars to whom we owe the creation of the magazine “*Annales d’histoire économique et sociale*” (1929). Finally, he recalls the invaluable contribution of people he defines as pioneers, such as Johan Huizinga or Norbert Elias.<sup>6</sup> These scholars, each very different from the other, have some characteristics in common, according to Ariès. *In primis*, their interest for the imaginary, a research field that today we would call “intersectional” with regards to primary sources, is highlighted. Furthermore, their strong opposition to a history which only pays attention to the political events of the past, to the ‘Greats’ and their contingent affairs becomes clear throughout their writings. Finally, a frame of reference we would now call ecological and contextual, where historic demographics plays an important role, and leaves a deep mark on the “second generation” of historians of mentalities, can be at least partially traced back to their work.

The Sixties mark another turning point, according to Ariès, who published this essay in 1979, more than forty years ago. From this point onward, the history of the stages of life, with childhood being the first, takes centre stage. It is not by chance that he mentions the issue of the “*Journal of the Société de démographie historique*” (1973), which has a specific monographic focus on “*Enfants et Sociétés*”, while in the early Seventies family itself was at the centre of international research. The historian’s research field seems to expand greatly according to Ariès, who remembers the topics addressed in the first instance, linked to economic and demographic history: “*la vie du travail, la famille, les âges de la vie, l’éducation, le sexe, la mort, c’est-à-dire les zones qui se trouvent aux frontières du biologique et du mental, de la nature et de la culture*”.<sup>7</sup>

6 Philippe Ariès, *Histoire des mentalités*, in: Jacques Le Goff (Ed.), *La nouvelle histoire*, Bruxelles 2006 (*Historiques* 47); cf. also Philippe Ariès, *Storia delle mentalità*, in: Jacques Le Goff (Ed.), *La nuova storia* (1979), Milano 1980 (*Gli Oscar studio* 81), pp. 143–166, at pp. 144–145 (Italian translation).

7 Ariès, *Histoire des mentalités* (see note 6), p. 182 (Italian translation, p. 160): “the working life, the family, the ages of life, education, sex, death, i. e. the areas that lie on the border between the biological and the mental, between nature and culture” (own English translation).

While the psycho-historical approach to the history of childhood was spreading thanks to the studies of Lloyd deMause,<sup>8</sup> the *histoire des mentalités* produced studies that were more focused on the intersections between the social imaginary, latent elements in collective social behaviours, constellations of cultural elements responding to both demands of change and permanence, ideas, worldviews, sensitivities shared by certain social groups and different cultures. After the *cultural turn* era,<sup>9</sup> the history of childhood has occupied a privileged place in the development of the international historiography on these issues, which today is ever more connected to ethnographic and / or sociological approaches, to the point of identifying the sociology of childhood<sup>10</sup> as a specific field of research: it focuses on the here and now of the stages of life in the form of permanent social groups that confront themselves with the transience of individual existences.

Childhood has been stimulating specific investigations in Western society which, during the last one hundred years, and especially after the Second World War, has witnessed radically changed lifestyles in terms of societal norms and cultural factors. Some of these changes include the liberalisation of sexual behaviours, the development of new communication technologies and the advent of new mass media: all of them cause rapid changes in the “feeling” of the stages of human existence. We are reminded of this by the studies of Neil Postman, Marie Winn and Marina D’Amato,<sup>11</sup> among others, while, thanks to the “history of childhood”,<sup>12</sup> the awareness of the different, culturally located, descriptions of this particular stage emerges.

In my opinion, however, Ariès’s 1960 pioneering and controversial study had the merit to stress that the “sentiment de l’enfance” – and therefore the meaning of the stages of life – is defined in relation to the social agencies in which the individual is trapped, as

8 Lloyd deMause (Ed.), *Storia dell’infanzia*, Milano 1983 (*L’asino d’oro* 18) (Italian translation). The Italian edition here consulted contains some essays published in the text “The History of Childhood”, New York 1974.

9 Luciano Pazzaglia / Fulvio De Giorgi, *Le dimensioni culturali della ricerca storica nel campo dell’educazione*, in: *Annali di storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche* 12 (2005), pp. 133–153.

10 Hengst / Zeiher (Eds.), *Per una sociologia dell’infanzia* (see note 1).

11 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, New York 1982; id., *La scomparsa dell’infanzia. Ecologia delle età della vita*, Roma 1984 (*Educazione comparata e pedagogie* 83) (also 2005) (Italian translation); Marie Winn, *Children without Childhood*, New York 1983; ead., *Bambini senza infanzia*, Roma 1992 (*I problemi dell’educazione*) (Italian translation); Marina D’Amato, *Ci siamo persi i bambini. Perché l’infanzia scompare*, Roma-Bari 2014 (*Saggi tascabili* 395).

12 Egle Becchi, *Retorica d’infanzia*, in: *Aut Aut* 191–192 (1982), pp. 3–26; Carlo Pancera, *Semantiche d’infanzia*, in: *Aut Aut* 191–192 (1982), pp. 191–196.

Maria Montessori had said a few years earlier and, more generally, in an “intersectional” sense.<sup>13</sup> According to Montessori, who wrote some of her fundamental works in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shaken by two World Wars but nevertheless defined by Ellen Key as “the Century of the Child”,<sup>14</sup> children find themselves trapped within the family and the school, within a universe of values that deviates from their ‘natural’ development in function of a certain idea of the relationship between generations.<sup>15</sup> This is why one of Montessori’s most well-known sayings overturns this perspective and, with an implicit quotation from William Wordsworth’s famous poem “My Heart Leaps Up” (1802), states: “the child is father of the man”. It is still a relationship between two generations. Using another lexicon, this time of Foucauldian origin, we could now say that the *dispositifs*<sup>16</sup> of subjectivation are omnipervasive and precisely produce the subject within the universes of values that are capable of influencing the way we view ourselves as individuals, and thus the ability to think and to recognise ourselves. These constellations of social meanings also imply a series of mirroring and modelling in the face of others, and in the relationships between the stages of life and generations. These are complex and interrelated mechanisms that, in my opinion, are at the centre of the pedagogical analysis from an epistemological and historical perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Philippe Ariès’s considerations on the *ancien régime*, attentive to the relationships between child and family, in an intersection of feelings capable of affecting the identity of individuals and social groups, still appear extremely interesting, even though they are faced with the difficulty of specifically defining the feeling of childhood as a heuristic

13 Regarding the “intersectional approach”, cf. Aasgaard/Horn/Cojocaru (Eds.), *Childhood in History* (see note 4).

14 Ellen Key published her famous work “The Century of the Child” in Swedish in 1900, and it was later translated into Italian in 1906 (Ellen Key, *Il secolo dei fanciulli*, Torino 1906) and into English in 1909 (Ead., *The Century of the Child*, New York-London 1909).

15 I refer in particular to the preface of the work “Il segreto dell’infanzia” in its 1938 edition, which was later enriched with new pages from a more recent Portuguese edition (Milano 1999).

16 The concept of *dispositif* is at the centre of a vast international debate. Among the now classic studies, cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos’è un dispositivo?*, Roma 2006 (I sassi), pp. 21–22: “Generalizzando ulteriormente la già amplissima gamma dei dispositivi foucauldiani, chiamerò dispositivo letteralmente qualunque cosa abbia in qualche modo la capacità di catturare, orientare, determinare, intercettare, modellare, controllare e assicurare i gesti, le condotte, le opinioni e i discorsi degli esseri viventi” (“Further generalizing the already very wide range of Foucauldian devices, I will call device literally anything that somehow has the ability to capture, orient, determine, intercept, shape, control and ensure the gestures, behaviours, opinions and speeches of living beings” [own translation]).

17 Monica Ferrari, *Lo specchio, la pagina, le cose. Congegni pedagogici tra ieri e oggi*, Milano 2011 (Condizionamenti educativi 66).

construct. In 1983, Ariès stressed the relationship between the images and the “sentiment” of childhood and of old age alongside the history of the Western World.<sup>18</sup> Ariès emphasized the need to reflect on the role of old age in society, on the one hand, and on the theme of social representations of old age, on the other. He underlines the symmetry between the history of childhood and that of old age, in the sense of the history of mental attitudes concerning these extreme ages of life as well as in their connection with the history of human societies and their forms of associated life. He speaks of a society, namely that of the 1980s, which is simultaneously rejuvenated or aged, as captured by a certain image of childhood (the king-child) or by a certain image of old age.

In my opinion, there is still a lot of research to be done on the relationships between studies on childhood, youth, minority (in a juridical sense) and old age, given that previous studies were often conducted in parallel with few opportunities for intersection. The issue is certainly complex, and it cannot be studied with a unilateral perspective, since it actually requires the intersection of a plurality of views, not least the juridical one. Moreover, in our times the “digital revolution” affects the ways human beings communicate with each other: the relationships between generations are still changing. And it is exactly generations and identity that are discussed, *inter alia*, when one speaks of a “lexicon to think history”,<sup>19</sup> and of “generations of feelings”<sup>20</sup> in the interconnections between people and things.<sup>21</sup> As for the Italian pedagogical debate, one should mention here the book entitled “Progetto generazioni. Bambini e anziani. Due stagioni della vita a confronto” (2012), edited by Michele Corsi and Simonetta Ulivieri.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays, the

18 Philippe Ariès, *Une histoire de la vieillesse?*, in: *Communications* 37 (1983), pp. 47–54. Cf. also Georges Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse en Occident de l'antiquité à la Renaissance*, Paris 1987 (*Les nouvelles études historiques*); id., *Storia della vecchiaia dall'antichità al rinascimento*, Bari 1988 (*Storia e società*) (Italian translation); Michel Oris/Isidro Dubert/Jérôme-Luther Viret, *Vieillir. Les apports de la démographie historique et de l'histoire de la famille*, in: *Annales de démographie historique* 1 (2015), pp. 201–229.

19 Francesco Benigno, *Parole nel tempo. Un lessico per pensare la storia*, Roma 2013 (*La storia. Temi* 31).

20 Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling. A History of Emotions, 600–1700*, Cambridge 2016; ead., *Generazioni di sentimenti. Una storia delle emozioni, 600–1700*, Roma 2016 (*La storia. Temi* 51) (Italian translation).

21 Remo Bodei, *Generazioni. Età della vita, età delle cose*, Roma 2015 (*Economica Laterza* 751).

22 Michele Corsi/Simonetta Ulivieri (Eds.), *Progetto generazioni. Bambini e anziani. Due stagioni della vita a confronto*, Pisa 2012 (*Scienze dell'educazione* 154). Cf. also, as an example of pedagogical research on the field in Italy: Mario Gecchele/Laura Meneghin (Eds.), *Il dialogo intergenerazionale come prassi educativa. Il Centro Infanzia Girotondo delle Età*, Pisa 2016 (*Scienze dell'educazione* 187).

perspective of pedagogical analysis, always more and more sensitive to the connections with “public history”,<sup>23</sup> to the education to speak about oneself, to the evolution of the relationship with gender identity over time,<sup>24</sup> to the *body turn*, i. e. to the research aimed at increasing the awareness that we *are* a changing body,<sup>25</sup> invites us to rethink the time of ageing as being an opportunity to “compose a life”.<sup>26</sup>

## 2 A Privileged Observation Point

To return to the *ancien régime* society, which has been the focus of different historical-pedagogical studies in the last fifty years, after the publication of Ariès’s book, and which offered some starting points for the development of new interpretations of complex phenomena, it seems to me that, in a research that focuses on the elderly and the concept of sovereignty between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, the *pédagogie princière* can be a privileged observation point due to the abundance of available sources and the peculiarity of the training path in view of a political and social project.

With regard to the sources, it is no accident that in Ariès’s 1960 book a central place is held by the childhood of Louis, Dauphin of France, between 1601 and 1610, when his father Henry IV was killed by François Ravallac. In this specific case, we have an exceptional source for those interested in issues that intersect biology and culture, namely the “Journal” of the *premier médecin* Jean Héroard, who lived alongside the Dauphin, recording his day *manu propria* for nearly twenty-seven years. In reference to the children and to the grandchildren of Louis XIII, it is worth mentioning that the *institutions principum* delineate the “having to be” of the relationships among the members of the

23 For a reflection in relation to the history of education, cf. Gianfranco Bandini, Educational Memories and Public History. A Necessary Meeting, in: Cristina Yanes-Cabrera/Juri Meda/Antonio Viñao (Eds.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham 2017, pp. 143–155; Gianfranco Bandini/Stefano Oliviero (Eds.), *Public History of Education. Riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze 2019 (Studi e saggi 204).

24 Vanna Iori, *Pedagogia dell’invecchiamento e identità di genere*, in: Corsi/Ulivieri (Eds.), *Progetto generazioni* (see note 22), pp. 73–86.

25 Maria Luisa Iavarone, *Abitare la corporeità. Dimensioni teoriche e buone pratiche di educazione motoria*, Milano 2010 (I territori dell’educazione 4). For a bibliography on the pedagogy of the body, cf. Matteo Morandi (Ed.), *Corpo, educazione fisica, sport. Questioni pedagogiche*, Milano 2016 (Condizionamenti educativi 67).

26 Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*, New York 2001 (reprint of the first edition 1989); *ead.*, *Comporre una vita*, Milano 1992 (Saggi) (Italian translation).

young princes' *entourages*. This "literary genre" had a remarkable success in the context of a monarchy such as that of the Bourbons of France, which had to face two difficult problems: Louis XIII and Louis XIV became "roi mineurs" after the death of their fathers. The first one became king at the age of nine, the second at five: in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, the "roi mineur" was used to become "majeur" at the age of fourteen.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, tutors (*précepteurs*) such as Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and François Fénelon significantly redesigned the *curriculum* of their royal pupils, publishing specific works *ad usum Delphini*. On the other hand, again with regard to the sources, it is worth remembering that in the case of the Italian courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a rich collection of letters gives insight into the relationship between parents and children as well as the members of the *familia* that took care of the dynasty's young heirs, the *princeps paterfamilias* and his wife. This interplay created a complicated web of relationships that defined the identity and social role of each person within the court.<sup>28</sup>

As to the specifics of the education of the prince, it should be remembered that a literature with a long tradition, revisited by humanistic pedagogy, poses in the mirror for princes<sup>29</sup> an opportunity to express cultural, pedagogic and political proposals capable of redesigning the sense of living within that particular community of associated life (the court) in relation to the government of a state. Moreover, in the specific case of France, the child prince, like his father (the sovereign), found himself living a condition that participates in both the human and the divine, following a juridical invention first studied by Marc Bloch and later by Ernst Kantorowicz.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the body of

27 Roberta Balzarini / Monica Ferrari Alfano / Monica Grandini / Sara Micotti Gazzotti / Marc Hamilton Smith, *Segni d'infanzia. Crescere come re nel Seicento*, Milano 1991 (Storia dell'educazione 1); Monica Ferrari, *La paideia del sovrano. Ideologie, strategie e materialità nell'educazione principesca del Seicento*, Firenze 1996 (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Pavia 80).

28 On the topic: Monica Ferrari, "Per non mancare in tuto del debito mio". L'educazione dei bambini Sforza nel Quattrocento, Milano 2000 (Storia dell'educazione 3); ead., *Lo specchio, la pagina, le cose* (see note 17). More recently, also for a bibliography: Monica Ferrari / Isabella Lazarini / Federico Piseri, *Autografie dell'età minore. Lettere di tre dinastie italiane tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, Roma 2016 (I libri di Viella 232).

29 For an analysis and a bibliographic review, cf. Monica Ferrari, *La lunga tradizione degli "specchi dei / per i principi" tra paideia e politèia. Riflessioni in ottica diacronica*, in: Mario Falanga / Nicola Lupoli (Eds.), *Sguardi incrociati sullo human development*, Napoli 2017 (Scienze dell'educazione 2), pp. 131–163.

30 Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges. Étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*, Paris 1961; id., *I re taumaturghi. Studi sul carattere sovranaturale attribuito alla potenza dei re particolarmente in Francia e in Inghilterra*, Torino 1973

the sovereign is in an antinomic condition: he is considered human and divine at the same time, thus embodying two faces, so that after the death of the father, power passes to the son, the “little phoenix” (as Héroard will define him), who carries the torch of his lineage beyond the time of men. However, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the fortune of the *specula principis* started to decline, Fénelon provided new images of the youth and old age of the powerful in his *fables* for the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of the “Roi soleil”. And we must remember that Louis XIV was a sovereign who died at a ripe old age, surviving both his children and grandchildren.

### 3 Childhood and Old Age at the Italian Courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century

The Italian courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century are a privileged observation point of the relationships between childhood and old age in a moment when humanistic pedagogy was redefining the educational path of the princes, following the rediscovery of the “Classics”. In some Italian cities, the 15<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of new educational experiences, patterns, practices, books and institutions between the rediscovery of the Ancients and a new Humanism: the Italian *magistri*, thanks to their translations and studies, reflected upon *paideia* and *politeia*. They thus opened new perspectives, not only about the education of the *élites*, which was still the most important issue for them and for their world.<sup>31</sup> This immediately reminds of the Paduan *contubernium*, of the teacher of many teachers: Gasparino Barzizza, the father of Guiniforte, who was the tutor of Galeazzo Maria Sforza. With regards to Mantua, I think of the “Casa Giocosa” of Vittorino da Feltre, which was not only attended by princes and princesses of the house of Gonzaga but also by pupils destined to play an important role as men of power or intellectuals in the court society. Here I also consider the fundamental role of Guarino Guarini (Veronese) at the court of Leonello d’Este in Ferrara, up to the conception of the little room, the

(Biblioteca di cultura storica 121) (Italian translation); Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton, N. J. 1957; id., *I due corpi del re. L’idea di regalità nella teologia politica medievale* Torino 1989 (Biblioteca di cultura storica 180) (Italian translation).

31 Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning (1300–1600)*, Baltimore-London 1989 (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science 107,1); id., *La scuola nel Rinascimento italiano*, Roma-Bari 1991 (Collezione storica) (Italian translation); Paolo Rosso, *La scuola nel Medioevo. Secoli VI–XV*, Roma 2018 (Quality paperbacks 511).

*studiolo*, which would remain emblematic of the relationship between the *princeps* and the Muses.<sup>32</sup>

It was a large and intricate network of teachers and also teachers of teachers who, both inside and outside of the universities and the court, redefined didactic practices through their teaching and works: many national and international studies have focused on this.<sup>33</sup> Here I would only like to stress that, from the reading of the correspondence of the court networks, a particular image of the children of 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian princes emerges. For example, young princes or princesses show themselves to be worthy of their parents to the extent to which they behave admirably<sup>34</sup> with regards to a phase of life that is often defined, also in the texts that are concerned with regulating their lives, as the *furibonda etate*.<sup>35</sup> This “furious age” was, in fact, seen as a period of life that could be subject to debauchery and excesses, and they were therefore in need of being kept under control by their (not too old) teachers and governors,<sup>36</sup> while the works composed in view of their education consider the whip as a tool to tame “children and boys” like “beasts and madmen” (“Questa fu facta per voi ragazzi / E anchor per quei che son bestiali e pazi”).<sup>37</sup>

The children of princes are required to become adults at an early stage, and to leave their childhood behind as soon as possible: they are portrayed as being older than their

32 For a recent bibliography, cf. Michele Rossi, *Pedagogia e corte nel Rinascimento italiano ed europeo*, Venezia 2016 (Saggi); Lucia Gualdo Rosa, *La paideia degli umanisti. Un'antologia di scritti*, Roma 2017 (Opuscula collecta 17); Monica Ferrari, *L'educazione esclusiva. Pedagogie della distinzione sociale tra XV e XXI secolo*, Brescia 2020 (Saggi 125); Monica Ferrari / Giuseppe Tognon (Eds.), *L'Umanesimo ri / formativo. Leggere, scrivere, vivere nel Quattrocento italiano*, in: *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche* 27 (2020).

33 For an analysis and a recent bibliography, cf. Monica Ferrari / Matteo Morandi / Federico Piseri (Eds.), *Maestri e pratiche educative in età umanistica. Contributi per una storia della didattica*, Brescia 2019 (Saggi 113).

34 Here, I am referring to the letters which praise the behaviour of little speakers, boys and girls, in the Sforza family. I also refer to: Maria Nadia Covini, *Donne, emozioni e potere alla corte degli Sforza. Da Bianca Maria a Cecilia Gallerani*, Milano 2012 (Storia lombarda 24) and Ferrari / Lazzarini / Piseri, *Autografie dell'età minore* (see note 28), also for a bibliography on the peculiarity of the correspondence in some Italian courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

35 On the topic, cf. the various versions of the “order” thought for regulating the life of count Galeazzo now transcribed in Ferrari, “Per non manchare in tuto del debito mio” (see note 28), especially p. 74.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

37 In particular, I refer to the “Liber Jesus”, composed for Massimiliano Ercole Sforza, Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan, Code 2163, c. 4v.

age in texts and works tailored for their education. A striking example is provided by the case of Massimiliano Ercole Sforza, son of Beatrice d'Este and Ludovico Maria Sforza, and specifically by the “Liber Jesus” and the “Grammatica del Donato” which were written for him. In the beautiful drawings, now preserved at the Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan, he was represented as a young boy, when he was still a child.<sup>38</sup> As a consequence, those who must work with the royal children and take care of their education (*magistri, praeceptores* and governors or *governatori*)<sup>39</sup> should therefore not be too old, so that they are able to keep up with and curb the youthful impetus of their pupils. It appears that the task of teachers and governors was mainly to help princes to overcome their childhood as early as possible.

The image of the *puer senex*, linked to medieval hagiographic literature,<sup>40</sup> is mediated by the rediscovery of the “Classics” and takes on new meanings in the case of the education of the Italian princes of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, whose public speeches on official occasions seem to project them onto an ideal plane, beyond the contingent, for the glory of their family. In her discussion of the Ancient Christian biography, Elena Giannarelli approaches the *topos* of the *puer senex*, connected to that of the *puer maior sua aetate*, as a way of modelling an *exemplum* that transcends the human being. She speaks of the “heirs of the martyr” and adds:

“Fare del *pais* un *paidariogeron*, attribuendogli la vecchiaia, simbolicamente il massimo della saggezza umana, oppure trasformare il bambino in un adulto è un modo per ri-

38 Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan, Code 2163 and 2167. Cf. Jonathan J. G. Alexander (Ed.), *Grammatica del Donato e Liber Jesus. Due libri per l'educazione di Massimiliano Sforza*, Modena 2016.

39 Regarding the *entourage* of the young Sforzas, cf. Federico Piseri, *Governatori e “magistri a schola” nelle corti sforzesche. Un primo approccio prosopografico*, in *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche* 20 (2013), pp. 41–54.

40 Here one can refer to the following essays and books: Michael Goodich, *Una santa bambina, una santa dei bambini. L'infanzia di Elisabetta di Turingia (1207–1231)*, in: Egle Becchi / Dominique Julia (Eds.), *Storia dell'infanzia*, 2 vols., Roma-Bari 1996 (*Storia e società*), vol. 1, pp. 91–114; Anna Benvenuti Papi, *Bambine sante nell'Italia dei secoli XIII e XIV. Quando la santità non è una scelta*, in: Anna Benvenuti Papi / Elena Giannarelli (Eds.), *Bambini santi. Rappresentazioni dell'infanzia e modelli agiografici*, Torino 1991 (*sacro / santo 5*), pp. 85–98; Dieter Richter, *Das fremde Kind. Zur Entstehung der Kindheitsbilder des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*, Frankfurt a. M. 1987; id., *Il bambino estraneo. L'immagine dell'infanzia nel mondo borghese*, Scandicci 1992 (*Idee 1*) (Italian translation), pp. 3–6. More recently cf. Marco Bartoli, *Santa Innocenza. I bambini nel Medioevo*, Cinisello Balsamo 2021.

scattare l'infanzia dalla naturale debolezza e rendere poi possibile l'ulteriore passaggio: il superamento della dimensione umana, indispensabile per l'approdo alla santità."<sup>41</sup>

Could we therefore say that childhood thus becomes the metaphor *par excellence* of the human condition and, in the juxtaposition of two different stages of life (childhood and old age), of its overcoming?

In Xenophon's "Cyropaedia", Ciro was a prodigious child, as Elena Giannarelli recalls in the above-mentioned study about the long-lasting *topos* of the *puer senex* (or *maior suae aetate*). The Italian *magistri* of the 15<sup>th</sup> century use this *topos* in a new sense, and they also reflect on old age from a political point of view. It is not surprising, then, that Ippolita Maria Sforza transcribed *manu propria* Cicero's "De Senectute", now preserved at the British Museum in London. The *magister* of Ippolita Maria Sforza, brought up with her brother Galeazzo Maria, was Baldo Martorello, a student of Vittorino da Feltre. Cicero's "De Senectute" is a work that best expresses the philosophical and political *topos* of old age across the centuries between the East and the West.<sup>42</sup> Cicero's treatise was also copied for Beatrice, daughter of King Ferdinand I of Aragon (Naples) and later queen of Hungary.<sup>43</sup> It was therefore not unusual that this text formed part of the rhetorical education of a 15<sup>th</sup> century princess, later on required, as a bride, to give a style to court life.

It must be remembered that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, works by authors such as Xenophon, Isocrates and Plutarch were translated from Greek, while Quintilian's "Institutio Oratoria" was rediscovered. Thanks to the work of many intellectuals travelling between the East and the West, the cultural heritage of the dying Byzantine Empire merged with a philological rediscovery of the Ancients, buried in the libraries of the West. From the

41 Elena Giannarelli, *Infanzia e santità. Un problema della biografia cristiana antica*, in: *Benvenuti Papi / ead.* (Eds.), *Bambini santi* (see note 40), pp. 25–58, at p. 37. "Making the *pais* a *paidariogeron*, attributing old age (symbolically the maximum of human wisdom) to him, or transforming the child into an adult is a way to redeem childhood from natural weakness and then make the next step possible: the overcoming of the human dimension, indispensable to reach holiness" (own translation). Cf. also *ead.*, *Lo specchio e il ritratto. Scansioni dell'età, topoi e modelli femminili fra paganesimo e cristianesimo*, in: *Storia delle donne 2* (2006), pp. 159–187.

42 For a contemporary reflection in this respect, and for a bibliography, cf. Norberto Bobbio, *De senectute*, Torino 1996 (Gli struzzi 481); Francesca Rigotti, *De senectute*, Torino 2018 (Vele 135). On the old age of women in contemporary times, cf. Loredana Lipperini, *Non è un paese per vecchie*, Milano-Firenze 2020 (Tascabili Bompiani 629) (reprint of the first edition 2010).

43 Mark K. Anson et al., *The Education of a Princess. Beatrice of Aragon and her Manuscript of Cicero's De Senectute*, in: *Codices Manuscripti & Impressi 112–113* (2018), pp. 1–12.

Ancients, a new cultural proposal between *paideia* and *politeia* emerged, which found an echo chamber in the courts.<sup>44</sup>

Cicero's "De Senectute" is a work that reflects not only on the passing of time, but also on the relationship between generations and the stages of life:

"Obrepere aiunt eam citius quam putavissent. Primum quis coegit eos falsum putare?  
qui enim citius adulescentiae senectus quam pueritiae adulescentia obrepit?"<sup>45</sup>

The "feeling" about the relationship between the stages of life is at the centre of this work: Cicero reminds us that our subjective perception leads us to (erroneously) believe that old age insinuates itself more rapidly than other stages in our lives. Old age, if prepared well during life, is associated with *gravitas*, wisdom, industriousness, a continuous predisposition to learning, especially in relation to students who themselves are eager to learn, and *auctoritas*. We also read the following: "Cursus est certus aetatis et una via naturae eaque simplex suaque cuique parti aetatis tempestivitas est data, ut et infirmitas puerorum et ferocitas iuvenum et gravitas iam constantia aetatis et senectutis maturitas naturale quiddam habeat, quod suo tempore percipi debeat".<sup>46</sup> Childhood is characterised by *infirmitas*, frailty, and is defined by what it is not. The *ferocitas* that

44 Ronald G. Witt, "In the Footsteps of the Ancients". The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni, Leiden 2000 (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 74), id., *Sulle tracce degli Antichi*. Padova, Firenze e le origini dell'umanesimo, Roma 2005 (Saggi. Arti e lettere) (Italian translation).

45 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De senectute* II,4 (id., *La vecchiezza*, transl. by Carlo Saggio, Milano 2002, pp. 130–131). "They say it is advancing almost by stealth, quicker than they thought. First of all who forced them to think something untrue? Perhaps old age takes the place of adolescence earlier than adolescence takes the place of childhood?" (own English translation).

46 Ibid., X,33. "The course of life is fixed, one and only and simple is the way of nature. Each stage of life has its own time. So that the weakness of children, the boldness of young people, the seriousness of the adult age and the maturity of old age bring something natural in all of them to be grasped in due time" (own English translation). For a bibliography on the Ancient World, cf. also Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 18); Umberto Mattioli (Ed.), *Senectus*. La vecchiaia nel mondo classico, 2 vols., Bologna 1995 (Edizioni e saggi universitari di filologia classica); Hartwin Brandt, *Wird auch silbern mein Haar. Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike*, München 2002 (Beck's archäologische Bibliothek); id., *Storia della vecchiaia. Il mondo antico*, Soveria Mannelli 2010 (Universale Rubbettino 6) (Italian translation); Gabriella Seveso, *Arrivati alla piena misura. Rappresentazioni dei vecchi e della vecchiaia nella Grecia antica*, Milano 2013 (Collana di pedagogia sociale, storia dell'educazione e letteratura per l'infanzia. Storia dell'educazione e letteratura per l'infanzia 4); Riccardo D'Amanti, *La ricezione di Massimiano della topica ciceroniana De Senectute*, in: *Ciceroniana on line* 2,1 (2018), pp. 75–103.

characterises youth can only be mitigated: maturity seems to be the exclusive property of old age. But we know that Cato, the protagonist of the treatise, was a patrician who occupied an eminent place in the social hierarchy. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century society of princes, where an individual's whole life was determined by a social hierarchy that predefined roles and functions since childhood, old age was the authoritative goal of a life of obedience to one's own "elders", until it is time to take their place.

#### 4 Childhood and Old Age at the Court of the Bourbons of France in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

When reading the pages of the "Journal" of proto-physician Jean Héroard, we are confronted with an exceptional childhood of the 17<sup>th</sup> century from the point of view of someone who was charged by the king of France with the precise responsibility of caring for the Dauphin. The *entourage* of the royal child was managed by a governess until the Dauphin was seven years old, and then taken over by a *gouverneur*.<sup>47</sup> It is mainly the physician's notes in the margins, written in Latin or in French, that allow us to understand what he expected from the future king, and what in his childhood was possible to see as *augurium de se*. This is for example what a note from 3 January 1605 refers to: the child sees the picture of David and Goliath in a book of incisions and exclaims: "E vela le peti dauphin, dict-il, monté su son gran cheval".<sup>48</sup> He seems to be like David and, moreover, he seems to recognise himself in that picture, when he says: "Here is the little Dauphin on his big horse". But in the "Journal" we can also find other notes by Héroard about the topic of the *augurium de se*. For example, on 10 January 1606, in a pretend play experience, the Dauphin defines himself as the puppy dog who chases the wolf and frees the sheep.<sup>49</sup>

The particular attention to the child's use of language demonstrated by the proto-physician shows an unprecedented interest in the childhood of the Dauphin, who was

47 For a bibliography on this subject: Monica Ferrari, Il precettore e/o il *gouverneur* dei principi bambini nella Francia del Sei/Settecento. Questioni di potere e rapporti di forza, in: Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche 20 (2013), pp. 105–121; Jean-Luc Le Cam (Ed.), *Éducation privée et pratiques préceptorales du XV<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols., Lyon 2015 (*Histoire de l'éducation* 143/144); Monica Ferrari, Il precettorato. Una questione di lungo periodo, in: ead./Matteo Morandi (Eds.), *Maestri e pratiche educative dalla Riforma alla Rivoluzione francese. Contributi per una storia della didattica*, Brescia 2020 (Saggi 127), pp. 59–86.

48 *Journal de Jean Héroard*, ed. by Madeleine Foisil, 2 vols., Paris 1989, vol. 1, p. 566.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 1149: "luy est le dogue qui court au loup et delibvre la brebis."

observed in minute detail in his everyday life. Héroard even goes so far as to register the first time the child pronounces a term, as in the case of the word “vraiment” (“truly”) (2 October 1605).<sup>50</sup> And this child, who stutters and speaks his own language, is capable, according to the doctor, to give a precise idea of his destiny as a king in many circumstances throughout his young existence. We therefore know that he is “pour son naturel prudent” (“wise by nature”), as when, on 7 January 1605, he is afraid of hurting himself, or when, on 14 January 1605, he distinguishes himself for his discretion in deciding the different roles for the dinner (“distribue les charges a Mr. D’Espéron pour servir a souper”).<sup>51</sup> His memory is sometimes “amazing”, as in the case of 2 April 1605, when he is able to recognise the pavilion where he had been taken for a particular religious feast.<sup>52</sup> Firmness, charity and compassion are some of the qualities that he shows to possess in August 1605.<sup>53</sup> On 18 September of the same year, he admirably proves to be much into arms,<sup>54</sup> while on 20 September he reveals his predisposition for music.<sup>55</sup> But he is also certainly capable (as on 21 April 1606)<sup>56</sup> of “propos d’ homme ancien”, i. e. of saying sentences typical of an age very different from his own. Between January 1605 and 4 January 1607 there are very few notes qualifying him as “enfant”, indicating that what deserves to be noted is his ability to rise above his age and give an anticipation of his destiny, to which the fate of France is linked.

In order to raise this royal child, it is necessary, according to Héroard, to put together an impeccable *entourage*: for this reason the *précepteur* and the *gouverneur* must be chosen with extreme care, as he himself claims in his “Institution du prince”, published in Paris in 1609.<sup>57</sup> According to Héroard, in this fictitious dialogue – covering a period of seven days – between the doctor and the *gouverneur*, Monsieur de Souvré, it seems that children do not have judgement and are not able to distinguish good from evil, but rather they learn from every occasion and from every person by imitation (p. 24v). The child is “land to be tilled” for his *précepteur* (p. 26r), and “a boat to steer” for his

50 Ibid., p. 775.

51 Ibid., pp. 571, 578.

52 Ibid., p. 633.

53 Ibid., pp. 734–735.

54 Ibid., p. 758.

55 Ibid., p. 761.

56 Ibid., p. 926.

57 Here I will refer to Jean Héroard, *De l’institution du prince*, Paris 1609. Cf. also Jean Héroard, *De l’institution du prince* (1609). Texte établi, présenté et annoté, ed. by Bernard Teyssandier, Paris 2013 (Bibliothèque des littératures classiques).

*gouverneur* (p. 24r). To his age, incapable of judgement, is opposed the “venerable” age of the *gouverneur* (p. 23r), pilot of the Dauphin and of his whole *entourage*. The *gouverneur* is therefore necessarily of an age characterised by *medietas*, wisdom, authority and strength; the *précepteur* too has to be “meur d’âge” (“mature regarding his age”). Maturity guarantees against inexperience, and allows one to verify, in the test of life, the morals of a teacher (p. 23r).

The first pages of Héroard’s “Institution” deal with nothing else but childhood and maturity. Among the Bourbons who would govern France in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were no old kings: Henry IV was assassinated in 1610 at the age of fifty-seven, while Louis XIII died in 1643, at the age of forty-two. This would not be the case for Louis XIV, who was born in 1638 and would remain on the throne until 1715, surviving his children and grandchildren, among whom the Duke of Burgundy (who died at the age of thirty), a pupil of Fénelon who would outlive him, stands out.<sup>58</sup> Fénelon wrote for his pupil, as was usual in this period,<sup>59</sup> *fables* and pamphlets with a decidedly moralising character, along with a series of much better known works, among which was the “Télémaque” (“Les aventures de Télémaque”, 1699), a book dear to Rousseau.

The first of these *fables*, published in the classic Gallimard edition of 1983, is entitled “Histoire d’une vieille reine et d’une jeune paysanne” and is entirely based on the contrast between ages and social conditions: actually, the magical exchange of ages is accompanied by an exchange of social conditions. However inappropriate, this change proves impracticable even in the “Histoire de la reine Gisèle et de la fée Corysante”. Certainly, the question of the intolerable alteration of social conditions is central in the two *fables*. Female old age is here associated with royalty. The body of the aged queen is minutely described in all its wretchedness. She is in the horrible condition of losing her self-image which is inexorably connected only to youth. The repelling old age of women is a long-lasting *topos* that we can here see in its relationship with power.<sup>60</sup>

58 The Duke of Burgundy was born in 1682 and died in 1712; his *précepteur*, Fénelon, was born in 1651 and died in 1715. On old age in France in that period: Jean Pierre Bois, *Le vieillard dans la France moderne, XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Essai de problématique pour une histoire de la vieillesse*, in: *Histoire, Économie et Société* 3 (1984), pp. 67–94.

59 Much has been written on the fortune of fables in France as a literary genre in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the sake of brevity, we refer here to the *notice* regarding Fénelon’s pedagogic fables, published by Gallimard in his “Oeuvres” (1983).

60 Cf. Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 18); Giannarelli, *Lo specchio e il ritratto* (see note 41); Bernard Ribémont, *Femme, vieillesse et sexualité dans la littérature médiévale française (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, in: Alain Montandon (Ed.), *Éros, blessures et folie. Détresses du vieillir*, Clermont-Ferrand 2006 (Littératures), pp. 57–77; Chloé Vallée, *Vieillesse et sexualité*. Anthropologie

There is clearly also a certain idea of royalty behind these *fables* for a French prince that was destined to reign. Perhaps precisely for this reason, the presentation of old age in all its horror and in female form was designed for the young grandchild of a king that was actually getting old, despite his garments, concealed the passing of time. It was not until Madame de Lambert devoted her work “*Traité de la vieillesse*”<sup>61</sup> to her daughter, that a positive portrait of women’s old age was provided. This followed the model of Cicero’s “*De Senectute*”, which was written from a male perspective, even if it was not connected to the image of royalty that interested Fénelon with reference to the education of the Duke of Burgundy.

On the representation of old age in the Middle Ages and in Early Modern Europe much has been written (even if further research is needed).<sup>62</sup> On the representation of royalty at the time of the Sun King’s absolutism even more has been written.<sup>63</sup> However, Louis Marin’s study, which deconstructs the portrait of Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743), following a satirical sketch of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>64</sup> is still very important. The portrait, now at the Louvre, dates back to the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1701) when Louis XIV was already over the age of sixty and therefore the king was approximately at the same age as Cicero when he wrote “*De Senectute*”. And, as in the fable, in the sketch of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the king is not only naked under his garments, but he is also old.

sociale et ethnologie, 2014. (dumas-01023873) (URL: <https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-01023873>; 7. 6. 2022).

61 Anne Thérèse Marquise de Lambert, *Traité de la vieillesse*, in: ead., *Oeuvres*, Amsterdam 1766; ead., *Traité de la vieillesse*, in: ead., *CŒuvres*, ed. by Robert Grandroute, Paris 1990 (*Les Classiques français des temps modernes* 3).

62 For example: Erin Campbell (Ed.), *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe. Cultural Representations*, Aldershot 2006; Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, Berlin 2007 (*Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture* 2); Giovanna Pinna/Hans Georg Pott (Eds.), *Senilità. Immagini della vecchiaia nella cultura occidentale*, Alessandria 2011 (*Studi e ricerche* 95). See also notes 46, 58, 60.

63 Here I only recall two now classic texts published in 1981: Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le roi machine. Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris 1981 (*Arguments*); Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*, Paris 1981 (*Le sens commun*). On this subject: Myriam Tsikounas, *De la gloire à l’émotion. Louis XIV en costume de sacre par Hyacinthe Rigaud*, in: *Sociétés et Représentations* 2,26 (2008), pp. 57–70.

64 I refer to the irreverent triple representation of Louis XIV (“*Rex, Ludovicus, Ludovicus Rex*”) which appears in William Thackeray’s “*Paris Sketchbook*”, published in London in 1840, and discussed by Mario Praz (Mario Praz, *Cronache letterarie anglosassoni*, vol. 1, Roma 1950, pp. 88–89) and by Louis Marin (Louis Marin, *Le corps glorieux du roi et son portrait*, in: id., *La parole mangée et autres essais théologico-politiques*, Paris 1986, pp. 195–225).

## 5 Perspectives of Research

Thanks to different kinds of sources that tell us about childhood and old age in connection with the education of princes between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, there are many tracks to follow with respect to different courts, all concerned with the issue of the relationship between generations. When the monarch is not elected, the father's power must pass to the son, following the unbroken chain of blood. Perhaps that is why in one of the images of the "Camera degli Sposi" ("Bridal Chamber"), painted towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Andrea Mantegna in Saint George Castle (Castello di San Giorgio) (in Mantua), the men of the house are holding hands, showing the urgency of a direct transmission of power.<sup>65</sup> And is this not the aim of the juridical fiction of the "double body" of the king, studied by Marc Bloch and by Ernst Kantorowicz? In the "society of princes"<sup>66</sup> the problem of the age of the person who governs (even if he is a legitimate blood descendant) adds to that of developing a training that should make him worthy of the position he occupies in the social hierarchy in view of the well-being of the state, the political body that he himself embodies through his own existence.

That is why Erasmus of Rotterdam in his "Institutio Principis Christiani" (1516), which marked the beginning of the fortune of the *institutiones* under the *ancien régime*, dictating a new style of political and pedagogical communication, reminds us that the age of the (chosen) king must not be too advanced, so that the typical ravings of old men could be avoided.<sup>67</sup> After the medieval *specula*, in which we see the image of a perfect ruler, capable of respecting his duties, Erasmus's "Institutio" is a turning point for the educational treatises dedicated to princes, placed as it is between the Image of Christ and the pedagogy of Humanism, with specific reference to new authorities from the Ancient World. Additionally, in the case of non-elective monarchies, the age of the person who governs is an issue that, in his view, should be raised and overcome: "In aliis nonnihil conceditur adulescentiae, aliquid donatur senectuti, error illi, huic otium

65 Ferrari, *Lo specchio, la pagina, le cose* (see note 17), p. 131; Pier Luigi Mulas, *L'iconografia ducale nei libri miniati al tempo di Ludovico Sforza*, in: Alexander (Ed.), *Grammatica del Donato e Liber Jesus* (see note 38), pp. 43–92, at p. 68; Ferrari, *L'educazione esclusiva* (see note 32), p. 200.

66 Regarding this term, which I would like to apply to a longer period of time encompassing the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, cf. Lucien Bély, *La société des princes. XV<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris 1999 (*Les nouvelles études historiques*); Christof Dipper / Mario Rosa (Eds.), *La società dei principi nell'Europa moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)*, Bologna 2005 (*Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico. Quaderni 66*).

67 Erasmus of Rotterdam, *L'educazione del principe cristiano*, ed. by Davide Canfora, Bari 2011 (*Biblioteca filosofica Quaestio 9*), pp. 12–13.

et cessatio. At qui principis munus suscepit, quandoquidem omnium agit negotium nec adulescentem esse licet nec senem, propterea quod non nisi magno plurimorum malo errat nec sine gravissima pernicie cessat in officio”.<sup>68</sup> These words are an implicit quotation of the ideology of the “Classics” (such as Cicero or Seneca), at crossroads with that of the Christian world. According to Erasmus, the prince can be neither too young nor too old: he must perhaps be put out of the time of human beings and live in a sort of adult age that means wisdom and strength.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for the young French Bourbon dynasty, anxious for legitimacy, the minority of two kings (King Louis XIII at the age of nine and King Louis XIV at the age of five) ended up risking the crown in various circumstances (from the excessive power of the royal counsellor Concino Concini to the Fronde of the Princes). In the same country, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the old age of the king perhaps also becomes, like the age of the queen of Fénelon’s fables, the sign of a social order that is crumbling, regardless of the tested mechanism of representation of power.

It is my view that it is necessary to further reflect on the two stages of life, childhood and old age, as being only apparently distant, thanks to specific case studies on European courts between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, when the society of princes was at its peak. Additionally, it is worth reflecting on their cultural representations and attitudes, and on how they intersect with each other as well as with politics and education in the art of government.

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68 Ibid., pp. 52–53. “To other men something is forgiven during youth, something is allowed during old age (*senectus*): error for young people, *otium* and retirement for old people. But whoever takes upon himself the burden (*munus*) of being a prince since he carries out an activity (*negotium*) of collective interest, cannot afford to be neither young nor old because his error would be a serious damage for a lot of people and his retirement from his duties (*officium*) would put every one at risk” (own English translation).