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Once Upon a Child...
Toward a Philosophy of Beginning

Abstract: This article offers a philosophical and literary theorization of the child's relationship with time. The author explores how the dispute around the temporal nature of children in the philosophy of beginning influences children's literature. The texts aimed at young readers play a significant role in shaping this debate and building the ontological concept of a child being toward time. This debate is vital to evolving child time archetypes: *puer disputationi, puer aevum, puer aeternum,* and *puer tempus*. These archetypes signify a shift in our understanding of the child's relationship with time and its finitude. Moving beyond the classical opposition of being and becoming, the author introduces the concept of emergence, referring to the process of forming new and complex temporal patterns of childhood.

Keywords: children's temporality, philosophy of beginning, children's literature, time archetype

The title phrase announces the topic of my article. "Once upon a child" is a paraphrase of the opening formula found in fairy tales "once upon a time," which introduces a chronosophy into children's ontology. I want to show that the child has always been entangled in dialogical discussions on the temporal nature and the child's understanding of temporality. I am trying to determine how the philosophical dispute regarding the temporal nature of children has influenced children's literature and the discourse of *children's studies*, reshaping how we discuss and understand childhood. Different understandings of temporality – whether regarded in transcendent or existential categories – have affected and determined the cognition of a child's being. Conceptualization from Plato's presence to Augustine's eternity, from the Cartesian imperative of duration to Bergson's eternal psychological time, from Heidegger's persistence fearing for its finitude (Heidegger, 2002: 2) to Arendt's natality shaped either the vitalist or the thanatical image of the child's temporal nature, situating it on the two opposite verges: at the end or at the beginning of time, forming contrasting

images of the child's nature (Szymborska, 2020). Children's literature reflects these evolving views, depicting childhood through lenses of either the philosophy of finitude or the philosophy of beginning, each shaping cultural representations of childhood's temporality. By addressing the temporality intrinsic to these notions, I want to consider how these discourses have changed the structure of temporal representations and our understanding of childhood. My goal is to explore how the philosophy of beginning shapes a new identification model that reconsiders our assumptions about time and temporality in relation to children as social agents and childhood as a distinct stage in life. In this context, I aim to create a typology of child-time archetypes to systematize and categorize the recurring patterns and models that represent childhood's temporal identity found in literature and philosophy. This approach will help clarify how children's experiences of time are constructed and understood.

BEFORE THE BEGINNING:
FROM *PUER DISPUTATIONI* TO *PIER AEVUM*

Emma Uprichard, in *Children as Being and Becomings: Children, Childhood and Temporality*, argues that a child is entangled in a discussion about time as the opposite dimension as being or becoming, and the temporality intrinsic to these. The notion of "being" suggests a state where the child is seen as an active social agent in the present, whereas "becoming a child" is seen as an "adult in the making", emphasizing future potential over present realities (Uprichard, 2008). Uprichard, drawing on Prigogine's views on time, suggests integrating both perspectives into understanding childhood as "being and becoming a child". Childhood is understood in this context as a marker of time throughout life. The becoming child discourse considers the ageing child, where time is an ontological property of that person.

Uprichard's linkage of "being" to "becoming" suggests a more nuanced philosophical understanding than the contemporary sociological propositions that Jenks, Proust, and other researchers addressed (Qvortrup, 1991; James, Prout, 1997; James, James, 2004). However, this perspective is still unsatisfactory to understand the time nature of childhood for a few reasons. Firstly, it reinforces the connection to the hierarchical adult/child dualism without involving contemporary conceptualizations, like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of "becoming-child". This "pervasive rationalisation and normalisation of stage theory, in its relentless chronologism – as David Kennedy observes – sees childhood as over before it begins" (Kennedy, 2013: n. pag.).[1] Second, while involving the social context aligns with contemporary

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[1] The concept of "becoming-child" in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy provides a rich framework for understanding the temporal ontology of childhood because it focuses on fluidity, transformation, and the potentiality of existence rather than fixed catego-

philosophy by emphasizing the influence of societal structures of temporality on childhood construction, it underscores the importance of the epistemological evolution of transcendent time construction throughout history and conceptions of subjects related to them. By examining childhood through these blueprints of childhood within the philosophy of beginning and finitude, I want to reveal that the idea of a child's "being and becoming" is more complex and requires deeper historical and philosophical context from the beginning, where all the time considerations about a child have started. I will also address how it foregrounds questions about how time constructs identity, experience, and existence.

The child's temporal nature of being and becoming balances both in literature and philosophy between two horizons: the philosophy of finitude and the paedocentric philosophy of the beginning. Heidegger's philosophy of finitude frames a child's existence within the constraints of mortality, viewing childhood as a series of temporal encounters that reveal a finite nature. This aligns with Uprichard's concept of "being and becoming a child," positioning childhood within a tension between present experience and future potential, often interpreted through an adult-centric lens of progression toward adulthood. Contrastingly, the paedocentric philosophy of the beginning introduces a different narrative arc, complicating the time perspective with eschatological chronosophy and affective criticism. Here, childhood is seen as a unique temporal experience shaped by the interplay of memory, loss, and the foundational aspects of life.

The philosophy of beginning is not new, yet it is rarely recognized as a distinct and widely acknowledged philosophical concept of childhood. In the following reflections, I propose this concept as a unique way of experiencing childhood through the perception of time, the impact of affect, and our attitudes toward the beginning of a child's life. The inspiration for such an approach comes from Bergson's text, particularly his portrayal within the framework of the concept of beginning in the *Time and Free Will* (Bergson, 2018).[2] Bergson's concern with finding a valid starting point starts with a difference:

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ries or developmental stages within the proposed typology of "being and becoming." "Becoming-child" positions childhood not as a fixed state but as an ontological category defined by its openness to time and transformation. This perspective enriches debates about what it means to "be" a child, emphasizing how children exist within and beyond adult-imposed structures of time and identity. It asserts that childhood exists as its own plane of immanence, characterized by its intrinsic value and potential rather than its role in achieving adulthood. This process also addresses the contemporary understanding of child-time nature, which evolved from more traditional aspects of the ontology of child-time nature (Deleuze, Guattari, 1983).

[2] Wittgenstein also formulated the philosophy of beginnings in *Philosophical Investigations*, where he delved into the nature of language, meaning, and the foundations of philosophy. None of the philosophers, though, attributed these conceptualizations to a child (J. Shotter, 2000).

the actual beginning. In this respect, Bergson positions it as the first principle, beginning from an indifferent being. A less is taken for a more, and we fall into a simple vision of intensities. In the final instance, the opposition of two terms that differ in nature is only the positive realization of virtuality that contains both. The role of intermediary degrees is precisely in this realization. They place one in the other, the memory in movement. Bergsonian demand is understanding why the thing is this rather than something else. It is a difference which explains the thing itself and not its causes. Seen in this way, childhood is understood not as a stage of age but as a signifier of experience of time. It includes not only the time of being a child but also how adults perceive childhood temporality – as not being, being and/or becoming a child, but also various temporal becomings of a child, which may vary in different cultures.

I propose to apply what I term the philosophy of beginning (gr. *filosofía tis archís*) to examine the child's being in its temporal nature, primarily understood in terms of its foundation toward the cyclical side of time, which was linked later into a linear time. This tendency refers to the being of a child that fights the concept of finitude and re-envisions childhood in *children's studies*, apart from instrumentalist assumptions that endlessly defer the recognition of a child as anything but a potential adult, centering instead on the child's unique ontology and capacity for continuous renewal. In this context, the child's experience becomes a continuous process of becoming, embodying the potential for endless new beginnings. The child is seen as embodying circular and linear time, a symbol of beginnings integral to existence. Ontologically, the child transcends being or becoming within a dialectic of timelessness and finitude.

To understand this dialectic between these philosophical perspectives of finitude and beginning, we must think about the child before the beginning when a child was considered a pure timelessness, being a part of the Divine and representing the first Ur-image of the eternal child archetype. Therefore, until philosophy and religion were accompanied by the conviction that God is *Summa Essentia*, the child was perceived as *puer disputtationi* – a timeless being. This term implies that a child exists beyond the confines of time, in a perpetual state of being that extends beyond temporal limitations. Ontologically, the child was neither being nor becoming, merely representing a hypostasis of a child, its incarnation, but not in a materialistic way.

We can find the mythological representation of the *puer disputationi* in the myth of divine child in ancient Egyptian and Greek symbol of the child-deity Harpocrates placed in the "Ouroboros" symbol, which gained a meaning of unity, a symbol of eternity and infinity, which marked the beginning and the end and self-renewal of natural cycles, periodicity of time, birth, and death. Soon, it became an archetype of child rebirth and timelessness and the first matrix of a child's identification, where the child had no beginning or end. Crispijn de Passe's emblem *Finis ab origine pendet* captures this transformation

underscoring the Latin sentence "In the end, is my beginning." From this perspective, the child could never die because it existed in a mythical, reversible, eternal time.

We can find this notion in Augustin's tractate *De civitate Dei* (413–427 C.E., Augustyn, 2002), stating that being in death leveled time and considered being in categories of divine timelessness. The child in this plan was only a contingent, incomplete being conceived of as *infiniti*; his/her subjectivity was embedded in the concept of immortality. The child's identity was inseparable from sacred time, representing humanity's aspiration to transcend earthly struggles and attain eternal bliss. This notion equates the child's beginning with the birth (but without an end), achieved through liturgical time (Kairos) that transcends death into a new beginning.

In modern times, this symbolism shifts as secular and religious understandings of time diverge in European cultures, especially in the 19th century. Now, a child exists in both sacred and secular times. Mircea Eliade explains that sacred time is circular, allowing people to re-enter an eternal present through ritual, where archetypes recreate the original act of creation (Eliade, 1987). With this draft, there is a need to raise the child to the rank of a myth, to the highest holiness or deity status, to preserve the child's status quo, which earlier represented the archetype of *puer disputationi*. This image develops into the *puer aevum* archetype, an eternal child who, though touched by time at birth, is sublimated to timelessness through ritual, symbolizing everlasting innocence.

In the philosophical treatise *Fear and Trembling* (I ed. 1843), Soren Kierkegaard defined this essential incongruence of being-a-child with "the paradox of faith", stating that Abraham could never lose his son Isaac because he ultimately belonged to God (Kierkegaard, 1982). The situation changed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as faith in a child's eternal life weakened, and dialectics of *Fear and Trembling* determined the relationship between children and time. Fearing losing children, people wanted to capture them in present nature for eternity. Myths and rituals like Uroboros become a way of preserving and recovering a child in the plane of eternal time, keeping him/her transcendent and unchanged. Western culture of consolation emerged, as seen in Antoniewicz's *Poselstwo aniołka w niebie do matki na ziemi*, where a deceased child assures his mother of eternal life in God, awaiting reunion (Antoniewicz, 1870).[3] The 19th-century children's literature echoed this soteriological

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[3] The literary examples used in the paper represent the most illustrative text within time archetypes. The criteria for selecting the corpus of literature included thematic relevance, historical and cultural diversity, and philosophical depth of either child being, becoming, or being and becoming. While a more detailed analysis of their plots is necessary, the breadth of the issues explored in this study is too vast to permit an exhaustive examination of each example, which would require treatment as an independent subject of inquiry.

view, portraying the child as reborn into a new ontological state after death, yet mentally and physically preserved as a child, belonging both to God and their parents.

This timeless notion of the child evolved into a nuanced, vitalist interplay between timeless essence and temporal reality, reframing the child's ontology. It resonates with Hannah Arendt's formulations of the philosophy of beginning, outlined in *Love and Saint Augustine*, transcending Heidegger's notion of mortality. Arendt's philosophy of beginning is called natality or birth. *Principium*, in her thought, suggests the governing role of the Creator, whereas *initium*, symbolized by birth, becomes the capacity of the firstborn individual. *Initium* refers to the beginning of man's soul, which pre-memory allows the deity to enact the story of humankind. It allows him also to become (*fieri*) (Arendt, 1996: 169). It transcends the Heideggerian philosophy of finitude to the ontological concept of infinity. Arendt notes: "Once we assume the perspective that we no longer view life as >>before death<< but as >>after death<<" (Arendt, 1996: 76). This devaluation of the end, the course of life itself, is leveled out from the beginning, and the end is no longer separated but has become identical in the encompassing concept. This thinking affirmed life itself, whether short or long. The weakness of Arendt's concept concerning this situation is that, paradoxically, natality does not apply to children. In other texts, especially *The Human Condition* and *Between Past and Future*, Arendt argues that beginning is only possible in the public sphere, from which children should be kept away (Arendt, 1978).

Nineteenth-century literature reveals a new dimension of childhood to the beginning, depicting death as a new beginning that transcends the destructive influence of Thanatos. Based on the power of *initium*, the child is portrayed as eternally alive. Through the new beginning, the child is revitalized and depicted *ab origine*, following what was at the outset. This theory applies only to children who have passed away in childhood. This sets the stage for a natural progression of life after death, and thus it represents the vitalist concept of a child's life. The child's timeless essence endures but undergoes a metamorphosis into a more profound comprehension of temporality. The child is now acknowledged within the interplay of their timeless core and the temporal reality that envelops them, signifying that there is no past or present significant relevance to its existence. Arendt's argument envisions such a form of being but does not attribute it to the child. It should affirm a child's life since it understands it as a new being. Each new birth (symbolical, physical, eschatological, etc.) guaranteed this beginning.

This opens the concept of childhood that transcends social beginnings in the *puer aevum* stage, encompassing a sense of eternal beginnings in one's biography, life, and afterlife. This beginning is presented as a source of meanings yet to be explored, reflecting on the child as a signifier of circular and linear time. The beginning is not an end but represents a sense of being intertwined in nostalgia, preserving a childhood marked by two dimensions of time perception.

"TIME (IS) A CHILD CHILDING…"
CHILD'S FALL IN TIME AND THE BEGINNING
OF *PUER AETERNUS* ARCHETYPE

By the end of the nineteenth century, the traditional understanding of child temporality was no longer sufficient. The high death rate of children and the increasing secularization of society necessitated a shift in perspective. This shift, crucial to our exploration, extended the concept of eternal time in Christianity to include unbaptized children. It also marked the progression from *puer aevum* to the *puer aeternus* archetype, a profound transformation in the perception of time and the child symbol from sacred to profane, and a reevaluation of sacred time for a broader population.

In the *puer aevum* stage, the child symbolized eternity, embodying perpetual youth, innocence, and a timeless essence beyond conventional time. However, this construction of temporal childhood in the nineteenth century raised two profound philosophical questions. First, within the philosophy of beginning, regarding the temporal and ontological nature of a child after death: Does it grow up or remain in child form forever? Second, could a child, within a new beginning acquired through death, remain in a hospitable previous form but experience a future life and duration apart from the conventional perception of time or become a new form of being?

The emergence of the *puer aeternus* archetype represents a more complex interplay between time and the eternal child, which tries to answer these questions. Unlike the pure timelessness of *puer aevum*, it combines a sense of perpetual youth with a resistance to growing up and an engagement with life's temporal challenges. The child, once eternal, now engages with the temporal realm, marking the beginning of a complex archetype that marks the intersection of timeless and temporal aspects of existence.

The child begins to experience the temporality and challenges associated with the passage of time in the afterlife, which relates to Heraclitus' thought: "Time (is) a child childing; its realm is one of a child." A double relationship is affirmed in this sentence: the time of childhood (*aion-pais*) and the power of childhood (*basileíe–pais*). The child being was not only eternal but actively engaged in the process of time unfolding and introducing aspects of change and metamorphosis either on a biological or spiritual level. Walter Kohan interprets this aphorism as the mode of being of a child as a form of circular empowerment:

> […] that there is another way of living time that could be seen as a childlike way of being, one that belongs to a child. […] In other words, […] in relation to time, a child is very powerful, more powerful than any other being. If in terms of chrónos, the child is at the beginning, in a first, undeveloped stage of being, in terms of aión there no more being more realized than a child. (Kennedy, Kohan, 2008:7)

Heraclitus views childhood not as a mere life stage but as a realm marked by intensity – a form of aionic time that represents a potent, vital force in human experience. This perspective suggests that unlike in Chronos (linear time), where a child is at an early stage, in Aión (eternal time), the child embodies a fully realized existence, showing a unique power over finitude. As David Kennedy remarks, a non-chronological, aionic experience of a child's time begins and, together with it, a non-chronological concept of childhood as a state of beginning. The aionic nature of a child evokes a "form of temporality that is not constructed through divisions and one-directional sequences" (Kennedy, 2013: 4).

This way of thinking led Deleuze and Guattari to understand Heraclitean childhood as a period of life and a specific strength, force, or intensity that inhabits a qualitative life at any given chronological time (Deleuze, Guattari, 1983). Childhood is liberated from a particular stage in life and viewed as a "zone", a region of the psyche, a way of being in time that can be acquired at any moment of existence, an intensity that inhabits all chronological times. However, Alain Badiou critiques this perspective in *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, arguing that Deleuze's emphasis on immanence and eternal return, as exemplified in the concept of the eternal return of difference, leads to a dead-end, negating genuine change and progression. Moreover, the Deleuzian vision of being is the infinite reservoir of "dissimilar productions" in a virtual reality of transcendence (Badiou, 2000:45). In this context, childhood loses its transformative potential, becoming trapped in an endless loop of sameness, which resembles how *puer aeternum* conceptualizes the temporal nature of a child. Badiou contrasts Deleuze's Platonic notions of being with Aristotelian reflections on bios, zoe, and the soul, highlighting how Deleuze's virtual self resembles the fabricated image. While this allows childhood to persist in an eternal time, shaping experiences beyond its chronological constraints, the soul of being gains linear temporal qualities, which become partially entangled in zoe, creating a hybrid state of being in time that extends into new dimensions.

This interplay raises questions about how childhood is represented in literature and its implications for understanding time and identity. Children's literature plays a pivotal role here in childhood's temporal ontology, as it triggers various philosophical disputes. In the 20th century, children's literature reimagined child beings, initiating the *puer aeternus* archetype, drawing on messianic vitalism and a post-secular, aionic understanding of time.[4] Initially, it related to the secularized theology of creation, which was based on the concept of a child's non-material, virtual and non-chronological existence. It also

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[4] We can find the sources of this belief in the "messianic vitalism" in the sense that Agata Bielik-Robson gave to this concept, where a child is an exceptional being that acquires the features of a being endowed with the fullness of life, something given in the mystery of salvation, unfulfilled (A. Bielik-Robson, 2004: 89).

empowered Heraclitean, aionic understanding of a child's time in post-secular eternity.

The literature presents two sides of the child's temporality in the *puer aeternus* archetype. Carl Jung highlights the archetype's divine, positive side, as seen in *Little Prince*. Conversely, its shadow side emerges in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, where the child embodies eternal childhood within the timeless realm of Neverland. Peter Pan, embodying death and eternal recurrence, traps lost boys in an unchanging state of being-child, reflecting Heraclitus' notion of *child childing in the realm of time*. Within the narrative, the child is granted the agency to choose whether to remain within the Aion time or choose Kairos. Peter Pan assumes an eternity akin to a deity who can take life but not bestow it.[5] However, Wendy, representing femininity and life, disrupts this stasis by enabling children to mature, challenging the endless cycle and affirming the possibility of progression beyond eternal recurrence. The perpetual nature of childhood in Neverland can be interpreted through the lens of Deleuze's concepts, where time folds back upon itself, potentially ensnaring individuals in a cycle of sameness as they become-child.

Posthumously, the child undergoes a metamorphosis through a new beginning into a new duration of childhood, governed by different laws of the time of eternal presence but preserving the same ontology, an idea that Clementine Beauvais describes as "locked in time" (Beauvais, 2015: 22). This archetype, aligning with Piaget's views on time, reflects a timeless present that halts change and growth, embodying the essence of *puer aeternus* archetype (Piaget, 1966: 67). Thanks to the power of rebirth and finding life-giving strength, this archetype allows for a new beginning apart from *Principium*, as it exceeds the finality of death.

It is worth returning to Jung's juxtaposition with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of being. Jung and Deleuze both explore beginnings, but each locates time differently. For Jung, the *puer aeternus* archetype connects with Aión as the core of a child's psychic energy, embodying creativity, renewal, and transformation – a perpetual cycle of beginning and end. It attains Heraclitean strength and divine prerogative but is also vulnerable, with an inconspicuous, questionable beginning (Jung, 1969: 177). Therefore, the "child" is *renatus in novam infantiam*. Thus, it is both a beginning and an end, signifying a perpetual cycle of renewal and transformation. However, Deleuze, in the treatise *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, states it is the very process of creating a beginning

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[5] The *puer aeternus* archetype allowed Barrie to strip the child's immortality from the sacred, enabling children to choose between eternal youth (Aión) or the linear progression of life (Chronos). In aionic life, Barries' childhood is not a static stage of life – as suggested by Badiou – but instead goes through it powerfully, as of intensity or duration. This literary child engages in "childing" – extending youth indefinitely but sacrificing adult maturity.

that entails both Aion and Chronos – instead of being submerged by the laws of Aion itself and then healed within it, as in Jung's theory (Deleuze, 2001). A child being in aionic structures transcends to a new beginning to endure death. This juxtaposition suggests that childhood is considered the ground of time. Deleuze posits that creating a beginning involves Aion (eternal time) and Chronos (sequential time). This implies that the creation of something new, such as the emergence of a beginning, is not solely governed by linear time (Chronos) but also influenced by the eternal, transcendent aspects of Aion. This concept aligns with Deleuze's ideas about becoming an immanence, where individuals transform and surpass limitations, including the finality of death. It challenges the conventional lens of growth with its teleological directionality and separation of children into age grades and life stages, embracing instead the concept of reliving childlike nature through a transformative beginning. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) reflects this, portraying life in flux beyond fixed identities, as in their notion of "becoming-child," which defies rigid social categories or molar identities (e.g., class, gender, species) to embrace a transformative experience of life (Deleuze, Guattari, 2004).

The concept discussed here finds resonance in Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-baby* (1863), where the main protagonist undergoes multiple metamorphoses and ontological beginnings, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and the moral purification attained through rebirth. The hero's death in a river and transformation into a water baby symbolize a "vitalist" manifestation of the soul and a continual process of becoming. The protagonist's death ruptures the imaginary framework of existence, echoing Lacan's concept of disrupted unconscious energy and Deleuze and Guattari's "body-without-organs" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1987). This disruption unleashes new potential, illustrating an artistic transformation of "becoming" akin to the concept advocated by Badiou. The child transcends biological life stages to exist in a realm of pure immanence even after death, intertwining linear time with eternity. The recurring force of potentiality inherent in childhood persists beyond the boundaries of temporal existence, highlighting the transformative power of beginnings and the continuous process of becoming.

Nevertheless, it is essential to pay attention to how, in late 19th- and 20th-century writings, childhood is freed from a fixed stage in life and reimagined as a zone of *initium*, a psychic region, a way of being in time, a form of intentionality or attention, and a field of intensities and flows, affective and noetic. This state embodies power as the sense of "intensity" and "flow", aligning with the energy that Deleuze and Guattari call "becoming-child" (Deleuze, Guattari, 2004). It represents a line of flight, escaping the constraints of molar categories and historical subjectivity.

PIER TEMPUS AND THE CONTEMPORARY BEGINNING(S)

As the *puer aeternus* archetype evolves, it emphasizes a child's quest for autonomous temporality, shifting reflection from finiteness toward a paedocentric philosophy of beginnings and a subjective sense of time. This new philosophy of the beginning explores the child's liberation from Chronos, emphasizing the modern struggle for an individual sense of time. Contemporary literature often engages with these themes, depicting children who experience alternative, non-linear forms of time. Emil Cioran's "the child's fall into time" concept highlights these temporal experiences, particularly in late 20th-century narratives (Cioran, 2008). These narratives inherit philosophical discussions surrounding secular and sacred childhood and engage with the dialectical tension between the beginning and the end of a child's life while seeking alternative temporal identities within this archetype.

A fall from eternity into time at birth signifies entry into consciousness and history, stripping the child of prior innocence. The new narrative figure *puer tempus* shifts this understanding, integrating two dimensions of temporality: the historical (linear and sequential time) and the eternal (a timeless or cyclical experience). Coming from similar premises but reaching different assumptions, children's literature theorist Clementine Beauvais considers calling this model of being as *puer existens* (Beauvais, 2015:20), capturing a child's journey of "becoming" within the linear temporality and progression of a child. The *puer tempus* archetype represents a child's experience of time, encompassing both the individual, historical and eternal aspects. This archetype still has a residual difference between immanence and transcendence but is intertwined with a child's presence. It causes children to fantasize about travelling through time or conquering it (both on circular and linear levels), which situates it in a "mighty" child status – using Beauvais vocabulary. This implies that archetypes are not just static ideas but have a psychological impact, shaping how children perceive and interact with concepts like time.[6]

While 19th-century thought linked becoming to eschatology, the 20th century aligns with an unconscious phase, allowing the child to traverse time and reach this phase of the child within. Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) embodies the *puer tempus* archetype, offering a vision of a child's evolving relationship with time and spiritual rebirth. The story delves into the child's psyche, capturing an inner journey toward a timeless self-awareness that unites past and future. It is situated on the side of regaining the eschatological order of reality, although it is unlike any other previous realizations. The novel explores the influence of time on a child's consciousness, creating an inner, reversible temporality that reflects the philosophy of the beginning: presence

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[6] The issue of archetypes affecting a child is not analyzed here since it is a broad topic to explore.

(*praesentia*) and beginning (*initium*). L'Engle talks about the beginning when a bond between *initium* and the child's consciousness is established. She builds a materialistic spatiotemporal image in a child's mind, its time-space, which becomes a precious component of its inner world. This imagery represents a path where the past meets the future, creating new forms of sacred space for the child's consciousness and reflecting infinity, as described by Marja Nikolajeva in her exploration of the time nature of consciousness (Nikolajeva, 2000). Therefore, it is an ontological, Parmenidean time *par excellence*, always identical to itself.

L'Engle emphasizes the sacred time a child must reclaim through an eschatological battle of good versus evil, echoing biblical and mythical rebirth. This journey requires openness to vulnerability, as the child learns to see "with the heart," echoing a Pauline message of love's triumph over death. On the ruins of rationality, a new, soothing, private myth of love of the Other arises – the new beginning of a child. This spiritual rebirth is needed for a child hero who finds himself/herself in his "desert" in a state of internal desolation. Salvation arises from transcending modern rationalism, affirming life, and embracing love's transformative pain. The child must acknowledge loss and confront the fear of growing up to create bonds with others. Therefore, *Wrinkle's…* viewpoint can be described as the philosophy of the beginning toward the Other's face (which relates to Levinas' understanding of transcending death). This being-toward-other triggers falling into the world and, therefore, time.

The contemporary discussion about the temporality of childhood and the use of *the puer tempus* archetype in the philosophy of beginnings is notably impacted by experiences of war and trauma. This is particularly evident in the series by Ransom Riggs (from Miss Peregrine's *Home for Peculiar Children* (2011) to *The Desolations of Devil's Acre* (2021). Riggs presents a haunting vision of children whose connection to eternity is fractured by historical violence, merging the past and present conflicts through Jacob Portman's journey. The child's temporality, marked by trauma, reflects a struggle to conquer the fear of death and cyclical repetition of conflict. This way of presenting a child and time shifts the question of "being after death" into being here and now, immersing the child in history and ephemerality, but does not give simplistic images of eternity.

Riggs examines how Chronos shapes new dynamics of eternity, offering two distinct perspectives (Riggs, 2011:235, transl. K.S.). The first highlights a cyclical eternal life of the loophole, where peculiars "are stuck in their youth, just like Peter Pan and his missing boys" (Riggs, 2011: 186). Contrary to Neverland these children are in perpetual youth without the ability to progress, emphasizing the limitations of eternal life amid traumas. Within the loops, peculiars relive previous experiences through endless beginnings. While it may appear to be eternal youth, suspending time comes with a cost: a renunciation of the

future and the fear of death. This type of eternity allows children to take control over their lives and extrapolate their trauma.

The second type of eternity refers to the mythical land called Abaton, also known as the Library of Souls, which is the equivalent of a peculiar paradise based on metempsychosis, where souls are endlessly reborn. This form of eternity denies traditional salvation, portraying an eschatological cycle of beginnings without a definitive return or resolution. Riggs' catastrophic image of paradise, which is not a pleroma to which one could return, overlaps the living dynamics of Levinas' metaphysical vision. Therefore, the desire for eternity becomes an eschatological mirage.

The experience of history and different levels of eternal time underscores the inherent ambiguity in a child's temporal experience, revealing that even eternity is subjected to time. Genuine eternity exists only within life, shaped by relationships beyond time's constraints – it neither conquers nor negates time. Recognition of this thought is a breakthrough in thinking about the child's time. It opens to a new metaphysics of the beginning and returns to integrity in the Hegelian sense. Ultimately, this perspective reshapes the understanding of child being with time. The child's psyche, motivated by a holistic vision of adolescence, claims the right to define and live its temporality on its own terms. Being a child is less about eternity and more about existing within time, rooted in experience. This literary conceptualization depicts that we can no longer refer to the child as "being", "becoming", or "being and becoming" since these etiquettes fail to capture the nuanced realities of different stages and aspects of childhood.

Modern debates about childhood and time often focus on how societal structures, such as education and socialization, impose linear and adult-oriented conceptions of time onto children (Qvortrup, 1991; James, A. James, 2004). The typology of temporal archetypes and the philosophy of beginning offer a counterpoint by highlighting the inherent differences in how literary children experience time. These frameworks challenge the adult-centric view of time by validating real children's unique, often non-linear or imaginative experiences of time, enriching the discourse on temporality. Contemporary children's literature illustrates a new model referring to time identity epitomized by *puer tempus*, which captures a new apparition of secular eternity, pondering similar issues found in philosophical discourse.

This conceptualization presents an alternative view of the timeless childhood of *puer tempus* found in reincarnation narratives. It challenges the traditional connection between growth and age in Western thought, suggesting that children's lives may start mid-cycle rather than at the beginning. In the insightful work *Reliving Childhood? The Temporality of Childhood and Narratives of Reincarnation,* Akhil Gupta delves into the intricate relationship between reincarnation and prevailing Western notions of childhood through Buddhist

perspectives (Gupta, 2002). He argues that cultures embracing reincarnation perceive development differently and defy traditional life stages. Gupta draws on Carolyn Steedman's idea of childhood's nostalgic structure to illustrate how developmental narratives reinforce modern views of childhood associated with loss (Steersman, 1995). The researcher compares the memories of reincarnated children to nostalgic adult recollections, as children remember events from a past life while undergoing current growth. He suggests that adults feeling nostalgic for their childhood experience loss differently than children inhabited by their previous lives since they maintain their essential self (Gupta, 2002:15). The researcher suggests that reincarnated children experience continuity across lifetimes, defying age-based growth norms. For them, becoming is determined by death, marking a new beginning in each cycle. Gupta's ideas resonate with Deleuze's notion of "becoming-child," emphasizing a non-linear life cycle of ongoing beginnings, which decouples childhood from age. Therefore, childhood stops being indexed to age – annihilates beginning, whereas it only shows the continuum cycle of beginnings without being able to address the first *initium* (using Arend's term).

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

The typology proposed in the article does not exhaust the complex problem of the evolution of child's time archetypes. The archetypes *puer aevum, puer disputationi, puer aeternus,* and *puer tempus* are carriers of universal psychological meanings. They can also be treated as a heuristic matrix of a child's temporal identification. They empower children to navigate their time path, whether linear, cyclical, or timeless. Temporal archetypes also represent how childhood is perceived across different cultures and historical periods, shaping various modes of temporal experience.

The philosophy of beginning, linked to concepts of *initium* (beginning) and *praesentia* (presence), explores the idea that childhood represents a unique starting point in the human experience, where time is not yet fully structured by societal norms. This perspective repositions childhood as a zone where multiple temporalities coexist, untethered from adult-imposed structures like schedules and ageing. Building on the typology of temporal archetypes and the philosophy of beginning, childhood can be seen as a zone where different temporalities coexist and are explored. This idea connects with contemporary discussions on childhood as a period where the rigid boundaries of adult time (such as deadlines, schedules, and chronological ageing) are less relevant, allowing for a more fluid and experimental approach to time. In this sense, the child's time experience is not just about progressing toward adulthood. Still, it involves a deeper engagement with time as a multifaceted and dynamic concept where children can choose their temporality and live it on their terms. This counters the romanticized notion of childhood as a period outside of time,

characterized by innocence and unchanging essence. Instead, it positions the child as an active participant in temporal experiences, where time is lived and experienced dynamically.

Returning to the discussion of being and becoming, one must ask: what is the status of the continuously evolving child in the two temporal dimensions of Aion and Chronos? It is insufficient, since Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming distances itself from the essential connection between ontology and the social realm, rendering becoming-child disembodied and disconnected from the real child and its eschatological temporality. Becoming-a-child is not just a topological position that defines the temporal forms of a child's existence but a dynamic process of intensities, transitions, and beginnings that bypasses the empirical child, embedding it in history and society without addressing its eschatological being.

A state that is different from both "being" and "becoming" that captures the difference in a child's relation to temporality could be described as "emergence". It refers to the process by which new and complex patterns, properties, or states arise from interacting with more superficial elements. Unlike Uprichard's concept of "being and becoming a child," the child's emergence transcends the linear life stages, focusing instead on unpredictable, complex transformations that arise through experience and interaction (Uprichard, 2008). It implies that a child's identity isn't pre-determined but unfolds through various influences, creating a unique state that isn't limited to past, present, or future. This concept aligns with Deleuze's "molecular child", representing aspects of childhood that defy rigid social roles, allowing children to form identities independently of societal expectations.

An emerging child is polytemporal, meaning it has a complex internal time experience and can relate to different historical periods and time identities. Viewing a child's emerging existence as polytemporal allows us to challenge the idea of a single, coherent ontology of a child that can be contained within one unified storyline. This opens space for alternative age identities that subvert the nature of "being and becoming a child" and add contradictory strands to a once unified form of child time identity.

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