

CHILDHOOD IN MEDIEVAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Non enim eram infans, qui non farer,
sed iam puer loquens eram...*

Sanctus Aurelius Augustineus

*Confiteor pueritiae ac juventutis
meae mala, adhuc etiam in matura hac
aetate aestuantia...*

Guibert de Nogent

I.

The title of this paper for most readers will look quite distinct – who doesn't know what are autobiography and childhood and who can't presuppose that long ago, the same way as in the modern times, speaking about themselves the authors of autobiographies used to begin with the first years of their lives? But for some scholars, especially for those who study history of pedagogics, who are in the new field called history of childhood or in theory of literature, putting together the terms "childhood", "the Middle Ages" and "autobiography" can provoke a considerable amount of questions. For the students of theory and history of literature, especially after the hot debates of the 70s, it became almost generally accepted to relate the term "autobiography" to the new specific genre of the Western literature at the beginning of which stands "Confessions" of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the autobiographic boom of the early nineteenth century. In such a perspective it looks better not to use the term "autobiography" dealing with the medieval texts. Or may be in a kind of compromise either to substitute it with something less definite like "early autobiography" or just put it in brackets, stressing its conventionality.

The similar objections can be received from the historians of childhood. In the last three decades starting with the pioneer work of Philipp Aries this new interdisciplinary branch of study wages the view that not only the modern concept of childhood, but the very interest to childhood as a specific and important period of human's life were alien to the medieval culture. Medieval world was "the world of adults" where the child was also treated as an adult and where no one seriously thought over the peculiarities of his or her age. The appearance of the modern image of childhood is usually traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries when both adult and child worlds obtain its own clear distinctions and the last one is recognized as having its own social and psychological values. And also often to the epoch of Romanticism which created the real cult of the child.

These observations are usually criticized in details, but in total they are rarely opposed constituting what may be called the main lines of the contemporary study both of theory of autobiography and history of childhood. And the title of the article presented doesn't claim to argue against them – formulating it the author was guided by different considerations. First, by this seeming obvious state of affairs that the Western Middle Ages left us a series of rather specific texts where the authors describe their own lives (or in other words the hero and the story-teller is the same person), and these texts can be hardly defined by any other word but autobiography. Second, by the fact that in some of these self-descriptions their authors give isolated from other parts of the narrative and detailed accounts of the first years of their lives. And finally by the assumption that the autobiographical stories of one's early years may be a source of more deep and clear vision of the medieval attitude to childhood. Anyway in opposition to a moral, philosophical or pedagogical treatise they discuss not the idea of the child, and not the children whom the writer met in the course of his

life, but the child whom he knows best of all – the author himself, now adult. This special perspective of the autobiographical writings put them into a peculiar group of historical testimonies about childhood, testimonies that can give a possibility to know not only what medieval people thought about the first years of their lives, but also how they went through them.

II.

Even the first acquaintance with the autobiographical texts from the fifth to the fifteenth century demonstrates that they do not give an easy way to the world of childhood of the medieval person. First, because most of the authors don't pay any special attention to this period of their lives. Peter Abelard in his *Historia calamitatum* gives a very brief and colorless account of his first years. Here only the most general and fragmentary information constituting a segment of the universal set of biographical clichés is mentioned. He points out to his place of birth, natural gifts of the child and his thirst for knowledge, a special care to him of his farther – all this in about twenty lines. Carl IV in the third chapter of his autobiographical *Vita* is more detailed, but his narrative by its form is very similar to the narrative of any medieval chronicle boringly registering only certain outward life circumstances. Giovanni Conversini is more detailed and incomparably more expressive in his concluding *Rationarium vitae* (chapters from four to nine). However he is also silent about many things we would like to know: his recollections of childhood almost completely dwell upon painful impressions of his study and especially cruel punishment he was exposed. As for an elder contemporary of Conversini and his idol, Petrarca, his *Posteritati* doesn't mention the years of his childhood at all. After a brief appeal to the readers the Poet immediately starts a story about his hard way to the Lord: "Adolescentia me fefellit, juventa corripuit, senecta autem correxit..." (Petrarca, p. 2).

One should also keep in mind that the author's life-story in the medieval autobiographical text is usually utterly outward. In the absolute majority of cases it is a description of events and acts, and behind them even that Pauline "inner man" (Rom VII, 22) making his choice between the sin and the Divine Grace is hardly recognizable. Moreover, the medieval autobiographical *vita* is often very schematic, built on this or that fixed biographical model, borrowed from either ancient or Christian traditions. Here the descriptions of childhood based on the antique model (in their majority these are late medieval and Renaissance writings) interpret such popular topoi as a hero's noble birth and his or her success in learning. Those which derive from the other cultural tradition – miraculous signs demonstrating that the hero is chosen by God and is governed by Him in his or her life.

Christian biographical (hagiographic) motives clearly dominate in the writings born in the monastic domain. For example in the life story of the Celestin V (Pietro del Morrone) it is said that when a boy was five or six the Almighty God demonstrated His benevolence to the future Pope by opening his heart to good things and putting in his mouth words of readiness to serve the Lord. The similar accents are observed in the autobiography of Gerald of Wales: when the other boys used to build fortresses and castles from the sand, he himself preferred to erect churches and was called by his father for this "my bishop". It should be obviously treated as a sign together with the others of the similar kind showing that the future life of the boy was predestined by Heaven from the very beginning.

From the fifteenth century on examples of simultaneous following both ancient and Christian traditions became more frequent and when as a result of this synthesis a new image of the Renaissance hero, *uomo universale*, appear. Benvenuto Cellini tells about the early stage of his existence in the same words as the childhood of a Saint in

hagiography is usually described (I, 3-4). He emphasizes that he was born at night after the All Saints' Day and portrays his own coming into being following the Saint Luke's story of John the Baptist's birth; after this he eagerly tells the reader about the sacred signs of his great future. At the same time a new Renaissance theme not typical for hagiography is clearly heard in his narrative: the child Benvenuto of the *Vita* demonstrates striking talents to any kind of art that are obviously granted to him from the Heavens (I, 5-7). However this mode of childhood description is not peculiar only for Cellini's autobiography -- one could remind that the beginnings of Giorgio Vasari's *Vitae* of the great artists have very similar form and style.

Nevertheless, among all medieval autobiographical descriptions of childhood there are at least two that stand aside and attract special interest. They differ from the others not only by their semantic depth and richness of details but also by the live personal attitude of the authors to this distant period of their lives. I mean here Saint Augustine's *Confessiones* and Guibert of Nogent *Monodiae*.

III.

Augustine quite obviously tells his life story following the widely accepted in ancient Rome view on the human life as divided in seven periods. As he didn't reach by the time of writing his "Confessions" the last two, *seniores* and *senectus*, he writes only about five of them: *primordia*, *infantia*, *pueritia*, *pueritia*, *adolescencia*, and *iuventus*. The first three of them according to Augustine constitute a certain important unity and he devotes to them almost the entire first book of his treatise (I, vi, 7-I, xx, 31). Though it should be added that these three stages of age are not equal for Augustine for their value: *primordia* and *infantia* are less important because he doesn't have his own reminiscences on them. It is also obvious that the author's interest to the beginning of his life has a quite certain color preconditioned by the

genre of the work – recollecting his past, the author heartily, sometimes even with torments, tries to conceive it in the categories of Christian dogmas suddenly opened before his eyes. That is why Augustine's recollections obtain rather specific form: each autobiographical testimony, each aspiration or act of the child is inevitably correlated with these dogmas which elucidate them by the Holy light of the Eternal Truth.

Primordia and infantia.

His coming into being and entering this world Augustine treats as a greatest miracle available to his personal understanding only in a very small degree. What was with him earlier, did he exist before he was conceived and born? -- all what he can is to ask the Lord about it, bowing his head before His infinite might and incomprehensibility of His Wisdom ("Have pity, then, on me, O God, for it is pity that I need. Answer my prayer and tell me whether my infancy followed some other stage of life that died before it" – I, vi, 9).

The very first years of Augustine's existence obviously are not remained in his memory – they are known to him either from the words of his parents and close people, or from his own observations over other babies. That is why his narration about this period of his life only relatively can be called autobiographical. Augustine even doubts if he should treat infancy as a part of his life ("I believe what other people have told me about it and from watching other babies I can conclude that I also lived as they do. But, true though my conclusions may be, I do not like to think of that period as part of the same life I now lead" – I, vii, 12). Anyway he describes in details and rather emotionally that he was the very same as other babies, acting as they do and acquiring step-by-step new abilities of communicating with the outer world ("But in those days all I knew was how to suck, and how to lie still when my

body sensed comfort or cried when it felt pain. Later on I began to smile as well, first in my sleep, and then when I was awake... Little by little I began to realize where I was and to want to make my wishes known to others, who might satisfy them... So I would toss my arms and legs about and make noises... And if my wishes were not carried out... I would take my revenge by bursting into tears" – I, vi, 7-8).

Pueritia. The failure of baptism.

For Augustine the age of childhood is a period inherited the previous infantile experience but nevertheless an undoubtedly new stage of his biography, the beginning of his conscious life, of his Self. The main new inner quality of this stage appears to be the ability of the child to express his thoughts ("I ceased to be a baby unable to talk, and was now a boy with the power of speech" – I, viii, 13); the main outer – his first experience in the contradictory and violent human world. In comparison with the next stage of youth it differs with the less inclination to vices (I, xi, 18).

One of his first serious conflicts as a child with the injustice of the adult world Augustine considers a failed attempt of his baptism. As he was born from a Christian mother special rituals anticipating baptism were made over him: made cross over and given a grain of salt an infant was ranked as belonging to catechumens, people who can take the rite of baptism directly, without any preconditions. Moreover from the early childhood Augustine heard from his mother about the eternal life that could be gained by every Christian ("As a catechumen, I was blessed regularly from birth with the sign of the Cross and was seasoned with God's salt, for, O Lord, my mother placed great hope in you" – I, x, 17). So once he fell seriously ill and being close to death started to beg to baptize him. But then after his mother already started preparations to the rite, he suddenly recovered and his baptism was delayed because it was considered that time that taking this sacrament in the more mature age could set a person free

from his previous sins. All this makes Augustine to protest against. Why this striving for God was forbidden to him in his years of childhood? What was the necessity - adds he with bitterness – of becoming more corrupted? However some intonations of the author let us make assumption that this denial of baptism derived from the will of Augustine's pagan father, who was a head of the family (I, xi, 17).

The studies.

Telling about his childhood Augustine often, with undisguised pain, uses to dwell upon his school years, which brought him a lot of misfortunes ("...and though I was small, my devotion was great when I begged you not to let me beaten at school – I, ix, 14). Childhood and adulthood here are also clearly separated and even oppose to each other. At school where he was placed to learn reading and writing he was not diligent and was often severely beaten for his negligence. But the cruelty to him, a small boy, as he clearly remembers, did not arouse any protest from the side of his kind and loving parents. On the contrary, wishing the best to their child, they approved this cruelty and even smiled on his punishments. This gave to Augustine an additional reason for sufferings: "Sometimes, for my own good, you did not grant my prayer, and then my elders and even my parents... would laugh at the beating I got – and in those days beatings were my one great bugbear" – I, ix, 14).

Now in the light of Heavenly Truth Augustine finds a deeply hidden secret sense of many things that happened to him in his childhood. For instance he clearly sees the fallaciousness of the things he was taught by his teachers. Instead of directing the boy's soul to the superior Divine objects they attracted his attention to frivolous stories about the adventures of pagan gods and heroes ("Let me tell you, my God, how I squandered the brains you gave me on foolish delusions" – I, xvii, 27). And these

stories (what a shame and horror to remember it, – adds the author) were extremely attractive to him.

However Augustine does not only moralize and weigh his sins on the scales of Divine Wisdom, but also tries to clear out some points by himself, relying on his own reason. Why, asks Augustine, he hated so sincerely Greek and on the contrary loved Latin so much? It is commonly known that Greek writers were highly skilled in telling amusing stories. In addition to it Augustine was persistently forced to learn the works of Homer from the early childhood ("I was forced to study Homer... For I understood not a single word and I was constantly subjected to violent threats and cruel punishments to make me learn" – I,xiv,23). As for Latin, he easily learned it without any compulsion, sufferings, and fear – just listening to those who were around, who took care of him, played and laughed with him ("I learned it without fear and fret, simply by keeping my ears open while my nurses fondled me and everyone laughed and played happily with me – I, xiv , 23). The bishop of Hippo then, rather unexpectedly, comes close to formulating one of the general principles of modern didactics: for the study of language a pupil's live interest is much more important than teacher's pressure ("This clearly shows that we learn better in a free spirit of curiosity than under fear and compulsion – I, xiv, 23). Though in a closer view this generalization is not unexpected very much. The logic of this pedagogical observation repeats on its own the main paradigm of the narrative in the "Confessions": the author's thought again and again goes from a concrete personal situation to a universal pattern and afterwards to the Divine Absolute. Everything that happens on the earth happens according to His Laws and even teacher's ruler obeys them ("But your law, O God, permits the free flow of curiosity to be stemmed by force. From the schoolmaster's cane to the ordeals of martyrdom." – I, xiv, 23).

The sins of Augustine, a child.

The whole story of his own childhood told by Augustine besides other things is run through the idea of the original sin. Though the author of the “Confessions” doesn’t remember it by himself, he is convinced that he committed vices as an infant – by watching other infants now, he can see himself as he was long ago (“Who can recall to me the sins I committed as a baby? For in your sight no man is free from sin, not even a child who has lived only one day on earth.” – I, vii, 11). He points out to the sins of babies the most grave of which for him is jealousy and concludes: infants are innocent by their bodily weakness and not by their soul (I, vii, 11).

But Augustine’s sins of childhood were incomparably more serious. He confesses that he deceived his tutor and teachers and now clearly sees the motives that moved him to do this – it mostly was his love to entertainment (“I wanted to play games or watch some futile show or was impatient to imitate what I saw on the stage” – I, xix, 30). Moreover he stole food from the table and from his home larder stockroom and cheated in games (“either from greed or to get something to give to other boys in exchange for their favorite toys” – I, xix, 30). But the main sin of the boy was his negligence of Divine matters and his passion to the vanity of earthly things: ancient fables of Troy (I, xiii, 22) or searching truth not in God, but in His creations (I, xx, 31). These childish vices seem not so important, but one should remember that for Augustine in their essence they do not differ from the gravest sins of adults. It looks as in the whole the world of a child and the world of an adult differ more in details than in nature. Everything is of the same kind here: in the beginning of life – tutors, teachers, nuts, sparrows; when someone is grown up – prefects, kings, gold, patrimonies, slaves. Only the ruler is substituted by more severe punishment (“Can this be the innocence of childhood? Far from it, O Lord! But I beg you to forgive it.

For commanders and kings may take the place of tutors and schoolmasters, nuts and balls and pet birds may give way to money and estates and servants, but these same passions remain with us while one stage of life follows upon another, just as more severe punishments follow upon the schoolmaster's cane.” – I, xix, 30).

Does Augustine tell about his own childhood?

Talking about Augustine the boy, the author of the “Confessions” creates an image of a gifted child with an open soul and kind heart rejoicing at truth and appreciating friendship (“I had an inner sense which watched over my bodily senses and kept them in full vigor; and even in the small things which occupied my thoughts I found pleasure in the truth. I disliked finding myself in the wrong; my memory was good; I was acquiring the command of words; I enjoyed the company of friends; and I shrank from pain, ignorance, and sorrow.” – I, xx, 31). All these benefits he refers not to his own score or to his parents’ but of course to God’s (“But they were all gifts from God, for I did not give them to myself.” – I, xx, 31). He obviously sees nothing of his own in them. But then if these personal qualities characterize specifically him, Augustine? To what extent he is talking about himself and to what extent about the child on the whole? Is he talking about his own childhood or about the early years of any person the same way as it earlier occurred in his account of infancy? Unclearness of the figure of a child-Augustine is emphasized by the fact that he doesn’t say a word to a reader about his appearance. Was he tall, short, well-fed, slim, what was the color of his hair, eyes – all this is inessential, does not deserve any interest, all this is replaced by the Christian idea of a child formulated by Augustine first in the history on the material of his own life.

This is the main goal of the author. In the general context of the “Confessions” his own life as it is does not and cannot have any self-contained sense. Augustine in his

early years is always a child on the whole, a part of the world miraculously created by God. That is why any concrete biographical details that distinguish him from others are not important. It looks like it is the very reason why Augustine does not mention neither the place of his birth nor the names of his parents who appear in his description more as abstract Father and Mother than as concrete people of flesh and blood.

IV.

Guibert of Nogent is often considered as Saint Augustine's follower. And he rally to some extent is because the whole tone of the first chapters of his "Monodiae" is quite close to that of Augustine's "Confessions". The same way as his distant predecessor, recollecting the events of his own life, Guibert is moved by the aspiration of self-knowledge, which is an integral part of perception of God. The same way as Augustine he sees himself a great sinner kneeling before His perfection and confessing the committed sins (*confessio peccati*), at the same time praises His greatness and Wisdom (*confessio laudis*). Moreover, besides the proximity of the confessional structure "Confessions" and "Monodiae" coincide in some important accents and meanings of the plot: both pay special attention to the role of mother in boy's upbringing, stress the inadequate severity of punishments for negligence at school, and describe boy's refusal to accept unfairness of the adult world. At the same time "Monodiae" is a very different type of writing. It is not a theological treatise but a song (in Greek *monodia* means a song for one voice), which flows freely from the author's mouth breaking all canons of a literary form. And Guibert in this special song is more interested not in the abstract child and not the miracle of Creation but in his own period of being a child, his own joys and sorrows. Moreover, the "Monodiae" demonstrate the signs of extremely deep and personal perception of childhood by its

author – probably this is the most psychological, the most self-concentrated, and the most detailed portrait of a child in the whole western medieval literature.

The limits of childhood.

The limits of childhood and other periods of protagonist's life are not clearly defined in "Monodiae". Guibert of course makes difference between certain stages of his life, but these stages do not look like certain metaphysical ages of each human being predestined by the laws of nature. They are more periods of time which are divided by some important events of his own life.

The first months of Guibert's life (he doesn't call it neither "infancy" nor any other special name) are described very briefly. He only mentions the death of his "carnal father", his successful physical development and his sprightliness, natural for this age (I, 4). A detailed description of his childhood begins only with the years of learning (approximately from the age of six) and ends when after his mother's departure he was left by his own (approximately at the age of twelve), when he makes numerous vices and soon after it accepts a position of a monk.

This sudden freedom from the control of adults opens a new period in Guibert's life. Under the influence of other boys he starts to commit sinful acts and challenge by all his behavior the norms of chastity expecting that later his sins will be excused. Guibert confesses in the vices committed at that time sincerely and in details and at the end of this self-humiliating account concludes that it was time extremely different from the years spent under the strict care of his tutor (I, 15).

Accepting after this monastic habit finally marks entering the second, the main and the most continuous period of his biography. Here in the monastery he not only revives to the pious life but also by miracle easily solves his old problem – the lack of desire to learning and of talent for learning. No other principal changes happens

neither in his “inner” nor his “outer” life till the very end of the first book. With the accepting monastic rule he either prematurely becomes an adult or enters the second period of childhood lasted for the most part of his life. However Guibert tells that later living in the monastery he did not escape the carnal lust natural for the age of youth (*adolescencia*) and that this lust was so strong that for a certain period of time it foreshadowed his aspiration to God (I, 6). And in the other place he tells about his frivolous verses inspired by this sinful passion (I, 17). But the structure of his narrative does not give a place for a special paragraph or chapter devoted to the author’s youth. Breaking traditional biographical canons this structure primarily reflects the logics and certain concrete circumstances of his own biography, his own apprehension of it and not the universal logics of a human life.

The child’s birth and futurity.

A detailed description of the child’s coming into light in “*Monodiae*” obviously is not accidental. According to Guibert (the similar views were widely spread throughout the Middle Ages) circumstances of child’s birth are the signs of his or her future, which the Creator gives to the world. But these signs are not obvious and clear and hardly understandable to the very end for a human being.

Guibert was the last child of his mother and the only one who passed infancy and reached adulthood. The author leaves this information without comments but from the context of his story one may conclude that it had a special meaning for him – a sign that he was chosen by God. The more obvious mark of Guibert’s destiny is the day of his birth – the Easter Sunday. No doubt that this coincidence is an expression of God’s Will and Guibert treats it as a chance for the pious life of the newborn child given by Heaven. But the future life of this child was also predestined by other circumstances of his appearance. It happened that when the hour of delivery was near

the child turned upside-down in the mother's womb, which was treated by all the family as a death threat for her. So they decided to go to the church and give a pledge at the altar of the Virgin Mary: if the baby is a boy, he will be devoted to serve the Lord and His Mother; the girl should also become a nun. Soon a boy was successfully born but it was small and feeble ugly creature embraced everyone by its appearance. At the same day he was baptized and before this sacrament another scene took place (it was later not once retold to Guibert): a woman took him in her hands and started to throw him over from one hand to another expressing her doubt that this creature would live (I, 3).

All these circumstances to Guibert's opinion were the signs, which told about his later life. But how to interpret them? What are the links between these circumstances and his later biography? It looks that the author of "Monodiae" himself is vitally interested in clearing out these questions. As it was predestined he became a servant of God and the Holy Mother, but he confesses that he does this service unworthy without strong belief, constantly sinning. Merits can not precede human life. They may be obtained as the result of one's own work of spirit. So it is more important what a person did in his or her life than when he was born. And Guibert's birth in the day of Easter absolutely does not guarantee his great futurity – his own chastity and devotion to God, he says to his readers, should be judged according to his deeds (I,3).

Years of learning. Apology of childishness.

The plot of Guibert's story of his learning, if not to take the details, is very close to Augustine's model: he also did not express first any eagerness to learning, also not once was severely beaten for it, and also was deeply hurt by their unfairness. What differs both stories from each other and differs greatly – their interpretations by the

authors. In the “Confessions” the boy’s pranks and his interest in playing with toys, which draw him away from learning, are nothing but confirmations of the idea of original sin’s presence in every human being (childhood is not innocent, it is only less vicious in comparison with other ages). Guibert’s reflections on the hard years of learning lead to conclusions of different character. The cause of his failure in the process of obtaining knowledge lies not in his own corruptness but the lack of knowledge and teaching skills of his tutor, for which he had to pay by his sufferings (I, 5). After describing his misfortunes derived from his tutor’s incompetence Guibert adds that he tells about all this not to blaspheme the name of a person whom he loved, but to share with the reader one of his pedagogical or even philosophical observations: “...we must not think we are entitled to teach as truth anything that crosses our minds. Let us not lose other people in the clouds of our own theories” (I, 5).

A substantial part in Guibert’s general observations takes his thoughts about the peculiarities of the age of childhood. Children obtain some qualities, which differ them from adults, and these qualities are neither good nor bad by themselves. They simply have to be put into consideration by adults instead of remaking the child’s nature by force – this will not bring a success neither to the teacher, nor to the child.

The whole six years Guibert spent under the eye of his strict home tutor, a person who doubtless loved the boy and wished him good with all his heart, but who often was too harsh to him. He prohibited to Guibert all that was usually allowed to other boys of the same age, controlled each of his steps demanding a behavior more suitable for a monk than for a boy (I, 5). Here Guibert draws an expressive picture of the hours when he had to sit in the clerical dress “like a trained animal” and to observe other boys playing war games. His tutor was also too strict in his demands to

learn Latin from morning till night not taking into consideration weak resources of his age: the tasks he received were difficult even for adults (I, 5).

In Guibert's story of his years of learning one could notice one remarkable pedagogical observation. God, he says, created the world with the amazing diversity of everything. Then why teachers forget about it when teach their students? The process of instructing children should also differ in its methods, and much more diverse for children than for adults (I, 5). This discourse of the author of "Monodiae" is probably the first confirmation of the principle of conformity and of what we would call now "psychology of the child" in medieval pedagogics.

Guibert's childhood and his personality.

When Guibert started to write his autobiography he was more than fifty, but his bitter memory about the early years was still alive, even more, it was still burning in his heart ("I confess the iniquity of my childhood and of my youth, still boiling within me as an adult" – I, 1). And the reader of "Monodiae" is easily made sure that this statement is not a rhetoric. Guibert really tells about his childhood with an unusual vivacity and passion and his discourses on the distant circumstances of his life and on his own shameful acts and desires have a taste of sincere bitterness and pain. Moreover, in comparison with Augustine his reminiscences are much more individualized. So no doubt that the autobiographism of such a kind is very attractive both for Guibert's biographers and for the scholars who deal with the problems of medieval personality. What was the role of the child's impressions and the first life experience to the forming of character and of the worldview of this, doubtless, extraordinary person? Some accents of Guibert's story, first of all concerning people influenced on the formation of his personality, lead to concretizing this question and formulating it in terms of psychoanalysis.

The first thing that attracts researchers' attention is the special role of the mother, whose portrait is drawn with an exceptional love and tenderness. Guibert definitely adores her endowing her with the qualities of more celestial than a human being: singular beauty, special purity, unprecedented chastity and great devotion to God. Her influence to the child was enormous. Till the age of forty she was near him being at the same time his spiritual mentor and the embodiment of the ideal of spiritual life (in this relation researchers not once pointed out to the closeness and sometimes even coincidence of her image in "Monodiae" with the image of Virgin Mary in Christian literature). Then it is the early loss of his father whose place in the child's life was taken by the home tutor. Though Guibert himself doesn't remember his "carnal father" he expresses quite obvious negative attitude to him, especially for his adultery and for the lack of devotion. He even presupposes that if his father left alive, he would not allow to fulfill a vow given at Guibert's birth and would make of him not a monk but a knight. Anyway in his story the most important figure after his mother is not his father but his tutor under whose strict eye he had to live for the whole six years. As for Guibert's attitude to this person, it may be treated as ambiguous. Though he constantly assures his readers in their deep mutual love, his reminiscences about his incompetence and unnecessary severity, his unjust cruel punishments are still agitating the memory of the monk.

However the loyalty of the scholars to the methods of Freud and Erickson and the final results of their analysis of these texts varies in some substantial aspects. One may meet here something similar to a rigorous medical statement ("Scratch this twelfth-century 'historian' and you will find underneath a guilt-ridden cleric, haunted by vivid sexual reminiscences of his mother and by the terrible chastening reality of the Virgin Mary" – Kantor, p.281), and more balanced and diverse pictures imbedded

into the historical and cultural context of the epoch (Georges Duby's and especially John Benton's who devoted to the role of Guibert's early experience in the formation of his character a considerable part of his article "The Personality of Guibert de Nogent").

Giving a summary of studies on the monk's biography, Benton outlines some features by which his figure is characterized most often. They are self-absorbedness, extraordinary critical "rationalistic" mind, patriotism, and religious intolerance. The experience of childhood to his opinion played the major role in their formation. This early experience also predetermined Guibert's individual psychological peculiarities which differed him both from the representatives of nobility and from the clergy – all his activity including writing was affected more by the sense of guilt than by the sense of shame. Having been grown up in the demands of strict self-control and sexual purity, afterwards, faced with the dark side of his nature, he suffered a deep crisis and at last his unclaimed love turned to his own personality and developed that special attitude to oneself which Sigmund Freud called narcissism (Benton, p. 308-309).

It is rather debatable of course if this kind of interpretation really helps to interfere the nature of the monk's personality. Psychohistorical approach, reductionist by its essence, inevitably transforms almost each autobiographical evidence into a more or less bright illustration of the "psychic unity of mankind" once discovered by the Viennese psychiatrist. In such a perspective the problem of historical development of personality, of the differences in apprehension of the outer world and self by modern and medieval man or woman, has a second or even the third grade importance. And the results of this kind of scholarship are similar to the "scientific" biographies of the nineteenth century. It does not matter very much where and when their heroes live –

they are always at their bottom the same person, very like the scholar's contemporary though by chance forced to act in different circumstances.

Anyway the discovery of "Monodiae" as one of the most revealing personal documents is an undoubted advantage of psychohistory. It showed unexpected richness and depth of the inner world of medieval personality challenging the widely spread ideas of its "incompleteness" and its indifference to the age of childhood.

V.

Thus we see two similar in some basic characteristics (Christian conception about original sinfulness of a person, confessional tone of the narrative, inability of both authors to think about themselves apart from the Divine Cosmos) but at the same time very different perceptions of his own childhood by medieval person.

For the bishop of Hippo it is one of the seven clearly distinguished ages of life of any person. It is the time when he after coming out of infancy acquired some new biological and social qualities and was less predisposed to sin than in the youth and adulthood. But for Augustine the distant years he recalls are more not his own childhood but a certain universal stage of development for every person and humankind as a whole. According to his idea the stages of human life are in their essence the same as the stages of the history of the world predetermined by the Creator: childhood corresponds to the time from Adam to Abraham, adolescence – from Abraham to David and so on. It is clear that in such a context neither his own Augustine's life nor the life of any other person can be principally different and bear any substantial peculiarities, so as the experience of childhood can not be self-sufficient for one's personal life. However this does not contradict the fact that some bright personal reminiscences of Augustine's childhood continue to live in his adult mind. But this life has a special character. The reminiscences become a point of

departure for the Christian interpretation of child's nature and at the same time the illustration of the commonly accepted postulates of Divine Truth.

Guibert's attitude to his childhood is much more personal – reminiscences of the early years still make a storm in his mind and soul. But the nature of such an intent look upon his own childhood is not easy to realize. The key to its comprehension probably could lie in the phrase from the introduction of "Monodiae" taken as an epigraph to this article – "I confess the iniquity of my childhood and of my youth, still boiling within me as an adult" (I, 1). But the whole autobiographical context of Guibert's story gives enough doubts for its conceptual nature. It looks more as a splash of a vague feeling than a result of a deep self-analysis. Anyway it is not convincing that those miserable misdeeds Guibert tells his readers about could produce such a strong repentance of a Christian soul, even the purest one. And the description of his early "vices" on the whole play in the story of his childhood too insignificant role. If to compare with Augustine, Guibert recollects his childhood, doubtless, much more spontaneously. He does not have a strong intent to open to his reader the Holy Truth, to give him a moral lesson or to praise the Lord (though all these motives are included in the autobiographism of "Monodiae"). He just tells about the events stamped in his memory adding to the story his own reflections on the image of his mother, his tutor, on the difficulties in obtaining knowledge, on his misdeeds and wicked desires, on the consistency of his intention to become a monk, on the outer circumstances determined his life in this period of time.

Does this mean that childhood was really "discovered" by Guibert and that in his attitude to it he is the same "practically a modern man" (the definition of Abel Lefranc) as in his rationalistic mind? Such a conclusion looks as premature for several reasons. It could be easily noticed for instance that Guibert, doubtless fixed on his

childhood, doesn't express even a very slight understanding of the crucial importance of his childhood for the formation of his personality. So he is still distant from the concept, which is widely spread in modern times being a cornerstone of the theory of psychoanalysis. And the well-known dictum of Wordsworth brilliantly formulating this new attitude – a child is the father of an adult – could look for him (not taking Augustine) a puzzle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abelard. *Historia calamitatum* / ed. Jacques Monfrin. Paris, 1962
- Amory, Frederic. "The confessional superstructure of Guibert of Nogent's *Vita*," *Classica et medievalia (Revue danoise de philologie et d'histoire)*. 1964, vol. XXV
- Ariés, Philippe. *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous L'Ancien Regime*. P., 1973
- Augustine, Saint. *The Confessions. The City of God. On Christian Doctrine*. Chicago etc., 1993
- Benton, John F. *Culture, power and personality in Medieval France*. L., 1991
- Cellini, Benvenuto. *Opere* / ed. Bruno Maier. Milano, 1968
- Duby, Georges. *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*. New York, 1983
- Frugoni A. *Celestiniana*. Roma, 1991
- Giovanni Conversini da Ravenna. *Rationarium vite* / ed. Vittore Nason. Firenze, 1986
- Giraldus Cambrensis. *Opera*. London, 1861, v.1
- Guibert de Nogent. *Autobiographie* / ed. Edmond-René Labande. Paris, 1981
- Guibert of Nogent. *A monk's confession: the memoirs of Guibert of Nogent* / tr. and intr. By Paul J. Archambault. University Park (Pensylvania), 1996

Herlihy, David. "Medieval children," *Essays on Medieval Civilization*. Austin (Texas), 1978

Kantor, Jonathan. "A psychohistorical source: the *Memoirs* of Abbot Guibert of Nogent," *Journal of Medieval History*. 1976, vol. 2

Nitschke, August. *Junge Rebellen: Mittelalter, Neuzeit, Gegenwart*. München, 1985

Petrarca, Francesco. *Prose*. Milano, 1955

Shahar, Shulamith. *Childhood in the Middle Ages*. L., 1990

Starnes, Colin. *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions*. Waterloo, 1990

Vita Caroli quarti / ed. Eugen Hillenbrand. Stuttgart, 1979

Кон, Игорь С. *Ребенок и общество (Историко-этнографическая перспектива)*. М., 1988

Research for the article was supported in part by a grant from ACTR/ACCELS, with funds provided by the United States Information Agency. None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed. The author also expresses his sincere gratitude to Professor George Majeska and the Department of History of the University of Maryland at College Park who made this work completely and utterly pleasant.

February 3 1997