

ANNA VERTUA GENTILE: EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND PRINCIPLES OF 'MODERN' EDUCATION¹

Gabriella Armenise*

Abstract: The essay examines the theme of educational planning and Anna Vertua Gentile's "modern" education founded on the set of rules with which 'good education' is identified through the *Galatei* or volumes dedicated to young girls.

Keywords: Anna Vertua Gentile, Galateo, education, projectuality

Anna Vertua Gentile's thoughts on "bon ton" and hints on female education
The educational action developed in the nineteenth century found fertile ground for interpretative research within the pedagogical thought of Anna Vertua Gentile (Dongo, Como 1845- Lodi, 1926)², a minor writer of Italian culture, active between the end of the 1800s and the first decades of the 19th century. She is the author of compelling short stories with an educational purpose, mainly appreciated for her *Galatei*. Anna Vertua Gentile, in

*Professore Associato di Storia della Pedagogia – Università del Salento.

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² Cf. *Dizionario generale degli autori contemporanei*, Vallecchi, Florence 1975; Maria Bandinelli-Buti, *Poetesse e scrittrici*, 2 vols., in *Enciclopedia Biografica e Bibliografica Italiana*, Istituto Editoriale Italiano B. C. Tosi, Roma, 1942; Theodoro Rovito, *Letterati e giornalisti italiani contemporanei*, Rovito ed., Napoli 1922; Carlo Villani, *Stelle femminili*, Appendice, Dante Alighieri, Napoli 1916; Voce, in *Piccola Enciclopedia Treccani*, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, Roma, 1995-2002; Ugo Zannoni, *La moderna letteratura per l'infanzia e la giovinezza*, Cappelli, Bologna 1925. See Archivio Storico Lodigiano, Sottoprefettura, Cart. 128; Archivio Storico del Comune di Codogno, Cart. 564, fasc. 17; *Libro degli Atti di nascita e dei battesimi della parrocchia di Dongo*, Tavola 42 dell'anno 1845, n. 24.

presenting the recipients of her works with precepts on how to behave in a social context, does not overlook the changes undergone by fashion, education and social customs. Among other things, she provides a true picture of the ideal profile of the 'modern' woman and her duties. And, in doing so, she produces interesting ethical-practical guides for the girl and the woman-mother, tracing in an exemplary way a real educational project, expression of a given ideological context, incredibly useful for understanding in a broader sense the historical evolution of those socio-formative factors that have distinguished the Italian reality between the two centuries.

The definition "good manners" (or "bon ton"), from a mainly semantic point of view, defines the behaviour of the "socially ideal" man. One need only think of the formulas of courtesy with which one should address others. A model of conduct, sensitivity and morality is firmly imprinted. The 'bon ton', if marked by 'good manners', becomes a glue for social relations and an effective tool for blocking conflictual attitudes.

Interesting examples of this are provided by A. Garrone in the phase of the rise of the bourgeoisie³.

In the *Galatei* of every era, there are always detailed rules with reference to the four constituent factors of "social communication": 1. body, 2. conversation, 3. public and private behaviour, 4. organisation of space (specifically the private space, i.e. the home). The regulation of the rules to be followed in public spaces seems to dominate in the behavioural *vademecum* that came to light in the last decade of the last century or in the new millennium, because of the tendency for abusive or disrespectful behaviour in the social sphere⁴.

The ways or contents of this communication recommended by a B. Gasperini (known by the pseudonym Bianca Rebecchi)⁵ are certainly different from those proposed by some representative figures of the second half of the 19th century such as Marchesa Colombi (pseudonym of Maria

³ Cf. Antonio Garrone, *Cortesia e buon costume: galateo per le famiglie*, Sarteschi, Torino 1881; Id., *Il Galateo delle Signore*, s. ed., Torino 1882.

⁴ Cf. Gabriella Turnaturi, *Signore e signori d'Italia: una storia delle buone maniere*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2011.

⁵ Cfr. Id., *Dopo di lei, Signora. Piccolo galateo dei nostri tempi*, Rizzoli, Milano 1957.

Antonietta Torriani Violler)⁶ or Anna Vertua Gentile with her *Come devo comportarmi? Libro per tutti* (Milan, Hoepli, 1865)⁷.

Anna Vertua Gentile in *Come devo comportarmi? Libro per tutti* (1865), reports her precepts on how to relate to each other in social life. Here, the duties of the modern wife emerge clearly: to keep the feeling of love alive and mutual esteem alive by means of courtesy or kindness.

Her production, recognised on a public level because of the emergence of an increasingly lively "feminine" writing⁸, is the immediate reflection of a meditated positivistic scientism.

A scientism that is attentive to the most varied areas of interest, from literary criticism to fiction, from journalism to the theatre and finally to pedagogy⁹.

Anna Vertua Gentile became the clear proof of the Italian writing modernity at the dawn of the 20th century, initiated in a more complete way by Matilde Serao, who holds the record.

⁶ Cfr. *La gente per bene: leggi di convenienza sociale. Il giornale delle donne*, Galli, Milano 1887.

⁷ For critical literature on the historical-ideological context, and to note Anna Vertua Gentile's thinking on the role of women and the educational action proposed, see, among many others: *Antologia stenografica*, Hoepli, Milano 1904; *I Mosconi*, edited by G. Infusino, Edizioni del Delfino, Naples 1974; *Storie di donne*, edited by Pino Boero, Brigati, Genoa 2002; *Tra letti e salotti. Norma e trasgressione nella narrativa femminile tra Otto e Novecento*, edited by G. Padovani and R. Verderame, Sellerio Editore, Palermo 2001; Bona Alterocca, *La stampa femminile*, in *La donna che cambia*, SEI, Torino 1968; Gabriella Armenise, *Anna Vertua Gentile: "libro per tutti"*, in "Nuovo Bollettino" CIRSE, 1-2, 2009, pp. 39-46; Id., *Sull'educazione "femminile" e importanza dei galatei nel secolo decimonono*, in Hervé Antonio Cavallera (a cura di), *La ricerca storico- educativa oggi. Un confronto di metodi modelli e programmi di ricerca*, II Tomo, Pensa MultiMedia, Lecce-Rovato (Bs) 2013, pp. 3-41.

⁸ Cfr. Antonia Arslan, *Dame, galline e regine. La scrittura femminile italiana tra 800 e 900*, edited by di M. Pasqui, with a foreword by Siobhan Nash- Marshall, Guerini Studio, Milano 1998; Dina Bertoni Jovine, *La stampa femminile in Italia*, in *Enciclopedia della Donna*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1964; Annarita Buttafuoco, *Condizione delle donne e movimento di emancipazione femminile*, in *Storia della società italiana. L'Italia di Giolitti*, vol. XX, Teti Editore, Milano 1981; Id., *Cronache femminili. La stampa emancipazionista in Italia dall'Unità al Fascismo*, Università degli Studi di Siena, Siena 1988.

⁹ Gabriella Armenise, *Guida al secolo XIX per la famiglia e gli adolescenti*, in Anna Vertua Gentile, Mara Antelling, Silvio Zambaldi, Scipio Sighele, *Il secolo XIX nella vita e nella cultura dei popoli*, critical re-edition by G. Armenise (p. V-LIX), Pensa Multimedia, Lecce 2008, p. VI; Gabriella Armenise, *La riflessione di Anna Vertua Gentile sulla «educazione moderna» nel secolo XIX*, Pensa Multimedia, Lecce-Rovato (BS) 2018.

In the nineteenth-century context, if we specifically analyse the *Galatei* of the first half of the century, we can see that they were mostly conceived and structured for the education of young people (male and female) and schoolchildren, to take care of their attitudes in social relationships. An exemplary model comes from M. Gioia with *Galateo. Compendio ad uso dei giovinetti d'ambo i sessi bisognosi di imparare le buone creanze nonché di ben contenersi nella vita civile* published in Milan by Sonzogno, reprinted forty-six times, also epitomised, with great success. On the same level is the *Galateo* addressed to schoolchildren and written by F. Soave in 1809 entitled *Il galateo o trattato elementare dei doveri dell'uomo. Regole di civiltà ad uso delle scuole* (Como, Ostinelli).

A more accentuated specialisation of *bon ton* manuals took place in the second half of the 19th century. Numerous *galatei* for "social groups" came to light, followed by those for "ladies and gentlemen" or for "all ages". The *Galatei*, by definition, do not neglect the reference to "gender"¹⁰. In most cases, the recipient is found in the title, and it is therefore easy to understand the vast range intended for the gentleman and the gentlewoman, as well as those dedicated to the people and the bourgeoisie, and also those intended for the field worker, the family, the lawyer, to which a myriad of recipients can be added. Nevertheless, the *Galatei* addressed to young people, children and schoolchildren prevail. No less attention is paid to girls and boys, as well as to schoolgirls or children of the people and, in a broader sense, to childhood (but always of both sexes). The objective shared by several 19th-century *Galatei* is to propose 'models of interpersonal relations' and the behavioural indications clearly differ according to the degree of importance attributed to existing social hierarchies or, again, in relation to the need to facilitate an exchange or solidarity between different social groups. And yet, the *Galatei* never relate exclusively to social or aesthetic issues. They can refer to moral issues, which affect children, adults, and young people equally.

The *Galatei* rarely refer to age. In fact, from being a boy or a girl, one immediately becomes a young man or a young woman.

In this sense, for pointing out these sudden transitions, there are the works of Mantea (pseudonym of the Piedmontese baroness Gina Sobrero), author of

¹⁰ Inge Botteri, *Galateo e Galatei. La creanza e l'istituzione della società nella trattatistica italiana tra antico regime e Stato liberale*, Bulzoni, Roma 1999.

Le buone usanze (Turin, Streglio, 1897), Gibus del Mattino (pseudonym of Matilde Serao) who wrote *Saper vivere, norme di buona creanza* (Naples, Tocco, 1900), Anna Vertua Gentile, author of *Come devo comportarmi?* (Milan, Hoepli, 1867) and *Le donnine di domani. Nozioni di doveri e diritti per uso della terza elementare femminile* (Lanciano, Carabba, 1907) and, again, Ida Baccini with *Lo spirito del Galateo e il Galateo dello spirito* (Rocca San Casciano, Cappelli, 1904).

The *Galatei*, in general, educate to the mediation that unequivocally affects individuality and sociality. With reference to the theme of education that affects childhood, and not only that, there are common features among all the *Galatei* published in the nineteenth-century historical-ideological context: 1. Adherence to the value of the norm, 2. Detailed description of the different forms of "good manners", 3. Detailed description of the different forms of 'good manners', 4. Precise description of the way of life in the social context, 5. Hygienic indications (body care and clothing), 6. Respect for the rules of civilisation, etiquette and cleanliness, commensurate with the role held (in the social, family and school context), 7. Call for moderation (to be acquired through obedience and the assimilation of precise behavioural models), 8. Recall of social destiny, always recalled and often amplified; in this sense the home and the family environment are understood as exemplary places for the purposes of training for the future role of adults and for the start of the respective destiny of social order (think, for example, of the training of the girl in the role of "housewife" or in "responsible care" of herself and others).

Other characters of inescapable value follow: 1. Valuing naivety, courtesy and kindness in all actions, movements and words, 2. Watching out for bad inclinations (ensuring that playing, for example, does not become a vice), 3. Viewing the child, then the future woman and mother, as an example of goodness, virtue and gentleness, 4. Attachment of importance to culture, the promotion of study and correctness, 5. Promotion of culture and the process of acculturation, 6. Encouragement of all activities that can contribute to the formation of character and psycho-physical development, 7. Enhancement of natural virtues typically feminine (grace, shyness, innocence, vanity, passion), although no specific teachings or behaviour for girls emerge, 8. Respect for nannies with whom an affective relationship is established that, in any case, should not erase existing social hierarchies, 9. The idea of school and boarding school as a training ground for life and a means of constructing ethical volition, 10. Rules of conduct regarding visits, school, home and church, 11. Recognition of rights (to be loved, instructed, educated, protected

and defended by parents and the state), 12. Recognition of the duties that for women, in particular, are enclosed under the term "mission" so as to be a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother and a good sister, 13. Knowledge and exercise of political rights for man, 14. Knowledge and non-exercise of women's political rights, in order to encourage men to perform their duties as citizens with dignity, 15. The parent-child relationship, based mostly on authority - from the second half of the 19th century - and in such a way that the role model for girls is always the mother and for boys the father (even though the child has always lived in a relationship with the mother, who is the first moral educator) ¹¹.

Anna Vertua Gentile, in line with some of the elements dominated in the *Galatei* of the time, just noted, focuses on etiquette and cleanliness, the importance of culture, study, correctness and moderation. No less important are the ability to watch out for bad inclinations; respect for the rules of civilisation; the assimilation of defined models of behaviour. In addition to these, there are also childlike qualities such as imagination, a propensity for sociability and playful-creative activities and, as far as the training of the child is concerned, the role of the lady of the house. Numerous pages are specifically dedicated to character formation and psycho-physical development. In full compliance with precise behavioural rules (with particular attention to the attendance of friends in their home, as well as the Church and educational institutions), children must also learn the importance of knowing and exercising their political rights. Women are expected to fulfil their long-standing mission of being good daughters, good sisters, then good wives and mothers.

The writer examines the female universe and soul with acumen in each of her works that contemplate the formative aspect and the process of acculturation¹². Female education, according to her conception, is always connected to social changes. These changes, based on precise ideological orientations, a legacy of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, based on the concept of equal rights for both sexes and the idea of women's independence, allow all women to enter the working environment, even the typically male one (such as journalism) and to gradually become aware of the importance of "female" education. As a result, existing prejudices on the issue

¹¹ Cfr. Gabriella Armenise, *Sull'educazione «femminile» e importanza dei galatei nel secolo decimonono*, cit., pp. 17-21; Gabriella Turnaturi, *Signore e signori d'Italia: una storia delle buone maniere*, cit.

¹² Ibidem.

were overcome and there was an increase in the number of educational institutions aimed at girls and women. The publishing industry of the time was paying more and more attention to the production of books and *Galatei* for girls and mothers, and our writer was specifically concerned with etiquettes and behaviour manuals for mother educators¹³.

Since their inception, *Galatei* have been instrumental in guiding the subject through the phases of growth, marked by anxieties related to the affirmation of their identity but also by crises in the historical context of reference in which formal rules, dictated by *Galatei* or by what they represent, seem to have to disappear in favour of individual interest¹⁴:

Eppure, all'individuo, non sfugge l'opportunità di far parte di un gruppo sociale, per rendersi utile allo sviluppo ed al benessere dell'intera comunità, della quale sente di poter essere parte attiva e laboriosa. Le crisi di identità si verificano non solo in occasione del mancato riconoscimento del proprio ruolo nel contesto sociale da parte degli altri, ma anche perché a volte è difficile comprendere realmente chi si è, mentre le cosiddette situazioni "informali", nelle quali si presume che ciascun individuo possa comportarsi senza schemi, procurano angoscia e insicurezza. Da qui la scoperta-riscoperta, anche nel nostro secolo, dei vecchi galatei, "recuperati dalla polvere" o, ancora, la riconosciuta necessità di scriverne e pubblicarne nuove versioni, in linea con le esigenze dei tempi¹⁵.

The *Galatei* of the nineteenth century in general, and those of Anna Vertua Gentile in particular, are distinguished by the tendency to provide both a

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Gabriella Armenise, *La riflessione di Anna Vertua Gentile sulla «educazione moderna» nel secolo XIX*, Pensa Multimedia, Lecce-Rovato (BS) 2018, p. 162, Gabriella Turnaturi, *Signore e signori d'Italia: una storia delle buone maniere*, cit., pp. 19-20.

¹⁵ Gabriella Armenise, *La riflessione di Anna Vertua Gentile sulla «educazione moderna» nel secolo XIX*, cit. pp. 162-163; Gabriella Turnaturi, *Signore e signori d'Italia: una storia delle buone maniere*, cit., 19. [«Yet the individual does not miss the opportunity to be part of a social group, to be useful to the development and well-being of the whole community, of which he feels he can be an active and hardworking part. Identity crises occur not only because of the lack of recognition of one's role in the social context by others, but also because it is sometimes difficult to really understand who one is, while the so-called 'informal' situations, in which it is assumed that everyone can behave without schemes, cause anxiety and insecurity. Hence the discovery-rediscovery, even in our century, of the old etiquettes, 'recovered from the dust' or, again, the recognised need to write and publish new versions, in line with the needs of the times»].

precise representation of childhood and adolescence and an effective portrait of places that are properly educational. New target groups and educational contexts emerge compared to the past. These behavioural *vademecum*, while reflecting places or educational figures inspired by “tradition”, require a different appreciation and representation¹⁶. Anna Vertua Gentile does this very well with her *Galatei* and behaviour manuals for mother educators: *Come devo comportarmi? Libro per tutti*, (1867), *Per esser barbate. Piccolo galateo delle Fanciulle* (1899), *La donnina di domani. Nozioni di doveri e di diritti per uso della terza elementare femminile* (1907), *A te, Sposa* (1914), *In collegio* (1915), *Una signorina per bene* (1947) and, again, among many others, the texts *Voce Materna*, *Per la Mamma educatrice* and *Voce dell'esperienza. Libro per signorine* (written and published between 1903 and 1914).

The volumes *Per la mamma educatrice* (1894) or *Voce materna* (1903) became the concrete expression of the thought of a thinker who, not intending to diminish the value of traditional educational models with a strong moralising imprint, set herself the primary objective of providing appropriate suggestions for the education of children (even if, at times, she allowed herself to be too involved in sentimentality and fell victim to excessive didacticism). In attributing to pedagogy, a normative value as well as a descriptive and explanatory one, Anna Vertua Gentile believes that pedagogy can effectively make use of the contributions offered by psychology, ethics, and sociology to achieve targeted educational objectives¹⁷.

This confirms her aptitude not to diminish the concept of the social destination of the individual, but above all the felt need to design a “renewed” educational system, based on firm ethical-behavioural principles capable of fully respecting both the aims of a morally healthy civil coexistence and the principle of the social destination of the individual.

¹⁶ Carlo Pancera, *Educazione dei costumi e insegnamento delle virtù*, in Gian Palo Brizzi (1986). *Il catechismo e la grammatica. Istituzioni e riforme nell'area emiliano-romagnola del 700*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1986, pp. 287 ss.

¹⁷ Cfr. Gabriella Armenise, *La riflessione di Anna Vertua Gentile sulla «educazione moderna» nel secolo XIX*, cit.

Educational planning and modern education by Anna Vertua Gentile

Anna Vertua Gentile, aware of the dialectical relationship that inevitably arises between the factors of social evolution and the educational process, attributes ever greater value to the human personality and the tasks performed by the subject in the social and family context. Hence the need to make known, to an ever wider public, the set of rules with which “good upbringing” is identified, and, essentially, that “code” which ends up defining the fields of action of the conventional norm. Hence the contribution made to the process of growth of the editorial genre classified by insiders in the field of education with the term *etiquette* or, more simply, *bon ton*¹⁸.

Vertua Gentile, although deeply religious, is positively influenced by the new religion of the century (science) and ends up considering both science and experimental research as effective tools for understanding moral precepts and natural laws. She is clearly fascinated, among others, by authors such as Paolo Mantegazza (in *Per la Mamma educatrice*, 1894), Cesare Lombroso (quoted in *A te, Sposa*, 1914), Roberto Ardigò and Aristide Gabelli. Therefore, he considers that the family and social environment can influence the subject and produce peculiar ideological and behavioural orientations by acting on the same desires, impatience, and habits¹⁹. Even positivism, then, beyond its limits, such as the tendency to lead all phenomena to some general laws and rules and, therefore, the tendency to support the objective value of scientific knowledge, becomes an important cultural point of reference for that “modern” pedagogy of which Anna Vertua Gentile²⁰ can be considered a forerunner, especially as regards the dynamics of psychological and social phenomena and, again, the relationship established between socio-educational model and cultural innovations.

Hers is a real educational provocation, which starts from the growing need to reform the process of acculturation of the female sex, included in the broader process of cultural literacy of the 19th century, which requires to concentrate its resources on the formation of a creature equal to man, although different from him.

¹⁸ Cfr. Ivi.

¹⁹ Cfr. Anna Vertua Gentile, *A. Per la mamma educatrice*, De Mohr & C., Milano 1894; Id., *Voce materna*, Hoepli, Milano 1903; Id., *A te, Sposa*, Casa Editrice Madella, Sesto S. Giovanni 1914.

²⁰ Cfr. Gabriella Armenise, *La riflessione di Anna Vertua Gentile sulla «educazione moderna» nel secolo XIX*, cit.

This attempt is clearly announced in *Vita intima* (1902) where the writer makes every reader reflect on the value of subjects, which comes from difference rather than equality, given that nature has given both genders different feelings, attitudes and functions with corresponding duties and rights. The conviction of the opportunity to educate the increasingly vital intelligence that distinguishes women emerges clearly, to adequately deal with the continuously evolving scientific progress. Vertua Gentile thus advocates an intelligent educational process for the female universe, aimed at encouraging aptitudes in the scientific and artistic spheres, without altering the specifically female qualities and virtues, and, on the contrary, facilitating in women the fulfilment of every function linked to their nature. Her educational reform therefore hinges on a greater sense of justice than in the past, since men, not limiting women to the simple role of mother-executor of women's work (and in some circumstances also to the role of servant), would then see them as a companion to be esteemed above all for the cultural support they would receive²¹.

From the writer's extensive dissertations on the question of reforming women's education, or rather its appropriateness, it emerges that it is not permissible to tear women away from their affections (their natural centre), but rather to make them increasingly aware of the greatness of the mission assigned to them, which is often obscured by materialism, itself the fruit of progress and civil evolution²². However, considering that each person is essentially rooted in becoming, in the possibility of becoming something *else*, according to a tension that is profiled as a real process of transformation, the writer, vigorously supports the *planning the training process*. A process whose natural outcome is the possibility of the subject to model an ever more complete form of himself. Ultimately, every change, declining in terms of planning, is aimed at becoming in the triple dimension of *having to be*, *being able to be* and *wanting to be*.

The tension inherent in educational planning inevitably involves the motivational systems of the individual because it finds its immediate feedback in the experiences of gratification, fullness, and authenticity, which clearly

²¹ Cfr. Anna Vertua Gentile, Mara Antelling, Silvio Zambaldi, Scipio Sighele, *Il secolo XIX nella vita e nella cultura dei popoli*, Vallardi, Milano 1902, pp. 6-12; Gabriella Armenise, *La riflessione di Anna Vertua Gentile sulla «educazione moderna» nel secolo XIX*, cit.

²² Anna Vertua Gentile A., Mara Antelling, Silvio Zambaldi, Scipio Sighele, *Il secolo XIX nella vita e nella cultura dei popoli*, cit., p. 18.

accompany the commitment, making concrete the choices made in terms of response to the outside world, but also with the aim of facilitating the processes of self-definition and, therefore, the construction of identity in the different stages of development.

Anna Vertua Gentile writes in her *Galateo*, as well as in her stories for young girls, about the form of good manners. She refers to the value of composure, which is typical of the bourgeoisie of the time, but also to respect for the principle of what ought to be, to be able to cope with all the duties required by the adult world. Anna Vertua Gentile strongly argues that the true success of any educational process lies in the affective harmony between spouses and that every reform connected with educational processes initiated in the family context derives from the female figure and her acculturation process. For this reason, it strongly supports the opportunity of the continuous and permanent process of education of women, also in function of the office of mother-educator entrusted to her that, compared to the past, should be transmitted more knowingly, to raise awareness in the noble task entrusted to her. In fact, women must be brought closer to the knowledge of natural phenomena and the fundamental laws of psychology, as well as to the laws of history and the life of society. The aim of this is to develop an ever more deeply felt sense of nationhood and freedom, with unquestionable ethical and social benefits that extend beyond family, regional and national boundaries. She intends to bring every woman closer to the value of the homeland, religion and family through constructive reflection based on dialogue and dialectical confrontation. She promotes a new way of relating to the world of children, young brides, and mothers, demonstrating in a concrete manner that it is possible to act consciously to create the ideological conditions useful for the promotion of a truly effective educational project, which also makes sense in the long term²³.

Vertua Gentile, among other things, is very careful not to lose sight of the relationship between the field of action of education and art or science and, above all, between education and hygiene and, again, between the process of education and the individual right to be able to use it (this, specifically for women). She seems to agree with Mantegazza's idea²⁴ that the perfectibility

²³ Gabriella Armenise, Daniela De Leo, *La missione educativa di Anna Vertua Gentile e Simone Weil: un filosofare scomodo*. In *Escritoras y personajes femeninos en relation, edicion e introduccion D. Cerrato*, (ed.) (pp. 378-392). Madrid: Editorial Dyckinson S. L., 2021.

²⁴ Gabriella Armenise, *La pedagogia "igienica" di Paolo Mantegazza*, PensaMultimedia, Lecce 2003, p. 121 ss.; Id., *Sull' "identità" e "funzione" della "pedagogia mantegazziana*,

of the individual can be traced to a proper harmony between the physical, the sentimental and the thought. Sentiment, according to his understanding, is the root cause of morality, happiness, and progress. It follows that the education of feeling, and thought must go hand in hand with the physical education of boys and girls, starting at an early age and continuing into adulthood. With reference to girls, she states:

Queste creature, dal lento e faticoso sviluppo fisico e morale, richiedono una continua, paziente, intelligente cura; tale, che l'educazione del corpo possa andare di piè pari, ma senza sbalzi né violenze, con quella del cuore, del giudizio e della mente²⁵.

Clearly, feelings are of considerable importance for physical and moral life and, consequently, 'the splendour of intelligence' is to be found precisely in the images derived from the senses or, to put it better, education of the senses is at the basis of education of thought which, in turn, plays an essential role in the process of preparing the subject for life in general and affectivity (or love) in particular. With these observations, Anna Vertua Gentile became a forerunner of "modern" education for the century under investigation.

An education that gives considerable importance to expressive abilities rather than visual ones. Speech, in fact, is a powerful means of thought, made possible by the sense of hearing²⁶. To avoid relapsing into vice, everyone must educate his or her temperament and senses through the intellect, and then refine instinct through feelings from the heart. Hence the idea of publishing a collection of readings entitled *Mente e cuore. Letture per giovinette* (Milan, Hoepli, 1888), thanks to which the addressee of the collection is provided with an effective vision of the "task" of the concept of "education" (no different from G. Pasotti, author of texts with a pedagogical structure): «tradurre l'uomo potenziale e possibile in un uomo attuale e reale;

in Marco Antonio D'Arcangeli, Alessandro Sanzo (a cura di), *Le "scienze umane" in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2017, pp. 245-260.

²⁵ Anna Vertua Gentile, *La voce dell'esperienza. Libro per signorine*, L'arte Bodoniana di L. Rinfreschi, Piacenza 1915, p. 25 [These creatures, with their slow and laborious physical and moral development, require continuous, patient, intelligent care; so that the education of the body can go hand in hand, but without jarring or violence, with that of the heart, judgment and mind].

²⁶ Anna Vertua Gentile, *come devo comportarmi? Libro per tutti*, 8 ed. riveduta e ampliata, Hoepli, Milano 1915, p. 74. [to translate the potential and possible man into an actual and real man; that of explicating and developing the implied and enveloped man; that of making the man from whom he is born, become what he is destined to be].

quello di esplicitare e sviluppare l'uomo implicato e involupato; quello di far sì che l'uomo da quale nasce, diventi quello che è destinato ad essere²⁷».

The term *education* undoubtedly originates from *educere*, which means to bring out of man those elements capable of facilitating the process of formation, instilling in him a behavioural model for a life he does not have but could have through the enhancement of specific faculties. Anna Vertua Gentile is aware that character is formed through the interaction of the acts performed by the pupil. She performs these acts not because she is driven by the force or violence of another but by a free act of her own will, together with a sense of conscience and self-love. If the educator fails to stimulate free action, much of the educational action loses its value. A functional tool for the development of mental and moral strength is reading, to be done with knowledge, followed by critical meditation and the selection of what is useful. Knowledge, to be understood in all its facets (knowledge of nature, of oneself, of things and people), if supported by an adequate educational process aimed at refining the senses and emotions, stimulates the process of identification with situations to be associated with one's own and refines the sense of sacrifice and altruism. Emphasis is placed on the “power of goodness”, which is considered a comfort to the human soul and, above all, a source of joy (a powerful educational tool for strengthening character). All these aspects are masterfully exposed in *La potenza della bontà. Libro per signorine*, which was a great success and reached its third edition in 1926)²⁸. Here, she outlines her thoughts on the concepts of goodness, perfection, moral beauty, selfishness, and devotion to duty. She promotes an “active goodness”, i.e. one that makes the idea of duty “higher and nobler” in society, inspired by the admonition “to live for the good of others”²⁹; and in a brief summary of her thoughts on relationships, it is noted that: In social relationships, a sense of justice and solidarity are essential; 2. Goodness and sincerity are essential in human relationships; 3. Compassion and moderation are essential in relationships with all beings in general.

For Anna Vertua Gentile, the “person at heart” does more than just do good in human society. The “person at heart” turns his or her attention and

²⁷ Giorgio Pasotti, *Consigli*, in Anna Vertua Gentile, *Mente e cuore. Letture per giovinette*, Hoepli Milano 1888, p. 221. [«To translate the potential and possible man into a current and real man; that of explicating and developing the implied and enveloped man; that of ensuring that the man from whom he is born becomes what he is destined to be»].

²⁸ Cfr. Anna Vertua Gentile, *La potenza della bontà. Libro per signorine*, Hoepli, Milano 1926; Id., *La voce dell'esperienza. Libro per signorine*, cit., p. 217.

²⁹ Anna Gentile, *La potenza della bontà. Libro per le signorine*, cit., p. 13.

care towards any suffering being, always fighting cruelty, selfishness, and harshness wherever he or she finds them. Moreover, by sympathising with all forms of suffering, by consoling the victims of animal brutality and human wickedness, the “person at heart” concretely exercises the virtue of duty, in the broadest sense of the word. The exercise of duty is not easy to implement due to three orders of actions that overpower man's mind, leading it down the right or wrong path (goodness, malice, and selfishness), while morality is based on benevolence, making altruism and goodness the main motives of ethics. For the writer, then, more than the desire for individual well-being, the sense of goodness should be well rooted in every individual, capable of stimulating in the subject the feelings of pain and sacrifice, contributing to imprint in the "human history" of the "holy words" for the success of a "good education": constancy, ideality, sacrifice, disinterestedness, and goodness³⁰.

Anna Vertua Gentile makes a precise classification of values in relation to society (respect, honesty, goodness, solidarity, altruism, democracy), to divinity (theological virtues: faith, hope and charity), to civilisation (beauty, harmony, culture), to practical life (ideality, work and honesty) and, avoiding entering into sharp contrast with instances of humanity typical of the Gospel message - which she entirely shares - she argues for a sort of narrative apologue that contains within itself the assumptions of a moral formation that is also secular in some respects. First and foremost, she intends to stir consciences through the proposal of an ethic capable of contributing to the development of Italy, which had recently reached unity. Implicit in the proposed behavioural model is a conduct inspired by dedication to work and to the nation as well as obedience and docility. The first two factors (dedication to work and to the nation) would seem to prevail and, in perfect adherence to the widespread idea of wanting to contribute to the formation of the gentleman and the gentlewoman, it is concretely spent to make girls and boys fully aware of the concepts of decorum, goodness, prudence, altruism, devotion to duty and love for their country³¹. The formation of character, in short, is the result of a recognised "perfectibility", to which the respective faculties must be directed - according to a given educational plan - to allow the children to imitate a given type taken as a model. Naturally, to succeed in directing the faculties of children in their infancy, it is necessary that they have a strong will, while to form their character, it is necessary to act on their

³⁰ Ivi, p. 58.

³¹ Cfr. Anna Vertua Gentile, *La potenza della bontà*, cit., pp. 171-174; Id., *A te, Sposa*, cit.; Id., *La voce dell'esperienza*, cit.; Id., *Fanciulli d'Italia*, Hoepli, Milano 1911.

will, firmness, and strength. Moreover, essential factors of human perfectibility, ethical volition, and true happiness (as the fruit of small actions and daily satisfactions), always guided by common sense, are represented precisely by the decent control of impulses, goodness, simplicity, altruism, the theological virtues, and brotherhood and, again, by a sense of duty (and, therefore, also by love of work and country).

Anna Vertua Gentile's educational action, in short, is aimed at providing a precise educational direction, which begins with the family (through the maternal figure) and then affects society. The latter, enjoying the fruits of the process of education initiated with the scholastic institutions, has the precise duty not to underestimate female education, committing itself concretely to the acculturation of the popular masses and promoting a dialectical relationship with the educational agencies (school and extra-school), to make every form of education (also addressed to girls) truly effective and avoid the danger of corruption and vice³².

³² Cfr. Gabriella Armenise, *La riflessione di Anna Vertua Gentile sulla «educazione moderna» nel secolo XIX*, cit., pp. 180.