



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
FIRENZE

# Child labour in post-unitary Italy between history and Children's Literature

Dr.ssa Michela Baldini

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of child exploitation emerges in the period of the industrial revolution, a period in which the industry has its maximum thrust of development and begins to exploit the labour work without distinction of sex or age. The legislation regarding minor was often combined with female legislation and never fully applied, due to the lack of controls and the instrumental blindness of the great industrial bourgeoisie. Not only do historical analyses circumscribe and focus the phenomenon of child labour, but also fictional and cinematographic plots focus on the *topos* of a childhood "without childhood".

Part of a night shift in an Indiana glass factory, August 1908. Lewis W. Hines (1874-1940)



Child Labour in a textile mill. South Carolina, 19th century

## METHODS

Research moves through a historical analysis inspired by Foucault's episteme and the French school of "Les Annales" which inaugurated a new era of studies. The purely political history was abandoned in favor of a *histoire événementielle* (proposed by Bloch and Febvre) which takes into account social problems and narrative history, resulting in a different History that is demonstrated in the long run, through multiple aspects and not only through historical "facts", an approach in which History emerges, as stated by Bloch and Braudel, in the diachronic dimension of duration. In this regard, a source of information certainly not marginal, is constituted by the literature and in particular in Children's Literature, in which the concept of work assumes a connotation of human dignity, but at the same time proposes an image of adultized and exploited childhood.

## OBJECTIVE

We will try to reconstruct a more detailed image of denied childhood and child exploitation through the analysis of nineteenth-century novels and stories. Alongside the pages of famous writers such as Charles Dickens and Giuseppe Verga, the archive research will be exploited to bring out a social picture that is as clear and precise as possible.

## RESULTS

Since there is no real literary genre dedicated to child labour, we will isolate the works that mostly brought the phenomenon to the fore, trying to recreate a portrait of the phenomenon as likely as possible.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Antonelli Q., Becchi E., (a cura di) *Scritture bambine. Testi infantili tra passato e presente*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1995
- Ariès P., *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, Bari, Laterza, 1968
- Bacchetti F., *I bambini e la famiglia nell'Ottocento. Realtà e mito attraverso la letteratura per l'infanzia*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2017
- Bertoni Jovine D., *L'alienazione dell'infanzia. Il lavoro minorile nella società moderna*, Firenze, Luciano Manzuoli, 1989
- Bianchi B., Lotto A. (a cura di), *Lavoro ed emigrazione minorile dall'Unità alla Grande Guerra*, Venezia, Ateneo Veneto, 2000
- Cambi F., Olivieri S. (a cura di), *Infanzia a violenza. Forme, terapie, interpretazioni*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1990
- DeMause L. (a cura di), *Storia dell'infanzia*, Milano, Emme, 1983
- Di Bello G., Nuti V., *Soli per il mondo. Bambine e bambini emigranti tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, Unicopli, 2001
- Megale A., Taselli A., *Lavori minorile e percorsi a rischio di esclusione sociale*, Roma, Ediesse, 2006
- Becchi E., *Il bambino sociale: privatizzazione e de privatizzazione dell'infanzia*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1979
- Santoni Rugiu A., *Storia sociale dell'educazione*, Principato, Milano, 1976
- Shorter E., *The making of the modern family*, New York, Basic Books, 1975
- Trisciuzzi L., *La scoperta dell'infanzia*, Le Monnier, Firenze, 1976
- Olivieri S. (a cura di), *Le bambine nella storia dell'educazione*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2009
- Villani P., *Storia economica e "histoire événementielle": alcune considerazioni*, in "Il Mulino", n°13, gennaio-aprile, 1970
- Wishy B.W., *The child and the republic. The dawn of modern american child nature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968