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There Isn't Any Child: Functional Innocence and Coming-of-Age in Odoevtseva's *The Angel of Death*

Western culture in the twentieth century became increasingly favorable to the idea of childhood and cultivated the notion that children are inherently innocent. Conversely, the advent of psychoanalysis sexualized children and reduced them to bodies as vessels of instincts and drives. Dealing with this duality, my paper will ponder the intricate construction of the protagonist's mind in *The Angel of Death* (1927), a novel by the lesser-known Russian writer Irina Odoevtseva. With the help of psychoanalytic theory, the paper will delve into the subject of coming-of-age, and treat it not only as a temporal, but also as a spatial phenomenon that conceals intense energy and desire. In addition, I will discuss the bizarre position that this émigré novel occupies as it harkens back to the artistic and literary movement of decadence in the late 1920s. Set outside of Russia, amidst Parisian immigration, *The Angel of Death* speaks of the childhood horrors and coming-of-age recklessness. The novel opens with a scene, in which the heroine, Liuca, is traumatized by the sight of her own first menstrual blood. Although her mother assures her that this is a symbol of maturity, Liuca quickly ascertains that members of her family still consider her a child and grant her no access to their secret conversations. Instead of claiming her new role as an adult, the heroine exploits her status as a child by cultivating willful ignorance of what conspires around her. Symbolic initiation into adulthood and simultaneous inadmissibility to it coupled with Liuca's recurrent and disjointed memories of the long-lost homeland (the narrator is often uncertain about the authenticity of Liuca's memories), create a rich space within the heroine's psyche, where the distinction between truth and dissimulation, as well as reality and fantasy, is arbitrary.