

Book Review

Alla Ricerca della Madre (In Search of the Mother), Lucio Zichella, 2016. Rome, Italy: Edizioni Libbra. ASIN: B01NBM9WSE

In Search of the Mother is the fourth of Lucio Zichella's novels. After a life dedicated to scientific research and care of pregnant and new mothers as an obstetrician and gynecologist, Lucio Zichella embarked on the field of literature. He felt that the cool rigor of scientific language was unable to deeply express what he had learned from his professional and human experience with mothers. Over time, he also understood the value of a novel in catching the complexity of reality and in spreading the scientific and humane message among lay people. During his professional life, Zichella witnessed the astounding power of the mother's speechless marvel at her baby having just been born and learned the richness and truthfulness of nonverbal language.

In this novel, the author guides the reader in discovering the subtle power of musical language to penetrate the depth of psyche and to heal, especially when it is accompanied by wisdom practice and love. To validate the scientific foundations of his insights, he places an eminent figure among his imaginary characters: Professor Ludwig Janus, featured in the novel as a pioneer of prenatal and perinatal psychology and medicine, a discipline particularly focused on the fetus's life and the protective and adverse factors influencing his/her development. Among the protective influences, Zichella highlights the role of music, documented through individuals' memories of musical pieces they were exposed to during gestation.

The author quietly introduces another element intrinsic to music and transcending verbal communication: faith and spirituality — faith that creeps into music, marking the way towards the protagonist's healing. Through his sharp and deep insight, Zichella leads us to discover a realm where it is possible to recover from the most ingrained obsessions, when science marries art and faith and we are guided by love. The novel's title is quite telling: It refers to the search of the quintessence of archetypes, the Mother. If the title is not coincidental, it is not coincidental either that the novel ends with the birth of a new life, a baby whose emblematic name is Francesco.

Most striking throughout the novel is the evidence of the fetus as a person whose individual identity is shaped by prenatal imprinting. Through this imaginary story, we learn about the new interdisciplinary science of epigenetics. A human fetus, during maturational processes

leading to and preparing for birth and life outside the womb, has already a psychological identity, influenced by the stimuli of the internal environment (maternal psycho-sociobiology: her emotions and behaviors also conditioned by her external environment and culture), which contribute to the formation of implicit (visceral) memory and to the regulation of the nervous system. The genetic material (DNA) passed down by parents during fertilization is already influenced throughout the gestational period by life inside the mother's body, and has shaped the individual's psycho-behavioral predisposition. It is an existential protocol modulated also by the environment and culture in which the mother lives, which resonates with Edgar Morin's (2008) thinking about the "Paradigm of Complexity." Morin foresees in his book on human identity a second prehistory determined by the necessity of a new model of knowing reality. An aspect of this model could be the definition of characteristics of fetal physical experiences, in particular through his maturing organs of perception (hearing and sight). But this is not all, since prenatal reconstruction comes to be an introduction to life through those maternal behaviors and interpretations recalled in psychoanalysis.

The novel is a fascinating, imaginative, and original story, combining scientific knowledge with wisdom in a lyrical, romantic style. It reflects a current increasing awareness of the necessity for science to embrace subjective experience and intersubjective engagement as the essence of human development. The lyrical tone gives a sense of the depth to the unborn baby's life as well as to the maternal experience during pregnancy.

In this novel, Zichella writes about a musician, Luca, who had lost his mother during birth, and whose mother lives on in his remembrance of the music she had enjoyed playing on the piano during pregnancy. The embodied memory of musical sounds influenced his predisposition to music and art appreciation, his love of music, and opened him to perceiving its energy and catching its potential. Throughout his life, Luca felt an intimate need for performing on piano the musical pieces his mother had played (and he had heard) during gestation, for instance those by Schumann and Brahms. These pieces seemed to be vividly present in his visceral memory. He wanted to search in all his memories and sensory experiences for instances even of the physical contacts with the amniotic liquid and parts of his own body, which may have belonged to a primordial consciousness.

This prenatal connection between mother and child through music is also supported by my experience of listening to my favorite piano music during pregnancy and my daughter's predispositions. I allowed the fine power of melodic vibrations to travel through the body and depth of the psyche and to induce healing and communicative energy movements which were amplified when combined with wisdom/mindfulness practice. Regularly listening to my favorite music shaped my child's sense of rhythm, her love

of playing piano and composing music, as well as her mindful personality. I recall her rhythmically dancing without music on (rocking side to side) while sitting up at four months old. It was as if she were performing the pieces memorized in her body during gestation and to which she had been regularly exposed. Alfred Tomatis (1992) strongly supports the possibility that the memory of sounds is also memory of physical contact and energy in the womb because sounds emit vibrations in the form of energy fields, especially if they have an emotional content

Luca's constant search for his mother manifested in an obsessive body narrative, driven by the violent tearing apart of the mother-child psychobiological continuum due to her death. It generated anxieties that only music could soothe, almost inducing a psychophysiological regulation. Music almost re-established that missed continuum. The documentation of the role of music in pregnancy through individuals' memories of it is in line with ancient wisdom. Music is an essential component of primal wisdom and wellbeing among all cultures, as it celebrates rhythm, fine nonverbal sensory communication, movement of energy, and spirituality. Among many indigenous cultures, throughout childhood, detailed knowledge of one's beginnings is passed on, including the same song the child was exposed to in the womb. For millennia, our indigenous cousins have been aware of the power of music and maternal voice to be stored in the body and maintain the safe continuum, or recreate it when it was broken.

Lucio Zichella's book is available in Italian. I think it should be translated in English, since it would be an important addition to prenatal and perinatal psychology and medicine. I would be very interested in venturing on this journey.

Reviewed by
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References

- Morin, E. (2008). *On complexity*. New York: Hampton Press.
Tomatis, A. (1992). *The conscious ear*. Paris, France: Station Hill Press.