

Book Review

Stephen Spitalny

Agatha Christie: An Autobiography

In this excerpt, Agatha Christie, whose mysteries are read worldwide, gives us a wonderful picture of a young child's experience of separateness leading up to calling himself "I." At the same time, young children also experience a oneness with the world. They are fully connected with all they experience and it is from this that the child's total trust in the world arises. The experience of separateness develops slowly, reaching a crescendo at the nine-year change. Can we consider how both of these perspectives can be true? These polarities of separateness and oneness exist simultaneously in the child's development and challenge us to be flexible in observing seemingly contradictory realities. – S.S.

Point of view. The point of view of a child. We all knew it once but we've traveled so far away from it that it's difficult to get back there again. I remember seeing my own grandson Matthew when he must have been, I suppose, about two and a half. He did not know I was there. I was watching him from the top of the stairs. He walked very carefully down the stairs. It was a new achievement and he was proud of it, but still somewhat scared. He was muttering to himself, saying: "This is Matthew going down stairs. This is Matthew. Mathew is going down stairs. This is Matthew going down stairs."

I wonder if we all start life thinking of *ourselves*, as soon as we can think of ourselves at all, as a separate person, as it were, from the one observing. Did I say to myself once, "This is Agatha in her party sash going down to the dining room"? It is as though the body in which we have found our spirit lodged is at first strange to us. An entity, we know its name, we are on terms with it, but are not as yet identified fully with it. We are Agatha going for a walk, Matthew going down stairs. We see ourselves rather than *feel* ourselves.

And then one day the next stage of life happens. Suddenly it is no longer, "This is Matthew going down stairs." Suddenly it has become *I am* going down stairs. The achievement of "I" is the first step in the progress of a personal life.

*Source: Agatha Christie: An Autobiography. Dodd, Mead & Company (New York, 1977).
Submitted by Nancy Foster of Acorn Hill Waldorf Nursery and Kindergarten.*