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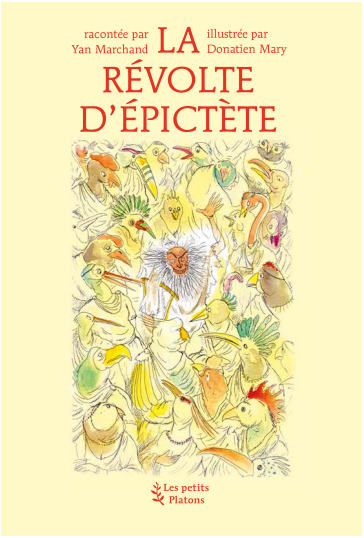
Yan Marchand , Donatien Mary

The Revolt of Epictetus [La révolte d’Épictète]

France (2014)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Epictetus Greek Philosophy Hellenism Roman Empire Rome Saturn Seneca Stoicism Titus (Emperor) Vesuvius Zeno of Cyprus (Zeno of Citium)





Courtesy of the Publisher.

General information	
Title of the work	The Revolt of Epictetus [La révolte d’Épictète]
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France, Turkey
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	Yan Marchand, *La révolte d'Épictète*. Paris: Les Petits Platons, 2014, 64 pp.
ISBN	9782361650483
Official Website	lespetitsplatons.com (Accessed: October 13, 2021).
Available Onllne	Available for purchase at lespetitsplatons.com (Accessed: October 13, 2021).
Genre	Adaptations, Fiction, Illustrated works, Philosophical fiction, Short stories
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Angelina Gerus, University of Warsaw, angelina.gerus@gmail.com
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Creators



Courtesy of the Author.

Yan Marchand , b. 1978
(Author)

Yan Marchand, born in 1978, is a writer of books for young adults, based in Brest. Holding a PhD in philosophy from the Université de Rennes 1, he offers philosophy workshops for children and teenagers from 5 up to 17 years. He also runs trainings and lectures for teachers and childcare professionals wishing to incorporate philosophy into their practices. In cooperation with the Paris-based publishing house, "Les petits Platons", Yan Marchand authored several children's books including *Diogène l'homme chien* (*Diogenes the Dog-Man*, 2011), *Le rire d'Épicure* (*The Laughter of Epicurus*, 2012), *Socrate sort de l'ombre* (*Socrates Comes out of the Shadows*, 2012), *La révolte d'Épictète* (*The Revolt of Epictetus*, 2014), *Les mystères d'Héraclite* (*The Mysteries of Heraclitus*, 2015), *Socrate président !* (*Socrates the President !*, 2017).

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Questionnaire

1. What drew you to working with Greek and Roman

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philosophy?

— The encounter with Antiquity occurred, as it does for many children, through mythology. Digging to the right, to the left I ran into a book of Sophocles. It fascinated me, and, mixing up pretty much everything at the time, I put all the Ancients in the same basket; so I began to read Aeschylus, Horace, but also Seneca, Lucretius, Epictetus, Plato, not knowing yet that it was philosophy. And that captivated me: finally, books that did not tell stories but proposed ways of living in connection with a better understanding of the world and our finitude.

2. As you have a background in philosophical education holding a PhD in philosophy from the Université de Rennes 1, may you point out any particular books that made an impact on your writings?

— My writings interact with Heraclitus, the pre-Socratics in general and the philosophies of asceticism: cynicism, epicureanism, stoicism mainly. It's hard to point out any books. But more recent authors have influenced my writing, I believe. Heidegger and Levinas. But unfortunately, I cannot suggest a specific title.

3. I have an impression that in your stories the ancient texts are interwoven so closely with new authorial elements that it is sometimes difficult to separate them from each other. What sources are you using? How concerned are you with 'accuracy' or 'fidelity' to the original?

— There is always the lie of art! Indeed, in writing for the youth there are two often incompatible issues: the exposition of an often complex thought, and the proposal of a motivating narration. Sometimes it is necessary to adjust either the narrative or the exposition of concepts, so that there may arise some inventions which serve the story rather than the history of philosophy, and moments when the story weighs a bit more as it becomes more philosophical. But as far as possible, I create a plausible framework. I work on the biography, the historical and psychological context of the epoch and I try to see in what way the concepts of this or that author could make sense at that time, in

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that particular context. This gives ideas for plot twists. Therefore I try to be faithful to the century and to the spirit of the philosopher, but sometimes in order to give a bit of energy I can modify a fact without ever inventing it from scratch. It's a bit like a puzzle with a missing piece: I cut a new one but to make it fit, I have to tap on it with a fist.

4. What challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular texts or ideas?

— The challenges are often the same: to open a complex world to a reader without boring him. I therefore choose authors who often have a life on which I can base my concepts and who provide images, models and amusing examples that I steal without remorse. The other challenge concerns the length: it is not possible to produce a thousand pages, and yet our author has said many things. It is therefore necessary to reread everything and to make an important summary while remaining silent about other elements. For Heraclitus it is still fine, but for Heidegger it becomes a complex task. And the biggest challenge is this one: on the one hand you want to produce arguments and leave the fiction, or else you get caught up by the fiction and the text becomes weakly philosophical.

5. You have written children's books about different philosophers of Antiquity: who was the hardest and easiest to tell the story about?

— In general, these short books demand a huge amount of time from me. There is something of poetic writing, because it is necessary to contain the author, to write the text ten or twenty times before finding the fulgurance which will hold on a few dozens of pages. All the writings I proposed to "Les Petits Platons" were reworked several times. They were all difficult to write. The one that seemed to me the most obvious to work on was *Diogène l'homme chien* (Eng. *Diogenes the Dog-Man*, 2011), because I had been maturing it for a long time, and he's a very visual philosopher. I really struggled to draft *Thalès et le trône de la sagesse* (Eng. *Thales and the Throne of Wisdom*, 2021), because I wanted to talk about Thales but at the same time about the birth of a new way of thinking about things. So there was a greater philosophical intention.

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6. Why do you think Classics continue to resonate with young audiences?

— The Ancients speak about thought that discovers a way of looking at things, and I believe that this touches on something of childhood, which also awakens to a way of thinking that becomes capable of grasping the relationship that exists between things. Aristotle said that in order to undo a knot, one must understand how it is made. Ancient thought patiently unties knots, it manipulates, it sees the areas of friction, the points of contact, plays at that. Children too, perhaps. I also think that ancient thought is not just a thought, it proposes a life, or rather a powerful feeling of existence. Children often say that these lives are too risky, but at the same time they admire these incarnations of freedom.

7. Would it be a coincidence that the protagonists of your books in the "Les Petits Platons" series are characters coming-of-age? If it is not by chance, why do these situations become the core of the story?

— Pindar said: become who you are. Indeed my characters are in search of who they have to be and often this new life is not far away, but right there, in a decision, an act, a taking of freedom, right now and not tomorrow. I didn't realise this recurrence in my texts, and you are not the first to point it out to me. But isn't philosophy the proposal of another way of living, freer, more lucid. I therefore like to imagine stories in which the minds undergo a kind of metamorphosis; moreover, I think that young readers rather enjoy this dimension, since isn't their task to grow up?

8. Did you think about how Classical Antiquity would translate for young readers, especially in France?

— I don't know in what sense we should consider the word translation. But if we have to pass on an ancient text, there are passages that can attract young readers, especially those stories about freedom, openness, independence; in a word: autarkeia. And for young people who are in search of emancipation this makes sense. However, something also disturbs me in this ancient thought, because I don't

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want children to be nourished by this very male vision, which explains to a large extent the hypnotic relationship we have with power, with mastery and the negation of those who need to be accompanied. This freedom as a synonym for autonomy is very pronounced in France, so to think about how we got there is also to recast the concept in order to make it more open to the idea of interdependencies. So in my way of presenting the Ancients, I also try not to caricature them, as a great white-bearded sage and autonomous, but to present complex individuals, sometimes uncomfortable with the concepts of their time, which I think they were, most of them having lived through exile and being put to death or to exile.

9. You offer philosophy workshops and also run different philosophical trainings and lectures. Do you turn to Antiquity in this practice? If so, how often does it happen and how are these references particularly useful and valuable to you as part of your educational activities?

— I plunge my roots in Antiquity. I always have an eye in the antique rear-view mirror, whether with children, adults in training or with expert colleagues. I must have been born in the wrong century, but this is certainly a fantasised Antiquity; however, I borrow a lot of techniques and concepts from Greece especially. I watch over friendship in a permanent conversation. I also insist on the gratuity of the exercise and on the thrill of a thought that divides itself to think what it thinks, let's call it a dialogic function. The knowledge of the Ancients is also precious to accompany philosophical conversations, because it offers elements to think about the genesis of concepts, their evolution in history and therefore their mortality, when we often think that the words of our time are immutable mountains, but which for a long time have not meant very much. They are mutations of the past that only require a retrospective glance to make flesh alive again.

10. Do you have a favourite book by an ancient author?

— Hard to say, but I remember the one that, when I was still a child, made me say: I want to become like that: the Handbook of Epictetus.

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11. And a favourite ancient philosopher?

— I hesitate between Heraclitus and Diogenes, am I allowed to merge the two persons into one and invent a Dioclitus? Or a Heragenes?

Prepared and translated from French by Angelina Gerus, University of Warsaw, angelina.gerus@gmail.com



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Donatien Mary , b. 1983
(Illustrator)

Donatien Mary graduated from the École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg in 2007. He is a comic book author, cartoonist, illustrator for the press and children's publishing, and engraver. In addition, he experiments with different forms of visual arts using such techniques as etching, aquatint, woodcut, and linocut.

Sources:

Personal website (Accessed: October 13, 2021).

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Additional information

Translation	Turkish: *Epiktetos'Un Başkaldırısı*, trans. Metis Yayınları, İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2014.

Summary

Rome, at the time of the emperor Vespasian. Prince Titus, his son, is preparing a grand feast to celebrate Saturnalia when one of his slaves, young Julius, missteps and must be resold to another master. At the slave market, the boy, for the first time, meets Epictetus, who often comes there to talk to the human *merchandise* (that is how the slaves in the market are described in the book); Latin-speaking people there translate his words to those who do not understand Latin. Julius escapes with the philosopher and gradually learns what true freedom is. Though the boy, master-less, succumbs to the various temptations of the Eternal City. Everything changes when Fortune confronts him with members of the imperial family again. Thanks to their meeting at the time of Saturnalia, during which slaves and masters are equal, the fugitive Julius avoids Titus' punishment, and at the same time, his courage and sense of humour find favour with Titus' father, Vespasian. Julius becomes the mascot of the City. When his time of glory is over, Julius again is under threat of punishment from the Prince. He is saved by none other than Epictetus, who successfully argues that punishment would be an indication of the ruler's weakness and of the strength of those who suffer. Julius heads off to Pompeii, where nothing can shake his stoic spirit anymore, even the eruption of Vesuvius.

Analysis

The title of the book, *La révolte d'Epictète* (Eng. *The Revolt of Epictetus*), expresses its main idea: the Stoic questions popular opinion in pursuit of freedom (in the broadest sense of the word). Taking such a stand is a real revolt. The philosopher can be seen in the centre of the cover illustration, in the crowd of anthropomorphic bird-heads looking at him in astonishment. Though looking unkempt and hardly attractive, Epictetus is the only human being there.

On the front flap of the jacket, within a quote from the Preface to the *Handbook* by Giacomo Leopardi (1825), the Epictetus' *Enchiridion* is mentioned. However, its intertextual relationship with the children's

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book seems more an ideological connection than a textual one. Epictetus' *Discourses* are a better candidate for the main inspiration for this contemporary short story. Although rather fragmentary and woven into the new story, it shows a certain similarity to this classic text. Among these references, we could quote the reflection on freedom which uses as an example, the order of letters in the name Dion (Epictetus, *Discourses* I.12.12–13, II.2.23, II.13.20 cf. p. 28 in Marchand's book), the nature of donkeys (I.19.5, IV.5.21 cf. pp. 19–20 ibidem), dogs, and horses (II.9.10, IV.1.3 cf. p. 18 ibidem), mentions of Saturnalia (I.29.31 cf. p. 6, 37 ibidem), and Zeno of Cyprus (IV.8.12 cf. p. 53 ibidem), as well as an allusion to Epictetus' words about ears of corn and their destiny* (II.6.11–13 cf. p. 63 ibidem), which is used to metaphorically end the children's book – were not they meant to ripen and be reaped?

The Stoic philosophy in the book is featured mainly through the figure of Epictetus, and the theme of freedom along with its opposition to slavery is present both literally and figuratively. The readers are not given a full biography of the philosopher (although even researchers do not have one, as William Abbott Oldfather points out in the Preface to Epictetus' *Discourses* published in "Loeb Classical Library"**); still, they learn some important facts describing the character. For example, he was the freed slave of Epaphroditus, who had both legs broken, making the philosopher lame. Unlike the texts written by Arrian based on Epictetus, in the children's book, the topic of the organisation of the universe and the topic of God are of lesser importance than freedom (although the latter appears, for example, on p. 27 of Marchand's story). This approach is expanded upon through Epictetus' conversations with slaves (above all with Julius, whom he teaches freedom through obedience), and with Prince Titus, whom the philosopher convinces that the exercise of power is not an expression of genuine freedom. The idea of freedom is also embodied in the graphic material of the book. All of the characters are depicted with bird's heads (whereas on the title page, an empty open cage is drawn under the book's title); only Epictetus, as mentioned above, is depicted as a human from the beginning of the story. However, Julius undergoes a transformation and the relevant text is accompanied by a drawing of a bird's head gradually acquiring a human face (p. 59). What Julius learns, with Epictetus' help and as a result of what's happening to him, is particularly valuable in a children's book. Young readers can relate to certain aspects of the story (lack of freedom) as they too have experienced dependency on others. This similarity of

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experience allows the readers to identify with the protagonist and consider Epictetus as their mentor.

Next to the philosophical issues, the children's story by Yan Marchand also provides important information about the history and culture of ancient Rome: facts about the emperor Vespasian and his son Titus, the Jewish war, Saturnalia and various day-to-day details of that time, e.g., how banquets were held and what slavery looked like. The created narrative is credible and coherent, providing entertainment and at the same time introducing readers to the heritage of Classical Antiquity.

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* This metaphor, in turn, is an allusion to the verses from the *Hypsipyle* of Euripides. For futher information see note 4 in Epictetus, *The Discourses of Epictetus, with the Encheridion and Fragments*, trans. George Long, London: George Bell and Sons, 1890. Available online at perseus.tufts.edu (accessed: October 13, 2021).

** See Epictetus, *The Discourses as reported by Arrian, Vol. I, Books I–II*, Loeb Classical Library 131, trans. W. A. Oldfather, London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam's, 1925, p. VIII. Available online at archive.org (accessed: October 13, 2021).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Slavery Epictetus Greek Philosophy Hellenism Roman Empire Rome Saturn Seneca Stoicism Titus (Emperor) Vesuvius Zeno of Cyprus (Zeno of Citium)
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Animals Coming of age Desires Freedom Historical figures Humanity Learning Maturity Morality Obedience Philosophy Punishment Soul Teachers Values
Further Reading	Plutarch, *Lives, Volume I. Theseus and Romulus. Lycurgus and Numa. Solon and Publicola*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.

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Epictetus, *The Discourses as reported by Arrian Discourses, Vol. II, Books III–IV*, trans. W. A. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library 218, London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam's, 1928.

Addenda

This short story, issued by the French publishing house "Les Petits Platons" [The Tiny Platos], is part of the series adapting philosophical texts and ideas of all time for children and teenagers. Written in French, these books now are actively spreading worldwide, translated already into eleven languages. Along with *La révolte d'Epictète*, the series presents various other books retelling classic philosophical texts or referring to ancient philosophy in another way.

Official website of the publishing house (Accessed: October 13, 2021).

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