

THE RISE OF THE CULTURE OF YOUTH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION.

by David L. Brierley

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Part II: A Sudden Vision of Heaven: The Rise of the Idol 1904-1983

On December 27th, 1902 the character of 'Peter Pan' was first made known to the general public. He was "the boy who never grew up." The story was an immediate success for its author J.M.Barrie. The theme was the same as Oscar Wilde's 'A Portrait of Dorian Gray' – the ideal of eternal youth. But its success was due to the fact that it was a story for children whereas Wilde wrote his book for adults. Peter Pan tells us that "I ran away the day I was born, because I heard mother and father talking of what I was to be when I became a man. I want always to be a little boy and have fun, so I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long time amongst the fairies." Peter Pan therefore found himself in a state of suspension, of permanent becoming. He has the ability to fly at will and transports himself to Neverland. Peter is cryogenically frozen in childhood and although he still has his first teeth he acts as an adolescent. In his world there is nothing that he fears more than becoming an adult. Wilde was criticised whereas Barrie was the toast of London. The role of Peter Pan was played by a middle-aged actress to make it less controversial and further away from reality. Throughout the twentieth century until today the theme became an underlying issue in educational circles. How quickly should one grow up? How much pressure should be placed on the child and youth into maturing as quickly as possible?

The use of the name Pan was no coincidence. Pan is the Ancient Greek goat god of nature who was abandoned as a child and was the guardian of music and dance. Pan was the only god in mythology to die in his time like a mortal being.

Ideals and Idols 1917-1984

The twentieth century has seen a dramatic increase in the need of youths of someone to look up to, reaching a level today where 450 million youths the world over regularly watch the television programme 'Idol'. In the years before the First World War the first European idol appeared in the shape of Rupert Brooke, the famous English war poet. He became a figurehead for Europe's youth. Obsessed by 'Dorian Gray' and Peter Pan, Brooke announced that the world was imperfectly organized. One fault, one great fault, was that its inhabitants grow old. The worst part of it was not the decay of the body but that of the spirit. He looked into the future - "We are twenty-something. In 1920 we will be thirty-something. In 1930 we will be forty-something talking to rather fat, rather prosperous, rather heavy, married, conservative people who were once young with us." He observed that London was full of dead, top-hatted ghosts." These were once young and were "haunting the civilization that was their ruin." He continued,

"but suppose if a band of the splendid young people in the past had formed a scheme to escape the great destroyer, to continue young and suppose they had succeeded -wouldn't that have been wonderful, an

unequalled triumph?" Brooke called for the group to meet at Basle railway station "on 1st May 1933 at breakfast time" (written in 1908).

Brooke was charismatic and restless. He had been a rebel since his early teens. At Cambridge University he started a new style -long hair, soft shoes and open shirts with floppy collars. The poet William Butler Yeats called him "the most beautiful man in England." But Brooke was also a brilliant mind. After completing his sensational collection of poems '1914 and Other Poems' he announced: "We young have inherited the world." Brooke was to be the young man who offered his life for the cause of eternal youth. In 1915 he left England for the last time for Gallipoli and in the jaws of war died from blood poisoning on 23rd April, Shakespeare's birthday and his native country's national day, St. George's Day. Brooke is today seen as one of greatest experts on Shakespeare ever. At 28 years of age he had, as he put it, "awakened Europe's youth to the fact that the soul should be cultivated in youth and kept alive in adulthood."

By eight in the morning there was a huge, milling mob outside the Paramount Theatre in New York. It was October 14th, 1944, Columbus Day. The première was a success before it had ever begun. The world press were there with their notepads and cameras. Five hundred girls were hired in with photographs of Frank Sinatra pinned to their dresses screaming at a blown-up picture of a slightly built, nervous and young looking man even though he was 29 years old, was already married with a child. The great moment arrives, Sinatra appears on stage. Hysterical shouts of Frankie. Frankie! A big mob had gathered at the stage entrance, instructed to wait there. Sinatra is trapped inside, a lonely man. The vacuum is filled, hysteria takes over and an idol is formed.

The ideals of youth were replaced by an idol.

Another idol was buried in Greece, or rather, after his own wish, his ashes were scattered in front of the Byzantine chapel of St. Nicholas at Kardamyli. Bruce Chatwin died at the age of 49. He was a born storyteller but not until the third part of his short life did he manage to write them down. Stories were his obsession. He loved digging for them, bringing them to the surface and sharing them. Probably 60% were true. He had a vivid imagination and was a tremendous fabulist. From an early age he loved travel stories and maps. In his teens it was found that he was in possession of a photographic memory. Sotheby's, the London auction house, saw this talent and employed him in their art department. His close attention to detail and ability to remember what he had observed made him indispensable in the art trade. He did not just look but he looked with intensity. Chatwin's aesthetic obsession compressed itself into the activity of seeing and he was able at once to catch the uniqueness of form. This intensity found him almost blind. The advice was to take a break and seek the general view in wide open landscapes such as the ocean or desert. He appreciated the value of absence- leaving for somewhere where no one could reach him. There was a compulsion to the unknown in order to find the foreign in one's own soul that appealed to the youth of the 1960's. He took on the role of the modern nomad. He left the civilized life for the natural life in order to find the natural self. Disgruntled with a materialistic society, youths followed his example. Suddenly the youth of the western world were on the move as backpackers, leaving the known and secure surroundings for no fixed destination. Monotonous surroundings and tedious regular duties were thought to nurture fatigue, nervousness and apathy. Youth has to feel that the souls and spirits are nourished. In the 1960's young people felt they were too attached to material things that really serve no useful purpose in their individual development. The only real anchors in life are inner ones. The benches at the Sarbonne became empty. Backpackers went out into the world to find themselves with a copy

of Chatwin's 'In Patagonia' tucked away in their rucksacks. People started to think again about basic educational values, The Waldorf movement benefited and in the 1960's and 70's saw a threefold expansion in the number of Waldorf schools where the individual nurturing of the soul forces- of thinking, emotions and actions is a prime consideration in the teaching of youth.

Before the Second World War educationalists were aware of changes in growth patterns in children and youths but this first came to light in the 1950's. A survey was published in the British medical magazine 'Lancet' in 1956 that summarized data from health stations from the previous fifty years. Young people had increased in height on an average of 2 cm. per decade and in weight 1 kg. This meant that a nine year old in 1938 had an average size of a 10.5 year old in 1883. Most significant was the survey by the Scottish doctor J.A.C.Keddie conducted in Glasgow and Edinburgh. In 1955 compared with 1913 the average height of a nine year old had increased by 7.5 cms. in height and 3.5 kg. in weight. J.M.Tanner, in his now famous survey 'Growth in Adolescence', traced measurements from 1880 to 1950. He saw that there were marked increases in weight and height from five to twenty-one but the most abrupt increases were in adolescence in the age group 12-14 years. The question was what was the cause of this increase. At first one put it down to better nutrition. This is partly true but at the same time it was seen that in slum areas the data were not significantly different to prosperous areas. In a forty year period in the twentieth century there had been an increase of on average one year in physical maturity. Sexual maturity came at an alarmingly earlier and earlier age, on average 3.7 years earlier over an eighty year period. Each generation grew taller than the previous one. Physically youths felt not only that they were on par with the adults but they could look down on them. Further investigations showed that this increase was more marked in some countries than others and over ethnic boundaries. At first Africa and Asia were free from these tendencies.

Some researchers believed that the increases were due to the introduction of the machine into all aspects of society. Everything was speeded up. Walking was substituted for public and private transport that covered longer and longer distances at greater and greater speeds. Society wanted youngsters to grow up quickly defying natural growth processes. One wanted to come to a result as quickly as possible. New methods in agriculture with artificial fertilizers, light and warmth meant that food could be grown in half the time. The Swedish Nobel Prize winner in Science, Svante Arrhenius had the theory that the introduction of electricity in houses and schools induced unnatural growth processes. He wired up a classroom with extensive circuits and made comparisons with a classroom free from electricity. He found it difficult of course to measure increases in height but he observed that the tempo of work being done increased remarkably in the one classroom but not the other.

But what about other sides of maturity, of the inner life of the youngster, maturity in thinking, the emotional constitution and the way one acts? In short what about the soul? A person is not only made up of flesh and blood. Was there a significant change in maturity in this aspect of the human being? Teachers were able to see changes here as well, but in the opposite direction. It was taking longer to nurture the youths in the late fifties. It took longer to learn . . .

Throughout the Western World large scale reforms tried to find educational solutions.

Individualism and egalitarianism 1965-

What is it these young people were striving for, what did they want? What were they dissatisfied with? What were the revolutions of youth in the 1960's trying to achieve? And what is the underlying principle of the Waldorf school from its foundation in 1919?

When we take a look at the modern history of the twentieth century we clearly that it was a century of massacres and killings and we witnessed two world wars. It was also a century of a battle for the individual. According to the historian Todorov in the First World War 8.5 million young people men died in battle, 6 million were left limbless and 10 million civilians lost their lives. In addition in the Soviet Union 5 million died in civil war and 6 million from starvation. In the Second World War 35 million died in Europe alone (25 of these in the Soviet). Those who survived had wished to express themselves as independent individuals but were hindered in doing so by poverty, insecurity and war. In such a situation people foremost want security. Totalitarianism provided this, but in many parts of Europe youth were not satisfied with this. In a phase of developing one's personality self-expression of one's thoughts, feelings and acts is a necessity. The soul has a threefold composition. First there is the inner conscious space of thinking. So there is the intercourse of emotions and feelings. Here is both harmony and dissonance. Thirdly is the sphere of the will with its actions and deeds.

When a person becomes de-individualized he becomes part of the masses. It is then the masses that steer thoughts, feelings and actions. At the same time the development of human consciousness throughout time had given the human being a greater inner self-understanding than ever before and therefore more freedom as an individual. Thus totalitarianism provided the answer for many but not for the youth. Many youths who died or were killed young saw totalitarianism as a system to foster egalitarianism as a foe to individual self-realization. The youth of the 1960's did not tolerate that "we" replaced "I". They had seen it in Benito Mussolini's Italy in 1922 and Generalissimo Franco's Spain as well as in Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster's 'Superman' cartoon first published in New York in 1933.

Viktor Frankl (no. 119,104 in Theresielstadt concentration camp) lived in Vienna as were his two colleagues in psychology Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. They understood the battle for the individuality but differed in the view as to what motivates people. Freud talked of the will to be satisfied and attain pleasure, Adler the will to gain power but Frankl believed the will to gain a meaning in our existence is the main motivating force. He wrote a famous book about his experiences in the war and the de-humanization process.

It is not easy to be an authentic individual so that you can give something of yourself to the world and your fellow men. You need a good portion of self-security and self-esteem. You have to know when to say 'no' at the right time. You have to be nurtured to stand on your own two feet. That is the true meaning of the word 'pedagogy'.

Hannah Arendt has many valuable thoughts about the purpose of education. She is perhaps most famous for her book 'Eichmann in Jerusalem' about the war tribunal. The majority of people who commit crimes against humanity plead not guilty. They describe their part as being a small screw in a very large machine. They plead that they were only doing their duty to a leadership and that they worked only on the orders of others. The implication of de-individualization is that they can do little else. The responsibility of thinking, feeling and acting has been taken over by the powers that be. Without an active soul life, forever, changing and in flow, there can be no conscience.

Back to 1919. Europe was in ruins. Germany was crippled by a high inflation, poverty was abundant. The social and political life was chaotic. At the same time the first Waldorf School was established in Stuttgart to create new opportunities for the children of workers in a cigarette factory. Rudolf Steiner stressed in an address to the first parents that the motives underpinning the methods employed for both children and youth were long-term as an education for the 21st century where we would need to develop a new society based on co-operation between free and creative individuals. From the very beginning the policy of the Waldorf school was that each individual should be able to develop his own personality in an unrestricted and complete way as possible. The curriculum was the framework. Each individual is of high value.