Freud's Adolescence and the Prolegomena to Psychoanalysis

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The adolescence of creative individuals appears retrospectively preparatory. It is a period of apprenticeship permitting ego integrations of new identifications and the amalgamation of attachments from the past with goals for the future. A period of moratorium during which there is seeming inactivity permits the consolidation of new skills and interests. In Sigmund Freud's case, the period of early adolescence (following the onset of puberty) may have provided an opportunity for psychological discoveries through experiments with free association. These insights were repressed in later adolescence and did not reach fruition until subsequent maturity of the ego had taken place. It is suggested that early adolescence permits a pre patterning for later creative activity and the nascent contents are an anlage for the subsequent creativity.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the adolescent experience may contribute to the creativity of especially gifted individuals. In retrospect, the period of adolescence appears preparatory for what is to follow later as solid creative accomplishment. In one sense, this is readily apparent and offers no surprises. The adolescent goes through a period of apprenticeship and learns a body of knowledge or a series of skills which serves as a groundwork for subsequent attainments. A mastery of tradition, of what is already known in a field of study, is often a necessity for original work. This is socially institutionalized in varied educational programs, even though emotional attitudes toward the traditional may vary from unqualified

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acceptance to intense repudiation. Occasionally, the traditional is psychologically valued by the adolescent so that he may have a sufficiently elaborated background to negate or depart from. Nor does this imply that creative achievement may not simply follow along a line of tradition and be a further development of an already instituted line of thought. If we apply this link with tradition to Freud's life, we could say that in following histological and anatomical research in von Brücke's laboratory while still in his adolescence he was accepting the tradition. When he deviated from Meynert's preoccupation with "brain mythology" he used the nineteenth-century positivist tradition as a springboard from which to try something new.

There is another sense, however, in which the adolescent experience is preparatory to creativity. This preparatory phase is less clearly delineated and less likely to be consciously experienced as such, except perhaps after the fact. I believe that Erikson had this in mind when he described a psychological moratorium during adolescence (Erikson, 1956). Erikson compared the psychosocial moratorium of adolescence with the psychosexual moratorium of latency. Both permit a period of delay, of marking time. The childhood identifications are subordinated and new identifications emerge. Indeed, the period of early adolescence is often heralded by the affective stirrings of a sense of identity. The emerging adolescent has a sense of uniqueness, of singularity, which differentiates him from his parents and his peers. The childhood identifications become synthesized with the new opportunities offered by the larger society and the immediate milieu. There is both a delay of adult commitments and a deep involvement in activities which are later recognized as transitory. The adolescent often does not know that he is marking time; he feels immersed in what he is doing and sees no pattern to his activity aside from the involvements of the moment. In the case of George Bernard Shaw, as Erikson (1956) informs us, he broke loose from family and friends, from a training in business, from a moderate success which was unequal to "the enormity of [his] unconscious ambition" (p. 59). For a number of years he went through an apprenticeship of reading and developing a work habit suitable for an author. He wrote five apprentice-like novels and discovered his identity among "the mighty dead." By the end of this moratorium, the playwright had been shaped.

Other highly creative individuals have had similar periods of seeming inactivity while their creative potential was forming itself. Charles Darwin, while preparing himself for a career as a clergyman, took off for a voyage on The Beagle which lasted five years, and without being conscious of it at the time changed the direction of his life and ours (Greenacre, 1963). Leonardo da Vinci spent a youth taming wild horses, playing the lute, and apparently doing nothing for four years (Clark, 1952). At the end of this time, his genius was manifest. Goethe, according to Eissler (1963, 1967), experienced psychotic-like states during his adolescence, a period during which psychic structures were exposed to a "melting-down" process, subsequent to which his creativity became organized.