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Images of European youth at the turn of the century as reflected in the autobiographies of three Jewish writers: Arthur Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig and Ernst Toller

Zusammenfassung

In dem folgenden Aufsatz wird anhand der Autobiographien von drei deutschsprachigen Schriftstellern das Bild der Jugend in Europa vor rund einem Jahrhundert nachgezeichnet. Drei Themenbereiche werden untersucht: Elternhaus und Schule, Liebe und Sexualität sowie Politik und Gesellschaft. Dabei zeigt sich, daß die Jugendlichen damals kaum glücklicher waren als die Jugendlichen heute. In der Erziehung setzte man mehr auf Strenge als auf Zuneigung, in der Schule mehr auf stures Pauken als auf Förderung des Intellekts. Die ersten Liebesabenteuer hatten zwar noch eher den Reiz des Geheimnisvollen, litten aber unter einer verlogenen Sexualmoral und der Angst vor Syphilis. Zumindest wuchsen die meisten Jugendlichen noch in einer Welt der Sicherheit auf, aber auch die wurde gegen Ende des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts bereits überschattet von dem erstarkenden Nationalismus und Antisemitismus.

Die Europese jeug teen die draai van die eeu weerspieël in die outobiografieë van Arthur Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig en Ernst Toller

In hierdie artikel word aan die hand van die outobiografieë van drie Duitstalige outeurs 'n beeld van die Europese jeug van 'n eeu gelede weergegee. Drie temas word ondersoek: ouerhuis en skool, liefde en seksualiteit asook politiek en gemeenskap. Dit blyk dat die jeug van toentertyd nie gelukkiger was as die jeug van vandag nie. Op die gebied van opvoeding is die klem meer op strengheid as op toegeneëntheid geplaas, in die skool meer op drilwerk as op bevordering van die intellek. Die eerste liefdesavonture het wel nog die opwinding van die misterieuse gehad, maar is deur (seksuele) skynheiligheid en vrees vir sifilis bederf. Die meeste jeugdiges het ten minste nog in 'n veilige wêreld opgegroeï, maar selfs dit is ten einde van die negentiende eeu deur toenemende nasionalisme en antisemitisme oorskadu.

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What was it like to be young a century ago? I would like to pursue this question by focusing on three autobiographies, namely those of Arthur Schnitzler, born in 1862, Stefan Zweig, born in 1881, and Ernst Toller, born in 1893.¹

In the foreword to his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe wrote that it seemed to him as if the main task of the biography was to portray man in relation to his time. It is characteristic of the autobiographical literature of the mid-nineteenth century, especially the memoirs of authors whose development was significantly influenced by the First World War, to combine autobiography with historiography: the authors' own lives are felt to be representative of the development of an entire generation. In his memoirs published in 1933 under the title *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* — in the English translation by Edward Crankshaw *I was a German* — Ernst Toller writes these introductory words:

Not only my own youth is portrayed here, but the youth of a whole generation, and a slice of history into the bargain (T, no page number).

I will examine three areas of life: the home and the school, love and sexuality so important to young people, and politics and society. This last area is of special interest, because all three authors were of Jewish descent, and anti-Semitism was part of the experience of their youth.

- 1 Arthur Schnitzler's autobiography, *Jugend in Wien*, was published only in 1968, thirty-seven years after his death. The quotations in this essay refer to the English translation by Catherine Hutterer (*My youth in Vienna*) and are labelled 'S'. The English version of Stefan Zweig's autobiography, *The world of yesterday*, appeared in 1943, one year before the German edition (*Die Welt von Gestern*) which, due to Nazi censorship, had to be published in Sweden. The quotations refer to the third printing of the English edition (1945) and are labelled 'Z'. As early as in 1933, the year when the Nazis came to power, Ernst Toller's autobiography, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, had to be published outside Germany (by the famous Querido Publishers in Amsterdam who published many works by German authors in exile). Only one year later, the English translation by Edward Crankshaw appeared in New York. The quotations refer to this edition and are labelled "T".

All three came from relatively wealthy families. In the case of Ernst Toller, one could speak of 'middle-class'. His father was a grain wholesaler yet the Toller family could afford a cook and a nanny, and Ernst was able to study in France even after his father's death. However, compared to the legendary wealth of his two great-grandfathers, things seem to have gone downhill for the Tollers. In contrast, the family of Arthur Schnitzler was making progress. His father, the son of a carpenter from the Hungarian countryside, became a renowned laryngologist in Vienna, which earned him a university professorate and the title of "k.u.k. Regierungsrat". Stefan Zweig also grew up in the affluent Jewish society of Vienna, and in his autobiography entitled *Die Welt von Gestern* (*The world of yesterday*), he admitted candidly that his father, a textile merchant, had gradually become rich, even very rich (Z 5). Stefan was not one of those sons who begrudge their fathers their wealth: on the contrary, his material independence helped him to retain what he regarded as his only safe asset: the feeling of inner freedom. On the other hand, financial stability may have prevented him from being the great author he could have become if he had not sought his material mainly in literature and history.

He admired his father's business acumen, and his Italian mother's marked class consciousness amused him even as a child. His autobiography does not reveal whether he loved his parents. He wrote only a few unemotional pages about them. It seems, however, as if he may have belonged to that very small group of sons of those times who had a closer relationship with their fathers than with their mothers (cf Prater 1972: 3-4). On the whole, father-son relationships, which are generally more problematic than those between mothers and sons, were difficult at the turn of the century. Sons were kept under strict authority as long as possible, and began to rebel against their fathers. This revolt found its literary expression mainly in the drama of Expressionism, in plays such as *Der Sohn* (*The son*) by Walter Hasenclever or *Vatermord* (*Parricide*) by Arnolt Bronnen.

When Arthur Schnitzler was growing up, sons did not yet think in terms of murdering their fathers, but his relationship with his father was marred when the latter took and read his diary, which he

had kept locked in a desk drawer, and gave him — in his own words — “a censorious lecture” (S 71) because the diary provided proof that the sixteen-year-old boy had already been involved in erotic escapades and with prostitutes. Arthur never completely forgave his father for this breach of trust. The relationship was permanently spoiled when the father decided that his son’s literary ambitions (about which he had initially bragged in company) were a serious threat to his medical career. Johann Schnitzler had himself tried his hand at literature in his youth, and one of his teachers had even prophesied that he would become the Hungarian Shakespeare but he presumed that his son would do what he himself had done, namely to prefer the solid profession of a medical doctor to an unstable literary career. It is quite possible that Arthur Schnitzler’s decision to become an author stemmed from an aversion to his father; as a little boy, he dreamed of becoming a doctor like daddy, and the thought of becoming a writer by profession was foreign to him. It is significant that he admitted that his literary interest only really started to develop once he could feel removed from the field of medical obligations and responsibilities (S 76).

As a human being and as a writer, Ernst Toller was very different from Arthur Schnitzler, but they had the difficult father-son relationship in common, even though Ernst’s father died when he was only seventeen. In both cases, the result was a closer relationship with the mother. Schnitzler himself said that he had not been regarded as a ‘mommy’s boy’ by his peers without reason (S 28), and Toller’s biographer, Richard Dove, wrote that Ernst was “very much his mother’s son” (Dove 1990: 11). Perhaps the fact that both of them displayed obvious effeminate traits in spite of being ‘ladies’ men’ had a good deal to do with the close relationship they had with their mothers.

The relationship had a positive effect on the performance of young Arthur at school, and he was regarded as a good pupil, sometimes even as a very good one. This is probably the main reason why he did not find the uninspiring school system of his day overly oppressive. His name was inscribed in the demerit book only once, when he had allowed himself — contrary to his nature — to be drawn into a harmless prank. The entry, with the humiliating words,

"Arthur Schnitzler behaves like a ragamuffin" affected him to such an extent that he was suddenly attacked by violent nausea when he and his father happened to pass the school that evening in their carriage (S 65).

Whereas Arthur Schnitzler accepted school as a kind of law of nature, Stefan Zweig suffered a great deal as a schoolboy. He dedicated an entire chapter to the topic of "School in the Last Century" and complained eloquently about the musty, mouldy smell that clung to his school and which attached first itself to the clothes and then to the soul. He even called school "this prison of our youth" (Z 31):

For, if I am to be honest, the entire period of my schooling was nothing other than a constant and wearisome boredom, accompanied year after year by an increased impatience to escape from this treadmill. I cannot recall ever having been either 'joyous' or 'blissful' during that monotonous, heartless, and lifeless schooling which thoroughly spoiled the best and freest period of our existence. I must admit that even today I cannot help experiencing a certain feeling of envy when I see with how much more freedom, happiness, and independence children are permitted to develop in the present century [...]. For us school was compulsion, ennui, dreariness, a place where we had to assimilate the 'science of the not-worth-knowing' in exactly measured portions — scholastic or scholastically manufactured material which we felt could have no relation to reality or to our personal interests. It was a dull, pointless learning that the old pedagogy forced upon us, not for the sake of life, but for the sake of learning. And the only truly joyful moment of happiness for which I have to thank my school was the day that I was able to shut the door behind me forever (Z 29).²

- 2 Denn meine ganze Schulzeit war, wenn ich ehrlich sein soll, nichts als ein ständiger gelangweilter Überdruß, von Jahr zu Jahr gesteigert durch die Ungeduld, dieser Tretmühle zu entkommen. Ich kann mich nicht besinnen, je 'fröhlich' noch 'selig' innerhalb jenes monotonen, herzlosen und geistlosen Schulbetriebs gewesen zu sein, der uns die schönste, freieste Epoche des Daseins gründlich vergällte, und ich gestehe sogar, mich heute noch eines gewissen Neides nicht erwehren zu können, wenn ich sehe, um wieviel glücklicher, freier, selbständiger sich in diesem Jahrhundert die Kindheit entfalten kann [...] Schule war für uns Zwang, Öde, Langeweile, eine Strätte, in der man die 'Wissenschaft des nicht Wissenswerten' in genau abgeteilten Portionen sich einzuverleiben hatte, scholastische oder scholastisch gemachte Materien, von

Stefan Zweig's criticism becomes even more cutting if one takes into account that childhood is normally portrayed as better and happier than it really was — a phenomenon widely accepted among biography scholars (cf Pascal 1965: 114).

About Ernst Toller's school career we learn only that he was a good pupil when he liked the teacher and a lazy pupil when he did not (T 39). However, the repressive spirit of the educational system of the time is portrayed by an incident he describes. When the headmaster of his school found out that he had read a scene from Gerhart Hauptmann's play *Rose Bernd* at the literary club that he and some friends had established at school, he summoned Toller to his office and chastised him by saying:

Gerhart Hauptmann [...] is an ultra-modern revolutionary. I forbid such readings. Go back to your mathematics; you will find that they are far more important when you leave school (T 40).

Not only Hauptmann, but also other writers that the young Toller appreciated, such as Ibsen, Strindberg and Wedekind, were listed on that index of forbidden authors.

Carl Zuckmayer, three years younger than Toller, had a similar experience. In his autobiography *Als wär's ein Stück von mir* he remembers how they got stuck on Schiller's *Glocke* and *Die Braut von Messina* and that they spent a whole year reading the chapter on the crowning of the emperor in Frankfurt from Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, having to memorise the ranks and names of all the nobility mentioned in it. Encouraged by reading Ibsen, Björnson, Hauptmann, Schnitzler and Wedekind, which he had purloined from his parents' poison cabinet and read by torchlight under his blankets at night, he stood up in class and told the teacher that he and his

denen wir fühlten, daß sie auf das reale und auf unser persönliches Interesse keinerlei Bezug haben konnten. Es war ein stumpfes, ödes Lernen nicht um des Lebens willen, sondern um des Lernens willen, das uns die alte Pädagogik aufzwang. Und der einzige wirklich beschwingte Glücksmoment, den ich der Schule zu danken habe, wurde der Tag, da ich ihre Tür für immer hinter mir zuschlug (Zweig 1990: 45).

classmates wanted to read the plays of Friedrich Hebbel, for which he was almost expelled (Zuckmayer 1966: 171).

But, of course, pleasant memories are also part of the school years, because first love and the first kiss also fall into this period. Ernst Toller started very young. He was eight, or maybe even younger when he put his arm around his girlfriend Frieda and gave her a kiss as he had seen grown-ups do. Frieda was not overjoyed and said to him, "Oh dear, now I shall have a baby". When he asked her the next day whether the baby had already come, she said that he was really silly, that the baby was in her stomach and that it would probably come the next day. By then, however, she had already forgotten about it (T 26).

By contrast, Arthur Schnitzler reported remaining relatively free from the "puppy-love affairs which are so prevalent during this period" (S 30). He experienced his first love at the age of thirteen. The older and wiser Schnitzler was duly amused by this typical adolescent love affair when he wrote about it in *My Youth in Vienna*. However, the diaries of the young lover are written in a different, much more passionate language. His relationship with Franziska Reich, whom he called Fanny or Fännchen, lasted many years, despite interruptions, but did not have a happy ending.

Nor did he receive his initiation into manhood from Fanny — nice girls from good homes did not do such things in those days — but from a prostitute. The practice of leaving the sex education of young men to such professionals was not without danger. One tends to forget that a hundred years ago, before the discovery of penicillin, syphilis was as fatal as AIDS is today, and young men were not less afraid of it. They could not expect the older generation to understand their problems. The extent of fatherly understanding is mirrored quite accurately in Johann Schnitzler's reaction to his perusal of Arthur's diary. After the censorious lecture, the professor took his son into his surgery and gave him some well-illustrated textbooks on skin and venereal diseases in order to demonstrate to him the possible consequences of his immoral way of life. The shock therapy had the desired effect, at least for a while. Arthur temporarily suspended his visits to the ladies of the night, of whom there were just as many in Vienna at the time as there are in Rio or Bangkok today.

Papa Schnitzler's reaction was probably quite progressive in comparison to that of other fathers, as he was a doctor. As Stefan Zweig and others have stated, the preferred method of enlightenment, even though it was only practised by fathers with a very modern viewpoint, was as follows:

[...] the moment their sons showed the first signs of a sprouting beard, [...] the family physician was called in, and at the proper time bade the young man come into the room, polished his glasses unnecessarily before he began his lecture on the dangers of venereal diseases, and admonished the young man, who usually at this point had long since taught himself, to be moderate and not to overlook certain preventive measures (Z 80).

According to Zweig — and many have corroborated this evidence as well — other fathers employed a more direct method:

[...] they engaged a pretty servant girl for the house whose task it was to give the young lad some practical experience. It seemed best to them that the youngster take care of this bothersome matter under their own roof, for it not only preserved decorum outwardly, but also averted the danger of his falling into the hands of some designing person (Z 81).

Stefan Zweig vehemently denounced the hypocrisy of public morals at the end of the nineteenth century. Because society viewed sexuality as something anarchistic and therefore 'bothersome', something that could not be integrated into its ethics, it came up with a strange compromise:

It limited its morality, not by forbidding a young man to carry on his *vita sexualis*, but by demanding of him that this painful matter be attended to in as inconspicuous a manner as possible. If it was not feasible to do away with sexuality, then at least it must not be visible in the world of morality (Z 68).

That was also the recipe which Professor Schnitzler used in the case of his son Arthur. When Arthur used a rare moment of closeness between them to ask how a young person could manage not to come into conflict with the demands of propriety, society or hygiene, his father instructed him with this obscure answer accompanied by a gesture of finality: "One disposes of it". In his autobiography, Arthur Schnitzler writes about this failed attempt at communication that his father's advice was no great help, and that "he must have been aware

of the fact that I wasn't cut out to dispose of anything, in this or any other respect" (S 242).

Such advice was obviously equally unhelpful to others. Stefan Zweig recalled not only that, in Vienna, the name-plates on the doors of every sixth or seventh house read: "Specialist for Skin and Venereal Diseases", but also the gruesome treatment which syphilis patients had to undergo:

For weeks on end the entire body of anyone infected with syphilis was rubbed with mercury, the effect of which was that the teeth fell out and other injuries to health ensued. The unhappy victim of a severe encounter felt himself not only physically but spiritually spotted, and even after so horrible a cure, he could never be certain that the cunning virus might not at any moment awake from its captivity and paralyze the limbs from the spine, or soften the brain. Small wonder then that at that time many young people, once the diagnosis had been made, reached for their revolvers because they could not stand the feeling that they were suspected of being incurable. Then there were the other sorrows of a *vita sexualis* carried on in secret. Though I try hard to remember, I cannot recall a single comrade of my youth who did not come to me with pale and troubled mien, one because he was ill or feared illness, another because he was being blackmailed because of an abortion, a third because he lacked the money to be cured without the knowledge of his family, the fourth because he did not know how to pay hush money to a waitress who claimed to have had a child by him, the fifth because his wallet had been stolen in a brothel and he did not dare to go to the police. (Z 88-89).³

- 3 Durch Wochen und Wochen wurde der ganze Körper eines mit Syphilis Infizierten mit Quecksilber eingerieben, was wiederum zur Folge hatte, daß die Zähne ausfielen und sonstige Gesundheitsschädigungen eintraten; das unglückliche Opfer eines schlimmen Zufalls fühlte sich also nicht nur seelisch, sondern auch physisch beschmutzt, und selbst nach einer solchen grauenhaften Kur konnte der Betroffene lebenslang nicht gewiß sein, ob nicht jeden Augenblick der rücksichtige Virus aus seiner Verkapselung erwachen könnte, vom Rückenmark aus die Glieder lähmend, hinter der Stirn das Gehirn erweichend. Kein Wunder darum, daß damals viele junge Leute sofort, wenn bei ihnen die Diagnose gestellt wurde, zum Revolver griffen, weil sie das Gefühl, sich selbst und ihren nächsten Verwandten als unheilbar verdächtig zu sein, unerträglich fanden. Dazu kamen noch die anderen Sorgen einer immer nur heimlich ausgeübten *vita sexualis*. Suche ich mich redlich zu erinnern, so weiß ich kaum einen Kameraden meiner Jugendjahre, der nicht einmal blaß und verstörten Blickes gekommen wäre, der eine, weil er erkrankt war oder eine Erkrankung

In his later youth, Arthur Schnitzler at least had the advantage of his medical knowledge to protect him against infection. In his autobiography, he reports that he and a friend competed for the favours of a pretty and not at all prudish girl who could not choose between them, deciding the issue by lot. He won, but when he put his arm around the girl's neck, he felt a gland that revealed to him that she had been infected, whereupon he "nobly" relinquished her to his friend. He did add, however, that his friend "fortunately or unfortunately was in no more danger from this direction" (S 146).

Stefan Zweig came to the conclusion that being young in "those pseudo-moral times" was much more dramatic and yet more unclean, much more exciting and at the same time more depressing than the novels and dramas of their official writers depict it as being: "In the sphere of *eros*, in school and home, youth was rarely given the freedom and happiness to which its years entitled it" (Z 89). Nevertheless, he celebrated the time before the First World War as "the golden age of security". It had been such a stable time. All that was radical, all violence had seemed impossible in that age of reason (Z 1-2). One must, however, bear in mind that Zweig wrote his autobiography in 1940/41, looking back on the First World War, which had ended that age of security, and watching the Second World War, which plunged him into such deep despair that he took his own life in 1942.

Yet this transfiguration of the late nineteenth century was not his last word on it. Even though he wrote that the generation of his parents and grandparents had had better luck — and how could one who had been banished by the Nazis have judged differently — he added that he did not know if he envied them (Z 27). He had seen only too clearly how that generation had insulated itself from the problems of the coming era by adopting a 'Biedermeier'-like

befürchtete, der zweite, weil er unter einer Erpressung wegen einer Abtreibung stand, der dritte, weil ihm das Geld fehlte, ohne Wissen seiner Familie eine Kur durchzumachen, der vierte, weil er nicht wußte, wie die Alimente für ein von einer Kellnerin ihm zugeschobenes Kind zu bezahlen, der fünfte, weil ihm in einem Bordell die Briefflasche gestohlen worden war und er nicht wagte, Anzeige zu machen (Zweig 1990: 110-1).

attitude. It is doubtful whether Stefan Zweig sensed in his youth that the end of the century would also spell the end of certain socio-political values, indeed, a re-assessment of all values, although he recognised the change in the domain of the arts at an early age. But even the protected son of a wealthy family noticed that, particularly in the last decade of the nineteenth century, "politics broke into the realm of easy living with sharp and sudden blasts" and that the masses were becoming restless and demanding new rights (Z 59-60).

The barely two decades' difference between Stefan Zweig and Arthur Schnitzler is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that in *Die Welt von Gestern*, Zweig saw his epoch in terms of nationalism: "that arch-plague nationalism which has poisoned the flower of our European culture" (Z VIII), while Schnitzler — rather apolitically — saw snobbery as "the world ailment of our times" (S 12). He became famous for his unique ability to hit the sceptical playboy tone of the Viennese snob. But was he not himself a snob? In his diaries, the complaint about how boring life is recurs as often as the confession that he is given to hypochondriac tendencies. He usually tried to banish his boredom and hypochondria by going to his favourite café where, according to his own testimony, he "played billiards in the morning, cards in the afternoon, billiards and cards in the evening and cards and billiards at night" (S 125). Otherwise, he engaged in fleeting love affairs for a thrill. Even as a youth, he was aware that the declarations of love that he felt had to be made on such occasions were more or less deliberate lies. He prided himself on the fact that he had no illusions about these things and that he very seldom initiated a relationship, but that the girls chased him.

In his youth, Schnitzler did not bother with politics, but he was suddenly confronted with increasing anti-Semitism at university, which filled him with "anxiety and bitterness" (S 77). The German nationalist student associations started to exclude Jewish students and to beat up Jews when strolling through the city. Schnitzler himself was removed from a student committee because of his Jewish descent.

When Stefan Zweig started studying at the age of almost twenty, the sporadic encroachments of students belonging to the German nationalist corps had grown into a veritable flogging terror, but he

and his friends had literary ambitions and paid hardly any attention to this serious development:

We did not have the slightest interest in politics and social problems: what did these shrill wranglings mean in our lives? [...] And only decades later, when roof and walls fell in upon us, did we realize that the foundations had long since been undermined and that together with the new century the decline of individual freedom in Europe had begun (Z 66).

At least, Zweig could testify that he personally had not experienced even the slightest disdain at school or university because of his Jewish background.

In contrast, the childhood and youth of Ernst Toller, who was twelve years younger than Zweig, were overshadowed by anti-Semitism. In his autobiography, which he began writing in the late twenties and finished in exile in 1933, he recorded as his first childhood memory:

I see myself wearing a little short dress, standing outside our house looking at a cart. It is big, bigger than Marie, as big as a house. Marie is the nurse, and she wears a red coral necklace — round, red corals. She is sitting on one of the shafts, rocking to and fro. Then Ilse comes out with her nurse. She runs up to me and we hold hands; for some time we stand hand in hand and look at each other curiously. Ilse's nurse is gossiping with Marie, but suddenly she calls out: 'Come away, Ilse! He's a Jew'. Ilse drops my hand and runs away. I can't understand what the nurse means, but I begin to cry bitterly (T 13).⁴

Later, the children in the street also started calling "Jew" after him. One evening, when he went to bed, he asked his mother why they were Jews. But his mother just told him to sleep and not to ask

4 Ich habe ein Kleidchen an. Ich stehe auf dem Hofe unseres Hauses an einem Leiterwagen. Er ist groß, größer als Marie, so groß wie ein Haus. Marie ist das Kindermädchen, sie trägt rote Korallen um den Hals, runde rote Korallen. Jetzt sitzt Marie auf der Deichsel und schaukelt. Durchs Hoftor kommt Ilse mit ihrem Kindermädchen. Ilse läuft auf mich zu und reicht mir die Hand. Wir stehen eine Weile so und sehen uns neugierig an. Das fremde Kindermädchen unterhält sich mit Marie. Nun ruft sie Ilse: — Bleib da nicht stehen, das ist ein Jude. Ilse läßt meine Hand los und läuft fort. Ich begreife den Sinn der Worte nicht, aber ich beginne zu weinen, hemmungslos (Toller 1978: 13-14).

such silly questions. He did not sleep, however. He didn't want to be a Jew; he didn't want the children to run after him shouting "Jew" (T 23).

These childhood memories had a long-term effect: the young Toller was afraid of being ostracised and acted in an extremely German manner. As a student in Grenoble, he frequented the German student association gatherings, and after a few beers, he joined his fellow students in singing "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" through the night. He experienced the outbreak of the war like most people in his age group "in a state of emotional delirium" (T 65). During enlistment he was at first rejected, but he begged so urgently that his wish was granted. This made him proud; he is a soldier at last, "a privileged defender of the Fatherland" (T 64). When he was still in the communications zone by March 1915, he volunteered to go to the front. But there, in the gruesome reality of trench warfare, involving heavy losses, he experienced what would later be called "the education before Verdun". He realised that "all these dead men, Frenchmen and Germans, were brothers" and that he was the brother of them all (T 87). In his autobiography, Toller presented this insight as the consequence of a Saul-Paul experience. Whether it was indeed so or whether it is stylized in order to approximate his own transformation to that of his protagonist in the drama *Die Wandlung* (*The transformation*) is not that important in this context. What is more important is the fact that Toller paid with his health, and in the long run maybe even with his life, in order to be a good German. At the age of 22, in May 1916, he suffered a nervous break-down and was declared unfit for military duty, a condition which persisted until the end of the war. He never fully recovered, and many of his friends saw his weakened nervous condition as a major cause of his suicide in 1939.

For Ernst Toller, the First World War was the bitter end to a youth that was not untroubled to begin with. Did Arthur Schnitzler and Stefan Zweig, who were born earlier, have a happier youth? Even though they grew up in a "World of Security", according to the title of the first chapter of Stefan Zweig's autobiography, they were presumably not happier than young people today. In child rearing, the emphasis was on severity rather than love; at school on dull

repetition rather than on stimulating the intellect. But above all, the generation to which Stefan Zweig belonged was always in the wrong, so to speak. When he was young, youth was considered a flaw, and when he was an adult, youthfulness was revered and maturity counted for nothing. Zweig elaborated extensively on this “incomprehensible” situation, writing in his autobiography “that youth was a hindrance in all careers, and age alone was an advantage”:

Whereas today, in our changed state of affairs, those of forty seek to look thirty, and those of sixty wish to seem forty, and youth, energy, determination and self-confidence recommend and advance a man, in that age of security everyone who wished to get ahead was forced to attempt all conceivable methods of masquerading in order to appear older. The newspapers recommended preparations which hastened the growth of the beard, and twenty-four- and twenty-five-year-old doctors, who had just finished their examinations, wore mighty beards and gold spectacles even if their eyes did not need them, so that they could make an impression of ‘experience’ upon their first patients. Men wore long black frock coats and walked at a leisurely pace, and whenever possible acquired a slight *embonpoint*, in order to personify the desired sedateness; and those who were ambitious strove, at least outwardly, to belie their youth, since the young were suspected of instability (Z 34).⁵

At a time when “youth was a hindrance in all careers”, it must have been a particular hindrance to a budding author. Perhaps this is the reason why the literary perfection and the sensational success of

- 5 Während heute in unserer vollkommen veränderten Zeit Vierzigjährige alles tun, um wie Dreißigjährige auszusehen und Sechzigjährige wie Vierzigjährige, während heute Jugendlichkeit, Energie, Tatkraft und Selbstvertrauen fördert und empfiehlt, mußte in jenem Zeitalter der Sicherheit jeder, der vorwärts wollte, alle denkbare Maskierung versuchen, um älter zu erscheinen. Die Zeitungen empfahlen Mittel, um den Bartwuchs zu beschleunigen, vierundzwanzig- oder fünfundzwanzigjährige junge Ärzte, die eben das medizinische Examen absolviert hatten, trugen mächtige Bärte und setzten sich, auch wenn es ihre Augen gar nicht nötig hatten, goldene Brillen auf, nur damit sie bei ihren ersten Patienten den Eindruck der ‘Erfahrenheit’ erwecken könnten. Man legte sich lange schwarze Gehröcke zu und einen gemächlichen Gang und wenn möglich ein leichtes Embonpoint, um diese erstrebenswerte Gesetztheit zu verkörpern, und wer ehrgeizig war, mühte sich, dem der Unsolidität verdächtigen Zeitalter der Jugend wenigstens äußerlich Absage zu leisten [...] (Zweig 1990: 50-51).

the sixteen or seventeen-year-old Hugo von Hofmannsthal was considered to be an almost preternatural event. But Stefan Zweig, who still raved about "that wonderful and unique phenomenon Hugo von Hofmannsthal" (Z 46) at the age of sixty, had no reason to complain. When his first poems were published he was still in high school and his first book, a collection of poems entitled *Silberne Saiten* (*Silver strings*), appeared in his twentieth year. But a few months after its publication, he saw how insincere these poems were in their sentimentality. He detected "a scent of perfumed paper" in his first novellas, and a nearly completed novel even landed in the stove (Z 118). Very few people are born as such "great wonders of early perfection" (Z 46) as Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Arthur Schnitzler and Ernst Toller did not belong to that group of geniuses either. At the age of eighteen, Schnitzler had completed twenty-three dramas and had started another thirteen, but none of them were published, and he himself saw his literary activity only as a hobby. Toller also wrote poems, fairy-tale plays and dramas while he was still in high school, but the town theatre of Bromberg to which he sent these efforts never even responded. At the age of forty, when Toller recorded this, he looked back on his early literary efforts with self-irony (T 40). And yet, who would say that these attempts were in vain?

All in all, young people seem not to have been happier a hundred years ago than they are now, but at least they had one advantage: without television and computers, they had more time to read, and insofar as reading inspired them to personal literary activity, more time to write.

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