Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups, Politics
Number 73, September 2018 ISSN: 2047-0622
URL: http://www.freeassociations.org.uk/

The Educator as Neurotic: A Rankean Analysis of Impotent Teachers in Film
Daniel Sullivan

The phrase "those who can't do, *teach*" is almost literally made manifest in a series of 20th Century films that portray educators as impotent. Beginning with the classic *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939), and eventually carried through 1992's *Waterland*, a subset of increasingly bleak narratives has centered on protagonists who seem to compensate for an inability to have children of their own by instructing the children of others.

"Impotence," like any other disability or disease, is socially constructed and means different things at different times in history. As just one example, whereas historically in Western societies impotence was judged purely in terms of the ability to reproduce in successful marriages, it has in more recent decades come to have a more restricted meaning centered on the capacity for ejaculation (McLaren, 2007). I use the term here in a very broad sense, which only rarely explicitly involves a (male) physiological impediment. I highlight instead the high number of films that portray educators as in some way *childless* – a condition that itself manifests in a variety of ways, either in lacking any children, having stillborn children, or having children who are in some sense viewed by society as disabled (e.g., birth defects, cerebral palsy) – and *powerless* – unable to influence society more broadly, but also others in their lives, superiors, and the children they are supposed to instruct. Such themes are not merely incidental in films about educators. Burbach and Figgins (1993) argue that, prior to *Dead Poets Society* (1989), teachers were very commonly portrayed in films as powerless, loveless, or both. In a content analysis of 18 popular media depictions of teachers, Swetnam (1992) found that 78% were portrayed as single (and childless). Thus, when impotence is broadly construed, it seems to be a prominent theme in 20th Century film and literary depictions of educators. The question for analysis becomes: What is the significance of this theme?

In the early 20th Century there was a broad shift in expert explanations of impotence from a "moral" to a "psychological" problem, paralleling changes in the etiology of a variety of conditions such as depression (McLaren, 2007). This change was due in no small part to the emergence of psychoanalysis, with Freud and many of his followers not only focusing on male impotence as an apparently rising modern condition, but tending to explain it in terms of mounting social repression. Among these followers, Otto Rank offered an explanation for sexual conditions such as impotence that was unique and, intriguingly, positioned the problem as intimately related to the problem of education in modern society.

The last book Rank published in his lifetime, *Modern Education* (1932/1968), suggests that the modern era is a cultural "age of the Child." In the 20th and 21st centuries, Western individuals derive a sense of psychological security not from collective ideologies promising literal immortality (such as religions), but rather from the belief that

they will be immortal through their children. Rank believed this cultural shift had a profound influence on the modern philosophy of education, which focuses on developing the child's unique potential rather than indoctrinating the pupil with collective ideologies. When the transmission of collective beliefs is no longer valued, Rank asserted that the educator becomes obsolete. While parents live on through the individual accomplishments of their children, the educator loses their status as the conduit through which cultural wisdom should be preserved. Thus, Rank's work suggests that teachers in modernity come to be seen as archetypes of the *neurotic*, and hence characterized by powerlessness, lovelessness, and, often, childlessness.

Rankean psychology

Rankean psychology, and hence the Rankean approach to problems such as impotence, is unique in its insistence that fear of death and desire for immortality are at the root of all human striving and mental conflict (rather than concerns with sexuality and aggression). [1] Although humans are transient animals, we have a unique capacity for symbolic self-awareness, for consciousness, which makes us both aware of our inevitable death and eager to transcend it. Building from this observation, Rank (1941/1958) suggested a radical new understanding of culture as a collective attempt by humans to establish the symbolic immortality of their society and themselves. Early in cultural history, the immortality-striving of individuals and larger cultural groups generally moved in lockstep. However, a major theme in Rank's work is the historical emergence of a tension between personal and collective forms of immortality, which he saw as characteristic of modernity (Rank, 1930/1998; 1932).

More specifically, Rank (1941/1958) asserted that there have been progressive cultural-historical stages in the development of immortality ideologies, as they are represented in the various cultural spheres (cf. Sullivan, 2016). He proposed an ancient "magical" stage in "primitive" cultures, in which the self's immortality was fused with that of the group, as the group persisted through ancestor worship in a state of collective immortality. With Roman culture came the emergence of a "biological" stage, in which immortality was secured through offspring via legalized inheritance (the son guaranteed the father's continuity). Rank suggests that Christianity – which, relative to earlier religions, glorifies the Son to the same extent as the Father – ushered in a modern stage of immortality ideology, which after the Renaissance and Enlightenment became secularized as a *psychological* stage.

Under the modern psychological ideology, the concept of *personality* replaces that of *soul*. Most individuals today do not primarily strive to attain an abstract afterlife but rather seek to erect a personal legacy here on earth. This engenders a conflict between collective and personal forms of immortality-striving, as the individual seeks to invent their own personality and achieve fame for it *in spite of* or *beyond* their social affiliations

---

[1] Outside of psychoanalysis, Rank is certainly not unique in his emphasis on the desire to achieve immortality as the fundamental drive of human cultural activity. His theorizing shares much with existential philosophy, and is also markedly similar to Arendt's (1958) discussion of the *polis* as an endeavor to achieve collective permanence. Perhaps the earliest systematic formulation of the idea that immortality striving is the root of culture and psychology was by the obscure Russian philosopher Fedorov (see Lukashevich, 1977).

and ancestral identities. One consequence of this is a mass rise in neuroticism as many individuals experience a breakdown in personality from the cultural pressure to achieve a unique legacy (Rank, 1929/1945; 1932/1968).

Rank viewed neurotics as "failed artists" because like artistic geniuses they reject collective immortality ideologies as restraints on their own legacy. Unlike the socially productive artist, however, the neurotic is unable to affirm his unique self. "The neurotic, in his voluntary remaking of his ego, does not get beyond the destructive preliminary work and is therefore unable to detach the whole creative process from his own person and transfer it to an ideological abstraction" (Rank, 1932/1964, p. 142). This analysis sheds counterintuitive light on problems of sexual dysfunction. According to Rank (1996), "at the roots of mental (or imaginative) illness is not sexuality, as psychoanalysis assumed, but rather an *anti-sexual* tendency in man – which we may characterize as the voluntary control of the instinctive life" (p. 253). For Rank, just as the neurotic is afraid of yielding her precarious individuality to the compulsion of society's demands, she also (unconsciously) resists the normative sexual act of procreation because she sees in it a demand for collective (species) immortality.

> I believe that the deepest resistance to sexuality arises from the claim of the species that directly threatens individual integrity. The child, who, as it were, begins at birth to sunder itself from the species and to develop its individuality, feels sexuality first of all to be an inner claim of the species hostile to individuality and hence resists it…*Sexuality* is a kind of racial will forced upon the individual…in essence sexuality is a collective phenomenon which the individual wants to individualize, that is, control. This explains all sexual conflicts in the individual, from masturbation to the most varied perversions and perversities, above all the keeping secret of everything sexual by individuals as an expression of a personal tendency to individualize as much as possible collective elements in it (Rank, 1932/1968, pp. 50-52).

Thus, from Rank's perspective, sexual deviations such as impotence may in fact represent a (presumably unconscious) resistance on the part of the individual to collective immortality. The neurotic individual refuses to surrender their life force to offspring in a bid for personal continuity – which will ultimately fail because he cannot affirm his own personality.

Rank's analysis of the modern philosophy of education

Intriguingly, Rank saw mirrored in the conflict between individual "perversion" and the collective demand for reproduction the dilemma of modern education: "*In this strife between the individual will and the biologically given community ideology of the species we have before us the prototype of the educational problem*" (1932/1968, p. 50). He proposed that the evolution of immortality ideologies, culminating in the breakdown of collective in favor of individualistic ideologies in modernity, created a particularly difficult situation in the pedagogic field. Education is typically the means through which the collective beliefs and values of the society are transmitted. If this is so, then in the

individualistic, psychological era which no longer has need of collective ideologies, what content should education have and what purpose should it serve (Rank, 1932/1968)?

The answer to this question lies in the way contemporary philosophy of education understands and idealizes the child. Rank (1932/1968) proposes that the Enlightenment philosophy and political revolutions of the 18th Century, which laid the foundation of the modern psychological era, also radicalized the institution of education by ushering in a new intellectual "age of the Child":

> The great crisis in the ideology of Europe which also provided the New World with its new ideology was at the same time the birth of *modern pedagogy*. I mean the French Revolution with its climax in American democracy prepared for and determined by Rousseau's concept of the world and his ideal of education…With this idea of equality of all human beings and with Rousseau's ideas of education, the child-age was possible (pp. 12, 146).

The philosophy of the contemporary "child-age" contains a few primary implications highlighted by Rank. One is that a worldview that holds all human beings to be fundamentally equal also frames the child as a *tabula rasa* and emblem of uncorrupted innocence. But for Rank, the critical fact is not that modern psychology portrays children as innocent, but rather the ideological purpose which this idealized view of children allows them to serve.

Specifically, in the psychological stage of immortality ideologies, children become representations of their parents' quests for personal immortality. "The child…was important as the one who *continues our life*, now he is the *leader to a better life*" (Rank, 1932/1968, p. 147). Children are no longer the vessels of group immortality. Instead, they are believed to be the unique guarantors of their parents' utopian visions, keepers of the promised "unlived lives" of their parents. Rank (1996) referred to this culturally normalized desire as a "Prometheus complex" in parents: "Parents want to extend the biological *procreation* of the child in the creation and development of its character" (p. 201).

Given these cultural transformations in modernity the primary purpose of education is no longer to transmit and preserve collective values. Instead, Rank (1932/1968) suggests that modern education has two primary functions: (1) preparing children to be "*leader[s] to a better life*", i.e., helping them develop their full potential for achievement and self-assertion; and (2) providing for the "accumulation of concrete matter for instruction which has become necessary for practical and technical control of the external world" (p. 26). In short, modern education has become entirely child-centered and individualistic.

> The prototype of present-day education is not only negative in that it lacks, as already stated, a community ideology, but it is destructive in the pedagogic sense, indeed, it is anti-pedagogic, for it produces individuals who must stand in opposition to every community type and hence this

> latter, where it still exists, is pushed further and further into the background. (Rank, 1932/1968, p. 26).

If the modern philosophy of education is built on the Prometheus complex – forming children to be individualistic incarnations of their parents' personal immortality – it logically follows that this philosophy should undervalue educators. Compared to their prior status as watchmen of the community's sacred values, educators might now be seen as obstructive insofar as they force children to submit their personal development (and hence their parents' immortality) to society's will. Rank (1932/1968) wrote, "...The teacher does not fit into the psychological ideology…[the] *psychological phase of education*…is distinguished through the fact that the responsibility for its failure is not so much attached to the pupil or the method but rather to the educator himself" (pp. 15, 133). In an era when children are expected to fulfill their parents' outlandish dreams of success, their common inability to do so (evidenced by increasing rates of neuroticism) enhances the general tendency to look upon teachers as failures rather than purveyors of wisdom.

Importantly, Rank's perspective does not imply that *all* teachers and all pedagogic approaches would be devalued over the course of the 20th Century. Rather, he suggested that it is specifically those entrusted with the transmission of collective ideology and the preservation of cherished beliefs who would be devalued, relative to those employed to purvey practical and scientific knowledge for the "technical control of the external world." His analysis suggests that humanities instructors, or teachers of Latin and history, would be devalued and gripped by neuroticism to a greater extent than chemistry or applied science instructors in the modern ethos. However, Rank also held out the prospect that, in the age of the Child, educators might eventually come to be re-valued for a different purpose: not for transmitting rote knowledge to children, but rather showing them how to live, how to create a coherent personal legacy in a chaotic and individualistic cultural environment. We will see in the cycle of films that as Euro-American culture transitioned to postmodernism in the 1990s, a rise in exactly such positive media portrayals of teachers began to occur.

The implications of Rank's philosophy of education: Conservative or radical?

Rank's analysis can be rendered more concrete by considering the history of philosophies of education (particularly those informed by psychology) in the mid-20th Century – the time at which Rank wrote, and during which the cycle of films under discussion began to appear. The mid-20th Century saw the emergence in both Great Britain and the United States of various forms of "progressive education" inspired by the "discovery" method (Bernstein, 1975). Details of implementation varied – in England the Rousseau-influenced Plowden report of 1967 and the rise of Summerhill schools paved the way (Darling, 1986), while in the United States the ideas of Dewey and Montessori came to the fore (Semel, 1995). In general, these approaches shared the common themes of encouraging the child's creative self-expression and viewing the educator as potentially dangerous insofar as they might limit that expression (Bernstein, 1975). Thus, the rise of progressive educational ideology in the mid-20th Century began to fulfill Rank's prediction that educators would be increasingly devalued in the "age of the

Child." The films under consideration should be understood against the backdrop of this social movement.

Even earlier, the discourse of the 1910s-1940s surrounding psychology and education was already quite progressive. At this time, many psychologists – and psychoanalysts in particular – in both the United States and Europe were proposing fairly radical reforms that would be both more scientifically based and more child-centered than traditional pedagogies (Jacobsen, 1997; Taubman, 2012; Wooldridge, 1994). Indeed, this movement was part of the rise of age of the Child that Rank identified. Many psychologists seemed to see the potential for modern theories – such as psychoanalysis – to revolutionize pedagogy for the betterment of society. Against this historical backdrop, Rank's assertions that educators are devalued and likely to develop neurosis can seem quite odd, and one may well pose the question as to whether his own philosophy was a radical or a conservative one vis-à-vis the changing nature of pedagogy and society.

It is quite common in the historiography of psychoanalysis to debate the extent to which the positions of various theorists qualify as either "radical" and social-critical, or "conservative," and ultimately status quo (e.g., Jacoby, 1975). Not surprisingly, the same discussion arises when it comes to psychoanalytic theories of education (Taubman, 2012). Where such theories are concerned the supposed crux of the issue (just as in debates about therapy) is whether a given psychoanalyst maintains the "hard," critical core of Freudian thought (arguing that social structures are themselves neurotic, and must be fundamentally altered if the individual is to attain any greater psychological health), or whether they become philosophical apologists for contemporary society (typically, by arguing in more practical terms about the "curative" potential of education or therapy, or in more abstract terms about the individual's potential for "self-actualization").

When it comes to Rank's philosophy of education, the stakes and consequences are not immediately clear, and require some explication (which will be relevant for the subsequent interpretation of the film cycle). Generally, Rank has been criticized by Freudians (e.g., Rudnytsky, 1991) for abandoning the critical core of psychoanalysis and retreating into more abstract flights of humanistic thought. The reality is somewhat more complicated. By the end of his career, when he wrote his philosophy of education, Rank was essentially a Nietzschean existentialist in theory, outlook, and even method. As a consequence, his thought combined elements of pessimism and optimism that are typically more separated in the work of other psychoanalysts. On the one hand, he believed in the fundamental irrationality of human character and culture (driven, among other things, by the impossible need to deny death), and hence accused Freud himself of being overly rational, technical, and optimistic (Rank, 1941/1958). On the other hand, partly because of this view of human nature, Rank (1941/1958) remained highly skeptical of all major efforts at social reform. He was prone, for instance, to pointing toward the French Revolution as a case of history continually resolving itself, dialectically, into irrationality and violence.

Accordingly, when comparing Rank's philosophy to the work of progressive contemporaries, some key points must be borne in mind. First, Rank was not arguing that the role of the educator was no longer necessary, nor that educators deserve to be devalued, nor that all contemporary educators are doomed to impotence. His aim was not

primarily to construct a new psychological pedagogy (as it was for many of his contemporaries), but rather to develop a cultural psychology of the modern educational ethos, dominated as it is by psychological concepts in the age of the Child. Thus, his primary argument was that contemporary society devalues educators (particularly those in the humanities and similar disciplines committed to the transmission of collective knowledge), and that for this reason educators may either in fact become neurotic or be stereotyped as neurotic and impotent in the public imagination (a speculation borne out by the films under discussion).

Rank's understanding of the neurotic individual as a "failed artist" should also be recalled. Rank wrote repeatedly that neurotics are closer to recognizing the truth of human reality, and are in some ways psychologically stronger, than the average adjusted individual. Like Nietzsche, he valued the creative element in madness and its testament to the fundamental irrationality of human existence; he thus accused conventional psychoanalysis of an inability to appreciate the "rational" aspects of neurosis. Given this thrust of his work, Rank should not be interpreted as implying that teachers are to be blamed for their inability to adapt to modern standards. Quite the contrary: he is suggesting that the impotence of the modern educator is a symptom of larger contradictions in contemporary culture, which has too quickly endeavored to shed itself of past collectivist structures.

In his book on the relationship between psychoanalytic and pedagogical thought, Taubman (2012) distinguishes theorists in terms of their *therapeutic* or *emancipatory* aims. Some psychoanalysts have viewed education in primarily therapeutic terms, meaning either that the institution of schooling can actually be organized to contribute directly to the pupil's psychological health, or, more radically, that education can serve a social-critical function and thereby play a key role in the "curing" of a sick society. Others view education as instead possessing emancipatory potential, meaning it can never "cure" or demarcate the right path, but at best may sometimes illuminate for the pupil the dangers and possibilities inherent in herself and her society, information that she can use reflexively in her ongoing development.

In his analysis of modern education, Rank is partly attempting to critique the therapeutic approach (which he saw as basically coterminous with the rise of child-centered education) in order to argue for a more emancipatory pedagogic style. However, his analysis goes deeper, in that he is ultimately trying to understand how modern culture has reached a point of crisis, using changes in the educational system as an illustrative case. Thus his analysis is built around the transition from earlier, pre-modern forms of schooling – which emphasized either mere indoctrination into the communal belief system or the use of discipline to instill collective knowledge (Olson, 2003) – to modern approaches. Rank recognized that, beginning with the Enlightenment, a fundamental contradiction arose between the need of the nation-state to imprint its goals and values onto citizens through repressive, collectivist education, and the egalitarian rhetoric (of Rousseau and others) that eventually led to child-centered (and ultimately scientific-practical) forms of therapeutic education (cf. Olson, 2003). These and other social contradictions led Rank not only to diagnose modern culture as generally more likely to

produce neurotic individuals, but to develop his theory of the impossible situation in which the modern educator finds him or herself.

Ultimately, then, Rank's analysis is best understood not as conservative or radical, but in terms of the *dialectical* thrust of his thought. He saw in the ideological struggle over pedagogy a microcosm of contradictions in modern (democratic, capitalist) society. Because he stressed the relational and contradictory nature of human life, he was always suspicious of one-sided solutions to complex social problems. Rank recognized that the collectivist, educator-centered approach to pedagogy was no longer appropriate in modern society; but he was also concerned that a completely psychological, individualist, and child-centered approach would leave the individual without bearings and incapable of formulating a coherent self. Accordingly, Rank advocated a version of the "emancipatory" method (Taubman, 2012) that had stressed the developing *relationship* between educator and student. By taking advantage of the strong emotional forces present in this relationship, the educator can impart collective knowledge (e.g., history), while also modeling for the student a critically reflexive mode that shows how to make that knowledge their own, to utilize it in their own active self-construction.

The films I will discuss exemplify this analysis, insofar as they gradually follow a trajectory from anachronistic and incapable of adapting to modern social conditions (*Goodbye Mr. Chips*), through a period of pessimistic portrayals of the modern educator's impotence (*The Browning Version*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), toward at last a more optimistic demonstration of the educator's emancipatory potential (*Waterland*).

Impotent teachers in film

The impotent teacher appears in a series of films spanning the beginning of WWII to the end of the Cold War: *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939; hereafter *Chips*), *The Browning Version* (1951; hereafter *Browning*), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966; hereafter *Woolf*), and *Waterland* (1992). Employing the broad definition presented earlier, with a Rankian stress on childlessness, the protagonists are all *impotent*: Mr. Chipping's wife and baby die during childbirth; Mr. Crocker-Harris is a childless cuckold; George has only a fantasy child in his strained marriage with Martha; and Tom Crick's wife is left infertile by an early abortion procedure. *Chips* is different from the other films in that it establishes the archetypal myth, which the latter deconstruct in various ways. However, with the exception of the redeemed hero Chipping, the protagonists in these films are portrayed not only as childless but as unable to achieve their personal dreams, disenchanted with their teaching, and trapped by an overly introspective and ruminative approach to life.

It should be noted that these films have certain similarities and represent only a narrow subset of the different available depictions of educators in popular film. All are embedded in the specific history of British culture. The educator protagonists are portrayed by a series of some of the finest actors in the history of British stage and screen: Robert Donat, Michael Redgrave, Richard Burton, and Jeremy Irons. The idyllic boarding school narrative and the kindly schoolmaster are a cornerstone of the ideology of the British Empire, and both figure prominently in the memoirs and works of many

early 20th Century British authors and filmmakers (Boyce, 2012; Richards, 1988). *Chips*' sentimental depiction of these tropes represents a celebration of traditional British culture and a desperate plea for its immortality, even as it teetered on the brink of its mid-century freefall. This decline is already apparent in *Browning*, which overtly contrasts its grim narrative and ineffectual protagonist with that of *Chips* (Boyce, 2012). The expatriate protagonists of *Woolf* and *Waterland* testify to the fall of the Empire in a different way, with classic British actors like Burton and Irons playing teachers who seem alienated in the context of the middle- or lower-class United States.

Another point of commonality between the films is that the two more pessimistic examples were largely the work of gay artists. *Browning* was directed by the unmarried and gay Anthony Asquith, starred the bisexual Redgrave, and was adapted from the play by gay author Terrence Rattigan. *Woolf* was adapted from the classic work by gay playwright Edward Albee. Richards (1988) has noted other examples of homosexual British writers who depicted ineffectual or lonely educators, and this theme has resurfaced in multiple films. Thus, beyond the fact that these films center on male protagonists, the argument could also be made that they center on (potentially) queer protagonists. I certainly do not wish to imply any connection between sexual orientation, on the one hand, and impotence or neuroticism (in their various meanings) on the other. Nevertheless, this point is important to acknowledge for two reasons.

First, it is clear enough that the character of the impotent teacher has been used by artists as a conduit for expressing feelings of alienation in a largely repressive society. After all, homosexual acts have only been decriminalized in England since 1967, and technically only since 2003 in all parts of the United States. Second, some versions of queer theory (Edelman, 2004) have pointed out that contemporary discourse celebrating the Child locates all politics in a horizon of "reproductive futurism" assuming immortality as heteronormativity. In other words, Rank's analysis of impotence as a common form of neuroticism in the era of the Child must be understood against the backdrop of a patriarchal culture, and therefore might apply most readily to men who feel uncomfortable embracing conventional norms of masculinity and sexuality.

These observations should situate and delimit the following analysis. One the one hand, as mentioned in the opening pages, the theme of impotent educators (broadly understood) is far from uncommon, and there are several works that could also have been included here (*A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, 1972; *Butley*, 1974; *A Single Man*, 2009; *Monsieur Lazhar*, 2011; *Breaking Bad*, 2008-2013). There is also no reason to assume that this theme is restricted to the British cultural context (educators are also commonly portrayed as ineffectual or de-valued in U.S. films; Bulman, 2015), or to male protagonists (it is quite probable that female educators are depicted as childless to an even greater extent than males; Dalton, 2017). On the other hand, however, my primary aim is not to argue that impotence is the *predominant* lens through which educators are viewed in contemporary film. Rather, I believe that these works represent an important sub-genre of the education film that exemplifies with particular acuity Rank's ideas on sexuality, immortality, and education in the modern era. Their links to British culture are significant in this regard: at the outset of the 20th Century the British Empire represented the type of collective ideology which Rank proposed was being shattered in the modern era. That ideology was bound up with the traditional educational system of the United

Kingdom (as *Chips* exemplifies), which underwent radical reform in the child-centered era of the mid-20th Century.

Finally, the historical boundedness of this analysis should be acknowledged. Towards the end of the 20th Century, as Western society shifted towards postindustrialism and postmodernism, the psychological ambivalence of individuals in the future-oriented "era of the Child" began to surface in various forms of nostalgia (Jenks, 1996). The return of nostalgia for the past, combined with a continued emphasis on childlike innocence, potentially opens a cultural space in which educators may again be socially valued, not for their capacity to transmit collective ideologies, but rather to serve as exemplars for their students of how to establish a productive sense of personal continuity. This can be seen in the rise of positive film portrayals of "inspirational" teachers, beginning with *Dead Poets Society* (see Burbach & Figgins, 1993); and it was a trend anticipated by Rank, as I will discuss in the context of *Waterland*.

***Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and *The Browning Version*: Impotence as immortality and finitude**

Chips has become the blueprint for the image of the idealized schoolteacher, particularly in the context of British boarding school culture. Sam Wood's adaptation of the beloved novel by James Hilton is in many ways a complicated and impressive piece of work, which helped establish many tropes of the educational and romantic genres. These form the backdrop against which the cynicism of the later films must be understood.

The film is largely a series of flashbacks depicting the life of Mr. Chipping, who is a veritable institution at the boarding school of Brookfield. A Latin and classics teacher who guides the school as *ersatz*-Headmaster through the crisis of the First World War, "Chips" represents the impossible continuation of Victorian British collectivism into modernity – although the narrative ends after the war, he has served at Brookfield since 1870. At its core, *Chips* is a film about what Rank identified as humanity's primal dream: attaining immortality by fusing oneself with the broader social group. There are three prominent death or funeral scenes in the film (including Chipping's own at its conclusion) and each of these is bookended by a montage in which imaged historical events are intercut with seemingly identical shots of generations of schoolboys attending roll call. Individual lives come and go, but the Empire and its institutions will persevere forever.

Were it not for the basic conflict between the desires for personal and collective immortality identified by Rank, the plot of *Chips* would not be much more than this: Chippings achieves immortality by dedicating his life to teaching generations of students at Brookfield, hence aligning his destiny with that of the nation. Yet in the age of the Child, people increasingly seek personal immortality through their offspring and abandon crumbling collective ideologies. How can a character like Chipping, who devotes himself to King and country, be reconciled with this modern ethos? The elegance and pathos of the answer offered by the film rivals that of Greek myth. In the midst of a midlife crisis, when Chipping feels uninspired by his teaching and unable to emotionally connect with his pupils, he falls in love with a younger woman, Kathy (Greer Garson), whose modern vitality perfectly complements his old-world reserve. Kathy awakens a sense of humor

and empathic emotion in Chipping – just enough of the contemporary child-centered approach to reinvigorate his teaching and allow him to connect to future generations. But within a few years, Kathy dies in childbirth, and the baby with her.

Thus Chipping sacrifices the dream of personal immortality – represented by his stillborn child – for the betterment of collective immortality. Chipping's perennial master-pupil relationships with generations of students are an embodiment of his commitment to the collective even at the expense of his own legacy. Hence, in this first film, "impotence" is not a psychological problem but rather a noble act of individual sacrifice. Here, the basic conflicts identified by Rank – between individual and collective immortality, between the raw act of animal sexuality and the quest for individualistic transcendence – are simply denied in favor of the dream of harmonious synthesis. Because Chipping shows himself capable of romantic love and procreation, his ultimate impotence is not a sign of weakness, but rather a martyr's crown. Indeed, Chipping's inability to procreate biologically is the source of his cultural procreation. Although the deaths of his wife and child are tragic, they are redeemed through the narrative as Chipping forsakes egoistic immortality through his own child in favor of the "thousands of them, and all boys" – the students of Brookfield who will carry Britain through trial after trial.

Browning is in nearly every respect a critique and deconstruction of the harmonious reconciliation between collective and personal immortality presented by *Chips*. The film was made only about a decade later, but the interval had seen WWII, the beginning of the Empire's dismantlement, and entry into the Cold War. It is clear throughout that Terence Rattigan's source play and screenplay were carefully engineered to satirize *Chips*. The most dramatic way in which *Browning* stands *Chips* on its head is by recasting the significance of the protagonist's impotence. *Browning* is the first of the films in which personal impotence or childlessness – a dramatic device established by *Chips* – represents not a noble act of sacrifice, but rather a neurotic blockage.

Mr. Crocker-Harris (nicknamed "the Crock" in cruel contrast to the affectionate "Chips") fails in every way that Chipping succeeded (Boyce, 2012; Richards, 1988). Crocker-Harris has also taught Latin at a boarding school for the majority of his career, but while Chips was revered, he is feared and disrespected. While Chips' beloved Kathy died in childbirth, Crocker-Harris remains married to Millie (Jean Kent), who treats him like a cuckold by insulting his masculinity and carrying on a series of affairs with other teachers. Whereas Chips was called out of a celebrated retirement to guide the school to postwar glory, Crocker-Harris is asked to retire, denied a pension, and even instructed to forego his right of giving the closing speech at an assembly. Crocker-Harris knows that he is widely regarded as a failure; as he tells his replacement, Gilbert, he eventually had to resort to making a caricature of himself in order to connect with increasingly despondent students, but eventually even this strategy fell flat. "I don't know why they no longer found me a joke. Perhaps it was my illness. No, I don't think it was that. Something deeper than that. Not a sickness of the body, but a sickness of the soul."

Crocker-Harris displayed considerable passion and even artistry as a youthful scholar, nearly completing a radical new translation in rhyming verse of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. But his creative efforts were abandoned as he resigned himself to a life of emotional and spiritual stagnation, clinging to a self-critical image of himself. Very

significantly in light of Rank's theorizing, Crocker-Harris's neuroticism is repeatedly conveyed through the metaphor of mortality. The student Taplow (Brian Smith), who ultimately forms a redemptive bond with Crocker-Harris, says early in the film, "I don't think the Crock gets a kick out of anything. In fact, I don't think he has any feelings at all. He's just dead, that's all." His wife, Millie, when asked by her lover why she hates her husband, claims, "You can't hate the dead, you can only despise them." In reference to the emotional breakdown he experiences upon being given a retirement gift from Taplow, Crocker-Harris himself states, "My hysteria over that book was no more than a sort of reflex action of the spirit, the muscular twitchings of a corpse."

Beyond its significant association with his own neuroticism and mortality, Crocker-Harris's impotence serves another important function in *Browning*, namely symbolizing the decline of the collective ideologies whose vitality Chips embodied. In the film, traditional belief structures are represented by Crocker-Harris's position as a Latin teacher. Redgrave's command performance renders Crocker-Harris the epitome of British "upper lip" stoicism (Boyce, 2012) – the very value system that was upheld in *Chips*, but is shown to be defunct in this film. Traditional values are threatened from two sides in the form of rival younger teachers. Hunter (Nigel Patrick) is a science teacher whose classes are wildly popular in comparison to Crocker-Harris's dreaded grammar course, and who naturally is also the most recent recipient of Millie's wandering affections. Gilbert is Crocker-Harris's replacement, an advocate of what Crocker-Harris dismissively calls "the modern psychological method." These younger foils stand in for what Rank proposed were the two emphases of the modern philosophy of education, namely practical knowledge (Hunter's science) and child-centered progressivism (Gilbert's "psychological method"). In this sense, with Crocker-Harris's failure falls the traditional philosophy of education, and hence the British Empire.

Ultimately, *Browning* suggests that the only way for Crocker-Harris to overcome his impotence is by relinquishing his compensatory fixation with these dead traditions. Rather than obsessing over timetables and grammar, he must be revived by the power of emotion. In this connection, the narrative function of the master-pupil relationship in *Browning* is entirely different from that in *Chips*. Taplow does not represent generations of imprinted students, the amorphous collective. Instead, he is one unique individual who is capable of entering into a relationship with Crocker-Harris, offering him the affirmation he needs to pursue his personal ambitions. In turn, Taplow is inspired by the creative spark that Crocker-Harris once had and lost. The grimness of the film is thus tempered by the possibility that even at the end of his career Crocker-Harris can find in his relationship with Taplow the solution to the conflict of modern education.

Rank proposed that teachers in the modern era can overcome their devaluation by rejecting the Prometheus complex (seeking to mold children in their own image), and instead engaging in dialogue with their pupils, in order to change themselves in relation to the demands of the student. "As the child takes the adult for his pattern, to form his own ego ideal, this task would succeed much better for the child's development if the…teachers would adjust themselves more to the ego ideal arising in the child" (Rank, 1932/1968, p. 226). Thus, *Browning* upholds with Rank certain aspects of the progressive philosophy, insofar as a recognition of fallible human relationships is seen to be an essential aspect of education.

Across the space and time of *Chips* and *Browning* there is an inversion of the meaning of sexuality and its malformation in male impotence. In both films, sexuality and love represent the possibility of individual growth and expression, at the expense of cold, rational subservience to a collective vision. In *Chips*, however, the "freezing" of sexuality in the moment of death sublimates it; impotence is presented as the ultimate sacrifice for collective immortality. In *Browning* personal sacrifice is futile because collective immortality is no longer viable – thus male impotence is a block on individual growth, a symptom of neuroticism that must be overcome by opening the self to emotional connection.

In the historical progression of the films, *Chips* offered an anachronistic 19th Century vision of collective immortality which *Browning* refuted with the squarely modernist thesis that human relationships are the forward path from the rubble of grand ideologies. The next film was made during the social revolutions of the 1960s, and brings the cycle closer to what might be called a postmodern perspective, in which the prospect of any immortality quest – be it collective or personal – is drawn into question.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? **Truth and illusion**

Whereas *Browning* took pains to subtly ironize the imperial fantasy of *Chips*, *Woolf* takes the ideological implosion of Western civilization as its starting point and zooms in the lives of scarred individuals left in its wake. The dominant theme is that personal immortality – again symbolized by the child – is no longer a refuge from the apocalypse of traditional belief systems. Continuing *Browning*'s trope, the impotence of *Woolf*'s male protagonist operates as a manifestation of his neuroticism. But Crocker-Harris's neuroticism is a result of his failure to adjust to the decline of collective ideologies by embracing modern attitudes. By contrast, George in *Woolf* suffers the failure of those same modern attitudes. While the modern psychological age was depicted as a viable alternative in *Browning*, *Woolf* goes further to deflate the ideology of personal immortality through relationships and offspring. It does so by probing an essential conflict in human experience – not that between collective and personal immortality, but rather between *truth* and *illusion*.

For Rank, these conflicts were historically connected. A hallmark of the modern psychological ideology was an insistence on uncovering the truth in a positivistic sense (Rank, 1929/1945, 1930/1998). The individualistic abandonment of collective ideologies was justified by an insistence that modern science had uncovered the "true" reality of the physical world. This led to a new valorization of truth and self-awareness in one's personal life and relationships.

> As self-awareness undermined belief in the soul, self-knowledge, an unwanted byproduct of individuality, was declared to be the important thing. Out of the torment of self-awareness emerged the virtue of therapeutic self-knowledge, its product esteemed as "truth"…In place of the collective belief, "Truth is what everyone believes," arose an individualistic creed: "Truth is what I believe!" (Rank, 1930/1998, p. 60).

The modern zeal for truth also infiltrated educational philosophy: "The new educational ideology…seems to be enforced by a fanaticism for truth…this ideal of over-valuing

reality, a characteristic of our natural scientific world-concept" (Rank, 1932/1968, pp. 46-47). But for Rank, as for the later postmodernists, this emphasis is misguided; there is no single "truth" that can encompass the reality of human experience, only a series of human interpretations and illusions (Rank, 1996). Indeed, the maintenance of immortality-providing illusions – whether they be collective or personal, rooted in religion or relationships – is essential for healthy human functioning.

> With the truth, one cannot live. To be able to live one needs illusions…The more a man can take reality as truth, appearance as essence, the sounder, the better adjusted, the happier he will be. At the moment when we begin to search after truth we destroy reality and our relation to it…[The neurotic] suffers, not from all the pathological mechanisms which are psychically necessary for living and wholesome but in the refusal of these mechanisms which is just what robs him of the illusions important for living (Rank, 1929/1945, pp. 250-251).

From the vantage of this analysis, *Woolf* carries the symbol of the educator's impotence further in history towards our present moment. If in the psychological stage the educator is no longer the representative of collective wisdom but rather the paragon of a quest for truth, then his impotence testifies to the failure of self-knowledge to provide a new route to salvation, and its breakdown in blocked neuroticism.

George is a history professor at a liberal arts college whose career has stagnated, partly because of his tumultuous relationship with Martha (Elizabeth Taylor), the daughter of the college President who has looked unfavorably on George's performance. The film takes place over one night when the couple invites a new faculty member, science teacher Nick (George Segal), and his naïve wife Honey (Sandy Dennis) to their home for drinks. Debauchery ensues, with George and Martha lashing out at each other and drawing the younger pair into their web in a series of increasingly disturbing and fantastic games.

While the impotence of the teacher was framed redemptively in *Chips*, and presented somewhat subtly in *Browning*, in *Woolf* the theme becomes brutally explicit. Martha humiliates George for his failures as an academic, husband, and man throughout the evening, and openly flaunts her sexual encounter with Nick (a game of "hump the hostess"). Interestingly, not even the virile young suitor escapes the entanglement of academia and impotence – Nick married Honey because of a hysterical pregnancy, and she breaks down during the evening to admit that she is afraid of having a child. The fact that George is a henpecked history professor (rather than a Latin instructor, as in *Browning* and *Chips*) makes the decline of any viable collective ideology all the more salient. This point is further underscored by the transplantation of the paradigmatically British Burton to the United States – far from the idyllic boarding school legacies of the earlier films. There are no students to be seen in the film, no guarantors of the adults' immortality. Indeed, the latter are infantilized: after the first series of games, a long shot shows George smoking on a swing in the backyard, for all appearances like a sullen child.

The story of George's neuroticism – his own failure as an artist – connects the narrative conflict between collective and personal immortality with the more postmodern theme of truth versus illusion, just as these conflicts were interwoven by Rank. Chipping was buttressed by the collective immortality of England; *Browning* suggests that Crocker-Harris can transform himself through emotional connection to achieve personal immortality. But George is unable to achieve either collective or personal immortality because of his obsessive, modernist focus on the truth (Meyer, 1968). His cynicism prevents him from achieving academic success by promoting a glorified vision of history as collective immortality; instead, he champions what Nietzsche (1874/1997) and Foucault (1980) called *critical history*. In a key monologue, George summarizes his view of his academic subject for his guests:

> You take the trouble to construct a civilization, to build a society based on the principles of…of principle. You make a government and art and realize that they are, must be, both the same. You bring things to the saddest of all points, to the point where there is something to lose. Then, all at once, through all the music, through all the sensible sounds of men building, attempting, comes the *Dies Irae*. And what is it? What does the trumpet sound? Up yours!

In keeping with the modern ethos, George seeks to escape this bankruptcy of history and grand narratives by creating a personal legacy. He falls out of favor with Martha's father, the president, when he attempts publication of an autobiographical novel which he insists conveys "the truth" of the patricide he committed as a child (symbolizing the destruction of immortality ideologies). But both the novel and George's career are stillborn, and his failures become the butt of Martha's insults. George sins against his position as an imparter of collective wisdom by attempting to make his own story part of history. But ultimately his pursuit of truth reveals that, for both collectives and individuals, the *Dies Irae* is "up yours" – the child that the modern individual clings to for redemption in the wake of collective illusions is also a fantasy.

Indeed, the climax of *Woolf* occurs when George forces Martha to reveal to their guests that the adolescent son whom they have been referring to throughout the evening is in fact a fantasy concocted by the couple. Impotence is the result of biological or interpersonal factors in the other films. *Woolf* most directly exemplifies Rank's analysis by showing the Child for what it is psychologically – a fantasy of the parents, an attempt to redeem their finite and flawed lives. The painful exchanges in the climactic scene show that Martha sees their illusory child to be the only source of hope for their troubled relationship. She describes him in such passionate language as to suggest his immortal perfection (a "beautiful, beautiful boy," who is "tan before and after everyone"). She pleads with George not to divulge their secret, to preserve one last meaningful bond between them. But George accuses Martha of moving "bag and baggage into [her] own fantasy world." And when Martha retorts, "Truth and illusion, George. You don't know the difference", he replies, "No, but we must carry on as though we did." A self-conscious modern neurotic, he is ultimately unable to preserve the illusion in his quest for truth.

Woolf thus moves the cycle forward by sabotaging the redemptive potential of the modern psychological quest for personal immortality through children. It is no longer a question of overcoming the child's emotional distance, as in *Browning*; the child is simply absent, the dream of immortality sacrificed to the pursuit of truth. To move past the neuroticism of male impotence, it will be necessary to go beyond truth, to rediscover – at a critical distance – the importance of mutual construction of illusion in the pedagogic relationship. The final film in the cycle holds out the prospect – anticipated by Rank – of a valued, emancipatory role for the educator in the age of the Child, and thus for the educator to achieve creative self-actualization.

***Waterland*: The child in the future and the past**

After the modernist dream of collective immortality through Empire has been ridiculed by *Browning*, and that of personal immortality through the Child torn asunder by *Woolf*, a final film is left to sort the pieces. Stephen Gyllenhaal's *Waterland*, adapted from the experimental 1983 Graham Swift novel, hearkens back to the earliest works in the cycle while simultaneously offering a solution to the crisis of "Truth" and the breakdown of the psychological ideology. In the wake of Mr. "Chips" and Mr. "Crock" comes Mr. Crick (Irons), one last impotent male British teacher (and, like George, an expatriate in America).

Waterland opens with the leitmotif of the child as a symbol of intertwining desires for personal and collective immortality. The first diegetic sound is that of a baby's cry, an utterance Tom Crick describes as "miraculous" upon his return home from the Pittsburgh high school where he lectures on history. He has been speaking to his adolescent pupils about the French Revolution, which Rank (1932/1968) considered a key event in the emergence of the individualistic age of the Child. The baby's cry is miraculous because Tom's wife Mary (Sinéad Cusack) was rendered incapable of childbearing decades ago by a folk-healer's abortion, performed during their shared youth in East Anglia. The reason for this incongruous sound is that Mary, stricken by a mental breakdown, has abducted an infant.

The events in *Waterland* gradually circle back to this tragic tableau, expanding ripple-like and rhythmically on the themes it sets. The film straddles the first and second halves of the 20th Century through the framing device of Crick telling his students stories about his childhood in the mysterious "Fens", a rural English region where he and Mary came of age during the interwar period. In the narrative present – the 1970s – Crick struggles with his wife's depression and his students' apathy. Here the modern ethos of commercialized, practical education blatantly undercuts the antiquated model, the culmination of a process depicted in each film after *Chips.* Like Crocker-Harris, Crick is forced into retirement shortly after his Principal tells him, "There has been a steady decline in the number of students opting for history…Frankly, they're voting with their feet." As one student blatantly rebukes him: "You're just a teacher, that's all."

These same students seem beset by characteristically modern anxieties. Their spokesman, angry young man Matthew Price (Ethan Hawke), eloquently brings together the problematics of cultural decline and rising neuroticism by interrupting his teacher to ask, "What's the point? The only thing interesting I see about history is that it's going to

end." The objectless fear voiced by Crick's pupils epitomizes the neurotic modern child whom Rank had foreseen:

> Our present epoch is doubtless inferior to the earlier epochs in pedagogic fitness. We no longer believe sufficiently in the old ideologies and not yet enough in the new ideas to present them to the child with sufficient conviction, or even to live according to them. So the child himself has to bear much more responsibility which in other ages was taken over effectively by the collective ideologies and their representatives. Hence the modern child is so much more insecure…For he grows up in a neurotic atmosphere and so manifoldly forms his ideal of being grown up according to neurotic patterns (Rank, 1932/1968, p. 228).

Much to his students' initial surprise and amusement, Crick responds to their professions of anxiety by abandoning dry history recitations in favor of a series of autobiographical fables. Upholding the theme of the impotent educator, Tom and Mary's barrenness follows chronologically after an incestuous relationship Tom's grandfather had with his mother. Dick (David Morrissey), the child borne of this relationship – whom Tom grows up believing to be his full brother – commits suicide after discovering his true origins. The Crick family is thus marked by a series of "impotencies" and "abortions" which doom it to extinction. By recounting these personal tragedies in the context of the mass death of the World Wars and the concurrent fall of the British Empire, Crick welds the themes of personal and collective mortality into one.

In many ways the symbolism and narrative of *Waterland* echo the earlier films, but there is an important new element: the bitterness of *Woolf*'s attack on the failures of culture is replaced by something of the *jouissance* associated with postmodernism (Harvey, 1990) – the liberated enthusiasm that can come from realizing one is no longer beholden to outdated myths and laws. For Crick, history is not a set of collectively sanctified and immutable values and episodes doomed to repeat (as in *Chips*); nor is it a laughing stock whose *Dies Irae* is "up yours!" However terrible or pain-stricken the narratives offered by Crick may be, they are nevertheless haloed with bittersweet *nostalgia*.

The postmodern cultural period was anticipated by Rank's multi-perspectival view of the relationship between "truth" and illusion. Bauman (1991) argued that the key difference between the modern and postmodern epochs lies in the different cultural strategies of death denial that they foster, and Jenks (1996) similarly traces the distinction in terms of divergent cultural attitudes toward children as guarantors of immortality. In the modern era (which reached its zenith in the early 20th Century), Euro-American individuals pursued personal immortality via the Prometheus complex and the molding of their children's futures. But rising uncertainty about how to establish a legacy amidst the proliferation of value systems and careers in postmodernity has altered our collective attitude towards the child. Rather than looking optimistically to the betterment of our legacy in the child's future, we are now driven by uncertainty to retreat into nostalgic reveries of our own childhood, which we then compensatorily seek to re-create in the lives of our children. Rank (1932/1968) presciently anticipated this: "formerly the child

was referred to and prepared for the adult life, for being grown up, as to a Paradise, whereas we today are inclined to see in childhood our lost Paradise" (p. 148).

The gradual transition of Euro-American culture to uncertain postmodernity after the zealous progressivism of the modern era was reflected in films about educators. Starting in the late 1980s, most notably with *Dead Poets Society* (see Burbach & Figgins, 1993), a sub-genre of films developed portraying educators who, though embattled by administrators and society at large, inspire their pupils by conveying a strong "aesthetic-ethical-political" framework (comparable to the "emancipatory" role identified by Taubman, 2012). Dalton (2017) provides several examples of films in which passionate humanities instructors are positively contrasted with cynical or uninspiring scientific teachers, and notably the majority of these were released after 1990. Another common element is that many of these instructors – for instance, in *Dead Poets Society* and *Finding Forrester* (2000) – translate collective and personal history for their pupils by engaging in dialogic forms of storytelling. The theme recurs that in the postmodern era, young people nostalgically long for history, but only if they can see the relevance of history for their own life stories.

In *Waterland,* Crick cannot escape the haunting memories of his childhood in the Fens, and the Gothic stories of his cursed ancestors. It is his powerful nostalgia, for both lost childhood and the lost innocence of a world that had not yet fully succumbed to industrialization, that entrances Crick's students, desperate as they are for meaning in a disenchanted, neurotic world. Crick endeavors to teach his students the Nietzschean lesson that history must be in service of life. *Waterland* thus expresses a thoroughly postmodern relationship to truth and collective meaning. Under circumstances of modern individualism, people need history and cultural meaning systems on which to scaffold their own legacies. If history is simply exposed as illusion, as it is by George, the individual will be unable to escape neuroticism. At the same time, if history is merely an endless repetition of the "old ideologies," then the modern individual will be unable to break its grasp and creatively employ it.

It is significant in this connection that the event responsible for Tom's childlessness – Mary's abortion – occurred at the end of adolescence, the critical transition point in modern societies between youth and maturity. It did not happen gradually or in middle adulthood, as it does for the educators in the other films. In the context of *Waterland*'s time- and space-shifting narrative, Tom's "impotence" is not so much a sign of the teacher's irrelevance in the age of the Child, but rather a deep symbol of his nostalgic fixation to the past. History has marked and wounded Tom and Mary; and indeed, Mary seems unable to get out from under this wound. In the narrative present, she obsesses delusionally over the possibility of being given a child from God; she cannot live outside the old-world culture of the Fens. Tom, by contrast, finds a way with Price and his other pupils to reconcile with his own past and that of old Britain, drawing meaning from history as from a well of dark water for his ongoing existence. As he defends his subject against the criticism that parents fail to see its significance: "You should tell them that what's important is what we're teaching them [their children] about life, and how to live it."

Beyond adaptation and neuroticism: Three retirement speeches

Rank (1932) provocatively argued that the neurotic individual possessed the potential to be "healthier" than the average, adapted type of individual. While the latter blindly accepts collective ideology and never imagines how their circumstances could be otherwise, the neurotic wrestles with life and questions the validity of simple cultural solutions. To exercise one's potential as an individual, however, requires more than the neurotic's perennial refusal to accept any shared meanings. In order to become truly *productive* as a self-actualized member of modern society, Rank (1932; 1929/1945) proposed, the individual must move beyond the "second" stage of neurotic questioning of social mores to a "third" stage of active willing. The productive type who overcomes neuroticism is the individual who at first rebels against (rather than passively introjecting) social reality, but later learns to self-consciously will that which reality compels her to do. Such is the person who is able to find personal fulfillment and creativity in the limits of her social role; who does not perform the role with mute automaticity but rather in critical acceptance of her delimited space of freedom.

Across the films, we observe a continuous descent into neuroticism among the educator protagonists. At the same time, collective ideologies of nationalism and religion – still celebrated in *Chips* – experience an accelerated decline, first shown to be out-of-date and ineffectual (*Browning*), then torn to pieces in the postmodern exposure of illusion (*Woolf*), and finally glimpsed only at a distance through a foggy lens of nostalgia (*Waterland*). And yet, if we consider the retirement speeches given by the protagonists in *Chips*, *Browning*, and *Waterland*, a development occurs which echoes Rank's "three-stage" analysis of how the person can achieve full self-determination and move past neuroticism in the psychological era.

Chipping's speech is that of a man who is completely immersed in the collective milieu. For him, there is not the slightest doubt that his life has been worthwhile; he is convinced of the immortality of the British Empire. As he tells his student audience: "I do remember you, as you are now: That's the point. In my mind, you remain boys." For the adjusted type in a collectivist culture, each individual is an interchangeable part of the greater whole, and the future is only significant insofar as it represents a perpetuation of the past. Hence Chipping concludes with a Latin quotation from the *Aeneid*, which roughly translates: "It may be that in the future you will be helped by remembering the past."

In *Browning*, Crocker-Harris advances beyond Chipping by acknowledging the futility of upholding collective immortality ideologies in the modern era. But in his awareness of his failure to embrace the "modern psychological method" of education, Crocker-Harris cannot surmount the second developmental stage of reactionary neuroticism. Hence his speech is one of self-recrimination and guilt:

> I have degraded the noblest calling that a man can follow: the care and molding of the young. I claim no excuses. When I came here, I knew what I had to do, and I have not done it. I have failed, and miserably failed. I can only hope that you…will find it in your hearts to forgive me, for having let you down. I shall not find it so easy to forgive myself.

According to Rank (1929/1945), the neurotic can advance beyond this self-accusatory impotence only when he "has created an autonomous inner world so different and so much its own, that it no longer represents merely a substitute for external reality," so that he may "seek satisfaction and release in the creation and projection of a world of his own" (p. 265). The rare person in modernity who achieves this third stage can reconcile his individual difference with the demands of sociality by engaging in "creative" or "reformative" action, including in the educational profession. If such a person is a teacher, they have the potential to resolve the Prometheus complex by engaging in an emancipatory dialogue of mutual self-creation with their pupils. This dialogue will recognize – rather than reject – the significance of collective ideologies, but it will do so with the kind of critical reflexivity characteristic of the second, neurotic stage of development. As Rank (1932/1968) writes:

> …the prevailing ideology of the time the child has to accept, but not merely as something forced on him from without, but he must find means and ways of making the varying and given collective contents actually his own. This should be achieved not so much by the pedagogic system but by the personality of the pedagogue who has to show the child the ways and means of doing this…one must give the child certain ideologies not only because he needs them later in life but because he needs them for growth…[the child] will instinctively grasp the collective ideologies offered him, because he needs them as props, for the unfolding and justification of his individual ego (pp. 224, 227).

In his retirement speech, Crick appears to have resolved the apparent conflict between "truth and illusion" which keeps George blocked by neuroticism and which Rank proposes to be a false dichotomy in human experience. In explaining to the students why he chose to study history, Crick tells them about his experience in Europe at the end of WWII: "They were still digging corpses out of the rubble…women, and children…and uh, of course babies…and the only way I could cope with what I was seeing was to think of it as *history*, as part of a story, and not just those bits of meat. And that's what we've been doing, children…telling stories."

Crick has *shown* his pupils, through his own process of self-exploration, how the illusion of a collective ideology – of history, of religion – is a necessary support for the self, even when it is recognized as illusion. He affirms the importance of telling stories to make sense of our mortal existence, even when we understand that all our accomplishments are indeed mere stories.

Crick's childlessness is ultimately not a symbol of sacrifice or neurotic finitude, but rather a redemptive sign of the need to create our own legacies both in and in spite of history. Having been confronted by personal and collective mortality at the end of youth, Crick transcends the Prometheus complex; he is not attempting to project immortality on his students. The discontented Price finally accepts Crick's teaching method when he realizes that Crick is telling stories for his own, rather than the students', benefit. By wrestling with his past openly before his class, Crick has accomplished the difficult task of showing them how to *reconcile* collective and individual narratives, truth and illusion. Crick succeeds because he is able to offer his

personal struggles in answer to his students' need for meaning, and in the hallowed space of the classroom his stories become more than a neurotic refusal of life. Unlike Chipping and Crocker-Harris, he refuses to intone textbook material. But unlike George, he does not ruthlessly pursue personal truth at expense of all social illusion. Rather, he exemplifies for his pupils the painful but vital process through which one can determine one's self in critical engagement with culture. In the modern era, Rank insists, this should be the chief, emancipatory aim of education: showing students, through a dialogic process, the way out of neurotic refusal of life and meaning.

Daniel Sullivan is an Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Arizona. He received his PhD from the University of Kansas in 2013. He is the author of Cultural-Existential Psychology (2016; Cambridge University Press), and the co-editor (with Jeff Greenberg) of the interdisciplinary volume Death in Classic and Contemporary Film: Fade to Black (2013; Palgrave Macmillan).

References

Arendt, Hannah (1958). *The Human Condition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Asquith, Anthony (Director), & Baird, T. (Producer) (1951). *The Browning version* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Javelin Films.

Bauman, Zygmunt. (1991). *Mortality, immortality, and other life strategies.* Stanford: Stanford UP.

Bernstein, Basil. (1995). *Class, codes, and control (Vol. 3): Towards a theory of educational transmission.* New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Boyce, Michael W. (2012). *The lasting influence of the war on postwar British film.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bulman, Robert C. (2015). *Hollywood goes to high school: Cinema, school, and American culture*. New York: Worth.

Burbach, Harold J., & Figgins, Margo A. (1993). A thematic profile of images of teachers in film. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 20,* 65-75.

Dalton, Mary M. (2017). *The Hollywood curriculum: Teachers in the movies*. New York: Peter Lang.

Darling, John (1986). Child-centered, gender-centered: A criticism of progressive curriculum theory from Rousseau to Plowden. *Oxford Review of Education, 12,* 31-40.

Edelman, Lee (2004). *No future: Queer theory and the death drive.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Foucault, Michel (1980). *Language, counter-memory, practice.* Ed. D. F. Bouchard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.

Gyllenhaal, Stephen (Director), Cassavetti, P., & McGuinness, K. (Producers) (1992). *Waterland* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Palace Pictures, Channel Four Films.

Jacobsen, Kurt. (1997). Escape from the treadmill: Education, politics, and the mainsprings of child analysis. In Stephen E. Bronner & F. Peter Wagner (Eds.), *Vienna: The world of yesterday, 1889-1914* (pp. 63-79). New Jersey: Humanities Press.

Jacoby, Russell. (1975). *Social amnesia: A critique of conformist psychology from Adler to Laing.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Harvey, David (1990). *The condition of postmodernity.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Jenks, Chris (1996). *Childhood*. New York: Routledge.

Lukashevich, Stephen (1977). *N. F. Fedorov (1828-1903): A study in Russian eupsychian and utopian thought.* Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Meyer, Ruth (1968). Language: Truth and illusion in *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Educational Theatre Journal, 20,* 60-69.

McLaren, Angus (2007). *Impotence: A cultural history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nichols, Mike (Director), & Lehman, E. (Producer) (1966). *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Nietzsche, Friedrich W. (1997). *Untimely meditations.* (Trans. R. J. Hollingdale). New York: Cambridge UP. (Original work published 1874).

Olson, David R. (2003). *Psychological theory and educational reform: How school remakes mind and society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rank, Otto (1932). *Art and artist: Creative urge and personality development* (Trans. C. F. Atkinson). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Rank, Otto (1945). *Will therapy* and *Truth and reality* (Trans. J. Taft; One Volume Ed.). New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (Original works published 1929-1931)

Rank, Otto (1958). *Beyond psychology.* New York: Dover. (Original work published 1941)

Rank, Otto (1964). *The myth of the birth of the hero, and other writings* (Ed. P. Freund). New York: Random House. (Original work published 1932).

Rank, Otto (1968). *Modern education: A critique of its fundamental ideas* (Trans. M. E. Moxon). New York: Agathon Press. (Original work published 1932)

Rank, Otto (1996). *A psychology of difference: The American lectures* (Ed. R. Kramer). Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Original works published 1924-1938)

Rank, Otto (1998). *Psychology and the soul: A study of the origin, conceptual evolution, and nature of the soul* (Trans. G. C. Richter & E. J. Lieberman). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1930)

Richards, Jeffrey (1988). *Happiest days: The public schools in English fiction.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Rudnytsky, Peter L. (1991). *The psychoanalytic vocation: Rank, Winnicott, and the legacy of Freud.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Semel, Susan F. (1995). Basil Bernstein's theory of pedagogic practice and the history of American progressive education: Three case studies. In A. R. Sadovnik (Ed.), *Knowledge and pedagogy: The sociology of Basil Bernstein* (pp. 337-358). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Sullivan, Daniel (2016). Person-environment mergence and separation: Otto Rank's psychology of emotion, personality, and culture. *Psychoanalytic Review, 103,* 743-770.

Swetnam, Leslie A. (1992). Media distortion of the teacher image. *Clearing House, 66,* 30-32.

Taubman, Peter M. (2012). *Disavowed knowledge: Psychoanalysis, education, and teaching.* New York: Routledge.

Wood, Sam (Director), & Saville, V. (Producer). (1939). *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: MGM.

Wooldridge, Adrian. (1994). *Measuring the mind: Education and psychology in England, c.1860 – c.1*