Why I Write Books about Creativity

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The Clio's Psyche interview "The Creativity, Introspection and Pacifism of Andrew Brink" (September 1999, p. 75) gives the biographical context for my books to that date while not mentioning an essential reason for their being. Published in 2007, *Desire and Avoidance in Art* prompts further explanation of what I have been attempting. The unmentioned element in my life story is the transforming experience I went through as an artist, or at least as somebody who drew and painted. The subjects in *Desire and Avoidance,* whose talents and achievements far exceed mine, nevertheless grappled with conflicted avoidant attachments I had discovered in myself by painting. Having discovered them by externalizing spontaneous imagery, as did Picasso, Bellmer, Balthus, and Cornell, I wondered whether these celebrated artists had learned from their own experiences anything about their destructive relationships with women. My sense was that although producing visual evidence of anxious punitiveness towards women, they failed to grasp its developmental meaning. They became locked into futile repetitions of anxious maladaptive relationships, usually sacrificing the woman for reasons too obscure for her to understand. While my personal circumstances do not closely match any of theirs in kind or degree, an affinity was felt, the main difference being that, when painting, I was reading psychoanalytic theory and watching what happened as it happened during the production of imagery; I was also recording dreams.

While drawing and painting for several years in the 1960s and 1970s was exciting, the result was upsetting and unexpectedly life-changing, and it put me on a more self-aware course. The person I found in the unconscious was not nearly the one I had believed myself to be, requiring recon-

sideration of the benign, caring pacifist of self-presentation. Instead, repeated imagery showed turbulence, rebellion, and a wish for upheaval before any composure could be reached. The pictures are of a pent-up, enclosed, green world of biomorphic forms, the best of which shaped themselves without much conscious intervention. Tensions and oppositions built up and struggled within the forms. The power of forms seeking to compose and resolve themselves was certainly exciting but also frightening, as invention produced picture after picture. There was compulsiveness about it; the urge to paint seemed never ending, consuming more and more of my time. I had teaching and family obligations to meet, yet this task leapt to the fore. The more readily pathways to the unconscious opened, the more urgently I needed to record the messages from "active imagination." Faint promptings gave way to ready access and, using water colors, I set on paper as much as could be captured. The pictures have never been exhibited, not because they are inept, but because they represent for me far more than just another example of somebody trying to be an artist.

Beginning in the hyper-stimulated 1960s, this compulsion to paint might be explained by the contagious "liberation" of that rebellious era—which was certainly a factor. But for me, drawing and painting revived a technique of self-exploration first met in the pre-adolescent analytic treatments I had when intractable health problems led my parents to send me to a psychoanalyst. She seems to have been a follower of Melanie Klein, using drawing and playing with little toys to access my reactions to the tense family dynamics which she could see accounted for my symptoms—sore joints and enuresis. That encounter with a skilled and kindly analyst was lastingly important, although its true force was "forgotten" until new anxieties in my life revived what I had learned about self-repair.

Through the 1970s, the painting ran its course and

faded from my life. Nobody, except my wife Helen, knew that anything unusual had been going on concurrently with my teaching in a department of English and leading an outwardly ordinary life. But I was changed, broadened, and more alive for what may have seemed an indulgence of the self. Possibly, nobody really noticed the difference, but I certainly did, and continue to benefit, though I do not much like the obsessive and avoidant pathological elements in my makeup that were disclosed. No amount of painting or dream analysis could ever change these, but at least I know about them and, I hope, adapt in a civilized way.

There naturally followed a quest to understand, especially from psychoanalytic theory, the origin and meaning of creativity. I have needed to read and to consider everything I could discover on the subject. Long ago I had come upon P.W. Martin's *Experiment in Depth: A Study of the Work of Jung, Eliot and Toynbee* (London, 1956), along with William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), which introduced the "twice born" personality type. Henri Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (London, 1970) discussed the productive "creative illnesses" of both Freud and Jung, while a host of British analysts and writers on art in the "object relations" school had a lot to say about creativity following Melanie Klein's delineation of an "inner world" of infancy. Notable are Ronald Fairbairn, Marion Milner, Donald Winnicott, Adrian Stokes, Hanna Segal, and Donald Meltzer. Among their publications are statements of brilliance and lasting worth, such as Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (1971), the importance of which has yet to be fully grasped. There are also more recent examples of analysts writing on creativity who, like Milner, had productive experiences of communicating with the unconscious by means of drawing and painting. They had the benefit of being able to understand the developmental implications of their own material. Alice Miller's *Pictures of a Childhood: Sixty-six Wa-*

tercolors and an Essay (1986) is a very close parallel to my own experiences with the same medium. Of late, I found another parallel in Stephen Newton's *Art and Ritual: A Painter's Journey* (2006), a moving and psychoanalytically informed account of how he discovered authentic subject matter and the means to record it in paint.

Somebody needs to question Melanie Klein's metapsychology as an adequate basis for theories of creativity. Klein's so-called "paranoid-schizoid position," resulting from a rageful death-wish in infant development, is not sustainable in current attachment theory. While there is little or no support in attachment research for Klein's account of infancy, theorizing about creativity goes on as if there were support. The problem today is that attachment research, stemming from John Bowlby, together with advances in biochemical and neurological sciences, has totally reconfigured what used to be called the "inner world of imagination." The language of "objects" no longer serves, as so recently it seemed to serve, explanations of creativity in the arts. When reacting against Klein's affront to the rules of experimental science, Bowlby renounced her language of fantasy in an inner world. To reinstate it is no easy task, and whoever does so will need a range of competence far beyond any of his or her predecessors. There are a few signs of attempts to come to terms with attachment research, for instance by the anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake in *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began* (2000). But this is just a start in re-describing the inner world according to an attachment-initiated, neurologically mediated system of full circulation of information back to the conscious self. Evoking this developmental information by art is just one segment in a circle of learning. Perception, pre-verbal seeing and touching, and then responding with internalization of expected reciprocation by mother remain the components of a theory of creativity. But they await a compelling new formulation to account for what

some artists know from experience, yet can't explain in simple words. Although now out of fashion, such explanations are possible and one way or another they will be attempted.

***Andrew Whitelaw Brink, PhD**, is a literary scholar who has researched and published extensively in artistic creativity, psychobiography, Colonial America, and pacifism. He taught literature at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, from 1961 to 1988, and then headed the now defunct Humanities and Psychoanalytic Thought Programme at the University of Toronto from 1988 to 1993 before retiring to devote himself fully to scholarship. Brink has an abiding interest in the British "object relations" theorists and the durability of their ideas about personality formation and psychopathology. He serves as the Trustee Emeritus of the Holland Society of New York, a member of the Editorial Committee of de Halve Maen: Magazine of the Dutch Colonial Period in America, and on the Editorial Board of Clio's Psyche. Among the books Professor Brink has authored are Loss and Symbolic Repair: A Study of Some English Poets (1977), Creativity as Repair: Bipolarity and Its Closure (1982), Bertrand Russell: The Psychobiography of a Moralist (1989), Obsession and Culture: A Study of Sexual Obsessions in the Modern Novel (1996), The Creative Matrix (2000), and Desire and Avoidance in Art (2007). He can be contacted at abrink@cogeco.ca.* ❑

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