

## INTRODUCTION TO THE WINNICOTT ROUNDTABLE

*Sheila Ronsen, LCSW, Guest Editor*

*I have not met another analyst [i.e., besides Winnicott] who was more inevitably himself. It was this quality of his inviolable me-ness that enabled him to be so many different persons to such diverse people. Each of us who has encountered him has his own Winnicott, and he never transgressed the other's invention of him by any assertion of his own style of being. And yet he always stayed so inexorably Winnicott.*

—Masud Khan<sup>1</sup>

In the above quote, Masud Khan captures the living paradox that was Winnicott himself: his ability to be made use of by the other for personal growth while maintaining his “inviolable me-ness.” Theoreticians of various orientations have likewise “invented” Winnicott, elaborating on his thinking by making their own creative use of him. Yet Winnicott refused allegiance to any given school of psychoanalysis, insisting on his creative independence. It was the desire to explore this dialectic of Winnicott’s unassailable “me-ness” and others’ creative use of him that led me to convene this roundtable.

My motivation did not stem from intellectual interest alone; personal reasons were also a strong factor. My initial reading of Winnicott led to the experience of feeling found and recognized by another. His ineffable prose articulated the as yet unknown aspects of my psychic life. What had been ungraspable, on the periphery of awareness, took form. I might say, as with reading great novels or poetry, that Winnicott “created” experience for me.

In the literary critic Harold Bloom’s sense, I “misread” Winnicott; there is no strict reading of Winnicott, no pinning him down to orthodox doctrine or technique. I, like others, read and appreciate Winnicott in relation to his

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<sup>1</sup> Winnicott, D.W. (1975). *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (Introduction, p. xi). Basic Books: New York.

predecessors and contemporaries. At the same time, we improvise the Winnicott “text,” making it anew by accepting his open invitation to creatively engage with his ideas.

I envisioned the Winnicott Roundtable as preserving and reflecting this improvisational spirit. I wanted it to be a wide playing field in which each member of the panel could offer his or her personal rendering of some key aspect of Winnicott’s work. The four professionals I invited were chosen not only because of their deep and longstanding involvement with Winnicott’s work, but because each participant approached Winnicott in a singular way. Most importantly, each was eager to engage in dialogue with others who shared their passion.

Since Winnicott was a pediatrician and worked with mothers, I wanted to include a woman analyst known for her work with children. To this end, I invited Professor Elsa First, a renowned child analyst who teaches at New York University’s Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis and serves on the faculty of the Parent Infant Psychotherapy Training Program at the Columbia Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research. I chose Dr. Judith Kuspit because she is a distinguished scholar and highly respected teacher of British Object Relations theory. She has a breadth of knowledge and understanding of the cultural and historical landscape of Britain before and after World War II and of the concurrent developments within the psychoanalytic movement. Dr. Kuspit is on the faculty of the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Study Center, where candidates eagerly await their opportunity to share her passion for her subject. Dr. Fayek Nakhla, a psychiatrist and member of the British Psychoanalytic Society, trained in London at the time Winnicott attained prominence. In his book *Picking Up the Pieces* (1993), co-authored with his patient, Dr. Nakhla gives a rare chronicling of an analysis that was strongly influenced by Winnicott’s work. The question, “How might an analyst make use of Winnicott’s ideas?” is given one possible answer in Dr. Nakhla’s book. Dr. Murray Schwartz, currently a Professor of Writing, Literature, and Publishing at Emerson College, was founder and organizer of the Literature and Psychology Graduate Program at SUNY/Buffalo, one of several positions he created over the years that brought together psychology and the arts. In particular, I thought Dr. Schwartz would provide a unique perspective on Winnicott the writer, and how Winnicott’s writing creates a “transitional space” for the reader’s engagement and thought.

The roundtable participants were told they could present their ideas for 20 minutes each and could refer to notes but could not read a paper. The only stipulation was that no two participants focus on the same idea in their

presentations, although they would have ample opportunity during the roundtable to respond with their own thoughts and associations to any material discussed. I felt this would offer a more organic quality to the proceedings, echoing the “formlessness” that Winnicott felt was the field from which creativity arose. Likewise, in transcribing the roundtable for publication, I wanted to give a sense of the unfolding of the day and not force an order on the proceedings that I felt would be unfaithful to what occurred. I hope my decision not to cut and paste the transcript for publication to create a coherent, linear structure, but instead to invite “unintegration,” as Winnicott might say, will encourage readers to “tick over” the material and find in it something of meaning for them. The conversational style relayed herein, with its clipped sentences, unfinished thoughts and hanging phrases, is true to the participants’ speech. In relaying it thus, my intention is to give the reader a feeling of being there, in real time, and to convey the way the ideas emerged, got dropped, re-emerged, looped back and were picked up for further associations by both the presenters and the audience.

The authors I chose to contribute to the rest of this volume add their own associations to the play of Winnicottian ideas presented during the roundtable. Dr. Almatea Usuelli Kluzer, who contributed the Commentary on the Roundtable, is an Italian analyst who has written eloquently on the role of illusion and reality in Winnicott. As she is a lesser known voice on this side of the Atlantic, I wanted to offer her an opportunity to discuss some of her American colleagues’ responses to Winnicott. In addition, I thought we would benefit from the exchange of ideas. Dr. Michael Eigen, in contrast, is well known in the U.S. for his exquisite writing, which captures the inherent paradox and the numinous quality we find in Winnicott’s writing. Dr. Eigen has been running a group for analysts for over thirty years where the works of Winnicott, Bion and Lacan are read with the same ardor and diligence scholars use to mine Talmudic text. I approached Monica Lanyado because of her experience in the psychotherapeutic treatment of children and her position as training supervisor at the British Association of Psychotherapists. She allies herself with the Independent Group of analysts in Britain, the group with which Winnicott aligned himself within the British Psychoanalytic Society in response to partisan battles between the Kleinians and Anna Freudians. I felt Monica Lanyado could offer an example of how contemporary Independents’ thinking has developed since Winnicott.

The Winnicott Roundtable took place on March 24, 2007, at the National Institute for the Psychotherapies Training Institute in New York City, as part of its Continuing Education Program. The audience consisted of 80 analysts and analysts-in-training. The proceedings were recorded and transcribed. The following is an edited version of the transcript.

*Psychoanalytic Perspectives* and the National Institute for the Psychotherapies Training Institute wishes to acknowledge its appreciation to the Winnicott Trust for its support of the publication of this issue of the journal. I would also like to personally thank Beth Dorfman, LCSW, Submissions Editor for *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, for her invaluable help in editing this transcript and Teri Gatto, Executive Director of NIP-TI, for her help with grant writing. In addition, my thanks to Dr. Edward Corrigan for his insights and generous support, without which this Roundtable would not have happened. Last, but not least, my gratitude for the ongoing encouragement and support of my husband Carl Auerbach.

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