JOHN BOWLBY AND MARGARET S. MAHLER: THEIR LIVES AND THEORIES

Traumatic aspects of the lives of John Bowlby and Margaret Mahler can be seen to inform their intellectual careers, a perspective that suggests that attachment theory and separation-individuation theory are far more consonant with one another than otherwise. Articulating the domains of convergence between the two theories reveals the essential complementarity of the special strengths of each. Both theories were attempts to understand the role of experience in the development of mental representations. Mahler paid close clinical attention to inner mental states and their evolution, while Bowlby searched for behavioral correlates that could lend themselves to empirical observation and inferences about internal representations.

At this historical moment we are trying to see if a rapprochement between the attachment theory of John Bowlby and the separation-individuation theory of Margaret Mahler is possible. The controversies between their theoretical positions occurred between people of different cultural backgrounds and different academic traditions. In many quarters, Bowlby’s theories are thought to have replaced

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Mahler's. I will argue that we need the theories of both for a comprehensive psychoanalytic understanding of development and that the two had far more in common, intellectually and developmentally, than has previously been recognized. Significantly, these theories grew up in the context of personal traumas compounded by the great historical trauma of war. Both have at their heart an identification with the traumatized child that reflects the life histories of their originators. But as we now know from the most recent round of attachment research, traumatization often brings in its wake cognitive rigidities that can be transmitted from one generation to the next; recognizing this, we should allow that we have all to some degree been affected by fallout from the great historical traumas of the twentieth century. By now, however, given the distance of a generation, we are well positioned to take a fresh look at the theories of Bowlby and Mahler. Bowlby in particular always believed that at least one generation had to pass before new ideas could take hold and be carefully evaluated. As Phyllis Tyson (2000) has suggested, there is much to be gained by a rapprochement between attachment theory and separation-individuation theory and much to be lost in each tradition if one does not take place.

Attachment theory and separation-individuation theory each have a long and complex history. Bowlby's work has been elaborated most notably by Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al. 1978), Mary Main (2000), Peter Fonagy (2001), Karlen Lyons-Ruth (2003), and Arietta Slade (2000); Mahler's by Anni Bergman (Bergman and Fahey 1994), Henri Karens (1980), Calvin Setllege (1977), John McDevitt (1991), and Fred Pine (1992). There have been several attempts to compare attachment and separation-individuation theory. Carlson and Sroufe (1995) have noted the similarity of Mahler’s observations of refueling during the practicing subphase to Ainsworth’s observations of secure base phenomena. Lyons-Ruth (1991) has argued that behavior seen as typical of the rapprochement crisis is similar to the resistant/ambivalent style of attachment described by Ainsworth, while Fonagy (1999) has noted that Bowlby’s concept of role reversal of the normal parent-child relationship is similar to Mahler’s concept of “bad symbiosis.” (For a comprehensive comparison of contemporary attachment theory with psychoanalysis, see Fonagy 2001.)

In an attempt to understand how their personal histories of loss and trauma may have influenced their lifelong interest in these issues, I will consider the lives of these two original and distinguished psycho-analytic developmental researchers. I will then compare their theories (not those of their followers) in terms of underlying assumptions regarding development and adaptation.

**JOHN BOWLBY’S BACKGROUND**

Bowlby was a somewhat reserved and mysterious figure, often experienced as remote, as having an inner calm, though at times he could be irreverent and iconoclastic. A closer look at his life, however, reveals this personal reserve as reflecting a history of repeated loss and trauma. Friends who knew him well experienced him as a remarkable listener, humanly present both as supervisor and teacher, a man very generous and attentive to those who consulted him (Hamilton 1991). As I came to recognize how much Bowlby’s personal and intellectual style was a response to the cumulative weight of the losses he had suffered, I came to better appreciate the personal sources of his passionate—at times even provocative—allegiance to attachment theory.

John Bowlby was born in London in 1907 to an upper-middle-class family. His father, Sir Anthony, was a renowned surgeon but a remote and inaccessible man whose personality surely had been affected by his own traumatic history. When Anthony was five, his own father, serving as a war correspondent in the Anglo-Chinese Opium War, was captured and brutally tortured to death. His son grew up to be a royal physician and distinguished military surgeon, famous for taking great personal risks while treating wounded soldiers at the front during World War I. At home, Anthony took care of his widowed mother all her days, postponing marriage until she had passed away.

The fourth of six children, young John was raised by a nanny in traditional English fashion. He was sandwiched between a gifted older brother and a somewhat “backward” and fragile younger brother, Jim, toward whom he felt very protective. John and his older brother Tony were only thirteen months apart; treated as twins, they were placed in the same class in school and, though great friends, were highly competitive with each other. The family divided the year between London and a summer home on the Isle of Skye. In London the children saw their mother for only an hour a day after tea, during which time she read to them. In Skye she was much more available, regularly taking the children on nature walks. When Bowlby was almost four, however, his beloved nanny, whom he described as his primary caretaker, left the
family. He would later write: “for a child to be looked after entirely by a loving nanny and then for her to leave when he is two or three, or even four or five, can be almost as tragic as the loss of a mother” (Bowlby 1958a, quoted in van Dijkken 1997, p. 25). Of his mother Bowlby said she “held the view that it was dangerous to spoil children so her responses... to bids for attention and affection were the opposite of what was required” (Byng-Hall 1987, quoted in van Dijkken 1997, p. 25).

Just as his father was sent off to war, Bowlby, then seven, was sent off to boarding school, allegedly for his safety. He later told his wife that he would not send even a “dog” away from home at that age. He began *Separation, Anxiety and Anger*, the second volume of his attachment trilogy, with the following quote from Graham Greene: “Unhappiness in a child accumulates because he sees no end to the dark tunnel. The thirteen weeks of a term might just as well be thirteen years” (Bowlby 1973, p. 3). These experiences seemed to directly influence Bowlby’s adult attitudes. Fiercely opposed to remote and rigid English child rearing, he detested the deprivation of love and affection imposed on children in the name of not spoiling them. Life-long he had an unusual sensitivity to children’s suffering. Once, when Tony had callously destroyed a picture made from flowers by the frail Jim, Bowlby fought and defeated his older brother, so outraged was he at the latter’s insensitivity (Holmes 1993, p. 15). As for his convictions about separations, both from caretakers and from homes, I needn’t elaborate.

In 1925 he began as a medical student at Trinity College, Cambridge, where, studying psychology and preclinical sciences, he won prizes for outstanding intellectual performance. After Cambridge, but before beginning clinical medical studies in London, Bowlby took time off at age twenty-one to work at Priory Gate, a progressive school for maladjusted and delinquent children, at the time a most unconventional thing to do. “Fortunately,” according to Bowlby, his father had died and thus could not oppose his sojourn as a teacher (Holmes 1993, p. 18). At the school, as Bowlby got to know his charges, he became impressed by how many were affectless and how many had lost their mother early in life.

Social conscience certainly figured in his decision to work at the school, as it had in his decision to study medicine; Bowlby always felt that it should be “the ambition of all decent-minded men to do something to improve society” (van Dijkken 1997, p. 38). In 1929, at the age of twenty-two, he entered University College Hospital in London; four years later, in 1933, he qualified in medicine. Notwithstanding his dedication, however, Bowlby found the routine of medical school “so tedious and wearisome” that with a friend he started Bogey’s Bar, a sandwich shop, just to have a diversion. He also found time, while still at University College Hospital, to enroll himself in the Institute for Psychoanalysis. His training analyst, incidentally, was Joan Riviere. On leaving University College London, he went off to train in adult psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital. He qualified as an analyst in 1937 (Holmes 1993, p. 20). After the Maudsley he worked at the Child Guidance Clinic in London, where he was first introduced to the idea of intergenerational transfer of neurosis.

After completing his training, Bowlby met his wife-to-be on holiday in Ireland and married her in 1938. She was a devoted wife, the mother of their four children, and was an inveterate reader who provided her husband with epigraphs for the chapters of his trilogy. She also wrote articles for popular magazines like *Childhood and Nursery World* on topics her husband was addressing in professional publications.

Though I don’t intend to dwell on them, there are indeed aspects of Bowlby’s development in his youth and young adulthood that invite discussion in terms of separation, from his home and from his father, and individuation. And the same interpretive rubric could usefully be brought to bear on the closest friendship of his life, with Evan Durbin, to whom Bowlby, a socially very shy student, had been introduced by his older brother while at Cambridge. Durbin was an academic who went on to become a Labour politician. He regularly contested his friend’s nascent psychoanalytic ideas, providing Bowlby the opportunity to sharpen his thinking.

They were of a mind about the need for socially concerned action; indeed Bowlby at this time saw child psychotherapy as a kind of preventive medicine that would help change not only individuals but also society. The two men had similar intellects and temperaments and spent a great deal of time talking, thinking, and eventually writing together. They were each other’s best man at their weddings, and even lived together with their families in the same house in London for six years. The fruit of their collaboration was a book published in 1938, *Personal Aggressiveness and War*. A sense of Bowlby’s psychoanalytic contribution to this volume can be gained from the following observation on “unconscious aggression” in a domestic: “It is impossible to criticise
some maids without paying for it in breakages. 'Plates come apart in my hands' far more frequently after the maid has been reprimanded than when she is praised” (Durbin and Bowlby 1938, quoted in Holmes 1993, p. 22). Bowlby continued in later life to think that the suppression of negative affect is a central cause of neurotic difficulty.

But if Durbin indubitably made a contribution to Bowlby’s development in terms of ongoing processes of separation and individuation, he made perhaps an even bigger contribution to his friend’s interest in loss and the processes of grief and mourning through his tragic death shortly after World War II, when Bowlby was in his late thirties. On holiday, Durbin drowned while saving two children whose boat had tipped over. Durbin’s death was, by Bowlby’s own account, one of the two greatest losses of his life, the first being that of his nanny; it informed his thinking about grief and mourning ever after (Holmes 1993, p. 23).

Beginning in 1940, as the war raged, Bowlby was at the “invisible college” working with fellow analysts Eric Trist, Jock Sutherland, Wilfred Bion, and Pearl King to put army selection onto a scientific footing (Victoria Hamilton, personal communication). As early as 1939 he was greatly concerned that evacuating children under the age of five to the country without their mothers could lead to subsequent widespread psychopathology (Bowlby, Miller, and Winnicott 1939). As part of his war responsibilities, he and Susan Isaacs ran the program to evacuate children from London, which inevitably led to his being confronted over and over with the impact of loss and separation on children.

After the war he became head of the children’s department at the Tavistock Clinic and promptly renamed it the Department for Children and Parents, reflecting the importance he placed on the role of parents in child development and child psychotherapy (Bretherton 1995). In collaboration with Esther Bick, Bowlby set up a child psychotherapy training program.

When asked in his later years what experiences most affected the direction of his work, Bowlby named three. First in importance was his work before the war in the home for maladjusted children, where he was impressed with the amount of actual loss and emotional deprivation experienced by his young patients; “when I was there,” he once told a colleague, “I learned everything that I have known; it was the most valuable six months in my life, really” (Senn 1977, quoted in van Dijken 1997, p. 45). This experience was foundational for Bowlby and informed his paper “Forty-four Juvenile Thieves” (1944). That work led to his being invited in 1949 by the World Health Organization to research the impact of loss on children. At that time in postwar Europe there were literally millions of children who had been separated from their parents due to war and forced emigration. The invitation resulted in the publication in 1951 of the book Maternal Care and Mental Health, which described the impact of maternal deprivation on the child, a term coined, by the way, by Bowlby himself. In this book, published in popular form as Child Care and the Growth of Love, Bowlby argues that it is psychological deprivation rather than economic, nutritional, or medical deprivation that is the cause of troubled children. In the history of social reform, this was a new idea.

Second, Bowlby mentioned his work with James Robertson in planning and filming the documentary A Two-Year-Old Goes to the Hospital (Bowlby, Robertson, and Rosenbluth 1952). This internationally recognized film demonstrates the impact of loss and suffering experienced by young children separated from their primary caretakers. Along with Maternal Care and Mental Health, the film has often been credited as a primary influence in the change in public health policy to having parents stay with children while they are in the hospital.

Third, Bowlby cited his work with Melanie Klein during his psychoanalytic training, though here, to be sure, the influence was a paradoxical one. While in supervision with Klein on his treatment of a three-year-old boy who was anxious, agitated, and hyperactive, Bowlby was impressed that not only the boy, but also the boy’s mother, appeared to be extremely anxious and distressed. But Klein forbade Bowlby to ever speak to the boy’s mother. When some three months later the mother was sent to a mental hospital and Bowlby informed Klein of it, she responded by saying, “What a nuisance, you will have to get a new case.” Bowlby believed the woman’s breakdown was of no clinical interest to Klein, and this horrified him.

From early on, Bowlby was interested in the intergenerational transmission of attachment difficulties and how unresolved issues in one generation can be visited on the next. In an early paper he noted that “a weekly interview in which problems are approached analytically and traced back into their childhood is sometimes remarkably successful. Having once been helped to recognize and recapture the feelings which she herself had as a child and to find that they are accepted tolerantly and understandingly, a mother will become increasingly
sympathetic and tolerant towards the same things in her child” (Bowby 1940, p. 175). He became as alienated from Klein’s style of theorizing, with its emphasis on hypothetical inner processes of fantasy, as from her clinical indifference. He was determined to demonstrate that the real experiences of the child, not only fantasy, have very important effects on many aspects of development. He was determined also to rely on behaviors as indicators of internal representations, by both child and mother, that can be directly and reliably observed (Karen 1990).

A more positive psychoanalytic influence on Bowlby’s thinking came from the Hungarian School, which had always stressed the primary object tie to the mother. Of particular note were the theories and clinical observations of Ferenczi, Benedek, and Hermann, especially his paper on clinging (1936). Other influences included Fairbairn and Suttie in England, as well as René Spitz’s films of orphaned infants and Harry Harlow’s films of monkeys.

Far more than was common in psychoanalytic circles in those days, Bowlby required that his theories be consistent with the findings of neighboring disciplines. He was particularly interested in Darwin’s ideas about the evolutionary pressures exerted on animals to adapt to specific environments, and he developed close working dialogues with some of the leading ethologists of his day. It is said, by no less an authority than Mary Ainsworth, that the idea of attachment as a separate motivational system came to Bowlby “in a flash” when Julian Huxley gave him an advance copy of Konrad Lorenz’s King Solomon’s Ring (Ainsworth 1982). There, of course, Lorenz writes appealingly about the phenomenon of imprinting as he recounts tales of the baby ducks who followed him around as if he were their mother.

Soon after Bowlby became head of the Child and Parent Division at Tavistock, he brought in Robert Hinde, who was to become one of his most important mentors, to teach him everything he knew about ethology. Hinde arranged a meeting between Bowlby and Harlow, and after seeing Harlow’s tapes Bowlby became convinced he was on the right track in viewing the attachment system within an evolutionary biological context (Stephen Suomi, personal communication). Once Bowlby began to theorize about attachment in earnest, he constructed his theories under the constraints of evolutionary biology and ethology. He viewed himself lifelong as a psychoanalyst who was attempting to put object relations theory and motivational theory onto a firm scientific footing.

The long run speaks for itself: he produced over one hundred fifty publications in his lifetime, including his famous trilogy, Attachment (1969), Separation (1973), and Loss (1980), which stands as the pinnacle of his achievement. But the short run was problematic: each of the famous three volumes was prefigured by a paper Bowlby wrote and presented in the late 1950s or early 1960s (Bowlby 1958b, 1960a,b), and the three papers, particularly “Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood” (1960a), succeeded most immediately only in uniting the British Psychoanalytical Society against him. Anna Freud (1960), René Spitz (1960), and Max Schur (1960) wrote scathing commentaries on his work that Fonagy (1999) has referred to as crass critiques based on a profound misunderstanding of attachment theory (1999, p. 595).1

We can in part understand the magnitude of their critique by taking in what Bowlby was advancing. He viewed attachment behavior as an evolutionary survival strategy for protecting the infant from predators. The goal of attachment included and subdued the instinctual behaviors of sucking, clinging, following, crying, and smiling; the proximal aim of these behaviors in his view was to bring the infant closer to the mother. Bowlby postulated that unless there were powerful built-in behaviors that activated maternal care the infant would die. He observed further that attachment behavior is activated by loud noises, the sudden appearance of strange or looming objects, and other phenomena that would be associated with potential threat. He also noted an increase of attachment behaviors during times of fatigue, sickness, or pain, times at which additional care is required. Although Bowlby viewed hunger and sex as instinctual behaviors in their own right, he believed that the attachment system, because it protects survival, trumps all other motives when activated. Food and sex could be postponed for a time; survival could not. Incidentally, he viewed aggression as a response to the frustration of instinctual behavior and not as an instinctual behavior in its own right. Overall he was struggling with questions of what an underlying theory of motivation should look like,

1It is important to note that these scathing critiques of Bowlby’s work took place after a period of great historical and social dislocation, after Freud and his family, as well as Max Schur, had been forced to flee the Nazis and take up residence in England. Spitz had fled at an earlier time. In the postwar era it may not have been clear that Freud’s theories would survive. Then, too, Melanie Klein and Anna Freud were involved in their own power struggles. It was a sensitive period in which Spitz, Schur, and Anna Freud were in no mood to have traditional psychoanalytic theory challenged.
but in his papers of the late 1950s he contented himself with trying to
demonstrate attachment as a preeminent system in its own right. As
corollaries, Bowlby argued that the tie to the mother is independent of
need satisfaction, that the infant’s experience of anxiety is in the service
of maintaining the connection, and that the child is indeed capable of
mourning the mother if she were to be lost. Because psychoanalysis
at that time was still fundamentally committed to the preeminence of
libidinal and aggressive drives, and to a stage theory of development
in which ego organization and libidinal phases keep step with one
another, these stipulations about the attachment bond, anxiety, and
mourning challenged several axioms dear to the hearts of his colleagues.
What is most interesting in retrospect is how Bowlby handled the ensu-
ning ruckus: he simply ceased presenting to psychoanalytic audiences,
but he did not resign his membership in the British Society; while
diffident about his clinical skills, he continued all his life to see him-
self as a psychoanalytic theorist.

Working out the implications of his understanding of personality
structure proved far more complex than Bowlby first imagined. In
broad overview, Bowlby believed that in order to stay connected to the
caretaker (usually the mother) the child develops organized patterns
of coping with her personality. He believed also that the child will go
great lengths, including making great cognitive distortions and emo-
tional sacrifices, if need be, to stay connected to her (Bowlby 1988). He
believed that “a child’s self-model is profoundly influenced by how
his mother sees and treats him; whatever she fails to recognize in him
he is likely to fail to recognize in himself” (Bowlby 1988, p. 132). If we
view Bowlby’s model of personality formation in terms of contempo-
rary emphases on affect regulation, we may say, with Arietta Slade
(1999), that for Bowlby “the structure and functioning of the child’s
mind are determined by the types of feelings that are recognized and
allowed expression within the dyad” (p. 578). In other words, the on-
goings interactions between mother and infant lead to particular styles of
regulating affect, as well as to defensive strategies for excluding nega-
tive emotions, most especially anxiety and anger, which taken together
form the bedrock on which the child’s character will develop.

We should not conclude this brief overview of Bowlby’s career
without noting his commitment to affecting public health policy on a
broad front. His lifelong devotion and acute sensitization to questions
of separation, loss, and mourning—and the ways in which these experi-
ences are taken up in individual dyads—are hardly surprising given his
history. But he went well beyond a clinical emphasis on these topics.
He so believed in the importance of the mother-child relationship that
he made a sustained effort to bring its importance to public awareness,
an effort he viewed personally as a kind of two-generational war.

MARGARET MAHLER’S BACKGROUND

In contrast to Bowlby, whose reserve is well attested, Mahler was
intense and outspoken. In her memoirs she described herself as “very
impulsive,” as having “an unusually strict superego,” and as prone
to “depression” (Mahler 1977, p. 40).

Born in 1897 in Sopron, a border town in western Hungary some
forty miles from Vienna, Margaret Schoenberger (Mahler would be her
married name) was the first of two children; her sister was four years
younger. Her father, a socially prominent physician and the chief
public health officer of the district, belonged to an exclusive local gen-
tleman’s club of which he was one of the very few Jewish members.
Her mother was a homemaker who despite the fact that her husband
“adored her” was “deeply unhappy” during Margaret’s childhood.
Mahler describes her mother as “very beautiful, very narcissistic and
greatly pampered . . . she had as little to do with me as she could”
(Steptansky 1988, p. 4).

Mahler was quite sickly during her first year of life, and it was her
father rather than her mother who got up to take care of her at night.
She later came to feel that her mother had wanted her dead. Yet when
her younger sister Suzanne arrived four years later, her mother’s matern-
inal instincts seemed to spring to life. Suzanne was welcomed into the
household, was loved and accepted, and this, Mahler later observed,
only aggravated her own sense of maternal rejection because it stood in
such great contrast to the way she was treated. It left her “angry” at her
mother and “contemptuous” of her sister. Mahler later reflected on the
impact of this experience: “I believe it was my observations of my
mother’s loving interaction with my sister—and the way it contrasted
with her interaction with me—that guided me into pediatrics and
psychoanalysis and, more specifically, into subsequent investigation of
the mother–infant dual unity” (Steptansky 1988, p. 4).

Mahler turned to her father’s world: the world of the “intellect,
medicine and science.” Her father let her into his inner sanctum; he treated
her “as a boy” and once proudly said to his friends, “I have a daughter with whom I can discuss mathematics and politics” (Stepansky 1988, p. 7).

After finishing the local Higher School for Daughters at age sixteen, Mahler, in an effort to get away from her mother and to test her father, chose to attend a gymnasium in Budapest. She was surprised that her father supported her decision. “It rather suited him, after all,” she recalled, “that I should have the career of a boy. Whether or not I was his ‘son,’ I certainly had the brains and personality to study in the manner of a son” (Stepansky 1988, p. 11). Mahler became only the second woman to leave her hometown to pursue a higher-level education usually reserved for boys (Mahler 1977, p. 3).

Soon after arriving in Budapest, she met Alice Szekely-Kovacs, later the wife of Michael Balint. The Kovacs home was a gathering place for Ferenczi, Balint, Hermann, and Benedek, the leading lights of the Hungarian school of psychoanalysis, and there Mahler was warmly received and welcomed. It was in the context of these gatherings and especially from Ferenczi that she first became interested in psychoanalysis. That she was accepted as an insider in the Budapest circle later became an enormous source of comfort to Mahler during the very stressful time of her psychoanalytic training in Vienna, where she felt herself distinctly to be an outsider: “The lasting influence of the Budapest circle on my life and career ranges beyond the support and acceptance it provided during the difficult years of my analytic training. No less important was the role of this circle in shaping both my developmental outlook and my clinical concerns. The influential Hungarian analysts with whom I mingled at the Kovacs’ Villa—Ferenczi, Hermann, Bak, Benedek—made a very special contribution to analysis that to date remains insufficiently appreciated. The whole idea of the mother-infant dual unity, for example, originates in their theoretical and clinical perspectives” (Stepansky 1988, p. 15).

In 1916 Mahler enrolled at the University of Budapest to study art history; at the beginning of the second semester, however, she left her studies in art to formally enroll as a medical student. Although she feared that her father would be opposed to her pursuing a medical career, his response when she told him was “Darling, if that makes you happy I am all with you” (Mahler 1977, p. 8). Then, after three more semesters, she transferred to the University of Munich for clinical training in pediatrics. There she became research assistant to von Degkwitz and assisted him in trying to develop serums to prevent measles. This was her first research experience, and she found it very exciting. While in Munich, Mahler began to experience a growing anti-Semitism, culminating in the Kapp Putsch of 1920. Forced by edict to live outside the city, she was arrested one day while sitting at lunch, only to be released in two to three hours, the whole incident having been set up to frighten and intimidate her. Mahler decided then to transfer to the University of Jena, there studying with the famous pediatric neurologist Ibrahim, who was at the time treating ruminating and pylorospastic infants. She was inspired by the way he treated his child patients. On Sundays he would play with the children on the floor and give them piggyback rides (Mahler 1977, p. 15). While working in his clinic, Mahler had an experience that left an indelible mark on her mind. A father brought his only son, a preschooler, to the clinic because of failure to thrive. The father, who had never been separated from his son, left the child at the clinic. The boy died that night. The father returned the next day to take his son home, having dreamed that he had felled a tree in the forest and that the tree was his son. There was no medical explanation for the child’s death. Awed by this experience, Mahler began to think that the child was symbiotically attached to the father and could not survive the rupture of the relationship (Stepansky 1988, p. 32).

At Jena, despite Mahler’s outstanding academic performance, a local chapter of the national student organization tried to have her expelled from the university because she was a Jew. Only because Peter Blos’s father intervened was she able to remain. She then spent her last semester in Heidelberg before graduating magna cum laude from Jena in 1922. Because she was not a German citizen, however, she could not practice in Germany. She returned to Vienna, only an hour by train from Sopron, and worked there at the antifeminist von Pirquet’s prestigious institute for children. She quickly became “appalled,” however, “by the detached, sterile ways children were treated in this clinic” (Stepansky 1988, p. 47).

During summers Mahler worked at Moll’s Institute for Mother-Child Care. Almost two decades earlier, Moll had openly declared himself an opponent of psychoanalysis, though his own ideas about libidinal development, specifically of a component “contraction” drive to grab hold and attach oneself to the object, strongly influenced Herrnann and through him the rest of the Budapest circle. Mahler later described Moll as in the vanguard of pediatric researchers who appreciated how important it is “to help the mother in order to help her baby” (Mahler
Moll had instituted a policy whereby infants and mothers were hospitalized together for treatment and were assigned a specific student nurse for the baby’s care. Mahler was struck with how many more babies survived on Moll’s unit than on von Pirquet’s, though treated for the very same diseases.

Soon after beginning work at von Pirquet’s clinic, Mahler was approached by Willi Hoffer, who invited her to contribute to a new periodical he was editing, the Journal for Psychoanalytic Pedagogy. Hoffer then introduced her to August Aichhorn, who directed a network of child guidance clinics and would deeply influence the course of Mahler’s career. Of Aichhorn, Mahler said, “He was the most powerful influence of my formative years, and my perspective on children and their problems owes more to him than to anyone else” (Stepansky 1988, p. 54).

When Mahler expressed interest in having a training analysis at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute, Ferenczi asked Helene Deutsch to take her on. Mahler began the analysis in 1926, but after only fifty sessions or so she found herself “tired,” so to speak, with Deutsch declaring her “unanalyzable,” an experience she not surprisingly found traumatic (Mahler 1977, p. 51). She learned later that Deutsch had told Editha Sterba, and perhaps others, that Mahler suffered from “paranoid melancholia.” Soon thereafter she was dismissed as an analytic candidate and advised to undertake a therapeutic analysis; if that proved successful, she would be allowed to reapply. Mahler turned to Aichhorn and began analysis with him; six months later he arranged for her readmission. She graduated from the institute during her analysis with him, but decided that she needed further analysis, this time with Willi Hoffer. In 1933 she was admitted for membership to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute (Mahler 1977, p. 48).

Grete Bibring, her first official supervisor, believed mothers capable of perceiving their baby’s needs even when in another room; this vision made a lasting impression on Mahler. She later commented: “To speak of the unconscious communication between a nursing mother and her infant was highly unorthodox, if not suspect, at the time; an analyst of less stature than Bibring would not have been taken seriously” (Stepansky 1988, p. 73). Mahler came to share this belief in unconscious communication as a “veritable sixth sense” that allowed a mother to “apprehend when her baby was in distress” (Stepansky 1988, p. 74). As Stepanisky has observed, these ideas clearly informed her later thinking about the symbiotic stage of development.

Mahler completed her formal analytic training in 1933. Yet she always felt like an outsider in Vienna. Contemplating her experience later, she viewed her lack of acceptance in terms of her rebellion against the antiseptic, detached interpretation of Freud’s concept of neutrality: “I harken back to my own resistance to one of the major requirements for ‘insider’ status. . . . The ethos of antiseptic detachment from patient care prescribed by the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute ran counter to everything I had learned and experienced as a pediatrician. I had seen, in von Pirquet’s clinic, how devastating a sterile, detached approach to sick children could be; conversely, I had seen in Moll’s institute how therapeutically potent an approach of loving engagement could be with sick children” (Stepansky 1988, p. 82).

Mahler’s father had always discouraged her from marrying. “What do you need that for?” he would say, and then insist that she had to take care of her sister (Mahler 1977, p. 57). In 1936, at the age of thirty-nine, Margaret Schoenberger married a “very cultured, very gentle” Viennese businessman named Paul Mahler (p. 58). Two years later, however, the young couple were overthrown by the Anschluss. Within two months after the Nazis had annexed Austria, nearly the entire psychoanalytic community had left for Britain or America. Mahler had treated a niece of Lady Leontine Sassoon, widow of the Viceroy of India. At her niece’s behest Lady Sassoon wrote a letter to the British Embassy in Vienna inviting Mahler and her husband to come to England as her personal guests. It was this letter that enabled Mahler to escape from Vienna to England for six months and then on to the United States (Mahler 1977). Mahler and her husband left for England, each with the grand sum of one and a half guineas. With “great unhappiness” and dread, they sailed for America in October 1938.

There she was unhappy with her initial reception by the New York Psychoanalytic Society. Senior analysts including Kubie, Rado, and Stern advised her to get her medical license and go “pioneering” in the hinterlands (Buffalo, specifically), presumably to get rid of the competition. Soon she was caught up in the splits and wars of the society (Eisold 1998). Manifestly, none of them wanted her in their space. When she attempted to stick it out, she found herself a pawn in the hands of Kubie, who wanted Rado and his allies out. Kubie gave her the task of running the child analysis seminar, which previously had been
conducted by David Levy. This was a move that deeply insulted the distinguished and talented child analyst, a man Mahler greatly admired, and led to his resignation from both the New York Psychoanalytic Society and the American Psychoanalytic Association. He and Rado went on to form the Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research.

In January 1940 Mahler presented a paper on pseudoimbacility that brought her immediate recognition. She was invited to publish the paper (which foreshadowed her thinking on separation-individuation) in the Psychoanalytic Quarterly; this led to her becoming an Associate in Psychiatry at Columbia, where she became chief consultant to the children's service at the Psychiatric Institute.

In the early forties, Mahler begged her parents to come to the States, but they both refused. Her father died a month before the Nazis invaded Hungary, and her sister Suzanne managed to survive as a hidden person. In 1946, Mahler received the news, in a letter from a friend, that her mother had been murdered in Auschwitz. This horrific news understandably sent her into a long and very painful mourning process. She became deeply depressed and turned to her friend and contemporary Edith Jacobson for solace (Stepansky 1988, p. 108).

Jacobson came to assume a very important role in Mahler's life in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as both friend and mentor. The two were born the same year. Jacobson was a German Jew trained at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, who like Mahler came to the U.S. to escape the Holocaust. In this period Jacobson was working on her book The Self and the Object World, a classic finally published in 1964 that provided the theoretical underpinnings for Mahler's subsequent research into the separation-individuation process. In discussing the importance of Jacobson's contribution to her thinking, Mahler said that when she met Jacobson she had no idea what the concept of a "mental representation" meant. She had no idea what Jacobson was talking about. At some point Mahler went into analysis with Jacobson, an analysis she considered more successful than her earlier one with Willi Hoffer: "She helped me to work through and ultimately relinquish a certain tendency to form paranoid ideas" (Stepansky 1988, p. 120). As for Mahler's problematic relations with the New York psychoanalytic community, this strain was eased tremendously when in 1950 she accepted an invitation to teach at the Philadelphia Psychoanalytic Institute, where she became chair of the child analytic

program. Teaching there, as she put it, was "one of my pride and joys, ... one of the most gratifying of my activities and the most lasting contribution" (Mahler 1977, p. 55). For over a decade, Philadelphia would be her professional home away from home, even as New York remained her home base for research.

In the late 1950s, a decisive turning point occurred when Mahler and Manuel Furer opened the Masters Children's Center in Manhattan. It was at the Masters Center that Mahler developed the tripartite treatment model in which the mother joined the treatment as an active participant in the child's therapy and was routinely present in the room during the initial sessions (Mahler and Furer 1960). At the center, Furer and Mahler were particularly struck by the symptomatology of symbiotic child psychosis, which they saw as a derailment of the normal processes whereby self- and object representations become distinct. Soon, however, Mahler began to recognize that her nascent hypotheses about separation-individuation needed to be validated with normal populations. She no longer believed that the study of disturbed children in treatment could alone tell us what we needed to know about normal development. Fred Pine, Anni Bergman, and John McDevitt joined her and Furer in a research effort supported by the NIMH. This period became the most creative and generative time in Mahler's life. From 1958, when she and Furer wrote their first paper together, until 1975, when The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant was published, coauthored with Pine and Bergman, she and her colleagues published over thirty papers that came to revolutionize psychoanalytic developmental theory as understood in North America.

A COMPARISON OF BOWLBY'S AND MAHLER'S BACKGROUNDS

Although Bowlby and Mahler came from very different cultural backgrounds—Bowlby was an English Protestant, Mahler a Hungarian Jew—they both came from comparable upper-middle-class backgrounds and grew up in socially prominent and philanthropically minded physician families. A major difference is that unlike Bowlby, who had the support of his culture and immediate family circle, Mahler was overtly rejected by her mother and subsequently subjected to virulent anti-Semitism and misogyny during her academic training. She must have had formidable determination to pursue her own
developmental and intellectual trajectory in the face of this disorganizing and devastating threat.

The two had in common early traumatic emotional experiences that affected the course of their intellectual development. Bowlby was deeply affected by his mother’s inaccessibility, though he was compensated by his nanny’s attentions—hence the overwhelming importance of the loss of this primary attachment relationship at the age of five. Later the loss of Durbin, his closest friend, dealt him another blow. Mahler, quite similarly, was profoundly affected by her mother’s disinterest and hostile rejection from the beginning of her life, a plight compounded by the mother’s very different attitude toward her younger daughter, and later by her mother’s death in the Holocaust. But Mahler, too, was to some extent compensated—in her case by her father’s interest in a daughter he considered worthy to be his “son.” Stepansky has argued that Mahler had a lifelong struggle to establish a sense of identity in relation to the various milieus she entered and that this struggle informed her interest in the theoretical constructs of separation-individuation. By comparison, Bowlby would seem to have struggled primarily with issues of loss and their emotional fallout. Yet both were self-authorized, determined individuals who pursued their interests with vigor and passion in the face of formidable opposition. It is an interesting historical fact, given the importance we now place on their contributions, that both Bowlby and Mahler went essentially unrecognized by their original professional associations: Bowlby by the British Psychoanalytical Society, Mahler by the Vienna Society. Luckily, both were blessed with the two qualities Bowlby believed necessary for winning acceptance for new ideas: a strong belief in one’s own convictions and a long life (Victoria Hamilton, personal communication). Mahler died at the age of eighty-eight in 1985, Bowlby five years later at eighty-three.

Bowlby and Mahler were developing their ideas simultaneously on two different continents, yet though their lifespan was less than their concepts overlapped, they had no public intellectual dialogue. Early in their careers, each published a paper on the importance of the child’s profound emotional tie to the mother—an idea that would occupy their thinking the rest of their lives. Bowlby at the age of thirty-three, in “The Influence of Early Environment in the Development of Neurosis and Neurotic Character” (1940), and Mahler at the age of forty-five in “Pseudoimbecility” (Mahler-Schonberger 1942), began to spell out their ideas about the deep interconnection of mother and baby.

For the record, Bowlby references Mahler’s work in at least two papers and in three books. As for his criticisms, we might observe that Bowlby principally challenged the concept of an autistic developmental stage and the associated idea, not original with Mahler, of primary narcissism, both ideas that Mahler later gave up. Mahler, meanwhile, references Bowlby’s work in at least four papers and one book, though in these references she is generally content to observe that he, like herself, is a theorist who recognizes the importance of the child’s actual experiences, not just the fantasized ones. Bowlby returned the compliment in one of his citations of Mahler’s work, observing that they both give “substantial weight to the influence of the environment on development” (Bowlby 1973, p. 360). Neither theorist was an outstanding diplomat, so we perhaps should not have hoped for greater contact between them. Still, the fact is that in 1984, a year before Mahler died, Bowlby visited New York and told his friend Kay Rees that he wanted very much to meet Mahler and asked her to invite her to tea. They met on a Sunday afternoon, and Rees (personal communication) recalls they had a “whale of a time” and “got on like a house on fire.” They did not discuss theory but rather regaled each other with their irreverent escapades. They seemed to bond with each other over their shared roles as iconoclasts. At the very least, this contributed to their enjoying each other.

**CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES**

Let us begin by first clearing away an obstacle that has perhaps inadvertently kept people from trying more assiduously to integrate these two theories—namely, the difference in terminology. At first glance, the two theorists appear to be talking about two quite different things, “attachment” being the very opposite of “separation.” And beyond this accidental opposition in terminology, it is easy to suspect a more substantive difference. That is, the casual observer might suppose that Mahler is saying that separation is necessary for individuation, while Bowlby is stressing, to the contrary, that individuation occurs optimally only within the framework of secure attachment. But even a moment’s reflection will reveal that for Mahler separation from the object is an inner mental process that involves distinguishing oneself from an object who otherwise is libidinally available on a continuous basis. Put in Bowlby’s terms, separation is a process that occurs within the envelope
of attachment. There are differences between their two theories, to be sure, but they are in agreement on these essentials.

Overall, their resemblances are quite extraordinary in many ways. For both, their careers as psychoanalytic theorists were predicated, in the first instance, on personal observations of specific forms of childhood psychopathology. Bowlby interested himself in the etiology of the juvenile thieves he found in the group home, Mahler in the autistic and symbiotic psychoses she saw in the Masters Children’s Center. Their research led each to develop theories that extend well beyond the specific populations they studied—theories of how mental representations of stable objects develop in the mind of the child, or what today we might call theories of affect regulation. Then, too, as physicians as well as analysts, both were on a mission to change what they saw as the evils of institutional treatment of children. Both had strong interests in early intervention and preventive psychiatry. Both sought to reform medical practices that disregarded children’s subjective experiences of fear and anxiety and their need for parents and responsible adults to regulate their sense of security. Similarly, both regarded direct observation of children as essential to psychoanalytic theory building. They believed that hypotheses should be checked, refined, or discarded based on direct observation. Neither believed that a psychoanalytic account of early development can be based on adult reconstructions alone. They rather saw these reconstructions as providing hypotheses requiring confirmation through direct observational studies. Coupled with their emphasis on the real experiences of the child and on the variegated ways in which adaptation to the child’s environment can occur, this commitment to direct observation instilled in them a scientific rigor unusual for psychoanalytic theorists of their generation. It led them to yet another commitment—to joint treatment with the child’s mother, to the end of helping her develop an understanding of the child’s experience—a commitment that makes them equally forerunners to some of today’s most innovative forms of mother-child psychotherapy. Mahler and Bowlby each had great empathy for the mother’s experience during a time when that was a rare capacity indeed. Bowlby (1949), by the way, has been credited with writing the first family therapy paper, in which he reports a clinical breakthrough achieved by asking parents about their childhood experiences in the presence of their children (Bremerton 1995). Each was sensitive also to the intergenerational transfer of trauma. Indeed, Bowlby (1980) believed that the therapeutic principles derived from Mahler’s work, as spelled out by Joan Fleming (1975), are “extremely close” to those that he derived from attachment theory (p. 433).

As for the influence of other thinkers on them, we find a mixed picture. Within psychoanalysis, as we have seen, they were both highly influenced by the Hungarian school of psychoanalysis and its emphasis on the relational nature of early development. They were both, for example, particularly impressed by Hermann’s paper on clinging. And yet informing the thought of each was a set of authors the other largely ignored. For example, in The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant one looks in vain among Mahler’s references for any mention of Darwin, Lorenz, or Harlow, all thinkers dear to Bowlby’s enterprise. Similarly, the name Edith Jacobson, so important to Mahler, does not appear in the indexes of volumes 1 and 2 of Attachment and Loss, though to be sure several of her works are referenced in the third volume. Yet the differences in their theoretical allegiances are easy to overstate. Consider that Bowlby himself was willing to concede that the difference vis-à-vis more traditional notions was more terminological than substantive. He had this to say about his notion of “internal working model”: “Although the concepts of working models and forecasts derived from working models may be unfamiliar, the formulation adopted is no more than a way of describing, in terms compatible with systems theory, ideas traditionally described in such terms as ‘introjections of an object’ (good or bad) and ‘self-image’” (Bowlby 1973, p. 204).

Bowlby thought that this language offered the advantage of being more descriptively precise and better lent itself to systematic research. As for Mahler, consider that for all her emphasis on internal representations, she readily conceded that these reflect adaptation by the child to the actual interpersonal environment. In the following passage, written in 1963 and reprised in 1975, we find variants of the word adaptation three times in the same sentence: “From the beginning the child molds and unfolds in the matrix of the mother-infant dual unit. Whatever adaptations the mother may make to the child, and whether she is sensitive and empathic or not, it is our strong conviction the child’s fresh and pliable adaptive capacity, and his need for adaptation (in order to gain satisfaction), is far greater than that of the mother, whose personality, with all its patterns of character and defense, is firmly and often rigidly set” (Mahler 1963, quoted in Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975, p. 5).
In Mahler’s last paper, written with McDevitt and published in 1982, her writing again sounds very much like Bowlby. Here are two examples. She refers to the infant’s “attachment behavior” and adds: “if the infant’s development of his sense of self takes place in the context of his dependence on the mother, the sense of self that results will bear the imprint of her care-giving” (Mahler and McDevitt 1982, p. 837). This is very similar to Bowlby’s depiction of the working model of attachment, which he once characterized in these terms: “In the working model of the world that anyone builds, a key feature is his notion of who his attachment figures are, where they may be found, and how they may be expected to respond” (Bowlby 1973, p. 203). And about individuation, Mahler writes in the same paper that “one of the most important consequences of the sense of self as agent is the infant’s ability to internalize some of the mother’s organizing pattern of behavior—her soothing activities” (Mahler and McDevitt 1982, p. 843). Indeed, Mahler’s case histories in *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* are extremely nuanced; they have the contextual specificity that Bowlby advocated, a specificity linking the child’s behavior to its experience with a given set of parents.

In short, both Bowlby and Mahler were interested in how adaptation influences the development of mental representations. To be sure, Bowlby viewed external reality as closely linked to transformations in mental representations, while Mahler was more concerned about the child’s developing internal capacity to differentiate self- and maternal representations. Mahler was also interested in how the child’s particular characteristics shape mental representations. Bowlby, by contrast, allowed no space for temperament in his thinking, a major weakness in his theorizing.

In Mahler’s early work she attempted to make her observations consistent with traditional psychoanalytic theory, but later on she became interested in integrating her findings with contemporary developmental theory. At the end of her life Mahler (1983) wrote the following: “Paraphrasing what Zarathustra said in the prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘I say unto you: you must still have chaos in yourself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.’ I, the researcher of development in infants from four to thirty-six weeks of age, feel a most propitious chaos in my mind right now while trying to integrate the rich and most interesting ‘knowledge explosion’ with the separation-individuation process” (p. 6).

Up to this point, I have stressed the enormous degree of convergence between Bowlby’s and Mahler’s theories. This convergence is all the more remarkable, I think, when we recognize that they started from radically different assumptions in two crucial domains: drive theory and stage theory.

Let me begin with drive theory. Right along, Mahler attempted to fit her observations into classical theory, which posited a succession of libidinal stages occurring in an invariant sequence in health. In this scheme, psychopathology invariably entails regressions to and/or fixations at one or another libidinal stage. Moreover, since Anna Freud, it was further assumed that ego organization, how the self is constituted as a functional entity, develops in lockstep with drive organization. Ego regression and fixation at preoedipal forms of ego organization are hallmarks of more serious psychopathology.

All this Mahler more or less assumed as a point of departure, even as she sought to make more refined and rigorous observations. Thus, for Mahler, thinking in terms of “oral phase” or “anal phase” stages came naturally; she included phenomena like “castration anxiety” and “neutralized drive energy” to her picture of ordinary developmental sequences. Given the psychoanalytic zeitgeist of her times, she likely experienced enormous political pressure to stay within the traditional psychoanalytic canon. Given her indomitable independence of thought, however, it is somewhat surprising that she did not make a greater theoretical departure from this canon than she did. In fact, as she well knew, what she was theorizing was revolutionary in its time, in at least two ways. First, she was describing how the ego, or self, comes into being not with primary reference intrapsychically to its growing ability to gain control and mastery over endogenous drives, but in terms of how it gradually comes to feel itself distinct and separate from its objects. Second, she was shifting the burden of the most crucial of all developmental steps, the development of the self, away from the oedipal and firmly locating it in a much earlier stage of development. Indeed, we should remember that her stage theory is quite different from anything that had preceded it, amounting to an object-relational stage theory of the first two to three years of life. Nor should we forget just how radical all these steps were at the time, and how much her thinking mattered to clinicians who were just then turning their attention more fully to borderline and narcissistic patients.

Thus, to those who note how “old-fashioned” her language is in *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* and other places, it
may be replied that she was making a revolution, but in a different part of the vineyard. Bowlby, by contrast, decided at the outset of his career to jettison traditional drive theory as the touchstone of developmental theorizing.

As it happens, Bowlby did not directly criticize Mahler’s use of drive theory, which no doubt he simply considered traditional. Where he did depart strongly was from her parallel commitment to a stage theory. Bowlby had great reservations about stage theories generally, and about the concept of developmental lines in particular. He contrasted psychoanalytic developmental stage theory with the systems theory he proposed, in which development is viewed as proceeding along “an array of possible and discrete pathways. All pathways are thought to start close together so that, initially, an individual has access to a large range of pathways along any one of which he might travel. The one chosen, it is held, turns at each and every stage of the journey on an interaction between the organism as it has developed up to that moment and the environment in which it then finds itself...” (Bowlby 1973, p. 364). Using a model dear to the British, that of a railroad, he contrasted this systems-derived view with traditional stage theory:

These two, alternative, theoretical models can be likened to two types of railway system. The traditional model resembles a single mainline on which are set a series of stations. At any one of them, we may imagine, a train can be halted, either temporarily or permanently; and the longer it halts the more prone it becomes to return to that station whenever it meets with difficulty further down the line. The alternative model resembles a system that starts as a single main route, which leaves a central metropolis in a certain direction but soon forks into a range of distinct routes. Although each of these routes diverges in some degree, initially most of them continue in a direction not very different from the original one. The further each route goes from the metropolis, however, the more branches it throws off and the greater the degree of divergences of direction that can occur... In terms of this model the critical points are the junctions at which the lines fork, for once a train is on any particular line, pressure is present that keep it on that line; although provided divergence does not become too great, there remains a chance of a train taking a convergent track when the next junction is reached [Bowlby 1973, p. 364].

In this context, Bowlby had further, specific reservations about the stages that Mahler had described. He did not subscribe, for example, to the idea of an autistic phase; nor did he accept the idea of primary narcissism. Bowlby believed that the infant is born ready to become attached to a specific caregiver and that this immediate attachment is essential for survival. Contemporary research has strongly supported his position. In Mahler’s early work, she viewed the infant as living in an autistic shell, a state of primary narcissism. Interestingly, this is a theoretical position she changed her mind about toward the end of her career, when she was eager to take on the challenge of the new findings from infant research.

Bowlby also rejected another facet of traditional stage theory—namely, the idea that one can understand disordered adult personality as a fixation at an earlier level of normal development, and specifically the notion that borderline psychopathology can be understood as a fixation at the rapprochement level, where splitting as a defense predominates and object constancy has not been established. Mahler herself later in life developed her own substantial reservations about the applicability of observations about the development of separation-individuation to adult psychopathology. Little appreciated in this regard is that she ultimately distanced herself from the view, which she originated, that borderline transference oscillations recapitulate the phenomena of the rapprochement subphase (John Kerr, personal communication). She no longer believed that adult psychopathology can be viewed as a fixation at an earlier level of development.

Bowlby (1980) had similar, though more complex, reservations about Mahler’s concept of libidinal object constancy. He found it unsatisfactory, in part because it was linked to a drive theory that he outright rejected and in part because, following Fraiberg (1969), he felt the term was used in at least three different ways, a situation that led to confusion. Spitz (1957) and Furman (1974) equated it with Piaget’s concept of object permanence. Hartmann (1952) and Anna Freud (1968) reserved it to denote the child’s capacity to keep up object cathexis irrespective of frustration, which was contrasted with a previous stage that held the object as nonexistent, unnecessary whenever a need or libidinal wish is not present. Finally, Mahler (1966), Pine (1974), and McDevitt (1975) used it to refer to a stage when the child can function away from the mother for some length of time with emotional poise, provided a fairly familiar environment.

In general, Bowlby acknowledged that there are incremental changes in the differentiation of self- and object representations, but he did not like to conceptualize them as stages. He viewed separation-
individuation as moving along multiple pathways. His focus was on individual differences and different pathways, rather than on stages and fixations. If classification was needed, he preferred to do it with a typology of secure and insecure types of attachment and its subvariants as spelled out by Mary Ainsworth.

Yet I would be wrong to leave the impression that Mahler's work rises and falls with the stage theory he enunciated and that Bowlby distanced himself from. A careful reading of Mahler's case histories in The Birth of the Human Infant (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975) shows such sensitivity to the context of development that I believe that her observations easily fit into an evolutionary biological frame of reference and with systems theory in particular. My guess is that if she had the opportunity to participate in current theoretical dialogues her thinking would have moved much more in the direction of systems or complexity theory. Consider the following brief description of Teddy, a child with early traumatization in the form of deprivation of mothering:

Thus, certain behaviors, such as the relative lateness of his specific attachment to mother (compensation by prolonged symbiosis), or later, his excessive clowning, which at superficial observation might have been interpreted as maladaptive, were definitely found to be adaptive for his own particular needs in his particular situation [p. 169].

During the rapprochement period, even though Teddy's mother was emotionally fully available to him, she always included his older brother Charlie. Mrs. T., as we said, made a point of identifying the two children with each other, treating them almost as though they were twins. Thus, the rapprochement subphase did not seem to have a distinct beginning or end and lacked full subphase specificity. Still, Teddy entered into the third year having attained the expectable degree of object constancy and a high degree of individuality [p. 175].

Two points quickly: First, we see how readily Mahler concedes the existence of a departure, though one still within normal limits, from her postulated stage theory in the face of specific environmental factors. Second, though it is too complex to explicate here, we see how the developmental pathway of this little boy has veered off in response not only to his own trauma, in the form of the loss of his mother's availability, but in response also to her traumas (the death of her father, an injury to Teddy's older brother) and to the general changes that these have brought in the system of attachment relationships in the family as a whole. In short, this is a clinical case description that would have been right up Bowlby's alley. In fact, if one reads the second half of The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant carefully, one finds again and again that Mahler's case descriptions are more nuanced than one might expect. The cases are more ready to depart from the stage theory of the first half of the book than one might ever imagine. Though the cases are used to illustrate progression along the separation-individuation developmental line, the descriptions are very attentive to complex and unique individual mother-infant pathways that do not fit onto any simple linear pathway.

It is too early to think of Bowlby and Mahler simply as important historical psychoanalytic developmental theoreticians. Their work is alive and of great living relevance to us today. Their theories, both conceptual and clinical, form the underpinnings of a modern relational psychoanalytic theory of development. Bowlby's work illustrates dynamic systems theory very directly, while Mahler's clinical work, though not presented originally to illustrate dynamic systems theory, is nevertheless entirely consistent with a contemporary dynamic systems perspective. Any current reading of psychoanalytic developmental theory makes it clear that dynamic systems theory is reshaping the way we think about and are rethinking development. It is my belief that the future of a really clinically meaningful psychoanalytic developmental theory lies in its becoming a fully elaborated relational dynamic systems theory. In this regard, the depth of Bowlby's and Mahler's thinking was decades ahead of their time, and only now are we beginning to catch up with their most profound contributions.

Had Bowlby and Mahler lived another ten years, a dialogue between them might well have had a significant impact on the thinking, of both, an eventuality that likely would have reduced their theoretical differences. Those differences aside, I believe that the convergences in their observations and in the clinical implications that follow far outweigh the divergences. Bowlby and Mahler would have been on the same page in a case conference, particularly around the specificity of their understanding of the mother's role in the development of the child's management of affect regulation and around their recommendations for intervention.

In conclusion, I see Bowlby and Mahler as brilliant and generative thinkers whose work enormously widened the scope of a psychoanalytic understanding of development. Both hold a special place in
our theoretical and clinical thinking that will endure. It will be the challenge for our generation to move their work forward and to deepen our understanding of how inner world and lived experience intertwine in the developing mind.

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