

## The Pram in the Hall 2: A stranger in a strange land

For my second post I'm looking at creativity during pregnancy in a bit more detail. A lot of what I'm writing here might be most true of the first pregnancy you experience, although subsequent ones can be so different from the first that they can make you feel new to this time all over again. Creativity can be developed and enhanced by new experiences, since they give us a different perspective and new tools or ideas to play with. Our creative outputs can also benefit from exploring ourselves in greater detail. If you are a creative person and are pregnant, make the most of this time when you can.



Taweret, an ancient Egyptian hippo goddess of pregnancy and motherhood. (Image by Jeff Dahl, via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

### Useful tools

Some useful tools for any time as a creative person, but certainly good during pregnancy are:

**Recording** what goes on around us. Perhaps have a special tiny notepad to carry round with you and note ideas, feelings, sensations in.

Reflection. If you can, set aside a little time each day to consider the changes you are experiencing on all levels.

**A sense of curiosity.** You will probably come across every kind of 'must-do' pregnancy experience or birth preparation, many of which have a creative element. From belly painting to pregnancy massage, having a cast of your body or seeing 3-D scans of your baby and more, some will appeal, some may not. It is worth trying a few, however, perhaps even one that does not immediately appeal or seems silly, perhaps something that you don't even intend to use. Painting your belly may seem horribly hippy to you but you may find it fun and a new kind of creative outlet. You may not like your new body but see it in a different light when it is made of plaster. Enjoy experimenting a little.

### **Questioning ourselves**

Pregnancy can throw up many questions about your values and lifestyle choices and even your creative likes and dislikes. These are worth taking time over, not so much because the end result is important (most choices as parents that we fret over are not really all that crucial in the end, we all find a way that works for us and our children) but because the questioning process itself is interesting and a rare opportunity to consider aspects of our lives we may have taken for granted. What are your views on the environment and do you stand by them no matter the personal impact? Which of the many, many ways to parent attracts you and why? Who is part of the inner circle of your life and which relationships are shifting and changing around you? What are your career aspirations? Your life aspirations? Your material needs and desires? Weirdly, it is often in the seemingly mundane process of preparing for a baby that some of these questions come up. Who is allowed to shop with you and who isn't? What style of nursery decoration is unthinkable to you when someone else might find it delightful? Why do you desperately want some item which you would have shrugged off as frivolous or unnecessary before being pregnant? What is the parenting life you are envisioning when you buy a certain item over another? When you can, spend time wondering about these questions when they arise, they offer some valuable insights into ourselves as individuals and our values, which often translate into our creative impulses.

### **Our changing bodies**

This year's Mslexia journal is focused on the body and on exploring it: really seeing and feeling every part of it and considering how we choose

to communicate it through our creative work. During pregnancy, the changes your body goes through (and your lack of control over most of them) can be mesmerising. For some women it can be a time when they finally feel at ease with a body image they have struggled with, for others it can be an unsettling experience. Either way, the shifting nature of your body in a speeded-up timeframe can grow rich material for our creative selves to play with. Not only is there the physical aspect to experience but many physical elements can also be highly emotive, from the first felt movements of a child within to moments of fear, tedium and frustration, happiness and more that different stages and changes can bring.

### **Emotions and our relationships with others**

Perhaps because of hormones, or simply because of the whirling storm of changes in which we find ourselves, our range of emotions can be not only broadened but intensified. Patient people find themselves losing their tempers, the more passionate seem becalmed. A pat on the growing belly from a stranger can bring us out in tears of happiness at everyone's vast kindness to us or a violent desire to slap away the offending hand. These emotions can lead us to see both ourselves and others in a new light, to shift our relationships accordingly (even if only for a split second) and these are valuable to us in our creative work, in finding new ways to be ourselves and to be with others. Those around us can see our emotions more clearly written on our faces than when we might otherwise mask ourselves with social graces, and they respond accordingly.

### **The strength of creativity in our dark hours**

I feel it would be remiss of me to imply that all pregnancies are a fascinating time of happy creativity. For many reasons not all pregnancies are easy and not all end happily. Two early miscarriages inevitably coloured my experiences of my own two subsequent pregnancies. Without wishing to tread heavily on paths I have not had to walk, I know that creative outputs (both their own and those of others) have been a source of strength to people who have struggled through hard pregnancies or lost their baby. For myself it was a poem by Alice Meynell, written about her baby who had died: "...But oh, ten years ago, in vain, A mother, a mother was born." (Maternity) reflecting the change I felt I had made as a person (mentally and emotionally becoming a parent), which was not reflected in how others saw me.

### **The built-in deadline**

Finally, of course, we come back to lack of time as a wonderful source of creative inspiration. A great many first drafts or final proofs have been completed in the shadow of a looming due date. If you have a piece of work which has been procrastinated over, try using this deadline as your chance to reach the next stage of the work involved, it can be an astonishingly good motivator!

During pregnancy you may often feel yourself a stranger in a strange land which used to be known to you. If you can grab tiny moments in which to explore this time to the full, you may find it a rich source of inspiration, motivation and creative gestation, a storing-up of experiences on which you can draw in your current and future creative work.

In my next post I'll be looking at maternity leave, a time of new priorities and awakenings (although sadly most awakenings around small children are just too damn early).