

Irma Schwartz

Melanie Klein

What applies to most pioneers of psychoanalysis is the more or less strong and distinct interconnection of their theoretical reflections with their life and personality, and this applies in a special degree to Melanie Klein.

Therefore you will find here Melanie Klein's biography first and following this her theoretical work will be presented.

Melanie Klein was born 30th March 1882 in Vienna as the youngest daughter of Moriz and Libussa Reizes (née Deutsch). Her birthplace, Tiefer Graben 8, in the First District does not exist anymore, like other buildings connected with Melanie Klein's period of life in Vienna too. It was destroyed in World War II and replaced by a new building. The same goes for her later physical address Martinstraße 1 in the 17th District, where now a garage fills the gap site where the house had been.

And it goes for the primary school in Alser Straße too, which today does not exist anymore. Melanie Klein's father came from an Orthodox-Jewish family in Lemberg, with whom he had broken off because he associated with a more liberal emancipatory Jewish movement. Moriz Reizes was a general practitioner in Deutschkreutz in the Burgenland of today. Melanie's mother, 24 years her husband's junior, is described as an educated, beautiful, spirited, interesting young woman. She came from Slovakia, and in contrast to the family of Melanie's father, from a more open, tolerant, educated Jewish family. Melanie Klein's three older siblings were born shortly after each other in Deutschkreutz: Emilie 1876, Emanuel 1877 and Sidonie 1878. Because of ongoing financial difficulties the family decided to move to Vienna. At the time of Melanie Klein's birth her father was 54 years old already. Melanie was most of all the favourite of her uncle Hermann, mother's brother. He had lived with the family as a student and supported the family constantly, by helping with money again and again after he later became a successful lawyer. The flat in Martinstraße, where the family lived for the longest time, was financed by mother's brother.

Dieses Kapitel ist ein Nachdruck aus dem Buch: O. Frischenschlager (Hrsg.): Wien, wo sonst! (Wien, 1994, Böhlau-Verlag) mit freundlicher Erlaubnis des Herausgebers.

Melanie Klein stood out from early on by her intellectual curiosity and her ambition, which brought out rivalry with her three older siblings. Her sister Sidonie died at the age of four, probably of tuberculosis. With the help of her brother, who besides suffered from a heart disease, Melanie passed the entrance exam to grammar school and at the age of fourteen she was certain of her wish to study medicine. The biography of Phyllis Grosskurth shows Emanuel in other ways too as a very important attachment figure, perhaps he even was the great love of Melanie's life. He supported the relationship with Arthur Klein, whom Melanie met at the age of seventeen and married straight after Emanuel's death. In addition to his illness Emanuel had fallen into selfdestructive circumstances and died of alcoholism, drug addiction and malnourishment in 1902 in Italy.

The marriage of Melanie Reizes and Arthur Klein took place one day after her 21st birthday in 1903. Her husband was a chemist. About the period of this marriage and how it went almost nothing is known. But Melanie dropped her plan of studying medicine. She had three children, 1904 Melitta, 1907 Hans and 1914 Erich. A possible reason for this marriage might also have been the ongoing financial difficulties in her parental home, from which Melanie tried to escape. All in all the marriage had not been a happy one, she herself described it as 'the first big mistake of her life'. Obviously her children were not wanted, at least she wanted to avoid the second pregnancy absolutely and fell into a deep depression while pregnant with her second child. Interesting in this context is that Melanie knew from her mother that she herself was unwanted, too. Furthermore Melanie was the only one of the four siblings who was not nursed by the mother but handed over to a wet nurse.

Melanie Klein spent only few years in Vienna. During her engagement already she often stayed with her parents in law in Rosenberg (Slovakia), the capital of the Hungarian province Liptau. Thereafter the Klein family often changed residence, until they came to Budapest in 1910. There Melanie Klein's burdens seem to have increased enormously. In 1914 her mother died, in the same year Melanie Klein gave birth to her son Erich and the problems of marriage seem to have increased more and more. However she went in psychoanalytical treatment with Sándor Ferenczi at this time. As a result, probably considerably supported by Ferenczi, she quickly developed great interest in psychoanalysis. Ferenczi encouraged her to give her attention to child analysis. In 1919 she became a member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Society. In 1918 she had met Freud on occasion of the 5th Psychoanalytical Congress in Budapest. She was highly impressed by him and, as she wrote later, having met him raised her wish to 'dedicate' herself to psychoanalysis.

Arthur Klein was drafted in World War I and returned from the war wounded in 1916. The couple seemingly had moved apart more and more even after repeated attempts to reconcile. Arthur Klein's move to Sweden led to a new separation. During this time Melanie Klein often stayed with her parents-in-law again and increasingly left her children with them. When she moved to Berlin in 1921 she only took her youngest child Erich with her. After a renewed reconciliation with Arthur Klein the marriage apparently had split up definitely, but the bio-

graphic data about the date of divorce differ. In Berlin she went anew into analysis with Karl Abraham, however he passed away only one year later in 1925. This was a big blow for Melanie Klein, particularly because she was very much supported by Abraham. The other members of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Association rather rejected and criticized her because of her research of the early childhood unconscious.

As soon as 1920, she began the analysis of little boy Fritz, whose identity she revealed in the same year in a letter to Ferenczi. It was her youngest son Erich. And it seems as good as certain, that the analysis of Hans and of Melitta was also performed by their own mother. In her publications Melanie Klein named them Felix and Lisa. During the first time in Berlin Erich's psychological difficulties increased. But Melanie Klein never had the idea this could be connected with her. She only spoke of repressed libidinous wishes as the reason for his fears. For theory development especially this fact seems to be relevant, because pioneers of psychoanalysis frequently drew the 'case material' from their own family. In Berlin Melanie Klein developed her psychoanalytic play technique and finally, she was able to show that children mostly used their toys to express phantasies and fears symbolically.

Invited by Ernest Jones, Melanie Klein got the chance to give lectures in London. In 1926 she moved to England. The death of Abraham made this decision even easier and furthermore she recognized the imminent danger of increasing anti-Semitism in Berlin. One year later she became an ordinary member of the British Psychoanalytic Association. Her daughter Melitta had married the psychoanalyst Walter Schmiedeberg in 1924 and she went on studying medicine in Berlin. Melanie Klein's son Hans, who had been adjudged to his father Arthur Klein, lived in Rosenberg with his grandparents and lost his life in 1934 in a tragic accident in the mountains. Melanie Klein was so distressed by the death of Hans, that she did not even attend his funeral. According to her son Erich, who later named himself Eric Clyne, she was never able to cope with Hans's death until her dying day.

Melitta Schmiedeberg followed her mother to England in 1928. Melitta and her brother Erich lived in a joint household with their mother. In Berlin Melitta Schmiedeberg had already begun her own psychoanalysis with Karen Horney. Walter Schmiedeberg who did not get a chance of leaving the country until 1932, only then followed them to England. Edward Glover - in England Melitta Schmiedeberg's analyst - originally agreed with Melanie Klein's theories, but later he became one of her loudest critics together with Melitta Schmiedeberg.

The arrival of Sigmund and Anna Freud in London in 1938 increased the tension within the British Psychoanalytic Association rapidly and led to severe controversies, most of all between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein. These disagreements never divided the British Psychoanalytic Association, but a group of 'Kleinians' evolved, in vigorous opposition to the classic-minded analysts. After Glover retired from the British Psychoanalytic Association in 1944 Melitta Schmiedeberg moved to New York in 1945. She only returned to England in 1961.

Mother and daughter were never reconciled. After World War II Melanie Klein worked mainly as a training psychoanalyst and supervisor and withdrew from the British Psychoanalytic Association. Since Melanie Klein feared her lifework would not outlast her, the 'Melanie Klein Trust' was founded in 1955. Early in 1960 Melanie Klein fell ill with bowel cancer and died 22nd September 1960. Melitta did not attend her mother's funeral, even though she gave a lecture in London the same day.

Melanie Klein herself saw her theoretical views never in contrast with Sigmund Freud's theories. She was convinced that her views were an enlargement and continuation of Freud's thoughts. Melanie Klein attributed a special meaning to the object relations whereby she took the seeking of the object as a given from the beginning of life. Most important for Melanie Klein was the meaning of transference in the psychoanalytical process and she gave it a more important role than reprocessing of the past.

From 1920 to 1924 she analysed a growing number of children, some of them even younger than three years. Her method was to enable the children by use of toys, consisting of wooden women and men in two sizes, cars, animals, houses, paper, scissors, balls etc. to symbolically express their phantasies, emotions and fears in play. Melanie Klein accompanied this from the beginning with interpretations, on the positive as well as on the negative level of transference. Especially the use of interpretations at such an early age brought her a lot of opponents. While Freud presumed that the superego was only formed after having overcome the Oedipus complex, Melanie Klein thought that the Oedipus complex sets in very much earlier. In her opinion the Oedipus complex develops during pregenital stages of the development, therefore its first manifestations are of an oral, urethral and anal nature.

Melanie Klein's research led her to the understanding that two opposing forces are active in the newborn already, causing conflict for the child from its first day on. Since these drives are of a biological nature, the psyche cannot perceive them directly. Therefore the ego has to reach for phantasies and psychological transformations of the drives and has to represent the specific object that satisfies these drives. Crucial for the development of the child is here the interaction between those inner conflicting forces of love and hate and the real external object, which is the mother. Thereby the psyche acts from the beginning mainly by means of two operative mechanisms, that is to say introjection and projection.

Because of the limited cognitive abilities of the little child, Melanie Klein believes that at first the child perceives its mother only as the breast, meaning as a subobject. So the breast becomes a love object on the one hand and an object of the child's aggression on the other hand. Melanie Klein named this stage of development the paranoid schizoid position, which includes about the first three to four months of life. The name given to this position indicates that fears during this period are prevalently fears of persecution and the most important defence mecha-

nism is splitting. During this time the child perceives its mother primarily as breast and therefore has a relationship only to a part of its mother, a so-called partial object relationship. From the fourth month of life on the child develops the so-called depressive position. It is characterized by the overall object relationship, meaning that the child recognizes its mother as a person. Now the child's greatest fear is losing its mother. This separation anxiety arises from the child's own aggression drive. At the same time the child becomes aware of its total physical and emotional dependence on its mother. An important point in the depressive position is the feeling of ambivalence, i.e. the child learns to fear and to worry because of its mother, has destructive wishes at the same time and therefore suffers from guilt feelings. These feelings of guilt for the loved object lead to a new attitude in the child's life, to compensation. Its objective is to cure the harm the child believes to have done in reality as well as in phantasy. Interesting in this context is the fact that Melanie Klein developed her concept of the depressive position just when her son Hans lost his life in an accident in the mountains in 1934. There were even questions whether his death might have been a conscious or unconscious suicide. Phyllis Grosskurth, Melanie Klein's biographer, also asks whether Melanie Klein had ever processed the depressive position herself.

The book 'Envy and Gratitude' belongs to the most important part of Melanie Klein's late work. Here she describes envy as an inborn destruction drive that is very important for the child's development. The goal of envy is to be as good as the object. If that is not possible, it is tried to destroy the source of the good, i.e. to eradicate the source of the feelings of envy. Melanie Klein was of the opinion that fears and defensive attitudes during early childhood cannot be viewed in isolation. To a high degree they are influenced by the mother. But she emphasized that in extreme causes always the constitution would be critical for the extent of a psychological illness. This seems to be of significance for the question as to how far Melanie Klein was aware of her responsibility for her children's development or their problems respectively. It is remarkable that Melitta had such difficulties to leave her mother's sphere of influence, made possible only by a complete breach. The same goes for Melanie Klein herself, who hardly succeeded in leaving her own mother's sphere of influence. The fact that the father has such a minor role in Melanie Klein's theories seems to fit with her biography, too.

In conclusion, Melanie Klein's ideas met with interest as well as with opposition her whole life through and also afterwards. During her stay in England followers crowded around her. After Melanie Klein's death these 'Kleinians' developed her concepts and research further.

Correspondence address

info@cip-medien.com
Translated by Ulla Kalberg