

Melanie Klein in Pitlochry 1940-41



Melanie Klein (1882–1960)

Melanie Klein was one of the founding figures of psychoanalysis. Building on the discoveries of Sigmund Freud, she recognised the centrality of the infant's first relationships with its primary caregivers and elucidated the early mental processes that build up a person's inner emotional world. A pioneering child analyst from Central Europe, she was a controversial and powerful member of the British Psychoanalytical Society for thirty six years and continues to exert an influence across the world.



Klein in Pitlochry

In the early summer of 1940, Melanie Klein left her home in London for Scotland. In the beautiful Perthshire town of Pitlochry, the sixty-year-old psychoanalyst set herself up in a modest rented house, hundreds of miles from the bombs and air raids of the wartime capital.

This move constituted a much needed retreat for Klein, from both the ongoing violence of the Second World War and the political turbulence within the British Psychoanalytical Society. The lovely landscape and quiet streets brought her considerable relief, after several very difficult years: her son Hans had died in an accident in 1934, sending her into a deep depression. Then, toward the end of the 1930s, around the time of the Anschluss, a large number of psychoanalysts had arrived from Vienna - including Sigmund and Anna Freud - as they fled Nazi persecution.

While Klein would surely have sympathised with these individuals seeking safe haven in Britain, the Viennese influx nevertheless created deep conflict within the British Society. The analysts in the Vienna Society had always stridently opposed Klein's psychoanalytic theories, particularly her ideas about children's emotional lives. This theoretical clash was only intensified by the wartime situation.

Away from London and the Society for just over a year, Klein had time and space to devote to developing some of her most important ideas. The analytic work she carried out with a small number of patients - including two adults, a teenager, 'Dick', whom she had analysed twelve years earlier, and a troubled ten-year-old boy referred to in her notes as 'Richard' - played a crucial part in this.

Child Psychology

Klein had been analysing children since the 1920s, when she was living in Berlin. From the earliest years of her psychoanalytic career she believed that, through play, very young children expressed their anxieties, desires and fears, just as Freud had observed that adults expressed them through free association. This way of thinking about young children - as having such intense, complex emotional lives - was truly radical. Klein's understanding of the importance of the child's inner world has had a profound and wide-reaching effect on the way children's mental development is thought about. The discoveries she made in her work with children also had a deep impact upon analytic theory more broadly. Indeed, the work Klein carried out in



Pitlochry advanced her key concept of the depressive position and, a few years later, would also feed into the closely related concept of the paranoid-schizoid position.

Richard

In a letter to D. W. Winnicott in the spring of 1941, Klein wrote: "I have started the analysis of a very unusual boy of ten a month ago & keep full notes including my interpretations from this case. It takes me 1½-2 hours a day to make these full notes – a chore but well worthwhile. They should show much about the things we wish most people to understand, also about progress in technique through knowledge of depression."

Over a period of four months, Klein had 93 sessions with Richard, her notes on which were written up in great detail. With a smaller caseload than usual, she was able to get a great deal of writing done. This short but intensive stretch of work with Richard played a vital role in the development of her concept of the depressive position. She had first delineated this central element of her theory in 1935, in 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states', then clarified and deepened it in a paper of 1940, 'Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states'. A few years after her time in Pitlochry she would describe the link between the depressive position and the Oedipus complex in, 'The Oedipus complex in the light of early anxieties' (1945).

However, it was only many years later that Klein fully wrote up her analytic work with Richard in *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-Analysis of Children as Seen in the Treatment of a Ten-Year-Old Boy*, published posthumously in 1961. Alongside her extensive notes were reproduced the 74 pictures created by Richard over the course of his analysis.



Edited transcript of Hanna Segal's speech at the unveiling of a plaque commemorating Melanie Klein's time in Pitlochry (2nd May 1987)

I feel extremely honoured to have been asked to unveil this memorial for Melanie Klein. I am wearing two hats – one as the chairman of the Melanie Klein Trust and one as the representative of Mr Moses Laufer, President of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, who is not able to attend. But what I am going to say will come from myself wearing no hat.

I shall say a few words personally as myself as, first an analyst, and then a pupil, collaborator and friend of Melanie Klein. It is a great privilege to have known such an innovative, creative and great personality. Besides, in private she was a most delightful, warm and generous person, humorous, and with a great sense of fun.

Melanie Klein is considered by many – and I count myself among those – as the greatest of Freud's followers. Her contributions to psychoanalysis start with developing a technique for child analysis. That may not sound all that impressive, and today it is hard to appreciate what a bold and important step that was. At the time, her work met with enormous

opposition. Despite all Freud's discoveries about infantile sexuality and aggression, it was considered almost indecent to talk to children directly about those things.

Her boldness was based on her conviction about psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytical method, paradoxically far greater than some of those who considered themselves very Freudian, and were opposed to her work as not being compatible with Freud's.

It was also based on her deep devotion to the pursuit of truth without embellishments, placations or compromises. She approached children with the same honesty which should characterise all psycho-analytical work, and found that children responded to this approach. Wilfred Bion, much later, said that the mental apparatus, however immature, needs truth the way the infant needs milk. Without formulating it like that, it is certainly the principle she always followed.

Direct work with children both confirmed Freud's imaginative reconstructions and opened new vistas. Where Freud discovered the child in the adult, she discovered the infant in the child and in the adult. The analysis of Richard has a very special place in Klein's opus.

Klein, who came to England in 1926, often expressed her gratitude to Great Britain for having given her conditions of work which she did not have in her own country nor in Germany. It later gave her a place of refuge from Nazism. She also expressed to me her gratitude to Pitlochry, this lovely little town, which provided her with a place of refuge in the turmoil of the war, gave her hospitality, peace of mind and this precious girl guide's hut in which she could continue her work, in what was one of the most creative phases in her life. In July, soon after arriving in Pitlochry, she wrote to Winnicott:

"Scotland surpasses my expectations. That is saying a lot, since from a very early time in my life I fancied it as beautiful and romantic.

I found very good accommodation in a simple and pleasant house in the most lovely position and the people are very nice. I am quite comfortable and do enjoy the rest and the beautiful country in spite of the knowledge

– or all the more because of it – that this peaceful time will not last.”

It lasted only till the following July. It wasn't in Melanie's temperament to stay in a haven. By July she was back in London facing the air raids and the battles in the British Psycho-analytical Society. But she talked to me of Pitlochry with pleasure and affection. Few things would have given her greater pleasure than to know that she would be remembered here and honoured by a plaque.

I want to thank all the organisations which worked for it, and Dr O'Farrell, who was the moving spirit of the whole venture. I also want to thank the commissioner for Girl Guides for making it possible, and for the welcome and hospitality in the hut for all of us.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to contribute to this occasion by offering, on behalf of the Melanie Klein Trust, some photographs of Mrs



Klein, her toys and Richard's drawings, as a memento, which I understand you would like to display in the famous hut.



Find out more at:

www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk



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