



Melanie Klein

Her Life and Work

1882-1960

- ❖ Klein's theory developed and evolved from her capacities for keen observation and intuitive leaps of thought, in a climate of conflict, antagonism, and deep suffering.
- ❖ Her personal experience of loss and interpersonal turmoil, throughout her life, along with her battles with depression shed light on her continued interest in the tension between the inherent drives toward life/love and death/hate.

1882

Melanie Reizes was born on March 30th in Vienna, to Moriz (age fifty-four) and Libussa Reizes (née Deutsch, age thirty).

Her father, Moriz, came from an orthodox Jewish family from Galicia (now Ukraine), and her mother, from Warbotz, Slovakia.

Her father trained as a doctor against his very conservative family's wishes.

Melanie was the last of four children, joining six-year-old Emilie, five-year-old Emmanuel, and four-year-old Sidonie.

The family moved to Vienna from Hungary sometime between 1878 and 1882.



1886

Melanie's closest sister, Sidonie, dies of scrofula (tuberculous cervical lymphadenitis) at the age of eight.

Melanie is four years old.



1898

By the age of sixteen, Melanie has her sights set on studying at the gymnasium.

She has long wanted to study medicine, now specifically psychiatric medicine.

This year, she passes her entrance exams.



1899

At the age of seventeen, Melanie meets her future husband, Arthur Stevan Klein, four years her elder and a second cousin.

Klein is studying to be a chemical engineer in Zurich. He proposes to Melanie soon after their first meeting; she accepts.

The engagement spells the end of Melanie's medical ambitions. In fact, she never received any formal university training.



1902

On December 1, 1902 a second sibling, Melanie's adored older brother Emmanuel, dies in Genoa of heart failure, at the age of twenty-five.

His death comes after several years of aimless and poverty-stricken travel around the Mediterranean. He has likely been addicted to morphine and cocaine for some time, in addition to suffering from tuberculosis.



1903

Still in mourning for her brother, Melanie Reizes marries Arthur Klein on March 31st, the day after her twenty-first birthday.

In May, Melanie finds out she is pregnant.



1904

Klein's first child, Melitta, is born on January 19th.



Wellcome Images

1907-08

On March 2nd, Melanie gives birth to her second child and first son, Hans, after suffering a deep depression during pregnancy.

Late in 1907, Melanie becomes increasingly anxious and depressed, very unhappy in her married life.

She receives treatment – such as carbonic acid baths – for her “nerves.” As a result, she spends long periods of time apart from her young children.

In a series of strange, guilt-inducing and interfering letters, her mother, Libussa, discourages Melanie from seeing her children.



1909

In May, now severely depressed, Melanie visits a sanatorium in Chur, an alpine town in eastern Switzerland.

In a letter to her mother, Melanie expresses fear and dread that she might be pregnant.



1912

Melanie writes to her mother, who is staying temporarily in Vienna, that she is feeling better, in fact "quite healthy."

She refers to a "treatment" she has been having, though she does not refer to its nature.

It is likely psychological, perhaps even psychoanalytic.



1913

Around Christmas,
Klein finds out she is
pregnant again.



1914

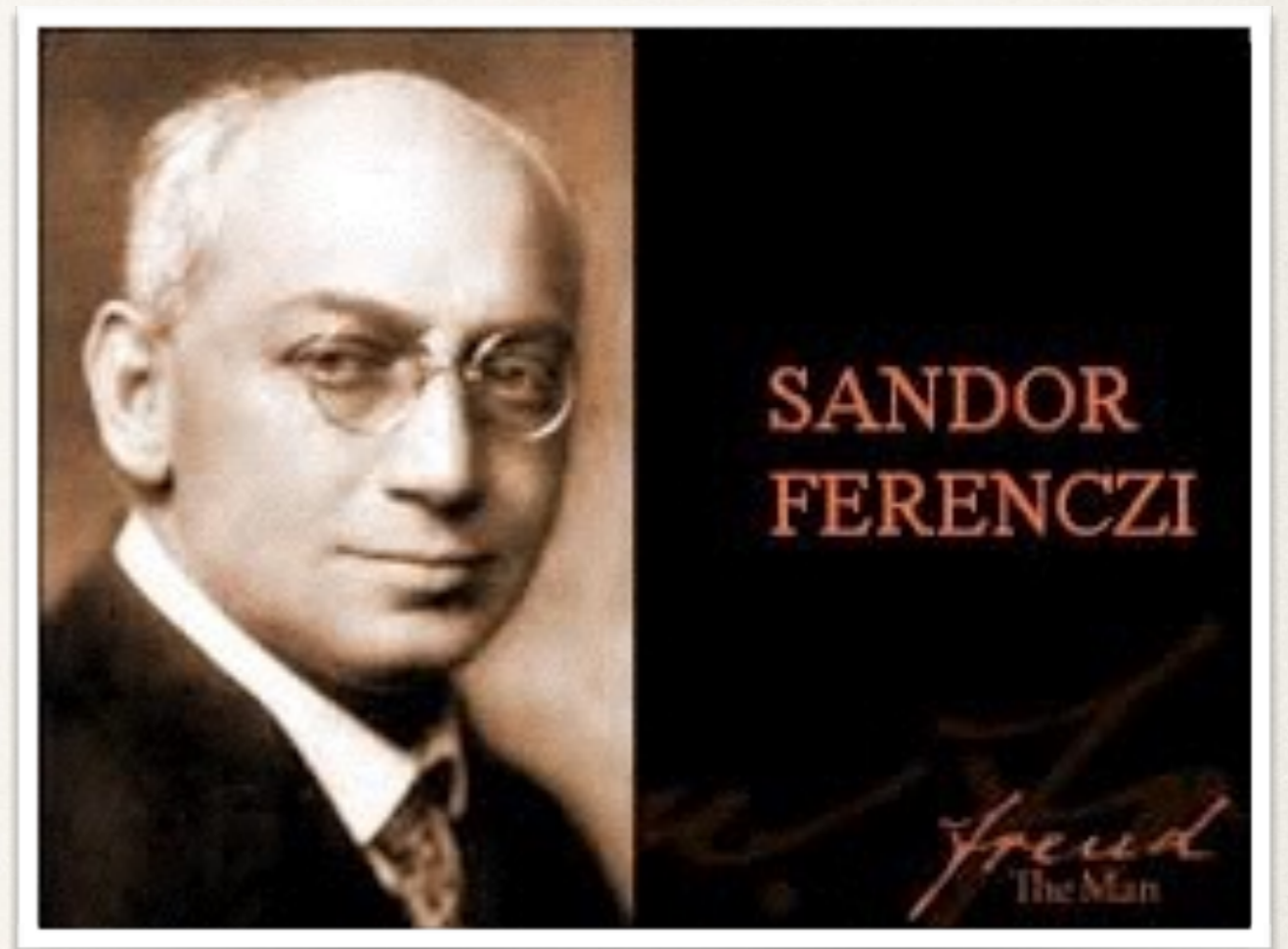
After another pregnancy, during which Klein is deeply depressed, she gives birth to her third and last child, Erich, on July 1st.

Two weeks later, the First World War breaks out.

Klein begins analysis with Sandor Ferenczi a Hungarian psychoanalyst and intimate colleague of Freud. For the first time in Klein's life, she is able to talk about her emotional experience, and be listened to by a highly intelligent, attentive and perceptive person. This encounter with Ferenczi constitutes a watershed in her life.

Klein reads Sigmund Freud's *On Dreams*. She is immediately filled with huge excitement about the insights and possibilities revealed by Freud, and becomes devoted to psychoanalysis.

On November 6th, Melanie's mother, Libussa, dies.



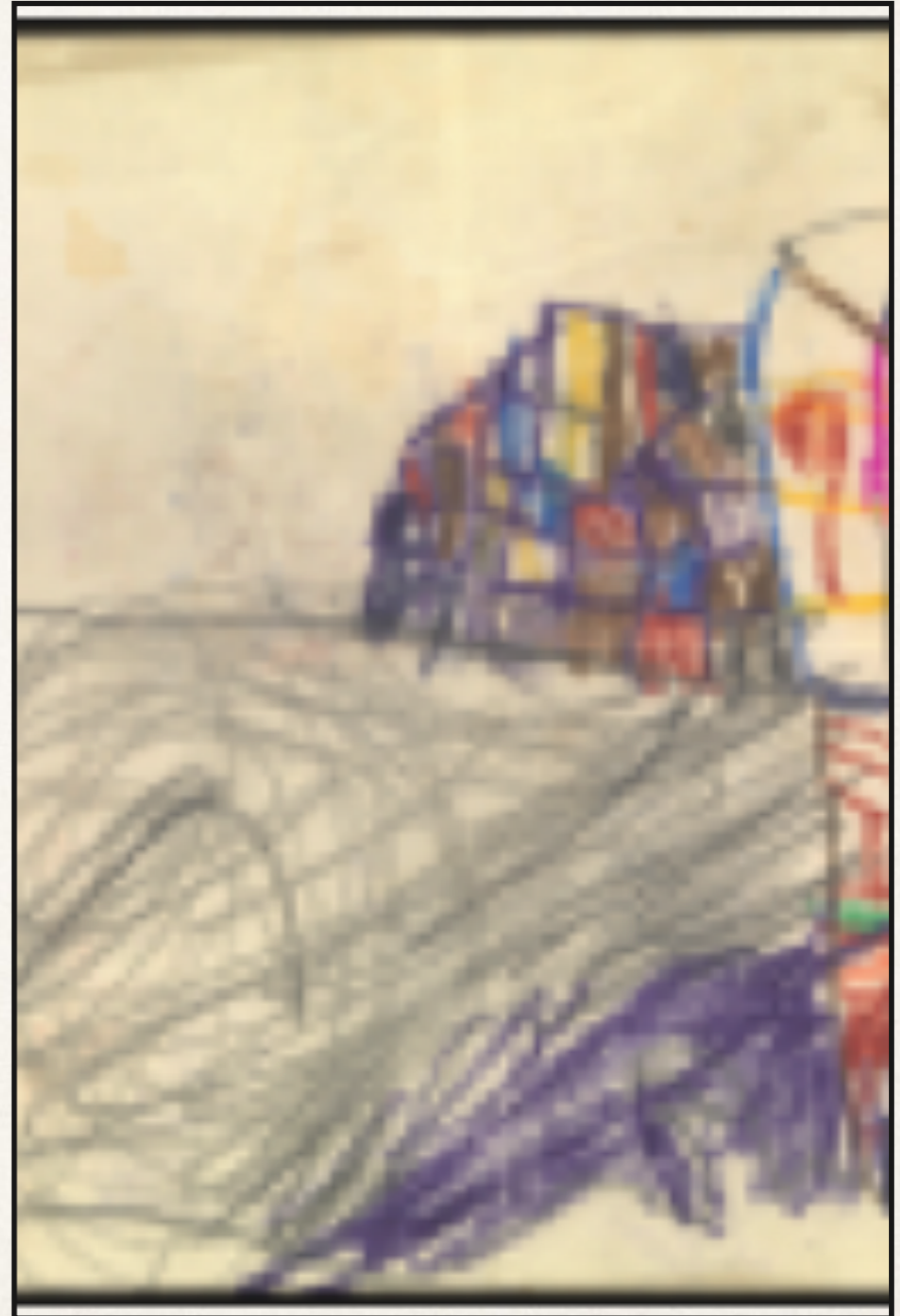
1919

In July, Klein presents her study of her five-year-old son, Erich, to the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Society; it is her first study of a child. She is soon afterward awarded membership.

The Hungarian Psychoanalytic movement is all but destroyed by anti-Semitism.

Melanie leaves Budapest, taking her three children to stay with her husband, Arthur's parents, in Rosenberg.

Besides the political turmoil, the Kleins' marriage is not working; they are increasingly unhappy living together.



1923

After being made a full member of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society in February, Klein embarks upon her first child analysis. This marks the start of a bold new approach to analytic treatment and theory, and the start of Klein's career.

The child Klein names 'Rita' in her notes enters analysis with her; she is only two and a half years old.

Meanwhile, in her personal life, Klein and her husband Arthur attempt reconciliation, moving into a large house built by Arthur upon his return from Sweden.



1924

Eager to learn from one of the great pioneers of psychoanalysis, Klein asks Karl Abraham to analyze her. Her treatment begins at the beginning of the year.

Although neither Klein nor her ideas were well received within the Berlin Society, Abraham supported and encouraged her pioneering work with children.

After several months of trying to repair their marriage, relations between Melanie and Arthur (picture right) fail to improve. Melanie leaves her husband for good in April.



1925

Abraham falls ill in May, deteriorating until he dies on Christmas Day.

Klein has been in analysis with him for only a year and a half.

It is unclear whether Klein ever fully recovered from the premature ending of her analysis and the death of Abraham.

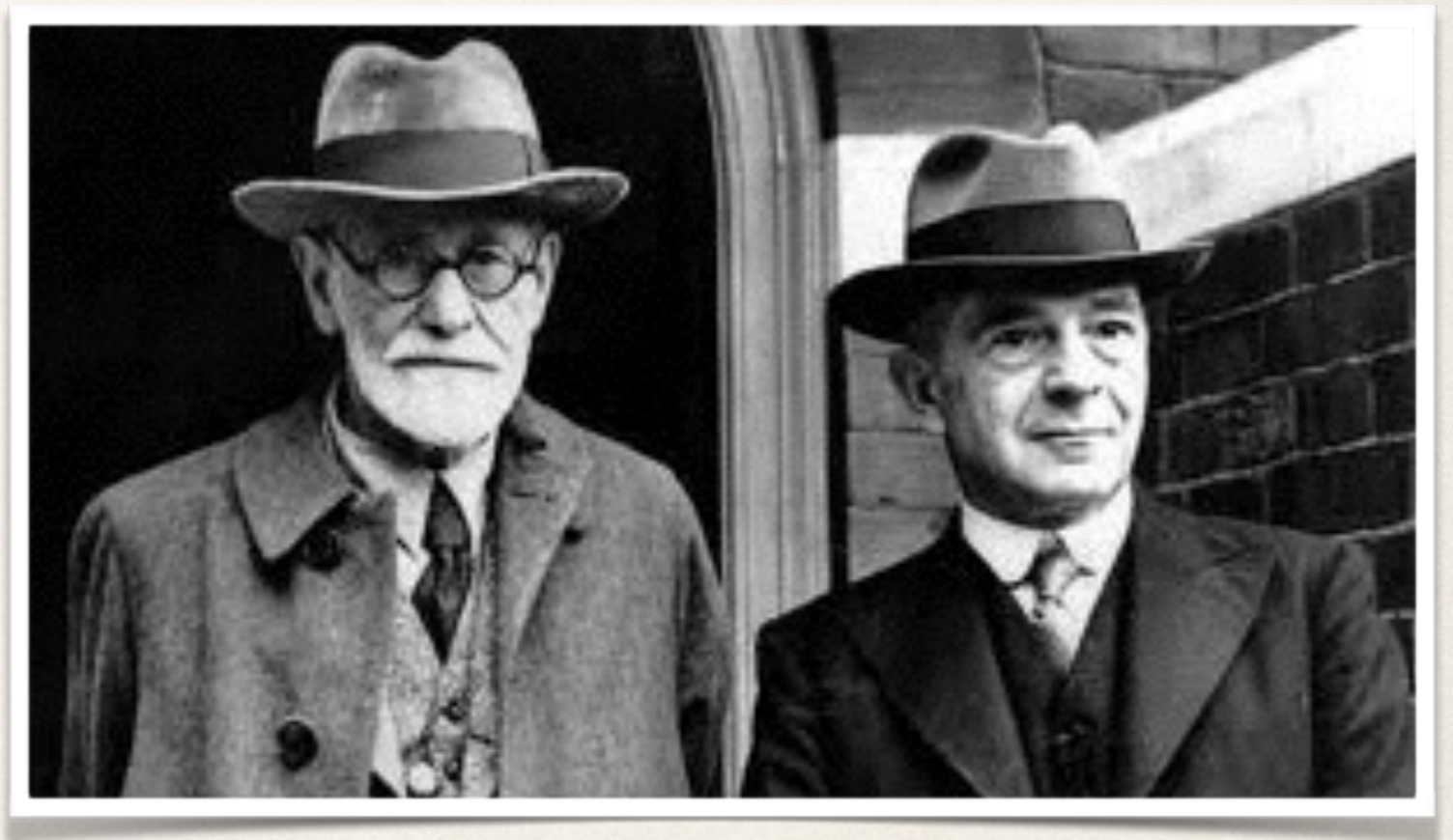
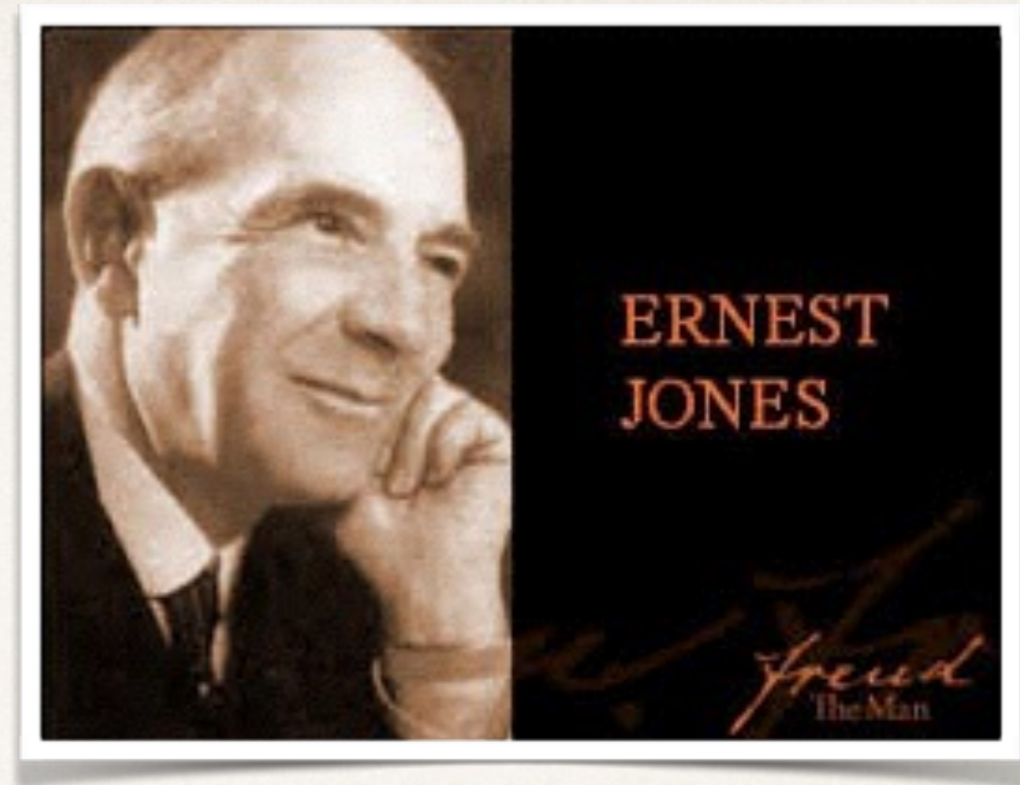


1926

Ernest Jones, founder and president of the British Psychoanalytic Society, invites Klein to London.

Klein begins analysis of Jones' wife and two children.

Klein now has 6 patients.



1929

Klein begins analysis of “Dick,” a four-year-old boy, seemingly struggling with schizophrenia.

His condition has since been re-described as infantile autism.

This analysis and its ensuing published paper form a key moment in Klein’s development of her ideas about early psychosis and its relation to aggression and guilt.



1930

Klein publishes, *The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego.*

This paper along with the *Personification in the Play of Children*, explores children's use of splitting the object into good and bad and the use of projection.



1932

Klein publishes *The Psychoanalysis of Children*.

Klein defines envy as the angry feeling that comes from seeing that another person possesses something that she or he desires. It is often accompanied by an impulse to take it away from that person, or spoil it. Klein thought that envious impulses were present from the beginning of life, and were initially directed against the feeding breast.

She saw envy as a manifestation of primary destructiveness, to some extent constitutionally based, and worsened by adversity. She believed that envy heightened persecution and guilt.

Klein came to see gratitude as an expression of love and thus of the life instinct, and as the anti-thesis of envy.



1934

In April, Melanie's eldest son, Hans, dies when a path crumbles under him as he hikes through the Tatra Mountains. He is twenty-seven. Melitta, amongst others, speculated that Hans' death was a suicide.

Melanie does not attend the funeral, held in Budapest, apparently too devastated to make the journey.

Klein reads the first version of her seminal paper, *The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States*, at the Lucerne Congress in August.



1935

Klein writes, *A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States*. The framework of “positions” is introduced. The depressive position is contrasted against the earlier paranoid phase, and a differentiation is made between part- and whole-object relating.

At Klein’s request, Donald Winnicott, a pediatrician and recently qualified psychoanalyst, begins analysis of her youngest child, Erich.

In Germany, on September 15th, the Nuremberg Laws are passed at the annual Nazi party rally. Jews are stripped of their citizenship, the right to hold influential professional positions, and the right to marry Aryans.

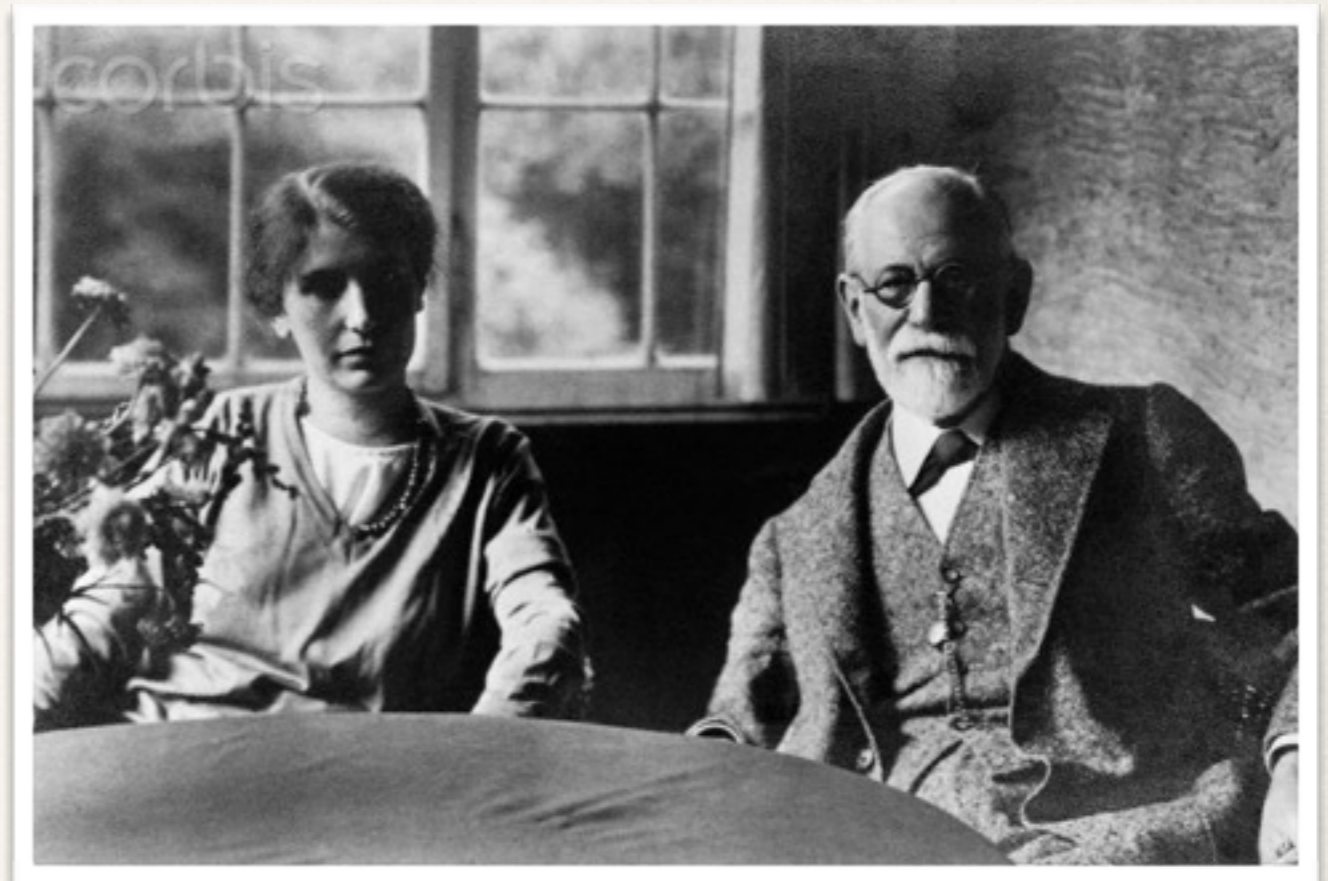


1938

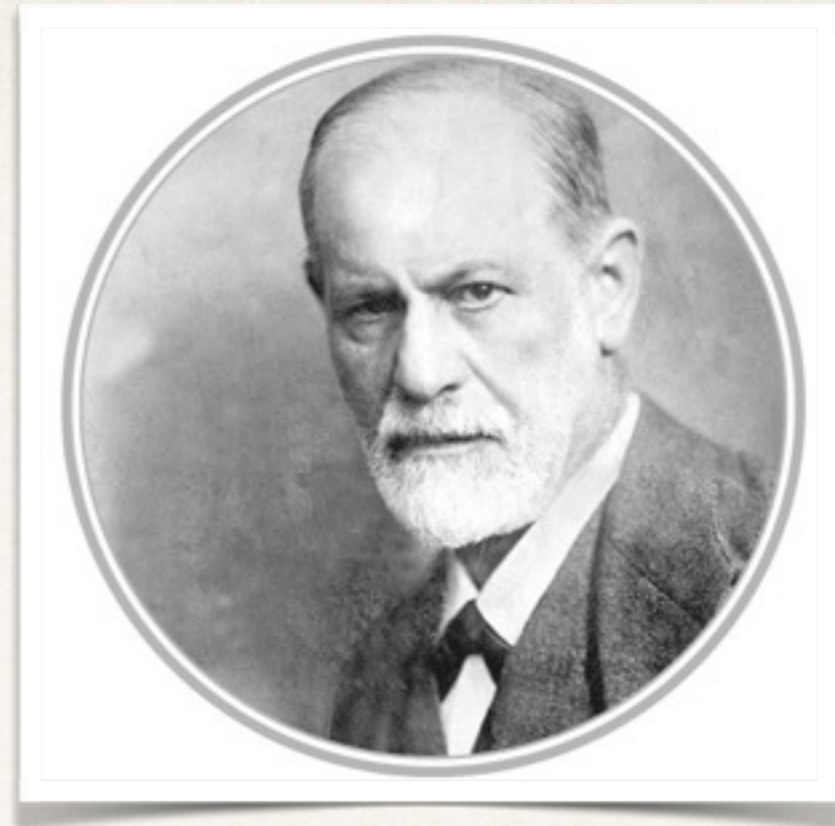
Sigmund and Anna Freud flee Vienna after the Nazis invade Austria in March. They arrive in London on June 6th. They are amongst a flood of refugee psychoanalysts fleeing Nazi Germany and Austria.

The British Society will undergo extraordinary theoretical divisions, with Melanie Klein and Anna Freud at the center of the conflict over which theory is truest to Freud's ideas.

On the nights of November 9th and 10th, Nazi supporters and SA stormtroopers vandalize and destroy Jewish shops and synagogues across Germany and Austria, killing, beating and arresting Jews. This horrific pogrom will become known as Kristallnacht ('Night of Broken Glass').



1939

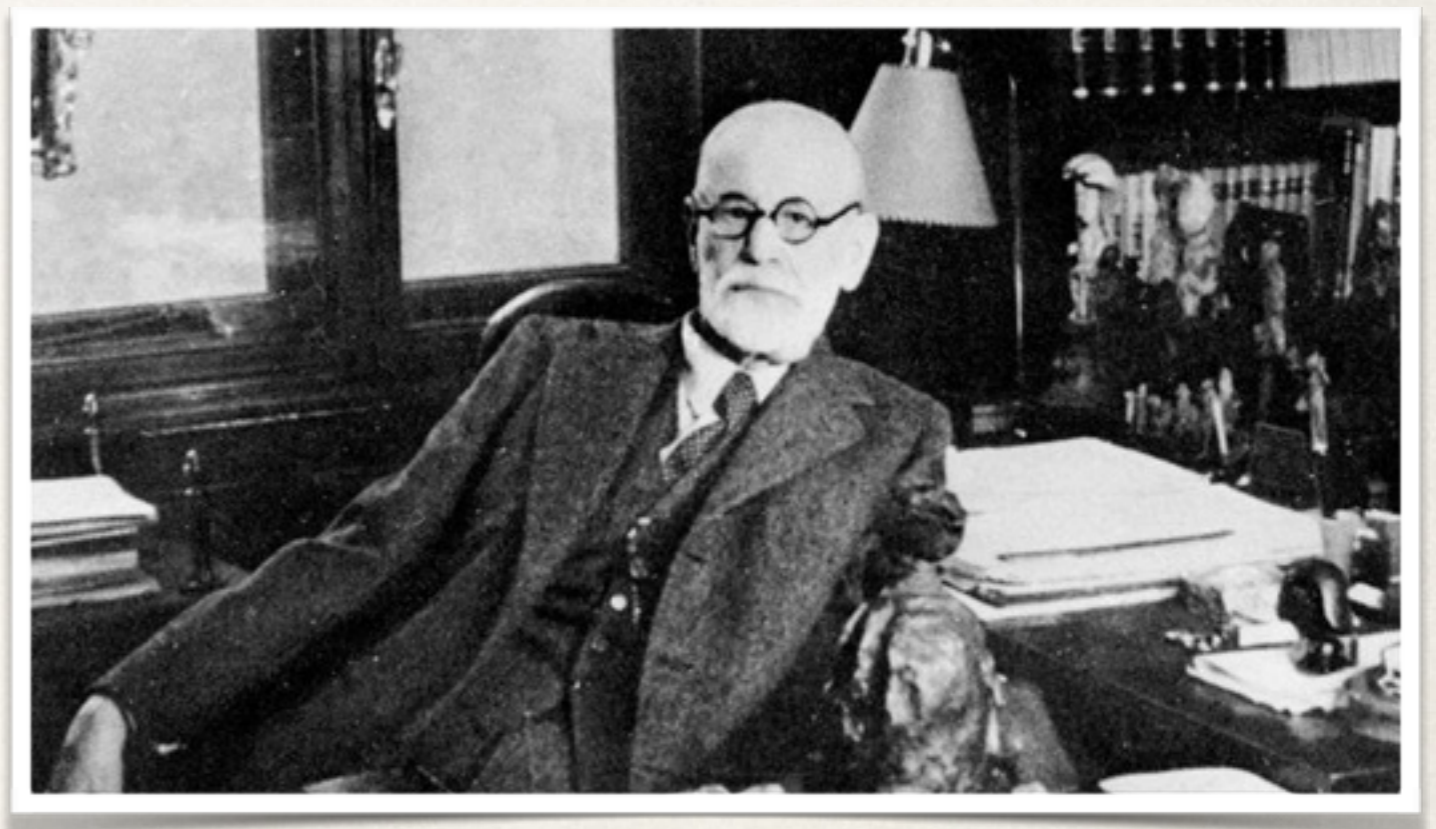


Arthur Klein dies in Sion, Switzerland, at the age of sixty-one.

On September 3rd, Britain declares war on Germany.

Klein moves to Cambridge temporarily, fleeing the capital for fear of air raids. Klein re-works *Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States*.

On September 23rd, three weeks after the outbreak of the Second World War, Sigmund Freud dies at the age of eighty-three, after years of suffering with cancer of the jaw.



1942

The first of the British Society's Extraordinary Meetings takes place on February 25th, after years of increasing discord and infighting among its members. They are heated and often venomously personal battles between the opposing groups in the Society: the Kleinians and Viennese Freudians. Anna Freud and Edward Glover attack Klein's legitimacy as a psychoanalyst, while Melitta Schmideberg attacks her mother with a seemingly blind rage, more personal than theoretical.

It looks as though the Society may not survive this deeply divisive war of ideas and personalities.



1945

Melitta Schmideberg leaves the UK for New York, now separated from her husband, Walter, and estranged from her mother. She lives there until 1961, working with adolescent delinquents.

Klein publishes *The Oedipus Complex in the Light of Early Anxieties*. She explores envy of the mother in the Oedipus complex of both sexes.

Klein spends August on a farm with her daughter-in-law Judy and grandchildren Michael and Diana.



1946

On December 4th, Klein gives her paper, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms," to the British Society. This is one of the most important works of Klein's career, and a pivotal moment in psychoanalytic thought, as she details the concepts of ego-splitting and projective identification.

This is the definitive paper in which the "paranoid-schizoid" position is introduced.

After much debate within the British Society, the "A" and "B" groups, and what becomes known as the "Middle Group," are at last established as an urgent means of resolving the on-going and irreconcilable differences between the Anna Freudians and Kleinians. The bitter arguments that have raged through the Society for years are now at least partly assuaged, and the Society looks like it will survive.



1949

At the sixteenth Psychoanalytic Congress in Zurich, Klein sees her daughter Melitta (pictured right) for the first time in four years. They do not speak.



1955

Klein attends the Geneva Congress, held in July. On the first day, Klein delivers a paper, *A Study of Envy and Gratitude*.

It is among the most controversial of all Klein's papers, and elicits a heatedly critical reaction. Paula Heimann, by now no longer on good terms with Klein, is among those critical of the paper's assertions.

On November 24th, Klein writes to Heimann, asking her to resign as trustee of the newly established Melanie Klein Trust. Marking the end of their long and close friendship, Heimann leaves the Kleinian group.

Klein publishes, *On Identification*, continuing her emphasis on the importance of a securely established good object. Projective identification is illustrated.



1956

Klein starts to sort through and order her notes on Richard.

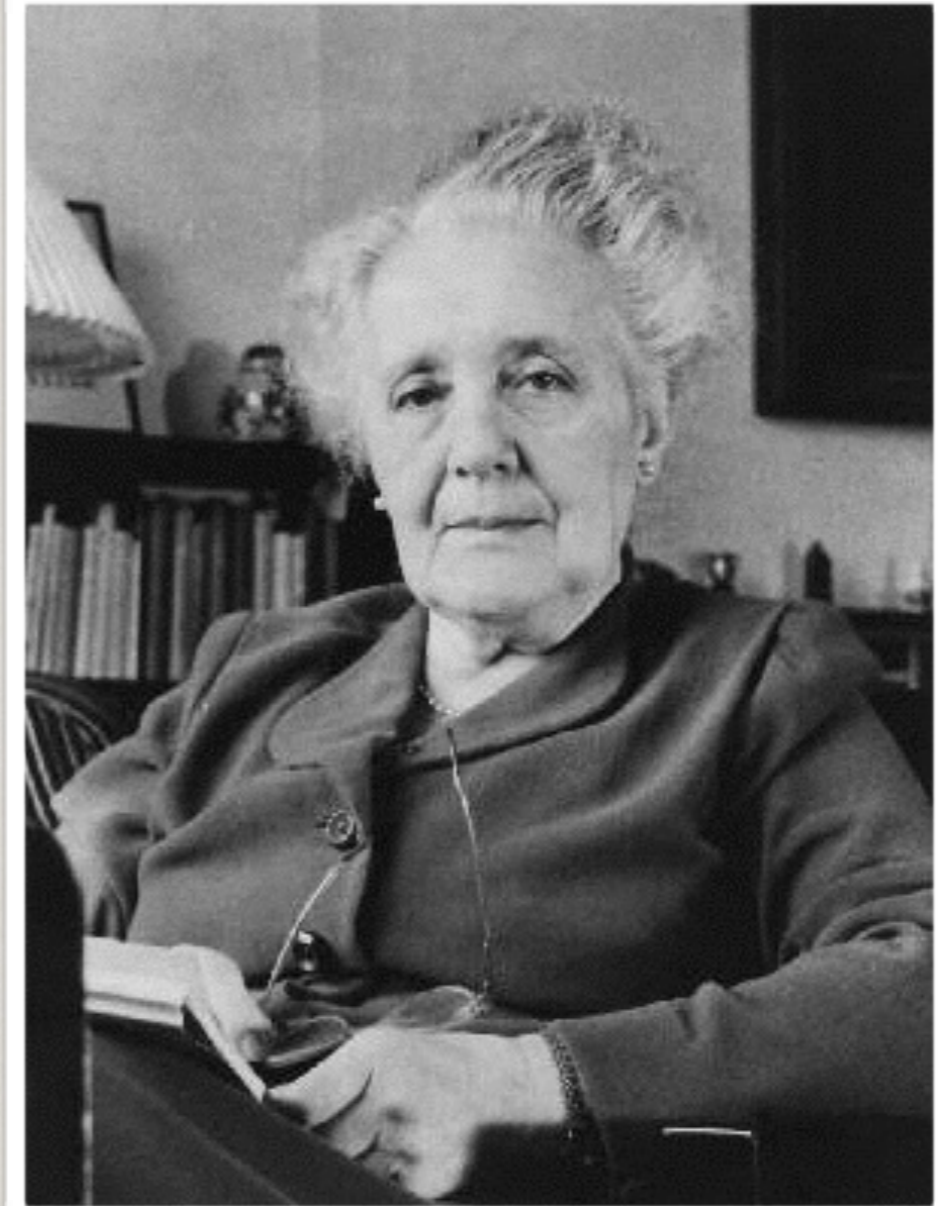
These notes will become *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, a full-length account of a single analysis.



1957

Envy and Gratitude is published in June.

In this, a compilation of her final work, an expanded description of both the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid positions is given. Envy is introduced as an expression of the death instinct.



1960

In the spring, Klein is diagnosed with anaemia, and is increasingly exhausted and physically weak. During the summer, Klein goes to Switzerland, to Villars-sur-Ollon, determined to regain her health. Her son, Eric, joins her, but by this time she has grown seriously ill.

She returns to England and is immediately taken to the hospital. She is diagnosed with colon cancer, and has an operation at the beginning of September. The operation seems to have been successful, but complications arise after she falls out of bed and breaks a hip. Melanie Klein dies on September 22nd.

She is cremated and her funeral is attended by many friends and colleagues. Melitta is not there.

