

Special Book Section: Biography & Memoirs

and Melitta Schmideberg. Wouldn't it be reasonable to insist that Klein's work be judged on its own terms, without resorting to defensive strategies to deal with her private life? The contagion of the Kleinian atmosphere of factionalism is evident even in the Foreword, in which—among several people thanked for their assistance—Dr K. R. Eissler, Secretary of the Freud Archives, is singled out for his lack of cooperation.

THIS ABSORBING BIOGRAPHY of a major theorist and an unusual woman is meticulously researched, full of information about the history of psychoanalysis and its founding fathers and mothers, who come alive on these pages. The development of Klein's theories is carefully charted, and it is no fault of the presentation that Klein's abstruse ideas and dense style require further study on the part of an interested or uninformed reader.

Anyone expecting a psychobiographical examination of Klein's theories, however, will be disappointed. Grosskurth is weakest when she offers psychological analyses that are meaningless in their generality. She writes, for example, that:

"Anna Freud and Melanie Klein were both aware that they were unwanted children, whose fathers had preferred their older sisters; and this affected them, in different ways, all their lives. . . . These personal factors suggest interesting possibilities for the reasons psychoanalysis diverged into two very different directions."

Grosskurth throws out provocative nuggets of information, but rarely ventures out on a solidly speculative or interpretive limb. We are told that Klein's childhood home was a hotbed of pathologically intense feeling, "a family riddled with guilt, envy, and occasionally explosive rages, and infused with strong incestuous overtones", yet no connection is made to

Klein's exploration of the significance for mental health of mastering early aggression and envy. Grosskurth repeatedly comments on the dominating intrusiveness of Klein's mother, yet she also quotes Klein's recollections in old age: "My relation to my mother has been one of the great standbys of my life. I loved her deeply, admired her beauty, her intellect, her deep wish for knowledge. . . ." A potent idealisation from a woman who wrote so convincingly about the force of ambivalence towards one's earliest attachments. Klein's penchant for the exercise of power of mind over circumstance, characteristic of the course of her life as a whole, is an intriguing personal corollary to her theoretical emphasis on the influence of internal psychic reality on interpretation of external reality and the environment.

Melanie Klein might have been just another turn-of-the-century Viennese woman, not dissimilar from many of Freud's cases: passionate, highly intelligent, but bound in a sexually constricted marriage, submerged in domestic duties, with no influence outside the home. But, as Grosskurth observes:

"This remarkable woman was able to surmount personal and professional difficulties and embark on fearless creative paths of her own, even if at great cost to some of those close to her."

This last qualification evokes the complexities of Klein's personality, which no doubt contributed to the antagonism she aroused. Until very recently Melanie Klein's work was studied and respected in Europe and South America, but was virtually unknown in the USA because it was the Anna Freud contingent of psychoanalysts who emigrated to the United States before World War II. Even today, mention of Klein's name there can merely provoke a bemused smile: the excesses and fallacies of her theories are better recognised than her enduring contributions.

Isabel's Agoraphobic

They said she should be glad
she had so much. It seemed
it was too much for her. She
wanted for nothing.

They said, Take a hold
on yourself! She held on until
she couldn't take any more.
Then she let herself go.

Jammed in, preserved,
pale as a bottled pear,
curled like a fiddle-head,
a frond of bracken, foetus

pickled in alcohol.
Smiles towards sundown.
How is she in herself?
Oh keeping very well. Considering.

Dorothy Nimmo

Books Encountered

A Word or Two Before You Go. . . . By JACQUES BARZUN. Wesleyan University Press, \$14.95.

Another briskly normative blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of solecisms. Their sources include not only advertisements, the business section of *The New York Times*, and cutesy acronyms like MOMA, but also *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Professor Barzun ends with a noble plea for a common tongue.

Destined to be Wives: The Sisters of Beatrice Webb. By BARBARA CAINE. Clarendon Press, Oxford, £15.00.

Meticulous and absorbing account of the other eight Potter sisters, with family trees relating them to many respected names, from Cripps to Muggersidge. Decorum concealed sibling rivalry, suicide, cocaine, and extra-marital adventures, mostly by men, but also by the youngest sister.

Head Above Water. By BUCHI EMECHETA. Fontana, £3.50.

Wonderfully direct autobiography by a Nigerian girl who came first-class to Britain in 1962 expecting Jane-Austen-land and finding cold Liverpool and North London lodgings. She left her feckless husband and kept herself and their five small children by librarianship and writing, having taken a sociology degree. Truly Victorian grit.

Ari: The Life and Times of Aristotle Socrates Onassis. By PETER EVANS. Cape, £12.95.

The fourth and most complete biography in English. Based partly on interviews, partly on letters, and partly on jet-set gossip, it suffers from the vices of the genre, but nevertheless paints a frank picture of its astute, snobbish, sexually voracious subject, an Eric Ambler character in real life.

The Annotated Innocence of Father Brown. By G. K. CHESTERTON. Edited by MARTIN GARDNER. Oxford University Press, £12.95.

Not an abstrusely titled piece of lit. crit., but the text of the first Father Brown collection, with pertinent notes by the American connoisseur of oddities who did the same for *Alice*, *The Snark*, and *The Ancient Mariner*. It includes variant readings and a full bibliography: all good donnish fun.

Nan: The Life of an Irish Travelling Woman. By SHARON GMELCH. Souvenir Press, £10.95.

The subject and source: Nan Donahue, an Irish "tinker" or gypsy, born in 1919. The listener and writer: a young anthropologist, author of two previous books and now an associate professor at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y. Despite some blarney, it movingly reconstructs the transition from Romany to trailer-dwelling, welfare-drawing town-dwellers.

Out of Egypt: Scenes and Arguments of an Autobiography. By IHAB HASSAN. Southern Illinois University Press, \$15.95.

Weird, but fascinating: elegant memoirs, interspersed with reflections, by a well-known literary critic born in Cairo in 1925, who left for good at 21 and is now a Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Seeking "scope" in America, he carried Egypt with him. His only return is Proustian.

Faking It: Art and the Politics of Forgery. By IAN HAYWOOD. Harvester Press, £12.95.

Perceptive but oddly inconclusive examination of copying, forgery, plagiarism, breach of copyright, imitation, concealed quoting, etc., by a tutor in English at the Open University, critical of capitalist attitudes to art, and seemingly delighted by Keating and van Meegeren. But is it enough to invoke response alone?

Freud and his Father. By MARIANNE KRÜLL. Translated by ARNOLD J. POMERANS. Hutchinson, £16.95.

Why did Freud reject his early view that neurosis came from

youthful sexual seduction, and espouse Oedipus, infantile sexuality, and the libido? Partly, Dr Krüll learnedly argues, because of his ambivalent need to please his father. Copiously documented exploration of an earnestly stuffy, highly-charged family.

The Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations Since 1945. Edited by WM. ROGER LOUIS and HEDLEY BULL. Clarendon Press, Oxford, £35.00.

Symposium, mainly by the great and the good, resulting from the first collaboration between Ditchley Park and the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington D.C. Yes, Sir Michael Howard concludes, there was something there; and it would be a great pity if it gave way to "new American" indifference and "new British" dislike.

Cambodian Witness: The Autobiography of Someth May. Edited and with an Introduction by JAMES FENTON. Faber, £9.95.

Harrowing account of a doctor's family who fled from Phnom Penh when the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975. They fetched up four years later in a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border. Only four (out of fourteen) survived. Someth May began his book in the camp, and finished it in England. He now lives in Washington, and writes as to the manner born.

Ends of the World. By CECILY MACKWORTH. Carcanet, £9.95.

Illustrated, handsomely produced and vividly impressionistic memoirs of pre-War and wartime France, the London Blitz, Palestine, Algeria, post-War Paris, etc., though far less full on her wartime escape than her 1941 *I Came out of France*, sadly long out of print.

The Violent Society. Edited by ERIC MOONMAN. Frank Cass, £15.00, paper £7.50.

Somewhat disparate essays by the editor, Paul Wilkinson, Richard Clutterbuck, and others, on "myths and realities", the idealised past, domestic violence, stress, public disorder, terrorism, and possible responses—including, from The Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, the faith and hope common to most religions. And charity?

Rites: A Guatemalan Boyhood. By VICTOR PERERA. André Deutsch, £8.95.

"I was not quite six when I was circumcised for the second time because the first job, performed by a Gentile doctor, was pronounced unclean by our new rabbi." This Roth-like opening announces novel-like memoirs of life in the Jewish colony of war-torn Guatemala, by a writer well schooled on *The New Yorker*. Irresistible.

Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew: An Italian Story. By DAN VITTORIO SEGRE. Peter Halban (42 South Molton Street, London W1Y 1HB), £12.95.

Imagine an Italian Jew from a prominent but impoverished Piedmont family serving in the British Army alongside an Arab and under a Jewish Palestinian sergeant, and you have in a nutshell the cultural confusion Professor Segre so cannily explores in this labyrinthine, spell-binding autobiography, full of passionate tenderness.

The Prodigy: A Biography of William James Sidis, The World's Greatest Child Prodigy. By AMY WALLACE. Macmillan, £10.95.

The unpromising subtitle belies a sympathetic study of how the boy, a godson of William James, with an IQ probably higher than Einstein's, grew from speaking at six months and reading a newspaper at eighteen months to becoming an unhappy rebel and eccentric, largely owing to media exposure and parental strife.

R.M.