

Melanie's childhood was steeped in Jewish ceremonial, and she was always deeply aware of her Hebraic background. Both parents maintained a strong feeling for the Jewish people, "though," she remarks cryptically, "I am fully aware of their faults and shortcomings." She would never have been able to live in Israel, she asserts. At one point her mother tried to keep a kosher household but soon abandoned the attempt, particularly as she was opposed by her strong-minded children. Klein describes the circle in which they grew up in Vienna as "anti-Orthodox."

However, certain ritual celebrations were always maintained. Melanie had a lasting attachment to the first evening of Passover, particularly because she, as the youngest child, took part in the traditional service. "Since I was very keen to get some attention and to be more important than the older ones, I am afraid this attitude influenced my liking of that occasion. But there is more to it. I liked the candles, I liked the whole atmosphere, and I liked the family sitting round the table and being together in that way."

The ceremonies connected with the Day of Atonement also left her with pleasant memories. Every detail was interesting to her: the black coffee preceding the festive meal, the day of fasting which she spent with her mother at the synagogue. Like the other children, Melanie was dressed in her best clothes and was keenly aware of being scrutinized by their mothers, although her own mother was too deeply engrossed in her prayers for such frivolity.¹² On Friday evenings, too, Libussa would recite short prayers from a lilac velvetbound prayer book her husband had given her as a wedding present. After only a few minutes she would close it and return it to the wardrobe; in Klein's view, these religious observances were an expression of family tradition rather than true piety. She felt this impression to be confirmed when her mother told her admiringly of the doomed student in her hometown who, on his deathbed, declared, "I shall die very soon and I repeat that I do not believe in any god." The tone in which her mother related this story convinced Melanie that she had been in love with him.

During the period of family affluence Melanie had what she describes as "French governesses." Since she was attending school at the same time, it would appear that they were more like nannies — or possibly maids-of-all-work — than proper governesses. The term "governess" is indicative of the snobbish fantasies that pervade the Autobiography. Undoubtedly the young women contributed to Melanie's knowledge of French, which she learned early. The first one, Mlle Chapuis, was hired from a convent, but did not stay long because she was so homesick. The second governess, Constance Sylvester, came from the same convent.¹³

When Melanie was eight or nine, she was "tortured" by the belief that one day she would turn Catholic, which she knew would torment her parents. What is puzzling is how these middle-class Jewish parents could have exposed her to such a temptation. When she poured out her heart to the gentle Constance, the latter would reply, "Well, if you have to do it, you can't help