

Chapter One

Early Memories

Melanie Klein was the stuff of which myths are made. Seemingly secretive about her past, indomitably self-assured about her present, her very being aroused speculation and suspicion. In a sense, she sought this enigmatic role; in another, it was thrust upon her by enemies and friends alike. Her enemies—who were numerous during her lifetime and after—spread scurrilous gossip about her. Her supporters, tenderly protective, assured the world that she was extremely discreet about her private life. She was more transparent than any of them realized, but in the course of her turbulent passage she learned the caution necessary to safeguard her work, and for most of her career the woman and her work were indistinguishable.

Melanie Klein was a woman with a mission. From the moment she read Freud's paper *On Dreams* (1901)¹ in 1914 she was enraptured, converted, and dedicated to psychoanalysis. Captivated by the concept of the unconscious, she followed its seductive lure into speculative depths from which even Freud had retreated. This was her offense: for daring to branch out on her own paths of investigation, she was branded, vilified, and mocked. Her detractors, by attacking the woman herself, sought to devalue her contribution to the knowledge of the mind. The innuendos about a shadowy past have been so widespread that a whole subliterate about the woman, her family, and her early work has proliferated. The truth is both simpler and more complex—and certainly more elusive—than her defamers have imagined.

During the last decade of her life, Melanie Klein began to receive numerous inquiries, particularly from America, about the history and development of her concepts. She was delighted by the interest, particularly as she feared that her work might not survive, an anxiety her colleagues often heard her voice. To the queries from abroad, she listed the facts of her life in virtually formulaic fashion: the information that her father had been a doctor and that she also had intended to study medicine but was prevented by an early marriage; her introduction to psychoanalysis through reading Freud's work while living in Budapest and her subsequent analysis by Ferenczi; the latter's encouragement to pursue investigations into child analysis; her joining Karl Abraham's group in Berlin in 1921; the invitation by Ernest Jones to give a course of lectures in child analysis to the British Psycho-Analytical Society in 1925; and her subsequent decision the following year to settle in England. To this was appended a bibliography of her major works: *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (1932), *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, 1921-1945* (1948), *Developments in Psycho-Analysis* (1952), *New Directions in Psycho-Analysis* (1955),² and *Envy and Gratitude* (1957). *Narrative of a Child Analysis* was to be published a year after her death, in 1961.

In 1953 she began work on a brief autobiography, which she continued at intermittent intervals until 1959, the year before her death. It is cautious, repetitious, ingenuous, and evasive—and invaluable to an understanding of the woman. There are also various fragmentary pages, as though she were attempting to rework the document until it reached its final, acceptable form. Similarly, all through her life she tended to write initial drafts of her most