

Interview with Margaret Rustin  
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## Interview with Margaret Rustin

Margaret Rustin er psykoanalytisk barne- og ungdomspsykoterapeut. Hun var leder for barne- og ungdomspsykoterapi på Tavistock klinikken 1985–2007. Hun har skrevet om mange aspekter ved praksis og utdanning i spedbarnsobservasjon og psykoanalytisk psykoterapi med barn, ungdom og foreldre. Etter at hun pensjonerte seg fra Tavistock fortsetter hun å veilede og undervise i store deler av verden ved siden av sin egen privatpraksis.

Intervjuet tar utgangspunkt i Rustins interesse for Klein og hennes aktualitet i dag. Vi ønsket å få svar på hva som beveget Rustin til å skrive bok og holde foredrag om Klein. Hvilken relevans har hun i dag?

*We are grateful to you for agreeing on this interview for Mellanrummet. We attended your presentation of your paper; "Revisiting Klein's Narrative of a Child Analysis", in Copenhagen in September, and know that you and your husband published a book last year called "Reading Klein".*

*– So – Why did you get interested in Melanie Klein just now?*

I was asked together with my husband, by the International Library of Psychoanalysis to prepare a book, in the Teaching Psychoanalysis series. It is called *Reading Klein* and would be parallel to the

volumes on *Reading Freud* and *Reading Winnicott*, which already exist. I have been working on that for several years, and in the process I reread all of Klein's published works. One of the things I found particularly striking was rereading the whole of the *Narrative of a Child Analysis*.

Some years ago, I was asked by an Academic Seminar in London, which is run by historians of psychoanalysis, if I could contribute a paper. What I wrote about was Klein's Narrative and I developed it into a chapter in the book. So that was work that I was revisiting and happy to present at the

conference in Copenhagen.

The process of reading and writing has been very interesting work for me since I retired from my job at the Tavistock. I was running the child psychotherapy training, and had also institutional responsibilities. After retiring I had more time for clinical work in my practice, which I enjoyed very much. I think that took me back to wanting to reread the significant, classical psychoanalytical writers who have influenced my way of thinking and working. I think particularly Klein because of her fundamental discovery of the kind of technique of child analysis which I have practised all my life.

I have also been reading two more recent books; Claudia Frank's book, which arose from her transcription of Klein's child cases seen in Berlin, and even more recently, Sue Sherwin-White's excellent book reviewing all Klein's work with children. I think it is quite interesting that other people have been looking at the details of Klein's work with children. There are more details to be found than what was included in Klein's published work, when one looks into the unpublished papers which are available in the Wellcome Archive.

*– What would you say are the greatest importance of Klein's contribution?*

There are several things I would like to highlight. First of all I do think her discovery of the fundamental technical way in which one could do analytic work with children, including young children, was absolutely brilliant. We do in fact owe to her that we can do psychoanalytic psychotherapy with children. Her discovery of the play technique is totally fundamental. I think as a child psychotherapist I feel a very particular debt because I think that is where most of our ideas about technique really came from. You all know these, her use of the particular way of providing a child with a bounded set of toys, and the nature of the relationship with the child as compared with the kind of relationship with parents and families and so on. I feel her thinking about that was the basis for the way I would continue to work. Obviously there are lots of things that are different in 2017 from when she was alive, but I think the technical discoveries were extraordinary, quite a matter of genius really.

Then I think her development of psychoanalytic theory, is a great contribution.

Probably there are three things that would stand out for me.

The first would be the emphasis on the centrality of anxiety, her differentiation between the paranoid schizoid anxieties and the depressive anxieties, and the idea of these two fundamental psychic positions. I continue to find this tremendously helpful as a sort of fundamental theorisation.

Linked with that, is the particular discovery of the mechanism of projective identification. She herself however was quite suspicious about the value of the countertransference and the use of it in clinical work. So that's really a later development. But it is of course a development which became accessible through the idea of projective identification; that is what made the study of countertransference possible. So that would be the second huge theoretical contribution.

And I think the third should be her interest in envy and gratitude. Sometimes people have approached these ideas in a rather unbalanced way, seeing Klein as always thinking about the negative; a lot of envy, a lot of hate and destructiveness. But I see Klein as very much balanced and that her whole way of thinking about development has to do with the balance of love and hate, envy and gratitude and so on.

*– What about the actuality of Klein's writings today. Many children we meet are suffering from severe anxiety and worries. Are there any parallels between Klein's time and 2017?*

It is interesting that Klein's work with Richard was undertaken in wartime when there was so much terror about survival. It is relevant to study the struggles that she had in deciding how to deal with external realities, as well as to do with the inner meaning for her patient Richard. I find it really interesting to reread, for example, when she went for a visit to London in the middle of the blitz, the heavy bombing of London, just how straight forward she could be with Richard, about his fears of whether she'd be hurt or would die, and what would happen to him if she died. You know these things were spoken about very directly by her. She was certainly a very brave person. The idea that one can talk to quite young children about things that worry them in such a direct and honest manner, is very useful to us also today.

She also shows great flexibility concerning the frame of working. Having to make do with very rough and ready circumstances during the war, she made it work. We are all faced with things like that frequently. For example, in clinics where building-work takes place in rooms you are supposed to work in, or somebody is in the room that you were going to use, etcetera. You must not get in a panic, but need to deal with your own worries as well as the child's.

*–What do you think of her ways of interpretation, going very deep, touching on infantile sexuality and oedipal conflicts?*

I think they are very startling when one first reads them. If we just stick with the Narrative and the patient she calls Richard, I think it seems clear that he was absolutely ready for them. I think on the whole, the children we see nowadays, are for the most part children with a much more damaged early background and not the severely neurotic, oedipal, children like Richard. The majority of the children we meet today seem to be dealing a lot more with pre-oedipal issues. These children obviously do require a different approach. Not that one avoids what the child is bringing, but that what the child is bringing is different. The oedipal themes which Klein tackled so boldly with Richard probably will come much later on in the treatment but sadly children we have in therapy are often taken out of treatment and the therapies are thus interrupted long before one reaches that point.

*–In your paper you write about how words can be experienced as concrete objects attacking the child, and that this require an other way of working with the child.*

When children function at a more concrete level, they sometimes hear us saying things, not at the level of giving meaning to things, but that they really experience the words as if we are actually throwing things at them. When that is the case, we obviously have to understand the child's fear that words are not to do with meaning and understanding, but can be used to attack. Then one has to interpret the child's fear of the analyst or therapist as somebody that is using their mind not to help the child but to attack the child. A lot of work is needed to reach a more symbolic range of communication with the child whose mind is in a less developed

state than Richard's was. If you put thoughts into words before the child can hear you at the level of words as providers of meaning, they may instead feel things as actually happening, and this can be very frightening for the child. Functioning on this level, the child can counterattack if they feel attacked. When this is the situation, it is of vital importance to interpret the anxiety. One often has to do quite a lot of work of containing the anxious thoughts instead of giving interpretations of meaning, before the child is ready to receive them.

I hope these observations help to make it clear just how rich a resource Klein's writings about child analysis remain for us today and that I will have encouraged you too to read her afresh along with the recent books which help us to appreciate her contribution more fully.

## Referanser

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