

# **THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE: THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN PSYCHOANALYTICAL SOCIETY**

**A**



## **PERSONAL VIEW**

**Maria Teresa Savio Hooke**

### **The early spark**

In this history I am trying to put together a small fragment in the larger landscape: the history of my society does not belong only to us, it is part of the history of the psychoanalytic movement, especially of its beginnings.

History, traumas and vicissitudes are not exclusive to the Australian Society, nor is it only our task to process and metabolize them and avoid depositing it on future generations.

Histories belong to all of us. I am thinking for example at the paper that Serge Frisch presented last year in Brussels, "What If Freud had stopped over in Brussels", which was so evocative and in which we all found part of our own histories and of our own struggles.

So, I welcome the initiative of the EPF to have in the program this Meet the Society section.

At the beginning there was a spark, an interest. We are now in Australia in 1911 and the spark came from a former Presbyterian pastor Donald Fraser who – as we learnt from Strachey (1913) - invited Freud, Jung and Havelock Ellis to give a paper before the Australasian Medical Congress in Sydney. Freud of course did not come, but he sent a paper titled “On Psychoanalysis “.

Freud mentioned this invitation in a letter to Ferenczi (1911): “Two days ago a new continent announces itself. The secretary of the Neurological Section of the Australian congress disclosed itself as a subscriber of the Jahrbuch and asked for a short account of my theories which are still quite unknown in Australia”. Freud ended his letter “no sign of life yet from Africa “.

The myth goes that Fraser was forced to abandon the ministry because of his sympathy for Freud.

So, in the same year that Freud, Ferenczi and Jung were aboard the Washington en route to the US to give the famous lectures at Clark University, in a more modest way this former pastor, having completed his medical studies, was organising the first reading groups on psychoanalysis in Australia and inviting Freud. (M.I. Rotmiller De Zetner, 1977)

But would the new continent be able to maintain this initial spark?

As you know, Australia was founded in 1788 as a colony of Britain, a dumping ground of unwanted convicts and a new country for free settlers. We are a nation of past and recent migrants. The tyranny of distance, the traumas of migration, and the opportunity and freedom that this experiment offered have shaped Australia and they have also shaped the history of psychoanalysis in this country.

In spite of the sufferings of the early settlers and the massacre committed against the indigenous populations, Australia is a successful experiment in which the rejects of one society created another society who has become a solid and flourishing democracy (Malouf 1998).

But behind the massacre and the appropriation of the land from the indigenous people – the sacred land - there are the unsettling feelings of guilt and shame, which only recently have been brought into the open.

And behind the myth of the Lucky Country, of hedonism and of emotional shallowness there is another story: of loss and dislocation, of alienation and malaise, of the tormented relationship between white and indigenous Australians.



Freddie Timms:  
Black Fellow  
Creek Country,  
1991 Art Gallery of  
New South Wales

In the years in  
which

psychoanalysis established itself in Europe and in the Americas, in the early and middle 1900's, Australia went through a period of further isolation. While remoteness protected the country from the most devastating effects of two wars, it also protected it – so to speak – from modernity, so while Picasso was seen as degenerative art and James Joyce was banned (Malouf 1998), the borders were also closed to all migration but the British.

This was called the White Australia Policy. Such attitudes and policies were a factor in Australia not benefiting from the exodus of European intellectuals in the middle to late thirties that created in America the new intellectual disciplines which marked the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Malouf 1988).

### **The Migration**

Such attitudes also affected the migration of the European Jewish analysts, which was part of the Diaspora following the surge of the Nazis. Six analysts applied to come to Australia in 1938, five Hungarian and a German; of the five only two got the visa: Clara Geroe and Andrew Peto.

Words don't convey what transpires from reading the letters and telegrams between Jones and the group of Hungarians: from one side the mobilization of the psychoanalytic community to save them and from the other the despair of the waiting for permits and visa, the fear of time running out, as a failure to obtain those papers was equivalent to a death sentence.

With the arrival of Clara Geroe in Melbourne in 1940 the psychoanalytic spark was reignited, or better it was reignited by the encounter between her and a very active and enthusiastic group of psychiatrists who had been working with Jones in trying to bring a number of analysts to Australia.

As in many countries, it was the working together of local pioneers and of refugees from Europe which established psychoanalysis. In Australia two psychiatrists: Roy Winn and Paul Dane represented this connection. They had been soldiers in the first war, and they became interested in psychoanalysis in response to



trauma, listening to the testimony of traumatized soldiers and shell-shocked veterans.

So, it all started with trauma.

Winn and Dane trained in London with the British Society and became the first analysts in this country, instrumental in establishing the first two institutes, in Melbourne and Sydney.

Clara Lazar Geroe had trained in Budapest at the school of Ferenczi and was analyzed by Michel Balint. I quote from an interview she gave in 1977 to Judy Brett titled "The Reluctant Immigrant":

"I came to Australia because Hitler came to Europe. We had a happy and well-ordered life, and I had no intention of migrating. When Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia Dr. John Rickman of the British Society came to Budapest to advise us how to get out and where we should go.

We heard of countries about which we knew almost nothing, and New Zealand was one of these. It was suggested that we should try as there was a lot of interests in modern educational ideas in New Zealand, more so than in Australia at the time.

There were four or five of us, who were friends and we thought we would like to migrate together. But with all the assistance from Jones, Princess Bonaparte and leading medical people in New Zealand, we were twice refused. It became more and more urgent and finally only I was able to obtain a permit, not for New Zealand but for Australia,

Then the war broke out and the permit was cancelled. I was so ambivalent about leaving that I was glad we could stay, but after some months our permit was renewed. We left on an Italian ship for Australia."

As we know, the politics of psychoanalytic institutions did not stop because of Hitler. Documents (Judi Meszaros, 2008) say that Jones was not supportive of the Hungarians settling in London as he did not wish to fill the society of which he was president with followers of Ferenczi, so they were encouraged to come here.

The unwanted again sent to the colonies.

# Melbourne May Be World SOUL-CURE CENTRE

By Alan Moyle

In a room in Collins-st. the other day a judge, on behalf of a handful of leading medical men of Melbourne and Sydney, launched Australia's first institute for psychoanalysis. As news, it won a small newspaper paragraph. But a renowned specialist told me yesterday that it was probably the biggest move yet in the history of Australian medicine.

## His Vest Is Bullet-Proof



"The Americas will not be threatened or steered into the ways the dictators want us to follow."—President Roosevelt.

It has raised the possibility of Melbourne becoming a world centre for the world cure — of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis has been so essential as it is today, with the loss of half the world's people among the carnage of war or shattered by the terror of war.

"Europe's loss is Australia's gain. Some of the finest overseas practitioners have arrived here or are planning to come to Australia. Their experience will be invaluable in developing this comparatively new science here. That is, perhaps, the main reason why I say there is every reason to believe that Melbourne may become the world centre for psychoanalytical research."

Or as Riccardo Steiner (2000) puts it: "America really seemed to work as a sort of dumping place and England as a place of higher civilization and culture". Australia was even a lower priority, the first choice for the refugees was London,

From the Sun News, 19 October 1940

then America, then – if all failed – Australia, or in the case of the Hungarian analysts, New Zealand.

### The first Institute – Melbourne as “The World Soul Cure Centre” (1)

So, since Freud's letter to Ferenczi of 1911 we had to wait for another 30 years for the new continent to announce itself and it did with a bang, with the foundation in 1940 of the first Psychoanalytic Institute in Australia, in Melbourne. Ernest Jones was on the Board together with many leading psychiatrists and intellectuals. Clara Geroe was soon appointed by Jones, apparently on Balint's suggestion, as training analyst of the British Society and Melbourne was authorized to function as a Branch of the British Society.

The arrangement of the Melbourne Institute as a satellite of the British Society lasted for nearly 30 years, until 1968 when the IPA came on the scene. This was probably based on a personal agreement, and was in contrast with the fact that already in 1925 the IPA set up a committee to recommend and oversee training for psychoanalytic Institutes ( Eisold, 1994 ).It nevertheless allowed a beginning.

But beginnings, as we know, leave powerful legacies and long shadows on the following generations and the repercussions and conflicts went well into the seventies.

Such arrangement may seem extraordinary to us today, but it was perfectly normal in the context of the country at the time: Australia was very British, at times more British than Britain: economically, politically, socially, and emotionally the links with Britain were very strong, many Australian still called Britain 'home'.

This was the beginning of a long lasting and emotionally complex association of our society with the British Society: as a small, isolated outpost on the other side of the world, with a fragile sense of identity, insecure about our non- so- kosher beginnings, we came to depend intellectually and emotionally from the British Society, and I think that for a while we lived in projective identification with it.

The struggle of our society to find its own identity is in a way parallel to the struggle of this country, which I think only in the last 10/15 years has found its own separate identity.

So, we have already the beginning of what was going to become a complex and potentially explosive mix with our double heritage.

Geroe brought to Melbourne Ferenczi's attitude of open-mindedness toward other disciplines, which meant a quite extraordinary outreach work even by today's standards: she established connections with universities and hospitals, and setup a low fee clinic and a child clinic.

I quote from her interview again: "This was a bit of a private war of mine. I had made a promise to myself that as I was lucky enough to come away from Hungary safely with my family, I would never turn away from the Institute for financial reasons any child who needed help. I kept it as long as I was physically able'.

This conveys the loss, the grief, and the chances to repair that the new country offered.

Being the only training analyst, she selected, analyzed, supervised, conducted clinical seminars, and recommended candidates for associate membership of the British Society. She also brought the tradition of training of the Budapest School: candidates had their first training case supervised on the couch by their analyst; this was seen as a better way to accomplish the analysis of the candidate's countertransference.

The influence of the Budapest School was still so pervasive, that in 1965, on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Melbourne Institute, in the presence of Michael and Enid Balint, Frank Graham, one of her first qualified analyst, talked about the occasion being a 'Ferenczi festival'. Comment that must have raised the eyebrows of the colleagues who – by this time - had gone to London, trained with the British Society, many in the Kleinian model.

But by now Clara Geroe had become identified with the rather loose boundaries that have been part of many beginnings, in this case of having to establish training with only one training analyst.

It is interesting that, with the death of the pioneers, there is no collective memory in our society of our Hungarian legacy; it is not part of our family romance.

### **The Sydney Institute – Premature losses**

Andrew Peto, the other Hungarian who had obtained the permit to migrate to Australia, but who delayed leaving and for that he tragically lost his wife in the holocaust, arrived in Sydney in 1949. Roy Winn, the local pioneer, Peto and Siegfried Fink, a German analyst member of the Swiss Society, founded in 1951. the Sydney Institute. At the inaugural meeting Peto gave a lecture on war neurosis to an audience of 60 people, which was remarkable for the times. For many years the institute worked closely with psychiatrists and such collaboration resulted in the position of 'psychoanalyst' in a general hospital (Martin, 1999).

Peto, analysed only one candidate as – after five years - he left for New York where he became president of the New York Society.

His departure must have been a devastating loss for the young Institute as Peto, apart from being the only training analyst, established a wide range of creative connections with the professional scene. Two other events marked the end of psychoanalytic training in Sydney. Peto's only candidate, died prematurely and Fink also died in 1961. Roy Winn, who went in analysis with Peto hoping to become a training analysis, had his hopes dashed.

The spark died again. We have now to wait 17 years (1968) for training to start in Sydney.

We see how the origin of psychoanalysis in Australia was marked by migration, loss, grief, unsettlement, and death.

How has this affected our group unconscious? I quote from Serge Frisch (2009):

“As psychoanalysts we are permeated by the unconscious, we are structured, as it were, by the unconscious of the institution to which we belong, the institution that existed long before we became psychoanalysts. In that sense our analytical societies are the locus in which unconscious elements are produced. We may also become the depositories of elements of the group unconscious, some of which have remained unprocessed by the group, handed down as raw material, from one generation to the next.”

I believe that such 'raw material' remained unprocessed. At the time the group was too unformed to be able to contain and metabolize it. A reflection on our early history became part of our consciousness much later. In this we reflected the culture of the country, the so called 'Great Australian Silence' towards its early history which has taken years to repair.

In 1958 a third Institute was founded in Adelaide, by an analysand of Clara Geroe. Training started in conjunction with the Melbourne Institute thousands of kilometers away. Adelaide became the outpost of her training tradition.

### **The first pioneers and the Australian Society of Psychoanalysts**

In 1953 a group of analysts from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide formed the Australian Society of Psychoanalysts, officially still as the Australian Branch of the British Society. Melbourne is not anymore, the only "world soul cure centre"!

The new group includes six analysts, plus Ernest Jones and Michael Balint. Reading the documents of the time, one is struck by the aliveness of its scientific life and especially of the outreach activities.

It is interesting that nothing of this gets mentioned in the many histories written of the Australian Society. Only the difficulties are emphasized, as if a mantle of negativity has become part of our collective memory.

But the disquiet was growing in London about the authority given to Clara Geroe and the British Society now passed to the IPA the responsibility for training in Australia..

### **The IPA and the bitter transition**

The transition from the old training system which had been in place for 27 years to the new one, according to IPA standard – culminated with the Australian Society becoming a Component Society in 1973. Prof. Martin, its foundation President, in his address at the IPA Paris Congress of that year spoke of the hope for psychoanalysis to grow and develop in 'this rapidly growing young nation'.

But psychoanalysis grew very slowly in 'this rapidly growing young nation' and the transition between the two training systems proved problematic.

For the first time, a number of analysts who belonged to three institutes divided by very long distances, and who had different trainings, different legacies and 'filiations', and probably not very experienced, were brought together with the task to set up training according to the IPA.

Not surprising, consensus proved especially difficult between the ones trained in Australia and those trained in London. The transition was acrimonious and bitter and planted the seed for what became a near-missed split a few years later. It consumed the energy of the newly formed society for years, and the energy, time, and money of the IPA.

As history is always contemporary history, what happen then is still very relevant today for newly formed psychoanalytic groups, when different legacies and different training experiences must find a way to live together. The IPA Sponsoring Committee came to Australia only once - the tyranny of distance again or perhaps it was the way things were done then - an exploration of the functioning of the group was not on the agenda, and the consequences of this have been serious.

### **The anxieties of the newly formed Australian Psychoanalytical Society**



The new Component Society with training as the main preoccupation became narrow and rigid. Training and the internal disputes soaked up all the energies and little by little the promising and imaginative outreach work died out.

The Society closed on itself and became inward looking. This bred elitism and orthodoxy. The ethos was of a monoculture which could not tolerate other views. This period was also marked by personal breakdowns, death, illnesses, and ethical breaches.

I believe that an anxiety of fragmentation held us together in an artificial way, denying individual difference and stultifying creativity: debate and confrontation was feared as possibly disintegrating the group. It was survival stuff.

We did not have our 'controversial discussion' as the phantasy was that the structure would not have been solid enough to contain it. This had a basis in reality: the group at this point was more a collection of individuals with different personalities than a cohesive working group; there was not a culture of working together. We needed a parental container to be able to start exploring our group dynamics and how we were functioning.

### **A narrowly averted split and the work of the IPA Site Visiting Committee**

This arrived in the late seventies, when Adelaide asked for the IPA intervention and requested to separate from the Australian Society and to become a study group. The threat of a split, which had been brooding for many years, became real. By now we are still small, and a split seems unrealistic: less than 50 members. Adelaide had 6 members. The focus of the controversies was centred on the appointment of training analysts, as it often is, also in this we were not unique.

We had three IPA Visiting Committees, but only the third in 1986 with Joseph Sandler and Arnold Cooper brought substantial changes and was transformational for the Australian Society. Their work gave the group the chance to take up a self-reflective, analytic stance toward its functioning, and this became possible as the committee itself functioned as container and facilitator.

This time the spark caught fire. The Australian Society took up the challenge and embarked on a process of change. The recommendation focused on a generational change and a more democratic sharing of power. Some recommendations took years to be implemented, others were done and then undone, and not everyone was happy. The generational change created a lot of resentment in the ones who were now out of office, and this provoked further conflicts.

But the IPA Visiting Committee's Report remains a very contemporary document even after 20 years. Many of the problems identified then reflected the many struggles which societies face in their development.

Change could not have occurred without two other important factors: new members qualified who were not part of the old conflicts, and over the years a significant number of colleagues arrived, mainly from England, who contributed with their own background, experience, and dedication to the development of the Australian Society and to the broadening of its profile.

## **Today**

Of the many changes of recent years, I would like to conclude mentioning two which I see as significant.

One has been the engagement of the Australian Society in a cultural discourse which has taken place in the country among historians, political writers, and social commentators about the silence on early history, the relationship with the First Nation people and past and recent migration; something that up to now had remained fragmented in the Australian psyche. In this we worked with our Jungian and Lacanian colleagues and within the mental health scene.

This testified to our growing independence and finding of our own voice in parallel with a similar process which was going on in the country. It was also an occasion for self-reflection on our own history and cultural heritage.

The other is the coming of age of our younger members and candidates, who now write scientific papers, publish, present to international conferences, and are engaged with the local and with the international psychoanalytic community. This conveys an aliveness which I hope indicates that some of the traumatic history of the past has been processed and that we are not the depository of the unfinished psychological tasks of the older generations.

At the end of the day, we all must confront the disillusionment about psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic institutions. I quote from Ferro (1999):

“Bion reminds us that we must be aware that there are elements inside us about which we can do nothing. It is a matter of making the best of a bad deal. In this case we are the bad deal. No one can be analyzed completely. Eventually the analysis has to stop and then we have to make do with what we are. “

I think this applies also to psychoanalytic societies.

I leave you with the Dreamers:

(1) This was the title of an article published by a Melbourne newspaper The Sun-News Pictorial Magazine on the occasion of the opening of the Melbourne Institute.

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