

**Interview with Dr. Leo Rangell, for Dr. Bond's book, Margaret Mahler, a Biography of the Psychoanalyst.**

**Interviewer: Dr. Alma H. Bond**

**Dr. Leo Rangell** first met Margaret Mahler in 1941 when he was a resident at the Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University. "Mahler was a new person in my life, a young emigré child analyst, when I was still a neurologist," he said. "I was very impressed with her even though she was quite young herself, perhaps 44 years old. I was impressed with her bearing and her authority already came through. She hospitalized a seven-year-old boy for Tourette's syndrome, and assigned the case to me. I gave him analytic psychotherapy, under her direction. I treated the boy for a year, as long as I was a resident, and we published a paper about it, *A Psychosomatic Study of Maladie des Tics (Gilles de la Tourette's disease)*<sup>1</sup>. To this day it is the only analytic paper about Tourette's. The case was very successful, and everybody was excited about it. She always referred to his "motoric" symptoms. Everybody else called it 'motor.' Fifty years later, she told me she had seen the 'boy' and gone to the movies with him. I asked her how he was. She answered, 'Much better.' It was a psychosomatic paper; I supplied the neurological part, and helped her with her English.

"I think I represented young American people to her, I, Jack Arlow, and Lou Linn, who were all residents together.

"We were socially and personally friendly, but it was a social relationship, not an intimate one. For instance, she never talked to me about her childhood. She knew my wife and children. Mahler made a first birthday party for my daughter, Judy, who is now sixty years old,

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<sup>1</sup>Mahler, M.S. and Rangell, L. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 17:579-603, 1943.

in her apartment on Central Park West. I tell her, 'Do you know that Margaret Mahler made you your first birthday party?'

"After Pearl Harbor, I left for the army. That's how we separated. She was very disappointed. She wanted me to write a book on tics with her. I would have wanted to do it, if I hadn't had to leave. I never moved back to New York She got mad at me, and said crazy things, like I left her. She said that I rejected her. As if I wanted to be in the army!

"I was proud of her and she was of me. To her surprise I became well known. She thought I was just a kid.

"I saw her occasionally after that at meeting, conferences, and so forth. I always said she was a good friend to me and I to her.

"She got mad at me another time, after I was president of the American Psychoanalytic Association. A lot was brewing at that time. Mahler was nominated for president. She was eager to do it, but got cold feet. David Beres also was running for president. She said I was the West Coast man for Beres, a close friend of Arlow, Brenner, and me. She believed I was a spy on the West Coast, and would ruin her career. She was afraid Beres would defeat her, so she withdrew. Beres was elected.

"We became friendly again through the literature. I always quoted her in my papers. I had great respect for her, and thought she was a marvelous child analyst.

"I had a hand in starting the Infant Psychiatry Conference in Portugal, and then Cannes. I gave a paper on psychiatry at the Cannes meeting. She was there.

"She had come over to be honored. We met and were friends again. Then she died.

"By the time we met for the last time, she had become bitter and feisty, with the same paranoid streak, and wore a self-satisfied look She felt she did not get the acclaim she deserved. She was a forceful, difficult, and important person, who didn't get enough recognition. She was

not as sweet forty years later as she had been in 1941. I remember her gently because of the party she gave for my daughter.

“She was competitive with me, and not at all passive. That’s why she was so nice to my daughter. It was very unusual, as I was a resident. I hadn’t started analytic training yet, and was just beginning to be a candidate.

“Her Separation-Individuation theory is remarkable. With it she made a lasting contribution to psychoanalysis. I do think there is a bit too much stress on the Rapproachment phase. I resent that, and think it should be put into its proper perspective. She never developed a school of her own, like the British analysts. Mahler and Greenacre were just as creative, but never had a separate school. I think that is to her credit, as I am against separate schools and in favor of integration.”