Politics Masquerading as Science: Ralph Greenson, Anna Freud, and the Klein Wars

Douglas Kirsner, Ph.D.

Psychoanalysis is not only a crucial means of understanding human nature and treating mental illness but also an intellectual discipline with pretensions to scientific status. Ideally, general investigations within the discipline together with scientific differences between the different schools of psychoanalytic thought should be addressed in scientific ways by subjecting the ideas to empirical and theoretical examination and evaluation of methods and evidence. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis is also a social movement with bases in many countries which, since Freud, have divided into several competing schools. Central to this competition is the struggle to obtain and retain intellectual authority, to inherit the mantle of legitimacy. How far has the “movement” dimension of psychoanalysis, and the competition among Freud's inheritors, undermined theory and practice? How far has politics encroached on and even compromised the intellectual discipline?

The basic rule of psychoanalysis is to be straightforward and honest. At least on a scientific basis, this involves the cut and thrust of argument with evidence rather than political campaigning under the guise of open scientific debate. This article, based on archival research at UCLA and the Library of Congress, demonstrates the level of political encroachment on a scientific approach in a particular period of the “Klein wars.” In this context, I neither advocate nor criticize Kleinian approaches. Instead, I point to historical evidence that illustrates the extent of the incursion of a political campaign into what ought to be and is often presented as a scientific debate that progresses through argumentation and intellectual and clinical evaluation. Since we do not live in an ideal world, some degree of contamination of science by politics is inevitable, but the extent of this encroachment is critical. Where the politics is clear, it can be taken somewhat into account, but politics pretending to be science is quite another matter. I want to outline a historical example of this, which shows how politics and personalities have distorted what should be a scientific issue and impacted the way that the discipline of psychoanalysis was pursued and understood. I refer to the historical evidence of correspondence between key players in what Ralph Greenson termed “our anti-Kleinian declaration of war.” I outline a period of the axis of Ralph Greenson in Los Angeles together with Anna Freud and the Hampstead Clinic in London in the development of their mutual mission to combat the Kleinians, as revealed through their correspondence. This case illustrates the effect of “behind-the-scenes” activities on distorting proper critical discussion in a major scientific
division in psychoanalysis. The sources viewed are the extensive Ralph R. Green-son Papers, 1934-1979 (GP; Collection number: 1497, UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections Manuscripts Division, Los Angeles, CA) and the Anna Freud Papers (AFP; Sig-mund Freud Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).*

From the 1930s onward the major division in the psychoanalytic world has been between the Freudians and the Kleinians. The deep-seated antipathy between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud is well illustrated by discussions held at the British Psychoanalytical Society between the Kleinians and Anna Freudians of the British Psychoanalytical Society from 1941 to 1945, known as “the controversial discussions” (King & Steiner, 1991). After World War II, training at the British Institute was divided between the A group, headed by Anna Freud, and Klein's B group. Students could choose which group to train with, and seminars were divided into group A and group B, the exception being that Anna Freud gave a series of seminars to both groups over the three-year training. The war between the Kleinians and the

The author is grateful to these collections for their invaluable help with this research.

Anna Freudians was represented in Britain by the differences between the British Society and Anna Freud's Hampstead Clinic.

Greenson's later particular contribution supporting Anna Freud against the Kleinians both in the United States and internationally is less known. Greenson and Anna Freud shared a common cause—their long-standing antipathy to the Kleinians. I have previously detailed Greenson's struggle against the development of the Kleinian influence at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, in particular how Greenson served Anna Freud in Los Angeles (Kirsner, 2000). However, I did not discover the full extent of this influence nor the nature of the international connection until I undertook subsequent archival research, which strongly confirms the findings of that earlier work.

Although the struggles between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, highlighted in the wartime “Controversial Discussions” were a crucial aspect of the history of the British Psychoanalytical Society from the 1930s, the entry of Kleinianism came much later to the United States. There was considerable resistance to Klein's ideas from the medically trained analysts of the American Psychoanalytic Association when ego psychology was the mainstream perspective. Klein was seen as anathema in the United States. The first theoretical discussion of Klein's ideas at an American psychoanalytic society was in 1959 by Bernard Brandchaft to the Los Angeles Society, where Greenson reportedly commented, “I can't wait to take on Kleinian psychoanalysis” (Kirsner, 2000, p. 168).

During the 1960s interest in Kleinian approach developed considerably in Los
Angeles with an enthusiastic Kleinian study group that sponsored visits by British Kleinians. The year 1968 saw what Greenson exaggeratedly called the Kleinian “invasion” of Los Angeles—the emigration from London of Kleinian analysts Wilfred Bion and Albert Mason. From that year the longstanding close relationship between Anna Freud and Ralph Greenson focused on a central issue. Not only was Greenson bent on destroying the Kleinian influence in Los Angeles, but he engaged in a united campaign against the Kleinians internationally. This was to be carried out principally through a “research project” (funded by his own Foundation) that led to the paper “Transference: Freud or Klein?” that was delivered at the Paris Congress of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in 1973 and subsequently published in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* (Greenson, 1974).

Greenson's Foundation for Psychoanalytic Research, principally funded through its president, Lita Annenberg-Hazen, who was a patient of Greenson's, appointed Anna Freud “Consultant Emeritus” in February 1968. This paved the way for a plan of paid consultations, which included discussing his own future research project about the Kleinians as well as the future direction of psychoanalysis in Los Angeles, especially given the Kleinian “invasion” (Greenson to Anna Freud, February 12, 1968, and March 18, 1968, AFP). Greenson told Anna Freud of his “great hopes” for that project he had begun and hoped “to continue on a broader scale with the Kleinians” (Greenson to Anna Freud, May 21, 1968, GP).

Anna Freud asked Greenson if the Kleinians were “gaining ground” and were new training analysts at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (LAPSI). She was referring to the simultaneous appointment in 1967 of sixteen new training analysts, including three Kleinians, at LAPSI after over a decade of blocking the promotions (Kirsner, 2000, p. 164). This provided the Kleinians with a bridgehead, since training analyst status is the major analytic pathway to legitimacy and authority. Given this eventuality Anna Freud saw Greenson's project of a “showdown with them” as becoming “more and more important” (Anna Freud to Greenson, November 17, 1968, GP).

Greenson replied on November 25, 1968, that although neither Bion nor Mason was a training analyst, they could still influence members of LAPSI by analyzing them. Since the Kleinian movement was growing, the Research Project would be “very helpful in influencing this trend.” He told her he would get Herbert Rosenfeld from London to present a psychotic case to him and his close colleague, Milton Wexler (AFP). The fact that Greenson thought the Research Project would “influence this trend” is scarcely the hallmark of objective scientific research, where the conclusions are open and not known beforehand. Greenson was disguising politics as scientific “research,” but not to Anna Freud.
Eight months later Anna Freud wrote asking Greenson to take an important matter very seriously. She was “very anxious” that he “produce the results of your discussions with the Kleini-ans very soon” (emphasis in original). She did not think there was much to be learned by waiting longer, “and if the interval is too long, your involvement with them will be misunderstood.” She saw it as important that “some clarification” occurred before the next International Psychoanalytic Congress. She was writing this out of “my personal concern for you” (Anna Freud to Greenson, August 10, 1969, GP).

Whatever her “personal concern”—which may refer to Greenson's consorting with Kleinians not being “misunderstood” by others—Anna Freud was anxious that Greenson should produce the results of the research “very soon” so that the issues could be canvassed between the 1969 IPA Congress, which was less than a year off in Rome, and the 1971 Vienna Congress. She correctly believed that Greenson would not learn more by undertaking further research, given that he knew the results in advance. This is evidenced by Greenson's reassurance to Anna Freud just five days later that he was “very well aware of the importance” of that research. “I feel that they do represent a real and destructive force in the psychoanalytic movement” (August 15, 1969, AFP). However, the reason for his delay was, he told Anna Freud, that he had not progressed far enough because he had only thus far studied how a Kleinian would analyze a neurotic patient. Even that, he said, was incomplete since the Kleinian presenting to him had only done so for a few months. That Kleinian happened to be the leading Kleinian during that period in Los Angeles, Bernard Brandchaft (see Kirsner, 2000, p. 189).

Greenson's study of how a Kleinian, Herbert Rosenfeld, treated a psychotic patient involved a plan. Greenson, together with his office neighbor and close colleague Milton Wexler, had arranged for Rosenfeld to come to the United States to present a case to Wexler with Greenson as auditor and then for Wexler and Greenson to go to England to listen to Rosenfeld presenting again. “That would give us an opportunity to accumulate enough data, so that we could publish something quite definitive about how the Kleinians really do work with neurotic and psychotic patients.” Presumably Greenson and Wexler did not tell Rosenfeld that they were doing this in order to attack the Kleinians, for otherwise Rosenfeld would not have consented. But Greenson felt “premature publication would diminish its importance.” In other words, he believed that the material he gleaned from Rosenfeld would help the cause.

But was this under false pretenses? Clearly, there was a caveat: “I realize that my constant presence in the company of Kleinians at seminars, etc., gives a false impression, but all my writings indicate that I am not taken in by what they are
proclaiming.” That is quite an exaggeration. For example, articles published before 1969 in Greenson's *Explorations in Psychoanalysis* (1978) reveal few references to Klein, one even positive (p. 173). Nonetheless, his *Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis* (1967) contains some negative critique of Klein while at the same time acknowledging some important contributions (pp. 134-35). The fact that Greenson was critical at times of Klein, even important times, did not mean that he could not appear to be open to Kleinians, even influenced by them at a given time. After all, people sometimes do change their minds in view of new ideas. Greenson wrote, “I told my Kleinian colleagues that I was coming to learn how Kleinians work and was not interested in becoming a Kleinian” (Greenson, 1974, p. 522). However, nobody would expect someone doing research to aim at joining their camp. What could be reasonably expected, though, is genuine openness. The Kleinians obviously were taken in by Greenson's pretense at openness, at least for a time. Brandchaft told me that the discussions in the research group involving himself, Alfred Goldberg, Gerald Aronson, Milton Wexler, and Greenson, though critical, “would have been a credit to any scientific community” (Kirsner, 2000, p. 189). Although Rosenfeld was scathing about Greenson's misconstrual of Klein (Rosenfeld, 1974, p. 49), he must have thought at the time of their meetings that Greenson had an open mind. Would any of them have participated had they known Greenson's real views at the time as revealed in these letters?

In the same letter to Anna Freud, Greenson maintained that although some Kleinian theoretical and clinical concepts had some value, he regarded the actual clinical technique and applications of theory as “nothing but a sheer disaster. I am convinced they provoke the clinical material that their patients produce,” in fact “an artificial neurosis” (August 15, 1969, GP). This damning indictment of Kleinianism with its passion and conviction makes it unlikely that he would see anything but what he was expecting in his forthcoming research.

Elaborating his thoughts concerning the Kleinians and the IPA, Greenson told Anna Freud that he believed the Kleinians could be counteracted most effectively by exposing what they did with their patients' clinical material. He was not so much focusing on technical errors as on something more important that informed his whole anti-Kleinian project to influence the IPA. In order to expose technical and theoretical differences, he wanted to show how Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalysts heard and dealt with their patients' material. A detailed demonstration of how Kleinians and Freudians differently listen and deal with case material “will make quite an impact” (Greenson to Anna Freud, September 9, 1969, AFP). That was the aim in the anti-Kleinian campaign they both shared. Of course, Greenson presupposes that most Freudians and Kleinians as groups treat their patients in requisitely similar ways. But given the difference between theory and application, it may be the case that there is
similarity between how some Kleinians and some Freudians similarly treat an individual or that Kleinians or Freudians treat patients differently among themselves. The relationship between theory and practice is not simply cause and effect. This is true not only for psychoanalysis but for the history of medicine and psychology. Major differences in theory do not necessarily imply consequences for the way a particular patient is actually treated by a particular psychoanalyst. Greenson categorized and overgeneralized in the service of his political aim to spear the Kleinians in what he saw as their most vulnerable spot for analysts who might be persuaded against Kleinianism.

Going beyond the Kleinians' errors of technique, Greenson wanted the project to show how “fanaticism” narrowed “perception and thinking,” eventuating in “a loss of clinical judgment and scientific integrity.” He did not believe that attacking theoretical misconceptions could be as effective as attacking the “fanaticism” in their clinical work “and the resultant dishonesty and hypocrisy that goes along with fanaticism. I feel the more material we collect and are able to use for these purposes, the greater impact the publication would have on the majority of psychoanalysts.” The best strategy to combat the Kleinians' “mystical appeal” was to target concrete clinical work rather than abstract and condensed theoretical formulations, as only thus would it be effectively communicable to analysts. “The Achilles Heel of the Kleinian position is far more in what he actually does than what he asserts he does in public reports. Only our detailed and intimate approach can reveal this” (Greenson to Anna Freud, September 9, 1969, AFP). This was the wedge he would use, and he therefore needed to gather the material for it. Greenson's role as a politician rather than a scientist could not be clearer. Not that there is anything wrong with straight politics—it is simply that he was attempting to misrepresent his political approach as purely scientific. Only through such disguise could this be effective—disguise not only to the Kleinian participants in the “research,” but also to the whole psychoanalytic community.

Greenson told Anna Freud that Milton Wexler, his colleague in this project, “agrees with the points of view I have described. However, we shall keep our minds open and we will alter our stand if we believe it to be in the best interest of psychoanalysis” (AFP). Despite this vow, he was expressing his negative views on Klein publicly at the time (Greenson, 1969, p. 352). However, engaging in robust debate on theory is a far cry from plotting to destroy the Kleinian movement at what Greenson thought was its weakest political link in clinical case work that was gathered so as to attack it with his own preconceived aims buttressed by material selectively chosen to fit his agenda.

Greenson was disingenuous about circulating drafts of this paper—“Transference: Freud or Klein?” which was based on this research project—before it
was finalized for the Paris Congress in 1973. He secretly circulated drafts for comment to Anna Freud and members of her center so as to fine-tune the attack but did not circulate drafts to any Kleinians at the time. This was because the scientific spirit was not really on Greenson's agenda in relation to the Kleinians—to him, the Kleinians were fanatics and enemies. Why else would he write to the Joffes in London just three months later, “I am trying to think about how you and

I and Yorke can collaborate on our anti Kleinian declaration of war”? (Greenson to Dr. and Mrs. Walter Joffe, September 2, 1971, GP). Or why did he state to Anna Freud that he was “getting together material for a paper attacking the Kleinians” (Greenson to Anna Freud, November 1, 1971, GP)?

Later Greenson went to the leading British Kleinian, Hanna Segal, in London in 1973. Greenson reported to Masud Khan that Segal “said that I misrepresented myself to her by coming for supervision when I actually came to learn.” If she had known it was not for supervision, she would not have charged Green-son. Moreover, she claimed to have helped Greenson with one of his cases. He denied misrepresenting himself, telling “each Kleinian that I came to learn how they worked and not to become a Kleinian.” Moreover, Greenson claimed she did discuss a case, but only after he insisted on giving her a resume of the past five years rather than just the last hour, as she had asked him to do (Greenson to Masud Khan, September 7, 1973, GP). Segal considered that Greenson had misrepresented himself to her. Greenson agreed that she had helped him with a case, which supports the impression that he was going to her for supervision. Greenson always claimed that he was not double dealing. As he wrote to Merton Gill, “I said to each of the Kleinians with whom I worked at the very beginning of our meetings that I was coming to them to learn how Kleinians work and I was not at all interested in becoming a Kleinian” (September 19, 1973, GP).

Nonetheless, this is a strange way of putting things. To “come to learn how Kleinians work” would normally be construed as embodying an open-minded attitude toward the results. Not only was he not interested in becoming a Kleinian (which nobody could assume anyway); he was interested in finding ammunition to attack them with.

On December 9, Greenson wrote to Anna Freud that Clifford Yorke's paper on Klein (later published; see Yorke, 1971) “was the most lucid and penetrating criticism of Kleinianism I have ever read. I was struck by the absence of rancor. I wish I could say the same about my ‘dream’ paper.” The fact of being “struck by the absence of rancor” in a scientific paper is itself revealing. Greenson had just delivered the A. A. Brill Memorial Lecture at the New York Psychoanalytic Society on November

11, “The Exceptional Position of the Dream in Psychoanalytic Practice.” (I suspect it
is toned down in its published form; see Greenson, 1970.)

Anna Freud told Greenson on December 14 how very pleased she was that Greenson liked Yorke's paper. “I do think that ‘the absence of rancour’ is extremely important in any discussion…. I do like your Dream-paper very much, but it struck me also that it would be more successful in its effect if you could clear it of such feelings. Probably this is one of the disadvantages due to using the opponent's material instead of only one's own. I wonder how you will be able to avoid that when you write your book on the Kleinian technique.” (She assumed that the research project would result in a book.)

Three months later on March 1, 1970, Anna Freud reported to Greenson that the Clinic was about to start a working group, chaired by Dr Walter Joffe, investigating “further Kleinian concepts.”

Later that year Greenson reported to Anna Freud that he had attended the first Faculty Committee meeting at LAPSI, “where all the rumpus goes on with the Kleinians. I felt impelled to speak from the podium three times, with no notes, and without any faltering. The last time in anger, a comrade in arms said, ‘It was good to hear the lion roar!’” (Greenson to Anna Freud, October 21, 1970, AFP).

Greenson continued working on the anti-Kleinian project and wrote Anna Freud, “It is imperative that I meet with you this summer in order to be clear about the Freud-Klein project. I would also love to meet with Yorke and Joffe” (March 26, 1971, GP; emphasis in original). They arranged to all meet in London that July (Greenson to Anna Freud, March 26, 1971; May 22, 1971, GP).

Anna Freud wanted the status of an independent psychoanalytic society for her center but the IPA refused on the basis that the Hampstead Clinic offered training only in child psychoanalysis, not in adult. That is, it did not offer training across all the required areas for psychoanalytic societies. Since the Hampstead Clinic was a minority within the British Society, they were not able to prevail over the Kleinians.

Greenson was “working hard” teaching his technique seminar at LAPSI to fifteen candidates during the academic year 1971-1972. He told Anna Freud that he decided to teach the seminar “to counteract the influence of those Kleinians among us who are training analysts (Americans) and who train some of the candidates in this group. The Kleinian candidates started out quite belligerently but have become much quieter and even thoughtful and perplexed.” He thought one part of this work could be included in volume 2 of his Techni book and another part could go into a paper, “A Critique of Kleinian Psychoanalysis.” He wondered if he should present the paper to the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) or at the IPA Paris Congress, where he could reach Kleinians (Greenson to Anna Freud, May 4, 1972, AFP). Two months later Greenson decided to choose Paris, and asked
Anna Freud to spend an hour with her to discuss “Transference: Freud or Klein?” He would love to obtain her suggestions, he indicated, and would arrive with a rough draft (Greenson to Anna Freud, July 12, 1972, GP). Anna Freud promised to be helpful (Anna Freud to Greenson, September 22, 1972, GP), and Greenson assured her he was working on a draft to be finished by the end of October (October 18, 1972, GP). She told Greenson (November 14) that the paper was “done very well.” He replied that he knew the paper would be accepted and had written requesting an extension in time and discussants to make it more like a panel—understandably he felt it was too important a subject to be presented as an ordinary paper. He had shown the paper to “a few people here who know of the Kleinian invasion,” who felt it was “a very clear demonstration of the enmity in the differences between the two schools” (December 12, 1972, GP). He had in fact written to IPA Program Chair Edward Weinshel that the issue was “too damned important to ask me to squeeze it into forty minutes and have twenty minutes of discussion.” He went on revealingly: “I feel this paper, if it is worth a Goddamn, should be the first battle to destroy the Kleinians, or any other lesser word you wish to use if ‘destroy’ is too strong for your blood, ‘expose’ the Kleinians might be better.” In a postscript he told Weinshel that Anna Freud favored its being given and that the Los Angeles Freudian analysts, who had been “contaminated by Klein,” when shown the paper, were “devastated” by it, “and there are only a handful I trust among these half-breeds.” He considered that the paper would have impact “because it lacks the usual vehemence that one has in Freud-Klein discussions.” vehemence he was demonstrating at that moment! (Greenson to Edward Weinshel, December 11, 1972, GP).

Greenson sent the paper to Walter Joffe and Clifford Yorke in London and wrote that day to Joseph Sandler at the Hampstead Clinic asking for his suggestions for the paper he knew would be accepted in Paris. He understood the universal expectation that it would be “extremely controversial, which is precisely what I want.” He wanted the paper “once and for all, to make the Kleinians come out and say where they really stand or don't stand.” He did not want the paper to be “any attempt at appeasement or playing down the differences.” He asked Sandler for suggestions or deletions (Greenson to Joseph Sandler, December 11, 1972, GP). Sandler sent some detailed amendments, and Anna Freud and Yorke responded that the draft was “beyond reproach.” Anna Freud said the paper confirmed that Kleinian technique was not so much an “error of technique” but “the logical outcome of a theory which in our view is an erroneous one” (Anna Freud and Clifford Yorke to Greenson, December 20, 1972, GP). Greenson responded on January 3, 1973, to Anna Freud saying that he would rework the paper “following the suggestions you have made and then I shall submit that to you and ask you how we should cut it down” (GP).

Thus Greenson received a considerable number of detailed suggestions from
Hampstead Clinic members Anna Freud, Walter Joffe, Joseph Sandler, and Clifford Yorke. Greenson asked Anna Freud on January 31, 1973, “if I may acknowledge your help in preparing this paper at the end of it, or would you rather remain anonymous? I thank all of you for your cooperation.” In a letter to Greenson, Sandler told him: “I don't think you should acknowledge any help—or at any rate, I don't want you to acknowledge mine. I can use the paper better here if I'm not connected with it” (Sandler to Greenson, February 6, 1973, GP). Yorke wrote, “I do not feel that my own suggestions merit an acknowledgement. It is very characteristically your paper and I am quite content to remain anonymous! (In any case, I think your paper would be more telling with the waverers if it were not in any way associated publicly, in however small a way, with someone known in the British society to be strongly anti-Kleinian)” (Yorke to Greenson, February 18, 1973, GP).

Greenson had no problem with this, but clearly he should have. This was a blatant case of politics over science and of changing the facts as to how the paper developed. It was a deliberate ploy to win adherents. This reflects not only on Greenson but on all the others involved.

Anna Freud wrote how “excellent” she “found your paper and how successful you were in blending technique and theory in it” (Anna Freud to Greenson, February 13, 1973, GP). In a letter to Anna Freud, Sandler, Yorke, and Joffe, Greenson wrote: “I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the help you have given me. I am not going to acknowledge any help from any British psychoanalyst in order not to make it seem that a known British anti-Kleinian helped me with the paper. I only acknowledged help from some of the American analysts who did make some helpful suggestions. I even question whether I should leave them out altogether and just mention that I had a grant from the Foundation to do this special research project.” (Greenson to Anna Freud, Sandler, Yorke, and Joffe, February 28, 1973, GP). Again, Anna Freud responded quickly, “I read it on the spot and I think that it is excellent, very clear, very informative, very firm without being provocative and one hundred per cent honest” (Anna Freud to Greenson, March 6, 1973). So there were many exchanges of letters from both sides of the Atlantic, with much time-consuming finessing the paper they all considered very important.

Greenson acknowledged no help from Hampstead members, including Anna Freud, in this anti-Kleinian paper. Only his own Foundation and the American colleagues were thanked in a note in the International Journal of Psycho-Analysis (1974, p. 37). Even these were dropped in Greenson’s (1978) collection of essays which included that paper.

Anna Freud apologized to Greenson in advance for not attending his presentation, but she had decided to “skip” the Paris Congress and “possibly all future ones” for
two reasons: She was getting too old for such events and “or perhaps too fed up with the inability of the IPA to keep psychoanalysis on a good course”

(March 6, 1973, GP). She was 78 and seriously disillusioned with the IPA, mainly for not accepting Hampstead as a component society in its own right. It should be noted that Leo Rangell was president then and that Anna Freud was close to Greenson, who was very negative about Rangell. Moreover, her candidate for the presidency of the IPA, Heinz Kohut, had withdrawn his candidacy since they had ascertained that he would not be elected. She responded to the Vienna Congress very coolly at the time, that is, she was upset with the leadership of the IPA led by Rangell (see Rangell, 2004, p. 149-67).

Greenson replied that he was pleased by Anna Freud's reaction to the paper and hoped it would “influence those who were influenceable.” But he was “very, very sorry” she would not be at the Congress, hear his paper, give him moral support by her presence, and even participate in the discussion, as he was hoping for the support of “anti-Kleinian colleagues” there (March 26, 1973, GP). The paper delivered in Paris—“Transference: Freud or Klein?”—together with the discussion by Rosenfeld were published later in the International Journal of Psycho-Analysis (Greenson, 1974; Rosenfeld, 1974). Hanna Segal's discussion was not published.

Greenson's paper discussed the differences between Freudian and Kleinian approaches to a question of technique—transference. It expressed Greenson's “negative experience with the Kleinians.” Greenson maintained that discussions between Kleinians and Freudians gave the impression of “people speaking two different languages at each other with one ignorant of the other and both firmly prejudiced against the other.” He had “become impressed and puzzled by the growing number of adherents to Kleinian psychoanalysis” (Greenson, 1974, p. 521; see Kirsner, 2000, pp. 188-90).

In his paper, Greenson asked whether the hints of rapprochement between Klein and Freud were significant or trivial, and speculated about what made the Kleinianschool attractive. He chose the subject of transference, elaborating four aspects so as to “expose differences between Freudian and Kleinian points of view” (Greenson, 1974, p. 522). Herbert Rosenfeld responded to Greenson's paper at the IPA conference, charging that he misrepresented the Kleinian position, making it “very difficult to consider his paper as a basis of scientific discussion of differences in analytic theory and practice.” Rosenfeld emphasized that Greenson's statements about Kleinian approaches were taken out of context and that some of Greenson's remarks “are quite
meaningless to me and which I cannot relate to my own work or that of my colleagues” (Rosenfeld, 1974, p. 49). Green-son put it succinctly: “Rosenfeld accused me of distorting Klein; Segal accused me of acting in bad faith” (Greenson to Edward Weinshel, September 25, 1973, GP).

On September 7, 1973, Greenson reported to Masud Khan that the reactions to his paper at the Paris Congress “were quite extreme,” though mostly positive. He considered that Rosenfeld's and Segal's responses indicated how effective his paper had been, in that Rosenfeld had not answered his paper and that Rosenfeld showed that he really worked like a Freudian in a case he presented in Paris. Greenson contended that Rosenfeld “could not come up with one concrete illustration of how I had misrepresented Klein.” Greenson maintained that Rosenfeld's failure to answer his repeated questions, “his silence, was far more eloquent than his words.” Greenson believed that he had scored a tactical victory over the Kleinians—perhaps reduced them to silence but not conviction. Segal's view was that Greenson had misrepresented himself to her, and that she would not have charged him if she had known he was there just to learn how Kleinians worked. Segal also said she helped him with a case he had been treating. He explained that the helpfulness with the case came after his insistence that he give a reesumee of the first five years of treatment rather than just the last hour. The interpretation arose from a screen memory of the patient in the first year. “I understand later that she felt rather ashamed of how she had answered my questions,” Greenson concluded (GP).

The psychoanalytic atmosphere during the 1960s and 1970s, in my view, highlighted in the Klein wars, was loaded with affect. As Andre Green recently recalled, “I was part of a European CAPS [Center for Advanced Psychoanalytic Studies] group in which the decision to co-opt Hanna Segal led to the resignation of the group's American organiser. I heard another American friend expressing his disgust at Melanie Klein's ideas. I still remember a bloody duel between Herbert Rosenfeld and Ralph...” (Green, 2005, pp. 627-628).

At the request of both LAPSI and the Southern California Psychoanalytic Society, Greenson presented the same paper at the Los Angeles Institute soon after. I have detailed this debate elsewhere (Kirsner, 2000, pp. 188-93) and will not repeat the details here. However, I can now fill out the picture by providing details of some of the responses to that event, together with Greenson's own reactions.

After the paper in Los Angeles, Greenson told Masud Khan that it was a pity that his paper became involved in “so temperamental and personal a discussion. I do
believe, however, that the Kleinians’ best defense is to attack the personality of their critics. If you think that it was rather intense and hectic in Paris, you should have been in Los Angeles when I presented the paper here” (Greenson to Khan, October 9, 1973, GP). Greenson claimed that the audience booed and hissed the Kleinian discussants “because of their very personal and savage attack against me and Anna Freud who they combined as a unit” (Greenson to Lotte Newman, October 25, 1973, GP). I could not discern any booing or hissing on the audiotape of the event so it could not have been too loud. Whereas Greenson experienced the Paris paper as being “strongly attacked” by the Kleinians, the Los Angeles paper was “more vociferously attacked by our small group of fanatical Kleinians” (Greenson to Lotte Newman, October 25, 1973, GP). It was clearly a tempestuous scene from all accounts of the evening. Greenson directed the entire blame to the Kleinians, as though he were simply an innocent scientist telling the truth as he saw it and the Kleinians fanaticallly attacked him. He had his cake and ate it—he wanted to provoke the reaction he blamed them for.

Greenson informed Anna Freud about the Los Angeles presentation, where he claimed that the Kleinians who spoke, Bernard Brandchaft and Albert Mason, had “insisted upon speaking.” Their long speeches “were so vicious and outrageous in their personal attack upon me that the audience began to hiss and boo them. It was an unbelievable experience. Nobody had ever seen anything like that at a scientific meeting of any kind, especially a psychoanalytic meeting. The discussants were absolutely unbelievable. They never answered any single point in my paper and only attacked me personally.” This is untrue. Brand-chaft in particular mounted arguments against Greenson's position, not Greenson himself, as the audiotape of the meeting reveals. Mason's presentation was certainly hostile about Greenson's approach, even accusing him of unconsciously plagiarizing Anna Freud's criticisms of Klein. But Mason basically argued that Greenson had not understood Klein and distorted her ideas and Kleinian approaches. The discussants repeated the charge in Paris that Greenson was misrepresenting Kleinians. Greenson reported to Anna Freud: “I did not answer the comments. I got up merely and said, ‘This was not a scientific discussion; this is an attempt to insult and mock me. I will not dignify such behavior with an answer. I hope some day, under other circumstances, some of us will have a scientific discussion.’ I sat down to thunderous applause. Then the people in the audience cornered both Brandchaft and Mason and started to attack them verbally, but I left.” This was a considerable exaggeration. Greenson resolved to “continue to present Freud and Klein the way I do because it certainly upsets the Kleinians…. The more upset they get, the better I feel we are doing” (Greenson to Anna Freud, October 15, 1973, AFP). Although Greenson was clearly upset, he was plainly pleased with the reactions. However, for the first time, he showed signs of being tired of the fight. “I am going to stop talking about Klein and Freud and get back to my book. That's what
I really should be doing anyway,” he wrote Lotte Newman (October 25, 1973, GP).

Like so many resolutions, it did not take long to break. Three weeks later Greenson wanted “to say a few more words about the Freud-Klein paper and its repercussions.” Greenson thought it had “caused a great deal of disturbance in our society and it may be for the better.” This was because there “is now more open talk about what are we going to do about the Kleinians and should we now seriously consider asking the Kleinians to leave or taking steps that would ensure that they do leave” (November 28, 1973, AFP). He was telling Anna Freud that his paper caused the more negative atmosphere toward the Kleinians. However, during my original research into the political history of LAPSI (Kirsner, 2000, pp. 139-231), I discovered that the Greenson-Mason debate was one event among many, and was as much a symptom as a cause of the atmosphere that was producing the events that followed. Within that context, however, Greenson was exaggerating the influence of the paper itself, not his own influence. Greenson was attributing to the impact of his paper the large personal influence at LAPSI, including his long-standing political influence, his considerable referral network, his institutional influence on key committees over time, the impact of his teaching, and his influence with key leaders of the APsaA.

Greenson maintained that the issue with the Kleinians had been “pushed to the forefront” by the APsaA, which had just issued a report of their committee's Site Visit to LAPSI (Kirsner, 2000, pp. 178-88). He reported to Anna Freud that the APsaA committee “found that we were no longer meeting the standards for teaching and supervision and training analysis that we had met in previous years.” He noted that there was soon to be a LAPSI meeting to discuss the recommendations, where he estimated that three fourths of the membership would favor reorganizing so that orthodox Kleinians would no longer be acceptable as members of LAPSI (Greenson to Anna Freud, November 18, 1973, AFP). On December 14, 1973, Greenson reported the success of his paper to Anna Freud and how much it had upset LAPSI. The APsaA site visitors blamed most of the problems on “the infiltration of the Kleinians” and they did not consider Kleinian training as being in accordance with the standards of the APsaA. They had offered help to LAPSI with the recommended major organizational changes. This essentially meant, Greenson went on, “that we are going to get rid of the Kleinian teachers, as training analysts, and as supervisors. I think there is cause for rejoicing” despite the pain for students and some faculty. “It seems that Kleinianism is not considered acceptable as part of Freudian psychoanalysis in the United States, which is quite an achievement” (Greenson to Anna Freud, December 14, 1973, AFP).

Anna Freud regarded the effect of Greenson's paper as
“most important. You have done much better than I did here. All I could do was withdrawal and the building of the Clinic but no influence on the Society.” She observed that Greenson had the backing of the APsaA whereas she had no backing from the IPA. “I look forward to the Los Angeles Society returning to its former state, and it will be all your doing” (Anna Freud to Hildi and Ralph Greenson, December 27, 1973, GP).

Anna Freud was “most impressed” by his success with the paper in moving the “establishment,” which she had never done. “The stand taken by the American against Kleinian training is absolutely new and unheard of.” In contrast, the IPA always took the view of freedom of opinion and expression (Anna Freud to Greenson, December 30, 1973, GP).

Greenson remained a man with a mission: “We are still struggling with how we are going to get rid of the Kleinian analysts and the other incompetents.” Although this was a procedural matter, “they are doomed and they know it” (Greenson to Anna Freud, January 31, 1974, AFP). Note the inclusion of “Kleinians” among “other incompetents.” We can see that the Kleinians were not seen to be just different or not as developed, but as not worthy of being competent analysts at all. Given that Greenson, LAPSI, and the APsaA were on a war footing, how was collegiality possible? The APsaA declared that “traditional American psychoanalysis” had to be taught at affiliated institutes and that unless LAPSI got rid of the Kleinians and incompetent analysts and reorganized accordingly, candidates could potentially encounter problems with becoming members of the APsaA, tantamount to discrediting their training (Kirsner, 2000, pp. 178-88).

Greenson suggested a plan in order to achieve his goal, and Anna Freud replied that “any method which will give you back the institute again and free it from being dragged into the Kleinian atmosphere is a good one.” She saw this as “of very great importance for the future of psychoanalysis” and wished the step of getting rid of the Kleinians had been taken by the IPA years before with a “clean division” between the two approaches (Anna Freud to Greenson, February 10, 1974, GP).

Greenson's campaign to provoke and then discredit the Kleinians was working. The Kleinians knew they were doomed once the APsaA intervened. Although compromises were achieved at LAPSI and a middle way later established (Kirsner, 2000, pp. 208-216), since the route through the APsaA was effectively blocked, it became a considerable risk to train overtly as a Kleinian analyst. Training analyst status, which required membership in the APsaA, would be difficult if not impossible to attain, so the movement was cut at the roots. A number of the Los Angeles Kleinians, including their leader, Bernard Brandchaft,
switched their commitment to Kohut and self psychology in the mid-1970s, but it was not until considerably later that the Klein-oriented Psychoanalytic Center of California was formed and affiliated to the IPA. In all his descriptions and historical accounts, Greenson failed to mention one factor that was constant in this history from the inception of the institute—the presence and active participation of Greenson himself as a key player.

It is instructive to contrast the admittedly later development of Kleinianism in the San Francisco Bay Area. This development and the reactions within the local Institute could not have been more different. Weisinger (2000) demonstrates explicit differences with the development in Los Angeles. In all, there was a line that was not crossed between science and politics. There was far greater interest and openness to the ideas, however skeptical some analysts were about them. Betty Joseph became a constant visitor to the San Francisco Institute, and she was appreciated though not necessarily agreed with. The decisive difference was the lack of the predominance of personality issues in San Francisco, which contrasted greatly with Greenson's role in Los Angeles.

No doubt there are stories from and about other participants in the Klein wars that also reflect poorly on a rigorous intellectual, critical, scientific approach and also represent the encroachment of politics on science. Psychoanalytic politics is scarcely confined to one theoretical approach and is quite endemic to the field, no matter what the theoretical orientation, locality, country, or professional background of analysts. Much of the politics, nationally and internationally, ultimately involves the issue of who is entitled to be anointed as a training analyst (Kirsner, 2000). Although the incursion of politics into the scientific approach has been so widespread, the extent is not inevitable. While the history of psychoanalysis has always been an admixture of people and ideas (Rangell, 2004), it is always a question of being aware of the dangers and level of political encroachment. Although the web between the players is still more complexly interwoven than I have been able to describe here, this material is an object lesson in what can go wrong when politics masquerades as science and how egregious its effects on open scientific inquiry can be.

References


