Przemysl - Vienna - London. Remarks on the life and work of Esther Bick (1902-1983)

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Old Galicia, the easternmost province of the Danube Monarchy, was not a bad breeding ground for psychoanalysis. At least in terms of its contribution to its personnel, several of its leading figures came from this cultural area. Siegfried Bemfeld (Lemberg), Eduard Bibring (Stanislau)[1], Helene Deutsch (Przemysl), Ludwig Jekels (Lemberg)[2], Hermann Nunberg (Bedzin), Wilhelm Reich (Dobrzcynica), Isidor Sadger (Nowy Sadz), and Max Schur (Stanislau) are just a few of the famous names who had their roots in Galician Jewry and found their way to psychoanalysis.[3] Less prominent, at least in the German-speaking world, is the psychoanalyst Esther Bick, who emigrated to England in 1938 and was born Estera Lifsza Wander on July 4, 1902, in Przemysl in the heart of Galicia.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, she is known, and in some circles even notorious, as a Schiller writer and close confidante of Melanie Klein, as a strict follower of her ideas, paradoxically also as a dissenter from the pure Kleinian doctrine, as a gifted child therapist, a meticulous observer, a perspicacious analyst, an inspiring training analyst and trainer, but above all as the creator of Infant Observation. Her colleagues remembered her as courageous, persistent, and highly intelligent.[4] Andrew Briggs added the attribute "determined"[5] in his tribute to Esther Bick, thus highlighting that striking character trait that, at least in retrospect, despite all the vicissitudes of fate, never deterred her from her scientific goal of understanding

1 Today Iwano-Frankiwsk (Ukraine).

2 Today Lviv (Ukraine).

3 Mühlleitner (1992). Of the total of 150 ordinary and extraordinary members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association between 1902 and 1938, no fewer than 21 were born in Galicia and partly grew up there, and a further three demonstrably had their family roots in Galicia.

4 Harris (1983), p. 101. The birth date 1901 given there is an error; correct: 1902.

5 Briggs (2002), p. xix.

the child's mind. The dark side of this determination emerged in a certain intolerance, which earned Esther Bick the reputation of being lacking in diplomatic skill and in the ability to compromise.[6] This applied not only, but especially, to all professional matters, to questions of theory and research. More than once, she thus blocked her career opportunities and alienated followers and friends. This trait had a particularly tragic effect in the last two decades of her life. Although these were characterized by tireless and fruitful work on her life's scientific theme—the early childhood psyche—she simultaneously had to experience how fragile personal relationships could be and, with her de facto departure from the Kleinian group, accept the loss of her surrogate family.

How did this come about? Melanie Klein's death in 1960 left her followers in great mourning for an admired person who had formed the center of their professional lives.[7] From both a scientific and group dynamics perspective, this created a gap that was almost impossible to fill. Who or what would hold the Kleinian group together now that the matriarch was no longer with them? A group composed of characters as diverse as Hanna Segal, Wilfred Bion, Betty Joseph, Donald Meltzer, Herbert Rosenfeld, Esther Bick, and others. Some resorted to an orthodox interpretation of Kleinian theories, thus clinging to the authority that Melanie Klein represented within their circle during her lifetime. Others, like those mentioned above, made extremely original, independent contributions to the further development of the theory, but always refrained from challenging certain foundations of Kleinian psychoanalysis. Melanie Klein's developmental theory, with its two positions of paranoid-schizoid and depressive, was one such foundation that seemed inviolable, tolerant of any modification. This, of course, also applied to such central Kleinian aspects as the emphasis on object relations, early paranoid and depressive anxieties, identification processes, and specific defence mechanisms, such as splitting, idealization, and projective identification.

Although Esther Bick also fully agreed with this, over the course of the 1960s she increasingly developed ideas that she herself viewed as complementary to Klein's developmental theory,[8] but which many influential Kleinians considered a departure from pure doctrine.

6 Harris (1983), p. 101.
7 Meltzer (1974), p. 336.
8 Meltzer (1986), p. 300.

It was initially her ideas, first officially presented at the Copenhagen Congress in 1967, and subsequently her uncompromising insistence, that brought her into conflict with some of her friends and confidants. The dispute sometimes escalated to a personal level and ultimately led to Esther Bick's almost complete isolation from her former companions. Only Donald Meltzer, himself a free spirit and enfant terrible of the British Psycho-Analytical Society (BPAS), and his wife Martha Harris remained on her side theoretically.

In her communication "The Experience of the Skin in Early Object Relations,"[9] Esther Bick drew attention to several theses she had developed in previous years and had already communicated in her seminars. In the posthumously published work "Further Considerations on the Function of the Skin in Early Object Relations" (1986) she revisits these ideas, supporting her ideas with numerous and convincing case studies. Furthermore, she also addresses the implications for therapy.

Her very dense explanations, supported by several examples, describe the most primal psychological state as a state in which parts of the personality are still completely indistinguishable from body parts.[10] Consequently, body parts could assume psychological functions. This is precisely what happens in the infant, who is initially in an unintegrated state in which the personality parts are perceived as loose, as if no active inner force existed that could hold them together. Rather, the infant experiences this feeling of being held together only passively through the experience of its external physical boundaries through its skin. Since this can only happen passively, an object is needed that conveys its cohesive boundaries to the baby.

"The optimal object is the nipple in the mouth, together with the holding, talking, and familiar-smelling mother." (1967, p. 115)

Since the optimal object is not always available, or, in some cases, fails to function, the infant searches for other objects to which it can attach its senses, in order to experience this feeling of being held together, at least for short periods of time. This is a form of defence, adhesive identification,

9 Presented at the XXV International Psychoanalytic Congress in Copenhagen in 1967 - here and subsequently marked with Bick (1967); cited after: Bick, Harris (1987).

10 Similarities to Bion's concept of "protomentality" become clear here. (Bion [1961]. It is known that Esther Bick carefully studied Wilfred Bion's works and incorporated various aspects of them into her concept. According to Bion's wife, Francesca, there was little contact between Esther Bick and Wilfred Bion, but on the few occasions they met, it became clear how much Bick admired Bion's work. (Personal communication to the author).

or adhesive identity,[11] as Bick later preferred to call it, to temporarily overcome the state of disintegration. Suitable objects for this purpose can be, for example, a lamp, a playing radio, or a mobile above the crib.

If development is unfavorable, this form of defence remains the only means of escaping the state of disintegration. However, objects are by nature fleeting and can disappear at any time; a light can go out, a sound can fade away. In order to escape dependence on a real object, it is gradually replaced in such cases by a kind of pseudo-independence, for example, through motor activity, and later through the inappropriate use of certain mental functions. Esther Bick then speaks of a "second skin formation" (1967, p. 115) which, according to Meltzer, is in its most extreme form a part of the autistic condition.

In normal development, the infant acquires true psychological independence by introjecting an external object that could already fulfill this function for him, and subsequently identifying with this "containing" function of the now internal object. Only in this way, according to Bick, does the fantasy or conception of inner and outer spaces emerge, which in turn form a prerequisite for the early defence processes (splitting, idealization) described by Melanie Klein.

Bick distinguishes between the concepts of unintegratedness and disintegratedness. The unintegrated state thus describes a passive experience of complete helplessness and catastrophic fears, such as the feeling of leaking out or falling apart, whereas disintegratedness, as described by Melanie Klein, is an active defence function (splitting processes) in the service of development (p. 114). The unintegrated state and its at least temporary overcoming through the passive experience of limitation and cohesion, is, according to Bick, a formation that precedes the paranoid-schizoid position.

By describing this experience as an initially general one, rather than as a pathological condition that she infers from the observation of a few conspicuous infants, one could assume that she is actually introducing a new, third position with specific object relations, anxieties, and defence mechanisms into Kleinian developmental theory. Robert Hinshelwood, author of the "Dictionary of Kleinian Psychoanalysis," makes such considerations when he states: "Esther Bick, Donald Meltzer, and Mattie Harris [...] were

11 Cf. Meltzer (1986), p. 300.

interested in autism, and they were turning over the idea that there was another position." They didn't put it like that, but they thought, there isn't just the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. They were very interested in these later discoveries, which they, Bick and Meltzer, made together. Adhesive identification, imitation, the development of the second skin."[12]

For Esther Bick herself, this possible interpretation of her concept was apparently irrelevant. Neither in her writings nor in her seminars did she formulate the term "position" in connection with her discoveries. As a true practitioner, she was solely concerned with phenomenology and, consequently, with an explanation for repeatedly recorded, yet previously puzzling, observations in infants. However, the fact that these concepts held far more potential than the two short surviving essays suggest, and that she also hinted at this potential in oral communications during her seminars, is brought to our attention by her academic colleague Donald Meltzer when he writes: "Esther Bick was a gifted therapist and teacher whose great difficulty in writing has deprived us of a record of the scope of her observations and ideas."



High Command! The Queen of the Empire visiting a children's home in Manchester, photo circa 1944. Esther Bick (front right).

12 Interview with Robert D. Hinshelwood, 17 November 2008.

Well, Esther Bick's writer's block is a separate topic, which must be omitted here for reasons of space. It is mentioned in this context only as one of the reasons why her conceptual considerations did not gain greater theoretical weight. Less scrupulous authors would probably have filled several books with their original ideas and wealth of experience. The few writings that she left behind were extraordinary, and it was no coincidence that at the end of the 1980s Elisabeth Spillius included no fewer than two of Esther Bick's only four articles known at the time in her anthology of post-Kleinian writings.[13] When alerted to this proportionality, Spillius said: "Obviously others, Segal, Bion, Joseph, are better known than Bick, but Bick had unique views on infant development, which I thought were a useful part of the Kleinian tradition."[14]

Although Bick based all her considerations on extensive data from infant observation, supplemented by clinical observations in her psychoanalytic practice (Bick, 1967, pp.115ff), and she was undoubtedly the most experienced infant specialist at the London Psychoanalytic Institute at the time, her ideas were hardly taken seriously by her colleagues.

An exception, as already mentioned, were Donald Meltzer and Martha Harris, who frequently met with Esther Bick in a kind of informal trio for psychoanalytic exchange of ideas.[15] Meltzer's work also contains numerous references to Bick; especially in his discussions on autism, he took up her ideas in order to incorporate them into his theoretical considerations. Significantly, it was Meltzer who ultimately formulated and discussed the concepts of "adhesive identification" and "two-dimensionality," which Bick had only briefly mentioned in her communications, in his own writing.[16]

Esther Bick's persistent and extremely vehement defence of her theses, with reference to the available data from infant observation, may have been one of the triggers for the value of Infant Observation—her most significant creation and part of the training curriculum at the London Institute for Psychoanalysis since 1960—being indirectly called into question at the end of the 1960s. At that time, consideration was given to reducing the number of seminars and reintroducing "purely" voluntary attendance. The primary goal was to relieve trainees of too many mandatory courses,

13 Cf. Spillius, 1990.

14 Written communication, Elisabeth Spillius to the author, February 11, 2009.

15 Interview with Meg Harris Williams on July 19, 2008.

16 Cf. Meltzer (1974) and Meltzer et al. (42008).

but at the same time, this revealed a certain lack of focus.[17]

Despite some adaptations in the early 1970s, infant observation remained an integral part of the course, and every aspiring psychoanalyst in England is required to conduct such an observation to this day.

Since the term "infant observation" has been used repeatedly, I would now like to offer a deliberately brief excursus on this training, research, and now also therapeutic method, which is so central in England. In German-speaking countries, thanks to the initiative of some dedicated practitioners, such as Ross A. Lazar (Munich) and Gertraud Diem-Wille (Vienna), it is now clearly on the rise, but its tremendous potential is still under-recognized.

Martha Harris, a student, later collaborator, and close confidante of Esther Bick, called the invention of Infant Observation "a stroke of genius" (Harris, 1983, p. 102). Indeed, with this training and research method, Bick achieved what she had initially not intended to be a major breakthrough. It was actually a necessity—Bick was looking for practical fields for trainees in child psychotherapy—that prompted her to develop Infant Observation in the late 1940s.

Together with John Bowlby and Theodora Alcock, Bick created and directed the training course in Child Psychotherapy at the Tavistock Clinic in London from 1948 onwards. They thus established a novelty in the field of British health professions: a three-year intensive course that, in addition to theoretical foundations, included personal analysis, extensive practical exercises, and the rapid transfer of patients from the second year of training onwards. To enable even "newcomers" to gain practical experience with children, Bick adapted Bühler's observation methods for her own purposes and called the methodological concept "Infant Observation." Esther Bick studied under Karl and Charlotte Bühler at the Psychological Institute of the University of Vienna in the 1920s and 1930s and, according to her own account, worked for a time as Charlotte Bühler's assistant. Precise observation was the methodological cornerstone of the child psychology research at the institute. This is where Esther Bick may have received the decisive impetus for her later creation of her own observation method.

17 I am basing this on information from numerous conversations with British analysts involved in the discussion at the time, all of whom wish to remain anonymous. Unfortunately, I was unable to verify this information using the minutes of the Training Committee of the London Institute of Psycho-Analysis, as these records will remain closed for years to come.

Starting with the Tavistock Clinic, Infant Observation, as an application of psychoanalysis in a non-therapeutic setting, became a success story and secured Esther Bick a permanent place in the history of psychoanalysis.

Three building blocks form the framework of Infant Observation: observation, recording, and supervision. A candidate visits a mother or family and their newborn child once a week for one hour at a set time over a period of one or two years. The task is to observe with even-handed attentiveness everything that occurs in the interaction between the infant and its environment, while remaining abstinent—that is, neither acting nor reacting in the setting. The observer is then tasked with recording everything they have seen as meticulously as possible, without adding their own interpretations. The record is handed over to an experienced supervisor and read aloud, discussed, and interpreted in a group meeting, ideally held once a week, with the supervisor and other infant observers.

The advantages this method offers for trainees in psychoanalytic child psychotherapy are obvious. In addition to practicing a posture of evenly suspended attention and abstinence, participants gain initial experience in precise observation, recording, as well as in the selection, connection, and interpretation of material. These are essential skills of the psychoanalytic craft. In addition, the prospective therapist or analyst gains continuous insights into ontogenesis, experiential knowledge that will be extremely useful later on, especially when working with very young patients. Esther Bick commented:

"I thought this important for many reasons, but perhaps mostly because it would help the students to vividly conceive the infantile experience of their child patients, so that when, for example, they started the treatment of a two-and-a-half-year-old child, they would get the feeling of the baby that he was and from which he is not so far removed." (Bick (1964) p. 558).

In later years, Esther Bick increasingly spoke of "mother-infant observation," because it had become clear that the instruction to concentrate exclusively on the baby was not only an illusion, but also a distorting reduction of the results. Some observers tended to focus on the mother or identify with her, but this should not be considered an observation error. Rather, a broadening or shifting of focus occurred, which was related as

much to the preferences of the observers themselves as to the people being observed. Such (apparent) irritations clearly indicate the countertransference occurring.

The instrument was considered so useful, initially in England and, from the 1960s onward, in other parts of the world as well, that it was integrated into various training curricula. Over the years, a vast amount of observational data accumulated in this way, and it was logical to use it for research purposes and development of theory.



Esther Bick (2. Reihe, 3. von links) im Kreise von Kollegen und Studenten an der Tavistock Klinik. John Bowlby (2. Reihe, 1. von links). Foto um 1948.

Esther Bick (second row, third from left) with colleagues and students at the Tavistock Clinic. John Bowlby (second row, first from left). Photo circa 1948.

II

In the second part of this article, I would like to dedicate myself to Esther Bick's years in Przemysl.

The political and social stratosphere that overlaid Galicia and its provincial town of Przemysl constitutes the first and most striking premise of this analyst; they are certainly characteristic of Esther Bick's thinking and actions.

Przemysl, situated in a hilly valley in the Eastern Beskids on the Sán River, was then a garrison and fortress town, its streets filled with uniformed troops, recruits, officers, and military officials gathered here from all parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The civilian population was divided into three main ethnic-religious groups: Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews, each in turn divided into widely divergent political and social classes. Above them was a thin upper class of Austrians of German descent, businessmen, civil servants, and officers.

At the turn of the century, the Jewish population constituted no less than 14 percent, making it the third-largest group in the district.[18] However, Przemysl never exhibited the classic character of a township; the other two ethnic groups, especially the Poles, were too numerically and structurally dominant.

Without the fortress, Przemysl would have been a less exciting, even completely insignificant place. However, its military importance significantly enhanced the city of 50,000 inhabitants. Infrastructure and services were better than in comparable communities in the province, and those with sufficient financial means could settle down there. Nevertheless, the quality of life for the vast majority of the population was unsatisfactory. "I know many people from Przemysl who would have preferred to have been born somewhere else," wrote Helene Deutsch in her autobiography. Even if she did not consider herself among these people, for her, even in old age and after many decades in exile, Przemysl remained her "center of the world".[19] This is a significant statement.

In a certain respect, Przemysl was perhaps the most Galician city of all, reflecting the conditions in this country almost one-to-one, a miniature image, so to speak, of what the province represented and entailed. While the Polish population dominated in Western Galicia, the rural east was dominated by Ruthenians,[20] while, for the entire country, there was a preponderance of Poles. In Przemysl, there was a clear Polish majority in the city itself, while the surrounding village communities were overwhelmingly inhabited by Ruthenian peasants.

On the surface, there was a tense calm and a seeming unity, held together by the emperor and his authorities. Beneath, however, tensions

18 Mark (1994), pp. 92 and 94.
19 Deutsch (1975), p. 15.
20 Mark (1994) p. 84.

simmered, and national, religious, social, and political conflicts became virulent in regular outbreaks. For example, in 1905, when the ebb of the revolutionary tide reached Russia, Galicia, and even Przemysl, there were demonstrations by the working class, clashes between Poles and Ukrainians, as so often happened in those days when social and economic tensions needed an outlet, and attacks against the Jewish population. They stood in the middle and were accused by both sides of working for the other, or, what seemed even more suspicious to their opponents, of standing up for their own ethnic group.

And they invited themselves? Torn between adherence to old traditions and the embrace of modernity, the Jewish population was no longer a homogeneous group. Orthodox Jews, some Hasidim, Hashelim, assimilated Jews, and the first Zionists formed the most important factions within the Jewish community. Social and ideological mobility were no longer isolated cases; on the contrary, they encompassed broad sections of the population. Orthodox Jews, however, found it particularly difficult to leave behind their familiar world of religious rules and commandments, the spiritual ghetto. Those who succeeded nevertheless required a considerable amount of self-confidence and determination.

This also applies to Esther Wander (later Bick), born into an Orthodox Jewish family[21] in 1902. Her father, Samuel Wander, 21 years old at the time, came from a family of small traders in the hamlet of Lacka Wola,[22] just 18 km from Przemysl. The 20-year-old mother, Chaja Lea, was a scion of the long-established Přemysl Malawer "clan", a widespread family of merchants and homeowners. After their wedding in June 1901, the young couple, despite the Malawer family's relatively well-off background, appeared to have struggled financially, as Esther Wander's birth register lists her address as ul. Mnisza 5 – a barracks built by the Jewish community for impoverished families.[23]

Not much is known about Esther Wander's early years. Documents have been found only sporadically, and she herself reported only fragments from this period. For example, that for the first five years of her life, she was raised not by her mentally unstable mother, but by her grandmother Dresel from the Malawer branch of the family. Apparently, she felt very com-

21 Cf. Harris (1983, p. 101.

22 Now Wolica (Ukraine).

23 Cf. Gardziel (2002), p. 250. or USC -collection. IKU.

fortable and protected there, for, unlike her mother, over whom she kept a veil of silence, she spoke of her grandmother with respect and warmth until the end of her life.

However, difficult years followed for little Esther; she had to leave her grandparents' household again around 1907. Her grandmother, 45 at the time, had become pregnant again and could no longer, or at least did not want to, keep Esther, so she sent her back to her biological mother, who was also pregnant with Esther's brother, Michal. Not only was the five-year-old torn from her familiar surroundings and brought into a family that was still emotionally and financially unstable, she also found herself confronted with "rivals" on all sides, as both families were expecting siblings.

The transition back to her mother had a massive impact on her development. Esther Bick later recounted that she had begun wetting herself again at this time: "She stood, she said, in the middle of the hall and everything fell out. So, that was a very bad beginning, a very distressing beginning and affected her all her life."[24] This regression was firmly etched in her memory, and she reported the "embarrassing" incident several times. As a psychoanalyst, these experiences were also useful to her, for example, in her understanding of Melanie Klein's concept of psychic disintegration (fear of loss of identity, splitting, and disintegration of the self) in the face of developmentally induced, transformative, and thus threatening changes in the usual course of life, such as puberty, parenthood, children moving out, job loss, retirement, etc.

The following years continued to be difficult for the little girl; a second (biological) sibling, Maryem, was born in 1911, and it can be assumed that Esther was not only neglected by her mentally ill mother, but that she also had to assist her in caring for the infant. This would certainly provide an explanation for the noticeably high number of absences and the significant decline in her school performance during this time.[25]

By 1914, her father had managed to gain a foothold as a merchant in Przemysl, as the now better addresses on ul. Jagielloska and later on ul. Slowackiego suggest.

When the first great global conflagration of the 20th century broke out

24 Interview with Elinor Wedeles, July 21, 2008.

25 Gardziel (20020, pp. 251ff; or USC - collection. IKU.

in August 1914, there was great excitement in Przemysl. Built as a first-class fortress since 1873, the city, with its ramparts and bastions built for kilometers around, was intended to serve as a breakwater against advancing Tsarist troops. After the first catastrophic defeats of the Austro-Hungarian army at Rawa Ruska and Grodek in August/September 1914, the front had indeed quickly advanced to within a few kilometers of Przemysl. It was necessary to hurry to evacuate the civilian population from the city. Women and children in particular were transported westward in special trains to Vienna, Prague, and other cities, while a significant portion of the male population remained behind to maintain the infrastructure.

This was also the case with the Wanders. The mother went to Prague with her three children in September or early October, where they stayed with a relative.[26] The father, Samuel Wander, remained in the city. In the following months, Przemysl was besieged twice by the Russians and, after bloody battles in which thousands of soldiers and civilians fell victim, twice conquered. After the second conquest, all Jewish men were deported by the Russians to the hinterland for forced labor—including Samuel Wander. Exactly when he returned is unknown, but he may have been held in Siberia for a year or two under terrible conditions, as Esther Wander suggests in her biographical interview with Sandra Mancia that he was physically ruined and died as a result in 1922.[27] In June 1915, the Austrian troops, with massive German support, finally gained the upper hand on the front line along the San River. The Russians were repulsed, and Przemysl and, a few weeks later, Lviv were liberated.

The Wanders returned to Przemysl during the course of 1916.[28] During the almost two years of their absence, about which little is known, Esther, now 14 years old, appears to have undergone a significant developmental

26 In an interview that Jeanne Magagna and Helene Dubinsky conducted with Esther Bick shortly before her death, she stated that at the age of 7 she had been sent to her aunt in Prague for 3 years to help her care for her baby. However, the school catalogs preserved in Przemyśl explicitly document her presence during these years; an absence can only be inferred from these sources for 1914 and 1915. APP -group SPMP syg. 157, 171, 189 and 195.

27 Mancia, n.d., p. 1. And: USC -group IKZ.

28 They initially lived in their own apartment before temporarily moving a year later to Walowa Street 5, the address of grandmother Drese! Malawer. Andrzej Gardziel speculates in his article about Esther Wander's years in Przemyśl that the family had again fallen into financial difficulties, which necessitated their move to the Malawers. (cf. Gardziel (2002), p. 254) Possibly, it was also due to the fact that the father had not yet returned from Siberia and thus the only breadwinner in the family was missing.

spurt.

After returning to school in September 1916, her grades suddenly became excellent, and she became a top student. Furthermore, new interests arose, a kind of political consciousness and the will to change her own situation, as well as that of the Jewish community as a whole. She presumably joined a Zionist youth organization at this time, which marked a clear break with her Orthodox origins. She likely became a member of Hashomer Hatzair,[29] which was just being founded in Vienna and quickly spread, especially to Galicia.

In any case, despite excellent grades, she temporarily abandoned her school career after the third year of the girls' vocational school in 1918 to concentrate fully on her now firmly established goal of emigrating to Palestine.

In order to be accepted as an emigrant by her group and subsequently nominated by the Palestine Office, she had to first complete a basic agricultural course and an internship on a farm. It was part of the Zionist idea of cultivating the then largely undeveloped Palestine with their own hands.

The Wander family's difficult financial situation precluded them from supporting her plans, and in order to earn the necessary money for herself, Esther Wander took a job as a nanny in a home for war orphans, almost on the side. It was there that her professional interest in child psychology began. On her first day of work, completely overwhelmed by the uncooperative children, she was about to quit the job when she came up with the idea of observing the other caregivers at work to figure out how she should behave towards the children. This actually proved very useful to her, as she soon found herself more at home.[30]

Her real goal, however, was and remained emigration to Palestine. She learned Hebrew, worked on a farm, and attended meetings and information events organized by her Zionist group. When her father, whose health had been ruined since the deportation, died in early 1922 at the age of just 41, her hopes of realizing this dream were dashed. Esther Wander was 19 years old at the time, had a job, clear plans for the future, and had both feet firmly on the ground. Her mother, however, was mentally unstable and apparently unable to support herself or her two underage children (Michal

29 A recently discovered, but not yet verified, photograph from that time could soon provide the proof.

30 Manda (n.d.), p. 2; and: Dubinsky, Magagna, (1983), p. 3.

was 14, Maryem 11) alone. Esther Wander had no choice but to abandon her emigration plans and help her mother.

While supporting her family, she wanted to complete her Matura (high school diploma) and then study psychology or psychoanalysis, which at the time were one and the same for her.[31] With great commitment and on her own initiative, she studied the material of various subjects, including Latin and Greek. In the summer of 1924, she finally passed the extremist examination at a private high school in Lviv. With her school-leaving certificate in her pocket, Esther Wander left Przemysl in October 1924 and went to Vienna to study at the Faculty of Philosophy under Karl and Charlotte Bühler.



Esther Bick in 1980

III

Further steps: She specialized in child psychology and finally earned her doctorate in 1936 with her thesis "Group Formation in the Second Year of Life," an empirical study of social behavior among small children. Her studies hardly went as planned, as it took her almost 11 years to complete.[32] Esther Wander had already submitted a first version of her thesis at the

31 Anonymous (1977), p. 1

32 From 1925, when she first enrolled in the psychology department, until her doctoral graduation in 1936. UAW -

beginning of 1935, but it was referred as inadequate. This is hardly surprising when one takes a closer look at this rejected "original version" of her dissertation. The barely more than 35 pages provided a fairly good interpretative overview, but in no way met the usual requirements of the institute, which placed particular emphasis on detailed statistical analysis and tabular presentation. A classification in the research context, as well as a comparison with other studies on the same topic, were almost entirely missing from this initial version.

Esther Bick must have had considerable difficulty writing even then. The deliberately matter-of-fact style and the brevity of the content suggest that she was making a great effort to do justice to the scientific language cultivated at the Vienna Psychological Institute, which was clearly not her own. Her disappointment at the rejection must have been all the greater. Ten months later, she submitted a dissertation of almost 90 pages, which was approved without any problems, although a somewhat harsh remark was added: "The weakness of the work remained [...] that the results were overshadowed by other works from the Vienna Institute [...]."[33] It seems as if it was more about the delay than the "overshadowing," because in my review of all the dissertations and research papers written at the Institute, I could not find any other study on the same topic or concerning the same age group. Perhaps this assessment refers only to the delay caused by the rejection of the first draft, but perhaps also to a much longer delay. After all, Esther Bick completed her final semester in 1932, leaving a gap of four years until the submission of her dissertation.[34]

In the year of her graduation, Esther Wander, now 34, married medical student Phillip Bick, two years her junior, whose name she adopted and bore for the rest of her life, although she separated from him in late 1938 or early 1939.

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33 UAW - Doctoral Examination File 12901.

34 It should be noted that the head of the child psychology department, Charlotte Bühler, always assigned dissertation topics with a view to her own extensive research. In her concluding overall assessments, she then incorporated the individual studies of her students as an empirical basis and mentioned them in footnotes. However, Esther Wander and her research do not appear in any of the many editions of Charlotte Bühler's standard works. One reason is probably that Bühler's main interest had long since shifted from child psychology to life course research by 1936. However, considering that the child psychology work of other students was indeed mentioned at the same time, the above-cited note in the doctoral examination protocol should be given more importance.

After the Nazi invasion in March 1938, the Bicks quickly realized that they would have to abandon their home in Vienna and emigrate. Initially, they considered emigrating to Australia, where Philipp had an acquaintance who would support them. Esther Bick, however, preferred to go to England, where her former university professor, Charlotte Bühler, had also fled. She seemed to hope that Charlotte Bühler, well-established and respected in academic circles, could help her there in some way.

Shortly before their planned legal departure, the Bick couple had to cross the green border into Switzerland in a dramatic escape in August 1938. The Gestapo was looking for Philipp Bick, not because he was Jewish, but because he—a railway worker's son—was apparently close to a workers' party, the Social Democrats, or the Communists.[35]

His life had been saved, but no future prospects were seen in Switzerland. To protect the domestic labor market, the refugees were denied any paid work. Esther Bick therefore returned to her original plan and tried to travel to England, which she succeeded in doing in the last months of 1938 or early 1939—the exact date is unknown. This step meant the end of her marriage to Philipp, who remained in Switzerland to complete his medical studies. While Esther Bick first encountered psychoanalysis in England and began a personal analysis with Michael Balint, Philipp completed the remaining examinations in Switzerland and completed a specialist training in psychiatry. In the following years, he worked as a psychiatrist in various sanatoriums in the cantons of Bern and Graubünden. In the summer of 1945, after six years of separation from Esther, he wrote her a letter asking for a divorce. Esther Bick agreed, and the marriage was dissolved in Bern in the fall of 1945. While Philipp Bick married another woman that same year, Esther Bick remained single for the rest of her life. Philipp took Swiss citizenship in 1954 and died in Bern in 1972.[36]

Esther Bick had meanwhile found a new centre of life in England. From 1940, she was in Manchester, working in children's homes, child guidance clinics,[37] and as a professional advisor to hospital staff. Furthermore, her analysis with Balint had sparked a burning interest in psychoanalysis. When she began her training as a psychoanalyst at the Manchester Semi-

35 n.d, pp. 4ff.

36 ZF - Family register "Bick-/-.

37 Child psychiatric and child psychological institutions, which at that time emerged in large numbers in England as independent institutions or as departments of clinics.

nar in 1942, the treatment was converted into a training analysis. Having since moved to London, she completed her training in 1948 and became an associate member of the BPAS. She subsequently underwent another analysis with Melanie Klein and became one of her most loyal followers.

During her time in Vienna, sporadic visits to Przemysl are documented, but afterward, she appears never to have returned. Her sister had died before the war, her mother in 1942; both, according to death certificates, died of natural causes. The brother, Michal, emigrated to Palestine in 1938 and realized the dream that his sister Esther had dreamed almost 20 years earlier.

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collection IKU (Israelite Birth Registers/Geburtenbücher der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde);
collection IKZ (Israelite Death Registers/Totenbücher der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde).

APP - State Archive in Przemysl (Staatsarchiv Przemysl) collection SPMP (Primary Schools of the City of Przemysl/Sammlung: Grundschulen der Stadt Przemysl), no. 328, ref. 157, 171, 189 and 195;
collection ASCIIGP (Civil Status Records, Israelite Religious Community in Przemysl/Sammlung: Akten des Zivilstandesamtes Przemysl, Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Przemysl) no. 1924, ref. 6.

TsDIAL - Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, Lviv (Historical Central State Archive of Ukraine, Lviv)
collection 701, No. 1, Ref. 188; (Collection: Birth Registers of the

Israelite Religious Community, Mosciska District)
UAW - University Archive, Collection of Doctoral Dissertations, Matr. 1290]
ZF - Civil Registry Office Fraubrunnen - Canton Bern
from the family register “Bick-/-”

Interviews and Letters

Interview with Meg Harris-Williams, July 19, 2008.
Interview with Robert D. Hinshelwood, November 17, 2008.
Interview with Elinor Wedeles, July 21, 2008.
Personal communication from Francesca Bion to the author, November 26, 2008.
Letter from Elisabeth Spillius to the author, February 11, 2009.

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