

Alix Strachey, we read in the programme of *Mrs Klein* at the Cottesloe Theatre, sometimes found the analyst Melanie Klein 'tiresome and faintly absurd: she never stopped talking and dressed up to the nines, "terrifically décolleté, and covered in bangles and rouge",'. Nicholas Wright takes much the same line in his amusing if somewhat discursive play, removing, however, all affection from Strachey's Bloomsbury assessment and placing Klein as manipulative Jewish mother and fierce professional rival at the centre of the stage. She is a monster.

Comfortably exiled in London and profoundly disturbed by the mysterious death of her son in 1934, Melanie (Gillian Barge) fights a violent and apparently conclusive battle with her daughter Melitta (Francesca Annis) which ends with Melitta's replacement as daughter, patient and colleague by the enigmatic Paula from Berlin (Zoe Wanamaker). All three performances are energetic and impeccable under Peter Gill's direction; what the play is actually saying, however, is not at all clear, save that when everything can be explained professionally nothing is fully understood. 'Mrs Klein' lacks the buoyancy of Stoppard on similar ground and the breadth of Mr Wright's own splendid plays for the RSC — 'The Custom of the Country' and 'Desert Air'.

Ratcliffe on Mrs Klein

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