

THE ABANDONMENT NEUROSIS



Germaine Guex

Translated by Peter D. Douglas

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For Nell, Jane, and abandonics the world over

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Germaine Guex was born on 17 April 1904 in Arcachon, Aquitaine, France, and died on 20 November 1984 in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Her father, Georges Guex, was a native of Switzerland and a Protestant pastor. Her mother Hélène, née Millet, was French, and died when her daughter was still young. At seventeen, Germaine Guex moved to Switzerland and lived with her aunt. There, she studied education and psychology at the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Geneva until 1923, after which she worked as an assistant to Jean Piaget in the psychology laboratory of the Institute until 1930. During this time, she became familiar with the work of Freud, completed a training analysis with Raymond de Saussure, and became a member and training analyst at the Société Suisse de Psychoanalyse.

Above all, Guex was drawn to clinical work, so, in 1930, she was recruited by psychoanalyst Dr André Répond, director of psychiatry in the Malévoz clinic, Valais, Switzerland, to oversee a psychoanalytically inspired medical unit and psychological counselling centre for children and parents. Being both a therapeutic and preventative facility, it was the first of its kind, and became the model for similar institutions in Switzerland and France. Three years later, Guex contracted tuberculosis and had to forego this work. She moved to Lausanne,

where she met her partner to be, the Swiss psychoanalyst Charles Odier (1886–1954).

After the Second World War, Guex began teaching at the Raymond de Saussure Swiss–French psychoanalytic education centre in Geneva. With Odier and Henry Flournoy, she sought to combine Freudian psychoanalysis with the genetic and psychological theories of Piaget. The research was, for the most part, inspired and shaped by their concept of what became known as abandonment neurosis, which they argued had a pre-oedipal aetiology, founded on the individual's fear of abandonment and need for affective security.

This research culminated with Guex's book, *La névrose d'abandon*, first published in 1950, which was, and still is, a ground-breaking work. Her research turns on two observations: the frequent occurrence of analysands whose neurotic symptoms are unrecognisable when measured against any of the Freudian diagnostic models, and the relatively large number of these patients who sought help from her, having already undergone thorough, classically Freudian treatments with analysts whose abilities and credentials were never in question, but who, none the less, could do nothing to relieve the suffering of these patients. What the analysands all had in common, Guex observed, were extreme, life-debilitating feelings of abandonment, insecurity, and lack of self-worth, originally ignited by severe pre-oedipal trauma.

Guex describes abandonment neurosis in terms of how to identify it diagnostically. She then goes on to outline every tool and treatment methodology, developed over many years of clinical practice, which can be deployed in the successful and lasting eradication of this pervasive pathology, repairing shattered lives in ways that seems to achieve the impossible, by helping these neurotics adapt to the rigours of reality and, ultimately, establish meaningful, ongoing relations with others.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Peter D. Douglas was born in Wembley, London, in 1956. In 1965, he migrated to South Australia with his parents on the £10 assisted passage scheme, and settled in the satellite city of Elizabeth. In 1972, he joined the Royal Australian Navy as a junior recruit and served five years, mainly overseas. He completed matriculation in 1976 and entered the Flinders University of South Australia the following year, emerging ten years later with a range of degrees and diplomas, including a Master of Arts.

In 1980, he began working as a performer, first as a musician in a touring band which also made records and actor into the late 1980s, then, into the 1990s, as a freelance writer, producer, and director of theatre, television, and film. In 1995, he joined Banksia Productions and began making television and film for audiences worldwide.

In 2002, he retired from commercial production and began lecturing in English at the University of Adelaide, and establishing the Bachelor of Media course. In 2006, he took up a position at Wilto Yerlo, the indigenous teaching arm of the University of Adelaide, mentoring Aboriginal students through their university courses.



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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

I had been in analysis for about four years, and we were at an impasse. I knew what the problem was: the analysis had gone as far as it could and we needed to be working towards termination. The only problem was that I did not want to. The whole prospect had brought back the terrifying menace of abandonment, and my analyst knew it, too, so only ever broached the subject with the greatest delicacy, at which I would rail petulantly, then go silent for days, sometimes weeks, at a time.

During one such episode, a copy of Laplanche and Pontalis's *The Language of Psychoanalysis* fell into my possession and, as with all psychoanalytic texts that came my way during those times, I began devouring it. But on reaching page 270 or thereabouts, my interest suddenly blasted off the Richter scale. I had come across the entry on Germaine Guex and her seminal work, *La névrose d'abandon*.

From that moment on I was on the hunt for anything and everything Guex that might be able to reveal more about her theories on abandonment and the profound and long-lasting effects it had on sufferers. I brought it up with my analyst, of course, but not being at all familiar with Guex, he could neither confirm nor deny the validity of Guex's ideas, although he certainly re-affirmed that many of my

problems did, without doubt, stem from issues of abandonment, as we had ruminated on time and time again.

Encouraged by this, and having scoured the globe, discovering the whereabouts of just two copies of *La névrose d'abandon*, I resolved to make an attempt to move towards termination of my analysis, the reason being, in part at least, because one copy of the book was located in the French National Library in Paris, and the other in the British Library, London; the time and effort involved in making a successful reconnaissance of either text could not be attempted within the working parameters of a full-scale psychoanalysis. So, it seemed that the positive prospect of such a venture outweighed all the abandonment fears prompted at the very idea of severing contact with my analyst.

Another discovery was that the book had never been translated into English. I resolved to make this my mission if I ever got hold of a copy, in which event I would need to re-hone my French. Someone had recently given me a copy of Albert Camus's *L'Étranger*, in French, which I had never actually read in French or English. I decided to translate it, and what immediately became evident to me, by way of an eerie coincidence, was that the character of Meursault made an iconic and prototypical case study, albeit fictional, in abandonment neurosis. Meursault's relationship to his mother seemed to have no affective substance whatsoever, and I found myself wondering if Camus was suggesting this emotional void was behind his protagonist's "autistic"-like disposition. I titled my translation *Intruder*, inspired largely by Camus's characterisation of the public prosecutor, whose courtroom rant paints a picture of Meursault, wrongly accused of cold-blooded murder, as an *intruder*, a clear and present contagion of danger evidenced by his moral bankruptcy and the fact that he did not cry at his mother's funeral, an intruder who must be eradicated as a means of preventing the spread of such virulence.

Close to a year went by while my analyst skilfully guided the analysis to its conclusion and I worked on *Intruder*. When the day finally came for my analyst and me to part, we said good-bye and I walked out of the door with a certain trepidation, but the sky did not fall in, which I took as an encouraging sign. I got straight on a plane to Paris and visited the French National Library. Unfortunately, I had an altercation with a librarian who took serious objection to the fact that I was not French. Consistent with the habit of a lifetime, I retaliated,