

Dr. Maud (Magdalena) Mannoni (-Van der Spoel)

1923-1998

French psychoanalyst Maud (Magdalena) Mannoni née Van der Spoel (was born on October 22, 1923), in the Belgian city of [Courtrai](#) and died in Paris on March 15, 1998.

With her mother, who was Belgian, and her father, a Dutch diplomat, she spent her early childhood in Colombo, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka); her first languages were Hindustani and English, both later forgotten after she returned to Belgium at age six. She studied [criminology](#) at the University of Brussels and began a training analysis with Maurice Dugautiez, one of first Belgian psychoanalysts. She would remain until her death a full member of the Belgian Psychoanalytic Society, an affiliate of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA).

Moving to France in 1949, she settled in Paris, met Françoise Dolto, married Octave Mannoni, and had both analysis and training analysis with Jacques Lacan, whom she supported during the 1953 split in the French psychoanalytic movement. Mannoni worked with [retarded](#) children at several institutions and her *L'enfant arriéré et sa mère* (1964) was the first title to appear in "Le champ freudien," a series under the editorial direction of Lacan published by Le Seuil. She went on to write numerous books for an analytic audience on childhood [psychopathology](#). Her view of the child as "spokesperson" for the [dysfunctional](#) family helped render obsolete the concept of "retardation" (*débilité*) then widely used in medico-social discourse in France. The child who appeared "retarded" was in fact waiting to be heard.

Mannoni's work in child psychology led her in 1969 to found the residential community known as *École expérimentale de Bonneuil*, which she directed until her death. The institution, which operated beyond traditional boundaries and used a variety of therapeutic strategies, with workshops and internships within and outside the school environment, became internationally renowned. Upon dissolution of the *L'École freudienne* in 1980, Mannoni appealed for the creation of training institute for young analysts and, with her husband and Patrick Guyomard, she established the Centre de formation et de recherches psychanalytiques (Center for [psychoanalytical](#) training and research; [CFRP](#)). Subsequently, internecine quarrels led to a crisis that went so far as to [entail](#) legal action against Mannoni herself. After the [plaintiff's](#) suit was dismissed, she called for dissolution of the CFRP, which was [duly](#) voted on January 30, 1995. Several months earlier on October 16, 1994, at the end of a [contentious](#) general assembly of the CFRP, she had founded the "Espace analytique." She remained its president until her sudden death from heart disease.

At the end of her life, Mannoni wrote of the practice of analysis that its lively dynamisms were "akin to the energy of the poets or of those who work face to face with poverty." These words [epitomize](#) both her [unflagging](#) engagement with writing and her attentiveness to those areas where psychoanalysis confronts life's hardships.

Bibliography

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