I assume the task of telling some of Heinz Kohut's story with great trepidation. Readers of this volume are not only well aware of and interested in his work but number among them friends and colleagues who knew him much better than I. Many go back years, if not decades, with Heinz Kohut. They have their memories and pictures of him stamped. I can only hope my work contributes to and enhances the memories of those who were really close to him, just as my primary source lies in what several of his friends have already told me of him, material that I have shamelessly appropriated and that I hope in the coming years will be expanded considerably. For let me make clear that another source of my trepidation is that I am nowhere near the end of my work on this project. I need much more time to interview Kohut's family and friends, his colleagues, his admirers and critics alike, former patients, everybody and anybody who knows anything and is willing to share memories and thoughts with me. Furthermore, Kohut's life blended into the larger story of the Chicago Institute since the war and, to some degree, the whole history of psychoanalysis since Freud. Before he was 50, Kohut was labeled—and he bore proudly—the title “Mr. Psychoanalysis.” Unlike cult figures like Erikson who left mainstream psychoanalysis for the universities and who wrote better prose, Kohut faithfully and diligently kept the psychoanalytic flame alive, serving on innumerable committees in Chicago and in the American Psychoanalytic Association and gaining the respect of everyone in the field from Anna Freud to Heinz Hartmann to colleagues closer to home in Chicago who had long known he was special. His publications before 1971 were relatively few and, though always interesting and even remarkable, they were, as he himself later noted, safe. Keep in mind that as late as The Analysis of the Self in 1971 Kohut was still using obscure terminology like “narcissistic libido” to express some really new ideas. This larger aspect of a volume I am preparing—the way Kohut's life was a part of psychoanalytic history—will occupy a good deal of my time researching.

Kohut is also an intimidating figure to write about. I make no claims to any special closeness to Kohut. I was not his patient, he no longer taught at the Chicago Institute when I was a candidate there, and I seldom saw him socially; but I was touched by him. In 1979 I helped organize a conference on political leadership at which he was the central figure. After that we worked on a book together and, in his last year, I conducted a series of taped interviews with him. He also expressed his enthusiasm for several papers he heard me give. I was in a sense the new kid on the block at the very end as he declined physically and at a time when many of his relationships with contemporaries had soured. In writing my biography, I hope I have enough distance to be objective, sufficient experience as a biographer to be effective, and enough sensitivity to discipline my subjectivity. I'm not indifferent to the largeness of Kohut. He was indeed an idealizable figure who elicited from the psychoanalytic community both abject devotion and contemptuous disregard (and, as in Freud's biography, the most interesting relationships he had are with those who moved from devotion to disregard). Yet he was always taken seriously; he was always considered special.

Not surprisingly, Kohut was apparently treated specially as a child. He was born on May 3, 1913. His father, Felix Kohut, who died in 1936, was very successful in the paper business and was a highly cultured man. He was truly gifted at the piano and before the first world war changed his life was heading for a career as a concert pianist. Heinz was also able to play the piano, but it was a seldom demonstrated talent. During all of World War I, Felix Kohut served on the Russian front, where his wife and baby Heinz used to visit him at times. Otherwise, from the time Heinz was 1 until he was 5, his father was away and he and his mother lived with her parents outside of Vienna. Heinz was particularly close to his maternal grandfather who, however, died before the end of the war. Felix, geographically removed in Heinz's early years, seems, after his return, to have been quite remote characterologically. Fathers and their substitutes were elusive for
the infant Kohut.

Heinz's mother, Else Lampl, who lived to see him serve as president of the American Psychoanalytic Association in the 1960s, is frankly an obscure figure for me right now (and I fear may always remain so). She seemed to be oppressively close at times, then apart and distant at others. “Difficult” is the adjective several people I've interviewed have used to describe her, though I don't yet understand what exactly made her difficult and what she was like when Heinz was young. He often described his childhood as sad and said he felt intense loneliness because of the social functions that took his parents away most evenings. In one of my own interviews with Kohut, he once referred to his “crazy mother” but it was said lightheartedly and he then went on to relate a touching anecdote of the congratulatory telegram she sent on his election as president of the American Psychoanalytic Association. There was something deep and abiding between Heinz and his mother, whatever the residues of ambivalence. Furthermore, if I may be permitted a conjectural aside, I cannot believe anyone who approached life with such zest and enthusiasm and who was always treated by others as unique and inordinately talented was not somehow treated specially by and close to his mother.

Be that as it may, Heinz was an only child whose education was remarkable, even by the rigorous standards of the Viennese elite. He was at first kept from formal schooling for the first 2 years, and had instead a tutor from the school work with him at home. He then went through the local elementary school and the Döblinger Gymnasium, from which he graduated in 1932. There he had the best of a classical education, including history and 8 years of Latin and 6 of Greek. He also studied French, the knowledge of which was further enhanced in several summers at pension, wide reading, and a full year in Paris as a young man. He never studied English when young. Later, in the United States, when he had to do a fast study of English, he immersed himself in Alice in Wonderland, from which he could always lovingly quote long passages. Heinz seemed to treasure especially the years in the gymnasium. He was at or near the top of his class and active in many things, cultural and athletic—he was good at track and field and he boxed well. In the last year of his life he spoke warmly to me of his teachers at the gymnasium and the wonderful enthusiasm they brought to their instruction. For example, half a century later he described in vivid detail the way a history teacher had evoked the French Enlightenment by painting a picture in words of the gardens at Versailles, their order and elegance.

From about the time he was 8 to 14 years of age, there was also an extraordinary tutor with whom Heinz was in constant contact. Heinz's mother hired this young man, who was probably a university student, for the sole purpose of stimulating her son intellectually. He would show up most afternoons and take Heinz to the opera, the art gallery, to walk the Ring, and talk and play intellectual games. Heinz talked to friends about this tutor for the rest of his life. He clearly left an indelible impression. Yet no one seems to remember his name and Heinz himself after his childhood lost track of him.

At 19 Kohut entered the University of Vienna and its Medical Faculty. He was a consistently good student, who at times creatively bent the rules to adapt a large institution to his own needs. Thus, in 1936 he simply took off without permission for Paris, where for a year he gained some extra medical training and experience working in various Parisian hospitals. One has to suspect, however, that visiting the treasures of the Louvre was as much a part of his intentions in living in France as was gaining an understanding of French medicine from the inside. In any event, he succeeded to stay without losing any time or credit at the University of Vienna. He simply had some friend present his little book to the professors for periodic signature to prove his attendance at lectures where of course he had not been present. Most people would probably not be able to pull off such a trick and not miss a step academically. Heinz was different.

As a student in the 1930s—he graduated with his medical degree in November 1938—Kohut became interested in psychoanalysis. One brief and not very successful therapy gave way to analysis with August Eichorn who was close to Freud and provided a direct link to the founder of psychoanalysis. Kohut never knew or met Freud, but there is a famous story he liked to tell of visiting the train station when Freud left...
for England on June 4, 1938. Freud, in a wheelchair, along with his wife, her sister Minna, Anna, Dorothy Burlingham, his dog Lun, and an entourage of patients and servants boarded the Orient Express bound for Paris. As the train left the station, Freud looked out the window and there stood Kohut with a friend. Kohut tipped his hat. Freud tipped his hat in return and the train rolled off down the track. It is a story that stresses continuities and Viennese connections in a crumbling world. Kohut's fond telling also suggests to me a special sense of mission that he felt about psychoanalysis as a young man.

Within a few months Kohut followed Freud to England, though, lacking Freud's political clout, he was without a passport or the visa he needed to go to the United States. He was therefore placed by the British in a camp for emigrés. There he stayed for the first half of 1939. As a doctor, Kohut enjoyed special privileges in the camp, which the British, civilized as they are, tried to make as pleasant as possible. The inhabitants, for example, took on the local village in a chess match—and defeated them roundly. Still, the camp was a draining experience and sometime that summer Kohut got pneumonia and secured permission to reside with his uncle, Hans Lampl, in London. This uncle had been a very successful businessman in Vienna and had escaped with enough assets to ride out the war in England. He was later to return to Vienna and resume his successful career.

In early 1940 Kohut got his visa and secured passage on a convoy to the United States. Once here he came immediately to Chicago, determined to escape war in Europe and build a new life. He chose Chicago, it seems, largely because an old and dear childhood friend from Vienna, Sigmund Levarie, had established something of a beachhead there as an instructor in the department of music at the University of Chicago. Kohut may also have been influenced by the presence in Chicago of two other noted analysands of Eichorn—Kurt Eissler and Paul Kramer. Upon arrival with barely 25 cents in his pocket, Kohut quickly applied for citizenship—which he was awarded 5 years later—and managed to get an internship at a small, southside hospital. As usual, he impressed everyone he met and the moment he finished his internship he came to the University of Chicago for a coveted residency in neurology. He served in this capacity with distinction. Neurologists at the university still talk of the loss to “real science” when Kohut left neurology for an assistant professorship in neurology and psychiatry in 1944 and then exclusively in psychiatry in 1947. He was apparently marked to be chairman of the section in neurology as soon as they got him through his residency. His boards, for example, were astoundingly good.

One wonders, of course, why Kohut chose to start with neurology and why he then left it for psychiatry. There is no doubt he agonized over his shifting interests; but from everything I can gather, Kohut also seemed to be consciously modeling himself on Freud. Kohut had already had one analysis and, not long after arriving in Chicago, began his second with Ruth Eissler. He read and talked about Freud constantly. The train scene in 1938 suggests a sense of identification with Freud and the psychoanalytic movement. Furthermore, Kohut wanted to be not just a neurologist but, like Freud, a good one. There was, in other words, an early sense of purpose in Kohut, an inner fire and lofty ambition to be Freud's successor, long before those thoughts had any basis in actuality.

In these war years Kohut lived in a room on the sixth floor of Billings Hospital and soon developed a network of close friends and colleagues. He worked hard in the hospital, of course, but he also regularly attended the opera and spent many afternoons wandering through the Art Institute. He also found the Museum of Science and Industry fascinating and spent many weekends there. For a cultured Viennese that museum, which so celebrates American capitalism, must have epitomized the culture of his adopted country. He went out often to modestly priced restaurants, played bridge with friends, laughed, and talked of the Viennese Ring as though it was on the other side of the Midway. He was pudgy then—the running of 7-minute miles and weight loss only came in the early '50s—and he was noted for his meticulousness by friends. His room was always neat as a pin and his clothes were carefully tailored. He rounded out his costume with gloves, which he started wearing at the very first sign of winter. His hair, brushed straight back in the European style, was always in place. Kohut and another well-kept central European on the sixth floor of Billings—Thomas Szasz—were both regarded as unusual by their parochial colleagues when they slept with a hair net; but that was how you kept it looking so good. In everything, he was very well organized. When he read a book, for example, he would carefully set it up in front of him and arrange different colored pens (for underlining) on either side in absolutely perfect order. It looked, said an old
friend, as though he were going to eat the book.

Kohut in fact became something of a legend on the floor. People noticed and remembered him. One thing that stood out was his humor and playfulness. He loved, for example, to tell jokes of the sophisticated Count Rudi from Vienna, and his country cousin, Graf Bobi, from Budapest. He would take great delight in telling these jokes, which, if the listener knew German, he would enliven by using Viennese and Budapest accents. Kohut's playfulness had long been a part of his character. Even in the gymnasium he had been a master of tricks like arranging for someone to blow a trumpet under an open window to drown out the lecture. Play, it seems, helped nourish his creativity and possibly relieved some of the tensions from hard work and compulsiveness.

Then, as later, Kohut's talents and interests were diverse. He was in analysis, constantly reading Freud and other writers in psychoanalysis, working on a daily basis as a neurologist, preparing for specialty boards at which he excelled, attending the opera, going to museums, eating out, seeing friends, reading widely and deeply in all kinds of literature (he was particularly fond of Thomas Mann), listening to and thinking about music, and so forth. Some talents and interests—like playing the piano—simply had to be suppressed. He was also a fine singer and, in the words of someone who knows about these things, he could have been an actor. How did he manage it all? Obviously, he was talented in special ways; but he also was a master both of limiting himself and of highlighting the experience of the moment. Then—and later—he hardly had the time to go to as many cultural affairs as he would have liked. When he did it was a big event, something he prepared for, which completely absorbed his attention. After a concert, for example, he could recall every second of the performance and describe in detail its ups and downs.

Kohut had great charm and seemingly boundless enthusiasm. His wide knowledge was impressive. In everyone's eyes, he was marked for greatness. When a little later he graduated from the Institute for Psychoanalysis (in 1948), he was immediately brought onto the faculty and staff, which was a rare honor. Within 3 years he, Joan Fleming, and Louis Shapiro had reestablished orthodoxy in the curriculum and ferreted out the Alexandrian heresy of shortening psychoanalysis. Yet in the '40s Kohut sometimes overpowered and offended. He had trouble suppressing his disdain for the thin cultural background of most Americans. Furthermore, when he talked, you listened. It was brilliant stuff, but his self-centeredness could isolate people and cause wounds that lasted a lifetime. One very perceptive person who knew him well then, noted how curious it was that no one ever hurt him more deeply than Kohut and yet his brilliance, charm, enthusiasm, and humor continued to be irresistible.

Once established in the Institute, Kohut never left it. He kept his appointment at the University of Chicago until 1950, but his concerns now lay elsewhere. He had, it seems, four goals. First, he wanted to become an excellent psychoanalyst, to heal in the unique way pioneered by Freud. Now, of course, it is difficult to assess the real quality of any psychoanalyst as a clinician. The evaluative criteria are unclear, the process secretive, and the therapeutic results often ambiguous. There is a lot more to learn about this aspect of Kohut's life. One of my personal goals is to interest talkative former patients in sharing with me their experience in therapy with Kohut. Be that as it may, I have picked up some interesting information on Kohut the clinician that is worth relating. Colleagues who worked with him over the decades seem to have no doubt he was a superb analyst. He was one of those few people whom other senior analysts consulted on their own cases. Patients who ended up in more than one consulting room talked of Kohut's extraordinary empathy and patience. Furthermore, his case presentations showed him to be completely on top of his cases. He was finely tuned to where a patient was in analysis and what direction the flow of associations was taking. There was undoubtedly an occasional failure, but Kohut gained renown as a successful analyst. Why? One time a former patient was giving a paper and doing a good job at it. Kohut was absorbed in the presentation and beaming happily. It was said then, and probably could apply generally, that he truly loved his patient.

The second goal Kohut seemed to set for himself was to become an informed and effective teacher. There is no doubt he managed to keep a class enthralled, no matter how far afield he went or how long the
digression. He liked to begin with a question and then talk at it for the next hour, thinking on his feet, so to speak, sharing with students the creative process. His charisma carried the day and inspired excited listeners to read and think on their own. The medium was, in a sense, the message. The only problem was that some prosaic minds at the Institute felt candidates should know some specific things about Freud from a course on psychoanalytic theory. They therefore established a second course, called a discussion group, back to back with Kohut's lectures, to go over the reading before hearing Kohut.

The same teaching style later carried over to his public lectures at which he could as easily enthral hundreds as he had done earlier with a dozen students. His marvelous ramble, however, had much more order than many realized. Sometimes, Kohut actually read a paper; but in general he talked, as Freud had, without notes at all. For run-of-the-mill presentations, he would seclude himself for an hour or so beforehand, and stride back and forth thinking. For the big talks, however, he made elaborate preparation. At the first self conference in 1978, for example, he talked without apparent direction but with clear inspiration on a panel entitled, “Psychoanalysis and the Sciences of Man.” A couple of years later in going through some unpublished material he asked me to edit, I came across a 70-page draft paper he wrote before the self conference entitled “Psychoanalysis and the Sciences of Man.”

Thirdly in his career, Kohut sought to achieve leadership of the psychoanalytic community and provide direction for its future development. For much of the '50s and well into the '60s, Kohut labored on many committees, especially those of the American Psychoanalytic Association. As usual, he took this work very seriously. For example, his excellent paper, published in 1960, “Beyond the Bounds of the Basic Rule,” which discusses applied psychoanalysis, began as a committee report. Kohut turned an otherwise mundane report into a classic statement on method in applied psychoanalytic work. There is no doubt he was good at such work and in

the end he rose to the presidency of the American. However, there is some question whether administration best expressed his creativity. He was in some ways too large a personality. In later years he liked to say half-jokingly that everything he knew of narcissism he learned from committee work, which is a gross exaggeration (that's why it's funny) and biographically misleading. There were also some sharp disappointments in the achievement of this leadership goal, most notably when he was outmaneuvered by Leo Rangell for the presidency of the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1969; and when, in 1978, he was not reelected to the Council of the Chicago Institute amid a great deal of intrigue, and some would say envy, on the part of some colleagues.

It was, however, in achieving his final goal as a researcher and original thinker in psychoanalysis that Kohut was, in the end, the most successful. I will briefly sketch here the development of his thoughts and put his ideas in a biographical context. In retrospect, the continuity in Kohut's thought seems to outweigh the apparent shifts in terminology. He began writing on applied psychoanalysis and surely never lost that interest. The 1959 paper on empathy defines the methodological basis of the psychoanalytic enterprise as a science. Those ideas never changed, only enlarged. It is not a radical intellectual shift to think of the self as being at the center of psychological life rather than to think of narcissism as one line of development, the way Anna Freud would have had it. Such a shift in language is far less important than the discovery of selfobject or, as he first called them, narcissistic transférences. The notion of the selfobject was there in Kohut's mind long before he removed the hyphen; it can be found in one of his earliest papers on Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice.*

Nevertheless, there do appear to be two major stages in the intellectual biography of Heinz Kohut that correlate with other changes in his personal and professional life. Of course the two stages overlapped; any delineation of stages in a life course has a large measure of artificiality to it. Yet we live by timed rituals and we mark passages by symbols that, once created, come to control other things. For Kohut it seems there was a major turning point in 1965, when two things happened: he reached the end of the line in his leadership goal; and, in the same year, before a meeting of the American, he outlined his thoughts on narcissism that inaugurated the original work that occupied the last 16 years of his life.

Before 1965 Kohut was Mr. Psychoanalysis, the most eminent spokesman for classical Freudian thought, conservative, and widely respected by Anna Freud, Heinz Hartmann, Kurt Eissler, and others. Until the mid-'60s the unquestioned respect of such figures seemed central for Kohut, but the effort it took
to maintain may have choked his creativity. But whether that is true or not, it soon became painfully clear
to Kohut that orthodoxy could not easily contain his developing thought. Anna Freud thus minimized the
importance of *The Analysis of the Self* in 1971 and after that quietly withdrew from Kohut's ideas. Kurt
Eissler, his old friend and colleague, whose wife

had analyzed the young Kohut, told him in the early '70s that he didn't understand a thing Kohut was doing.
Kohut was crushed. Such withdrawal of support at first genuinely confused (and upset) Kohut and he never
fully reconciled himself to it. But it is worth remembering that his bold new ideas were losing him the
respect of those he most admired and that he was increasingly and sometimes viciously attacked. It is now
an almost stale criticism of Kohut that he understood narcissism so well because he was himself so
grandiose. No great thinker is humble; and it took real courage and fortitude to move away from a
tradition—at least as perceived by those responsible for orthodoxy within that tradition—that was so
completely a part of Kohut's soul.

His language also gradually shifted from the arcane terminology of ego psychology to a clearer set of
terms more his own, ones obviously more appropriate for his ideas. This language change came in fits and
starts. The 1966 paper on narcissism is a model of clarity and stays largely free from jargon, while the first
book, in 1971, returns to the old terms to carry the new ideas. Then the rage paper in 1972 began a long
series of publications that, in an unbroken way, move toward a new language for self psychology, toward
terms like “selfobject” that are so simple and yet so richly evocative. I do not want to overdo this point of a
new language; still, our words are vital symbols of our thought. One cannot think freshly without
discovering a new way of saying things. It is central to the creative process in psychoanalysis—and in
many other areas of science as well.

As a footnote, I also want to point out that before “Forms and Transformations of Narcissism” in 1966,
Kohut had published a total of only six full-length, substantive articles in psychoanalysis, though he had
published a paper while still in medical school and several neurological papers in the early 1940s. Of the
psychoanalytic papers, two dealt with his psychological theory of music, one is the essay on *Death in
Venice*, and one is the essay on method in applied psychoanalysis. Thus, fully two-thirds of his major
publications dealt with applied psychoanalysis. A fifth article was the long synthesis, “Concepts and
Theories of Psychoanalysis” written with Philip Seitz, and only the last—the 1959 empathy paper—broke
new ground in psychoanalytic theory. The rest of his writing was not the kind of stuff that turns the world
upside down: there were 22 reports, panel discussions, book reviews, and obituaries, and two published
addresses as president of the American Psychoanalytic Association, the first as he assumed office, the
second when he left. The total number of printed pages for *everything* he wrote before 1966 (when he was
52) in Paul Ornstein's edition comes to only 295 pages. The point I hope is obvious: one gauge of Kohut's
expansive creativity since the mid-'60s is the marked increase in the amount of sustained, serious writing he
produced.

Finally, the mid-'60s marked a major change in Kohut's circle of friends: they got younger. Old and
dear friends remained just that, but complicated and competitive relationships with peers gave way to a
wholly new circle

of younger colleagues who self-consciously grouped themselves around Kohut as, beginning in 1902, the
first circle of admirers came to study with Freud. The Jung of the group—John Gedo—played a crucial role
in getting it organized. It met in Kohut's home, beginning in the late '60s, to go over emerging chapters of
the *Analysis of the Self* and first consisted of Gedo, Arnold Goldberg, Michael Franz Basch, David Marcus,
Paul Tolpin, and Paul Ornstein. Later, Marian Tolpin, Anna Ornstein, and Ernest Wolf joined, and Gedo
left. Some others have played a role in the group, which while Kohut was alive had three peak periods of
activity—before each of his two books, and during the preparation of the Casebook that Dr. Goldberg
edited.

The purpose of this group was to discuss Kohut's work in a supportive way. Kohut, like Freud earlier
with his group, was the master; they, the students. They were the best and brightest of the younger
members of the Chicago Institute; they now joined in his enterprise. Despite division, controversy, and some hurt feelings, the group endured, and both helped Kohut keep productive and feel recognized, and on their own began increasingly to extend his ideas in their own publications and, with the self conferences that began in 1978 and are now in their sixth year, to widen the circle of influence from Chicago to the nation. Over the years, snide remarks have been made about the fawning attitude of the group toward Kohut and his dominance over the members has been castigated. But he was, like Freud, the one with new ideas. It is to the group's credit that they recognized and appreciated it. As Arnold Goldberg told me,

*The thing about Heinz is that he had something. Like him or dislike him, you just don't often find that kind of person.... And he knew he was special. Most of his critics weren't playing the same game he was playing. He was playing hard ball. They were into the 16-inch stuff. There was just no one in his league.*

To conclude on that playful metaphor, we are, it seems, at a critical stage in the history of self psychology and indeed of psychoanalysis generally. Kohut had an acute and poignant sense of the importance of the annual conferences in pushing forward self psychology. He never missed one while he lived. He even dragged himself from his sick bed to attend the last, 4 years ago in San Francisco. He came on Sunday morning then, looking pale and tired, but he pulled himself majestically erect to lecture on empathy. After he finished the large audience stood and broke into long, moving applause. Somewhat embarrassed, he motioned enough. “Thank you,” he said in parting. “I want to take a rest now.” He died 4 days later.