

A letter from Richard B. Grose, PhD, LP on:

**The Interwoven Lives of Sigmund, Anna and W. Ernest Freud:  
Three Generations of Psychoanalysis (2015)**

International Psychoanalytic Books

by Daniel Benveniste, PhD

October 12, 2019

New York City

Hi Daniel,

What a strange and fascinating book you have written. Like the wise men and the elephant, my impression of what kind of book it was changed several times in reading it. In the first section when Sigmund Freud is in the picture, I was very impressed because it seemed that you have accomplished what I would not have thought possible, namely tell a story in which Sigmund Freud is a minor character. Since I usually think that Freud's greatness as a psychologist has for a long time been impaired by the cult of personality that grew up around him, I found your achievement compelling indeed. While I was reading this part of the book, I was often thinking of the 1960s play, "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," by Tom Stoppard. I don't know if you know that play but your book in this section resembles it. In the play, we see Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on stage all the time and periodically Hamlet and the other major characters walk on and act out scenes from Shakespeare's play and then move off stage, leaving Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to react to what they've just heard and participated in. So in the early life of Ernst Freud, his grandfather is seen mainly as a grandfather (in one scene Sigmund Freud is seen in the bathtub—a first in the literature, I think!) and not as the great Sigmund Freud.

Then as Ernst Freud becomes an adult, then a professional, but a late bloomer, I thought your book resembled Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, a book I hope you know. It seemed like your relationship to Ernst Freud is similar to Mann's relationship to Hans Castorp: both of you focus on someone who in many ways is an unremarkable person but who is worthy of our attention because he lives in, survives, and is molded by a remarkable world. In Hans Castorp's case, that world is Europe before the First World War. In Ernst Freud's case the world is the amazing family that he was born into. It was very compelling to see Anna Freud through the lens of her nephew's life.

How good also that you gave us the circumstances and more or less precise dates of the deaths of Freud's sisters. Their deaths are usually mentioned in a single sentence. Instead of joining that general dismissal, you briefly sketch their personalities as well as describe their terrible deaths. Those pages also dispelled my literary fantasizing as I was reading, as it became yet another kind of book.

None of which prepares the reader for how moving the end of this book is. The deaths of siblings occurring in three generations, the profound meaning of Fort-Da throughout Ernst Freud's life, Heinerle's death and Ernst's alienation from Colin when the latter was the same age, and finally and most moving, the meaning that you had for your subject—the book has, of course, laid the groundwork for these concluding passages and yet they are unexpected and give the book a depth that it didn't have when it, at least with me, made me think of other books. At the end of this book one doesn't think of other books.

It was a great pleasure to experience the Freud family from the perspective of W. Ernest Freud, and especially to experience Sigmund and Anna Freud as human beings and not as icons.

All the best,

Richard