

FINDING THE PIGGLE
Reconsidering D. W. Winnicott's
Most Famous Child Case

Edited by
Corinne Masur



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About the editor and contributors

Dr Zack Eleftheriadou, MSc, MA, Dip IMH, Dip NCFED, is a chartered counselling psychologist, chartered scientist and a fellow of the British Psychological Society (HCPC reg), a member of The Bowlby Centre, and a founding scholar of the British Psychoanalytic Council (London, UK). She has trained as an integrative and psychoanalytic adult psychotherapist, child and parent–infant psychotherapist (UKCP reg). Since 1990, she has provided training and has published extensively in the following areas: developmental issues, cross-cultural work, and refugees and trauma, including the book *Psychotherapy and Culture* (Karnac, 2010). Currently, she works as a pastoral tutor, infant observation tutor, and clinical supervisor at The Institute for Arts in Therapy and Education. Alongside her teaching work, she runs a consultancy, providing psychotherapy and supervision. She is a visiting external examiner for doctoral level university students and a member of the UKCP Child Faculty sub-committee, Infant–Parent Psychotherapy. Zack feels passionate about promoting early intervention and provides teaching to midwives and paediatric nurses on ways to facilitate the parent–infant relationship.

Angela Joyce, fellow and training and supervising psychoanalyst and child psychoanalyst with the British Psychoanalytical Society. At the Anna Freud Centre she was a member of the pioneering Parent–Infant Project and jointly led the child psychotherapy service. She works in private practice in London. She is currently chair of the Winnicott Trust, a trustee of the Squiggle Foundation, and has been an honorary senior lecturer at University College London. Her publications in Winnicottian studies include *Reading Winnicott* edited with Lesley Caldwell, New Library of Psychoanalysis Teaching Series (Routledge, 2011); ‘Introduction to Volume 6’, *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott* (OUP, 2016); and *Donald Winnicott and the History of the Present* edited (Karnac, 2017).

Professor Brett Kahr has worked in the mental health profession for over forty years. He is Senior Fellow at the Tavistock Institute of Medical Psychology in London and, also, Visiting Professor of Psychoanalysis and Mental Health in the Regent’s School of Psychotherapy and Psychology at Regent’s University London. He holds additional honorary appointments as Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the Centre for Child Mental Health, as Consultant in Psychology to The Bowlby Centre, and as Consultant Psychotherapist to The Balint Consultancy. He also serves as Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University, in recognition of his contributions to media psychology, having worked for many years as Resident Psychotherapist on BBC Radio 2. In addition to his roles as a clinician and teacher, Kahr is also a trained historian and has held the position of Trustee at the Freud Museum London and Freud Museum Publications, and has also worked as series co-editor of the “History of Psychoanalysis Series” for the publishers Routledge. Kahr has authored fifteen books and has served as series editor for more than sixty additional titles. His own publications include *D. W. Winnicott: A Biographical Portrait*, which received the Gradiva Award for Biography; *Sex and the Psyche*, which became a Waterstones Non-Fiction Bestseller, serialised in *The Times*; *Tea with Winnicott*; *Coffee with Freud*; *How to Flourish as a Psychotherapist*; *Bombs in the Consulting Room: Surviving Psychological Shrapnel*; and *Dangerous Lunatics: Trauma, Criminality, and Forensic Psychotherapy*.

Kahr has researched the life and work of Donald Winnicott for over thirty years and is currently completing the first part of his multi-volume biography of Winnicott, based on his interviews with more than 900 people who knew the great psychoanalyst personally. A registrant of both the British Psychoanalytic Council and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy, Kahr works with individuals and couples in Central London.

Justine Kalas Reeves is a child, adolescent, and adult psychoanalyst in Washington, DC. She trained at the Anna Freud Centre in London, and the Contemporary Freudian Society in Washington, DC. She teaches at CFS and Howard University. She is currently secretary of the Association for Child Psychoanalysis.

Deborah Anna Luepnitz, PhD, was on the clinical faculty of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine for over thirty years. In 2007, she joined the teaching faculty of the Institute for Relational Psychoanalysis of Philadelphia. Her books include: *The Family Interpreted: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Family Therapy* (1988) and *Schopenhauer's Porcupines: Five Stories of Psychotherapy* (2002), and she is a contributing author to the *Cambridge Companion to Lacan*. In 2005, Dr Luepnitz launched IFA (Insight For All) which connects homeless adults and children with psychoanalysts willing to work pro bono. She received the Distinguished Educator Award from the International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education in 2013, and maintains a private practice in Philadelphia.

Corinne Masur, PsyD, is a child and adult psychoanalyst who has worked with children and adults in a variety of settings for over forty years. She is a co-founder of The Parent Child Center in Philadelphia, The Philadelphia Center for Psychoanalytic Education, and The Philadelphia Declaration of Play. She was the editor of *Flirting With Death: Psychoanalysts Consider Mortality* (Routledge, 2019), and has written on childhood bereavement, the development of trust, the effect of divorce on children, and the denial of mortality, among other topics, and maintains a blog for parents: www.thoughtfulparenting.org.

Christopher Reeves was a child psychotherapist and director of the Squiggle Foundation. Between 1976 and 1990 he was first consultant and later principal of The Mulberry Bush School. He wrote extensively on Winnicott and issues to do with the theory and practice of child psychotherapy and psychoanalysis and he collaborated with Judith Issroff on the book *Donald Winnicott and John Bowlby: Personal and Professional Perspectives*.

Laurel Moldawsky Silber, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist whose training benefitted enormously by Winnicott's writings. She has been working with children and families in Bryn Mawr, PA, for over thirty years. She teaches and supervises at the Institute for Relational Psychoanalysis of Philadelphia. Her publications are in the area of play, intergenerational transmission of trauma, and childism. Her most recent publication was *Locating Ruptures Encrypted in Gender: Developmental and Clinical Considerations*, an original article which appeared in the *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy*. She co-edited a special issue, "Play for a Change" (Volume 19, Issue 2, 2020) for the same journal.

Foreword

Angela Joyce

The Piggie (1977) is a singular example of Winnicott's actual clinical work. Although his writings are peppered with clinical vignettes and references and there is the full volume of *Therapeutic Consultations in Child Psychiatry* (1971), nevertheless there is only one other extended account of his psychoanalytic clinic: *Holding and Interpretation* (1955). This new book of essays about Winnicott's original work with this young child is also singular. Although over the years since *The Piggie* was first published there have been several articles commenting upon it, there has not been a volume like this, which takes a view of the actual work from the perspective of some fifty-plus years subsequent development of clinical practice. It is a book which is both sympathetic to the original work and also questioning and critical in a creative engagement with it.

Winnicott is renowned as a clinician of rare skill especially with children. He was seen as possessing an extraordinary capacity to "get" children: to establish a connection with them at the deepest level; to discern their needs and wishes in such a way that he could be "used" by them to extend and enrich their selves. Brafman describes the therapeutic consultations as "examples of *communication with children*" (Brafman, 2001, quoting Winnicott, 1971, p. 8; emphasis in the original). Winnicott was

interested in the child's experience of his/her problem, their lived experience, rather than any diagnostic category. "He surprised his listeners by his ease, his unaffectedness, his simplicity and his anti-conformity" (C. & P. Geissmann, 1998, p. 219). He frequently referred to his psychoanalytic training as the ground in which these capacities were cultivated.

Psychoanalysis is a living entity and has and is evolving in different directions. Winnicott himself was party to this elaboration during the amazingly creative decades of the mid twentieth century, as he embraced Klein's opening up of the pre-genital, infantile world and then recreated his own, different version of the foundations of early life. While he took Klein's ideas and ran with them, he could be thought of as doing something similar with Freud's. He revolutionised the psychoanalytic understanding of the beginning of life by his insistence on the relational context of the establishment of the self, thus multiplying the complexity of considerations for the psychoanalytic clinician. But he also remained in many respects an avowedly Freudian psychoanalyst, as he considered classical psychoanalysis to have been created for people who had been fortunate to have had a good enough beginning and as a consequence became "whole persons". This meant that they had the privilege of complex mental development through which they were then able to have or were prone to intrapsychic conflict. This in turn gave rise to symptoms whose meanings could be discovered and elucidated within the classical frame. For people who had not been so fortunate, something different was required of psychoanalysis if it was to have any relevance to them. His ability to hold and contain these many, sometimes contradictory threads, not to say tensions, within his identity and practice as a psychoanalyst is reflected in the complexity of his work. Perhaps inevitably, he was coincidentally a man of his time and a pioneer who was able to think outside the box.

Winnicott's treatment of the Piggie took place in the mid 1960s, in the last decade of his life. He remained a pioneer as he sought to integrate these myriad influences on his thinking and practice, in the context of his determination to follow his own ideas authentically. He had been a children's doctor for more than forty years by this time and a psychoanalyst for more than thirty. Before he finished his training as an analyst and then as a child analyst he had already spent more than a decade working with ordinary families with an ill child and a parent or

somebody taking responsibility for that child, and this contributed to his concern for health and its dependence on psychosomatic integrity. “He came into it from health, building up health, diagnosing and building up health in children, rather than a lot of people who had to come into it from another angle from adult psychiatry and pathology” (Clare Winnicott, in Kanter, 2004, p. 262).

He had been much influenced by his time at Paddington Green Children’s Hospital, at that time a poor area of west London, not only because of the vast numbers of families whom he saw in his clinic, but also because of the richness and variety of work that he was able to do with his team. He had also spent the formative years of World War II as consultant to the hostels in Oxfordshire where evacuated, disturbed children were billeted. By this time in the 1960s he had been married to Claire Britton, whom he had met during that time in Oxfordshire, for nigh on fifteen years, and her social work background was immensely influential in his thinking. She is credited (Kanter) with originating the concept of “holding” in her understanding of the function of social workers in their relationships with their clients.

Winnicott was inclined to a binocular view—holding the tension between inner reality and the external world as central to his understanding of the human predicament. So family life was often the focus of his writings, in all its manifestations of health and pathology, in which each individual person establishes and lives their lives according to how that tension is held, initially for the baby by the mother and father, and ultimately within themselves. This work with the toddler the Piggie, whose difficulties were presented by her parents as related to the birth of her younger sister, is rooted in Winnicott’s psychoanalytic understanding of her development through these early years. That understanding was complex and reflected both his sense that her primary relationship with her mother was foundational, and also that as she grew, she was in the grip of “the consequences of instinctual experiences” in the family situation. Here she was working out these instinctual experiences on the interpersonal plane as well as internally. He was of the view that these situations are all the time held by the parents and through this the child is enabled to sort out her coexistent love and hate “so that they are brought under control in a way that is healthy” (Winnicott, 1954).

Several of the papers in this volume (Silber, Kalas Reeves, Eleftheriadou) take up what is seen as Winnicott's insufficient emphasis on the Piggie's family context, an interesting criticism as he is so known to privilege the so-called "environment". Certainly he was mindful of Gabrielle's parents and contrary to practice then current, included them in this "shared" treatment. He was keenly aware of a child's parents as a source of either help or hindrance in ongoing development and he recognised their therapeutic potential in adapting to their children's changing needs. "It is possible for the [psychoanalytic] treatment of a child actually to interfere with a very valuable thing which is the ability of the child's home to tolerate and to cope with the child's clinical states that indicate emotional strain and temporary holdups in emotional development, or even the fact of development itself" (Winnicott, 1977, p. 2).

All this is appreciated in this present book; but with the benefit of decades of development of clinical processes and the extension of knowledge and theory, the authors here bring a set of perspectives which both extend and challenge Winnicott's own understanding of his work. We might claim that his pioneering work within psychoanalysis enabled these later developments to take place. The much quoted aphorism "there is no such thing as a baby without maternal care", apparently needed to be spoken by Winnicott in the midst of the Controversial Discussions at the BPAS in the 1940s, enabled psychoanalysis to some degree to interrogate the relational environment of the nuclear family. Over the decades of the late twentieth century that interrogation became more extensive as the environment over several generations came to be recognised as having a continuing and major if hidden effect. As several authors in this volume point out, when Winnicott was treating the Piggie he seemingly did not investigate her family history over the previous generations. If he had, he would have learnt about the Holocaust history of the mother's family, the father's history of loss and migration, and perhaps extended his understanding of Gabrielle's loss of the exclusive place in her mother's mind.

One trenchant critique of the theoretical paradigm within which Winnicott is working with this child is his apparent ignoring of the thinking coming out of what would become "attachment theory". That he knew about this work is evident in his review of some of the films made by Joyce and James Robertson chronicling the impact of separations

on young children in different situations (Winnicott, 1959). There he was fully in agreement with the painful truth of their effects, and even went so far as to say: “for most of us [it] needs no proof” (p. 529). As Masur (Chapter Four) points out, it is interesting therefore that there is no reference to the probable separation that the Piggie had endured when her mother gave birth to her sister. This is all the more interesting in that several of the Robertson films are about such children who had to endure both the separation from their mothers and the subsequent arrival of new siblings. As Masur does, we might speculate about his potential rivalry with John Bowlby, whose work at that time was laying the foundations of attachment theory and with whom Winnicott had a collegial but difficult relationship. Winnicott viewed Bowlby as not taking sufficient cognisance of the inner world and the power of unconscious phantasy in shaping the experience of the external environment.

Winnicott was intent on pursuing his psychoanalytic task of uncovering the unconscious meaning to his patient of her experiences. Here, as a nearly three year old whose early life seemingly had been good enough, he assumed that she was a “whole person”, full of conflicting unconscious wishes and anxieties rooted in her instinctual life. His Freudian identity is evident in his focus on her psychosexual development, as his interpretations and indeed his contribution to her play in the transitional space of the work, attend to her oedipal longings as they have now been shaped by the arrival of her little sister. As Masur (this volume) points out, the Kleinian influence is also there: in his references to the inside of the mother’s body for instance. He was alert to the presence of health in his patients and privileged the innate tendency towards growth and development. In *The Piggie* he wrote: “It is from the description of the psychoanalytic work, however, that the reader can see the essential health in this child’s personality, a quality that was always evident to the analyst even when clinically and at home the child was really ill.”

The Piggie was published posthumously, six years after Winnicott’s death, and reviewed sympathetically though not regarded as without flaws. Psychoanalyst James Hood (1980) wrote: “Winnicott evidently enjoyed himself immensely in an activity that centrally focuses on play and on the interpretations which make play possible again for an ill child.” Hood adds later: “Perhaps even more importantly the vague, chaotic, ill-understood or frankly confusing episodes are also allowed

their full measure of description and comment. These have to be tolerated as they are in the treatment process itself.” Another review by Ivri M. Kumin (1979) observes that the account is full of “moments of brilliant insight and uncanny clinical judgement, but also instances of misunderstanding, sleepiness, muddle and missed opportunities. In other words this is an honest and human book.” Peter Tizard, an eminent paediatric colleague of Winnicott’s, wrote to Clare: “The book tells so much about Donald and brings back all sorts of memories of his talking about children and his approach to them in his ordinary outpatients ... it said so much about his complete acceptance of other people—adults and children—the one essential basis for good doctoring ... there are so many delightful glimpses of Donald’s sensitivity to children, for instance to know exactly when to call the child Gabrielle and not Piggie” (unpublished letter, DWW archive).

This book extends our thinking not only about this fascinating case, but also about psychoanalysis, children, history, the external world, inner reality, and the development of theory and practice over time. It demonstrates the aliveness of the psychoanalytic tradition in its myriad iterations.

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Introduction

Corinne Masur

In January 1964, the parents of a little girl named Gabrielle wrote to Dr Donald Winnicott asking whether he could “spare time” to see her. They said, “She has worries, and they keep her awake at night and sometimes they seem to affect the general quality of her life and of her relationship with us, though not always” (Winnicott, *The Piggie*, 1977, p. 5).

Gabrielle’s parents contacted Winnicott with a great mixture of feelings, as parents generally have when considering a course of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis for their child. They were worried, of course, and also guilty, fearful that their having had a second child so close in age to Gabrielle might have caused her suffering and necessitated professional intervention.

After reading the parents’ letter, Winnicott decided to see Gabrielle, and since the family lived at a significant distance from his London office, and since his schedule was busy he decided to see her “on demand” in what he called “psychoanalysis *partagé*”, or shared psychoanalysis in which the parents were an integral part of the treatment, communicating extensively with Winnicott before and after sessions.

Gabrielle was treated over two and a half years and was most often brought to the office by her father.

Winnicott wrote up his notes about this treatment and set them aside for several years until he was asked to supervise a case at the 1969 International Psychoanalytical Congress in Rome in their pre-congress meetings. He was unable to identify a student to supervise for the meeting and thus, in his playful way, suggested to his junior colleague and student, Ishak Ramzy, that Ramzy supervise *him* on the case of *The Piggle* in front of the audience. He said that he would present a child analytic hour and warned Ramzy that he might find it “pretty awful as analysis” (1977, p. xiii). He also threatened Ramzy with the possibility that he would not give him any material to review prior to the meeting—although he ended up giving him the manuscript (which eventually became the book entitled *The Piggle*).

In front of a standing room only crowd, Winnicott and Ramzy presented. Much discussion ensued, concerning, among other things, whether this case represented psychoanalysis or psychotherapy.

The case was later published posthumously in book form in 1977, edited by Ishak Ramzy. As Clare Winnicott (Winnicott’s second wife and a child clinician in her own right) said in her preface to the volume, “The book presents the reader with a rare opportunity to be admitted into the intimacy of the consulting room” in order to study the child and the therapist at work (p. vii). Winnicott’s notes are provided in order to give the reader insight into his theoretical understanding of what was happening between himself and the child as well as within the child’s own mind. The description of Gabrielle’s play provides a dramatisation of the child’s inner world. As Clare Winnicott said, this work with Winnicott enabled Gabrielle “to experience and play with those fantasies that most disturb[ed] her” (p. viii).

Undoubtedly this treatment, and Winnicott’s presence in the life of the Piggle’s family were of the utmost importance to both Gabrielle and her parents, providing a powerful cause for hope for the return of this little girl to health and well-being following the onset of her very disturbing symptoms. And for more than five decades since its publication, the written version of the treatment has been read by graduate students, psychiatric hospital doctors, psychoanalytic candidates, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others interested in childhood psychopathology and the psychotherapeutic treatment of children the world

over. It has provided a primer for play therapy with very young children, an art practised successfully by very few. Winnicott's deep listening to Gabrielle has given a model of working with children to practitioners as has his way of entering into and making meaning of the very young child's play.

For years, while this book was read and reread, the identity of the Piggie was unknown to most (although, as you will learn in this volume, some Winnicottian scholars and historians did know). Then, in 2017, Deborah Luepnitz published a paper in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* on her discovery of the adult who was the Piggie (reproduced in this volume). In her work with homeless people, Dr Luepnitz had corresponded with another therapist who did similar work. In the course of her second letter to Dr Luepnitz, the other clinician revealed that she was Gabrielle, the child written about by Winnicott in the book entitled *The Piggie*. Dr Luepnitz was fascinated and eventually planned to meet Gabrielle to learn more about her and her recollections and feelings about her treatment.

Dr Luepnitz began to think about the case as it was written by Winnicott in light of the new information she was learning regarding the patient. This led to writing the paper, "The Name of the Piggie" in which Dr Luepnitz investigates new lines of inquiry not regarded as priorities by Donald Winnicott in his treatment of Gabrielle: the transgenerational transmission of pathology/trauma and the ways that language in general and names in particular organise individual subjectivity. Luepnitz states that her goal is not to supplant but to expand Winnicott's—and therefore, our own—understanding of the case.

It is to this same purpose that this volume is dedicated. This book includes Dr Luepnitz's wonderful paper and goes further, opening up a large number of new lines of inquiry which are looked at by various authors. This is especially meaningful considering that in Dr Luepnitz's paper she quotes Gabrielle as saying that she hoped at some point the case would be looked at in a new light and areas not covered by Winnicott would be explored. Of course the case has been discussed previously—and in some cases in ways that Gabrielle felt shut down further discussion (see Luepnitz in this volume)—but in this book the case is re-examined with new vigour.

Noted Winnicottian scholars Christopher Reeves and Brett Kahr make contributions to this re-examination as do Laurel Silber, Justine Kalas Reeves, Zack Eleftheradou, and I.

In my chapter, I explore the issue of loss and mourning in the life of Gabrielle and the effect of these upon her inner life and symptomatology. This was an area barely mentioned by Winnicott and only examined or interpreted, in my reading, once or twice—and glancingly so. It is striking to me that both Winnicott and Gabrielle's parents formulated the origin of her distress as coming from sibling and oedipal rivalry rather than from the prolonged loss of her mother during the mother's delivery of the new baby and her recovery. In the 1960s it was common for women to spend ten or more days in the hospital following the birth of an infant. However, that was a long, long time for a toddler to be without her mother. We know now and indeed, it was known at the time of Gabrielle's treatment, how injurious such separation can be for a young child. And the relative absence of interpretation of Gabrielle's sadness, anger, and depressive feelings as related to this loss is particularly notable coming from a man who himself laboured to prevent the separation of children from parents in war-torn London during the Blitz and after.

In Brett Kahr's chapter, new historical information is revealed regarding Winnicott's relationship with Gabrielle's family as is new Winnicottian biographical information, providing a rich context within which to understand Winnicott's work with Gabrielle. Kahr's access to hitherto unexplored historical documents pertaining to the Piggles family and to Winnicott's life is remarkable and a wonderful contribution to the Winnicottian literature.

In Christopher Reeves' posthumously published chapter he explores the nature and purpose of *The Piggles*' message. Originally Reeves presented this material in an extended paper published in two parts. In Part I he discussed *The Piggles* in its historical context alongside other contemporary child analyses (Klein's *Narrative of a Child Analysis* and McDougall's *Dialogue with Sammy*) and its ambivalent reception by its contemporary audience. He identified theoretical issues raised by the material; the use of commotional and conjunctive interpretations; the use of time, and analysis on demand; the place of play in therapy and the role of the parents, and he reviewed the dialogue between analyst and child as set out in the text, identifying emerging themes. He attempted

to understand what Gabrielle was trying to communicate and reviewed Winnicott's interpretations, identifying areas in which they might have been at odds with what the child was experiencing.

In the second part of the paper, "Discussion and Critique", he reviewed the nature of the messages Winnicott wished to communicate to his audience through the psychoanalytic case of *The Piggie* and reviewed the dialogue which serves as the material for the work. This part provides a discussion and a critical analysis of the case, and an examination of both explicit and less worked-out conclusions which can be drawn from it. Reeves considered the case as evidence that therapy with a child can be intensive without being extensive. He highlighted Winnicott's emphasis on the importance of play for working through internal conflicts, not merely as providing material for interpretation. Whereas Winnicott held firmly to the efficacy of his commotional interpretations, and the notion that Gabrielle's unconscious dispositions were agentic and intentional, Reeves argued for an alternative to Winnicott's interpretation, highlighting the use of make-believe play, the irregular timing of the sessions, and the child's own maturational processes as being important elements in her recovery. He suggested that, for Winnicott, these factors were intuitively, rather than conceptually worked out, and, in so being, contribute to the enigmatic nature of the original work.

In Laurel Silber's chapter entitled "Child analysis is *shared*: holding the child's relational context in mind", she focuses on Winnicott's "psychoanalysis *partagé*". She discusses the way in which Winnicott entered Gabrielle's changing attachment context and helped the family to sort out the grief and fear which they were experiencing around the change brought about by the birth of a new sibling. She examines Winnicott's concept of psychoanalysis *partagé* comparing it to Phillip Bromberg's "standing in the spaces" and Selma Fraiberg's "Ghosts in the Nursery", emphasising as they do the need to consider the subjectivity of all the family members when trying to understand the (child) patient. She goes on to look at the attachment research and the transgenerational transmission process as they apply to the case of *The Piggie*.

In Justine Kalas Reeves' chapter she explores a number of aspects of the case of *The Piggie* including the use of Winnicott as a developmental object for Gabrielle as well as the idea of psychoanalysis *partagé*. She also writes about the theme of sibling rivalry within the case, the idea

of intergenerational trauma within the family, and the possible role that the parents' marital troubles may have played in Gabrielle's development of symptoms.

In her chapter, Zack Eleftheradou also looks at the case of *The Piggle* from a contemporary interpersonal perspective. She asks the reader to enter the consulting room and imagine the family asking for help in 2020. She takes into account the concept that the family is a system which needs to be seen in its entirety as well as considering Daniel Stern's and Beatrice Beebe's emphasis on implicit communication within the family and Selma Fraiberg's concept of intergenerational trauma. Importantly, she also discusses cultural and racial issues within the case, a subject which Gabrielle herself reflected on as an adult. As Luepnitz noted in a revised and unpublished version of Chapter One given at the Division 39 Panel in March 2020: "She [Gabrielle] lamented that no one who has written about the case has picked up on its 'massively racist discourse'—by which she means the black mummy and the fears of all things black."

Donald Winnicott has often been described as a non-linear thinker, as courageously original, observant, and insightful, for example, by Judith Issroff. He drew attention to the kinesthetic and motoric ways of communicating (for example, crawling backwards to describe a schizophrenic child's way of lining up his thoughts), he described the importance of the mother–infant relationship in new and revealing ways, he examined the importance of the transitional object and of transitional space as well as developing myriad other new and original ideas and concepts related to human psychic development. His creative genius and sensitivity to children (and to people of all ages) cannot be underestimated and any critique found here is made exclusively in the interest of providing further life for the seminal case of *The Piggle*.