



## The Memoirs of Margaret S. Mahler

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A brilliant and influential figure among contemporary psychoanalysis, Margaret Mahler revolutionized our understanding of the first years of life. In her classic study, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, Mahler, drawing on several decades of research, expounded the separation-individuation process through which the child separates from its mother and comes to experience a sense of individuality and autonomy.

Now, three years after Mahler's death at age 88, historian Paul Stepansky has sensitively compiled and edited the surprisingly candid memoirs that this imposing woman began writing with him during her last years.

Mahler describes bourgeois life in the Hungarian village of her childhood, with her resentful mother, protective father, and beautiful younger sister. She recreates her days as a student and physician, from the Kovacs salon in pre-World War I Budapest, to the leading medical facilities in Germany, to Freud's Vienna where she practiced pediatrics and studied psychoanalysis. Interspersed with these reminiscences are revealing assessments of her eminent teachers and colleagues, including Sandor Ferenczi, Anna Freud, August Aichhorn, and Helene Deutsch. Finally, Mahler recalls her emigration from Austria in 1938 and subsequent life in America, where she achieved international prominence as a teacher, researcher, and clinician.

Over the course of her eventful life, Mahler fought to break free from painful family circumstances, from the provincial conventions of her youth, and from the stifling sexism and anti-Semitism of the professional community in Europe between the two world wars. A moving record of these successive struggles, Mahler's memoirs illustrate her determination to achieve personal autonomy and professional identity - a quest with fascinating parallels to the process of separation-individuation as she came to understand it during more than five decades of theoretical and clinical work in pediatrics, child psychiatry, and psychoanalysis.

Here, then, is the gentle yet powerful story of a remarkable woman whose personal struggles shaped her professional triumphs, and whose understanding of infancy and childhood has become integral to modern psychological theory and practice.

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