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*Freida’s Song*, by Ellen Prentiss Campbell. Baltimore, Apprentice House Press, 2021;

Reviewed by Fran Bartkowski

What is it about houses and the hauntings of earlier lives lived in them? There is a house that is nearly the protagonist of this marvelous novel. Freida’s Cottage was central to Chestnut Lodge, a mental health complex in Rockville, Maryland. In 2021, it was added to the Register of National Historic Landmarks to memorialize Freida Fromm-Reichmann, one of the early women trained in psychoanalysis in Germany, who fled the Nazi terror of the 1930s, and who came to live and work there from 1935 to 1957, when she died. History and fiction are imagined to life in this novel of two women who inhabit different histories in this house. Eliza, a contemporary psychotherapist, moves into the Cottage in 2009. Ellen Prentiss Campbell’s latest novel, *Freida’s Song*, is a seductive narrative that interweaves the historic interior and professional life of Fromm-Reichmann, and the fictional life of Eliza, single mother and her adolescent son, who come to live in the same house decades later.

Both women are living out in their time in the Cottage the wounds and scars of loss and love, the passions for the patients they are trained to heal, and for the loved ones whom they do their utmost to help thrive. We move between two timelines smoothly, eager to discover how these two women will become interconnected in fiction, in a space and place that housed their lives in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Living nearby, Campbell knew Chestnut Lodge and its buildings, and became intrigued after a fire in 2009 destroyed all, but left the Cottage intact. Her work as a writer and a psychotherapist drew her into Fromm-Reichmann’s history. As Campbell notes in an interview subsequent to the publication of *Freida’s Song*, she believes that Fromm-Reichmann “believed loneliness was at the root of mental distress.” These combined arts that Campbell practices – writing and healing – gave her own imagination space to create the character of Eliza, her son, Nick, and his quest to know who his father was.

Fromm-Reichmann was innovative in her methods of dealing with schizophrenia and psychosis, having been trained in psychoanalysis; and having treated traumatic brain injury, which she saw as a doctor among wounded World War I veterans. Chestnut Lodge was rare among institutions claiming to help and to heal schizophrenia and psychosis. Fromm-Reichmann, with her acute listening skills, found ways to connect with her patients. Among the most well-known years later was Joanne Greenberg, who published the autobiographical novel in 1964, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, about her treatment and cure with the pseudonymous Dr. Fried.

Fromm-Reichmann’s listening skills and techniques are notable in many ways, but especially given that she had two parents who grew deaf as they aged, and she herself was growing deaf in the 1950s. Among her work unfinished when she died in 1957, was an essay about loneliness, which was surely a subject she was coming to know more intimately herself. Ann-Louise S. Silver is a practicing psychotherapist who has written about Fromm-Reichmann, and who discusses the tie between the work and the personal experience of deafness. Both Silvers and Ellen Prentiss Campbell are to be applauded for bringing Fromm-Reichmann back into the history of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, as is Gail A. Hornstein, who published in 2000, her well-received biography of Freida Fromm-Reichmann, *To Redeem One Person is to Redeem the World*.

Freida and Eliza’s stories are intertwined by Campbell through memories each of these women brings to live with her in the Cottage. Eliza had first spent time in this setting as a social work intern before she was a mother, knowing little of the history that was lived there. She returns later for a position on the staff, with her son. A photo of Fromm-Reichman is displayed in the Cottage by her followers and staff, to acknowledge her legacy as a founder. The tapestry Campbell weaves of the 1930s and the 2000s creates patterns that bring into relief the nature of the work on wounded hearts, psyches, bodies and spirits, now half a century later. Though we listen in on exchanges with their colleagues about some of their most difficult cases, our attentions are tuned to the warp and weft of Freida’s friendship with Gertrud Jacob, a painter and dear friend, as they lived together the news of the war in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, and Gertrud’s losing battle with tuberculosis in the 1950s. Freida also still carried memories of her love affair, marriage, and divorce from her younger student, and analysand, Erich. Their brief and difficult marriage was fraught with how World War II rendered them nomadic, displaced, unhoused. That husband was Erich Fromm, whom many readers recognize from his early work, *Escape from Freedom*, first published in English in 1941. While that book was read by college students of psychology, sociology, and philosophy over a number of decades, Fromm-Reichmann’s book, *Principles of Intensive Psychotherapy*, published in 1950, remains a landmark text for students of psychology, and was not widely read by a broader audience.

Eliza has kept the identity of Nick’s father a secret; we know the power that secrets exert, especially for the young, who seek to know more of who made them, who they are, who they might aim to become. Readers live, with Eliza, her purposiveness as well as her anguish, in not being able to heal Nick’s psychic and physical wounds, as she heals the children of so many others among her patients. When Eliza and Nick discover paintings done by Gertrud, and a journal kept by Freida, Eliza will turn to those writings, feeling that “Freida was with her,” as she reassembled her own pain, learning more of the pain that Freida lived privately, such that their efforts to heal themselves are merged in this marriage of history and fiction.

Readers of *Freida’s Song* will enter the Cottage, and the lives of both these women in the familiar traumas of wartime, and life in the emerging traumatic times of this rough century, only now reaching maturity in 2021.

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