Women of the Wednesday Society: 
The Presentations of Drs. Hilferding, 
Spielrein, and Hug-Hellmuth

Posing My Interest

In Midsummer 1962, the Basic Book Service announced as its Alternate Selection the newly translated Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society Volume 1, 1906–1908, edited by Herman Nunberg and Ernst Federn. It was the first of what turned out to be four volumes: the others were published in 1967, 1974, and 1975. The notes begin in 1906, when Otto Rank became paid secretary of the Society. In 1913, they grew thin, and—apart from one meeting in 1918 just after the War and a moving brief account (long after Rank’s break with Freud) of the people present and the agreements made in 1938 when the group was dissolved by the Nazis—they cease altogether in 1915 due to Rank’s departure for military service in World War I. In eloquent detail, these volumes show psychoanalytic thinking in statu nascendi. The topics covered range from clinical cases through biology, psychiatry, sociology, and criminology to the lives of painters, musicians, writers, as well as reviews of books and scientific articles. Nunberg suggests that the “discussions . . . disclose, perhaps more clearly than his books and essays, how Freud’s mind worked” (1962, xxix); and the minds of his colleagues are similarly revealed.

These minutes are not a sterile, bare-bones text, such as is produced by present-day analytic societies. In the very earliest days, from 1902 until 1906, there were no minutes at all of the “Wednesday Evening Psychological Meetings” that took place.

I would like to thank Vera Camden for her good suggestions, and Peter Rudnitsky for a beautiful job of editing my final draft.
in Freud’s waiting room amid billowing cigar smoke. As the group became more formalized in 1906, "little Rank," as Freud called him "affectionately, betraying just a touch of condescension" (Gay 1988, 176), began his labors in pen and ink. Two years later, the group recast itself as the "Vienna Psychoanalytic Society." The notes seem relatively open. As everyone was aware of Freud’s ambitions, the speeches are infused by a sense of taking part in the unfolding of a great historical drama.

The notes, of course, reflect the perspective of Rank, who was in a phase of mutual admiration with Freud, although sycophancy does not appear to have contaminated his evenhandedness. He recorded contentious opinions, even when Freud’s contribution does not seem particularly perspicacious. Nunberg’s foreword to Volume 3 is much more worshipful than any of the members themselves: “One can only admire the patience with which Freud tried to show them their errors and wrestled with them for their recognition of the basic tenets of psychoanalysis, which formed the foundation for their own work” (1974, xi). Freud usually spoke at or near the end of a meeting, incisively highlighting what he saw as the central points. When he chose, he palliated the discussion, but he could also add non sequiturs and contradict other members, especially Adler. Rank, however, frequently gives the main speaker the last word—perhaps including a note that he had answered all the preceding arguments. Contrary to Nunberg’s orthodox repudiation of “errors,” some of the ideas that were devalued at the time can now be seen to have foreshadowed the most promising directions in recent analytic thinking. I will present evidence that, as speakers to the Viennese group, Margarete Hilterding and Hermine Hug-Hellmuth both fell into that category. Sabina Spielrein, though ultimately less impressive in my view, was later acknowledged by Freud to have anticipated aspects of his own theoretical development.

Freud was famously nasty, at least to outsiders, about his Viennese colleagues. For example, in March 1911, after he had handed over the presidency of the International Psychoanalytic Association to Jung, he wrote privately to the latter: “You have been very kind to the Viennese in your handling of the Congress question. Unfortunately they are a lot of rabble and

I shall feel neither horror nor regret if the whole show here collapses one of these days” (McGuire 1974, 411). Freud’s need to damn one past friend while elevating a current one with whom he sought closeness may have affected his judgments of the local group. However, evidence of his affection for the “gang,” as he called the group to LudwigBinswanger when the latter visited from Switzerland (Gay 1988, 178), is provided by his faithful attendance at all the proceedings. Gay and many others—including Abraham, Jung, and Jones—have followed Freud in calling the Viennese mediocre. It is time, however, to reappraise the conventional dismissal of the Wednesday group and to look freshly at its discussions. Outsiders, such as Jones, may have struggled with their envy of those who met with Freud nearly every week during the academic year.

The Wednesday Evening Psychological Group was perf orm a men’s club. It began with four members and grew to between seventeen and twenty—doctors, lawyers, writers, academics, teachers. That this professional club founded by Freud for his support would be all-male was inevitable in that era. The presentations of scientific papers by the first three women members did not occur until 1910 to 1913. A comparison is afforded by the Royal Society of Medicine in London (Gilbert 2003). Founded in 1907 to represent many medical specialties—the same year that the first woman received an M.D. from the University of London—this group was, when the question of membership for women arose, mixed in its opinions. The Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society felt strongly that women should not be members, yet the Society of Anaesthetists made its agreement to join the new Society conditional on women being accorded membership. Finally, after much dissension, on January 14, 1910, female doctors became eligible for the Royal Society of Medicine.

In tune with the times, it was in April 1910 that the first woman (who happened also to be a doctor) was admitted into Freud’s fellowship in Vienna against intense hostility. In May 1907, when there were still no women in the Wednesday Society, Fritz Wittels presented his essay “Female Physicians.” Wittels, a relentless misogynist, opined that a woman is harmless as a medical student because “the average half-way normal
student regards his female colleague as nothing but a prostitute,” but “as she becomes a physician . . . she becomes a danger for others.” A specialization in psychiatry was out of the question, since as “a woman she can never understand man’s psychological secrets” (Nunberg and Federn 1962, 196). He believed woman’s “true profession” was “to attract men.” She should never be allowed to occupy a position superior to a man’s because “she would always abuse the power of her office.” Although the men in the group had some demurrals, almost all concurred in barring women from higher education. Max Graf, the father of “Little Hans,” called attention to Wittels’s “intense affect” while delivering the paper, but he agreed that it was “harmful” for women to study. Graf believed that “the female physician . . . is better qualified to substitute for the mother, i.e., as a nurse” (197). Freud, who termed the paper “original, high-spirited, ingenious,” criticized Wittels for being juvenile, but is caught on record as saying that “it is true that woman gains nothing by studying” (199).

In looking at when and how women participated in the discourse of this early psychoanalytic study group, I intend to stay close to the transcript of the Minutes, a text that is both more casual and less subject to secondary revision than either their published works or the biographies about them. I have used secondary sources only as they affect my understanding of the women’s presentations at the Society. The relatively unguarded discussions contain currents and undercurrents that can help us to appreciate the impact of these pioneering figures on Freud’s thinking about female development, as well as revealing what the women themselves contributed in their interactions with the men, and where they may have deviated along gender lines.

Frau Dr. Margarete Hilferding, née Höngsberg (1871–1942)

In the opening moments of the session on April 6, 1910, Paul Federn proposed the first female, Dr. Margarete Hilferding, and Stekel proposed a male, Dr. Herman Frischau, as new members. But the nominations had to wait as the seventeen men in attendance listened to Freud’s report on the Nuremberg Congress where he had just engineered Jung into leadership of the newly founded International Psychoanalytic Association, thus shifting the political center of the movement from Vienna to Zurich. Revised governance was now proposed for the local group to establish it formally as a constituent Society. (This took effect in October 1910.) In an effort to assuage the distress of his oldest adherents and to place himself more in the background, Freud persuaded the Viennese to demote him to “scientific chairman” and to make Adler president. In a letter to Jung on April 12, he congratulated himself on his “statesmanship” in having “ceded the presidency to Adler” (McGuire 1974, 306). He made no mention of the advent of the first woman into his group.

At the April 6 meeting, Adler was diplomatic and conciliatory in his vision of increased cooperation in teaching and publishing with the Zurchers. Freud said he had concluded that Vienna was “not fit soil” for psychoanalysis “to thrive in” (Nunberg and Federn 1967, 466). Stekel defended the city as “the soil in which analysis first flourished,” while Tausk, lamenting the hand-over to Zurich, added that Vienna was paradoxically the best soil because it was a “sick” soil (467). It was in the context of this crisis in the larger movement—reflected by Jung’s emergence as Freud’s heir apparent and the founding of the International Psychoanalytic Association—that women first were allowed into the Vienna group.

Just after Adler assumed the chair, the issue of Margarete Hilferding’s election was turned over to the executive committee for discussion. It received a mixed response. Sadger was against admitting women to the Society, though he later supported Hermine Hug-Hellmuth’s membership. Wittels, Sadger’s nephew, wrote a letter (consistent with “Female Physicians”) opposing female members that was taken up “off camera.” In the session of April 14, 1910, in which the Society was reorganized, Adler announced that he was in favor of “female physicians as well as women who are seriously interested . . . and want to collaborate with us” (Nunberg and Federn 1967, 477). Freud said he “would take it as a gross
inconsistency were we to exclude women on principle." A test ballot then taken on the spot revealed three of those present to be opposed to admitting women, and eight in favor. Hifferding was admitted on April 27 by a vote of twelve in favor and two opposed. She attended her first meeting on May 4, 1910, and remained part of the group until October 1911. At that time, she joined with those who resigned from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society after the ouster of Adler, when members were forced to choose between continuing to attend Freud’s group and joining Adler’s “Society for Free Psychoanalytic Investigation” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 283). Hanns Sachs summarized the situation from the loyalists’ perspective by stating that “it is far from the board’s intention to drive anyone out . . . but there has to be a clean-cut separation” (282).

“On the Basis of Mother Love”

On January 11, 1911, after nine months of membership—and nine years as an all-male institution—the voice of this first female contributor, listed by Rank as (Mrs.) Dr. Hifferding, was heard in formal presentation at the scientific meeting. Besides the speaker, eighteen members and two guests were in attendance. In the concluding remarks to her talk, “On the Basis of Mother Love,” Hifferding said that “in a certain sense she had been misunderstood” by the group (Nunberg and Federn 1967, 125). She was disappointed that the “psychic components” of mother love had been stressed in the discussion, but not “the physiological component” that was “her actual concern.” It is hard to know from the record what Hifferding meant by this. Perhaps she believed that the audience had not grasped the import of her comments about the influence of bodily functioning on the mother’s psyche. Certainly, their remarks obliterated the subjectivity of the pregnant and nursing woman who is dealing with the bodily needs of her growing infant. Hifferding agreed with some of what Freud had to say about the psychological meanings of a mother’s maltreatment of her child, but she demurred that his emphasis on the mother’s rivalrous repressed sibling memories went “too far into the psychic sphere for it to be able to explain anything to us” (125). She scolded Federn for setting up a category of “degenerate mothers.” His comments had been what we would now recognize as outrageously biased and sexist. “It just won’t do,” she announced with authority.

Hifferding had observed in her medical practice before she became involved with psychoanalysis that some mothers look forward to the birth of a child, but after the baby is born have no love. After a while, a “sympathy” may develop, based on the “convention that demands love on the part of the mother” (Nunberg and Federn 1967, 113). She found that the tendency for “psychological factors” to arise as “substitutes for physiological mother love” was especially pronounced in well-educated mothers. The “nonexistence of mother-love” is seen in the refusal to nurse, a desire to give the child away, hostile acts (extending to infanticide), or a dislike for a particular child because, say, the father has deserted. Hifferding questioned whether these women were as “deranged” as the law would have it (114). Maltreatment can occur especially with illegitimate children and those not brought up by mother herself. The first-born child, she notices, evokes maximal hostility, while the youngest, in being spoiled and pampered, suffers from its reversal into the opposite. Exaggerated love and overanxiousness compensate for the mother’s hostile impulses. She states boldly: “there is no innate mother love.”

Hifferding deploys her new psychoanalytic knowledge to argue that “it is by way of the physical involvement between mother and child that love is called forth,” and “certain changes in the mother’s sexual life are brought on through the child” (114). She notes that, “among certain peoples” (115), a woman may avoid sex during weaning. Painful uterine contractions can be brought on by suckling the baby and frigidity can occur during the nursing period. She concludes that, for a time after delivery, the child represents “a natural sexual object for the mother. There exist between mother and child certain sexual relationships which must be capable of further development” (115).

Hifferding suggests that fetal movements awaken the mother’s love and pleasure, and these may be sexual. The loss of bodily pleasure because of the baby’s birth may cause aversion to set in. Milk shooting into the breast gives another
pleasurable sensation: “it can be said that the infant’s sexual sensations must find a correlate in corresponding sensations in the mother” (115). Hilferding generalizes:

if we assume an oedipal complex in the child, it finds its origin in sexual excitation by way of the mother, the prerequisite for which is an equally erotic feeling on the mother’s part. It follows, then, that at certain times the child does represent for the mother a natural sex object; this period coincides with the need of the infant for care. After this, the child must make way for the husband—or perhaps the next child.

Maternal love, she concludes, while not innate, can be acquired through the nursing and physical care of the first child, after which it is bestowed on subsequent children by the ignition of these intimate memories.

At the time of her paper, Hilferding was forty years old and the first woman to gain an M.D. from the University of Vienna. She had both a three-year-old and a six-year-old son, and was thus close to early mothering herself. Her emphasis on the sexual sensations of fetal movement, suckling, and touching shows her sensitivity to the interplay between the bodies of mother and infant. She seems, moreover, to have been in the process of divorcing her husband, a well-known Marxist financier (Appignanesi and Forrester (1992, 194). One wonders whether her own alienation from her husband is reflected in her comments on how the intensity of the sexualized bond between mother and child can be prolonged under such circumstances.

**Group Discussion**

There was much resistance to Hilferding’s ideas in the group. Universally, the men did not—or could not—enter into this discourse about the bodily sensations of a newly delivered mother together with her baby. They tended to redirect attention towards male experience, as in the opening comment by Alfred von Winterstein that invoked the “hypothesis of

Moritz Benedikt according to which there exists a close connection between mother love and the feeling experienced during the coition that led to the conception” (Nunberg and Federn 1967, 116). They held forth about everything from the mistreatment of children to women’s withholding of sex from their husbands at the time of breast feeding. Adler, who in the previous meeting had advanced his theory of “masculine protest,” was the most in tune with Hilferding; but in his general reflections on “the psychology of mother love” (120), he too avoided engaging directly with what she had to say. Josef Friedjung noted that father love can be deficient too. Sadger reproached Hilferding for overlooking what had been “scientifically ascertained” by Havelock Ellis, citing his findings that the sexual sensation in the nipple was “the deepest basis for mother love” and “provides the mother with the enjoyment of a new, until then unknown, perverse feeling of pleasure” (117). He ignored Hilferding’s exposition of the normative quality of these pleasures and their impact on the emotional growth of the child.

The extreme emotional distance evinced by the Wednesday men is tied to their view of gender roles. Federn, despite having brought Hilferding into the group against considerable opposition, resorted to stereotypes that once used to masquerade as “science.” Citing as his authorities the Viennese gynecologist Paul Mathes’s *Textbook for Midwives* (1908) as well as the Italian jurist Lino Ferriani’s *Degenerate Mothers* (1891), he proclaimed that fathers who have warm feelings for children possess “feminine traits” (123). Federn believed that there are women with a “favorable formation of the introitus vaginae” whose pelvis and constitution predispose them for childbirth with “very strong organ instincts” (122), while “maternal hatred...will be displayed by women who have predominantly masculine characteristics” (123). The “maltreatment of children, as well as other transgressions, occur with degenerate mothers... whose organs are not meant for mother love.”

Hilferding, an incipient “two-person” theorist who appreciated the reciprocity of the mother-infant bond, entered the Wednesday group in the first flush of “one-person” drive theory. Not until such later figures as Winnicott, Bowlby, Loewald, and Kernberg did psychoanalysis pay close attention
to how the relationship with a caretaker forms the crucible of an infant’s emotional life. Hilferding understood that love and hate, pleasure and unpleasure, were building blocks for the infant’s affective repertoire. She studied the mother’s mental representations of pregnancy. To this day the erasure of the pregnant body qua body from psychoanalytic theory remains a hangover from the phallocentrism of Freud and his followers. Prior to my own preoccupation (Balsam 2003) with the pregnant body in structural theory, I have not found anyone except Hilferding who grants as much centrality to this experience of the functioning female body.

Talking as she did about women who could feel sexual about their infants, Hilferding did not view the mother as someone whose fate role it is to diaper “His Majesty the Baby” (Freud 1914, 91). A mother who can hate and physically maltreat a child is not the pale figure of Freud’s case histories, “monotonous, drab, all chiaroscuro, no color” (Erlich 1977, 334). Hilferding implies that a mother’s revulsion from or cruelty towards her infant can arise not only when she feels robbed of the plenitude of pregnancy through giving birth. It can also be aroused when the mother is forced to bear or take care of a child from whom she has obtained insufficient satisfaction for any other reason.

After hearing Hilferding’s presentation, two members of the group remarked, “too much has been said about mother hatred” (Nunberg and Federn 1967, 124). They moved quickly to mother love in the animal kingdom. Others derided Hilferding’s view that the first child is the one in most danger of being hated. (In October 1910, the Vienna Society had held a session on the dangers of being the excessively loved eldest—and temporarily only—child, i.e., the mother’s natural favorite, as was Freud.) Federn chided “Hilferding’s denial of mother love for the first child” (122). Retreating from Hilferding’s focus on physical and emotional experience to nature and art, the discussants were able to entertain the idea of hostility from the step-mother and even the mother in fairy tales.

In his response to Hilferding’s presentation, Freud steered clear of her commentary on both the maternal body and the mother-child bond. He uncharacteristically affirmed that “the only way to find out something about mother love can be only through statistical examination” (italics added). Freud was appreciative yet condescending: “It is praiseworthy that the speaker undertook a psychoanalytic investigation into a topic that, as the result of the convention that we maintain, had been held back from investigation” (118). But he delivered a blow when he remarked that “those explanations that she arrived at before . . . psychoanalysis are the ones that are the most estimable, being original and independent.”

More substantively, Freud stressed that the mother’s disappointment with the baby could be due to the contrast between her fantasy and reality, as when newborns are perceived as “ugly,” which, he says, they actually are! Frustration can also occur in “mothers who have experienced the harmful effect of modern literature and who used the yearning for a child as a subterfuge for their sexual cravings” (119). He interpreted the mistreatment of children as being frequently an overreaction to the child’s “sexual misbehavior”—that is, masturbation—or a revival of the mother’s own infantile sexuality. Freud’s concentration on the mother’s childhood is valid, but it caused him to bypass Hilferding’s topic of the adult sexual woman in her pregnant and birthing state.

Adler, who also spoke at length, took the radical position that maternal hatred was more elementary than maternal love, as in “now I am a slave” (120) to the baby. He added that “the first feelings are nearly always hostile; feelings of affection are defined by later determinants.” His socialist leanings sensitized him to the oppressiveness in a woman’s having too many children and the demands of child-rearing: “love cover[s] up primarily hostile emotions . . . [that] appear when man must renounce some gratification” (120). As I have noted, Hilferding became a follower of Adler’s. Perhaps her ease in discussing maternal aggression had been influenced by socialism, which she combined in an original way with Freud’s emphasis on sexuality.

Hilferding was not intimidated by either the eminence or the erudition of any of her fellow members. She elucidated how the mother’s responses to sensations of fetal movement and milk shooting into the breast become powerful organizers of her mental life, and in turn help to organize the infant’s representations of experience. She articulated the sense of loss
that some women feel in giving birth, manifested in a diminution of pleasure and consequent rejection of the infant. The sensual and sexual bond between mother and baby was observed by Hilferding to form the nidus of the Oedipus complex. In all these respects, she was far ahead of her time. To this day the physicality of the mother-infant dyad, especially in pregnant and newly delivered women, is still being explored psychologically.

Postscript

During the period of her membership in the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Margarete Hilferding attended faithfully, was remarkably down-to-earth, in tune with daily life, an astute observer, a good listener, and active contributor to the discussions. Together with others loyal to Adler, she was forced to resign on October 11, 1911. She had voted to stay in both groups, rejecting the notion that Freud's and Adler's theories were incompatible. A modern reader is free to fantasize about how she might have helped to promote a two-person outlook or challenge the notion of a male libido had she been allowed to remain in Freud's circle. Before the September 1911 Weimar Congress, Jung wrote to Freud that "the feminine element will have conspicuous representatives from Zurich: Sister Moltzer, Dr. Hinkle-Eastwick (an American charmer), Frl. Dr. Spielrein (!), then a new discovery of mine, Frl. Antonia Wolff... and last but not least my wife" (McGuire 1974, 440; Jung's exclamation point). Two days later Freud wrote back, "We Viennese have nothing to compare with the charming ladies you are bringing from Zurich. Our only lady doctor is participating like a true masochist in the Adler revolt and is unlikely to be present" (442).

After World War I, Hilferding became president of the Vienna Society for Individual Psychology, while her husband Rudolph was "an outstanding socialist theoretician and Minister of Finance in the Weimar Republic" (Nunberg and Federn 1974, xv). Her further writings included "Medical Experiences in the War" (1918), five articles in 1922 on "Maternity" in the newspaper The Female Worker, and "Sterilization: A Problem of Population Politics" (1932). She was a renowned doctor to the working classes and maintained her strong interest in motherhood. Margarete Hilferding died in the concentration camp at Theresienstadt on September 23, 1942; Rudolf Hilferding perished at Auschwitz in 1941 (Mühlleitner 1992, 146).

Fräulein Dr. Sabina Spielrein (1886–1941)

On the same day in October 1911 that Hilferding and her Adlerian colleagues left the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, "Dr. (Miss) S. Spielrein" applied for admission. The only comment Freud made in introducing her was that she was "from Vienna," and that, like the four other male candidates, she was known to "a large number of the members," and "immediate balloting" on the entire pool could thus take place (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 281). Sadger tried to delay matters by suggesting a procedure whereby a smaller number of votes would be required to reject an applicant. This was tabled. The following week, on October 18, 1911, "Spielrein" (284) appeared in the roster of seventeen members present. That Spielrein followed Hilferding seamlessly into the group as the second woman was coincidental. She was eager to begin, and the meetings proceeded on the surface as if the Adlerian exodus had not taken place.

In contrast to the debate that had broken out a year and a half earlier in response to Hilferding's application, the political exigencies at this moment of group disruption acted to lower gender discrimination. In addition, Spielrein was personally intriguing to Freud because of her close connections with Jung. To Freud's eyes, Spielrein, fresh from medical school in Zurich, could no doubt be cultivated as an attractive spy or courier.

Spielrein last attended the Society on March 27, 1912, after six months of regular membership, although she remained a member through the 1913/1914 list. Her main presentation took place a month after her admission, on November 29, 1911. She also did a joint presentation with Bernhart Dattner on masturbation on March 20, 1912. The former presentation was markedly "Jungian," while the latter,
only four months later, was decidedly “Freudian.” From Vienna she eventually moved to Geneva, where Jean Piaget was her analysand and her writings showed his influence. Spielrein’s intellectual life seems to have been dominated by whatever male was her champion.

**History of Spielrein’s Presentations**

Sabina Spielrein was a Jewish Russian who, at the age of nineteen, had been treated by Jung in 1904 for what he diagnosed as a “psychotic hysteria” as an in-patient at Zurich’s Burghölzli Psychiatric Hospital. She became his first psychoanalytic patient and went on to graduate from medical school. Her well-known affair and break-up with Jung also took place before she appeared in Vienna in 1911, when she was still only twenty-six years old.

On November 8, 1911, Spielrein spoke up for the first time in Society discussions. She prefaced her remarks by saying that she could consider the matters at hand “only from the standpoint of her school [Jung]” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 302). On that occasion, Stekel had elucidated Freud’s idea that the unconscious did not know time, while his co-speaker, Josef Reinhold, took up the still-current puzzle of how the unconscious can be known to conscious cognition. Spielrein asserted that infantile experience “stirs up complexes” proceeding along “phylogenetic pathways” and that, at the “deepest level,” we “do not know how to measure time.” She was at ease with notions that are recognizable in contemporary theory as symbiotic fantasy and the fantasy of oneness. She referred to the loss of boundaries in “The Mothers” from Goethe’s Faust as an example of timelessness. Hewing to Jung’s line, she proposed that in sublimation a “recent desire is transformed into a phylogenetic one” (303).

Although Jung was fascinated with the notion of the archaic mother, Spielrein’s awareness of maternally based archaic fantasy would have been alien to the Vienna group. Kerr (1993) argues that the disorganization in Part 2 of Jung’s opus, Transformations and Symbols of the Libido (1912), was influenced by his preoccupation with an internalized malign

nant and destructive mother, personified by Spielrein during their affair and vitriolic break-up. Clearly, Spielrein was harvesting the fruits of her personal involvement and theoretical discussions with Jung. In addition, if she suffered from what we would today call a “borderline personality,” then she might well have had unusually free access to primitive layers in the psyche.7 Not so Freud, who in Civilization and Its Discontents admitted that he had no appreciation for the “oceanic feeling” (1930, 64). In Vienna, Spielrein found herself in the land of the Father.

Spielrein’s November 1911 presentation, “On Transformation,” is hard to follow from Rank’s notes. Some of the vagueness may be due to Spielrein’s imaginative and globally ranging style of mind; but perhaps Rank felt unconscious resistance to her ideas. After all, this group of Freudians was listening to ideas inspired by their arch-rival, and in the presence of their jealously guarded father figure.

Spielrein attributed her disappointment with the discussion that followed to the fact that the auditors had not read the larger paper from which her presentation was abstracted, “Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being.” This paper appeared the following year in the Jahrbuch für Psychoanalytische und Psychopathologische Forschungen, edited by Jung. Spielrein’s starting point in her longer essay was the question: why, so often, are the positive forces of sexual connection repressed and only its destructiveness seen in consciousness? The excerpt in Vienna took up some aspects of the problem. As Kerr’s (1993) excellent account has shown, Jung and Spielrein’s work had been entirely enmeshed. Both were fascinated with life and death and what a contemporary analyst might call sublimation. Both valued sacrifice as a form of transcendence, and they shared a culture of symbols and mythology.

It is argued by Kerr (1993) and by Appignanesi and Forrester (1992) that Jung owed a great debt to Spielrein in his theory-building. I tend to view it the other way around—that Spielrein’s work was “derivative” of Jung’s. Her intense emotional entanglements with Jung and Freud may have been more pivotal for psychoanalytic politics than her intellectual work per se. Her flight from Zurich to Vienna in 1911 helped to drive the wedge between them. It is not clear whether her
relationship with Jung extended to actual intercourse, though it certainly became an amorous liaison that transgressed the bounds of propriety.

Her written communications, including her letters (Carotenuto 1980) and her 1906–1907 diary (Spielrein 2001), were wildly and at times despairingly passionate, filled with acute reactivity to any hint of boundary-setting on his part. Her tone, in fact, resembles that often found in a borderline psychotic consumed with adoration for a therapist who is unwittingly leading the patient on by ambiguous signals. Jung’s letters (Jung and Spielrein 2001) were less passionate, but for a supposed doctor/patient relationship they were excessively appreciative, filled with devious hints in arranging to meet with her and evidence that she was special to him. At the very least, if he was attempting to maintain his doctorly boundary against great pressure from her out-of-control transference, he was doing a poor job. He fanned the flames of her attachment by sharing his work with her, his coy responses to her requests to see him, and his expressions of devotion. Together they wavered between a conviction that it was all about transcendent love and his attempts to interpret the sexual aspects of the transference. She accuses him in her diary of being cruel in not loving her enough. Jung may have been terrified of saying no to her because of her frequent rages when thwarted (well documented during her hospitalization). He seemed very susceptible to flattery and was perhaps using her success in being discharged from the hospital and going to medical school to show off his own prowess as a healer to Freud. He was obviously intrigued by her brilliance and her tremendously idealized attachment to him.

It is very hard to ascertain precisely when Spielrein’s formal analysis ended, when her amorous collaboration with Jung began and cooled, when they stopped seeing each other, and at what point it was mostly contained in letter writing. Even during her hospital stay in 1904 she joined the doctors in doing psychology experiments and attended lectures, all with the blessing of Eugen Bleuler and his therapeutic community. After she was discharged as “cured” on June 1, 1905 (Minder 2001), her treatment as an outpatient with Jung lasted for four years. Spielrein knew how important Freud was on every level to her ex-analyst/mentor/lover/friend, just as Freud knew that she was an object of Jung’s preoccupation. Her appearance in Vienna was thus overdetermined and included, no doubt, a desire on her part for revenge on Jung for backing out of their liaison, partly due to his wife’s objections following the birth of their first son.

Even under ordinary circumstances, rage, devastation, and a desire for revenge can arise when an erstwhile partner’s ardor cools. But these were extraordinary circumstances because of Spielrein’s history of severe mental illness and the imbalance of power in her relationship with Jung. In addition to being her physician, he was a married man with “polygamous” tendencies. Spielrein’s habit of making a rapid allegiance to the most powerful man in her current environment would have set up Freud in her mind as a bulwark against Jung’s rejection. I believe that Spielrein’s desire to besmirch Jung in Freud’s eyes may have hastened their alienation.

Freud’s public repudiation of Jung began the night of Spielrein’s presentation. Kerr (1993, 371) notes the satisfaction that this response must have brought the jealous Viennese. Five days earlier, on November 24, 1911, Jung had written to her that Part 2 of Transformations and Symbols contained “a genetic theory of libido” (Jung and Spielrein 2001, 182), and that he was worried about how Freud would take this correction of his cherished theory. Jung specifically, if elliptically, asked her not to “betray” him to Freud and tried to impugn Freud’s view of neurosis as arising “only from repressed sexuality,” reminding her that “here in Zurich we think that neurosis is a conflict”—the very theory that Spielrein put forward in this paper. Spielrein was thus aware that her paper underscored how much Jung had come to differ from Freud.

In her concluding remarks to the discussion, Spielrein stated that “the sexual instinct is a particular case of the drive for transformation” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 335), a clear deemphasis of sexuality likely to stir up Freud’s negativity toward Jung. Especially because she herself was Jewish, Spielrein’s reference to Christ as an example of Freud’s “savior” type—that is, males who try to rescue prostitutes as an expression of their oedipal desire—may well have bolstered Freud’s fear of Jung’s tendency to “Christianize” psychoanaly-
line is drawn in to shore up the patient’s shattered self-esteem, only to become idealized in turn so that negativity can continue to be directed against the formerly idealized object.

Freud could have served as the recipient of the idealized half of Spielrein’s split transference. It does not excuse Jung’s cruel and self-glorifying behavior towards her to propose that she had a borderline personality. Neither does a recognition of either Jung’s or Spielrein’s psychopathology diminish their creativity or invalidate their powerful visions of human existence. Everyone has psychodynamics of some sort. My account presents their clinical and personal alliance as the prototype of a folie à deux between a needy, self-involved therapist with poor boundaries and a compelling but possessively consuming patient, leading to severe ethical violations on the part of the therapist. Psychoanalysis and the understanding of erotic transferences were, to be sure, then in their infancy. However, Jung was a sufficiently seasoned hospital psychiatrist to be aware that he was exploiting Spielrein’s youth and patience. In an unusually personal editorial note, Nunberg writes in the Minutes: “Dr. Spielrein was my colleague at medical school . . . she suffered a psychotic episode” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 329). This looks like a warning to the reader. For many years she and her work were “forgotten,” until Carotenuto (1980) brought her letters and diary to public notice. More recently, Kerr (1993) and the contributors to the January 2001 issue of The Journal of Analytical Psychology have paid exquisitely close attention to Spielrein’s importance to Jung and Freud. Her role in the history of psychoanalysis can no longer be ignored, though it is, of course, open to a wide variety of interpretations.

The Response to “On Transformation”

Spielrein’s paper stressed the destructive component that she viewed as enwrapped in sexuality, even calling it—after the Russian biologist Ilya Mechnikov—a “death instinct” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 329). We do not usually take note of the tendency towards self-destructiveness that is built into the “instinct for living” (330). Turning to mythology, Spielrein noted that the tree of knowledge has “a dual role as symbol of
death and symbol of genesis,” and that it “makes its appearance once again as the wood of Christ’s cross.” She likewise alluded to Wagner’s Flying Dutchman and the Siegfried myth, a private reference to the preoccupation with the Nibelungenlied she shared with Jung. In her transference fantasies, as Kerr has observed, “Siegfried” stood simultaneously for the son she would give Jung and for Jung himself, with Spielrein in the role of the protective, self-sacrificing mother” (1993, 227). Stressing the Jungian motif of sacrifice, Spielrein argued that its fusion of creation and destruction is analogous “to being transposed into the mother’s womb; the dying individual, too, is transferred back into the mother and then reborn. The prenatal state is equated to death . . . , a shadow existence” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 331). As she dialectically concluded, “death in itself is quite horrifying, but in the service of the sexual instinct it is the saving grace.”

As I read their responses, the assembled men tried earnestly to follow Spielrein’s train of thought, and (though no coherent conclusions emerged) they seemed to connect better with her high-flown ideas than with Hilferding’s reflections on the female body. Sachs, who spoke first, demurred at Spielrein’s Jungian notion of the “ambivalence of volition,” but was prepared to agree that “in the fantasy of all men birth and death are closely linked” (331), though he viewed this as a Freudian idea. Tausk found the paper to be “close to metaphysics” and credited Spielrein with having come “by deduction to all those questions to which in psychoanalysis one has come by way of induction.” He found particularly “valuable” her point that “resistance to sexuality stems from the destructive element” (332). Federn, however, reproached Spielrein for her lack of “a precise summary” and claimed that “the interpretation of sacrifice as union with the mother would be valid only for the era of the matriarchates.” In a possible sneer at Spielrein’s personal history, he wondered whether “myths were created not by healthy individuals but rather by the demented.” In addition to comments by three others, Stekel spoke up to claim that “the conception of anxiety as a reaction to the death instinct is contained in his book about anxiety”; he likewise proposed that bridge symbolism in dreams “signifies the phallus and the trees, but also the bridge that leads to death” (333).

Interestingly, there was one woman present on the evening of Spielrein’s presentation—Dr. Margarete Stegman, who was a guest from the Berlin Society along with her husband. In her comments, she astutely specified that Spielrein had alluded to two levels of love—the universal and the personal—which Margarete Stegman wanted to differentiate. With her avowal that “the death wish makes its appearance as the wish to give oneself to the universe” (334), Stegman showed herself to be more attuned to Spielrein’s probing of archaic fantasy than any of the men in the group. She also noted that “the fear of love is a fear of the death of the personality.” I believe that Stegman, like Spielrein, was describing a common set of fantasies in borderline psychopathology, where the fear of closeness to another is ultimately a fear of merger, which is equated with being swallowed up or consumed.

As usual, Freud spoke last. He saw clearly the potential challenge to his own work emanating from Zurich. It is noteworthy that he did not say anything about a death drive. He rather zeroed in on what he regarded as an overly general use of symbol and myth. Freud started by dismissing Adolf Wilbrandt’s play, The Master of Palmyra, which had been cited by Tausk, as “silly” and “childish” (334). Tausk probably served as a displaced whipping boy for his anger at Jung. Freud then proceeded to launch his first salvo in the war against his heir apparent that ended so vindictively in 1914. Remarkably that Spielrein’s presentation “provides the opportunity for a critique of Jung” (335), he corrected her view of symbols, specifying a difference between the sexual and the genital. (As a genital symbol, the snake is always male, but it is feminine as a sexual symbol.) He stated that in his recent studies Jung used “any mythological material whatsoever . . . without selection.” Alleging an “especially strong distortion” in the Book of Genesis, he claimed that “psychoanalytic elucidation” was required to decipher its significance. In contrast to “our psychological point of view,” moreover, “the speaker attempted to base the theory of instincts on biological presuppositions.” The Zurich school had been put in its place.

The letter Freud wrote to Jung on the following day is even more revealing:
Fraulein Spielrein read a chapter from her paper yesterday (I almost wrote the *ihrer* [her] with a capital "i" [= your]. . . . I have hit on a few objections to your [Ihrer] (this time I mean it) method of dealing with mythology, and I brought them up in the discussion with the little girl. . . . What troubles me is that she wants to subordinate the psychological material to biological considerations: this dependency is no more acceptable than a dependency on philosophy, physiology or brain anatomy. (McGuire 1974, 469)

Freud’s “biological” interpretation of Spielrein’s duality may have been influenced by the fact that, immediately prior to her presentation, he had received a letter from Bleuler announcing his resignation from the Zurich Psychoanalytic Society. Bleuler, who cared deeply about preserving the values of a scientific community in psychoanalysis, had proposed that the “ambivalence” seen in the behavior of dementia praecox patients was linked to Darwin’s views on how emotion always encodes opposite pairs. Thus, in accusing Spielrein of reducing psychology to biology, Freud heard her pairing of eros and destruction as a Bleulerian or Darwinian duality.

Two weeks later, in a letter to Jung on December 17, 1911, Freud returned to Spielrein’s discussion of the Genesis story of the apple “as an instance of woman seducing man” (McGuire 1974, 473). Branding the text of Genesis a “tendentious distortion devised by an apprentice priest,” Freud credited Rank with the suggestion “the Bible story may well have reversed the original myth,” in which Eve was really Adam’s mother. This, of course, allowed Freud to preserve the centrality of the Oedipus and castration complexes, as opposed to Jung’s analogical panorama of myths of sacrifice and rebirth. The two men were at odds over whether libido was solely sexual, and Freud used Spielrein’s presentation to stoke his ire at Jung.

On the other hand, Freud viewed Spielrein personally with indulgence and avuncular condescension—“the little girl,” as he and Jung both dubbed her. He also appreciated her intelligence. Since Spielrein’s paper came on the heels of Adler’s ouster, and since Adler had stressed the major role of aggression in psychic life, Freud must have felt unpleasantly pursued by “aggression” in both Hilferding’s and Spielrein’s papers. In his biography, Jones (1957) quotes Freud as saying: “I can remember my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first made its appearance in psychoanalytical literature, and how long it took before I became accessible to it” (275); and Jones gives a footnote to Spielrein at this point. Clearly, Spielrein played a pivotal role in Freud’s gradual acceptance of the idea that an “instinct of destruction” needed to be placed alongside the instincts of “hunger and love” in psychoanalytic theory.

**A Contemporary Interpretation of “On Transformation”**

Spielrein’s ideas seem today like flights of unconscious fantasy organized around the binary pair of life and death, or rather birth and death, since her emphasis falls on the procreative force that is an expression of libido. I think this reflects her still raw and unrequited love for Jung. She likely felt that she had sacrificed herself in Zurich by losing herself in him, but that this had led to her “coming into being” in her newly found ability to exist and her professional achievement. Jung’s analysis had given her these reasons for hope, which were equivalent to bearing his baby. As I have suggested, this kind of fantasy is characteristic of an archaic, all-or-nothing object relational system. Their “Seigfried”—at once their joint theory-making, the new professional identity that Jung had empowered, and her transference fantasies of having his baby—was a “sacrifice” aimed at transcending and sublimating her incestuous desire for him. Spielrein’s analysis may be interpreted as a “cure by love” or “flight into health” since her passion for Jung was in the end at least partially requited. She shared her grandiose fantasy of being godlike and together giving birth to a baby or theory or both.

The connection between Spielrein’s anxieties about childbirth and the bodily “destruction” involved in her femaleness, which brings her ideas close to those of Hilferding, is shown in this extract from her 1912 paper, “Contributions to the Knowledge of the Child’s Soul”: “I perceived the child as a danger-
ous, in itself deadly disease. . . . [I]t is a common occurrence that a woman imagines a new being as something that grows at the expense of the old one. It is interesting that we react sometimes with lust, sometimes with anger, or at least with displeasure, to these images of destruction” (quoted in Appignanesi and Forrester 1992, 206).

**Spielrein’s Contribution to the Discussions on Masturbation**

In 1910, the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society had embarked on a series of discussions on masturbation, with a view to publishing them in the *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*. The eighth of these discussions took place on March 20, 1912, and the speakers were Spielrein and Bernhard Dattner.

Dattner gave the main presentation, in which he followed the outline of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) to trace masturbation from infancy to maturity, considering its consequences for “the individual’s physical readiness and psychic development” (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 75). Like the majority of his colleagues, Dattner viewed masturbation as harmful, especially in adolescence because of the loss of semen. He referred to an “instinctive knowledge of the unsuitability of masturbation in terms of the perpetuation of the species,” and connected the habit to “a lack of will power” and “the disturbance of inner secretion” (76).

Despite being listed as one of the presenters, Spielrein does not appear to have spoken until well into the discussion, after Freud had spoken twice. Freud stressed that his concept of the “latency period” should not be taken too absolutely and that sexual development often unfolds without drastic interruptions. Freud’s flexibility regarding the psychosexual stages makes it particularly telling when he reveals his rigidity with respect to the phallic meaning of “castration anxiety” in women. This overconfidence contrasts with Spielrein’s subtlety.

Spielrein, who represented the “female” view of what she reminded the audience was “still so very uncertain” a topic, stated that girls masturbate by retaining their “natural needs” (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 78–79). This appears to be a veiled reference to her own stool retention and anal masturbation prior to being hospitalized as a teenager, reported by Jung to Freud in a letter of October 23, 1906 (McGuire 1974, 7). Spielrein does not refer to women as castrated; indeed, she shows that she thinks more clearly than Freud about this issue when she “considers woman’s application of the castration fantasy to man as an analogy to man’s castration fear” (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 79). She cites a patient who was afraid her hand would fall off and mentions the female superstition that “one’s mind is being sewed up.” These observations anticipate Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer’s discussion of a female’s fear of losing her capacity to be “genitally open” and becoming sealed up (1985, 331)—a more vivid punishment than being deprived of a penis she never had—as well as Arlene Kramer Richards’s (1996) ideas about the ubiquity of female fears concerning the loss of genital functioning.

Spielrein points to displaced forms of female masturbation—hand-rubbing, tearing one’s hair, and what she terms “psychic masturbation” (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 79) stimulated by reading novels or seeing pictures. She accepts that women are “generally more erotic” than men and that virtually anything can arouse the desire to masturbate—from listening to music, through pressing a child to her body, to kleptomania. Her expansive sense of erotic feminaleness, which includes the skin as well as the genitals, uncannily foreshadows Irigaray’s (1985) striving to discover and articulate the feminine.

Spielrein’s exploration of bodily fantasy differs markedly from her obsession, just a few months earlier, with sacrifice, transcendence, and sublimation. Part of this remarkable shift may be attributable to the fluidity of identity that I postulate in her borderline personality organization. She may have used her chameleon-like ability to fit into whatever milieu she happened to find herself to ward off terrifying feelings of abandonment. When she moved from Zurich to Vienna, her immersion in Freudian theory seems to have quickly dispelled her Jungian preoccupations with mythology and metaphysics. Spielrein’s prescient thinking about female eroticism had the potential to offer a major contribution to Freudian theory. Unfortunately, she did not stay long enough in Vienna to become a rooted part of the psychoanalytic movement. Her
restless soul led her to Berlin, Geneva, and finally back to her native Russia—all the while pursuing her clinical work, teaching, and writing. Tragically, like Margarete Hilferding, Spielrein’s life ended during World War II, when she was murdered in Russia, together with her two daughters, in 1941.

Frau Dr. Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, née Hug von Hugenstein (1871–1924)

At the age of forty-two, Hermine Hug-Hellmuth first attended the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society on October 8, 1913, at a time when Jung and Freud were severing their ties; and she remained a loyal adherent until her death in 1924. Anna Freud was first listed as a guest on November 19, 1918, when Hug-Hellmuth was also present, so the two women had six years of overlap in the Society. As Hug-Hellmuth was “the world’s first practicing child psychoanalyst” (MacLean and Rappen 1993, xi), there must have been considerable rivalry between them. Citing Hug-Hellmuth’s will, which asked that nothing be written about her or her work, Anna Freud refused to assist Hug-Hellmuth’s biographers a full forty-four years after her death (MacLean and Rappen 1991, xi; see Appignanesi and Forrester 1992, 197).

Hug-Hellmuth had a star-crossed life, being the target of two scandals. The first involved A Young Girl’s Diary, a journal published anonymously in 1919 that purported to record the life of an upper-middle class girl named Rita from the age of eleven to fourteen. Only in 1922 did Hug-Hellmuth own up to having edited this bestseller, claiming that its author had since grown up, married, and died. She included in the preface a 1915 letter from Freud that had expressed resounding praise for the journal. Critics felt that the sexual and emotional precocity, as well as the elegant style, of the journal pointed to its having been written by a grown-up; and Hug-Hellmuth’s reputation suffered. The matter was never resolved. Hug-Hellmuth’s second scandal was that she was robbed and brutally murdered by her nephew Rolf, the son of her deceased half-sister Antoine. Like other analysts in those days, who used their own families as raw material, Hug-Hellmuth had written articles about Rolf’s development. At the trial, where he received a sentence of twelve years, he accused her of making him a guinea pig of psychoanalysis.

As Dreil (1982, 141) points out, Hug-Hellmuth’s pioneering interest in child analysis must have been exceedingly important to the Vienna Society in 1913 for the opportunity it afforded of confirming Freud’s theories of infantile sexuality from direct observation. Even before her appearance at the Wednesday Group, Freud admired Hug-Hellmuth’s work. He wrote to Jung on December 28, 1911: “I have received a splendid, really illuminating paper about color audition from an intelligent lady Ph.D. It solves the riddle with the help of our psychoanalysis. . . . Can you use it in the Jahrbiich?” (McGuire 1974, 474). Freud likewise commended the influence exerted by Hug-Hellmuth on his daughter Sophie’s rearing of his grandson Ernst. He wrote to Abraham on September 22, 1914: “My grandson is a charming little fellow. . . . A strict upbringing by an intelligent mother enlightened by Hug-Hellmuth has done him a great deal of good” (Falzeder 2002, 279).

Hug-Hellmuth’s Presentation on Stanley Hall

On October 29, 1913, a few weeks after she began attending the Society, Hug-Hellmuth spoke on the topic, “On Some Essays by Stanley Hall and His School, Seen from the Viewpoint of Psychoanalysis.” In Rank’s sketchy summary:

After first giving a brief comparative characterization (Stanley Hall’s and Freud’s), their methods and conclusions, the speaker discusses from the psychoanalytic viewpoint an essay by Hall on “Rage,” and a study by C. Ellis and Hall about “Dolls.” The paper is intended for publication in an American journal. (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 208)

An editorial footnote incorrectly identifies the first author as “A. Caswell Hills,” instead of “Ellis.” It also states, despite Rank’s assertion about the “American journal,” that Hug-
make his storied trip to America with Jung and Ferenczi in 1909. By 1913, however, Freud had become alienated from Hall due to Hall’s open-minded attitude toward Jung’s and Adler’s work, as well as Freud’s own. In a letter to Hall on November 21, 1913, about a month after Hall’s papers were discussed by Hug-Hellmuth, Freud did not bother to mention this event, which would have been of great interest to Hall. Two months earlier, Hall had written to Freud that he was “trying in a very crude way to apply your mechanisms to the study of children’s fear and anger” (Rosenzweig 1992, 373)—surely a reference to the second paper discussed by Hug-Hellmuth. He confessed that he was hampered in his study of psychoanalysis by “the rather wild use of sex symbolism.” After this 1913 exchange, there was a ten-year gap in the Freud-Hall correspondence.

The paper on dolls was based on a questionnaire that Ellis and Hall had distributed to 800 teachers and parents. It was comprised of eleven questions that inquired into everything from the physical appearance of children’s dolls to their feeding habits, diseases, names, discipline, accessories, sleep, and “psychic acts.” The researchers wondered: How real for the children are the dolls’ feelings of cold, anger, pain, jealousy? “What constitutes the death of a doll?” A question about the funeral services held for dolls may have given rise to Hug-Hellmuth’s paper, “The Child and Its Ideas of Death,” published in Imago in 1912.

It was most original of Ellis and Hall to investigate what death meant to children by looking into their play with dolls. The investigators received 648 replies, of which ninety-four reported on boys, and the rest on girls. A second questionnaire with twenty-eight short questions eventually replaced the original. Ellis and Hall’s paper contains direct quotations from the respondents. This is reminiscent of the attention to the individual that is highly valued in psychoanalysis, as opposed to other medical or psychological specialties. That Hug-Hellmuth choose to present not her own work but Hall’s on her Wednesday debut, although she had been publishing original papers for over a year, is a sign of Hall’s extreme importance to her notwithstanding Freud’s growing coolness to his American host. Having done her doctorate in chemistry, Hug-Hellmuth
may have felt that in Hall she had found a scientist who shared her capacity to observe closely and make reasoned deductions.

Ellis and Hall's puritanical rectitude, however, sometimes breaks through, as in their disparagement of "elegant French dolls which teach love of dress and suggest luxury," but do not kindle the child's imagination, and their "many mechanical devices, as for winking, walking, speaking and singing" (1896–1897, 134). This attitude may have appealed to the unmarried schoolmistress in Hug-Hellmuth. Ellis and Hall's final paragraphs exalt the usefulness of dolls to a child's psyche: "Do you know a mother now very fond of her children who was not fond of dolls as a girl?" On the other hand, they wondered whether there was ever a woman who is "very fond of dolls but is not very fond of children?" The authors evinced a willingness to be surprised by their data to which Hug-Hellmuth likely also aspired in her psychoanalytic contributions. Ellis and Hall show a keen awareness of gender issues. When they asked, "Are dolls representative of future children?" (163), they found that they "must readjust [their] views" because it turned out that a great many boys also played with dolls. Long before modern feminism, they recommended that "more play with girl dolls" would help to "make [boys] more sympathetic with girls as children if not more tender with their wives and with women later" (161).

By the same token, the most exciting aspect of Ellis and Hall's paper was that they allowed themselves to notice that their results did not always support the received wisdom of the nineteenth century. The authors contend:

*The educational value of dolls is enormous, and the protest of this paper is against longer neglect of it. It educates the heart and will even more than the intellect, and to learn how to control and apply it will be to discover a new instrument in education of the very highest potency. Every parent and every teacher . . . should study the doll habits of each child, now discouraging and repressing, now stimulating by hint or suggestion.* (164; italics added here and below)

They recommend that there should be "a doll expert to keep the possibilities of this great educative instinct steadily in view," and "careful observations upon children . . . should be instituted as an experimentation to determine just what is practicable."

Ellis and Hall's enthusiasm for the pedagogical value of dolls is boundless: "Dolls are a good school for children to practice all they know . . . Could not manikin dolls . . . teach some anatomy?" "Why are dolls, which represent the most original, free and spontaneous expression of the play instinct so commonly excluded from kindergarten?" (164). As I have suggested, their paper must have drawn Hug-Hellmuth's attention to the idea that play can help to elucidate the mental life of children and thus spurred her to become the first child analyst. Ellis and Hall interrogated received notions of health and "normality":

Children's ideas of life, death, soul, virtue and vice, disease, sickness, all the minor morals of dress, toilet, eating, etc., of family, state, church . . . are as open as day here to the observer, and although unconscious to themselves, almost anything within these large topics can be explored by the observing, tactful adult, without danger of injuring that naivete of childhood. (174)

It is easy to see why Hug-Hellmuth offered this paper to the Vienna Society as part of her introductory presentation. Hall's curiosity about children mirrored her own. He and Ellis had conducted their research within a tradition that was congenial to her own scientific education. She may have wanted to rekindle Freud's interest in Hall. And perhaps she needed a male authority from America to lend support to her pathbreaking work that was to be carried on independently of the males in the Vienna Society.

Hall's second paper, "A Study of Anger," also relied on a questionnaire about children that he sent to 900 teachers. It included ten questions that ranged over analogous terms for the children's feelings, physical signs of anger, how children spoke of past anger, and details of family life. He probed in a way that could be described as analytic. He wanted to know the children's own ideas about what made them angry and how they felt afterwards. He wrote extensively about every possible manifestation of anger, reporting many of his respondents'
direct descriptions. Hall noted that there are 125 words in the English language that mean varying shades of anger, and he impugned the inadequacy of the theories of his intellectual rival, William James.

Hall draws few conclusions. The paper affords a panorama of the scope and texture of a single emotion. As an antidote to anger, he (dubiously) recommends briefly whipping the child to induce shaming or socially isolating him or her. He employs a neuropsychological model to consider the forerunners of the affect. This paper shows his fascination with the exquisite detail with which anger is expressed and provides a rich account of the interpersonal dynamics leading to its differing manifestations.

Group Discussion

The discussion of Hug-Hellmuth’s presentation occupies only two pages in the Minutes. Friedjung began by cautioning against “formulating statements that needlessly provoke the reader’s opposition” (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 209). It seems that Freud’s coolness to Hall was contagious and made Hug-Hellmuth’s exposition of his ideas seem to be a provocative act. As often happened during Society meetings, Friedjung responded without engaging the material of the presenter. In a competitive style of interaction, he told Hug-Hellmuth that “a fine observation concerning dolls is to be found in Ibsen’s Master Builder.” This type of behavior appears to have become exacerbated when a woman—especially one such as Hug-Hellmuth who was already a published author and known to be favored by Freud—was the featured speaker.

Eduard Hirschmann jumped on the bandwagon by criticizing Hall’s “investigation of groups,” calling it “overrated” as compared to analysis. He charged that there were inadequacies in Hall’s definitions of hate, sadism, and narcissism, though Hall’s paper is in fact exceedingly strong in its descriptions of each of these concepts. Federn did find a “historical value” in Hall’s account of the “sexual sources of these psychic phenomena,” yet it is hard to detect anything like this in either of his texts. Federn interpreted the bottle used in play with dolls as a symbol of urethral eroticism—an example of the “wild use of sex symbolism” to which Hall had objected in his letter to Freud. Most notably, Federn stated that “to assume the existence, as the speaker did, of a specific drive for taking care of others is unjustified.” There were only two kinds of play with dolls—the “narcissistic” and that derived from the maternal instinct.” Hilferding’s challenge to the notion of “innate mother love” had clearly had no effect on Federn, and he was unpersuaded by Hug-Hellmuth’s prescient argument for an innate human need to form attachments. According to Federn, “what is actually typical of rage has failed to become apparent” in Hug-Hellmuth’s presentation.

The remainder of the discussion focused on the connections between sexuality and rage, which Hall had not addressed in his paper, as well as on psychogenic explanations of neuralgia or migraine as fits of rage. Rank believed that Hall was incorrect in alleging that only persons who are loved or hated provoke rage. Hall, however, seems not to have said this; he simply quotes one twenty-two-year-old female who responded: “A person that I neither love or hate would have a hard task to put me in a temper” (1898–1899, 540). Rank stressed that rage “is often directed toward entirely indifferent persons or occasions” (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 210). Yet Hall had shown an awareness of displacement when he pointed out that everything from “the perversity of walking with those who will not keep in step” to “having the hair out of order” or “the approach of a dog or cat” could become “sore points or anger zones” if they happened to be “individual weaknesses” or tied to “special experiences of provocation” (1898–1899, 545). Like the other Vienna men, Rank seems to have been provoked to unusual tendentiousness by Hug-Hellmuth and her way of presenting the material. The only time her name is mentioned in the notes is when Rank (whose father was an alcoholic) concurred that “the connection between alcoholism and rage, mentioned by Dr. Hug, plays an important role” (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 210).

As was his wont, Freud spoke last. He echoed the consensus that Hall “seems to confuse rage with hatred” (210). But this is again inaccurate. Rather than equating the terms, Hall sought to distinguish them. Freud then showed that he under-
stood something about the significance of Hall’s paper on anger for psychoanalysis when he conceded that there were “difficulties with the theory of affect in general” (210). Regarding the doll paper, however, he did not appreciate its potential to provide a foundation for Hug-Hellmuth’s development of play as a mode of analytic therapy. He merely affirmed that playing allows a child to give “vent to instincts” and that to play with dolls “satisfies various sexual strivings.”

Rank’s minutes record no comments by Hug-Hellmuth. Although no one else picked up on Hall’s far-sighted recommendations, his paper is extraordinary in the scope of its observations, its brilliance in pointing to play as an avenue into the psyche of the child, and its wisdom in urging that “experts” be trained who could use play as a tool to provide psychological help. But though what Hug-Hellmuth had tried to communicate was lost on the members of the Vienna Society, Winnicott’s affirmation that “psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together,” and “where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play” (1971, 38), suffices to demonstrate that both she and Stanley Hall were far ahead of their time.

Concluding Comments

Implicitly, the topics of Hilferding’s, Spielrein’s, and Hug-Hellmuth’s presentations to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society all had to do with gender. The issues they raised ranged from mother love and mother hatred, through birth and death, to playing with dolls. Each talk was innovative. Hilferding’s observations about the maternal matrix and the psychological birth of the infant foreshadow (without having been recognized) the work of Margaret Mahler, Hans Loewald, and others who sought to meld object relations with libido theory. The potential in Hug-Hellmuth’s presentation is likewise immense, given that she used Hall’s papers as a stimulus for developing her ideas about play as a royal road to the unconscious of children. Spielrein’s psychosophical discourse on birth and death may actually have been less original than her contribution to the discussion on masturbation, where her insights into female castration anxiety and the widespread erotic sensitivities of the female body went unheeded by her cohort. Many scholars have found Spielrein’s better-known papers to be exceptionally creative. I am perhaps in the minority in viewing her major presentation to the Vienna Society as more derivative than those of Hilferding or Hug-Hellmuth. I have also argued that Spielrein had the further agenda of stirring up Freud against Jung.

All three women were prescient in their vision of aspects of psychoanalytic theory that did not develop for years. In Spielrein’s case, her trajectory remained within Freud’s orbit, and he gave her an acknowledgment in 1920. Hug-Hellmuth’s contribution had to await Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, both of whom regarded her as a rival and accorded her meager and denigrating credit. Hilferding’s grasp of the reciprocal physical and psychic influences between mother and infant has, to my knowledge, never before been given its due. I am thrilled to have discovered her early beacon of light.

The responses to the appearances of all three of these female professionals before the Vienna Society are truly a study in “old boys” group psychology. Rather than being heard, the women were instructed by the men, who designed to impart their knowledge, but did not seem to want to learn anything new from those they had belatedly accepted into their midst. To be sure, simply trying to keep up with the insights that were pouring from Freud’s pen and attending weekly meetings on an encyclopedic range of topics with so many different presenters would be enough to tax anyone’s powers. If Hilferding’s presentation unconsciously frightened the men due to its raw maternal physicality, perhaps this had to do with the fact that she drew on her own work with patients, even though her mentor Adler was present. Still, she did not provoke hostility, as would have transpired had the zealous Freudians detected a pronounced Adlerian influence. Her talk presumably came across as largely independent of Adler, though obviously encouraged by him. Consequently, they resorted to “teaching” her instead.
Spielrein was received by the group (apart from Freud) with greater deference and less disputatiousness than the other two women. I believe that this may have been because the Viennese felt they were listening to Jung’s mouthpiece. The members were temporarily on their best behavior, not yet having had a cue from Freud that the two giants were parting ways. Hug-Hellmuth’s presentation evoked the greatest opposition. Like Spielrein, she seems to have used the voice and ideas of a male authority to camouflage her own brilliance. It was probably Hall whom the men felt they were engaging in battle. They did not notice that before their eyes Hug-Hellmuth was giving birth to analytic play therapy!

The sympathy understandably evoked from historians of psychoanalysis by Spielrein’s exploitation at the hands of Jung may have led to an overrating of “On Transformation.” She never developed this set of ideas further than in “DeSTRUCTION as the Cause of Coming into Being.” Her inspiration seems to have dried up once she left Jung’s sphere. Her early promise may have been compromised by the strains of a borderline personality and her inner sense of doom in unrequited love. Spielrein’s astuteness and acuity show up in her clinical observations about female sexuality in the masturbation session. One deeply regrets that she did no further work in this vein. Hug-Hellmuth’s misfortunes, alas, were not those that draw such ready sympathy as Spielrein’s. Many seem to have been made uncomfortable by her memory. Both her scandals—the doubts concerning the authenticity of the young girl’s journal and her murder by her nephew—have criminal overtones. Even the latter, where she was obviously a victim, is shadowed by the story of the nephew’s complaints against her for “analyzing” him. Hug-Hellmuth’s writing is so luminous and evocative, however, that it should be able to transcend anything that happened in her life. Hilferding has been almost entirely forgotten in part because she was tainted, in Freud’s eyes, by Adler. None of these three women, moreover, was blessed with a natural death. Two were killed during the Holocaust, while the third was strangled in her own home.

The admission of the first two women, Hilferding and Spielrein, to the Vienna Society may have been expedited by the larger upheavals in the psychoanalytic movement. All three were the only female members at the time of their presentation, which introduced a new vantage point to psychoanalysis. Hilferding’s was clinically based, Spielrein’s was philosophical, and Hug-Hellmuth’s drew on Hall’s research methods. Each talk involved a creative leap for its author, and each presaged important future developments in the field—Hilferding’s, the amalgamation of object relations with drive theory; Spielrein’s, Freud’s dual instinct theory as well as the understanding of unconscious fantasy; and Hug-Hellmuth’s, child analysis and the use of the play technique.11

None of the women fared well in the discussions. Freud spoke condescendingly against each paper—in a Victorian “gentlemanly” way, of course! He praised Hilferding’s pre-psychoanalytic work, while he spoke through and past Spielrein to Jung, as if she were a cipher. With Hug-Hellmuth, he contented himself with tempering the severity of his colleagues’ criticisms of the distinguished researcher whose texts she had chosen to present. Each woman was disappointed by her reception at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. Hilferding sounded angry. Spielrein sounded self-abnegating. Hug-Hellmuth’s comments, if she made any, were unrecorded. Still, it was a beginning.

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Notes
1. I say “relatively” because, for example, the minutes for May 31, 1911, when something about Adler and his group may have been debated, “have not been preserved” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, 279). When meetings resumed on October 11, (the Chairman: Freud), “speaking for the Board,” declared that Dr. Adler’s circle . . . bear the character of hostile competition,” whereupon Carl Furtmüller, reading an exchange of letters, “expresses surprise at the change of mind on the part of the Board” (281). With some members favoring separation and others mediation, Isidor Sadger forced the matter to a vote. All this suggests ongoing covert discussions. More evidence to support the inference that all was (naturally) not being said is that, in the meeting immediately after Adler’s departure, the minutes continue as if nothing unusual had happened.
2. Frischauf, though a frequent guest at Society meetings, never became a member (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 311).
3. It was not uncommon for presenters to react defensively to negative comments. Rank, Stekel, and Sadger—to cite just three examples—also faced sharp criticism. Yet the collective response to Hilferding’s material was even more tangential than was normally the case.
Hilferding’s terms are confusing to the modern ear. The distinction between physiological and psychological factors is in consistent in modern context. I think she is probably equating the "psychological" with what Winnicott (1960) would have seen as a version of the false self, as opposed to spontaneous feeling or expression of true self that she is calling "physiological."

In this and ensuing passages, I have added italics to highlight the most original aspects of Hilferding’s contribution.

Appignanesi and Forrester’s (1992, 195-96) summary of Hilferding’s life, career, and participation in the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society is very useful, but they provide no documentation for their reference to Hilferding’s divorce. It goes unmentioned in the biographical note of Nunberg and Federn (1974 xxv), as well as in Mülheim’s "Biographical Lexicon of members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society (1992, 145-46)."

I am inclined to accept Jung’s psychiatric description of Spielrein, which would fit this Kernbergian diagnosis. It would account for her intellectual brilliance and acute emotional insights, but also her tendency to compensation, impulsiveness, to be swept away in the erotic transference to Jung, and the fluidity of her boundaries and ego-identity. The compromised need-satisfying object relatedness also helps to explain the fact that nothing seems to be known about Spielrein’s husband. Perhaps he did not mean very much to her compared to the famous men whom she regarded as wishful extensions of herself.

Rank’s notes for this session seem markedly disconnected. The discussion was fast and rich, and one wonders if he was scrambling to take down at least some of the things that were being said.

In the fourth discussion on masturbation, held in January 1912, Spielrein had already spoken of "psychic masturbations," which she took to be a form of excitement that a woman then "imitates" in "physical masturbations." She singled out as "a special form of female masturabation: breasts at her own breasts while imagining herself both mother and child" (Nunberg and Federn 1975, 25).

Whatever the authenticity of the journal, Freud was justified in his accolade. I concur with Deutsch, who said that if Hugh-Hullmuth was in fact the author, then she showed "both psychological insight and literary talent" (cited in Appignanesi and Forrester 1992, 201). I wonder whether the journal might depict her imagined sense of her half-sister Antoine’s inner life.

According to Kerr (1993), Freud’s tribute to Spielrein in Beyond the Pleasure Principle is historically inaccurate and she did not mean anything like a death instinct. Rather, in Kerr’s view, she argued that "sexuality brought with it such themes as that of dying in the arms of the beloved. Which is quite a different thing" (501). My own reading of her talk is closer to Freud’s, in that I see it as a contribution to the contemplation of masochism and sadism. In either case, one might connect her thinking, for example, to Klein, Bion, Kernberg, and the Novaks (1996), who examine the "fearful symmetry" of sadism to masochism in terms that closely approximate Spielrein’s fantasy systems.

References


