Many gifted and unusual women have been drawn to psychoanalysis. Indeed it can be argued that this fact constitutes one of the most significant elements of Freud's intellectual legacy: the creation of a theory and therapy that afforded women, as theorists and therapists, opportunities to undertake meaningful work among whose satisfactions was the knowledge that their theoretical and clinical investigations continually reshaped and refined psychoanalysis (Thompson, 1987). The contributions and lives of many first- and second-generation European women analysts—among them Lou Andreas-Salomé, Sabina Spielrein, Marie Bonaparte, Helene Deutsch, Anna Freud, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, and Joan Riviere—have been the subject of both scholarly and popular interest. By contrast, the lives and careers of American women analysts are not as well known or appreciated. This essay represents an initial contribution to rectifying this neglect by sketching in broad strokes a portrait of the 58 American women who became psychoanalysts between 1911 and 1941. A consideration of their institutional, clinical, and theoretical contributions will both encourage an appreciation of their individual achievements and demonstrate that psychoanalysis offered a wide range of women, with distinctive temperaments, interests, and talents, an opportunity to pursue gratifying work. Individual portraits encompassing the personal histories and careers of Helen Ross, Martha Wolfenstein, Elizabeth Zetzel, and Phyllis Greencore illustrate this last point.

In the 30-year period from 1911 to 1941, there are three distinct, if overlapping, stages in the development of psychoanalysis in the United States. During

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An early version of this essay was presented at the Western regional Psychoanalytic Conference on Psychoanalysis and Its Influence on 20th Century Culture, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA, April 7–9, 2000.

1 See, for example, Livingstone (1984); Carotenuto (1982); Kerr (1993); Berrin (1982); Roazen (1985); Young-Bruehl (1986); Quinn (1987); Grosskurth (1986); Segal (1980); Hughes (1991); and Appignanesi and Forrester (1992).
the first period, 1911 to 1919, psychoanalytic societies are established in New York; Washington, DC; and Boston, and the American Psychoanalytic Association is founded. The second period, between 1920 and 1932, was one of reorganization for the societies, whose activities had been disrupted by the First World War. During these years American societies looked to Europe for organizational guidance, and many analysts traveled to Vienna, Berlin, London, and Budapest for personal analysis and training. The third phase, the years 1932 to 1941, heralded significant changes: American societies established their own training institutes and declared their independence from the standards of the International Psychoanalytical Association. Parallel with these events, there was a growing influx of emigré analysts to the United States. The outbreak of World War II interrupted these developments, and my survey ends at this point.

A Collective Portrait

During the years between 1911 and 1941, 58 American women joined the psychoanalytic movement. The majority, 51 out of 58, became psychoanalysts after 1920. By and large they were drawn to psychoanalysis in the mid-to-late 1920s and early 1930s. A significant number, 27 of the 58, received all or part of their psychoanalytic training abroad in Vienna, Berlin, Budapest, or London.

The careers of some of these individuals are very well documented, whereas for others only broad outlines of their careers are known. For the majority (48 of 58), it was possible to collect basic biographical and professional data. All but five had medical degrees, not a surprising finding given the medical requirement of American societies. Women psychoanalysts graduated from the top or very good medical schools, including Johns Hopkins, Rush in Chicago, Cornell, Columbia, Tufts, Stanford, and the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania; and several attended medical school in London, Vienna, and Geneva.

Geographically the majority grew up in the Midwest or along the East Coast; a small number came from Colorado and California. Two were from Canada, and the families of two migrated from Russia when they were very young children. Socially their backgrounds are equally varied. Some women came from wealthy, privileged backgrounds, notably Dorothy Burlingham, Ruth Mack Brunswick, Viola Bernard, Muriel Gardiner, Edith B. Jackson, Mary O’Neil Hawkins, and Bettina Warburg. Equally some came from families that struggled to maintain themselves. These individuals, among them Helen Ross, Lucile Dooley, and Lillian Malcove, supported themselves from an early age.

The seven American women who became psychoanalysts before 1920 are an eclectic group. They include Lucile Dooley, Beatrice Hinkle, Josephine Jackson, Mary Isham, Marion Kenworthy, Mary O’Malley, and Edith Spaulding. Only two of them, Marion Kenworthy and Lucile Dooley, were to play prominent roles in the development of American psychoanalysis. Kenworthy’s multifaceted career defies compression, but she is remembered today for her work training social workers and as the first woman president of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Dooley grew up in a deeply religious family in Tennessee and Kentucky and worked as a missionary school teacher in the South and for a short while in Japan before developing an interest in psychology. At the urging of L. Pierce Clark, she attended the 1909 Clark Conference and heard Freud deliver his famous lectures. After finishing medical school at Johns Hopkins, she traveled to Vienna in 1930 where she underwent an analysis with Ruth Mack Brunswick. Her experiences in Europe had a deep impact on her, both emotionally and intellectually, and upon her return to Washington, DC she became a leading training analyst in the Washington Psychoanalytic Society (Burton, 1998).

Beatrice Hinkle and Josephine Jackson, respectively, the first and second women members of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, pursued successful careers outside the psychoanalytic mainstream. Hinkle was born in 1875 in San Francisco, where she became the first woman public health doctor in the United States. During her tenure the city was struck by bubonic plague and she was impressed by how differently people responded to the disease. She began to practice suggestion, at the time a popular form of psychotherapy, and in 1905 she moved to New York. Hinkle’s interest in psychoanalysis prompted her to travel to Europe. She attended the 1911 Weimar Congress and began an analysis with Jung. She returned to New York, joined the New York Psychoanalytic Society in 1911, but soon returned to Europe. By 1915 she was back in New York and reapplied to the New York Psychoanalytic Society, but was blackballed by four members, probably because of her Jungian sympathies. Hinkle’s major work was The Recreating of the Individual (1923) where she developed her ideas on psychological types. Critical of Freud, she linked the psychological conflicts of women to their social and cultural position. Hinkle was also part of the New York feminist network, Heterodoxy, so named because the only requirement for membership was that a woman hold nonorthodox views on the position of women and social issues (Wittenstein, 1998). For many years Hinkle ran a small sanatorium, Smokey Hollow Lodge, in Connecticut. This establishment was memorialized by Nancy Hale (1957), a former patient of Hinkle’s in her novel, Heaven and Hardpan Farm. Gently sardonic, the novel describes an establishment where extroverts are housed on one floor and introverts on another. Hinkle was one of the founders of the New York Jungian Institute in the 1930s and continued to play an important role in its activities until her death in 1953.

In 1913 Josephine Jackson was elected the second woman member of the New York Psychoanalytic Society. She is an intriguing figure because although she remained a member for nearly 20 years, she only attended one meeting of the society, and her name is virtually absent from accounts of the history of the
early psychoanalytic movement in the United States (Thompson, 1998). In 1903 Jackson became the first woman to graduate from Rush Medical College of the University of Chicago. She moved to Pasadena, California, in 1904, and it was there that she began her career as a psychotherapist and psychoanalyst. It is likely that her interest in psychoanalysis developed before her move to California because two institutions she was associated with, Northwestern University Medical School and Rush Medical College, employed or trained several neurologists who were seriously interested in Freud's work.

Jackson built a thriving psychotherapy practice in Pasadena, and her establishment was described as a kind of psychotherapeutic boardinghouse. Not content to confine herself to presiding over this milieu, she also wrote books and articles and lectured, and in the late 1920s she published a newspaper column, *Guiding Your Life*. Jackson's books, written in the style of primers, make it easy to see why she was described by a colleague as a popular and gifted lecturer. Her first book was charmingly titled *Outwitting Our Nerves* (1921), although the title of her second, *Guiding Your Life* (1937), conveys a more accurate sense of the mixture of sympathetic listening and reeducation that inform her therapeutic approach. Jackson's appeal as a writer is confirmed by the sales figures for the first book, which reportedly sold 100,000 copies, a truly staggering figure when compared to William A. White's *Mechanisms of Character Formation* (1916) which sold 3810 copies, and A.A. Brill's *Psychoanalysis: Its Theories and Application* (1912) whose sales reached 8750 copies (Hale, 1971). In a curious twist of fate *Outwitting Our Nerves* played a minor role in the life of the distinguished writer V. S. Naipaul. His father in Trinidad, in an attempt to lift Naipaul's spirits when he was depressed and living alone in London in the early 1950s, sent him Jackson's book.

The careers of the women who became psychoanalysts after 1920 coincide with the institutionalization of American psychoanalysis. It is natural, therefore, to ask what roles the women played in the institutional development. Nathan G. Hale Jr., in *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States* (1995), devotes a chapter to those young Americans who sought training in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and then returned home to wrest power from a generation of less well-trained older figures. He emphasizes, correctly I think, the element of generational conflict in the struggle to realize more rigorous training standards and to tighten the standards for selecting candidates. But all the examples he cites are men, notably Ives Hendricks in Boston and Lawrence Kubie and Bertram Lewin in New York. It is one thing to insist on higher standards, but another to design and implement criteria for realizing these standards. Many women, among them Sara Bonnett, Marie Breuhl, Lydia Dawes, Joan Fleming, Phyllis Greenacre, Susanna Haigh, Lillian Malcove, May Romm, Helen Ross, Helen Tartakoff, Lucia Tower, and Elizabeth Zetzel, who held positions as training analysts, supervisors, and teachers, played important roles on educational and curriculum committees in transforming the selection and education of candidates during the 1940s and 1950s. At the local level, women also held various offices in societies and institutes, including ten who served as president of either their society or institute. On the national level, however, only one woman from this group (Marion Kenworthy) became president of the American Psychoanalytic Association, and only two (Joan Fleming and Sara Bonnett) chaired the Association's Board of Professional Standards. Although many women analysts wrote influential papers and published regularly, they were underrepresented on the editorial boards of the three major American journals (*The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, and *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*). Three women—Phyllis Greenacre, Edith Jackson, and Ruth Mack Brunswick—served on the editorial board of *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* from its inception in 1945. Ruth Mack Brunswick was also on the board of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, and Greenacre and Helen Vincent McLean served on the editorial board of *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* in the late 1950s. This underrepresentation remains to be explained.

Although the institutional influence and role of women analysts within the American psychoanalytic movement has been insufficiently explored, their stature outside psychoanalysis was considerable. For example, women analysts headed child guidance clinics in hospitals or social agencies (Florence Clothier, Eleanor Pavenstedt, Marian Putnam, Helen Ross), held hospital or university teaching positions (Lydia Dawes, Margaret W. Gerard, Edith Jackson), and acted as long-term consultants to clinics and social service agencies (Viola Bernard, Muriel Gardiner, Margaret W. Gerard, Marion Kenworthy, Margaret Powers). Thus we misread their power and influence if we restrict ourselves to considering only the psychoanalytic offices they held.

It is widely acknowledged in both oral tradition and various written accounts that women analysts were held in high repute for their clinical skills and valued as supervisors and teachers. Thus a woman analyst may have never held a position beyond that of training analyst, or even have written very much, yet have an immense reputation within the field. Lillian Malcove and Grace Abbate, members of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, and Helen Tartakoff of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society are excellent examples of this phenomenon. The fact that this kind of influence is difficult to measure should not deter us from devising ways to read the record for it. Of equal interest is the conception women held of psychoanalysis as a theory and technique. The question here is: What exactly did they see themselves as preserving, distilling, and extending in their roles as teachers and supervisors?

Setting aside the complexities that arise when trying to reconstruct the institutional roles of women analysts, it is possible to delineate their intellectual
achievements and in so doing to appreciate the remarkable and diverse nature of the careers that women psychoanalysts created for themselves. In the rest of this essay, the careers of four individuals with very different personal histories and intellectual gifts illustrate how women forged distinctive and fulfilling careers both as clinicians and psychoanalytic writers. These individuals are Helen Ross, Martha Wolfenstein, Elizabeth Zetzel, and Phyllis Greenacre.

Four Careers

Helen Ross

Helen Ross (1890–1978), one of the few American lay analysts, was for many years the administrative director of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute. She is also remembered as the coauthor, with Bert Lewin, of Psychoanalytic Education in the United States (1960). Ross was born in Missouri in 1890, one of seven children in a family that valued education. Her older brother supported her college education, and after her own graduation in 1911, she worked for five years as a school teacher to enable her younger siblings to continue their education. During this period she augmented her income by teaching English to immigrants in a Jewish settlement night school in Kansas City. She writes that under the tutelage of Jacob Billikopf she learned a great deal about social problems, and traced her later interest in social work to this experience (Ross, 1945). In 1916 she began graduate work in sociology and economics at Bryn Mawr and the following year was awarded the Susan B. Anthony Memorial Fellowship. She gave up her graduate studies, however, at the urging of Pauline Goldmark, one of the famous Goldmark sisters, whose sister Alice was married to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, to accept a job as a field agent for the U.S. Railroad Administration, whose women’s division was headed by Pauline Goldmark. For two years she traveled all over the United States, investigating the working conditions of women working on the railroads and, she emphasized in a memoir, making sure they were getting equal pay for equal work. In 1920 she went to London to study at the London School of Economics. Beginning in 1914 she and an older sister had established a summer camp for girls in Michigan, and she writes that the constant contact with “the everyday problems of normal children” sharpened her interest in human behavior and made her eager to deepen her understanding of personality development. This led her to an interest in psychoanalysis, and in 1929, at the urging of Franz Alexander who had recently arrived in Chicago, she went to Vienna. There she was analyzed by Helene Deutsch and began a lifelong friendship and collaboration with Anna Freud. After returning to Chicago in 1934, she began a private practice and acted as a consultant to a number of social agencies. For many years she also wrote a newspaper column, About Our Children, for the Chicago Sun-Times. Autobiographical fragments she left behind and the recollections of colleagues and friends after her death leave the vivid impression of an adventurous woman, a doer in every sense of the word, whose analytic career was a platform for conveying in clear and intelligent language the insights of psychoanalysis to teachers, social workers, and parents. Her curiosity and social conscience took her from Missouri and Kansas to Bryn Mawr and field work, insuring that working women were being treated fairly on the railroads. From there she went to London and Vienna, where she found her vocation in one of the most vibrant intellectual movements of the twentieth century.

Martha Wolfenstein

Martha Wolfenstein (1911–1976), also a lay analyst, earned an M.A. in psychology and a Ph.D. in aesthetics from Columbia University. Unlike Ross, she was not a member of a society belonging to the American Psychoanalytic Association, but nonetheless was a widely admired teacher and supervisor in New York. Wolfenstein wrote three classic essays on childhood bereavement: “How Is Mourning Possible?” (1966a); “Loss, Rage, and Repetition” (1969); and “The Image of the Lost Parent” (1973). Her mother died when she was a child, and there is a history of parental (maternal) loss extending back several generations in her family. Ellen Handler Spitz, the psychoanalytically trained art historian, has written insightfully about this history and its role in Wolfenstein’s work, and in particular how it shaped her study of the Belgium painter René Magritte (Spitz, 1985, 1998). Wolfenstein also wrote a powerful study, “Goya’s Dining Room” (1966b). In explicating the psychological fantasies revealed in Goya’s paintings, she argues that for this artist the loss of his hearing was linked to the earlier losses, in their infancy, of all but one of his five children. Themes of grief, rage, and sexual guilt are linked to the horrifying images that characterize the paintings that Goya painted after his illness in 1792.

Less well known, but deserving of wider appreciation, are Wolfenstein’s books on film (Wolfenstein and Leites, 1950), children’s humor (1954), and catastrophic events (1957). She also wrote a group of less well known essays whose subjects become the prism for illuminating the origins and vicissitudes of cultural values and attitudes. Two of these essays are especially notable because they exemplify how psychoanalytically informed observation can illuminate the mutually reinforcing bonds of individual experience and cultural values. The first essay explores the behavior of parents and children in the park and the second scrutinizes government publications on child care.

The first, “French Parents Take Their Children to the Park” (1954), followed two trips to Paris that Wolfenstein made in 1947 and 1953 as a member of the Columbia University Project Research in Contemporary Cultures which was led by the anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. She begins by noting that in the park French children do not leave their parents to play with other
children in a communal area. French parents do not appear eager to have their children play with others, “showing little of the usual eagerness of American parents that their children should make friends and be a success with their age mates” (1954, p. 100). French children quickly learn that displays of physical aggression are not permissible, and verbal disputes are substituted.

These observations lead to a broader and quite far-reaching analysis. For the French, childhood and adulthood are two very distinct conditions. One consequence is that the emotions of the child do not seem very serious, and French adults are likely to be detached in the face of the child’s distress (p. 111). Americans, by contrast, do not recognize a sharp cleavage between childhood and adulthood. For example, to be able to play with children is a highly valued capacity. In France, childhood is a long and difficult preparation for adult life and in particular schoolchildren are subjected to the hard regime preparatory to taking the dreaded *bachat*, a rite of passage to which youth are subjected by their elders. Wolfenstein writes that the relation between childhood and adulthood is almost the complete opposite in the two cultures. In America, childhood is regarded as very nearly an ideal time, an end in itself; adults feel nostalgic for their childhood. Adulthood is a ceaseless round of work and getting ahead, and the enjoyment of immediate sensual pleasures is nearly lacking. With the French, it seems to be the other way around. It is in adulthood that the possibility of living in the moment is achieved; sensual pleasures are an end in themselves. Concern with such pleasures and ingenuity in achieving them are persistent themes of adult life (p. 116).

“Fun Morality: An Analysis of Recent American Child-Training Literature” is based on Wolfenstein’s (1951) close reading of publications of the U.S. Department of Labor Children’s Bureau, in particular, the Infant Care Bulletins of three periods: 1914–1921, 1929–1938, and 1942–1945. A close examination of bulletins published in 1914 and the early 1940s leads to an account of the emergence of “fun morality.” Between 1914 and the early 1940s, the conception of the child’s basic impulses undergoes a startling transformation. In 1914 the infant is depicted as being endowed with dangerous, strong impulses manifested in autoerotic, masturbatory, and thumb-sucking behavior. The child fiercely rebels if these impulses are interfered with, and the mother must be ceaselessly vigilant against the child’s sinful nature. By the early 1940s, in contrast, the baby has been transformed into a creature of almost complete harmlessness. The intense and concentrated impulses of the past have disappeared, and have become diffuse and moderate in character. The baby’s play with him or herself is now seen as expressing interest in exploring his or her world.

In this recent period, Wolfenstein (1951) finds parenthood has become a major source of enjoyment for both parents. “The parents are promised that having children will keep them together, keep them young, and give them fun and happiness” (p. 173). Enjoyment, happiness, and fun now permeate all activities with the child. The message is clear: parents ought to enjoy their children. Wolfenstein cogently remarks that:

When a mother is told that most mothers enjoy nursing, she may wonder what is wrong with her in case she does not. Her self-evaluation can no longer be based entirely on whether she is doing the right and necessary things but becomes involved with nuances of feeling which are not under voluntary control. Fun has become not only permissible but required, and this requirement has a special quality different from the obligations of the older morality (pp. 173–174).

Wolfenstein links this changing conception of human impulses, which is accompanied by an altered evaluation of play and fun, as signaling a profound moral transformation. Instead of being suspect, if not taboo, fun has become obligatory. Instead of feeling guilty of having too much fun, one is inclined to feel ashamed if one does not have enough of it. The boundaries between work and play are being increasingly breached by this changing conception of the nature of the self.

Elizabeth Zetzel

Elizabeth Zetzel (1907–1970) was born in New York but received her medical education at the University of London. She began her analytic training in the 1930s at the British Psychoanalytic Society where her analyst was Ernest Jones. In a short memoir describing the years between 1936 and 1938, Zetzel (1969) recalled with pleasure her exposure to the work of Melanie Klein and her followers, Joan Riviere and Susan Isaacs. She credits D. W. Winnicott, however, with most influencing her subsequent work because he was “fully alive to the importance of the real mother-child relationship. . . . My first awareness of the importance of early object relations was attributable to my opportunity to work in his Clinic at Paddington Green Hospital” (p. 718).

Zetzel returned to the United States in 1949 and became a member of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society, where she was a leading training analyst and teacher. She was a prolific writer and her essays include contributions to psychoanalytic technique—her name is practically synonymous with the term “therapeutic alliance”—and to the psychodynamics of hysteria and depression. But equally as important as her original contributions to the psychoanalytic literature was her sympathetic interest in the work of Melanie Klein. In an astute and generous obituary written after Klein’s death, Zetzel (1961) decreed the fact that many contemporary analysts still remain unfamiliar with Klein’s work:

[Failure to acknowledge her contribution is so prevalent that papers on infantile development and early responses to separation and loss typically omit...]
detailed reference to her concept of the depressive position, to her recognition of the positive functions of early anxiety, and to her formulations concerning the role of symbol formation in the learning process [p. 422].

At the same time, Zetzel was deeply skeptical of the theoretical reconstructions that Klein posited in her writings. She also chided Klein and her followers for failing to acknowledge the work of other analysts, notably Anna Freud, Willi Hoffer, Rene Spitz, Phyllis Greenacre, and Ernst Kris, whose findings on early psychic development were convergent with their discoveries.

Zetzel’s (1961) efforts to rectify the situation she described in her obituary of Melanie Klein began with her return to the United States. At a meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, Zetzel (1951) presented a paper urging her American colleagues to recognize the value of Klein’s clinical findings. In 1954 Edith Jacobson invited Zetzel to present a paper to the New York Psychoanalytic Society on Klein’s work. In February 1955 Zetzel presented the paper, “An Approach to the Relation between Concept and Content in Psychoanalytic Theory (with special reference to the work of Melanie Klein and her followers),” which was discussed by Heinz Hartmann, Rudolph Loewenstein, Bertram Lewin, Phyllis Greenacre, and Margaret Mahler. The discussants were knowledgeable about Klein’s clinical findings, but skeptical of her theorizing. Phyllis Greenacre’s comments alluded to conversations she had had with Zetzel about Klein’s findings and exhibited a serious interest in them.

Zetzel’s advocacy of Klein’s work has significant implications for the development of psychoanalytic theory in the United States. Conventionally psychoanalytic theory in America in the 1950s is portrayed as dominated by the variant of theory called ego psychology. But Zetzel’s writings on Klein and her followers, and her extended contacts with other analysts interested in preoedipal development, notably Edith Jacobson and Phyllis Greenacre, suggest a more fluid and complex state of affairs. In other words, among a group of influential psychoanalytic thinkers, there was a sophisticated awareness of Klein’s work and a recognition that her clinical discoveries should be considered in their own work.

Phyllis Greenacre

Phyllis Greenacre (1894–1989) was born in Chicago and after finishing medical school in 1916 moved to Baltimore where she was an intern and resident at the Henry Phipps Clinic at The Johns Hopkins Hospital under the great Swiss-American psychiatrist Adolf Meyer. In the late 1920s, she moved to New York and in 1932 began psychoanalytic training at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute. Among American analysts whose careers were established in the 1930s and 1940s only one other, that of Bertram Lewin, matches hers in terms of clinical and theoretical creativity. Greenacre’s essays were engaging, stimulating, and insightful when first written, and remain so. Particularly noteworthy are her studies of creativity, fetishism, the creative individual, and infant development. Two aspects of her work and career deserve serious study: her clinical researches and the emergence of her long preoccupation with creativity and the creative individual. In turn, they each speak to a larger question in the history of psychoanalysis that has been unjustly neglected: How do we account for creative theoretical innovation that is not characterized by dissent and schism?

Greenacre’s first psychoanalytic essay, “The Predisposition to Anxiety” (1941), and a companion paper, “The Biological Economy of Birth” (1945) were not well received at the time because they were regarded by many as excessively speculative, and were criticized for their exploration of the preverbal stages of infancy. Undeterred by this reception Greenacre continued to explore with imagination and empathy the inextricably linked physical and psychological maturational vicissitudes of the infant and young child. Her clinical approach rested upon her conviction of the importance of reconstruction and screen memories in analysis. She reported (1971) that she watched patients as devotedly as she listened to them because nonverbal communications—weeping, sweating, muscle cramps, blushing, sudden hoarseness—constitute the body’s reporting in its own language. In her view such nonverbal communications may be representative of experiences which have never heretofore been verbalized, or they may be representations of childhood experiences which were at such an emotional pitch as to preclude clear verbalized thinking, that is, communication with the self, even when speech had been reasonably established (p. xxiv). In a later defense of reconstruction and screen memories in analytic work, Greenacre (1980) cited Freud’s precepts regarding their importance in clinical psychoanalysis. She notes that he wrote an explicit statement regarding the efficacy of reconstruction in 1938 shortly before his death. She also makes an interesting observation on why reconstruction fell out of favor for so many years. She observes that “the prolonged period of mourning for a lost leader” was accompanied by an “increased clinging to those metaphysical perspectives which had been his last gift before the war had forced emigration.” She goes on to write that an apparent expansion in the intellectual framework of analysis was accompanied by a somewhat reactionary tightening in the teaching of technique. “The precise interpretation began to take the place of reconstructive interest” (p. 39).

It is clear from Greenacre’s writings that she felt free to explore not only Freud’s legacy but also the work of other analysts, for example, the writings of
Willi Hoffer, Heinz Hartmann, Ernst Kris, and D. W. Winnicott. This openness to the thinking of others, while at the same time pursuing her own interests, is one of the most attractive features of her work. Such responsiveness also served to continually renew her own creativity.

In 1953 there is an important shift in Greenacre’s work with the publication of “Certain Relationships between Fetishism and the Faulty Development of the Body Image.” Henceforth she returns again and again to explorations of the problems of fetishism, early ego development, and the creative individual. Greenacre’s observations that fetishism and allied conditions were frequently accompanied by feelings of change in body size, together with a tendency to individualize and personalize different body parts, was accompanied by an awareness that such descriptions were frequently found in fairy tales and folklore, unusually so in Lewis Carroll’s Alice books and in Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels. These insights led to her 1955 book, Swift and Carroll, a rich and absorbing biographical study of the two men in relation to their preoccupation with and insight into these particular phenomena. This book remains an exemplary and outstanding work of applied analysis. In studying writers and artists for what their lives and creations may reveal about complex clinical phenomena, Greenacre was continuing a rich line of psychoanalytic research begun by Freud (1910) with his study of Leonardo da Vinci.

In 1957 Greenacre published her first theoretical essay on creativity, “The Childhood of the Artist: Libidinal Phase Development and Giftedness.” She described the (potentially) gifted infant as unusually responsive to both external and internal stimuli; possessing a capacity to see and capture relationships; and having an enhanced capacity for symbolization and continual access to primary process thinking. This essay contains her famous characterization of the gifted individual as engaged in a “love affair with the world.” It should perhaps be noted that citations of this phrase often omit her observation that this love affair may also present itself conversely as a colossal disappointment in the world (p. 490). Nonetheless Greenacre believed that “for the potentially gifted infant the primary object which stimulates certain sensory responses to it is invested with a greater field of related experiences than would be true for the infant of lesser endowment” (pp. 489–490). This love affair with the world has often been considered to reflect narcissism, whereas in Greenacre’s view it is really more of a collective relationship. In this connection she notes that gifted children may solve their oedipal problems less decisively than others. Thus she stressed the importance of the family romance in creative individuals, a theme elaborated in “The Family Romance of the Artist” (1958), and in her book, The Quest for the Father: A Study of the Darwin-Butler Controversy, as a Contribution to the Understanding of the Creative Individual (1963).

Two other important points Greenacre makes in her 1957 essay concern the nature of the artistic creation and the role of aggression. Concerning the former Greenacre (1957) observes:

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It seems unlikely that the artistic performance or creative product is ever undertaken purely for the gratification of the self, but . . . there is always some fantasy of a collective audience or recipient . . . . The artistic product has rather universally the character of a love gift, to be brought as near perfection as possible and to be presented with pride and misgiving [p. 490].

She also proposed a theory of aggression as initially a manifestation of a positive developmental force, a positive response by the infant to the vicissitudes of its earliest experiences, both frustrating and gratifying.

What inspired this long and rich phase of Greenacre's work, which begins with her 1953 essay, when she was 59 and had already published many notable contributions? She directly links this phase of her work to her meeting Ernst Kris in 1941. Greenacre (1971) later recalled that she was “soon launched into a discussion concerning Alice in Wonderland. It was a little eerie as I found myself stating, with a lively interest, observations and opinions that I did not know I had. It was Kris's great talent to stimulate and liberate people in this way” (p. xxvii). In “The Family Romance of the Artist,” written in Kris’s memory, Greenacre (1958) elaborated on the importance of their meeting.

The subject of creativity had not previously been in the arena of my clinical research interests and I had never expected to tackle it. Perhaps I was intimidated by a latent interest which might become too engrossing. At any rate, it was through the stimulation—even the persistent prodding—of the late Ernst Kris that my concern with the subject was brought into the daylight. Now I am grateful for this gift—surprising to me at the time and hesitatingly accepted [p. 505].

Her relationship with Kris is a valuable reminder that friendships among and between analysts can have an enormous impact on the emergence of new developments. Friends and colleagues and, by extension, societies may foment and sustain an environment (or boundaries) within which an individual’s curiosity and imagination can flourish. But with the exception of Freud’s relationships with Flisser, Ferenczi, and perhaps Abraham, their role has perhaps not been sufficiently appreciated or examined. Support and acceptance were important to Greenacre, who was very aware of herself as working alone.

Greenacre notes that the creative product is always intended for a particular recipient or collective audience. Perhaps if we can understand what response Greenacre sought to evoke we might better appreciate why some analysts arouse such excitement and insight in their readers. In other words an analyst’s style, the capacity to use written or oral language to help the reader experience a new and meaningful insight, seems to be an important dimension of an analyst’s creativity.

In addition, Greenacre’s work and career is especially relevant to an important, but neglected, problem that confronts historians of psychoanalysis, the
question of how to explain creative advance in theory and technique that does not follow from or end in schism. The history of innovation in psychoanalysis is all too often written as if it is synonymous with its recurring schisms (Thompson, 1995). Schisms can foster creativity, but they can also have negative consequences, especially when new groups re-create the rigidity they claim to be rebelling against or create a new one. In addition, many emergent creative and innovative ideas do not rise out of a context of institutional dissent, and their genesis requires as much attention and explanation as those that arise during schism. If the history of psychoanalysis focuses only on schisms as the basis of creativity, much is clearly lost. Phyllis Greenacre's work and career certainly illustrate this point. She is, however, only one member of an interesting and diverse group of analysts who managed to be creative and individualistic in their work and whose stimulus to creativity may have been of a similar order to hers. Such a group might include, for example, Bertram Lewin, Ella Freeman Sharpe, Martha Wolfenstein, D. W. Winnicott, and Marjorie Brierley. The history of psychoanalysis will remain incomplete, in my view, until the conditions that made their achievements possible are viewed as essential to our history as those that surround the recurrence of its schisms.

The work of Phyllis Greenacre, and the other analysts I have noted, offers us an opportunity to examine under what circumstances creative developments have occurred in psychoanalytic theory apart from periods of dissent and schism. In particular I would argue that there are two features of Greenacre's work and career that may be true for other figures like herself: a responsiveness to the ideas of others and a significant friendship that encourages and supports a latent interest.

In closing I want to make one observation about a tantalizing link between Greenacre's personal history and the nature of her psychoanalytic interests and the character of her writing. The latter is characterized by beautiful, evocative prose in the service of imaginative theoretical ideas, and sensitive, often tender, interpretation of clinical material. She uses language to create an atmosphere of intimacy that draws in the reader. This intimacy is perhaps a reflection of an archaic yearning or need to stimulate a response in her reader. The clarity of her writing is thrown into sharp relief by the unexpected appearance of words or phrases that underscore how excited and absorbed she is by her subject. Very often the subject is the intimate relationship between the physical and psychological maturational experiences of the infant and young child. As a young child, she wrote before she spoke. Apparently a speech impediment prevented her from speaking intelligibly before her sixth or seventh birthday, and she communicated by writing notes, having learned to read and write at the age of four (Kabccnell, 1990, p. 23). In her essay, "The Transitional Object and the Fetish with Special Reference to the Role of Illusion" (1970), she writes: "Speech is the great creation of each infant's life, and he leaves his individual stamp in many ways on its ultimate fullest achievement" (p. 349). Greenacre also, to our great and lasting benefit, left her individual stamp on the language and thought of psychoanalysis.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this essay I noted that psychoanalysis in America attracted a diverse group of richly talented women between 1911 and 1941. These women sought and exercised considerable influence and power within societies and institutes as teachers, supervisors, training analysts, and members of curriculum and educational committees. Psychoanalysis, as a theory and profession, afforded them work that was emotionally engrossing and intellectually deeply satisfying, and their clinical and theoretical publications enriched, modified, and extended psychoanalytic theory in important ways.

The brief sketches of the careers of Helen Ross, Martha Wolfenstein, Elisabeth Zetzel, and Phyllis Greenacre have illustrated the point that psychoanalysis, as a theory and profession, allowed them to make contributions that reflected their individual gifts. Thus, Helen Ross was an educator and administrator, who effectively reached out to the larger community through her newspaper column and her talks to parents, teachers, and child care workers. Martha Wolfenstein wrote on a sweeping range of cultural subjects with insight and sophistication, thereby demonstrating that applied analysis is a valuable part of the psychoanalytic canon. Elisabeth Zetzel's independence of mind supported her conviction that American analysts needed to heed Melanie Klein's clinical discoveries, and conversely her familiarity with American psychoanalytic thought enabled her to point out to Kleinians that they should be more receptive to the writings of American analysts that complemented their own findings. Finally, Phyllis Greenacre's brilliant originality of thought and expression is a testament to how psychoanalysis, as a theory and profession, could nurture and sustain individual creativity.

References


