Hilda Doolittle and Creativity—Freud's Gift
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ABSTRACT

The problem of work inhibition in a woman is addressed in terms of a specific case. The paper investigates the patient's view of how such an inhibition was cured in a brief analytic treatment of the American poet Hilda Doolittle conducted by Freud in 1933—34.

FREUD MAY WELL HAVE WONDERED WHAT IT IS THAT WOMEN WANT, BUT IN the case of one woman who went into analysis with him and went on to tell the tale, it was clear that he gave a woman what she wanted. That woman was Hilda Doolittle (1886–1961), an American poet with a purported writing block, a work inhibition. Applegarth (1977) observed work inhibitions among women in our times. If Freud managed to help Doolittle with it, there may be inferences to be drawn for current versions of this problem in women.

Doolittle had written some wonderfully terse imagist poems, a minor play, and letters to her friends before her analysis with Freud. She was 27 when her first poem was published in Poetry magazine. Four years later a slim volume of her poetry was published. The quality of her early work excited other poets so much that Pound considered her to be the founder of a whole new poetic aesthetic, a school which became known as Imagism. The only way to convey what that early work was like is with a sample. This is the first poem in Sea Garden, her first book of poetry, published in 1916:

SEA ROSE
Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meager flower, thin,
sparse of leaf,
more precious than a wet rose
single on a stem—
you are caught in the drift.
Stunted, with a small leaf,
you are flung on the sand,
you are lifted
in the crisp sand
that drives in the wind.
Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf?

This poem is on the small scale typical of women's poetry, but brings this scale down to the exquisitely tiny, making themoment in time and the few square inches of
space occupied by the rose itself fill the entire poem. The rose is unsentimental, absolutely opposite to the lush, sweet, round, full-scented flower of prior poets. It is not given by a lover to his lady, it conveys no sentiment. What is important is the image, the thing itself. And the image is a tough one. Consider the words used to describe the rose: "harsh," "marred," "meager," "thin," "sparse," "stunted," "flung," "acrid," and "hardened." The action of the poem is what happens to the passive rose. She is "caught," "flung," "lifted." Doolittle's inventive use of language is as new as today; the sand is "crisp." Surely this is the contradiction of everything the rose had been in Western culture. Yet the image of this rose is sweeter, the poet asserts, than the overblown fullness we have been accustomed to admiring. And the image convinces.

Although there was no break in Doolittle's productivity, the quality and originality of her work had diminished by the time she sought analysis (Duplessis, 1986). She wrote three unpublished and undistinguished novels in the 1920s. A play of no great interest had been completed when she entered treatment with Freud in 1933 at age 47. Freud had requested copies of her work prior to her analysis, in order to become acquainted with her personality through her work. Once he took her on as a patient, he was clear in his intent to enable her to create and equally clear in his recall of this goal afterwards. He wrote to Hilda Doolittle on October 27, 1933: "I am deeply satisfied to hear that you are writing, creating, that is why we delved into the depths of your unconscious mind I remember." After her analysis she wrote and published epic poetry of a scope rarely attempted in our century and even more rarely in any age attempted by a woman. Her epics are remarkable for their quality and coherence. In 1960 she was the first woman to receive the American Academy of Arts and Sciences medal. She also published several distinguished works of prose in the 25 years of her life after her brief analysis. What, one may wonder, was it that Freud gave Hilda Doolittle?

Fortunately, she left much evidence in her published works about what she thought he gave her. Moreover, inferences may be drawn from the letters she wrote to her friends and those she received from Freud and others. From March 1 to June 12, 1933, she visited Freud six days a week for her treatment. She resumed treatment for five weeks from the end of October through December 2, 1934. By modern standards, this would be far too short a period of treatment to qualify as a complete psychoanalysis, but by any standards, the therapeutic effect would have to be considered spectacular. Whatever it was that Freud gave her, it was clear that she lived on it for the rest of her life. She described it most directly in Tribute to Freud (1956), her memoir of that analysis. Her most important poems, Bid Me to Live and The Gift, bear the imprint of her experience with Freud. In addition, her major poems, "Trilogy," Helen in Egypt, and "The Master" all deal with her analytic experience, reworked through several metaphors: as a war, as an island idyll, as a rebirth, and a journey. It provided not only material to be worked over for the next quarter of a century, but also the freedom and inner wholeness to do the work even without immediate access to publication.
Doolittle's life was a sexually ambiguous one. Her position in the world of letters was established early by a man, her then former fiancé Ezra Pound. Her career, her daughter, her analysis, and her life were supported by her wealthy female lover Bryher (born Winifred Ellerman). Doolittle had married once and had become pregnant twice before her liaison with Bryher. She also had several male lovers even during the time she was living with Ellerman. Thus her sexuality was complex, with male and female partners both important to her. Furthermore, there is general agreement (Duplessis, 1986); (Friedman, 1981); (Robinson, 1982) that Doolittle retained intimate friendships with former lovers for decades after their passions had cooled.

Yet her work prior to analysis was not androgynous, but entirely in the female tradition. She wrote lyric poems, short and full of intense private emotion, like that of other major women poets. But after her analysis she wrote epic poems, in which adventure themes like those explored in the Odyssey and the Iliad were dominant. Thus, not only the fact of her work but the form of it was what had previously been thought of as exclusively masculine. In addition, she was able to use the epic form to express content no poet had ever used before to express it. She developed a way to explore the classical themes of war and its aftermath which combined travel, exploration, and adventure with specifically female concerns of maternity and nurturance.

The puzzle is how she was able to achieve this creativity. Her letters to Bryher, written daily, and even several times some days, attest to her sense of the importance of what she was doing, her awe of Freud, and her determination to make the analysis work for her. Her letter to Bryher of February 28, 1933 relates the awestruck attitude she encountered in the manager of her hotel before the actual beginning of her treatment: "The manager is terribly impressed, we of Vienna did not know that Doctor Freud took any but the most learned professors, does he now take—ah, er, patients? I said I was working with him through a friend also a lieber Gott Herr Professor of London or words to that effect."

The fact of the letters and their frequency support the idea that she was eager to keep in touch with her family through the analysis, and to reassure them that she was not forgetting them. The family at that time was a complicated one, including Bryher, Doolittle's daughter, and Kenneth MacPherson. MacPherson had been Doolittle's lover. Bryher had married him, supposedly to stabilize the relationship. Although he subsequently became homosexual, the three adults lived together as a family and raised Doolittle's child. If every family has trepidations about what the change in the family members in analytic treatment will mean for the others, this particular, highly irregular family would have had even more to worry about than most. Would Doolittle become heterosexual? Would she lose interest in Bryher? Would Freud try to "cure" her of homosexuality? The reassurance she attempted to provide in her letters surely colors her presentation of Freud himself and the process of her work with him. But it is worth sifting through her correspondence for evidence of what the
effective therapeutic action of her analysis consisted of in her own opinion as well as for clues to what may have affected her without her awareness.

On March 1, 1933 she writes: "I stuck to the coat, was ushered into the waiting room and before I could adjust before joyless street mirror, a little white ghost appeared at my elbow and I nearly fainted, it said 'Enter fair madame' and I did." Doolittle presents Freud as both little and a ghost. She refers to this ghost as "it," a presence rather than a person. She may be minimizing the power of this ghost by calling it "little," or she may be emphasizing his spiritual power by contrast with his lack of physical strength. She goes on in this first account of her first visit with Freud: "We talked of race and the war, he said I was English from America and that was not difficult. 'What am I' [asked Freud] I said 'Well, a Jew.' He seemed to want me to make the statement—then went on to say that that too was a religious bond as the Jew was the only member of antiquity that still lived in the world." Here Doolittle describes the opening phase of the treatment in which Freud encouraged transferential statements, especially of a negative kind, since to be a Jew in that time and place was to be hated and persecuted. Freud would have had to know of Doolittle's preoccupation with the ancient world from her poetry which used images of the classical Greek world as its universe of discourse. Therefore, by describing himself as a member of an antique people, Freud fostered her identification with him. To describe himself as a member of an antique race was also to say that he was allied to the source of her poetry.

By March 2, she described him in quite different terms: "He got off his desk, an Ivory Vishnu that the Calcutta psychs sent him, and dug out a Pallas, about six inches high that he said was his favorite. O lovely, lovely little old papa." On March 10 she already saw what the outcome of her treatment was to be: "And note all papas remarks, which may be ammunition against the world, for all time." This intense positive transference was the vehicle for her exploration of her past. On March 23 she described their work together as follows:

F. says mine is the absolutely FIRST layer. I got stuck at the earliest pre-OE stage and 'back to the womb' seems to be my only solution.

My triangle is mother-brother-self. That is, early phallic-mother, baby brother or smaller brother and self. I have worked in and around that, I have HAD the baby with my mother and been the phallic baby, hence Moses in the bulrushes. I have HAD the baby with the brother hence Cruikshank, Cecil Grey, Kenneth, etc. I have HAD the 'illumination' or back to the womb WITH the brother hence you and me in Corfu (island=mother) with Rodeck always as phallic mother...I well, well, well I could go on and on and on but once you get the first idea, all the later diverse looking manifestations fit in somehow. Savvy? Its all too queer and at first I felt life had been wasted in all this repetition etc., but somehow F. seems to find it amusing, sometimes and apparently I am of a good 'life' vibration as I went on and on repeating, wanting to give life and
save life, never in that sense to destroy life (except self-rat to get back to the
womb phase, all most natural).

This view of her life and the repetitions of situations of her earliest days seem to
have been an acceptable story to tell her lover and patron, to reassure her that the
analytic work was not a danger to the relationship and that she was getting her
money's worth.

But all was not so simple. No letters from Doolittle survive to tell of the
negative transference, but two letters to her from Kenneth MacPherson, undated, but
probably from 1933, imply that it not only existed, but was communicated to Bryher
as well. Bryher is referred to by her pet name "Fido." "Chaddie" is Doolittle's first
analyst, an Englishwoman who seems to have also treated MacPherson. Kenwin is the
name of the country house they shared in England. The first letter says:

*I understand from Fido that your hour with Papa is now becoming the hour of
the dog-fights. That must be too Kenwin to be pleasing! Certainly it wouldn't
induce a smooth flow of inner consciousness.*

The second letter enlarges on this theme:

*You! You and your old man of the mountains. It must be a peculiar state of
affairs. I wonder if you like it as much as you thought you would? More? Less?
Certainly its an unique experience, if that's any consolation. That playwright
female who committed suicide got tangled up with p.sa. I expect she went to
some sort of Chaddie. No, someone worse, for it must be said for Chaddie,
awful as she is, she DOES put one on one's mettle, till one feels to hell with the
old baggage, who is SHE anyway! ...2 Anyhow I expect you to yowl gloriously
on Papa's couch. Power to you.*

MacPherson encouraged her not to be too much in awe of Freud's power or
prestige, to keep her sense of humor and her sense of self intact, thus implying that he
believed her to be frightened or discouraged by her anger toward Freud. Her fears that
psychoanalysis might precipitate suicide were addressed, but MacPherson tried to
reassure rather than alarm her.

By May 3, Doolittle had a completely new understanding of her difficulties which
she communicated to Bryher this way:

*Papa has a complete new theory but he says he does not dare write it, because
he does not want to make enemies of women. Apparently we

2 MacPherson's ellipsis.
3 Doolittle's ellipsis.
4 Bryher.
5 Doolittle's ellipsis.
have all stirred him up frightfully. His idea is that all women are deeply rooted in penis-envy, not only the bi-sexual or homosexual women. The advanced or intellectual woman is more frank about it. That is all. But that the whole cult and development of normal womanhood is based on the same fact; the envy of woman for the penis. Now this strikes me as being a clue to everything. The reason women are FAITHFUL when men are not, the reason a Dorothy R. or a Cole will stick like grim death to some freak like Alan or Gerald, the reason mama or my mother went insane at the oddest things, the reason for this, the reason for that. I was awake all last night and up this morning just after 7 ...3 as this seemed to convince me more than anything. What got me was his saying the homosexual woman is simply frank and truthful, but that the whole of domestic womanhood, is exactly the same, but has built up its cult on deception. Well he did not say deception. He just flung out the idea. I screamed at him 'but the supreme compliment to women would be to trust women with this great secret.' I said Br.,4 the princess and myself would appreciate it and keep it going. Or something like that. Any how, do you see what I mean?? We have evidently done some fish tail stirring, and if Papa bursts out like the Phoenix with his greatest contribution NOW, I feel you and I will be in some way responsible. This is a thing, for instance that Chaddie fought against, and tried to make out that the monthly is interesting and that men envy women. Well men do. But the whole thing must be 'built on a rock' anyhow, and I feel S.F. is that rock and that perhaps you and I (as I did say half in joke) ARE to be instrumental in some way in feeding the light. Now you see all this in the ucn may also be assisted by our liking the little-dog, as I think we certainly do, ...5

This letter is partly written in red ink, indicated here by the bold lettering. It contains much underlining and some words in all capital letters. It is the only place in all the correspondence with anything like such emphasis. Doolittle was clearly excited as she wrote it, excited by the idea, and perhaps excited by the notion that Freud himself was afraid to say it aloud lest women become too angry with him. More than 50 years later, feminists still find penis envy the most provocative of Freud's ideas. It is considered insulting to women, destructive to the development of young girls, and to be understood, if at all, only as a metaphor. For Doolittle the idea was not a metaphor. Her reference to the "little-dog," a coy pet name for the clitoris, shows that she is thinking of the actual penis, not an equivalent or metaphor. Doolittle's excitement suggests that she considered it the crux of her analysis. It was an idea Freud had been elaborating since he first proposed it in his "Three Essays" (1905). What may have seemed new was the notion that all women, homosexual and heterosexual, shared this dynamic.

The idea of the actual thing, rather than the metaphor, became a theme in the analysis. On May 15, H.D. wrote to Bryher:
But the cure will be, I fear me, writing that damn vol straight, as history, no frills as in Narthex, Palimp and so on. I keep dreaming of literary men, Shaw, Cunningham, Grahame, now Noel Coward and Lawrence himself, over and over. It is important as book means penis evidently and as a 'writer' only am I equal in ucn in the right way with men. Most odd. However we will work it all out, only I am sick of myself at this moment. I do, do, do wish you were here.

Doolittle seems to have had a need to feel equal to these literary men in her circle. She could achieve the equality she longed for only by writing, not by the relationship with Bryher. By May 18, Doolittle was regretting having communicated this idea that she could be cured only by writing of her experiences from the time of her marriage in 1913, through pregnancies and the establishment of her relationship with Ellerman in 1919. Their habitual use of initials, nicknames, and pseudonyms, the searching for metaphors in ancient cultures, all the ways that reality had been falsified and evaded must be given up, at least temporarily. Doolittle knew that this would not be easy for Bryher to accept. She wrote: This is a bone to you, I realize, but Papa seems to believe explicitly that it would be best for me to make this vol. of mine about 1913–1920 explicit. I am merely collecting data, from the outside, not working with the dream or "stream of consciousness" at all. Papa says that my dreams show that a bridge in the ucn has been made somehow and that the whole ps-a is more or less 'over' in the primitive sense, but it will need a lot of guts (my word) my end, to get the thing done in a stern manner and not leap goat-like on the top of things in a dope-y stream of consciousness like Narthex.

This part of her analysis was complete. Doolittle went alone to Switzerland to write of her analysis and what she had learned. The manuscript she produced that summer remained in Switzerland during World War II. In London in 1944 she wrote Tribute to Freud (1956). On her return to Switzerland after the war, she wrote a gloss on Tribute, using her personal notebooks. It was published as "Advent," the coda to Tribute. Many of the details in the letters are reproduced in "Advent": the Vishnu, the Athene, the discussion of Freud's Jewishness, the triangles, the literary friends, and the concern about what is real, what is dream, and what is fantasy. "Advent" skips over the events of April and May, but in June Athene is mentioned again and connected with earlier goddesses. The final note reads: "Some of us, a group of six or eight, now seated on a mountain slope, ask, are we dead?" (p. 187).

The theme of death was to be prophetic. When Doolittle returned to Freud in the autumn of 1934 for more analysis, it was to deal with questions relating to the fear of death. Her manifest impetus was the death of another of Freud's patients, the young man who had had the hour before hers during her first treatment. He had died in an airplane accident. Doolittle feared Freud's death, both because he was an old man and because of her understanding of the Nazi intentions toward all Jews. This had revived
her fears of her father's death when he had a severe head injury with much bleeding when she was a child. On November 14, 1934, she wrote to Bryher: "The whole now of the psa is about death, not so very cheerful, but I suppose the boil in the uc-n has bust." This theme was no doubt very important to Doolittle. She had grown up in a family in which death was all too present. Her father's first wife and their daughter had died; her two older brothers had survived their mother's death. Her own mother's eldest child, a girl, had also died. The family often visited their graves when Doolittle was a little girl. Her earliest experiences thus included the idea that females were especially vulnerable to death. When she was a young woman, she experienced the death of her first child as well as the deaths of her parents, grandparents, and siblings. Shortly following Doolittle's first treatment with Freud, Bryher's father had died. He was so significant a figure to Doolittle that she had written to Bryher on September 22, "THE FATHER is the great mind, the sweep of sea and sky, my own father, yours and our dear old 'papa'... Those three men are the three wise men to me." Of them, only Freud was now left alive.

But death was not the only theme of the second phase of Doolittle's treatment. The issue of sexuality reappears as the decisive issue in her letter to Bryher of November 24, 1934.

It appears that I am that all-but extinct phenomina [sic], the perfect bi-

I can keep up being a 'woman', even a 'nice woman' for about two hours, then I get a terror of claustrophobia, this is no joke—and have to get to an intellectual retreat, book or pages—to prove I am a man. Then I prove back again. The only thing I want is the cloak of invisibility. That is why it is so hard to be at Audley for more than a few hours. I can act perfectly, the part, for a few hours, then I feel I shall go mad. This makes me, as a 'genius', if I may use the word, but breaks me, as a

person. I know you will make allowances and try to understand. It has meant everything to have this connection with Freud.

The understanding achieved was that creative work, not social or sexual gratification, was Doolittle's satisfaction in life. The bisexuality was a resolution that allowed Doolittle to bow gracefully out of the lesbian activity without rejecting Bryher, and thus without biting the hand which had so generously fed her. The resolution was strengthened by a consideration of the role of identification in forming the perfectly bisexual personality. On November 27, Doolittle wrote to Bryher:

Also, usually a child decides for or against one or other parent, or identifies himself with one. But to me it was simply the loss of both parents and a sort of perfect bi-sexual attitude arises, loss and independence. I have tried to be man or woman, but I have to be both. But it will work out papa says and I said now, in writing. Masturbation with me only breaks down the perfection, I have to be perfect (in bo bo mica?) I may get that in writing and will become more
abstract toward the writing in life, now that I know WHAT I am. O, I am so grateful and happy, Fido

At this juncture Doolittle had found a way out of her dilemma. By seeing herself as perfectly bisexual, by finding childhood roots for her choice, and receiving the permission from Freud to consider herself perfect, she was able to give up trying to make what was for her an impossible choice; now she was free to pursue writing as her main source of pleasure and satisfaction. As it turned out, she wrote for several hours a day, seven days a week for the next two decades and produced poetry and prose of great quality. Some of these works were produced during the time she lived with Bryher in very tight quarters in London during the blitz.

It was especially amazing that World War II with its hardships and terror did not interfere with her ability to write. She had terrible experiences in World War I; the cold, starvation, loss of her baby, the deaths of her younger brother and her father, and the break-up of her marriage had all happened in that war and its aftermath. World War II evoked memories of all of that. She had always required peace, solitude, and freshly sharpened pencils on her desk in order to work. In the blitz nothing was orderly, solitude was impossible, and quiet did not exist. Her newfound capacity to write what she thought undisguised allowed her to write even under these trying conditions.

Among the things she produced in London during the blitz was an account of what she recalled of her experience with Freud. And the central interpretation as described in this book consisted of a moment when Freud handed her a small bronze statue of Pallas Athene, "'She is perfect,' he said, 'only she has lost her spear'" (p. 69). Such an interpretation would hardly seem likely to empower a woman writer. But for this particular woman writer, the remark had resonances other than the universal one of penis as organ of power and woman as castrated person without power. Freud had asked for and read her published works. In 1927 she had written a play called Hippolytus Temporizes which contains the line: "let tall Athene have the broken spear" (p. 31). The tall Doolittle may well have seen Athene as one aspect of herself. The spear is, in fact, not part of Athene, it is only her weapon. If she loses it, she has lost her tool, not her capacity. Similarly for Doolittle, if she does not have a penis, she is perfect anyway. She still has her capacity to create. All she needs is the pencil, the paper, and the will.

"The Master," a poem written in homage to Freud, expresses the same idea:

I was angry with the old man
with his talk of the man-strength.
I was angry with his mystery, his mysteries,
I argued until day-break;
O, it was late,
and God will forgive me my anger,
but I could not accept it.
I could not accept from wisdom
what love taught,
woman is perfect [1983, p. 455].

The alternative to accepting the idea that a woman could be perfect without
a penis was, for Doolittle, to hallucinate. The play deals with this possibility. In the
play Hippolytus tries to attain love and passion by entering the woods of Artemis, the
huntress, and rejecting the rational world of his father Theseus, king of Athens. By
choosing the woods over the city, and Artemis in place of Athene, Hippolytus winds
up in the bed of his stepmother Phaedra, loses his moral judgment, his sanity, and
ultimately his life.

Freud's understanding of the play as well as his recall of the line must have been
condensed into the interpretation. His meaning is not that the woman is castrated, but
that she is subject to the laws of reason, and that reason is preferable to madness,
restraint to lawlessness, and human interaction to the life of the outlaw. Athena is the
lawgiver, the goddess who delivered the Greeks from the horrors of talion law, and

the passing down of feuds and sins from generation to generation in the House of
Atreus. To accept the perfection of Athena is to accept reason, balance, the possible
rather than the perfect. It is better to live with the world one is given than to run away
into madness.

For Doolittle, madness had been preferable to the acceptance of her woman's body.
She had actually courted the hallucinations she experienced years earlier on a trip to
the Greek Islands with Bryher. Freud seems to have convinced her that her
hallucinations were symptoms, not illuminations, and had helped to reconcile her to
her femininity and her bisexuality. After the analysis, Doolittle understood
her bisexuality to entail elaboration of the fantasy through her work. She came to
understand as well the need for activities that shored up her feminine identity to
alternate with the more masculine activity of writing. The fantasy (or theory)
of bisexuality replaced her earlier fantasy of damaged femininity. The hallucinations
had been a maladaptive compromise. The poetry was a supremely adaptive
one (Breener, 1982). Freud had not only helped her to become more creative, but had
also helped her to accept herself as a person. He bade her not only to write, but to live.

DISCUSSION

Would a modern analyst have attempted to analyze this woman? The
hallucinations are diagnostic of psychosis, or, as Freud called it, narcissistic neurosis.
The unorthodox household arrangements, Doolittle's age at the time of seeking
treatment with him, her failure to benefit from previous analytic treatments, all were
factors suggesting that analysis could not help this woman. Modern analysts inclined
to diagnostic categories different from the ones Freud used would certainly consider
her to have a "borderline personality." Based on these diagnostic possibilities, an
inference of early narcissistic trauma would be made. Early narcissistic trauma would
be expected to make analysis long, difficult, miserably painful, and likely to
precipitate a psychotic episode or end in a stalemate. The particular interpretation of penis envy would not be used even if she was treated with an analytic therapy. Such an interpretation would be thought to be likely to be misunderstood because such a patient would be unable to hear it as a metaphor (Grossman and Stewart, 1977).

These ideas make it very difficult to accept what happened in this particular treatment. One way of understanding it is to say that the treatment was not, after all, an analysis. Freud was old by then, worn down by his continual bout with cancer, his endless pain, and his precarious situation as a Jew in the increasingly anti-Semitic political climate of Germany and Austria as well as the rest of Europe. One could say that he was merely assuaging her pain as he faced his own, that he taught her to bear her troubles as he bore his.

Theories about what Freud gave Hilda Doolittle have been put forth by Holland (1969), Riddel (1969), Friedman (1981), (1986), and Jeffrey (1992). While Riddel focuses on the interpretation of her penis envy, Holland considers all psychosexual stages. Jeffrey emphasizes object relations, i.e., Doolittle's idealization of Freud and her identification with him. Friedman (1986) concludes that Doolittle attributed to her treatment with Freud the "explosion of her creativity in the last twenty-five years of her life" (p. 329). In Friedman's view, Hilda Doolittle came to Freud with a readiness to oppose him and gained from him the permission to do that. Friedman specifically discounts any possibility of a therapeutic benefit from interpretation based on Freud's theories of female sexuality. She understands that theory thus: "He argued that in reaction to the traumatic revelation of their 'castration,' girls either became 'normal' feminine women, passive in their relation to men; or masculine women who sublimate their desire for a penis into their competition with men; or neurotic women, blocked in love and work." It is Friedman's conclusion that this theory cannot serve as "a source of empowerment for women's creativity" (p. 329).

Friedman therefore attributes the therapeutic effect of their work together to the complexity of Freud's character. She believes that Freud's maternal aspects and his delight in independence encouraged Doolittle to oppose what Friedman considers his destructive ideas. She argues that Freud succeeded with Doolittle by breaking his own rules, by using intuition (a code word for feminine style intellectual functioning), and by reciprocity rather than hierarchy. Friedman concludes that Freud and Doolittle had a sort of symbolic intercourse which enabled her to continue producing their mutual gifts to posterity for the rest of her life.

Friedman's ideas seem to me to have some serious contradictions. If what enabled Freud to help Doolittle was his feminine way of receiving opposition passively and thinking intuitively, how can he have helped her by fertilizing her? The image of impregnation is surely the quintessential image of male functioning, the one thing anyone must understand to be the good masculine act. To attribute this impregnation to Freud's feminine side results in a muddle of feminine and masculine traits rather
than a blend or interaction of them. There must be more to it than this. While I am not
satisfied with her conclusions, I believe that Friedman is on exactly the right track to
finding the answer to the

puzzle of what happened in the brief treatment that allowed Doolittle to leave with
such a brilliant result. The issue of sexual ambiguity is the crucial one.

Brenner (1982) would see the therapeutic action of the interpretation to have been
a revision of the compromise formation. While Doolittle had been androgynous in
her sexuality and feminine in her poetry before the analytic work, she became
essentially feminine in her love life and capable of encompassing both feminine and
masculine themes in her poetry after the analysis. This view describes the situation
elegantly, but I believe that it can be supplemented by a consideration of the
narcissistic features of sexual ambiguity.

One could hypothesize that Freud considered Doolittle to be a possible disciple,
taught her some principles of psychic functioning and some ideas about development,
and thereby gave her narcissistic gratification which helped heal the early narcissistic
wound. This point of view would rest on ideas about the etiology
of narcissism advanced by several theorists (Kohut, 1971); (Kernberg, 1975). These
ideas are, to my mind, best adumbrated by Bach (1985):

Similarly narcissistic "phantoms" such as transitional
objects, imaginary companions, doubles, vampires, ghosts, muses and the
creative product itself may be regarded as readaptation phenomena to correct
distortions in the sense of mental and physical well being, particularly when
these distortions have occurred before the establishment of a firm sense of self
[p. 15].

The idea that the "phantoms" are in principle interchangeable suggests that the
principle of treatment for these narcissistic phenomena is interchange. For Bach, the
therapeutic action of psychoanalysis derives from the capacity of the patient to see
multiple perspectives. If she can only tolerate a world in which everyone is concerned
with her, she is hurt every time other people fail to respond to her needs. If she fails to
see herself as the center of her world, she experiences a catastrophic loss of
self-esteem. Either experience can precipitate psychic disaster. If the patient can see
that she is simultaneously the center of her own world and a peripheral person in
someone else's world, she is not vulnerable to narcissistic wounding. Psychoanalysis
allows the person to see both sides of the truth at the same time. If this idea is applied
to Doolittle's analysis, by seeing herself as not having a penis but being perfect, and
by seeing this as a wonderful secret of which she and a few trusted others are the
keepers, Doolittle changes from a patient to an acolyte. By seeing herself as perfect
and bisexual, she changes from a sexual outlaw or freak into the perfect artist, the
genius. As she remakes her view of herself, she turns symptom into adaptation.
I believe that the capacity to understand fantasy as unreal while at the same time treating it and experiencing it as real is crucial. The idea of alternating between being a man in fantasy and feeling like a woman, which Doolittle so poignantly describes as her bisexuality, is so important because it provides the prototype of the fantasy experience of being and not being, having and not having, doing and not doing. It also seems to me that this view takes account of the adaptive value of fantasy formations as well as the potentially maladaptive consequences (Arlow, 1969a), (1969b). In this view, psychic change may consist of the development of multiple points of view, multiple fantasies, and relatively easy transition from one fantasy to another, rather than replacing fantasy with reality or accepting the inevitable.

**SUMMARY**

Hilda Doolittle's successful analytic treatment for work inhibition, a writing block, was conducted by Freud in a way which impressed the patient as especially helpful because he made two important interpretations. The first was a reconstruction of her early wish to be a phallic partner in a relationship with her mother and little brother. This was encoded in her book about her analysis in the statement that Pallas Athene was perfect, only "she has lost her spear." "She is perfect" was the idea which enabled Doolittle to accept her capacity to create while acknowledging her femininity. Second, the idea of bisexuality as "perfect" was implied in the later interpretation of her identification with both parents at once as having resulted from her infantile belief that she was suffering loss of both parents at the same time. The resolution she achieved was to tolerate alternating views of herself as masculine in her work and feminine in other aspects of her life, especially her love life and social relations.