

# Abraham A. Brill



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Abraham Arden Brill (1874-1948) était un psychiatre et psychanalyste américain. Né en Autriche, il arriva aux États-Unis seul à l'âge de 13 ans. Il étudia à l'université de New York et de Columbia où il reçut son diplôme de médecine en 1903. Après avoir étudié avec Jung en Suisse, il revint aux États-Unis en 1908 où il devint l'un des premiers et des plus actifs sectateurs de la psychanalyse. Il traduisit en anglais la plupart des œuvres importantes de Freud, mais aussi plusieurs ouvrages de Jung. Il pratiquait la psychanalyse tout en enseignant à l'université de New York et à celle de Columbia.

## Anecdote

Lors d'une discussion avec Bernays, le neveu de Freud, il expliqua à celui-ci que la cigarette était pour les femmes comme le "flambeau de la liberté". Bernays utilisa cette idée au profit d'une campagne de publicité : il envoya un groupe de jeunes mannequins participer à la parade de Pâques de New York (en 1931). Il avertit la presse qu'un groupe de jeunes femmes avait décidé d'allumer la torche de la liberté pour affirmer leur résistance à la domination masculine. À son signal, les jeunes femmes allumèrent toutes leurs cigarettes Lucky strike devant un groupe de photographes ravis du scandale qu'une telle manifestation ne manquerait pas de produire au vu des mentalités de l'époque.

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## International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis

The American psychiatrist Abraham Brill was born on October 12, 1874, in Kanczugv, Austria (then Galicia) and died on March 2, 1948, in New York City.

His father was a noncommissioned officer in the Austrian Army who served with Maximilian in Mexico. After spending his childhood in Austria, Brill emigrated to the United States in 1889 at age fifteen, without his family and with almost no money. He worked to support himself through high school and college, graduating from New York University in 1901. He received an MD degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University in 1904.

Brill worked as a psychiatrist in the New York State Mental Hospital System at the Central Islip State Hospital under the tutelage of Adolph Meyer and August Hoch. From 1902 to 1907, he traveled in

Europe, first to Paris and then, at the suggestion of Frederick Peterson, to Zürich; there he learned about Freud's new science, psychoanalysis, from the staff of the Burgholzi Psychiatric Clinic (which included Eugen Bleuler and Carl Jung). He returned to America a year later and accepted a position as assistant physician of mental disease, Bellevue Hospital, which he held until 1911. In 1909 he attended the Clark University Conference, traveling with Freud's party from New York. He became the first practicing psychoanalyst in America and interested a small group of New York psychiatrists in psychoanalytic ideas.

In 1911, Sigmund Freud urged Ernest Jones to establish the American Psychoanalytic Association (APA) with James Jackson Putnam as president, and Brill as secretary. Brill refused to participate and instead, on February 12, 1911, with fifteen other physicians, founded the New York Psychoanalytic Society, several months before the APA was established in May of that year. From that time to the close of the First World War the New York Psychoanalytic Society was kept alive, practically single handedly, by Brill. He was the expositor and public advocate of psychoanalysis par excellence. He spoke at medical, neurological, and psychiatric societies, and to lay groups as well. He lectured to social workers, the New York City Police College, the Education Department of NYU—many of these lectures were reprinted in professional journals and lay publications. During the 1930s he presented a weekly radio broadcast lecture on mental health themes.

Of greatest importance for the dissemination and promulgation of psychoanalytic ideas in America were Brill's translations. Brill translated into English the major work of Sigmund Freud, some of Carl Gustav Jung's works, and Bleuler's Textbook of Psychiatry. His own publications included numerous journal articles and important books, including *Psychoanalysis* (1921). His *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* was published in 1938.

Abraham Arden Brill's importance to psychoanalysis was also as a leader of both psychoanalytic and psychiatric institutions. Brill became a member of the APA in 1914. He served as president of the APA in 1919 and 1920 and again from 1929 to 1935. He was president of the New York Psychoanalytic Society from 1911 to 1913 and from 1925 to 1936. His influence on psychoanalysts both in New York and the United States was at its zenith between 1929 to 1936. During this period he played a central role in restricting membership in the New York Society and in the APA to physicians. He defied Freud, who was supportive of lay analysis, because of his concern about "quackery," medical treatment by poorly trained or unauthorized practitioners. It was Brill's conviction that the survival of psychoanalysis in the United States depended on maintaining its medical identity.

Brill also played an important role in achieving autonomy for the APA within the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). These organizational and credential principles were maintained until overturned by the settlement of a lawsuit brought against the IPA, the New York and Columbia Psychoanalytic Institutes, and APA by a group of psychologists in the 1980s. From the years immediately preceding World War II and until his death in 1948, Brill was displaced first by the Americans Bertram Lewin and Lawrence Kubie, and then by the Viennese psychoanalysts who emigrated to New York to escape Nazi persecution. However, he remained a proud and respected figure who more than any other psychoanalyst was responsible for the growth of psychoanalysis in the United States.

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See also: Frink, Horace Westlake; International Psychoanalytic Association; Lay analysis; New York Psychoanalytic Institute; United States.

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Images in Psychiatry

Abraham Arden Brill, 1874–1948

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A.A. Brill was one of the most influential American psychiatrists of the past century. His efforts and personal views were major factors in the development of psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis in the United States during the century's first half. Brill left the Eastern European village of his childhood at the age of 14 and came, alone and without resources, to the United States and New York City to seek his fortune. By the time he was 29, he had graduated from the Columbia University College of Physician and Surgeons and then trained in psychiatry and neurology. In 1907, he traveled to Europe to pursue the latest advances in psychiatry and became acquainted with the work of Sigmund Freud. Upon his return to New York City, he began what was the first private practice of psychoanalysis in the United States (1).

Brill became Freud's first English translator, and Brill's translations played a major role in the popularization of psychoanalysis in the United States. In 1911, Brill organized a group of 20 physician colleagues to found the first American psychoanalytic organization, the New York Psychoanalytic Society. Brill thought of himself as the father of American psychoanalysis, writing in 1938:

Psychoanalysis was unknown in this country until I introduced it in 1908....[psychoanalytic terminology], some of which I was the first to coin into English expression, can now be found in all standard English dictionaries. Words like abreaction, transference, repression, displacement, unconscious, which I introduced as Freudian concepts, have been adopted and are used to give new meanings, new values to our knowledge of normal and abnormal behavior. (2)

Throughout his career, Brill was unalterably opposed to the practice of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy by nonphysicians and worked diligently to promote psychoanalysis as a subspecialty of psychiatry. In 1931, he helped to found the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, devoted to training physicians in psychoanalysis. As a result of almost a decade of Brill's efforts, the American Psychiatric Association established a Section on Psychoanalysis in 1934 with Brill as its first head.

#### Footnotes

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