

# **Jews in the Development of American Psychoanalysis: the First Fifty Years**

By Arnold Richards

Though psychoanalysis was born in Vienna in the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the first decades of the next century its center of gravity shifted to the United States. In the 1930's events in Europe accelerated the spread of Freud's ideas in America and led to the establishment of New York as the new center of the psychoanalytic movement. The culture of Europe at the turn of the century was also decisive in fostering and consolidating the Jewish identity of the psychoanalytic movement. The anti-Semitic climate in central Europe discouraged the absorption of psychoanalysis into the mainstream of intellectual and social life, and had the effect of concentrating, to Freud's dismay, the new field's ethnic associations.

The forced emigration of numerous Jewish analysts from Europe in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought many to the United States, which ensured that the development of psychoanalysis here would continue to be influenced by Jewish thinkers . Furthermore, some of the forces that had made psychoanalysis in Europe attractive to Jews were also found in the United States . Few university appointments were open to Jews; so a profession that shared much of the social and financial prestige of medicine, but could be practiced independently of

unwelcoming institutions, had great appeal. Given all of these circumstances, it is not surprising that most of the great contributors to the establishment of psychoanalysis in America (1908–1958) were Jews, and that the Jewish influence on psychoanalysis remains very strong even today.

Psychoanalysis came to America out of a Jewish milieu. Founded by Freud, a Viennese Jew, it was subsequently nurtured and developed by Freud with his mostly Jewish students and followers and their mostly Jewish patients. The Jewish pedigree of psychoanalysis was a sensitive issue for Freud, who feared that the new field would never be given its due if it were seen only as a "Jewish" science. "Rest assured," he wrote to his early disciple Karl Abraham, also a Viennese Jew, "if my name was Uberhuber, in spite of everything my innovations would have met with far less resistance." ( Hilde C. Abraham and Ernst I Freud A Psychoanalytic Dialogue: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham 1907-1926;New York: 1965). He made an effort to enlist Christian followers such as Oskar Pfister, a Protestant minister and C. G. Jung, both of whom were early converts to psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, Andrew Heinze an American historian and Judaic scholar places Freud in the tradition of rabbinic moralists like Israel Salanter, and Schneur Zalman, in the way that they looked to the family for universal laws of psychological conduct and morality. So the Jewishness of psychoanalysis -- and of psychoanalysts -- was from the beginning a complicated issue.

Abraham Arden Brill was the first practicing American psychoanalyst. Born in 1875 in Kanczuga, a small village in Eastern Galicia not far from the birthplace of Freud's father, he came to the United States alone at fourteen with two dollars in his pocket, determined to make a place for himself in society. Brill shared Freud's wish to keep psychoanalysis from being seen as Jewish, but for different reasons. He intentionally distanced himself from his provincial Orthodox roots in his efforts to integrate himself fully into what he saw as "American" culture. He achieved the foothold he needed by putting himself through medical school at Columbia University and training as a psychiatrist at New York's Central Islip State Hospital. Brill learned about psychoanalysis at Eugen Bleuler and C. G. Jung's Burgholzli Clinic in Zurich, and visited Freud in Vienna. As soon as he returned to the States in 1908 after he had traveled to Vienna and had a brief analysis with Freud he established a psychoanalytic practice.

Brill was Freud's first English translator, and the founder in 1911 of the first American psychoanalytic society, the New York Psychoanalytic Society. "Psychoanalysis was unknown in this country until I introduced it in 1908," he wrote in 1938. "[Psychoanalytic] terminology, some of which I was the first to coin into English, can now be found in all standard English dictionaries. Words like *abreaction*, *transference*, *repression*, *displacement* and *unconscious*, which I introduced as Freudian concepts, have been adopted and used to give new

meaning, new values to our knowledge of normal and abnormal behavior (Brill 1938, Introduction, *Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, A. A. Brill translation, Modern Library).

Brill strove throughout his life to bind psychoanalysis with psychiatry and establish it as a medical specialty. As a financially and socially ambitious Jew in America, he wanted to consolidate his own access to medical prestige; he also believed that the new field would be more likely to survive as a medical specialty. Therefore he stubbornly opposed Freud's acceptance of lay analysis, the practice of psychoanalysis by non physicians, and he succeeded in building his own preference for medical exclusivity into the young American psychoanalytic institutions, where they were to leave a bitter and haunting legacy.

However Brill tried to assimilate himself into American Gentile society, his Jewish identity permeated his work. He saw a parallel between Judaism, which preached control of the emotions, and psychoanalysis, in which superego and ego (roughly conscience and reason) were set up in opposition to the biological passions: Brill in a public lecture in 1937 said "The old rabbis preached, 'He who conquers his primitive feelings is as strong as one who can conquer a city' (Heintz 183).

Politically, Brill would likely have been less forceful in his campaign to restrict the practice of psychoanalysis to physicians if he had been more confident of his own

place in society. His New World struggle with his Old World Jewishness left an indelible mark on American psychoanalysis.

Freud recognized Brill's contribution to psychoanalysis in America. He wrote in the preface of the 1932 edition of the *Interpretation of Dreams*: "If psychoanalysis now plays a role in American intellectual life, or if it does so in the future a large part of this result will have to be attributed to this and other activities of Dr. Brill's." Ever fearful, however, lest psychoanalysis be marginalized as a "Jewish science," Freud supported James Jackson Putnam, a Boston Gentile, as first president of the American Psychoanalytic Association over Brill, and Horace Frink, another non-Jew, as President of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, which Brill himself had founded.

But Freud's hope that Gentiles would lead American psychoanalysis was never realized. Putnam founded the Boston Psychoanalytic Society, the second American society and a very influential one, in 1914, but his co-founder, Isidor Coriat (1875-1943), was a Sephardic Jew, a member of the American Jewish Historical Society and married to a rabbi's daughter. The Boston society became home to many refugee analysts after the war, notably two influential couples: Helena and Felix Deutsch, and Edward and Grete Bibring and; and Hans Sachs the first training analyst at the Berlin Institute and the editor of *Imago*.

Meanwhile, Brill's New York Society and Institute maintained its preeminence and its Jewish leadership. In 1937-1938 Bertram Lewin, born in Texas but trained in Berlin, was president. During his term Walter Langer, a Gentile analyst training in Vienna, came back to New York seeking help in getting the remaining Jewish psychoanalysts out of Europe. Lewin refused this help, on the grounds that there were already too many psychoanalysts in the country and certainly in New York (Langer and Gifford 1978).

In 1938, however, Lawrence Kubie succeeded Lewin as president. Kubie was a German Jew, and with another psychoanalyst from a wealthy German Jewish, New York family, Bettina Warburg, he organized the Rescue Committee of the NYPI, which provided passports, money, and jobs for almost all of the Jewish psychoanalysts in Europe who were at risk.

On September 23, 1939 -- Yom Kippur -- Freud asked his doctor, Max Shur, to administer the lethal dose of morphine that would release him from his losing battle with cancer. After his death, centrifugal tendencies in the analytic movement became more apparent. The organizational harmony, such as it was, of the 1930s was followed by the schisms of the forties, also initiated mostly by Jewish analysts. Sandor Rado, a Hungarian Jew who had been director of training at the Berlin Institute, came to New York to take the same position at the New York Psychoanalytic. In 1942 Rado, who shared with Brill the wish for close connection

with the medical establishment, left the NYPI to start a new institute affiliated with the medical school of Columbia University. There he promoted a modification of classical Freudian theory and practice which he called Adaptational Psychoanalysis. The second schism, almost at the same time, began when Karen Horney, whose book *The Neurotic Personality of our Time* had views on sexuality and women which departed from Freud, lost her faculty position at the NYPI. When she resigned in protest, Erich Fromm and William Silverberg (Jews), and Clara Thompson (a Gentile) went with her, and together they founded the Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis. This group also subsequently split over the question of lay analysis; Fromm and Thompson started the William Alanson White Institute, which trained non-physicians, and William Silverberg founded the Institute of the Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital of New York Medical College group associated with New York Medical College, which only trained physicians.

Theodore Reik came to study at the New York Psychoanalytic in 1938. He was a student of Freud's, a non-physician, and in fact had been the subject of Freud's paper "The Problem Of Lay Analysis," with which non-medical psychoanalysts had unsuccessfully argued for their legitimacy against Brill. But Brill had prevailed in the United States, and Reik left the NYPI in [[[year ]]] because his lack of a medical degree meant that he could never be a training

analyst there. He founded the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis in 1948, a prestigious institute for the training of lay analysts. Reik clashed with Brill also on account of his unapologetic pride in his Jewish heritage and its spiritual and ethical values; he felt that Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer, did not adequately understand the place of Freud's Jewishness in his personality and his work.

New York in the late forties became home to a group of prominent Jewish women, refugee analysts. Edith Jacobson made an outstanding contribution to what has come to be known as Object Relations theory in her monograph *The Self and the Object World*. She was imprisoned in Berlin by the Nazis for two and a half years for shielding a patient who was a Jewish Communist. Annie Reich and Elizabeth Gero Heyman convinced the Gestapo to release Jacobson, who had diabetes, because she was ill. This group also included the noted child analyst Berta Bornstein; Margaret Mahler, who formulated a seminal theory of separation and individuation in early childhood; and Annie Reich, who was an early student of narcissism and related phenomena.

Jews figured prominently in West Coast psychoanalysis also. Ernest Simmel organized the first psychoanalytic study group in Los Angeles in 1934. In Europe he and Otto Fenichel had belonged to the group of Jewish analysts that came to be (?) known as "the Freudian Left" (see Jacoby). Other members of the group, which

included Jacobson, eventually emigrated to New York. But Simmel went to California. Fenichel joined him there later, arriving in 1938 in Los Angeles, where he published his great 1945 work, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of the Neuroses*. In 1944 Ernst Simmel organized a conference on anti-Semitism in San Francisco, in which Otto Fenichel also participated. The proceedings were published in the book *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease*, (New York, 1946) and offered a psychoanalytic critique of prejudice. Fenichel proposed that the Jew occupies a special place in the mind of the anti-Semite; the Jew is the authority that oppresses him, and the "primal instincts that he harbors within himself". The conference was an attempt to use psychoanalysis to account for the malignancy of anti-Semitism, a subject that continues to concern psychoanalysts. Earlier Rudolph Lowenstien had written a book *Anti-Semitism and Jew* on that subject)

Elsewhere in the country, other Jewish analysts were directing the course of events. The key figure in San Francisco was Siegfried Bernfeld. Bernfeld was not a physician. He was an outspoken advocate for lay analysis and for less rigid and constricting techniques of psychoanalytic training. In Chicago, Bruno Bettelheim established the Orthogenic School at the University of Chicago, a therapeutic school based on psychoanalytic principles. He wrote about his concentration camp experiences and published several other psychoanalytically-related volumes of broad popular and professional appeal.

Roy Grinker, Sr., from Chicago was one of Freud's last analysands. Before the war Grinker (?) psychoanalyzed Rabbi Joshua Liebman, who subsequently wrote *Peace of Mind*, (1946) a great work that popularized Freudian depth psychology. Two Jewish women also did a great deal to popularize psychoanalysis after WWII; one was Lucy Freeman with her book *Fight against Fears* (1951), and the other was Joanne Greenberg, author of *I never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964). By the end of WWII, the center of psychoanalysis had shifted from Vienna to New York and Boston. This was the heyday of psychoanalysis in the United States, partly thanks to a vogue for the psychoanalytic treatment of "shell shock," which brought analysis into the public eye. Grinker contributed to this awareness, having done notable work treating soldiers who returned emotionally ill from combat.

A new generation of American-born Jewish analysts came to prominence during this Golden Age. In New York, this included Charles Brenner, who came from Boston, Martin Wang, who emigrated from Germany via Italy, and native New Yorkers Jacob Arlow and David Beres. These four founded an influential postgraduate study group and in combination and as individuals made important contributions to the classical psychoanalytic literature. One of these, Brenner's *Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis*, is perhaps the most widely read introduction to psychoanalysis ever published.

In Los Angeles this later generation included Ralph Greenson, the model for Leo Rosten's novel *Captain Newman, MD*, and the movie that was made from it with Gregory Peck. Greenson wrote extensively about psychoanalytic technique.

Another was Leo Rangell, who wrote extensively on psychoanalytic theory, and who has the distinction of having been president of both the American and International Psychoanalytic Associations. Rangell in his nineties remains an important voice in American psychoanalysis.

Although there are no data available about the actual numbers of Jewish vs. Gentile psychoanalysts, during its developing years in this country the Jewish influence has been enormous. How things will develop remains to be seen as the lay analysis issue is resolved and as socio-political questions about psychoanalytic theory come into dispute. Why were American Jews so interested in becoming psychoanalysts?. During the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were two American industries with a preponderance of Jews - movies and psychoanalysis (Gabler 1990). These were new enterprises which offered opportunities for advancement, recognition and financial success to the cohort of first and second generation American Jews. Psychoanalysis probably has an appeal also based on its emphasis on interpretation and exegesis which were central to Jewish tradition and scholarship. But in the final analysis the main determinant might have been the

identification of these Americans with the charismatic Jew and first psychoanalyst  
– Sigmund Freud.

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