

INTRODUCTION

Embodying Rabbis

In a recent review of my earlier work, Miriam Peskowitz has recorded her students' images of traditional Jewish males, imagined as ancient rabbis:

In the imagination of my students, the Rabbis of Roman Palestine and Sassanian Babylonia are 'little old Jewish guys,' 'nice, sweet,' 'kind of grandfatherly.' They are 'bearded' and 'balding.' ... Rabbis are imaged as 'sitting, studying,' 'hunched over,' and 'slight of frame.' They 'would have worn glasses, had they been invented.' My students' ancient 'Rabbis' do not pole vault across the Jordan River to engage a bathing woman who turns out to be a man, and Rabbi Yohanan at that, as in b. Baba Metzia 84a. Nor do they contemplate sexual desires and trade hints about sexual techniques for the marital bedroom (b. Nedarim 20a–b), or hide beneath their teacher's bed to listen to and analyze the sounds of sexual intercourse (b. Hagiga 5b). Invariably, my students think ancient 'Rabbis' are 'very unattractive,' if their bodies can be imagined at all.¹

Peskowitz's students know something about the Rabbis, but there is something else they clearly do not get. In early modern eastern Europe, the ideal Jewish male, the Rabbi or talmudic student, was indeed characterized by qualities that made him very different from, in fact almost

1. Peskowitz, "Imagining," 288.

the exact opposite of, the "knight in shining armor" heartthrob of our romantic culture. The East European Jewish ideal of a gentle, timid, and studious male—*Edelkayt*—moreover, does have origins that are very deeply rooted in traditional Jewish culture, going back at least in part to the Babylonian Talmud. These characteristics, however, were not supposed to render the male even slightly unappealing, let alone "very unattractive." For Peskowitz's American students, even American Jews, the gentleness of the rabbinic male can only be imagined as sexlessness, encoded as unattractiveness, because these students (like most of us) have been molded so thoroughly by the "dominant fiction"² of gender that our culture maintains. A gentle, studious, sweet man can only be imagined as old and nearsighted (i.e., castrated?) and could not possibly be attractive sexually. In the readings that follow this introduction, we will see that such a man is interpreted as anything but sexless within rabbinic texts; indeed, he is represented as the paramount desiring male subject and object of female desire.

The dominant strain within European culture, in contrast, continues to this day to interpret activity, domination, and aggressiveness as "manly" and gentleness and passivity as emasculate or effeminate. In this book, I will argue that the early modern Ashkenazic traditional ideal Jewish male, "unmanned" but not desexualized, has something compelling to offer us in our current moment of search for a feminist reconstruction of male subjectivity (while being ever mindful, at the same time, of the absolute necessity for an equally trenchant critique of that culture for its *own* systems of oppression of women).

As a recent critic, Carole Siegel, has written about the fin de siècle English sexologist Havelock Ellis, one of the consequences of the dominant fiction of gender in our culture involves the patronizing assumption that "men whose deepest sexual desire does not involve dominance of women [i.e., rape] must be in some way physically deficient."³ Ellis considers "the hymen an anatomical expression of that admiration of force which marks the female in her choice of a mate."⁴ Psychoanalyst Frederick Lane continues to reflect this ideology of maleness by assuming confidently that "strength, assertiveness, activity, stoicism, courage, and so forth" are "gender syntonic" for men.⁵ In this, he perpetuates

2. This very useful term is Kaja Silverman's: see *Male Subjectivity*.

3. Siegel, *Male*, 59.

4. Quoted in Craft, *Another Kind*, 90.

5. Lane, "Genital," 147.

the commonly held wisdom of a culture within which nineteenth-century novelist Grant Allen could write:

Hermeria was now beginning to be so far influenced by Alan's personality that she yielded the point with reluctance to his masculine judgement. It must always be so. The man must needs retain for many years to come the personal hegemony he has usurped over the woman; and the woman who once accepts him as lover or as husband must give way in the end, even in matters of principle, to his virile self-assertion. She would be less a woman, he less a man, were any other result possible. Deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex we come on that prime antithesis—the male, active and aggressive; the female, sedentary, passive, and receptive.⁶

And as that consummate representative of Victorian culture, John Ruskin, wrote, "The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest." Women, in contrast, "must be enduringly, incorruptibly, good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation ... wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service."⁷ While this description of "woman" could almost serve as a job description for a traditional rabbi, the application of such norms to male comportment and the rejection of the "masculine" ones by traditional Judaism, as well as the cultivation of activity and even aggressivity in dealing with the outside world for women, led, of course, to a stereotyping of Jews (male and female) as outside the realm of normal sexuality, as queer, as sexually predatory, or as entirely sexless. As Camille Spiess, a French writer of the 1920s opined, Jews were "at best, 'half men, half women.'"⁸

A central claim in this book is that there is something correct—although seriously misvalued—in the persistent European representation of the Jewish man as a sort of woman. More than just an antisemitic

6. Grant Allen, quoted in Reynolds and Humble, *Victorian Heroines*, 41. Note that there is actually tension within this text between indications that the situation of male dominance is natural and that it is historical: "It must always be so," followed immediately by "for many years to come"; but finally we come to something that is "deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex."

7. Quoted in Craft, *Another Kind*, 73. On Ruskin see Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 117–29.

8. Quoted in Mosse, *Image*, 73.

stereotype, the Jewish ideal male as countertype to "manliness" is an assertive historical product of Jewish culture. This assertion constitutes the central new point of this book, in contrast to the consensus view, according to which "[the] ideal of masculinity, indeed modern society as a whole, needed an image against which it could define itself. Those who stood outside or were marginalized by society provided a countertype that reflected, as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the social norm. Such outsiders were either those whose origins, religion, or language was different from the rest of the population or those who were perceived as asocial because they failed to conform to the social norms. For those so marginalized, the search for an identity proved difficult and painful. However, not all outsiders faced the same problems, though basically their options were limited to a denial of their identity or its co-optation by the acceptable norm, until—in the last decades of the nineteenth century—these choices were increased by acts of self-emancipation."⁹

For Jews, male Jews at any rate, one can neatly reverse this picture. Jewish society needed an image against which to define itself and produced the "goy"—the hypermale—as its countertype, as a reverse of its social norm, and its self-identity was hardly difficult or painful (except, of course, for the pain of being mistreated physically). This form of Jewish stereotyping of the gentile Other had enormous historical tenacity. Emblematic, perhaps, of this relationship is the fact that in early modern Europe, the little finger was referred to by gentiles in certain places as "the Jew," while the thumb is called in Yiddish "the goy"! In other words, rather than thinking of the stereotype as a one-way process of domination, we must begin to consider processes of complex mutual specular relations. Premodern Jewish culture, I will argue, frequently represented ideal Jewish men as feminized¹⁰ through various

9. Mosse, *Image*, 56.

10. I write this way to indicate clearly that I am not ascribing some form of actual or essential femininity to certain behaviors or practices, as to a Jungian anima. For the toxic effects of that ideology, see Connell, *Masculinities*, 12–15; and cf., now especially, Garber, *Vice-versa*, 211–14. (I anticipate returning to this critique in a future work, D. V.) I am rather marking these performances as "femme" within the context of a particular culture's performatives, and particularly as it intersects with other cultural formations. The point then is not to reify and celebrate the "feminine" but to dislodge the term. "Phallus" and the "feminine" (and in only a slightly different register, "Jew") are fatally equivocal terms in Western discourse, insisting on their disconnection from real human beings of particular groups—men, women, Jews—at the same time that they inescapably declare their connection with these groups. Weinger goes through contortions to insist that everyone is "Jewish" but Jews only more so, and that there can be Jews (such as

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discursive means. This is not, moreover, a representation that carries with it any hint of internalized contempt or self-hatred. Quite the opposite; it was through this mode of conscious alternative gendering that Jewish culture frequently asserted its identity over-against its surroundings. If anything, as we shall see, it was the process of "Emancipation" of the late nineteenth century that produced both the pain and the difficulty of Jewish (male) identity.

By suggesting that the Jewish man was in Europe a sort of "woman," I am thus not claiming a set of characteristics, traits, behaviors that are essentially female but a set of performances that are read as nonmale within a given historical culture.¹¹ This culture can be very broadly described as Roman in its origins and as European in its scope and later history.¹² It is the culture of romance that, while always contested—in large part by "feminized" Christian religious men—maintained hegemony as a male ideal, ever gaining intensity through the nineteenth century and beyond.¹³

Bernadette Brooten has described well the Roman origins of this culture: "Active and passive constitute foundational categories for Roman-period culture; they are gender coded as masculine and feminine respectively. In their presentations of a wide range of sexual behaviors and orientations, astrologers often categorized an active sexual role as masculine and a passive sexual role as feminine; for this reason they described passive men as effeminate and active women as masculine."¹⁴

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Weininger) who escape being Jewish; by doing so he provides only one dramatic example of this aporia. For the coinage itself, compare Ed Cohen's "'fem'-men-ists" (E. Cohen, "Are," 174). I had, in fact, for a long time considered "fernmenize" but worried that it would be read as a pun on "men" and not on "femme." My usage further distinguishes the cultural processes that I am describing from those referred to when one speaks of the "feminization of the synagogue," by which is meant the fact that in certain "assimilating" communities only women typically attended the synagogues (at the same time that Protestant churches were being feminized in the same sense). This phenomenon, discussed most recently and cogently by Paula Hyman, is not what I am talking about here (Hyman, *Gender*, 24–25).

11. The project has nothing to do with men "getting in touch with their feminine sides" or the anima or "androgynous Judaism" but rather with unsettling and destabilizing the cultural model(s) of gender that such formulations and movements underwrite and reinforce for our culture (Garber, *Vice-versa*, 223–26).

12. Veyne, "Homosexuality."

13. More accurately, as pointed out by George Mosse, the romanticism of the nineteenth century involved a fantasized revival of medieval romance (Mosse, *Nationalism*, 8). In his newest book, Mosse provides a much more detailed and nuanced account of what elements are retained or reappropriated from early ideals—Roman martial ones and medieval chivalrous ones—and what are wholly transformed in the production of modern manliness (*Image*).

14. Brooten, *Early Christian*.

This paradigm can be asserted as the dominant fiction of Roman cultural engendering.

Like any dominant fiction, this one does not necessarily represent the "real" experience of Roman subjectivity. It was, moreover, vulnerable to breakdown under conditions of historical pressure.¹⁵ The early Rabbis constitute an instance of opposition to the representation of masculinity as activity and dominance, just as their later analogs in modern Europe would resist romantic ideas of masculinity like those of Ellis and Ruskin. Rabbinic culture was originally formed at a moment of great ferment within Roman society, in the period known as the Second Sophistic (approximately the second century C.E.), within which new gender paradigms were forming throughout the Empire and Jews and Christians were playing important roles in such formations. Both early rabbinic Jews and early Christians resisted the Roman imperial power structure through "gender bending," thus marking their own understanding that gender itself is implicated in the maintenance of political power.¹⁶ Various symbolic enactments of "femaleness," as constructed within a particular system of genders—among them asceticism, submissiveness, retiring to private spaces, and interpretation of circumcision in a particular way—were adopted variously by Christians or Jews as acts of resistance against the Roman culture of masculinist power wielding. This point is made by Virginia Burrus about early Christianity: "For men, the pursuit of Christian asceticism entailed the rejection of public life and therefore of the hierarchies of office and gender; 'in this respect, their opponents were not far off the mark when they insinuated that male ascetics were 'feminized' through their rejection of the most basic cultural expressions of male identity.'"¹⁷

Judith Perkins has described the situation thus: "Societies are char-

15. In her recent work, Carlin Barton is engaged more and more in documenting the interruption of the fictions of masculinity—under circumstances not entirely unlike those that attended the crisis in the dominant fiction in the United States after World War II, as demonstrated by Silverman—in Roman culture (Barton, "Savage Miracles"; "All Things").

16. In other words, the "ambivalent cultural space" that Garber speaks of (*Vested Interests*, 229) is constituted at least in part, and very early on within Jewish culture, out of a fraught attraction/resistance to the dominant cultural models of gender and its relation to the public/private opposition. In *Making*, Burrus includes very important reflections on the question of the cultural universality or specific historicity of this very distinction which, as we see also from the rabbinic material analyzed here, is so implicated in constructions of gender as well.

17. Burrus, *Making*, 14. The similarities with the Rabbis are obvious. The difference, which is equally striking, is that for the Rabbis this feminization was not coeval with asceticism, a point that I shall be making throughout this book.

acterized by competing relations of power, but, distanced by history, cultures often appear univocal. Either only the discourse produced by the dominant culture is left or, dulled by time, our ears are not keen enough to overhear the competing strains. Such a situation adversely affects the understanding and tracing of social change over time. It is by good fortune, therefore, that, from the social body known as the Roman empire, narratives remain that embody the voices—the values and the passions—of alienated groups at the brink of momentous change."¹⁸ The Rabbis were only one of such alienated groups within the Roman political and cultural sphere. Early Christians were another, and there were yet others neither Christian nor Jewish.

The Greek romances also first appear on the scene during this period of ferment in the construction of gender and especially masculinity. Perkins has pointed out that "until recently, the Greek-ideal romance found few admirers; one of the genre's perceived flaws was its heroes' characterization. Commentators faulted the heroes for being weak, passive, and overly prone to threaten or seek suicide. The romance protagonists did not conform, it appears, to contemporary expectations of behavior proper for the male lead."¹⁹ Paradoxically it seems, the heroes of these romances were not romantic heroes or even "real men." There is a wonderful moment in Achilles Tatius's novel *Leucippe and Cleitophon* in which our hero is being beaten and not fighting back. After a while, the hero and first-person narrator declares that his opponent "grew tired of thumping me and I of philosophizing."²⁰ "Philosophizing" is thus equated with passivity, with not thumping back. But as Perkins herself notes, "Even as it has been in the modern period, in antiquity such mildness [as that of the Stoic or the hero of the novel] could be misconstrued as cowardice."²¹ That same "philosophizing," how-

18. Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 124.

19. Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 90.

20. (5.23.7); see Goldhill, *Foucault's*, 95.

21. Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 91. In demonstrating the shifts in sensibility within Hellenistic/Roman culture at the time of the Rabbis (not the periodization that she uses), Perkins adduces the difference between a scene in one of the Hellenistic romances and its Homeric intertext. When Hector is beseeched by his mother, exposing her breasts, to remain in Troy, he does the "manly" thing and goes off, nevertheless, to war. In contrast, in Chariton's *Charaeas and Callirhoe*, the hero, faced with exactly the same plea and action in support of the plea, attempts suicide (Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 100). Perkins quite convincingly explains this (and other actions of the romances) as instantiations of a new Stoic ethic. Epictetus explicitly cites the heroes of epic and tragedy as "anti-models" because they imagine that "great things" reside in "wars and deaths and the destruction of cities" rather than in self-control (101). While clearly there are enormous differences between the Rabbis and the Stoics—for the former suicide was never an option—there yet

ever, is associated (as nonphallic Christian maleness is as well) with asexuality. In the same text we read an incredulous response to a claim of virginity on the part of the heroine who had been captured by robbers and pirates: "You a virgin? Were the robbers eunuchs? Was it a pirate den of philosophers?!"²² The Rabbis, I repeat, provide a uniquely different exemplum of this oppositional form of masculinity in that they, like "philosophers," did not regard violence as enhancing or definitional for masculinity; for them, being philosophers (i.e., students of Torah) did not entail entering into a eunuchlike state by any means. Rabbis had—indeed were—bodies, as the texts referred to by Peskowitz, among many others, would clearly establish.

However, and quite paradoxically, it is also this very insistence on embodiedness that marks the male Jew as being female, for maleness in European culture has frequently carried a sense of not-being-a-body, while the body has been inscribed as feminine. A medievalist, Clare Kinney, has recently written of another definitive moment in European cultural history: "Real men—that is, representative Arthurian heroes—don't have bodies."²³ If this "not-having-a-body" is defined as manliness, then Jewish men were not "real men" at all, for they quite decisively were bodies, were defined by their bodies. This idealization of the male body and its reinscription as spirit with no body reached its apotheosis in the nineteenth century. As George Mosse has observed, "Above all, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, male beauty symbolized timeless order."²⁴ The Lacanian distinction between the phallus and the penis reinscribes the identical dualism that privileges "male" incorporality over "female" embodiedness.²⁵ This cultural motive, which goes back at least to the pre-Socratics in Greek culture,

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remain to be fully explored the ways in which rabbinic care of the self is part of the new techniques of the self being developing in their world. Thus, if the supreme ethic for Stoics was to be willing to die when hope of success at one's task had been lost, leading to the athlete's/martyr's choice of death rather than defeat, for the Rabbis, staying alive at *almost* any price was a fundamental value. Presumably this would have rendered a Rabbi even more "feminized" than a gentle Stoic sage. I hope to treat these questions more fully in a work-in-progress. For another fascinating parallel between the Romances and early Christian sensibilities, see Shaw, "Passion," 9.

22. (6.21). See Goldhill, *Foucault's*, 116.

23. Kinney, "(Dis)embodied Hero," 49. For quite a different—but not entirely irreconcilable—reading of the same text, see Dinshaw, "Kiss."

24. Mosse, *Nationalism*, 31.

25. An earlier version of this introduction included an extensive discussion of the Lacanian phallus. At the urging of good critical friends, I have decided to make that discussion into a separate paper which will appear elsewhere, D. V.

privileges the ideal over the real, the homogeneous over the heterogeneous, and thence the phallus (as an ideal abstraction from the penis) over the female body, the sex that is not one.²⁶ Insofar as the penis of flesh—as opposed to the phallus, which is a platonic idea of the penis—is paradoxically feminine in the European Imaginary because it is body,²⁷ it is this insistence on the penis that inscribes the Jewish male as forever carnal and thus female. Another way of making the same point would be to avow that for rabbinic culture, femminization is not equivalent to castration precisely because masculinity was not defined by possession of the phallus. To resist this sort of patterning, rabbinic thought must be antidualistic.

It seems highly significant that nowhere in rabbinic literature is there a representation, for instance, that would have the body of the embryo supplied by the mother while the spirit is provided by the father, nor, a fortiori, one in which the father supplies the form and the mother the raw matter. Indeed, the standard and explicit myth of conception in rabbinic texts is a partnership of three in that the father supplies the white parts of the body: bones, teeth, the white of the eye, brain matter; the mother the red parts: blood, muscle, hair, the pupil of the eye; and God supplies the intelligence, the spirit, the soul, eyesight, motion of the limbs, and the radiance of the face (Nidda 31a).²⁸ In other words that which in many of the surrounding Greco-Roman cultures was bestowed by the father is provided here by God. For rabbinic Judaism, the father and mother provide the matter—the white and the pupil—of the eye, and only God provides spirit, the capacity of the eye to see. The father and the mother provide the muscle and sinew; only God provides the spirit, the active motor capacity.

Lacanian will immediately object, of course, that according to their theory no one, in fact, has the phallus. And that is certainly true. Jacques Lacan obviously escapes one crude and vulgar possible (and actual) reading of Freud, the "penis envy" tradition, which projects men as the possessors of the phallus that women desire and can achieve only

26. This sort of patterning presumes an allegorical metaphysics, and in its crudest naturalizations, an allegorical physics, as well. Woman is man's signifier. As such, she may never be the thing signified, but allegorical discourse allows her to be *taken for* the signified as a kind of reading procedure. And man is God's signifier in much the same way.

27 Montrelay, "Why Did You."

28. This is based, of course, on a notion of menstrual blood as being the female equivalent of semen (Satlow, "Wasted Seed," 158–62). Here again, as Satlow points out, rabbinic conceptions are quite different from the ones of the more Hellenized, Greek-writing Jews, whose views were Aristotelian.

through possessing a man as an "appendage to the penis" (in Freud's charming formulation) or by giving birth to men. For Lacan, castration consists specifically of the recognition by all subjects, male and female, that they can never possess the phallus. It nevertheless remains the case that for Lacan, to have the phallus remains the *desire* of all people always and everywhere, male and female, even if "having the phallus" is only an imaginary phenomenon.²⁹ The phallus is for Lacan a psychic universal, while I avow that the "phallus" is not even so "real" an entity as a psychic universal, however imaginary or symbolic, but a culturally specific representation of human desire and fulfillment, one belonging to the dominant strand of European culture but resisted and refused (albeit not entirely successfully) by a subaltern culture that subsisted within the dominant one, namely, the culture of rabbinic Judaism. I shall argue that the phallus, for which universal status is claimed by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, is in fact not a universal but a culturally specific representation of sexual difference and of human adequation. Freud and Lacan were misled by the pressures of their own cultural situation, not in the sense that this "charge" is usually made—that Freud was simply a Victorian or simply a Jewish male—but rather that Freud's and Lacan's ideas on this matter were formed by the entire tradition of Western culture going back to the Greeks. The only way to dislodge this representation, then, is to find an Archimedean point "outside of" European phallogocentric culture, something that will not be easy to do, given the historical relations between that culture and its interlocutors, in our case the ways that Judaism is from its very beginning both a part of and apart from Hellenistic/Roman/European culture.

Though hardly feminist, rabbinic Jewish culture thus refuses prevailing modes through which the surrounding cultures represent maleness as active spirit, femaleness as passive matter, a representation that has dominated much (if certainly not all) of European cultural imagination and practice. Maleness is every bit as corporeal as femaleness in this patriarchal culture. This refusal provides a partial explanation for how Jewish cultural imaginings could conceive of a valued masculinity as being feminized in the terms of the dominant Roman culture. When Europe has sought female equality and autonomy, this has been achieved through dis-embodiment of the female;³⁰ we have, rather, to em-

29. Lacan, "Meaning," 83–84.

30. D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*.

body men, to take away the phallus and leave only the penis behind. Only a new cultural theme—not a mere transformation of the old one—could re-embodiment the male. We critically require a historicizing relativization of the psychoanalytic account of the phallus, via what might be called an ethnography of male subjectivity. This book is intended as one small chapter in such an ethnography,³¹ a chapter on rabbinic Jewish maleness. I am not claiming an antiphallic location for an essentialized and dehistoricized Jewish culture but rather something much more complex—and, I dare hope, more convincing—to wit the elaboration, at certain moments of Jewish cultural history and within particular political conditions, of the possibility of an embodied male who fully within the order of sexuality and even paternity, is nevertheless not "masculine" or "manly" in the terms of the dominant fiction and thus inscribes the possibility of male subjects who refuse to be men. In a sense then my argument is congruent with those, particularly Zionists, such as most recently Aviva Cantor, who see Jewish masculinity as being different owing to a peculiar political situation.³² The difference is that whereas they pathologize this difference and seek only to end it, I critically celebrate it and seek to retrieve it as an Archimedean lever to help move the world of the Western phallogocentric culture.

In the antisemitic imaginary of Christian Europe (and perhaps Muslim Africa and Asia as well), male Jews have been represented traditionally as female,³³ but as Sheila Briggs points out with reference to the latest forms of this representation, this obtained only with respect to "the negative sense of the feminine."³⁴ There is, however, a positive signification to "feminization" as well. In a cultural system within which there are only two genders, the only way to symbolize "refusing to be a man"³⁵ may be an assertion that one is, in some sense, a woman. This represents then, at least potentially, a positive oppositional identity to "manliness" that is neither "castrated" nor emasculate, because it does not read femininity as lack. To make a point early that I hope will become clearer throughout, it is not the identification with women that bears here the "feminist" potential but the "refusal to be a man." The identification with women is an epiphenomenon of resisting manliness, but not one that implies "castrated" status for either the unmanly man

31. Cf. Gilmore, *Manhood*, and Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's*.

32. Cantor, *Jewish Women*.

33. Mirrer, "Representing," 181.

34. Briggs, "Images," 256.

35. Stoltenberg, *Refusing*.

or the woman.³⁶ Traditionally many Jewish men identified *themselves* as feminized, beginning with the Talmud and through an opposition to "Roman" ideals of the male, and understood that feminization as a positive aspect of their cultural identity. Accordingly, while not feminist, rabbinic culture might yet prove a resource in the radical reconstruction of male subjectivities that feminism calls for.

Lest this appear an idyllic picture, I must introduce at this juncture some less than idyllic images, powerful moments within which early rabbinic discourse is not resistant to Roman representations of masculinity and violent exercise of sexual power but fully complicit with them. Michael Satlow has demonstrated that Palestinian rabbinic culture in the Roman period did not eschew representations of penetration as a mark of status. The most dramatic example of this is a text that Satlow cites from the Palestinian Talmud: "'May the house of Yoab never be without someone suffering from a discharge or an eruption, or a male who handles the spindle, or one slain by the sword, or one lacking bread' [2 Sam. 3:29]. 'A male who handles the spindle'—this is Yoash, 'they inflicted punishments on Yoash' [2 Chr. 24:24]. Taught Rabbi Ishmael: This teaches that they appointed over him cruel guards who had never known woman, and they abused him as a man abuses a woman."³⁷ For this text, then, punishment consists of being anally penetrated—a "castration" that renders the man a woman, that is, "a male who handles the spindle." Satlow writes, "The language and superficial topics under discussion by Palestinian rabbis of the third and fourth centuries might be biblical, but their assumptions about homo-eroticism certainly are not. Underneath these few and scattered traditions lurks the same complex attitude toward the pathic as exhibited in Roman sources. For a man to allow himself to be penetrated was tantamount to him 'effeminizing' himself, a prospect viewed with loathing by (at least) the male elite of antiquity." As Satlow emphasizes, however, "this same concern with the penetrated male did not exist in Babylonia."³⁸ The point is thus not to marginalize as "foreign," and clearly not to deny, the existence of such representations within rabbinic Jew-

36. See the very interesting discussion in Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 141–46.

37. Palestinian Talmud Qiddushin 1:7, 61a; translation in Satlow, "They Abused," 14, slightly modified.

38. Satlow, "They Abused," 11, 15. As we will see in chapter 3, it is Babylonian Rabbis who represent themselves positively as feminized, while in Palestinian versions of the same story (the legend of Resh Lakish) this motif does not appear. In Palestine, Resh Lakish remains a military hero even after his conversion to the study of Torah, while in Babylonia within seconds after the conversion, his lance no longer works.

ish culture of the talmudic period, still less to conjure up some ahistorical Jewish essence that would resist them always and everywhere, but rather to ferret out the evidence for an equally significant discourse that is resistant to the dominant fiction of an inexorable association of male gender and sexuality with power and violence and of female gender—that is, being penetrated—with humiliation.

I am not arguing for the absence of certain voices and patterns of meaning within rabbinic culture but rather for the presence of other voices within the somewhat discordant chorus that makes up the multivocality of rabbinic discourse on the body, gender, and sex. I could make a case as well for the dominance of these other voices at certain junctures of rabbinic textuality with the material conditions of Jewish lives, but I don't need to argue for such dominance in order for my text to do its work. In my eyes, my book will have succeeded if it does no more than convince readers that the discourse I have sought is one valid among the multiple discourses of Jewish cultural life, materialized on the one hand as a highly valued text for study, the Talmud, and, on the other, in the particular practices (or better, some of the particular practices) of Jewish cultural life at a distinctive moment in its history on the cusp of European modernity.

It hardly needs saying yet again that the official discourse of this culture was certainly sympathetic neither to women nor to homoeroticism, and yet it is important that I say it here lest I be perceived (once more) as denying these nearly self-evident facts. Modern Jewish "Orthodoxy" is marked by pervasive (though not ubiquitous) misogyny and by nearly ubiquitous homophobia. Clearly the seedbed for extremely violent discourses of gender and sexuality is well prepared within rabbinic textuality; my task here is not to deny the existence of these seedbeds but to cultivate other ones that are equally "there" in the texts, even if not highly regarded or even noted by the current social institutions within which rabbinic Judaism is (mostly) lived.

Jewish Culture and the "Rise of Heterosexuality"

I find it necessary at this point to clarify some terms of art that I will be using—some of them fairly idiosyncratically—throughout this book. I shall begin with my notion of "queer" and then move on to "heterosexual" and "homophobia." Since the term "queer," its extension, and its political valence are highly contested I wish to explain my

usage of "queer" and "queer theory." I understand this to be an investigation that systematically puts into question any praxis, theoretical or political, of the "natural" in sexuality, praxes that historically in our culture have naturalized heterosexuality, enforcing heteronormativity.³⁹ Queer theory is theory that recognizes that human desire—that is, even desire for "straight sex"—is queer, excessive, not teleological or natural, and is that for which the refusal of heteronormativity on the part of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and others provides a privileged but not exclusive model.⁴⁰ The conformations of desire are a cultural construction, and traditional Judaic culture, for all its well-known abhorrence of a certain homosexual act, male anal intercourse, and its near-universal inducement of marriage and procreation,⁴¹ was *not* a "heterosexual" culture—because "heterosexuality" had not yet been "invented." As Michael Satlow has recently pointed out, "The rabbis [of the talmudic period] considered male sexual attraction to other males to be unexceptional,"⁴² and "no evidence suggests that the rabbis defined people by the gender of the object of their sexual desire" (24).

Heterosexuality is a peculiar institution of contemporary Euro-American culture. It has been best defined by David M. Halperin as "the production of a population of human males who are (supposedly) incapable of being sexually excited by a person of their own sex *under any circumstances*" and has been referred to by him as "a cultural event without, so far as I know, either precedent or parallel."⁴³ Neither the assumption that some (even most) people prefer to have sex with people who have different genitals than they do, nor even the tabooing of certain or all same-sex genital acts, constitutes heterosexuality.⁴⁴ Only the premise that same-sex desire is *abnormal*, that it constitutes, in Foucault's words, a separate species of human being, creates this category. There is an enormous gap between the earlier condemnation of one

39. Freud, despite his somewhat tarnished reputation in this regard owing, in part, to the American Ego psychologists' reading of his texts, can plausibly be identified as the originator of queer theory (Freud, "Three Essays"). Bersani (*Freudian Body*) and Dean ("On the Eve") explicate Freud in this regard.

40. Others (and indeed, I, in other contexts) use the term differently as a theoretical approach to identity formation and not a theory of sexuality. The two usages are complexly related in ways that go far beyond the scope of this introduction. In "On the Eve," 124, Dean has very interesting things to say about this motive.

41. D. Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews?"

42. Satlow, "They," 18.

43. Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 44,

44. In his latest book, Halperin has expanded on this point compellingly (*Saint Foucault*, 44).

who pursues certain forms of pleasure as a sinner, on the same order as one who eats forbidden foods, for instance, and the modern placing of that person into a special taxon as an abnormal human being. This is not to say, of course, that the earlier formation was more benign to those who engaged in same-sex practices than the latter; but the production of the heterosexual as the normal type of human being has powerful effects that ripple throughout the projects of constructing gender within a social formation such as our modern one. And as Satlow has concluded, "Penetration, not same-sex desire was problematic for the rabbis."⁴⁵

The "normal" male in our social formation, and especially the adolescent, is engaged in a constant project of demonstrating to himself that he is not queer, that he does not desire other men. This is quite different, I hypothesize, from socialization in a society where it is assumed that men do desire other men but it is forbidden to do anything (or some things) about that desire, that is, a culture without heterosexuality. There is accordingly a necessary connection between heterosexuality and homophobia. Homophobia is not an accidental or facultative adjunct of heterosexuality but its enabling condition.

One of the richest and most evocative descriptions of the actual psychic workings of homophobia in the American adolescent male is one by Larry Bush:

No one called me faggot, but I was *younger* than all of them—admitted to school at four and a half, hanging around with my brother's friends, always the aspiring innocent, always the willing victim. Gentle but slow with girls. Quick to cry. Thank God I had a great outside jump shot in basketball and could handle a bad hop like Brooks Robinson. So the misconceived jokes ("Take Bromo, homo, and wake up feeling yourself") and careless exclamations ("You suck") were rarely aimed at me.

Yet now, as a dry-boned adult, I walk the streets, ride the subways, meet my public, with the fear of being considered homosexual shaping my posture, wardrobe and facial expressions. I'll carry a dirty canvas shoulder bag rather than a nice leather one—better to be considered an overage hippie than a queer. If I cross my legs (knee to knee) on the subway, I'll be sure to match it with a sober, "masculine" look on my face....

Whatever happened to the joy of being a boy who loved other boys, who giggled himself to near insensibility with boyfriends ...? How is it that the subtle warnings about being effeminate have completely overwhelmed the warmth and pleasure of same-sex bonding?⁴⁶

45. Satlow, "They," 24.

46. Bush, "To Be," 34.

Crucial in Bush's account is the ratio between the necessity to demonstrate that one is not effeminate and the rejection of intimacy between men, both driven by the exigency to certify "straight" status, that one is a certifiable heterosexual. In other words, homosexual panic and the consequent homophobia that it generates become the source of a violent impulse, verbal or physical or both. This violence, I suggest, is directed toward both women and gay men alike in the effort to prove (to oneself) that one is not queer. Gay-bashing and wife-beating are close companions.⁴⁷

Homophobia in this exact sense is a product of the modern culture of heterosexuality,⁴⁸ in which male sexual desire for men or any effeminate behavior threatens to reveal and expose that the man is essentially not straight but queer.⁴⁹ Without a doubt, and to somewhat understate the case, male-female sexual relationships were nearly exclusively prized within traditional Jewish culture. In that sense, one could surely claim that rabbinic Jewish culture has always been heteronormative, even if not heterosexual, that is, homophobic. The absence of heterosexuality permits a much greater scope for forms of male intimacy, eroticized and otherwise: "Who is a friend?" a midrash asks. "He that one eats with, drinks with, reads with, studies with, sleeps with, and reveals to him all of his secrets—the secrets of Torah and the secrets of the way of the world."⁵⁰ "Sleeps with" does *not* have the euphemistic value that it has in English or German, but the text is certainly reaching for a very intense and passionate level of male-male physical intimacy here. The "way of the world" is a somewhat ambiguous metaphorical term that can refer to several areas of worldly life, including business,

47. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 88–89; *Epistemology* 186; D. A. Miller, "Cage," 112.

48. Jonathan Ned Katz, *Invention*, 33–55. This chapter of Katz's is one of the most convincing demonstrations and exemplifications of Foucault's hypothesis about the invention of sexuality that I have yet seen. Unfortunately this fine book is marred by a cynical and vicious foreword by Gore Vidal that demonstrates only that he had not even read the book when he wrote the foreword.

49. Note the difference between this account and a superficially similar one that treats the man policing "himself for traces of femininity" as thereby victimized (Lentricchia, "Patriarchy," 743) or that elides the difference between "teaching men who will not conform how to alienate and despise themselves"—and "even men who do conform" (774–75)! For discussion, see Edelman, "Redeeming." I am not commiserating here with the "poor" male who "submits" to heterosexuality by dominating others, but with the victims of this practice. Lentricchia's discourse is reminiscent of those Israeli liberals, like Golda Meir, who are most angry at the Palestinians because the latter have "forced them to be oppressors."

50. Shechter Aboth, chapter 10.

but especially sex.⁵¹ Male intimacy, it seems, for the talmudic culture includes the physical contact of being in bed together while sharing verbally the most intimate of experiences, a pattern not unknown in other cultures. The image of two men in bed together talking of their sexual experiences with women is reminiscent of ethnographic descriptions of Barasana (Colombian) tribesmen, lying in hammocks, fondling each other and talking about sex with women.⁵² Thus, while we cannot draw conclusions about the sexual practices of rabbinic men from such a passage, we can certainly, it seems to me, argue that it bespeaks a lack of "homosexual panic" such as that necessitated by the modern formation known as "heterosexuality." The absence of homosexual panic in pre-modern Jewish culture permitted a much greater scope of behavior coded as "feminine," within the larger cultural context, to be normative in male performance in general and in affective relations between men. As we shall see in chapter 4, this very structure for the production of gentler, antimacho men was not thereby rendered empowering for women. If anything, this "kinder, gentler" form of patriarchy may have solidified certain forms of male power.

I am convinced that homophobia is a significant tool of misogyny, or, better, that homophobia and misogyny are intimately imbricated with each other, as Larry Bush's paradigmatic account richly suggests. This alone should make clear the urgent need for antihomophobic (or even better, queer) cultural criticism to be directed as forcefully as possible against misogyny. This does not mean, unfortunately, that no gay man or lesbian is misogynist or that no feminist is homophobic. Wayne Koestenbaum has written of his own work: "I pursue these slant readings because I believe that I am drawing on a system comprehensive enough to unravel a range of perplexities. This system is, in essence, feminist: it questions heterosexuality's privilege and forces masculine writing to take seriously the threat of 'queerness.'"⁵³ I would seriously

51. As indicated by the following text among others: "When his wife died, Rabbi Tarfon said to her sister during the mourning period: Marry me and raise your sister's children. And even though he married her, he did not behave with her according to the way of the world until after thirty days." (Kohellet Rabba, 9. See also Bereshit Rabba, 22.) Now although the sexual meaning is not the most frequent one for this collocation, it is certainly a readily available one. Thus while it is a meaningless claim (because unfalsifiable) that this is what the author of this text "intended," it is hard to escape concluding that the sexual connotation would have been present for any recipient of this text.

52. Greenberg, *Construction*, 71.

53. Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, 5.

question, however, whether all critique that calls itself feminist questions the privilege of heterosexuality.⁵⁴ Similarly, I find Koestenbaum's declaration that "when men are sexually engaged with each other they are acting against and not in accord with the wishes of patriarchy" curiously unhistorical. Is there only one patriarchy, pristine, timeless, changeless? Have there not been patriarchies (e.g., Greece of the fifth century B.C.E.) in which the sexual engagement of men with men was in accord with the wishes of patriarchy, further enacting the thoroughgoing marginalization of women and the age- and class-related systems of male domination that marked those cultures as patriarchal?

Alan Bray has, for instance, explicitly considered "the ways in which sexual activity between men, far from being an adversarial practice, can merely repeat prevailing patterns of dominance and subordination in cultures characterized by gender polarity."⁵⁵ Of course I am not claiming that the "political dreams of a feminist and of a gay man [necessarily] have nothing in common," only resisting the implication that they *necessarily* (naturally?) have something in common.⁵⁶ At the same time I insist that they ought to have (nearly) everything in common, for there is no partial liberation. I share Koestenbaum's vision of a criticism anti-patriarchal, feminist, and queer but am less certain (than he was when he wrote the book, at any rate) that it is so easily reachable. In fine, the question of how focusing on the historical constructions of masculinity, a project in which both the subject and object of discourse is male, can remain feminist and not be a more sophisticated reinstatement of androcentrism remains for me a problem and an open question.

An intentionally feminist endeavor, my project is, nevertheless, a venture in the description of male subjectivity, its formation, regulation, and construction. I do not wish this to be taken as, or worse, to *be*, complicit with a project or a politics that is beside the point of or even hostile to feminism—as a lot of "men's studies" or gender studies seem to be.⁵⁷ Much of *that* endeavor seems to end up conniving, in fact, with reinvestments and reinforcements of *heterosexuality*, with what Chris Craft has called "the excruciating acoustics of the so-called men's movement (heady jamborees at The Tom-Tom Club, itself something of

54. Edwards, *Erotics*, 10–11

55. Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 3.

56. Edwards, *Erotics*, 44.

57. Modleski, *Feminism*.

a traveling circus), the major impetus behind which seems to be to dispel a circumambient sissy-boy anxiety by forging fashionably dysfunctional males into iron men and warrior dads."⁵⁸ In contrast to a men's studies that would be collusive with such a men's movement, this study is engaged not in dispelling sissy-boy anxiety but in revalorizing and reeroticizing the sissy. I believe, then, that feminism needs to liberate not only women but also femininity, *not* because "femininity" is the natural state of women but because the "repudiation of femininity" has played a central role in the oppression of women within European culture.⁵⁹ Jewish culture has something to teach us about the liberation, the raising up of femininity, and while the feminist return will not be direct because of the ways that Jewish culture itself has been oppressive of women, it is nonetheless a real potentiality.⁶⁰

Donald Hall has recently referred to Stephen Heath's claim that "men's writing, male discourse, will simply be the same again; there is no politically progressive project that can work through that idea [of writing the male body] (unless perhaps in and from areas of gay men's experience, in a literature for that)." As Hall correctly observes, Heath ignores differences *within* the male body, other than those of sexuality, notably differences of race and class: "I submit that during and around the [nineteenth century], the caricatured bodies of lower-class, Irish, and non-European men provided remarkably similar sites [similar to the bodies of women and gay men] for the play of classist, racist, and imperialist beliefs."⁶¹ Certainly for at least the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, the caricatured bodies of Jewish men also provided such a site (see Plate 1); however, my argument is not only that the oppressed male body is a site of discourse for his (male) oppressors

58. Craft, *Another Kind*, 15.

59. A very concrete example of this can be found in Susan Estrich's *Real Rape*. Estrich shows how the traditional rule requiring the "reasonable woman" to have engaged in actual physical combat in order to argue that she was raped renders her "not a woman at all. Their [the judges'] version of a reasonable person is one who does not scare easily, one who does not feel vulnerable, one who is not passive, one who fights back, not cries. The reasonable woman, it seems, is not a schoolboy 'sissy'; she is a real man" (65). One does not by any means have to be an essentialist in order to see how the masculinist value system that despises sissies oppresses female subjects here just as it oppresses deviant male subjects.

60. Contrast the approach of Barbara Breitman, who, though sympathetic, considers the "affective program" of rabbinic Jewish maleness pathological and proposes a wholesale adoption of Robert Bly's "Tom-Tom Club" in order to "liberate the energy" (Breitman, "Lifting Up" 107).

61. D. E. Hall, "Muscular Christianity," 5–6.

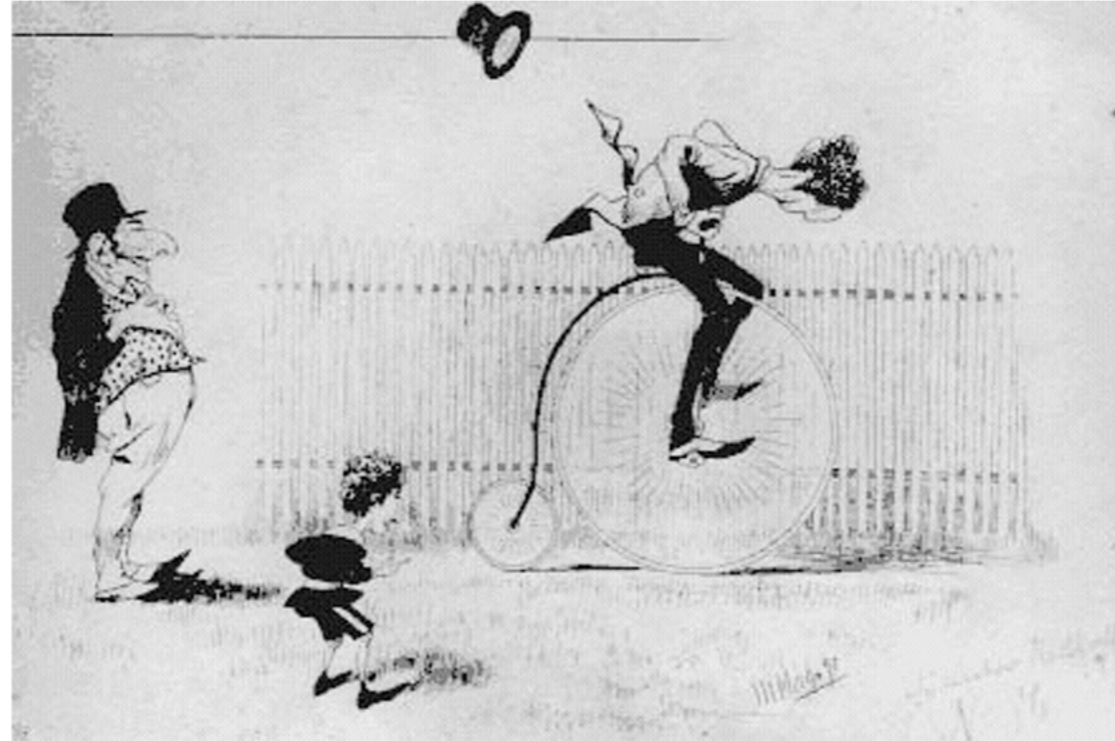


Plate 1.

The Caricatured Body of the Male Jew. Cartoon of a Jew falling off a bicycle, by H. Mayr, 1890.
(Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.)

but that the submissive, dominated male body is also a site of knowledge.⁶² Surely what defines all of the cited groups over-against the male body that cannot write itself progressively is that they are all not in power over (all) others. This is almost tangibly the case for ancient Athens, within which adult citizen males penetrate all other bodies and may not be penetrated by them, thus an almost literal phallocracy. In other words, I suggest that the very fact of being politically dominant, of hav-

62. An analogous point is made by Lori Lefkowitz when she argues that the subversion of the pattern of primogeniture for which Genesis is famous is to be explained "perhaps because they [i.e., the ancient Israelites] may have been a relatively small, militarily weak, and young people" ("Coats," 19). Satlow also makes an analogous point: "Romans saw the individual citizen male as primarily responsible for sexual self-control; according to the rabbis, it is God, whose words are revealed through rabbinic interpretation, who sets sexual limits. This difference, in turn, might well have arisen from the differing political conditions between Romans and Jews. For the (wealthy) adult male Roman citizen, sexual penetration, as well as sexual restraint, were political acts, assertions of one's power over others and oneself. That is, for the Roman, the subjugated Jews would have been linked, on some level, to those who were penetrated, an idea that clearly would have made the Jews uncomfortable. For the rabbis (who were juridically virtually powerless) and the Jews (who were politically dominated by Rome) of late antiquity, sexual penetration and self-control were not understood politically" ("They," 24).

ing empires, produces mystification of the male body.⁶³ As an instructive example, I offer a brief case study from the work of Virginia Burrus on the shift in Christian discourse of gender from the period before Christianity became imperial to the time after its domination of the Roman Empire.

In a series of recent articles, Burrus has been analyzing the transformation of the gendered effects of early Christian discourses of martyrdom as Christianity became dominant within the Empire. Burrus provides the following schematic account: "It was a favorite story in the post-Constantinian church, when the days of imperial persecution were for most Christians long past: a trembling young girl, brought before the magistrate, courageously defies her male oppressors; shattering expectations of age and sex, she manages against all odds to preserve both her virginity and her faith, an audacious act of self-assertion finalized by the welcomed death of the executioner's sword."⁶⁴ Burrus shows through her intertextual reading that the meaning of female martyrdom has been refocused by this period via the increasing emphasis on a different Roman cultural model specifically for virtuous women, one that reinforces female passivity. In the second century, we find Perpetua, who is marked as a Christian resister to the Roman culture of gender by her "ability to stare directly back into the faces of her persecutors, not with the elusive demeanour of a proper *matrona*," an ability that "broke with the normative body language in a way that signalled an aggressiveness that was not one of conventional femininity." And slightly before her lived Blandina, whose "fortitude and endurance were compared to those of a victorious male athlete."⁶⁵ By the fourth century, we have the trembling Agnes. No longer the victorious, valorous, virilized gladiator, the virgin martyr is now modeled on such types of passive, female virtue as Lucretia or Polyxena. Burrus traces the discursive modes through which is achieved "the literary transformation of would-be 'manly' women—*viragines*—into femininely docile *virgines*."⁶⁶

The most important aspect of the revision from Perpetua to Agnes is the transformation of the martyr from victorious gladiator to "Bride of Christ," that is, from a figuration that bends gender to one that reinforces its hierarchies while nevertheless subtly shifting their mean-

63. For a fascinating exploration of connections between imperial power and representations of gender, see Joshel, "Female Desire."

64. Burrus, "Reading."

65. Shaw, "Passion," 4, 19.

66. Burrus, "Reading."

ings. Indeed, we find the beginnings of this transformation already in the work of the male editor of Perpetua's account.⁶⁷ Thus in Prudentius' version of the story of the martyrdom of St. Agnes, the girl understands her impending execution as being just short of literal sexual intercourse: "This is my lover, I confess, / A man who pleases me at last! / I shall rush to meet his steps So I don't delay his hot desires. / I shall greet his blade's full length Within my breast; and I shall draw / The force of sword to bosom's depth. / As bride of Christ."⁶⁸ However, there is more, for as Burrus shows, this active expression of female desire is transformed within Prudentius' text into something that confirms gender expectations much more powerfully, a passive surrender of the girl's neck to executioner's sword. Instead of Christ's lover, she ends up being merely his suppliant: "She bent her head / She worshipped Christ as suppliant / That her sinking neck, more readily / Might endure the threatened wound." This is a highly charged displacement. In the classical models which served the well-educated Prudentius, women die by the neck, not by the breast. In what may be the most important proximate intertext, Euripides' *Hecuba*, exactly the same alternatives are offered; Polyxena offers her executioner either her breast *or* her neck, and Burrus writes: "May not the virgin Polyxena claim the virile death of a sword plunged into a defiantly bared chest? But the tragedian entertains the possibility of boundary transgression only to reassert gender distinctions more firmly; in the end, Euripides' Polyxena, like Prudentius' Agnes, dies of a wound not to breast but to neck.... Prudentius provides Agnes with the place of death which for him, as for ancient Greek tragedy, reestablishes her essential femininity in sexualized subjugation."⁶⁹

By the fourth century, the masculine discourse of the Church triumphant no longer wanted Mary to be made male, as the early Christians did. One way to think of this is that with temporal power becoming an increasingly important element of Christianity's praxis, the gender hierarchy of male and female became an important symbolic structure for naturalizing that power; whereas before, the subversion of that hierarchy was a tool for neutralizing, denaturalizing imperial power. "Orthodox" Christianity was no longer involved in a subversion of all the hier-

67. Shaw, "Passion," 32.

68. Quoted in Burrus, "Reading."

69. Burrus, "Reading." See her complex and nuanced further discussion.

archies of empire, having become imperial itself.⁷⁰ Pre-imperial Christianity thus provides an elegant example of the knowledge of gender that powerlessness makes available.

At the same time, it cannot be argued that lower-class, Irish, non-European, Jewish, pre-Constantine Christian, colonized, or gay men have not oppressed women. This is not to say nor even to suggest or hint—in fact I wish to expressly deny—that we find some sort of non-patriarchal paradise in Jewish or any other colonized society. Gender and hierarchies do not cease to be a problem in these subaltern formations—indeed they may be exacerbated—but we do end up with a very different sense of how gender and the symbolization of the sexed body function within these subcultures, one of which I will study here.

The Flow of the Argument

The flux of the book is as follows. Part I is a critical presentation of the construction of the feminized Jewish male ideal. In the first chapter I present a series of texts intended to show that traditional Ashkenazi Jewish culture produced a model of masculinity that was openly resistant to and critical of the prevailing ideology of "manliness" dominant in Europe. The alternative Jewish form of maleness was known as *Edelkayt* (literally, "nobility," but in Yiddish "gentleness and delicacy!"); its ideal subject was the *Yeshiva-Bokhur* (the man devoting his life to the study of Torah) and his secularized younger brother, the *Mentsh*.

Within traditional Ashkenazi Jewish culture,⁷¹ as I said earlier, the soft man was the central and dominant cultural ideal, not a marginalized alternative. In contrast to a certain tradition in Jewish historiography that has also recognized this reality, I do not consider this ideal as the desperate product of an abnormal situation but as one possible (and for me highly desirable) realization of talmudic culture. Talmudic culture means, in my parlance, the series of different cultural entities that

70. Yuval Rotman has recently argued that the earliest clear official Christian condemnations of self-castration are also from the fourth century, and that this shift in Christian discourse is also related to the imperialization of Christianity (Rotman, *Attitude*).

71. I want to make clear that by emphasizing "Ashkenazi" here my intent is not to imply that Sefaradic (Spanish and Eastern) Jews do not manifest these readings of talmudic culture and the cultural constructs of gender that they lead to, but only that my research and knowledge have focused almost exclusively on northern Europe. Not to mark this would be precisely to subsume Sefaradic Jews under an undifferentiated rubric of the universal Jew and thus erase their specificity and difference.

are in large part and in constantly changing ways crucially informed by the centrality of the reading of the Talmud in their practice. The Talmud was the most valued text (indeed virtually the only valued text, the Bible not excepted) of Ashkenazi culture, and constant study of it by the male elite—with all the trickle-down effects that such centrality implies—one of the most important material facts of the culture. Indeed, one of the names that this culture had for itself was "the way of the Talmud," דרך הש"ס. I argue that the scholarly ideal male found in the text had a profound effect on the production of this ideal in Ashkenaz in a Jewish culture that, like that of the Babylonian Rabbis, sought explicitly to produce its ideals in opposition to and dissimulation from the ideals of the circumambient dominant culture.

Accordingly, in the second and third chapters I discuss talmudic texts in which such an ideal counter-male is articulated as an alternative, subaltern fiction. In making this appeal to the talmudic texts, I am decidedly not arguing for some essential, continuous Jewish countergendering, a working out of some national spirit or even cultural continuity that persists down through the ages through all the vicissitudes of Jewish history. Such romantic historiography runs contrary to my cardinal ideas and commitments.⁷² Rather than seeing the culture of the Babylonian Rabbis as an antecedent of Ashkenazi culture, implying a continuous essential Jewishness, I proffer the Talmud text as the most relevant intertextual matrix in the production of traditional Jewish cultures. Judith Perkins has recently described well the "Foucauldian" perspective that informs my work as well as hers: "My focus is writing itself as a historical agent as it enabled the institutional formation ... and not on historical events or figures as such."⁷³

The cultural theme that I am recovering in rabbinic Jewish culture can easily be countered by citing contradictory texts. This very theme has not always been dominant within the tonality of even Diaspora Jewish culture. In the Middle Ages, there were prominent rabbinic figures who were, at the same time, generals in the armies of Spain, and of course they were just as Jewish as the *Yeshiva-Bokhur* "sissies" with whom I identify. As David Biale writes: "Perhaps the best-known Jewish military figure of the Middle Ages was the poet and communal leader, Samuel HaNagid, who led the armies of Granada in the early

72. The recent analysis by David Myers (*Re-inventing*, 142–44) of such trends and their location in modern Jewish political life will immediately show why.

73. Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 9–10.

eleventh century. He left an array of military poems describing his exploits in battle."⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, this Spanish Jewish culture picks up on other themes and moments in rabbinic literature and, moreover, places much more emphasis on the Bible and classical Hebrew cultural models than does its contemporary Ashkenazi adjunct. German-speaking Jews of the late nineteenth century, such as Theodor Herzl, not infrequently affected Sefaradic ancestry as part of their assimilationist projects.⁷⁵ I am not claiming an essentialist, pure (and utopian) construction of masculinity in the Talmud or in later Jewish cultural practice but am instead focusing on a particular theme that attracts me, owing to my own particular set of identifications and desires, both political and erotic. Audre Lorde has written, "Our visions begin with our desires." I am tracing a cultural theme, an overtone, or a voice in the polyphony that I wish to isolate and amplify.⁷⁶

Christian culture also presents an array of male exemplars and models, from the knight on one hand to a gentle, passive St. Francis on the other. What it does not imagine, at least not until modernity perhaps, is a fully sexualized male who is not active, powerful, and aggressive.⁷⁷ One might well ask at this point: If this discourse was contested, however, from within Jewish culture, and if within the history of European Christian culture there has been pervasive opposition to its dominant fictions of masculinity, what then constitutes the basis for any claim for

74. D. Biale, *Power*, 76. He was also one of the exceptional rabbis who recommended beating a disobedient wife! On this, see chapter 4 below. Biale has done a wonderful job of dislodging ahistorical notions of eternal Jewish powerlessness in Diaspora.

75. Aschheim, *Brothers*, 28.

76. I want to take this opportunity to correct a methodological error in my previous work, *Carnal Israel*. Although I was clear then as well that the (nonmisogynist) strains of tradition that I was isolating were not the only ones that were there, I still had some conception of a possibility of identifying dominant and subordinate ideologies. This was a mistake. There is no method, neither statistical nor other, that enables such weighing of authority. The contrary (but identical) mistake is made by Judith Baskin who comes to the exact opposite conclusion from mine. For her, the misogynist strain is dominant, and the antimisogynist one a "minority voice."

With reference to my current project, I am not, therefore, claiming for the vision of gender that I am exploring, dominance, exclusivity, or authenticity over others that are equally "Jewish." I am asserting that this particular voice can be found in the texts and saying that I like it and wish to strengthen its presence and influence in the current Jewish (and general) society. This is a strategy different from the one of *Carnal Israel* and, I hope, one that avoids its apologetic pitfalls.

77. This is not contradicted by the notion, prevalent from Roman times, that what characterizes true masculinity is control of self, as so brilliantly documented in Foucault's *Care* and the work of many classicists. As Pateman describes Rousseau's theories of gender (which are, I think, quite typical): "Men are the active and aggressive sex and are 'controlled by nature' [i.e., they naturally control themselves]; passive and defensive women have only the control of modesty" (*Disorder*, 21).

difference on the part of Judaism? I shall attempt to show through textual readings that within Judaism, in contrast to much of Christianity, feminized men were not read as emasculated or desexualized. They thus occupied a space in the erotic economy of Jewish culture that monks, quite obviously, never could (at least openly) within Christianity. Another way of putting this would be to state that since the monk within Christian culture has a binary opposite in the knight, the former can be removed from the category of "real men" within Christianity and stand as an oppositional force to it. Monks, then, effectively form a distinct gender within Christian society, one that is removed from the paternal and sexual order. Within the Jewish culture that I am describing, however, the opposition is not between different men so much as between Jewish men and non-Jewish men, with Torah the primary marker of the difference.⁷⁸ Although rabbinic Judaism also provides an array of male ideals and modalities, it fell to Ashkenazic Judaism to furnish European culture with the possibility of a male who is sexually and procreationally functioning but otherwise gendered as if "female" within the European economy of gender.⁷⁹ The Jewish men obviously remain within the sexual order, since they do not form a separate gender within the Jewish cultural system. Seen however from the point of view of the larger cultural system, they appear similar to monks and thus feminized. This appearance as feminized, from the perspective of the surrounding culture, can then be mobilized as a signifier in Jewish culture as well—for good and ill.

I have, however, attempted to show that some of the very talmudic texts that play this theme also are aware of its problems and contradictions, even its misappropriations of female capacities. Second, in the very instances in which I find a utopian alternative to the dominant fiction in talmudic culture, I also try to show how even that utopian instant itself contains pitfalls, especially for women. I must constantly reckon, indeed struggle, with the ways that "utopian" analysis can slip from a hermeneutics of recovery connoting that a wish and hope for something vastly new and better show through a cultural product into

78. Since these are the primary terms of gendered difference, Jewish men who *do not* have Torah are occasionally marked as being "like women" (Weissler, "For Women"), but these are the Jewish men who will appear most "manly" to the non-Jewish world, as will become apparent in the next chapter of this book.

79. I emphasize "ideally" to make clear that I am not claiming that Jewish men necessarily behaved differently from other men, but that there were different cultural ideals at work, which sometimes may even have had a referent in "reality." For the continuity between medieval and classical ideas about maleness, see Bullough, "On Being," 31.

a hermeneutics of conservation, in which that wish and hope are taken for *the already existing reality* and thus are used as an alibi for a fundamentally conservative, even reactionary position. These considerations should serve as a caution against any essentializing or totalizing statements about Jewish culture that I do not, in fact, claim to be making.

Following the analysis of these talmudic texts, accordingly, there will be a chapter in which I strive to articulate a theory of the rabbinic domination of women. In this fourth chapter, I carry out what I hope is a more incisive critical analysis of the structure of male domination within rabbinic culture and its functions than I have done heretofore in this or other work. I open the chapter by presenting some of the women's voices that, raised in protest against the exclusion of women from Torah, enabled the foundation of a feminism for traditional ("Orthodox") Jewish women. As in so much else, second-wave feminists here are highly indebted to our mothers of the first wave, and the debt should be paid in part through recovering their voices and honoring them. In this chapter, two diverse realizations of talmudic culture are contrasted: one that absolutely condemned male violence toward wives and another that did not. This serves two purposes. The first is to exemplify how different social possibilities can be founded on the same textual base, making clear that the claim for a talmudic culture does not constitute an essentialism. The other purpose is to clarify the structural defects of an important aspect of halakha, namely, paternalistic male control of women, which even at its most benevolent, can easily be turned to its malevolent opposite, just because women were excluded from real power. My goal is to delineate this oppression in sufficient specificity that the description will be an effective diagnostic tool in the search for therapies for this cultural ill and, moreover, to ensure that the culture will survive the therapy. I could not possibly undertake to perform a full-scale and detailed analysis of rabbinic "patriarchy" in the context of this book, and in any case such work is well under way by other scholars (Baskin, Hauptman, Levitt, Peskowitz, Wegner). But I do want to look at the structurally "negative" consequences of that very moment within the culture that I am recovering as "positive."

The second half of the book describes the reconstruction of Jewish gendering under the pressure of the rise of heterosexuality, especially in Vienna at the fin de siècle. The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters focus largely on two crucial figures in the invention of the modern Jewish man as an undoing of the tradition of the effeminate Jewish male:

Sigmund Freud and Theodor Herzl. Although the interconnections of these two have been explored by critics before, I think the full measure of the implications of their two cultural projects, psychoanalysis and Zionism, for the invention of the modern Jewish man has not yet been taken. One of the major purposes of this book will be to understand what happened to Jewish culture as the regime of heterosexuality increasingly impinged on it in the nineteenth century. Much of my argument turns upon the claim that psychoanalysis and Zionism were two specifically Jewish cultural answers to the rise of heterosexuality at the fin de siècle. The "hero" of this part of the book, however (and mine), is a Jewish woman who successfully diagnosed and resisted these projects: Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim).

The extent to which the heterosexualization of Jewish culture implied a loss for Jewish women has not been fully realized. The final chapter provides, then, a positive model for Jewish modernity in the guise of Bertha Pappenheim, once Anna O. (the first psychoanalytic patient), grown to be the militant leader of Jewish feminism in Germany. Pappenheim remained an Orthodox Jew all her life and thus, for me, is the prototype of a radical critic who yet remains within (and not outside of) the traditional culture. She also criticized bourgeois culture and its effect on the female subject by identifying with traditional Jewish alternatives and models for women's lives, notably Glikl of Hameln, an early modern female Jewish memoirist who will be discussed below.⁸⁰ Pappenheim empowered herself by reclaiming the "deviant"—that is, deviant from the bourgeois heterosexual ideal—gendering of traditional Jewish women as her own and using this alternative gendering as a tool in the struggle for women within and outside of Judaism. I seek to do the same, to save myself and also contribute something to others, through a parallel (not identical) reclamation of the Jewish sissy. Pappenheim teaches that the struggle against oppression within Jewish culture need not lose sight of the critical force that Jewish culture can bring to bear on models of gender that were developed within romantic European culture. I hope herein to continue her work.

Talmudic culture is the culture that is crucially informed by a pivotal practice of reading the Talmud as its most valued book. Actual cultural forms are mediated through a complex set of social, economic, historical, and cultural conditions, which frequently include the nature of the

80. In referring to Glikl here I shall use the Yiddish spelling that she would have adopted, and not the German "Glückel."

cultural practice of the societies within which Jews found themselves in different times and climes. Not a history, my book attempts to understand one Jewish social formation, Ashkenaz on the cusp of modernity, as one such realization of the cultural possibilities that a certain strain of talmudic discourse made possible. Another way to describe how this text differs from a history would be to say that I am not trying to recover the "truth" of Jewish culture but rather the "best" of what Jewish culture has offered in the past, and I want to suggest what it can be in the future. This "best" is, of course, a value judgment, one that many will not share, and the judgment grows out of who I am, where I come from, and where I have been in my life. *Unheroic Conduct* also constitutes a narrative of how I take myself to be a Jew and to be a product of my love for the Talmud and my feelings of commitment to its authority, as well as my commitment to certain ethical norms, including most prominently my feminism and my identification with gay, lesbian, and bisexual Jews (and the Queer Nation as a whole).⁸¹

81. I would like to express that the spaces in which I have felt most accepted and validated as an "out" Orthodox Jew in America, yarmulke, beard, and all, have been such queer environments as Pride parades and gay, lesbian, and bisexual studies conferences.