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:

> Hermenia 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 femminized[10] 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. Weininger goes through contortions to insist that everyone is "Jewish" but Jews only more so, and that there can be Jews (such as

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]

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 "femmenize" 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 ascesis 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 historicality 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" incorporeality 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.

Lacanians 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 femminized in the terms of the dominant Roman culture. When Europe has sought female equality and autonomy, this has been achieved through dis-embodying 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-embody 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 phallocentric 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 femminized, beginning with the Talmud and through an opposition to "Roman" ideals of the male, and understood that femminization 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 homoeroticism 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 femminized, 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.
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> 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 premodern 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.