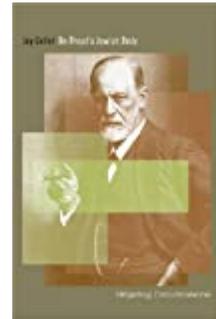




Jay Geller. *On Freud's Jewish Body: Mitigating Circumcisions.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. xii + 355 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8232-2781-5; \$28.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8232-2782-2.



Reviewed by Timothy E. Pytell (Department of History, California State University San Bernardino)

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How Jewish was Freud?

Sigmund Freud's Jewishness has long been a matter of contention amongst scholars. The controversy emerged with Freud's description of himself as a "godless Jew" in 1918. But exactly what did he mean? Was he simply a secular Jew? For Freud, as for many modern European Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rise of virulent antisemitism often led to the embracing of a Jewish identity. Freud's Jewishness also raises the issue of whether or not the *science* of psychoanalysis is a Jewish science. According to Peter Gay, Freud was a man of the Enlightenment, deeply committed to rationality, truth, and objective science, and therefore psychoanalysis is in no way a Jewish science. Some scholars, however, have found Gay's binary opposition between Freud's Jewishness and psychoanalysis simplistic. For example, Sander Gilman has argued that the science of psychoanalysis represented a haven for Freud from the prevalent antisemitism. In Gilman's sophisticated and nuanced understanding, the hypermasculine world of European modernity perceived the Jewish male as effeminate; the neutral realm of science was thus a

place where Freud could establish his own masculinity. Jay Geller's new book cultivates the terrain opened by Gilman. Geller's intent is clear: he seeks to establish a "positive" Jewish identity for Freud, and thus views his book as a contribution to the "canon formation" of Jews caught in a white man's world, which will provide an alternative to Holocaust-determined identities (p. 20). In what can best be described as a Freudian reading of Freud, Geller claims Freud was deeply traumatized by antisemitism, and following the claims of Daniel Boyarin, Geller argues that the heart of this trauma was a feeling of Jewish inferiority based on "knowledge of [his] own circumcision" (p. 27). For Boyarin (and Geller), Freud's feminization via his circumcised penis leaves him in the "thrall of homophobic panic," and all of Freud's corpus can be read as a form of acting out his all-too-Jewish trauma (p. 27). For example, the Oedipus complex represents not a comment on Greek tragedy and the universal human condition, but rather "Freud's family romance of escape from Jewish queerness into gentile, phallic heterosexuality" (p. 27). Geller worked on this book for

twenty-five years, and his mastery of Freud's corpus is impressive.

Geller's argument unfolds in six chapters. The first establishes that Freud was actually traumatized, by analyzing Freud's discussion of slips in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) with particular focus on how Jewish-gentile relations were characterized by the uncanny, or specifically "dread, anxiety, and fascination, by the projection of all that would be strange on the all-too-familiar" (p. 44). The second chapter "diagnoses how Freud, having internalized [the] problematic situation for the Viennese Jews ... symptomatically externalizes and acts it out on his body and in his body of work" (p. 62). To support this contention, Geller provides a highly sophisticated postmodern reading of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and the origins of psychoanalysis. Geller claims that Freud's self-analysis, which began with the famous "dream of Irma's injection," can be read as "day residues about gender identity, Jewish identity, and the body, as well as how the masculinist ideology of Freud's Vienna, the 'objective' authority of knowledge, the labeling power of nosology, the expropriation of reproduction, and the telltale signs of nose all contributed to the emergence of the manifest dream" (pp. 66-67).

The third chapter focuses on Freud's essay on fetishism (1927) and connects the fetishized Jewish nose to circumcision via analysis of Freud's case studies of the *Wolf Man* (1918) and the *Case of Little Hans* (1909) along with Freud's associate, Wilhelm Fleiss. Chapter 4 develops the connection between cultural antisemitism, the markers of circumcision (symbolic castration), and the development of psychoanalysis by analyzing a footnote in the *Case of Little Hans*, with which Freud connects antisemitism to castration and the subsequent development of the castration complex. Chapter 5 examines Freud's marginalia and markings in Daniel Paul Schreber's memoirs to question why Freud did not focus on Schreber's blatant antisemitism and concludes "by refusing to recog-

nize Schreber's identification with the Eternal Jew, Freud substitutes an 'emasculated' Schreber for an 'unmanned' Jew" (p. 160). This focus allows Freud to claim that the castration complex is not solely a Jewish affair.

The final two chapters shift the focus from case histories to studies of group psychology and the psychoanalysis of culture. Chapter 6 considers Freud's image of masculinity by analyzing *Totem and Taboo* (1913) in combination with reflections on the founder of the Wandervogel, Hans BlÃ¼her. According to Geller the "warp and woof that structures Freud's tapestry of History ... [is the] entanglement of the gendered, sexed, and ethnic position of this son of *Ostjuden* living and writing in the metropole with a particular strand of argument that emerged out of the enthusiasm and *MÃnnerphantasien* surrounding Germany's late-nineteenth-century colonial adventures" (p. 162). In the last chapter, on *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Geller concludes that circumcision lies at the heart of Freud's Jewishness, and not the quasi-Lamarckian vision that Freud pursued in his later works.

This book is erudite and fascinating to read, although as a reader, I would have preferred to have been spared the image that each chapter is a "piece of a penis" tying Freud to *Judentum* (p. 211). Also, Geller is fully aware that his thesis is open to criticism, that it is "overdetermined" (p. 40) and thus marked by a certain "truthiness" – or the hermeneutic anxiety at the heart of much of contemporary cultural studies. Nevertheless scholars interested in Freud, cultural studies, Jewish studies, the history of psychology, and scholarly discussions of the significance of circumcision will find this book a worthwhile read. Of course, Geller's Freud is a postmodern construct. Readers who still prefer to view Freud as a man of the Enlightenment might profitably contrast Geller's volume with George Makari's recent *Revolution in Mind* (2008), an equally excellent reconstruction of Freud's remarkable intellectual achievement written in a more traditional vein.

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