



The Jew's Body

By Sander Gilman

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Drawing on a wealth of medical and historical materials, Sander Gilman sketches details of the anti-Semitic rhetoric about the Jewish body and mind, including medical and popular depictions of the Jewish voice, feet, and nose. Case studies illustrate how Jews have responded to such public misconceptions as the myth of the cloven foot and Jewish flat-footedness, the proposed link between the Jewish mind and hysteria, and the Victorians' irrational connection between Jews and prostitutes. Gilman is especially concerned with the role of psychoanalysis in the construction of anti-Semitism, examining Freud's attitude towards his own Jewishness and its effect on his theories, as well as the supposed "objectiveness" of psychiatrists and social scientists.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Circumcision engages Jewish males in a powerful paradox: while establishing their religious and cultural identity, it marks them as profoundly different in others' eyes. This difference manifests itself in perceptions of the Jewish male's habits and physiognomy. No matter what tongue he speaks, the Jew's language is always different and therefore suspect. Even Christ's final words--those of a Jew in Aramaic--must be "translated into Greek, Latin, German or English for the self-labeled Christian reader to understand." During the Austrian monarchy, Jews' feet were construed as weaker than other men's, disabling them from military service and signaling "their inability to be full citizens." In three central chapters, Gilman demonstrates how Freud's theory of creativity, which holds that artists sublimate unacceptable characteristics, universalizes his experience as a Viennese Jew compelled to "deny his essence" into a property of the human psyche. Applying the techniques of literary criticism to predominantly European myths, documents and artworks, Gilman (Jewish Self-Hatred) has written an intriguing interpretive history of the Jewish male body. Illustrated.

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From Library Journal

Gilman (humane studies, Cornell Univ.; history of psychiatry, Cornell Medical Coll.) has produced a weighty book of essays on the evolution of hatred toward Jews in Western culture. The hatred has conjured up a series of bodily images of the prototypical Jew. Aspects of this vast fantasy are painstakingly examined from the image of the clovenfoot to that of the Jewish voice and nose. Gilman is particularly adept in dissecting the corpus of 19th- and 20th-century pseudoscience which sought to take an intellectual approach to the subject. Medieval images often have a way of recurring even in our own times. Gilman tries to show how modern psychiatry beginning with Freud and modern medicine have struggled to come to terms with these images. This book, densely written and academic in approach, is recommended for libraries with strong Judaica and sociology holdings.

- *Paul Kaplan, Dakota Cty. Lib., Eagan, Minn.*

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About the Author

Sander Gilman is Goldwin Smith Professor of Humane Studies at Cornell University and Professor of the History of Psychiatry at Cornell Medical College.

Users Review

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Roberta Haile:

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