

9-1-1994

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Literature with Jewish Content: A Bibliographic Overview

Jack Nusan Porter

The Spencer Group, Newton Highlands, MA

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ajlpublishing.org/jl>

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Information Literacy Commons](#), [Jewish Studies Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), and the [Reading and Language Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Porter, Jack N.. 1994. "Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Literature with Jewish Content: A Bibliographic Overview." *Judaica Librarianship* 8: 124-126. doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1252.

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Literature with Jewish Content: A Bibliographic Overview*

Jack Nusan Porter

The Spencer Group
Newton Highlands, MA

Abstract: The topic of gay, lesbian, and bisexual literature with Jewish content has been taboo for a very long time. Because of Judaism's deep-rooted commitment to the family, alternative forms of sexual relationships have rarely been mentioned in Jewish literature. Only in the past twenty-five years, with the rise of AIDS, but starting in the radical 1960s with its innovative sexual and cultural critique and revolutionary approach to politics and power arrangements, have we seen the rise of Jewish literature on gay, lesbian, and bisexual lifestyles. Since homosexuality is still *asur* (forbidden) in *Halacha*, this is still a controversial topic and care must be taken to handle it with sensitivity. Still, librarians and teachers should introduce these issues at age-appropriate and text-appropriate levels. This bibliographic essay demonstrates the wide range of material that exists on this topic—from research guides and anthologies to novels and sociological works. The literature is growing by leaps and bounds; much of the material is useful for Jewish libraries but must be updated regularly since this field is undergoing great change. However, since gay history is still history, the encyclopedias and research guides will always be useful. The paper includes a special section on homosexuality and sexual politics in Nazi Germany, a special interest of the author, a son of Holocaust survivors.

Reflexive Statement

My interest in this issue began with my research on the Holocaust and its non-

*Paper presented at the Association of Jewish Libraries Convention, June 22, 1993, at a session on "Gay and Lesbian Jewish Literature."

Jewish victims, especially Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, the famed German sexologist hounded by the Nazis, and on his relationship to the gay and straight communities of Berlin. This interest turned into work with such eminent scholars as Professors Rudiger Lautmann, George Mosse, James Steakley, Vern Bullough, Bill Percy, Richard Plant, and Claus Mueller. They encouraged me to pursue my research despite the fact that most of the important literature is in German and in Germany. I did indeed pursue the topic, and my earliest writings on the life of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld appeared in my book *The Jew as Outsider* (1982) and in an entry on Hirschfeld in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica Decennial Book, 1973–1982*.

I carried out other research on sex and gender issues during the Holocaust, the persecution of the "pink triangles," and Jewish resistance in general. In fact, I discovered an entirely new element in the resistance: a gay and lesbian resistance group in Germany that many scholars had overlooked.

Looking at history through "gay eyes" brings out some startling new discoveries. For example, Baruch Spinoza, like Socrates, may have been excommunicated not only for his radical ideas about God and man, but also because he was a lover of young men and boys!

But the most astonishing finding of all may be that the Holocaust might have started over a "lovers' quarrel." Hershel Grynszpan and the man he killed, consul Ernst van Rath, may have been homosexual lovers, and Grynszpan may have killed Rath over this issue (see Gerald Schwab, *The Day the Holocaust Began: The Odyssey of Herschel Grynszpan*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990). Thus Kristallnacht (and the Holocaust) possibly began over a lovers' tiff. In any case, homosexuality, kinkiness, and homophobia on the part of Hitler and Himmler as well as Ernst Röhm and other gay *Sturm-Abteilung* ("Storm Troops") leaders are part of history. No one disputes that. In short, to

understand the Holocaust, one must first understand the politics of homosexuality.

A second major influence on me was the 1960s counterculture (I am in my mid-40s) in which new and exotic life-styles (clothes, music, sexuality) included a Jewish radical component. This led to my first major book, *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology* (Grove Press, 1973). In that book was one of the first Jewish voices of the gay movement: "Coming Out Jewish," by Chicagoan Robbie Skeist (pp. 314–322). The earlier *Chutzpah Anthology* also had essays on gays.

A third impact was our friendship circles. My wife and I know many gays and lesbians in the social work, cultural, and academic spheres of Boston. One of my wife's friends, Helaine Zimmerman, an "out" and proud (doubly-proud) Jewish woman, often came with her lover, an Italian woman, to office parties and to our home for seders. Helaine had the same problems about bringing a "shiksa" home to mother that Jewish males have, but she managed to pull it off. The reader will be happy to know that she has divorced the "shiksa" and married a nice Jewish girl.

A fourth impact was a search for my own identity as a father, husband, man, and sexual being. In short, my identity as an "outsider." The outsider status of Jew is beneficial for a writer. I have written about this in one of my earliest books, *The Jew as Outsider* (Lanham, MD and London: University Press of America, 1982). There is a great deal of homophobia in the Jewish community, but still, Jews are by and large liberals and fairly tolerant. Homosexual or lesbian identity can lead to rejection by the Jewish press, by Jewish bookstores (often owned by Orthodox Jews), and the larger Jewish community, and yet GLBi (Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual) Jews retain their identity under these circumstances.

Finally, a fifth influence: I recently received a grant from the United Auto Workers through the National Writers Union

and its gay caucus called WORDS to survey and interview gay, lesbian, and bisexual writers and their problems getting books published and into libraries and bookstores. I have met and continue to meet a wonderful group of writers, including John Preston (who since died of AIDS), Philip Gambone, Warren Blumenfeld, Lesléa Newman, Jyl Felman, and Max Hunter.

Criticize the Sin, Not the Sinner

While theologically, homosexuality is a sin, newer interpretations by the rabbis have shown that a separation can be made between the "sinner" and the "sin." This is based on the medical model of deviance in sociological theory, that being gay is an illness that can be "cured." Just drink enough hot "tay" [tea] and chicken soup, and it will all go away. The medical, psychiatric, and sociological establishment have, however, rejected this model. Most believe that homosexuality is 80% a biological issue and 20% a learned behavior, and that no matter where (Germany, Israel, or Somalia) or when (the Renaissance, Nazi Germany, or the end of the 20th Century), somewhere between 5 and 10% of the population will be gay.

But humans are too complex to pin down. They are sexually polymorphous, including being celibate; and one can be celibate and gay (certainly there are gay priests and lesbian nuns, as well as gay/lesbian rabbis). Bisexuality is also an option for many. Many gay synagogues have been established in the USA, Canada, Europe, and even Israel.

Gay Jewish literature thus has a background as well as a foreground. Many of the leaders in the gay movement are political and social activists or writers, novelists, and poets. I refer here to the late Harvey Milk, the "mayor of Castro Street," Warren Blumenfeld, Lesléa Newman, Jyl Felman, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Irena Klepfisz, and the founders of ACT-UP, such as Larry Kramer. Bisexuals are less prominent. The bi "heroes" of my generation were Paul Goodman and Leonard Bernstein, not very good role models actually, but the best that exist for now.

Barriers to Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Writers

Barriers to GLBi writers is a large topic that I have written about at length in a report of a survey mentioned above, but it is beyond the scope of this article.* I have dealt with such issues as censorship and self-censorship, advocacy, education, networking, liter-

ary and library segregation, chain stores, and cognate issues.

Some questions that librarians on limited budgets should ask are: What books should I purchase? To whom should we make this literature available? Naturally, some material is more suited for adults or for scholars, and some for children, but do not fall for the myth that gay or lesbian literature must be by definition *sexual*. We are not talking about erotica, but of a category of literature that should be treated by the same criteria as any other type of literature. Happily, the task is easy. There is so much excellent material out there that the problem is not too little but too much for any budget to handle. The annotated bibliography which follows is designed to assist librarians in selection.

**Readers who wish a copy of this survey should please send the author \$5.00 and a SASE to cover photocopy and postage costs.*

Bibliographic Overview

In the 1990s, we are seeing an explosion of books and articles on the gay, lesbian, and bisexual lifestyle, much of it relevant to librarians. The following is an overview of such literature.

There has been such an outburst of gay literature that it is impossible to list all titles (see Newsweek, May 10, 1993, p. 58, as well as a special issue of Moment, "Homosexuality and Judaism," June 1993). Some of the most important Jewish material is listed here. Entries that are starred () are highly recommended.*

Research Guides

**Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, by Wayne R. Dynes. Garland, 1990. 2 vol., \$150. Has section on Judaism.

**Homosexuality: A Research Guide*, by Wayne R. Dynes. Garland, 1987. \$20, paper. (Vol. 313 in Garland's Reference Library of Social Science.) Has a section on Judaism but not Israel.

Homosexuality: An Annotated Bibliography, by Martin S. Weinberg and Alan P. Bell (of the Kinsey Institute). Harper and Row, 1972, paper. Dated but useful.

The Big Gay Book, by John Preston, Plume/Penguin, 1991, paper.

**Duberman, Martin et al., Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past*. Merid-

ian Books/Penguin, 1990, paper. Has good articles on the "Pink Triangles" and the Jews, by Prof. Erwin Haeberle.

Historical Material

**Boswell, John. Christianity, Social Tolerance, & Homosexuality*. U. of Chicago Press, 1980. \$16.95, paper.

**Cantarella, Eva. Bisexuality in the Ancient World*. Yale University Press, 1992. \$27.95. On Greek & Roman bisexuality.

**Horner, Tom. Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*. Westminster Press, 1978. \$11.99, paper.

Gay Sunshine: 20 Years Anthology; Gay Book of Days, by Martin Greif. Lyle Stuart Books (Carol Publishers), 1982. \$12.95.

Books on the Holocaust and Nazism

Oosterhuis, Harry; Kenedy, Hubert (eds), *Homosexuality & Male-Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*. Haworth Press (Harrington Park Press), 1991. \$17.95.

Faderman, Lillian; Erikson, Brigitte. *Lesbians in Germany: 1890s-1920s*, Naiad Press (Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302), 1990. \$8.95, paper.

**Koonz, Claudia. Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*. St. Martin's Press, 1987. \$16.95, paper.

**Porter, Jack Nusan. Sexual Politics in the Third Reich*. The Spencer Press (8 Burnside Road, Newton, MA 02161), 1991. \$19.95, paper. Includes bibliography, photos, maps, and filmography on homosexuals and Jews in Nazi Germany as well as on gay Jewish life and on the "zeydeh" of gay life and sexology, the famed Jewish doctor Magnus Hirschfeld. See also my work on Magnus Hirschfeld, a famous Jewish sexologist and gay rights leader in Germany in my book, **The Jew as Outsider*, University Press of America, 1982, paper or hardcover, and my entry on him in the **Encyclopaedia Judaica Decennial Book, 1973-1982*.

**Plant, Richard. The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals*. Henry Holt, 1986.

Rector, Frank. *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals*. Stein & Day, 1981.

Shilts, Randy. *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, & the AIDS Epidemic*. St. Martin's Press, 1987. Shilts' book shows how the modern-day silent plague of AIDS started.

**Johansson, Warren; Percy, William A. "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual, 7 (1991): 225-263*. A very important review-essay on the many books in German, French, Dutch, and Italian that have not yet been translated. These books are by such important European writers and

researchers as Rudiger Lautmann, Gunther Grau, Burkhard Jellonnek, Claus Mueller, Wolfgang Roll, Hans-Georg Stumke, Rainer Hoffschildt, and Claudia Schoppmann (see her work on the overlooked lesbian life under National Socialism). Heinz Heger (Alyson Press, 1984) has also written one of the few trustworthy accounts of a gay man's life in Sachsenhausen.

Naturally, the issue is still controversial. Was the gay genocide really a genocide? Were homosexuals really targeted for complete annihilation as the Jews were, or could they escape the dragnet by "passing"? The numbers were also very small—no more than 20,000 died in the camps compared to 500,000 Gypsies and six million Jews. Can we call it genocide? The jury is still out in many scholarly circles on this question.

Major Writers

Major lesbian writers include Lesléa Newman, Jyl Lynn Felman, Louise Rafkin, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Adrienne Rich, Irena Klepfisz, Evelyn Torton Beck, Robin Becker, Irene Zahava, Elana Nachmann-Dykewoman.

Gay writers and thinkers include Alan Ginsberg, Paul Goodman, Leonard Bernstein, Barney Frank, Warren J. Blumenfeld, David Leavitt, and Lev Raphael.

Anthologies and Reports

**Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian or Gay and Jewish*, ed. by Christie Balka and Andy Rose. Beacon Press, 1989. \$14.95, paper.

**Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*, ed. by Evelyn Torton Beck. Persephone Press, 1982. \$8.95, paper. Has excellent bibliography for librarians to peruse. (Beacon Press has come out with a later edition.)

**The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*, by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz. Beacon Press, 1989, paper. Jewish feminist writings, with several Jewish lesbians contributing.

Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out, ed. by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu. Alyson Publications, 1991. \$11.95, paper. A few of the contributors are Jewish.

Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book, ed. by Ginny Vida and the National Gay Task Force. Prentice-Hall, 1978. Good source book; slightly dated, but contains excellent articles.

*Blumenfeld, Warren J. (ed.) *Homophobia: We all Pay the Price*. Beacon Press, 1992. paper.

*Blumenfeld, Warren J.; Raymond, Diane. *Looking at Gay & Lesbian Life*. Beacon Press, 1988, paper. Important book for

school discussions on homophobia and anti-semitism and how they are related.

Two overlooked anthologies that are now "classics" in the field and which contain some of the first material ever published on gays:

**Chutzpah: A Jewish Liberation Anthology*, ed. by Steve Lubet, Jeff Mallow, Adar Rossman, Susan Schechter, Robbie Skeist, and Miriam Socoloff. New Glide Publications, 1977, paper.

*Porter, Jack Nusan (ed.). *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology*. Grove Press, 1973.

Novels and Short Stories

*Felman, Jyl Lynn. *Hot Chicken Wings*. Aunt Lute Books, 1992. \$8.95, paper.

Leavitt, David. *Family Dancing*. Warner Books, 1984. See also his other books.

*Newman, Lesléa. *A Letter to Harvey Milk*. Firebrand Books, 1988. \$8.95. Stories of being Jewish and lesbian; very lovely gentle stories. See also her other books:

**Heather Has Two Mommies*. Alyson Publications, 1990. \$7.95, paper. Children's book, B & W drawings.

**Gloria Goes to Gay Pride*.

**Belinda's Bouquet*.

All available from Alyson Wonderland, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Rafkin, Louise. *Queer and Pleasant Danger*. Cleis Press, 1992.

*Raphael, Lev. *Dancing on Tisha B'Av*. St. Martin's Press, 1990. \$7.95, paper. Excellent book by gay Jewish male.

Journals

Several journals deal with GLBi issues:

**Bridges*. PO Box 18437, Seattle, Wash. 98118.

Lilith magazine (an excellent Jewish feminist journal).

Response.

Sojourner.

See the *Moment* special issue (June 1993) mentioned above for details regarding international Jewish organizations and shuls.

Publishers and Bookstores

Major lesbian and gay presses are: Alyson Publications, Naiad Press, Volcano Press, Firebrand Books, Aunt Lute Foundation Books, Crossing Press, Amazon Press, Banned Books, Persephone Books, and Harrington Park Press.

General presses sympathetic to GLBi writers include St. Martin's, Beacon Press, and Garland Press.

Bookstores are also important: Glad Day in Boston and Montreal, the Blue Door in San Diego, and others in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Ogunquit, Provincetown, and Northampton, Mass., all are key centers of gay and lesbian culture and the arts.

To add to this list or make any corrections, please write or call Dr. Jack Nusan Porter, Director, The Spencer Institute for Sociological Research, 8 Burnside Rd., Newton Highlands, Mass. 02161, Tel. (617) 965-8388.

Jack Nusan Porter was born in the Ukraine and raised in Milwaukee. He has a Ph.D. in sociology from Northwestern, and is a former professor in the Social Sciences at Boston University and former Research Associate at Harvard University in Ukrainian-Jewish Studies. Dr. Porter is the author/editor of Jewish Radicalism; Confronting History and Holocaust; The Sociology of American Jewry; Genocide and Human Rights; Jews and Cults; Sexual Politics in the Third Reich, and many other works. He was founder and editor of the Journal of the History of Sociology. His two essays on the Holocaust and genocide appear in the anthology On Prejudice: A Global Perspective, edited by Daniela Gioseffi (Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1993). He lives in Newton Highlands, Mass., with his wife and two teenagers.