WEININGER, Otto (1880-1903)

Otto Weininger was an Austrian philosopher and racial theorist. Born in Vienna to Jewish parents, he committed suicide five months after the publication of *Sex and Character* (1903; English trans., 1906), which was based on his doctoral dissertation. *Sex* went through more than twenty-five printings in two decades. Today, Weininger is remembered primarily as a misogynist and an anti-Semite. An opponent of women’s rights campaigns in Germany, he declared that a woman had no soul and could only fulfill the role of mother or prostitute. Extrapolating from recent discoveries in cell biology, he alleged that few individuals were entirely male or female, and the proportion of masculinity or femininity within a person could vary over the course of a single day. Homosexuality was superior to heterosexuality, as lesbians tapped into “masculine” intellectual abilities and male homosexuals were able to avoid the feminizing effects of intercourse and reproduction. Weininger’s romantic individualism and his championing of androgyny were enticing to many modernists, several of whom were Jewish. Kafka, Karl Kraus, D. H. Lawrence, Schoenberg, Gertrude Stein, Strindberg, and Wittgenstein all expressed their debts to Weininger, however eccentrically. Freud, who rejected Weininger during his lifetime, ultimately labeled him “highly gifted but sexually deranged” and blamed his anti-Semitism on a fear of castration.

**Bibliography**

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