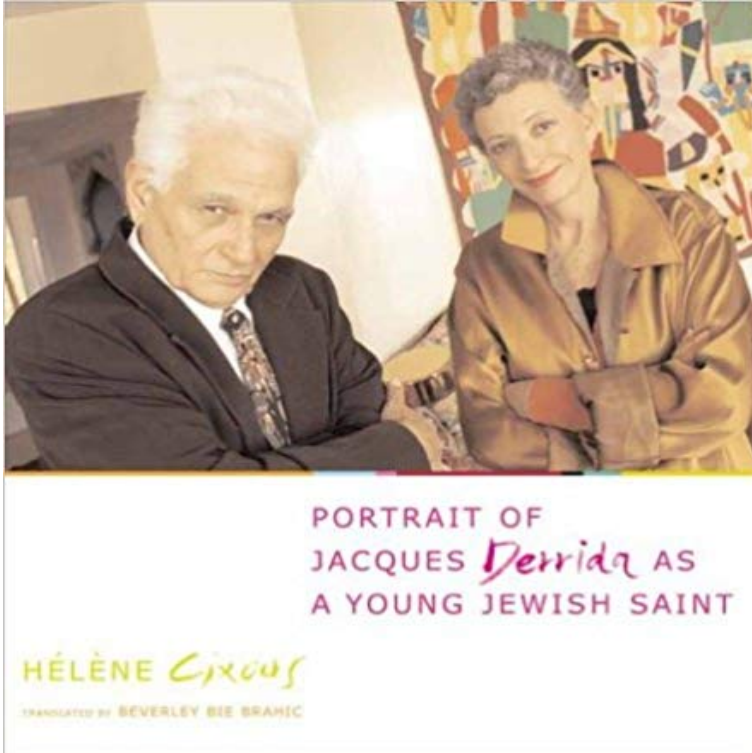


Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism)



Who can say I am Jewish? What does Jew mean? What especially does it mean for Jacques Derrida, founder of deconstruction, scoffer at boundaries and fixed identities, explorer of the indeterminate and undecidable? In *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous follows the intertwined threads of Jewishness and non-Jewishness that play through the life and works of one of the greatest living philosophers. Cixous is a lifelong friend of Derrida. They both grew up as French Jews in Algeria and share a belonging constituted of exclusion and nonbelonging?not Algerian, rejected by France, their Jewishness concealed or acculturated. In Derrida's family one never said circumcision but baptism, not Bar Mitzvah but communion. Judaism cloaked in Catholicism is one example of the undecidability of identity that influenced the thinker whom Cixous calls a Jewish Saint. An intellectual contemporary of Derrida, Cixous's ideas on writing have an affinity with his philosophy of deconstruction, which sought to overturn binary oppositions?such as man/woman, or Jew/non-Jew?and blur boundaries of exclusion inherent in Western thought. In portraying Derrida, Cixous uses metonymy, alliteration, rhyme, neologisms, and puns to keep the text in constant motion, freeing language from any rigidity of meaning. In this way she writes a portrait of Derrida in flight, slipping from one appearance to the next, unable to be fixed in one spot, yet encompassing each point he passes. From the circumcision act to family relationships, through Derrida's works to those of Celan, Rousseau, and Beaumarchais, Cixous effortlessly merges biography and textual commentary in this playful portrait of the man, his works, and being (or not being) Jewish.

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