

THE AESTHETICS OF REGENERATION

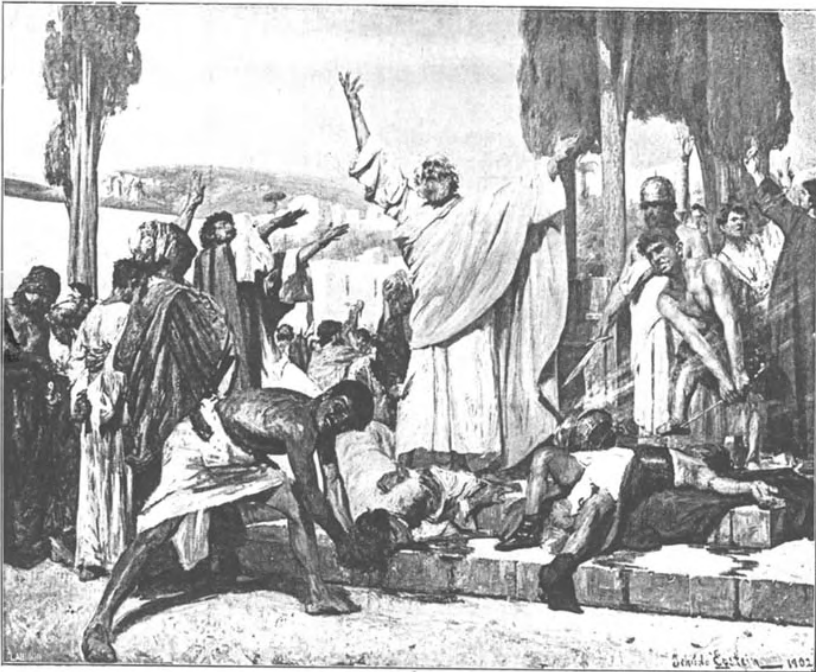
Martin Buber, E. M. Lilien, and the aesthetic state

The birth date of Jewish national art can be quite precisely specified: December 26, 1901. It is on this date that the Fifth Zionist Congress began in Basel, and Max Nordau announced the opening of an unprecedented Jewish art exhibition in the congress hall. Consisting of 48 works of art by 11 Jewish artists, the exhibition, which officially opened the following day, included etchings, feather-pen drawings, lithographs, tempera and oil paintings, and even two sculptures. The works were created by an international group of Jewish artists, among them Jehuda Epstein (Vienna), Jozef Israels (The Hague), Alfred Lakos (Budapest), E. M. Lilien (Berlin), Oscar Marmorek (Vienna), Alfred Nossig (Berlin), Hermann Struck (Berlin), and Lesser Ury (Berlin).¹ Martin Buber, together with Lilien and Berthold Feiwel, curated the exhibit, with an expressed purpose of highlighting the need for the cultural regeneration of the Jews.² By and large, the works of art depicted Jewish themes along one of two trajectories: the authentic, heroic tradition of Jews in antiquity and the contemporary situation of Jews in exile. The former were fairly traditional figurative renditions of Jewish kings such as Saul and David, the heroic resistance of the Maccabees, and the integrity of Jewish prophets such as Jeremiah; for the latter, the artists produced a number of portraits of present-day Jews, often downcast and displaced, embodying a sense of longing for a lost greatness.

To illustrate these trajectories more concretely, I would like to begin this chapter by discussing two of the paintings featured in the exhibit: Jehuda Epstein's *Die Makkabäer* (1902) (Fig. 3.1) and Lesser Ury's *Jerusalem* (1896) (Fig. 3.2). Epstein's 1902 painting was the finished version of the oil painting that he exhibited at the congress in December of 1901. It depicted a moment of Jewish resistance to Hellenic paganism under the rule of King Antiochus IV. When the Jewish priest, Mattathias, was forced to make a sacrifice to a pagan God, he murdered the official and destroyed the pagan altar in order to preserve the monotheistic tradition. He stands in the center of the painting with outstretched arms and one foot on the fallen victim. Fellow Jews proudly display the bloody bodies, while other fighters and onlookers praise their victorious leader, who, in turn, praises God. By contrast, Lesser Ury's

oil painting, *Jerusalem*, depicts a dour group of Jews sitting on or around a bench, seemingly resting while on a journey. The nine figures, male and female, young and old, are heavily cloaked in dark robes and oppressively crunched toward the ground. There is no victory to be celebrated in Ury's painting, only the solemn awareness of pensive longing, mixed with prayer and forlorn transition. At the Congress, Ury showed the centerpiece of *Jerusalem* (1896) and one or two studies he made for this painting.³

Stylistically and conceptually, Ury's painting and his studies for it evidence a clear historical debt to Ferdinand Hodler's paintings of the early 1890s, particularly his great painting *Die Nacht* (Night) of 1891 and two pictures he made the following year, *Die Enttäuschten* (The Disappointed Ones) and *Die Lebensmüden* (Those Who are Exhausted of Life). In each of these paintings, there is a group of partly clothed figures resting in a landscape with countenances of anxiety, disappointment, and sheer exhaustion. As the titles make clear, *Enttäuschten* and *Die Lebensmüden* refer to those figures who have become downtrodden and exhausted of life. The sullen figures, reproduced in a serial fashion across the picture plane, stare hopelessly at



Die Makkabäer. (Ölgemälde.)

Figure 3.1 Jehuda Epstein, *Die Makkabäer* (1902).



Jerusalem (1896) Oelgemälde.

Figure 3.2 Lesser Ury, *Jerusalem* (1896).

the ground. Like Ury's painting, they are seated on a bench in a landscape that is ultimately as placeless as their desires. Their despair, isolation, and longing are highlighted by the fact that their gazes never intersect those of the spectator.⁴

Epstein's painting, on the other hand, presents the viewer with an exhilarating moment in a decisive battle, wherein two followers of King Antiochus lay dead or dying in the foreground, while Jews triumphantly celebrate their victory over paganism. As evidenced by the commotion on the right-hand and in the background behind the Jewish spiritual leader in the center of the painting, the battle, however, is not yet over. Of course, spectators at the Fifth Zionist Congress who saw Epstein's rendition of the Maccabees knew how things would turn out: after failed attempts to make the Jews abandon monotheism and introduce idols into their temples, the Seleucids went to war with the Maccabees⁵ for some three years, until the Jews eventually regained the Temple in Jerusalem and, nearly two decades later, in 142 BCE, drove the Seleucids entirely from Palestine. The victory marked the start of a renewed Jewish independence in Palestine, the first in more than 500 years, a victory that is celebrated by Hanukkah, a very important holiday, as Schmidt notes, for the Zionists.⁶ Whereas Epstein's depiction of the Maccabees commemorates the triumph of monotheism and the return of the Second Temple to the Jews of Jerusalem, Ury's painting of "Jerusalem" depicts a vague, desolate landscape, layered between sky, ocean, and ground.

Nothing in the painting—architectural, geographic, or historic—suggests the city of Jerusalem, save the title.⁷ It is a painting of frozen despair and meditative longing, far from the Jewish victory celebrated by Epstein.

Indeed, when these paintings were first exhibited at the start of the twentieth century, the triumphal stories from Jewish antiquity had long been displaced by despair and longing. We can trace this quite clearly in the identificatory gazes of the central figures in the two paintings. In Ury's painting, four of the figures stare at the ground; three gaze toward the left at the oceanic emptiness before them; and two face in opposite directions: the face of the shrouded woman sitting on the bench at the right-hand side is completely obscured by her robe, while the crouched man at the bottom-left stares directly at the viewer, his vacant gaze extending far beyond the finitude of the picture plane. They represent two sides of the same coin of hopelessness. But, more significantly, a comparison of the protagonists—in Epstein's painting, the "muscle Jew" in the foreground and Mattathias, the spiritual leader; in Ury's painting, the haggard man on the left gazing at us and the woman in the center with her head in her hand—reveals, I would contend, the Zionist vision of Jewish history: the glorious past, the desperate present, and the redeemed future. This can be elucidated by looking at the attendant mechanisms of identification built into each of the paintings.

Due to their prominence and sheer size, the viewer first notices and identifies with the central figures in both paintings. In Ury's painting, it is the woman sitting on the bench with her hand holding up her frail head; in Epstein's painting, it is the spiritual leader, draped in a lush, white robe. While the woman's knobby body sinks into despair, Mattathias stands perfectly erect and reaches for the sky, raising both of his hands toward the heavens. He even steps on the dead body of a fallen Hellene to gain extra height. But upon further observation, there is only one figure in each painting that actually looks directly at the viewer. In Ury's painting, it is the crouched man at the bottom with his bent legs and sullen stare. His blank gaze intersects with our own. According to Buber, he represents the physical "degeneracy" and spiritual homelessness of the contemporary, exilic Jew. In Epstein's painting, it is the heroic, shirtless muscle Jew in the foreground of the painting. His strong legs are spread far apart, giving him the extra leverage to drag the bloody body of the fallen pagan down the last stair by the head. He smiles at us with the enthusiasm of a war hero, perhaps hoping that we will be moved to join him. Here, this image of the muscle Jew appears to be deliberately pushed to the edge of an almost hysterical glorying in death, something that, at first glance, seems to be at odds with Nordau's insistence on discipline and clarity. The muscle Jew, however, was not only a regenerative figure of discipline but also the embodiment of a renewed, historically and theologically justified militarism.

In 1903, Buber published a celebratory essay on the work of Lesser Ury in a multi-artist study of Jewish art called *Juedische Kuenstler* [Jewish

Artists].⁸ The 170-page book featured short essays on six contemporary Jewish artists, Josef Israels, Lesser Ury, E. M. Lilien, Max Liebermann, Solomon L. Solomon, and Jehuda Epstein, with copious illustrations of their work. In his discussion of Ury's "Jerusalem" painting, Buber made one of the most scathing indictments of the Galut Jew that he ever penned. Building directly on the arguments of Nordau's 1892 cultural critique of degeneration and reciting the repertoire of anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jewish degeneracy, he wrote:

In the foreground on the left-hand side, a figure crouches on the ground, a disheveled, tormented one around whose neck hangs insanity. Here is degeneration, the specific degeneration of the Jews [*die spezifische Entartung der Juden*], which gave rise to a sick, half-clever, half-crazy desire for life and a sick mysticism. Here we see the horrible wounds of millennia and the frenzy that shook Sabbatai [Zevi]. This is the clearest representation of the Galut-type, in his peculiar pathology; he is completely filled with stunted possibilities, a horrible inner field of corpses. In the sketches, the fatalities of an hour lie on the ground alongside the millennia of destruction of our people's spiritual powers. He who looks into the face, inspired by the mercilessness of the great artist, understands that next to Jewish decadence [*jüdische Décadence*], every other decadence looks almost like a harmless game.⁹

Buber essentially adopted the conceptual language of Nordau's *Degeneration* and applied it mercilessly to his characterization of the exiled Jew and the Jewish people in exile. Unlike Nordau, who never directly assigned his topology of degeneration to Jews, Buber freely transferred this language of degeneracy to his assessment of the Galut Jew. Indeed, this description resonates quite closely with contemporary anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jew as physically, mentally, and morally degenerate. While Nordau stopped short of equating the "sick mysticism" and "decadence" of *fin de siècle* Parisian culture with the Jewish people in exile, Buber has not only done precisely this, but he has also gone a step farther: The Galut Jew exhibits a pathological investment in mysticism that goes back, at the least, to the messianic fervor surrounding Sabbatai Zevi in the seventeenth century and extends right up through the present day with a decadence that is more decadent than any other. The Galut Jew is on par with Huysmans's *des Esseintes*, unable to rationally perceive the world around him, let alone decisively act and overcome the monstrosity of his own degeneracy.¹⁰

But do the Maccabees in Epstein's painting exhibit the masculine resolute-ness, discipline, and battle-readiness of the muscle Jew, to employ Nordau's terminology? To be sure, the jubilant battle scene in Epstein's painting is quite unlike the blank stare, crumbled body, and "decadent" mysticism

of Ury's depiction of the Jew in exile. Even if Epstein's Maccabees—painted several years after Nordau first articulated the idea of muscular Judaism at the Second Zionist Congress—are the exemplars of “strong-chested, tautly-jointed, boldly-looking men,” they seem to have entered a new phase or, perhaps more precisely, actually returned to an old phase: muscularity as militarism. After all, the grin of the central figure verges on an unrestrained hysteria, something that seems to confound Nordau's singular insistence on discipline. In fact, it might be said that both of these paintings represent the dangers inherent in a polarized vision of degeneracy and muscularity. As we will see, it was Lilien who imagined a hybrid visual form for the Zionist corporeal ideal in which decadence and muscularity were rendered compatible with, not antithetical to, one another.

In terms of the aesthetics of regeneration, these paintings, when considered together, represent a progressively cyclical theory of Jewish history, something that certainly would have been recognizable to the congress members. Taking the despair of present-day exile as the starting point, Zionism posited the rebirth of the Jewish people and the Jewish nation according to a logic that was motivated, at once, by the cyclicity of return and the linearity of progress. As Yael Zerubavel argues in her study of the production of collective memory in Israel, Zionism created:

a master commemorative narrative that outlines three periods—Antiquity, Exile, and the modern National Revival. . . . This semiotic system presents a basic conception of linear progression through historical time. But its segmentation into three periods also suggests some notion of historical recurrence that transcends this linearity. This does not imply a fully circular movement through time, but rather a spiral thrust forward to the future with a symbolic incorporation of certain features of the ancient past.¹¹

In other words, the Zionist conception of regeneration does not simply entail a return to the greatness of Jewish antiquity; rather, it demands a progressive movement forward through the present that is inspired by and builds upon the greatness of the past. The paintings exhibited at the Fifth Zionist Congress emblematically distilled this theory of history through their evocation of a need to move beyond the despair of the present, reviving ancient heroism as a prerequisite for imagining the strength of the future Jewish nation. This is evident when we place the paintings in a “historical dialogue” with one another.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how Jewish national art not only disseminated the Zionist ideology of Jewish history as both heroic return and civilized progress, but was also predicated upon the regeneration of the Jewish body and body politic. Building on my discussion of the art of Epstein and Ury, I will first turn to Buber's articulation of the idea of Jewish national

art in order to specify how his conceptualization of the visual marks a significant break from the history of art within modern Judaism. As we will see, in view of the tradition of the *Bildverbot*—the Second Commandment forbidding the production of images¹²—the production of art for the sake of regenerating the nation is a radically new understanding of the domain of the visual within Jewish history. Far from simply replicating the stale, nineteenth-century arguments about Jewish aniconism (arguments that range from the anti-Semitism of G. W. F. Hegel and Richard Wagner to the moral superiority espoused by Heinrich von Graetz), I will argue that Buber invents a concept of “aesthetic education” that leads to the restoration of the Jewish State. In this respect, the brute fact that he turns to the domain of the “aesthetic” and argues for the creation of “Jewish national art” has to take priority over the analysis of the specific content of the art and its attendant mythologies. Buber, I suggest, looks to Friedrich Schiller’s idea of “aesthetic education” and applies it to cultural Zionism such that the very production of art serves to ground a state and overcome the degeneracy of the present. In the second part of this chapter, I will look more intensively at the ways in which E. M. Lilien, certainly the most famous Zionist artist, created a “national art” by reformulating elements of both decadence and the so-called degeneracy of the Galut Jew into a progressive potential for Jewish history. I will focus on the early illustrations made by Lilien for the books of poetry, *Juda* (1900), *Juedischer Almanach* (1902), and *Lieder des Ghetto* (Songs of the Ghetto) (1902/03) and attempt to articulate the paradoxical nature of his Zionist art of “Jewish Decadence.” To anticipate my argument, Lilien’s decadent style—far from simply opposed to the modern idea of progress—used and revalued the visual vocabulary of decadence to call for and facilitate an aesthetics of Jewish regeneration.

The Jewish aesthetic state

I will begin with the speech that Buber gave to the members of the Fifth Zionist Congress on December 27, 1901. It is here that he provided the first theoretical and historical rationale of the necessity and urgency of producing Jewish national art. Up until this point in Jewish history, he argued, the Jewish people did not create art because they lacked the vital connection to the spiritual and physical fertility of the nation:

For thousands and thousands of years we were a barren people [*ein unfruchtbares Volk*]. We shared the fate of our land. . . . The very thing by which the essence of a nation expresses itself to the fullest and purest extent, the sacred word of the soul of the people [*Volksseele*]*—artistic creativity—was just about completely lost to us.*¹³

Buber explicitly ties the production of art to the consciousness of nationality, such that the very possibility of a national art is predicated upon the

stability and fertility of the ground. The 48 works of art on display at the congress could not yet be understood as the expression of a national art, he argues; instead, they signified the makings of a consciousness of nationality, for “a national art needs a soil from which to grow and a sky to strive for” (SP, 155). For this reason, the reclamation of the Jews’ geographic and historical homeland was the critical prerequisite of a true national art. In so arguing, Buber drew attention to a vicious circle that characterized Jewish life in exile: Without a nation, the creativity and productivity of the Jews was grossly stunted and, hence, they could not make great works of art. But without artistic production—the way in which a nation expresses its cultural uniqueness and beauty—the Jews could never become a great nation.

Through their perennial struggles within Western civilization for religious freedom, social recognition, and political emancipation, Jews of the Diaspora, Buber argues, came face-to-face with the “full seriousness of our degeneration [*Entartung*]” (SP, 153). But, at the same time, it was precisely the “marriage to Western civilization which made it possible to unfold our ancient desire for national existence and life . . . what we call Zionism” (SP, 154). Not unlike the arguments put forth by Dohm for the “civic improvement of the Jews,” their disenfranchisement was not only to blame for their degeneracy but also represented the possibility of their regeneration. Of course, unlike Dohm, Buber and other early Zionist thinkers considered the return to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish nation to be the ultimate cure for the degeneracy endemic to life in exile. As with Nordau and Herzl, this acceptance of the anti-Semitic diagnosis of Jewish degeneracy did not, however, entail the concomitant acceptance of racial determinism or other race-based explanations of inherent immutability. Instead, Buber took the binary terms of the diagnosis and sought, through the logic of progressive regeneration, to revalue and redeem Jewish existence.

To do so, Buber first articulated the history of Jewish experience within Western civilization in binary terms. On the one side, there was the Galut and everything negative that came with being uprooted and displaced from one’s homeland. Here, he cites the uncertainty of living in the ghetto, the sickness that comes from cramped quarters, the barrenness that stems from stunted possibilities, and the degeneracy that results from the absence of one’s own soil and sky. On the other side, he sees the organicism of a healthy nation, the productivity of culture, the vitality of the ground, and the capaciousness of the landscape. Ultimately, having one’s own “home soil [*heimatliche Erde*]” and sky would foster the growth of “the cultural and artistic buds”; but until then, the immature buds “must be cultivated on foreign soil with a gentle, loving hand” (SP, 155).¹⁴ To effect this movement from the ghetto to the homeland, from sickness to health, from degeneracy to regeneracy, Buber sees Jewish art as a kind “great educator [*ein grosser Erzieher*]” (SP, 156) precisely because it fosters a consciousness of nationality. The cultivation of art—even

on foreign soil—represented the start of the education and regeneration of the Jewish people.

Buber then proceeds to discuss the range of contemporary Jewish contributions to the arts, including music, painting, sculpture, and literature. He places a specific emphasis on the visual arts and mentions the importance of the paintings of Josef Israels, Max Liebermann, Lesser Ury, E. M. Lilien, and Jehuda Epstein, as well as the sculptures of Marc Antokolsky, Henryk Glitzenstein, Alfred Nossig, and Boris Schatz, among others, for cultivating what he, invoking Schiller's seminal concept, calls "the aesthetic education of the people [*Aesthetische Erziehung des Volkes*]" (SP, 167). Quite clearly alluding to Schiller's 1795 letters on aesthetic education, *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man), Buber suggests that artistic production and, more generally, the realm of the aesthetic, can play an important role in the "formation" and even the "redemption" of the Jewish people by serving the Zionist project of state formation. Artistic production—beginning on foreign ground—becomes an essential means for creating a unified sense of nationality. As we will see, Schiller's notion of the aesthetic as both the restoration of a lost unity and the prerequisite of the moral State played a critical—although largely unrecognized—role in the development of Buber's theory of Jewish national art.¹⁵

What has been well studied is Buber's intellectual development during this period and his involvement with the intellectual avant-garde in Vienna, including the Symbolists, the "Young Vienna" literary scene, and the inheritors of "decadent" philosophy.¹⁶ In terms of the latter, Buber was intensely engaged with the work of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, particularly through the Young Vienna group, and had even attempted to translate Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* into Polish just before entering the University of Vienna.¹⁷ As Buber wrote in an article he published on Nietzsche in December of 1900, Nietzsche represented—to both himself and his generation—the herald of a new age, the embodiment of "the heroic human being who creates his own self and beyond his self."¹⁸ For Buber and the Young Vienna intelligentsia, Nietzsche's philosophy, coupled with the aesthetics of decadence, was the glorification of modernity's most rarified possibility: the dialectic of destruction and rebirth. The modernism of Zionism—that is to say, its investment in this very dialectic—can be explicated cogently within a Nietzschean framework.¹⁹

Indeed, Buber was hardly immune to organicist, proto-nationalist concepts such as soil, blood, and resurrection to explain the Zionist concept of Jewish regeneration.²⁰ In a programmatic essay entitled "Juedische Renaissance" that appeared in the first edition of *Ost und West: Illustrierte Monatsschrift für modernes Judentum*, Buber argued that Jews, like other nations coming into their own, were at the threshold of rebirth.²¹ He posits that the development of a universal sense of beauty is becoming linked with the growing individuality of nationality and the specificity of national production.

Invoking Goethe's concept of "*Weltliteratur*"—a late coinage of Goethe's in which he saw the increase in cultural commerce and exchange resulting in "nations . . . [becoming] stronger, by more quickly benefiting by each other's advantages"²²—Buber suggests that the emergence of a Jewish renaissance was part of a "deep unity of evolution" (JR, 7) that resurrected the Jewish people's unique form of nationality. Far from subulating nationality through the spread of aesthetic education or the universalizing of beauty, the consciousness of nationality would actually be strengthened according to "the specific characteristics of one's ethnic blood [*die spezifischen Eigenschaften eines Blustammes*]" (JR, 7). It was the Zionist movement, he argued, that—for the Jewish people—brought together the aesthetic universals with the specificity of national strength and tribal unity. Here, Buber is not hesitant to invoke the *völkisch* concepts of blood, race, and nation, concepts that Moses Hess had introduced decades earlier to justify the urgent modernity of the Jewish project of regeneration. As Mark Gelber provocatively and rightly indicates:

While it is true that the German words for race and blood, "Rasse" and "Blut," are polysemic signifiers that, given specific contextualizations, may be free of racist or genetic connotations, these terms are employed by Buber and an entire segment of German Cultural Zionist writers precisely in their racialist sense.²³

In so doing, he draws the conceptual antecedents of regeneration into clearer focus, while underscoring the specificity of the Zionist program: "[t]he Jewish people's participation in nationality has its own particular character: *muscle flexing, looking up, and raising up*. The word resurrection comes to mind" (JR, 7, my emphasis). This corporeal concept of Jewish renaissance, very much in accord with the Zionist theory of history discussed by Zerubavel, is neither a simple return nor a naive progression; rather, it is "a rebirth of the whole human being" (JR, 8), "a new creation from ancient material" (JR, 9), and a national movement composed of "latent energies" (JR, 9) in which Jews "feel themselves to be organic and strive for the harmonious unfolding of their powers" (JR, 10). Zionism thus represented the harnessing of these newly resurrected energies, coupled with a drive toward physical health, racial strength, national unity, and aesthetic productivity: "Through the training [*Erziehung*] of a vivacious seeing and through the collection of creative powers, [the Zionist movement] will reawaken the gift of Jewish painting and sculpting" (JR, 10). In this respect, the creation of Jewish art was part and parcel of cultural Zionism's racialized concept of a vital body and body politic.²⁴

Emphasizing the affinity of Buber's Zionist writings with certain *völkisch* conceptions of nationality, Margaret Olin recently summed up the conceptual tensions in his idea of "Jewish renaissance" in the following way:

His conception of culture . . . was nourished, like his philosophical interests, directly by the philosophy of Nietzsche and in turn resembled the *völkisch* ideas of German nationalists, which contrasted a nationally based “culture,” expressing the soul of a nation, to an internationalist and strictly Unitarian “civilization.” Jewish art played a part in this “renaissance” because of the symbiotic relationship between nationalism and art. Art needs a nation from which to grow; Zionism needs art to express Jewish nationality.²⁵

Olin draws our attention back to the culturally heterogeneous, if not politically unsavory, conditions of possibility for the emergence of the Zionist concept of Jewish regeneration, a territory that was first mapped out explicitly by George Mosse.²⁶ In order to understand the origins of the Zionist concept of regeneration, this affiliation with *völkisch* conceptions of nationalism needs to be clearly recognized: among other things, it was a strategy of self-legitimacy that places the Zionist imaginary squarely within the cultural context of modernist conceptions of the racial and aesthetic state.

In order to understand the emergence of Buber’s specifically racial aesthetic state, we need to turn our attention to how he thought the cultural “barrenness” and spiritual “degeneracy” of the Jews would be overcome in favor of the creative productivity and regeneracy of national art. It is here that Buber’s ideas engage with the modern debates over the supposedly perennial problem of Jewish aniconism, the idea that Jews do not engage with the domain of the visual. As Kalman Bland has argued in his highly suggestive book, *The Artless Jew*, Jewish aniconism, something that Buber directly addressed, is actually a modern invention and probably began with Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in which the latter rebuked Judaism for its refusal to represent God.²⁷ In fact, prior to the sixteenth century, Bland points out, no Jew or Gentile ever remarked that Judaism was comprehensively aniconic, that all visual images were prohibited, or that Jews had a constitutional deficiency vis-à-vis aesthetics and the domain of the visual.²⁸ Hegel, however, consciously transforming Kant’s awe of the Second Commandment in his third critique from a “sublime” injunction²⁹ into a spiritual deficit, posited that the Christian God, unlike the Jewish God, “is set forth in his truth, and therefore as thoroughly concrete in himself, as person, as subject, and more closely defined as spirit.”³⁰ After Hegel, Jewish aniconism remained a touchstone for determining both Jewish racial degeneracy—exemplified, for example, by Richard Wagner’s anti-Semitic tirades over the so-called lack of creativity inherent to Jews—as well as (decidedly more rarely) Jewish racial supremacy—exemplified, for example, by the Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz, who saw Jews as “morally superior” to all other races precisely because they did not produce visual works of art.³¹

Wagner’s anti-Semitism has been analyzed judiciously in recent years, most notably by Paul Lawrence Rose and Marc Weiner, and I will not

reproduce their arguments here.³² It is, however, worth pausing on Wagner's "Judaism in Music," an essay that he first published in 1850 in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, because it catalyzed the racial imagination perhaps more than any other nineteenth-century treatise on the so-called artless Jew.³³ In this essay, Wagner attempts to articulate the difference between "Jewishness" and "Germanness" with respect to the fateful question of culture and creativity. His argument is as simple as it is malicious: Jews are guilty of reducing culture to the valuelessness of commerce and money; through their unbridled egoism, they negate the spiritual depth and greatness of German culture (something that extends back to the Greeks) by turning Christian values and artistic beauty into units of monetary exchange. In his infamous words:

The Jew turns [everything] into money. . . . What the heroes of the arts, with untold strain consuming all of life, have wrested from the demonic enemy of art of two millennia of misery, is converted by the Jew into artistic objects of exchange [*Kunstwarenwechsel*] . . . It is not necessary to substantiate the Jewification [*Verjudung*] of modern art; it springs to the eye . . . But if emancipation from the yoke of Judaism is seen to be the greatest of necessities, it will be most important to check our forces for this liberation. We will not, however, gain these forces by an abstract definition of the phenomenon itself, but only from precisely knowing the nature of the inhering, unchanging sense of ourselves which expresses itself as an instinctive repugnance to the essence of the Jews.³⁴

He continues by citing the fundamental lack of artistic creativity among the Jews as evidence that they are incapable of contributing to cultural development:

The Jew's sensory perceptual talent [*die sinnliche Anschauungsgabe*] has never been sufficient to give rise to plastic artists [*bildende Künstler*]: From time immemorial, their eyes have been busy with far more practical things than beauty and the spiritual content of the formal world of appearances. We know nothing of a Jewish architect or sculptor in our times.³⁵

In a word, Jews are constitutionally incapable of producing art and, instead, through their engagement with the world of commerce and exchange, "Jewify" the German world of art.³⁶

Wagner concludes his vitriol with a "solution" to the so-called Jewish question that requires the Jew's redemption from being a Jew. He cites the case of Ludwig Börne, who he believes found "redemption" from his accursed Judaism through baptism, and calls for Jews to follow his lead and "quit being

Jews.”³⁷ Addressing a presumably Jewish readership in the final lines of his essay, Wagner says:

Without looking back, take part in this regenerative work of redemption [*Erlösung*] through your own self-annihilation [*Selbstvernichtung*]. In this way, we will be one and undivided. But beware, only one thing can be the redemption from your burdensome curse: The redemption of Ahasverus—destruction! [*Untergang*].³⁸

In these famously violent lines, Wagner transformed the longstanding Christian myth of the “wandering” or “eternal” Jew, Ahasverus, whose salvation would only come on Judgment Day upon confessing his love for Jesus, into a present call for Jewish redemption by self-sacrifice. It is only through the death of the Jew by his own hand—something that cannot be understood as simply metaphorical—that the Germans and the Jews can become “one and undivided.”

In articulating his own account of Jewish aniconism in the introductory essay to the collection *Juedische Kuenstler* of 1903, Buber begins by citing Wagner and inquiring into the historical conditions explaining the absence of Jewish art. Buber writes: “It was still possible for Richard Wagner to deny Jews the sensory perceptual talent [*sinnliche Anschauungsgabe*] for producing plastic artists. . . . [But w]hen we today point to the dearth of Jewish artists, we are obliged to inquire into the causes of that unproductivity.”³⁹ Like Wagner, Buber recognizes the lack of Jewish art and even suggests that it may have something to do with “the racial characteristics” [*Rasseneigenschaften*] of the people (JK, 1). However, very much unlike Wagner, Buber insists that such characteristics:

are not something final and unchangeable but merely the product of the soil and its climactic conditions, of the economic and social structure of the community, of the life forms and of the historical fate created at the time of the formation and determination of the race, developed over thousands of years, strengthened through heritage, and, finally, matured into an almost unchangeable power.

(JK, 1)

In other words, the Jews’ creative efforts have been stifled for thousands of years due to the historical, socio-economic, religious, and demographic conditions of the Diaspora, but there is nothing inherent to the Jewish people—either religious or racial—that explains their alleged aversion to all things visual.

Not only has the Galut and the misery of life in the ghetto physically enfeebled the Jews and squelched artistic productivity, but the rigidity of Jewish Law itself, Buber insists, has also contributed to the degeneration

of the Jews. The reification of religious traditions brought with it the shunning of the human body and the refusal to appreciate beauty:

To look is sinful. Art is sinful. And the law of this concept reaches a power as no law possessed it in any people, at any time. Education [*Erziehung*] of the generations happens exclusively as a tool of the Law. All creative effort is stifled from the start.

(JK, 4–5)

Only recently, Buber maintains, has this outlook changed with the rejuvenation of Hasidism and the birth of Zionism.⁴⁰ The liberation of the modern Jew—physically, spiritually, economically, and politically—has resulted in the production of works of visual art that now bear “national characteristics” [*Volkseigenschaften*] (JK, 6). The six artists profiled in the collection *Juedische Kuenstler* and the eleven artists who exhibited their work at the First Zionist art exhibit in 1901 thus represent the makings of a national-racial consciousness effected by means of the visual.

Buber and other early Zionist ideologues of regeneration thus rooted their ideas in Enlightenment notions of progress and improvement: Jews could change, develop, and evolve. As we have already seen with Nordau, the ghetto Jews could become “true moderns” or “muscle Jews” through manly discipline and physical training. In the same way that Nordau addressed “a missing corporeal upbringing” (*eine fehlende körperliche Erziehung*), Buber’s early work addressed a missing “aesthetic education” (*aesthetische Erziehung*). Although they both accepted the anti-Semitic diagnosis—whether that of weak Jews or of artless Jews—Nordau and Buber espoused a program of rejuvenation that simultaneously built upon the heroism of the past and projected the progressive regeneration of the Jewish people as a whole. For Nordau and Buber, the definitive solution to Jewish degeneracy was the formation of a state.

This logic played out consistently in the way in which Buber discussed the significance of Jewish artists and the way in which the cultural Zionists, especially in the early years of *Ost und West*, used Jewish art to stimulate an appetite for national rebirth and unity.⁴¹ In his brief discussion of two of the paintings by Jozef Israels that were exhibited at the Fifth Zionist Congress, Buber argues, for example, that the light of redemption lay hidden in the melancholy landscapes and forlorn figures that Israels painted. For example, Israels’s oil painting, *The Son of an Ancient People*, depicts a squalid room in a Jewish ghetto house. A despondent Jew sits on the doorstep, with clothes hanging above him, cleaning supplies on his left-hand side, and the symbols of his Judaic faith, Sabbath candles, placed on a stool alongside the objects of everyday life—an umbrella, pitcher, and plate. *Saul and David*, the other painting Buber discusses, refers, of course, to the first two great kings of Israel.⁴² In Israels’s painting, Saul is bathed in darkness, hunched

over and turned away from the landscape, while David plays the harp and casts his gaze upon the expansiveness of the renewed nation. It is the leadership of the young David that redeems the sins of his predecessor. Buber's analysis reads like this:

Millennia speak out of these silent, motionless individuals and a yearning that is trampled by fate. Yes, it is the giant, dark-as-death hand of fate that hovers above them like a heavy, gray cloud that consumes all light. But beyond that cloud, invisible to our eyes, present to the master's most secret dreams, the first light of redemption [*Erlösung*] begins to stir, one that will be victorious.

(SP, 161)

This idea of redemption—the unification of the Jews, the resurrection of their creative talents and physical strength, the rebirth of the Jewish state—thus presents a very different “solution” to the Jewish question than the kind of destructive redemption demanded by the likes of Wagner. Here, once again, we sense echoes of the Nietzschean idea of rebirth and renewal on a higher, revolutionary level.⁴³

Not only, then, do these paintings illustrate the ideals of the Zionist project and its theory of redemptive history, the brute fact that they are paintings—that they are works of Jewish art—already disproves the stereotype of Jewish aniconism and combats the Wagnerian strain of racial anti-Semitism. This is perhaps even more evident by another work on display at the Fifth Zionist Congress, a sculptural work by Alfred Nossig that explicitly thematizes and transforms the anti-Semitic stereotype. Rather than depicting the triumphal, ancient history of the Jews or the pensive longing of the Galut Jew, Nossig created a remarkable sculpture, “Der ewige Jude” (The Eternal Jew), that appeared—as a photograph—in the first edition of *Ost und West* in January 1901 (Fig. 3.3) and, later that year, was exhibited at the Fifth Zionist Congress. In this piece, Nossig is calling upon and revaluating Michelangelo's famous sculpture of “Moses,” arguably the most canonical and deeply problematic representation of Jewish self-determination (given the horns growing out of Moses's head). What makes Nossig's sculpture so extraordinary is that he has taken up one of the most persistently anti-Semitic inventions of the modern era—the myth of Ahasverus, the eternally wandering Jew—and transformed it, through a cultural revaluation of Michelangelo's sculpture, into a Zionist ideal. The eternal Jew, condemned to wander the earth until the end of time,⁴⁴ is now depicted to be the protector of the Torah, clutching it firmly against his breast with his muscular biceps and large hands, and, hence, is the redeemer of the Jewish lineage. But even more than this, Nossig has, perhaps with some irony, made this anti-Semitic emblem of the wandering, artless Jew itself into a work of art. The eternal Jew is now a Zionist hero in sculptural form.



Figure 3.3 Alfred Nossig, "The Eternal Jew" (undated), from *Ost und West* (January 1901), 5–6.

It was Wagner, after all, who promulgated the historical absence of Jewish sculptors while simultaneously calling for the self-destruction of Ahasverus, the Jew who poisons the culture of Germany by turning art into the monetary logic of commerce and exchange. Nossig's sculptural rendition can thus be understood as the nullification of both the stereotype of the artless Jew and the myth of the eternally wandering Jew. Nossig "Jewifies" the Christian legend by turning the eternal Jew into a redemptive figure who is bringing the Torah back to the Promised Land. And, then, perhaps more importantly, he turns the aniconic tradition of the unproductive, uncreative Jew on its head by the sculptural instantiation of that very myth.

The journal itself, *Ost und West*, in which a photograph of Nossig's sculpture was first published, also reflected this Zionist revaluation of the anti-Jewish stereotype: the picture of Nossig's sculpture was framed, on the one side, by an introductory essay calling for "Jewish solidarity" and advancing a cross-cultural Jewish dialogue. A poem by Ben Israel entitled "The Eternal Jew" followed. And on the other side, Nossig's sculpture preceded Buber's programmatic essay "Jewish Renaissance."⁴⁵ Like Nossig's sculpture and Buber's concept of rebirth, Israel's poem reformulated the Christian legend by turning it into a Zionist allegory. Rather than being punished by Jesus, the wandering Jew has actually saved the Torah from the destruction of the Temple, as the poem's refrain goes, "The Torah, save the Torah!" The final stanza reads:

Hosianna! The day of redemption has come:
 Soon he turns back to the Promised Land.
 And the head that never found rest,
 laying on the wall of the Temple,
 Is covered with tears on holy sand –
 The Torah, the Torah has been saved!⁴⁶

In effect, the wandering Jew is now a Zionist hero who returns in sculptural form to bravely and defiantly found a regenerated nation.

Prior to Buber and Nossig, the absence of Jewish art and the apparent aniconism of the Judaic tradition were used to justify a wide range of arguments about Jewish uniqueness, ranging from anti-Semitic "proofs" of Jewish inferiority vis-à-vis the artistic achievements of the Greeks to an anti-Hellenism that proclaimed the Jews to be morally superior to all other nations, something that happened to explain the uncanny survival of the Jewish people. Buber, however, was the first thinker to connect the "regeneration" of the visual with that of the Jewish nation. In so doing, he did not simply extend the modern tradition of Jewish aniconism—as something to be detested or celebrated; rather, he reformulated the very tradition itself in terms of an "aesthetic education" that was directed at the regeneration of both the Jewish people and the Jewish nation. As he concluded his 1901 essay, "Jewish Renaissance":

This national movement [Zionism] is the form in which the new culture of beauty announces itself to our people. Before we can follow in the footsteps of other nations, we must first face an internal battle. Many a sickness has to be removed and many a hindrance eliminated before we are ready for a rebirth of the Jewish people.

(JR, 10)

Not unlike the rationale for Nordau's regenerated "muscle Jew," the way to overcoming this "sickness" was an "aesthetic education" and the espousal of Jewish national art. The Jews would then be prepared to return to their homeland.

It is precisely this connection between art and nationality, something particularly manifest in his articulation of the Zionist version of the "aesthetic state," that most commentators who speak about Buber's turn to the visual downplay or entirely miss in subsuming Buber into the modern tradition of purveyors of Jewish aniconism. For this reason, I would like to indicate how Buber's Zionist conception of "aesthetic education" is drawing on quite another tradition within aesthetics, namely Schiller's tripartite theory of history and state formation that he articulated in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). Schiller's letters represent a fundamental treatise on aesthetics that Buber could not have failed to read in his doctoral program in art history at the University of Vienna.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this connection to Schiller's concept of "aesthetic education" has gone by surprisingly unremarked.

As Schiller makes clear in the first letters, his belief in the salvational role of art and the concept of the aesthetic owe much to the present-day "course of events," which "threaten to distance the guiding spirit of the age ever more and more from the art of the ideal."⁴⁸ In hardly veiled terms Schiller is alluding to the Reign of Terror in France, something that unquestionably gave an urgency to his calls for "freedom" and the creation of the "aesthetic state."⁴⁹ The letters, penned between 1793 and 1795, urge for a restoration of social order by way of the domain of the aesthetic. Disillusioned by the brutality of the French Revolution, Schiller argues that enlightened European states cannot simply be transformed by physical willpower and violence, however much this violence appears to be in the service of some future rationality, without also changing the nature of individuals. The ideal state cannot be imposed from above or violently brought into being from below; instead, the "moral state"—Schiller's highest ideal—can only be achieved after humankind itself is fundamentally transformed by means of beauty and art.

Schiller's argument is structured by a tripartite theory of history and state formation, something that turns out to be quite compatible with the Zionist conception of history articulated by Buber and analyzed by Zerubavel. Succinctly put, humankind must move from the domain of the merely physical and sensuous to that of the moral and free by way of the aesthetic. This movement is effected on both the level of the individual and that of the people

as a whole through the processes of “Bildung” and “Erziehung,” two of the fundamental terms of Schiller’s concept of education and state formation.⁵⁰ He considers the Greeks to have exhibited a harmony of nature that combined a fullness of form with a fullness of content, “[uniting] all the attractions of art and all the dignity of wisdom without, however, becoming the victim of them” (AE, 352). Unfortunately, this harmony is now lost, and the present bears witness to disorder and fragmentation, as humankind strives in vain to restore this way of being:

State and church, laws and morals were now torn asunder; enjoyment was separated from work, the means from the ends, effort from the reward. Eternally chained to but a single, tiny fragment of the whole, human beings taught themselves [*sich ausbilden*] only to be fragments . . . [and] never developed the harmony of their being.
(AE, 354)

But through art, Schiller argues, the “aesthetic state” will create the possibility of overcoming the degradation of the present and restore humankind to a harmonious, unified state of beauty and freedom. For Schiller, this is a concept of history and state formation, which is structured by a classically theological, tripartite model of unity, fall, and redemption.

The thrust of Schiller’s letters concerns the redemptive value placed on art and, more generally, the domain of the aesthetic. His argument, much like Buber’s, plays out simultaneously on two levels, that of reforming the individual and that of reforming the people as a whole. In the fourth letter, Schiller employs an important metaphor—that of an artist shaping or giving form to a block of stone—in order to explicate his theory of state formation. He cites three kinds of artist: the first is a “mechanical artist” who does a stone violence in his concern for the parts for the sake of the whole, or, in other words, the individuals over the people; the second kind—the “fine artist”—does the same violence but with the opposite concerns. The third kind of artist—the “pedagogical and political artist”—brings both together: “only because the whole serves the parts, may the parts submit to the whole” (AE, 348). In the same way, Schiller argues, the State is an organization in which the parts must be properly attuned to the whole. For this reason, his argument necessitates the transformation of single individuals—steeped in division and personal gain—into ideal, moral beings. At the same time, an aesthetic state can only be formed when beauty, as he proclaims in the final letter, also “resolves the conflicts of nature . . . in the intricate totality of society” (AE, 429). The pedagogical and political artist resolves these tensions, at once individually and socially.

Indeed, the metaphor of the artist forming the people is a fundamental part of the history of the German concept of “Bildung,” which contains theological and aesthetic resonances of formation and cultivation on both the level of the

individual and the greater society.⁵¹ As Schiller makes clear in the final letter, the goal of “aesthetic education” is the cultivation of a new, ideal humanity in a new, ideal state. In this respect, *Bildung* is not simply tantamount to “education” but rather refers to the active processes of self- and social-formation. The aesthetic state, a kind of utopian society in which humankind is redeemed and restored to its prior unity, “carries out the will of the whole through the nature of the individual,” establishing harmony and wholeness through beauty (AE, 430). It is art alone that can help humankind “recover from its deep degradation” (AE, 359) and, thus, aesthetic education [*aesthetische Erziehung*] is central to this process of redemptive regeneration: “Humanity lost its dignity, but art has rescued and preserved it in significant stone; truth lives on in the midst of deception, and from the copy [*Nachbilde*] the original [*Urbild*] will once again be created” (AE, 363). Here, as throughout the letters, the “Bild” metaphors serve to underscore the primacy placed by Schiller on the creative elements of art for both educating and restoring humankind.

On a note of poetic optimism, he concludes his meditations with a vague conjuring of the ideals of the aesthetic state:

In [the realm of artistic taste], even the mightiest genius must give up his sovereignty and trustingly bend down to the sense of a child. Strength must let itself be bound by the graces, and the haughty lion yield to the bridle of a cupid. . . . Given wings by it, even cringing mercenary art rises from the dust, and at the touch of its wand, the chains of thralldom drop away from the lifeless and the living alike. Everything in the aesthetic state, even the subservient tool, is a free citizen [*ein freier Bürger*] having equal rights with the noblest.

(AE, 431–32)

Schiller’s aesthetic state is thus the utopian resolution of all possible tensions and violent excesses of his day; it is characterized by the highest moral ideals of freedom and equality. Although he was not the first to instrumentalize art in the service of state formation, his letters on aesthetic education represent a critical distillation of the Enlightenment paradigm of aesthetic autonomy. After all, it was the realm of art—in its purity, simplicity, and, ultimately, beauty—which he believed could revolutionize both human nature and the state.⁵² Fredric Jameson, for example, considers Schiller’s aesthetic letters as “one of the first meditations on the antinomies of cultural revolutions,” but only after demonstrating that his utopian ideal is basically “a hypothetical systematization” that “aimed at nothing less than the creation of a new, national, middle-class culture . . . the education of the German bourgeoisie to political unity and autonomy” through art.⁵³ After all, the utopia of the aesthetic state is, for all practical purposes, the universalization of the middle-class values of beauty, dignity, and harmony.

In December 1901, just one week before the Fifth Zionist Congress in which Buber articulated his own call for “aesthetic education,” he published a short essay in the Jewish weekly, *Die Welt*, entitled “Ways to Zionism.”⁵⁴ In much the same fashion that Schiller employed the metaphor of sculptural creation to articulate his notion of the ideal form of social Bildung, Buber uses the same metaphor to articulate his understanding of Zionism. He writes:

This approach [of struggling to find one’s self] means to seek our people because we love them and not to recoil from any unpleasantness that we find. To see in our people the material for a statue and not be confused because the material is not marble from Paros or Carrara, but tough, clumsy stone which resists. This approach means to want a life for our people, but not a life that is satisfied with just being life, rather a rich, full, creative, continually productive life. . . . the Zionists, who carry within themselves more than Zionism, . . . are the Jewish people. This people is the material for our sculpture. They do not at all become unpliant because of their Zionism. But they are enveloped in a great white light that resembles that of marble.

(WZ, 107–108)

Here, Buber links the Zionist concept of regeneration with the metaphor of artistic creation: the Jewish people, far from condemned to their degeneracy, are the malleable stone used by a Zionist sculptor. His notion of the aesthetic is unique within modern Judaism precisely because he reformulates the tradition of aniconism by likening the Jewish people to the material for creating a “sculpted image.” After all, Buber does not hesitate in considering one of the tasks of Zionism to be the creation of “statues” from the raw material of the Jewish people.

But in order to create the very best statues—and, hence, realize the Zionist ideal of a state—the Jewish people have to be properly “formed” and “educated.” In much the same way that Schiller sees art as helping humankind “recover from its deep degradation,” Buber sees art as helping the Jewish people to overcome their particular “degeneration.” Before the Zionist state can be realized, aesthetic education is thus critical to the regeneration of both individuals and the people as a whole. As he argued in his speech to the Fifth Zionist Congress, Jewish art is important precisely because it is “a great educator” [*ein grosser Erzieher*]:

[Art] is a teacher of the living perception of nature and of people, a teacher for a living sensitivity of all that is strong and beautiful, of perceiving and feeling what we have lacked for so long and now what will be recovered through the pictures and poetry of our artists. And it is essential to us Zionists that this living perception

and feeling are regained by our people. For only fully developed, complete human beings can be complete Jews who are capable and worthy of creating their own homeland [*Heimat*].

(SP, 156)

Much like Schiller, art helps humankind overcome its disunity and fragmentation by resurrecting the essential values of strength and beauty, and it is this process of restoring harmony that represents the prerequisite of achieving the ideal, “aesthetic State.” In Schiller’s words, “beauty . . . restores harmony in the tense man and energy in the languid man, and in this way, in accordance with its nature, brings back to the condition of limitation an absolute one and makes of man a whole, complete in himself” (AE, 389). And in the final letter, he writes that the cultivation of “the beautiful makes something whole of man . . . and only the communication of the beautiful unites society” (AE, 430). For both Schiller and Buber, then, art restores a lost harmony by helping the fragmented people become complete and vital beings once again. This is the essence of the “aestheticized politics” of regeneration.

The process of aesthetic education—at once the regeneration of individuals and the restoration of the state—rests upon a theory of history that for both Schiller and Buber could be characterized as a kind of “progressive regeneration.” Schiller’s model of aesthetic education, as we have seen, is organized by a tripartite structure of unity, fall, and redemption, a narrative structure that Buber and other Zionists consistently applied to their own articulations of Jewish history. Whereas for Schiller ancient Greece represented the unified world before the fragmentation of the present, Buber and the Jewish artists look to the heroism of the ancient Jews and the foundation of Israel by its early kings. However, the point is not to return to a past greatness; rather it is to take the myths of the past as a foundation for “[building] a new beauty . . . [from a] block of marble that waits for our hand and our chisel” (SP, 154–155). The new society—achieved by way of the aesthetic—is, at once, the rebirth of a lost harmony and the creation of a future state marked by a new cultural and social productivity. In Zerubavel’s apposite analysis, it is “a spiral thrust forward to the future.” For Buber, then, the cultivation of the aesthetic, especially Jewish national art, served not only to educate the Jewish masses and redeem their particular degeneration, but it also served to create the possibility of an ideal state. Drawing explicitly on Schiller’s notion of aesthetic education and thereby reformulating the history of Jewish aniconism, Buber applied Schiller’s argument for the creation of the aesthetic state to his articulation of the Zionist cause. In so doing, he aestheticized the politics of regeneration.

In the second part of this chapter, I want to turn to the early work of one particular artist—E. M. Lilien—in order to examine more carefully how Buber’s concepts of “Jewish national art” and “aesthetic education” played

out in practice. Lilien, as I already noted, was one of the co-curators of the 1901 Zionist art exhibit and was by far the best-represented artist, showing 12 of his feather-pen drawings at the exhibit. Having also designed the official postcard of the Fifth Zionist Congress and illustrated a major book of poetry, Lilien's work was very well known and respected by congress members. His signature style, however, differed markedly from the other Zionist artists that I have already discussed due to his use of the visual techniques of *Jugendstil* and the symbolism of decadence. The question that I now want to address is how Lilien could create works of art using the visual vocabulary and signs of decadence, which, seemingly paradoxically, served the Zionist aesthetics of regeneration and sought to overcome Jewish degeneracy.

E. M. Lilien and the art of decadent Judaism

In his speech delivered at the Fifth Zionist Congress, Buber mentioned the work of six Jewish painters by name: Jozef Israels, Moritz Gottlieb, Max Liebermann, Lesser Ury, Ephraim Moshe Lilien, and Jehuda Epstein. He briefly discusses the qualities of "Jewishness" within their work, variously emphasizing the "mystery," "living power," or "tragedy" of the figures that these artists depicted. He describes Lilien and his artwork with the following words:

He penetrated deeply into the miracle of our people; he has recognized the meaning and value of our old themes and made them into his own. He experienced Zionism within himself and internalized it completely. Precisely because he belongs to the young generation, he is one of us. And, indeed, I expect much more of him than what he has already accomplished. He has drawn wonderful sketches. His technique is rich and mature. Yet his art is more promise than fulfillment, like the striving of our new generation in general. Certainly, his book *Juda* and his Hebrew ex libris have earned him our full admiration, and we put our hope in him, which is more than the greatest praise. He is more than an honored master; he is our friend, our brother.

(SP, 162–163)

Hearing this laudatory, although somewhat vague description of Lilien, listeners at the Zionist congress who were not already familiar with the avant-garde style of his work might have assumed that, technically and historically, Lilien's sketches and feather-pen drawings were no different from the paintings of Epstein, Ury, or Israels that were also on display. Indeed, the relatively traditional oil paintings by Epstein, Ury, and Israels (and we can add Liebermann and Gottlieb, too) essentially depicted Jewish themes such as antique heroism and exilic longing through conventional, figurative renditions

of Jews and Jewish history. Although Buber detected “a Jewish decadence” more decadent than any other in Ury’s portrait of the degeneracy of the Galut Jew, Ury’s paintings themselves can hardly be called “decadent.” Indeed, none of these Jewish painters—except for Lilien—utilized the artistic techniques and iconographic innovations of *fin de siècle* decadence, art nouveau, and symbolism to render the “richness” and “mystery” of Judaism. Strangely, however, Buber completely elides mention of this in his description of Lilien and his “wonderful sketches.” After all, how could decadence and degeneracy be compatible with his Zionist call for Jewish renaissance and aesthetic regeneration?

Before turning to Lilien’s work, we should briefly clarify the terms of our analysis. By “decadence” I am referring to a convergence of certain literary, medical, philosophical, and visual discourses during the last decades of the nineteenth century that reflected upon, embraced, and variously represented notions of decline and sickness. As we have already seen within the literary domain, Huysmans’s *À Rebours* (Against Nature) might serve as an anchor-point for the attempt to invert and revalue the traditionally recognized, “positive” side of structuring oppositions such as health and sickness, true and false, normal and pathological, regeneracy and degeneracy, and so forth. In medicine, one could cite the work of Nordau, Charcot, and Lombroso and their attempt to conceptualize the consequences of pathology for racial integrity; in philosophy, the late work of Nietzsche, particularly his reflections on Wagner, illustrates an attempt to come to terms with degeneracy vis-à-vis the dialectic of life and death. Within the visual arts, art nouveau (and its contemporaneous German incarnation, *Jugendstil*) and symbolism represent the two *fin de siècle* movements that internalized and embraced these discourses of decline, sickness, and cultural pessimism.⁵⁵

Since Buber avoided any mention of Lilien’s “Jewish decadence,” I want to begin my discussion of Lilien by underscoring how different his art looked when compared to the other Zionist artists who also exhibited their work at the fifth Congress. If, for example, we take Lilien’s *Gedenkblatt des fünften Zionisten-Kongresses* (Memorial postcard of the Fifth Zionist Congress) (Fig. 3.4), one can immediately place its stylistic features—the intertwining, arabesque forms of the frame; the organic lines of the thorns and the rising sun; the androgyny of the angel of salvation; the anti-industrial, artisan landscape with a plough; the interplay between sinuous lines and spiritual forces in the redemptive image of Zion—within the lineage of the visual techniques and cultural criticism pioneered by William Morris, Walter Crane, Aubrey Beardsley, Henry van de Velde, and other artists of the *fin de siècle* avant-garde. Although Lilien’s illustrations were stylistically unique in the context in which they were shown at the Fifth Zionist Congress, his art evidences a clear debt to the stylistic innovations of Beardsley and Crane, the latter of whom also conceived of a regenerative political movement—namely, Socialism—as compatible with the visual styles of decadence.



Gedenkblatt des 5. Zionisten-Kongresses.

Figure 3.4 E. M. Lilien, *Gedenkblatt des fünften Zionisten-Kongresses* (1901), from *Ost und West* (January 1902): 17–18.

In Lilien’s illustration, a Galut Jew—hunched-over, aged, and forlorn—is given direction by an androgynous angel who points him in the direction of the rising sun. Enveloping the old Jew with his magnificent wings, the angel, with his erect, muscular posture and youthful beauty, represents the Zionist ideals of corporeal strength, clarity of vision and determined purpose, even while his masculinity is far from certain. Far in the distance, a man with a plough and oxen tills the fallow ground of what is supposed to represent the homeland of Palestine. The Hebrew inscription at the bottom of the postcard reads: “Our eyes will behold your return to Zion in mercy.” Zionism and decadence are—seemingly paradoxically—mutually constitutive.

Thematically speaking, the 12 illustrations that Lilien showed at the Fifth Zionist Congress certainly had much in common with the paintings and sculptures produced by the other Zionist artists. He, too, utilized stories and rituals from the Jewish tradition, such as the prophet Isaiah and the celebration of the Sabbath, side-by-side with representations of the urgent desperation of Jews wanting to return to Palestine. As for the latter, in addition to his *Gedenkblatt*, the vignette *Palaestina* (later used as the masthead for the colonial journal of the same name edited by Alfred Nossig and Davis Trietsch, Fig. 5.1) and his illustration *Heimatlos* (homeless) both convey the Zionist determination to overcome the Diaspora and reestablish the Jewish nation.

But what makes Lilien's art so unique is not its extension of these well-established Zionist themes; rather, it is his particular iconography, what Michael Stanislawski playfully—but not incorrectly—termed Lilien's "Judenstil."⁵⁶ By "Judenstil," Stanislawski means:

Lilien's extraordinary mélange of decadence and Jewishness—the admixture of *Jugendstil* and *Judentum* . . . a nationalist Jewish art that would at once decry the sterility and unnaturalness of bourgeois Jewish society, celebrate sexuality and physicality as well as the life of the workingman, and promote the rejuvenation and potential freedom of the Jewish people.⁵⁷

Indeed, Stanislawski is not the first to point out the strange convergence of Jewish themes and the visual techniques of decadence, symbolism, and *Jugendstil* in Lilien's art.⁵⁸ As early as 1901, in the first article to appear about Lilien in *Ost und West*, M. Hirschfelder articulated precisely this convergence of *Jugendstil* and Jewishness in situating Lilien's work vis-à-vis the historical pressures of the *fin de siècle*:

Sobriety and brutal striving for reality are the necessities of our day. And here, too, this autonomous phenomenon comes forward, even if not entirely a succinct form, as in these nerve-racking [*entnervten*] times. And in the same way that the searching soul fled to religious themes in times past, it turns there today—I would almost say to make melodies. The characteristic trait of modern painting is indeed symbolism . . . And can one wonder why in our disharmonious time a whole range of outstanding artists stroke their harps to sing precisely such tones out of natural reaction? In an audacious pleasure to create, . . . Lilien stands out as one of the most engaging young representatives, particularly as the only one within new Jewish art.⁵⁹

He continues by emphasizing how Lilien emerged from "the night of disadvantaged and poor circumstances" in the Eastern Galicia ghettos of Drohobycz to arrive at Vienna's Academy of Art in 1894.⁶⁰ Shortly thereafter he moved to Munich, "the painter's Mecca," and became one of the most prominent *Jugendstil* artists of Jewish heritage, publishing 14 of his illustrations in the movement's key journal, *Jugend*.⁶¹

Published primarily in 1897 and 1898, Lilien's illustrations in *Jugend* clearly evidence an engagement with the organicism of art nouveau and the prelapsarian, anti-industrial simplicity imagined by its exponents in *fin de siècle* Europe. At the same time, the undecidability of the hybrid forms—"counter to nature"—evidence his engagement with the discourses of decadence. Like his colleagues, Lilien made use of hybrid human-animal forms that brought together the carnality of the human body with a decadent

animal sensuality and the lushness of fertility. This can be clearly seen in many of his illustrations during this period, in which the sensuous eroticism of decadence is characterized by sinuous lines, fleshy forms, and hybrid bodies. As Charles Bernheimer argued, this ‘non-natural’ hybridity is a critical touchstone of the decadent subject,⁶² and, as we will see, the stylistic innovations—the organicism of the landscape, the hybridity of the figures, the innocent irrationality of the scene—will form the fundament of Lilien’s Zionist drawings over the next years.

But what is missing in the literature on Lilien—and this is true of all the critics that I have encountered, both Lilien’s contemporaries (such as Buber and Hirschfelder) and present-day critics (such as Gelber, Stanislawski, and Heyd)—is an explanation of how Lilien’s decadent art was compatible with and even furthered the Zionist project of regeneration. Although Stanislawski introduced the useful concept of “Judenstil” to describe Lilien’s art, he actually gives scant attention to the concept of decadence and its relationship to Zionism, focusing his attention instead on Lilien’s anti-bourgeois thrust and the ways in which he, applying Mosse’s critique, drafted late nineteenth-century ideas of masculinity “into the service of national symbols or stereotypes.”⁶³ Indeed, he is not wrong, but what I want to propose is that Lilien’s art requires a reevaluation of conventional understandings of decadence as simply tantamount to decline, sickness, and senescence precisely because he placed his iconography of decadence in the service of the Zionist concept of progress and Jewish rejuvenation. Lilien seems to be searching for a new type of figuration adequate to the Zionist leap into the future, one that forges a compatibility between the aesthetics of regeneration and the aesthetics of decadence. In so doing, his art takes him away from his orthodox Viennese origins and into the strange realm of a new kind of cosmological physicality.

To show this, I will first examine a significant strand of the conceptual history of decadence, namely its derivation from eschatology and its antithesis to the concept of progress. I argue that Lilien’s art, however, deploys decadent forms within Zionism to support a decidedly modern, non-eschatological understanding of Jewish history, one which is defined preeminently by Enlightenment conceptions of progress. In this respect, conventional definitions of decadence as the strict antithesis of progress, such as those of the art historian Edward Lucie-Smith, are of little use in understanding the historical and political significance of Lilien’s art. According to Lucie-Smith:

Decadence was not a mere renewal of the Byronic obsession with the “great, bad man”, the spoilt hero who is somehow superior to this unflawed counterpart; nor was it simply a perverse revival of the early Romantic fascination with death and suffering. Decadence involved a renunciation of the idea of progress, spiritual as well as material, which had sustained intellectuals ever since the eighteenth century.⁶⁴

In the case of Lilien's Zionist art, decadence, on the contrary, actually fosters this notion of progress.

To see how this thesis necessitates a reconsideration of conventional understandings and histories of decadence, let me briefly provide some background of the history of the concept. In his seminal book, *Five Faces of Modernity*, Matei Calinescu shows how decadence was originally connected to an eschatological notion of temporality as the last epoch before the end of the world.⁶⁵ Far from being a late nineteenth-century invention, decadence, he argues, is an antique concept, well-established within the Judeo-Christian tradition, signifying decline and decay. In the eschatological world-view, the future was already determined by the past, such that experience and expectation were bound to one another in a cyclical fashion, with a predetermined element of decay. That is to say, what would happen in the future—namely, the end of the world and Judgment Day—was already fixed, and human beings, as temporal animals, had simply to wait out their own misery and the decline of the world itself: “The approach of the Day of Doom is announced by the unmistakable sign of profound decay—untold corruption—and, according to the apocalyptic prophecy, by the satanic power of the Antichrist” (FF, 152–53). The greater the decadence and misery of the world, the closer the day of reckoning.

In an important essay on the conceptual history of the terms “progress” and “decline,” Reinhart Koselleck, largely in accord with Calinescu's account, demonstrates that “progress” is a modern, eighteenth-century invention, while its antonym—decline, decadence, and/or decay—goes back to Antiquity and the Judeo-Christian idea of the eschaton:

According to the Christian teaching of the interim time between creation and the end of the world, people found themselves, since the coming of Christ, in principle within the last time period, within the last *aetas*, namely the *senectus*, within which nothing else fundamentally new could occur.⁶⁶

Although one sometimes spoke of progress or, more often, of perfection throughout the Middle Ages, secular progress or change did not in anyway countermand the overarching, eschatological world-view, namely that the world itself was rushing toward its end. In Koselleck's words: “The more misery there is in the world, the nearer the salvation of the elect. However, the future is not the dimension of progress but rather that of the end of the world.”⁶⁷ In other words, decadence is the pre-modern world's most ineluctable feature.

Up until the eighteenth century, then, progress and decline were, in Koselleck's terms, correlational concepts, in which all coefficients of change were determined by the view that this world was rapidly decaying. Both progress and decline made use of metaphors derived from biology and natural life cycles: on the one hand, decadence was associated with twilight,

senescence, putrefaction, sickness, and exhaustion, while, on the other hand, progress was associated with rebirth, dawn, germination, health, and vitality. The modern concept of progress, however, overcame and denaturalized the strictly biological, correlational relationship between renewal and imminent demise. Exemplified, among other places, in the ideas of Condorcet, Wieland, and Kant, the modern notion holds that “progress is general and constant while every regression, decline, or decay occurs only partially and temporarily.”⁶⁸ As Koselleck cogently argues in another essay, “The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity,” our contemporary understanding of progress—a collective singular built upon the openness of the future—is intimately connected to a non-eschatological experience of time.⁶⁹ Indeed, the epochal category of “*eine neue Zeit*” (literally, “a new time”) or “modernity” was not only conceived in the century of Enlightenment, but it represented the first time that the “horizon of expectation” (the future) became detached from the “space of experience” (the past).⁷⁰ In modernity, the eschatological world-view was displaced by the openness of the future such that progress is not simply balanced by decline but could very well surpass the latter through revolution or acceleration, two of the fundamental characteristics of “modern time.”⁷¹ “What was new was that the expectations that reached out for the future became detached from all that previous experience had to offer . . . The future could be different from the past, and better, to boot.”⁷²

According to Calinescu and Koselleck, then, the modern concept of progress, at least since the eighteenth century, displaced the eschatological world-view, which had held that decadence was the inevitable way of the world. The decadence of the Roman Empire may have been preordained, at least within this world-view; however, Zionism was a politic that was fundamentally about self-assertion, evolution, and the belief in progressive change. For this reason, we might say that the very conditions of possibility for the Zionist view of regenerative history may be found in the eighteenth century: in the same way that science, medicine, technology, governments, and societies were now imagined to progress, Jews, too, could change for the better. Once again, we recognize the ideas of Christian Wilhelm Dohm who applied the Enlightenment ideology of progress to the possibility of Jewish “improvement,” something that was fully embraced by Zionist thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century. For both Dohm and the Zionists, there is nothing inherently “decadent” or “degenerate” about Jews; their “degeneration” and “barrenness,” as Buber argued, is the product of historical and socio-economic circumstances, all of which could be changed by the modern logic of progress. In other words, the Zionist conception of history is predicated on the possibility of an unknown and open future in which evolutionary change could occur.

As I argued earlier with respect to Nordau and Buber, the Zionist conception of Jewish history posited a progressive rebirth of the Jewish nation through, among other things, “physical” and “aesthetic” education. This

conception of historical change is not a cyclical return, nor is it simply a linear progression forward; rather, it is, to use Zerubavel's words again, "a spiral thrust into the future," building upon the greatness of the past and reclaiming—in the present—the heroic tradition of Judaism for the sake of the future state. For Buber, as well as his cultural Zionist colleagues, art was the critical means for moving from the chaos of the Galut to the redemption of the state. Although the cultural Zionists (represented at the fifth Congress by "Democratic faction" members Buber, Lilien, Feiwel, and others) never fully convinced the "political Zionists" (those members, such as Nordau, who were unequivocally behind Herzl) about the necessity of art for state formation, both groups conceived of the historical tasks of Zionism to be the progressive regeneration of the Jewish people. Despite the break between the two groups that historians of early Zionism have often emphasized, the cultural Zionists—in their prioritizing of the question of culture and cultural productivity—and the political Zionists—in their prioritizing of the practical issues of financing and land acquisition—shared an unequivocal and overlapping investment in the modern concept of progress.⁷³ Both believed that Jews could change, evolve, and move forward, overcoming the degeneracy of the Galut and the ghetto.

At the fifth Congress, Lilien, a representative of the "culture" faction, underscored Buber's advocacy of "aesthetic education" as the means of realizing the Zionist idea of the State. On the last day of the Congress, he argued that:

culture will make us into complete Jews and will also enrich our Judaism. In times past, when a Jew was a *Culturmensch*, he belonged to foreign nations. Since the rise of Zionism, when a Jew makes a mark on science or art and is a Zionist, he belongs to his own people. He creates a Jewish culture.

(SP, 396)

In the same way that Buber, drawing on Schiller's notion of the aesthetic, argued that art could make Jews into "fully developed, complete human beings," Lilien—as the foremost Zionist artist—echoed this sentiment, arguing that "culture" would foster a sense of unity and identity among the Jewish people. This becomes even clearer when we turn to the three major projects that he worked on during this period: his illustrations for the book of poetry, *Juda* (1900); his editorial work and artistic contributions to the *Juedischer Almanach* (1902); and his illustrations for the German translation of Morris Rosenfeld's Yiddish poetry, *Lieder des Ghetto* (Songs of the Ghetto) (1902/03). In these illustrations, we can see how Lilien revalued the visual language and aesthetics of decadence to give form to the Zionist concept of progressive regeneration.

In the first book-length study of *Lilien* published in 1903, Stefan Zweig posited that *Juda* “is a document [that represents] not only one of the most perfected works of German book illustration but is also the first page of the history of a nationally conscious art.”⁷⁴ This was not an overestimation of its significance. *Juda* was the product of an artistic collaboration between Lilien and Baron Börries von Münchhausen, a German poet who was a member of the avant-garde artist group *Die Kommenden* in Berlin.⁷⁵ The 82-page book consists of 15 philosemitic, ballad poems written by Münchhausen and luxuriously illustrated by Lilien. The poems, composed in a simple, rhyming verse, were primarily derived from stories and figures from the Old Testament, including Sodom and Gomorrah, the harlot of Jericho, Moses, Job, and Samson and Delilah. Lilien, in Zweig’s words, “paraphrased the poems and enveloped them in a decorative unity, which embraced the ancient-national [*altvölkisch*], blue-white colors of home, interwoven with thorns and illuminated by silver stars of Zion” (SZ, 21). Together, Lilien and Münchhausen—a Jew and a German—created a consciously national art for the Jewish people.

When *Juda* was published in 1900, it was immediately praised in both the Jewish and the non-Jewish press across Europe and quickly became a collector’s item. As Hirschfelder wrote, for example, about *Juda* in 1901, “All the symbols of Jewish worship and spirit shine forth and blow upon us like distant winds from home . . . in a richly changing fashion, pictures from a sunken time long ago come over us like in a panorama.”⁷⁶ Lilien and Münchhausen juxtaposed ornate illustrations of Torah scrolls, Jewish angels, candelabras, and images of the Holy Land with poems that sang about the heroic traditions and myths of the ancient Hebrews. As both Hirschfelder and Zweig remarked, the book evoked a sense of pride insofar as it was perhaps the first work of Jewish national art to illustrate the Zionist desire to return home.

The Zionist orientation of the book is, in fact, quite explicit from its first poem, “Euch” (To you). Surrounded by more than two dozen Jewish faces drawn by Lilien (Fig. 3.5), Münchhausen’s poem calls—in no uncertain terms—for the “lost tribe” of Jews to “go back” to their ancient homeland:

Respected people, I will show you the bridge
 Away from hate and scorn to your youthful joy
 Lost tribe, I know the way
 And the way is: back!
 Back to the beauty of once sung psalms
 . . . Back to your great, ancient God! . . .
 Be what you are, ancient Israel
 Your God still lives, and his columns
 go forth even today—hear O’ Israel!⁷⁷

Not fortuitously, the following two pages illustrate a determined, but internally conflicted Jew about to make the decision to return to the Zionist utopia. The winds of change blow against this lost Jew, who, with his arms crossed and head bowed down, is cloaked in a long robe adorned with flaming hearts falling toward the ground. Far in the distance is the ancient land of Israel, and a joyous group of men and women dance in celebration of their return.



Figure 3.5 E. M. Lilien and Baron Börries von Münchhausen, "To You," *Juda* (1900), 2.

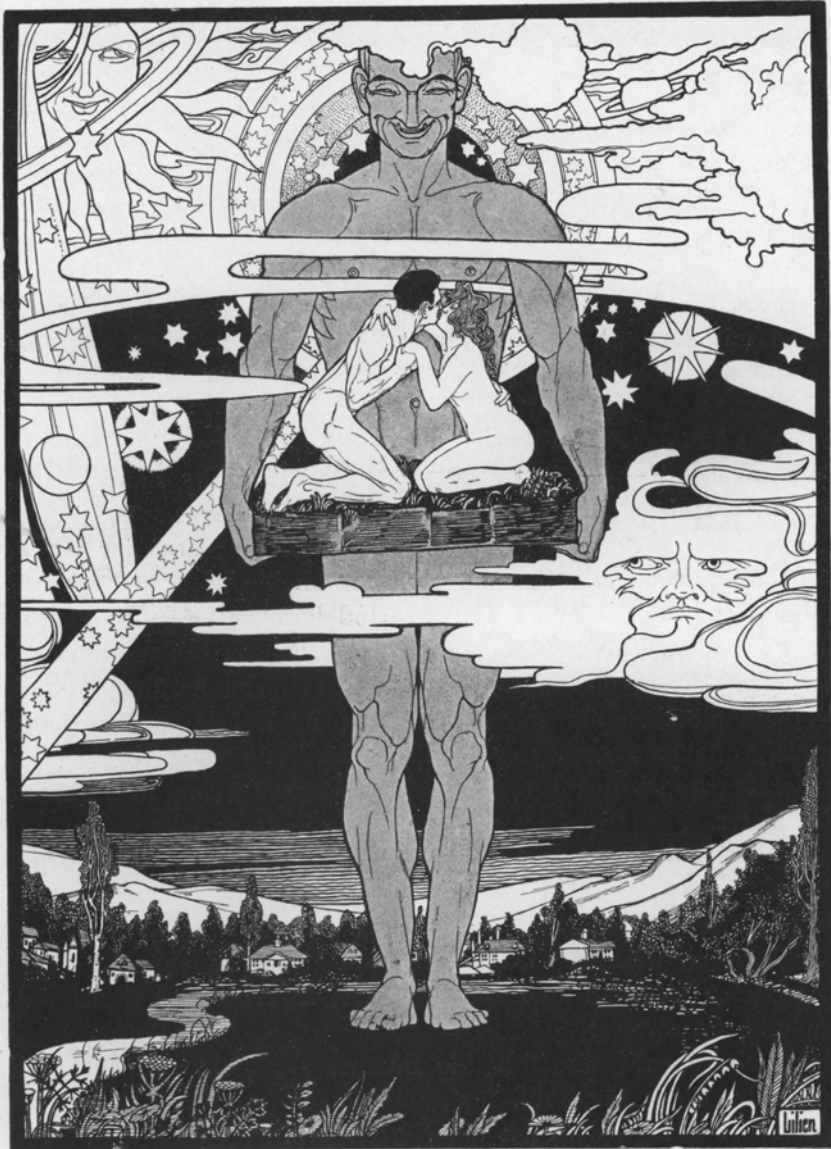
Indeed, throughout the book, this theme of return is emphasized over and over again. In another illustration, Lilien depicts a forlorn Jew, wrapped in thorns that cover his skullcap, arms, and chest. He is in Egypt, where the Jews were once enslaved, something that can be interpreted contemporaneously as their enslavement in the European and Russian ghettos of the Diaspora. Across a precipitous chasm and sinuous body of water, a radiant sun rises, with light that shines forth from the Jewish homeland. Ultimately, the decision to return home—something that simultaneously represents physical, spiritual, and national rejuvenation—rests only upon him. It is through art and the domain of the aesthetic that this decision is given form and even catalyzed.

As a “national” work of art, *Juda* functioned by coupling the Zionist idea of imminent return with the heroic strain of ancient Jewish history. This is highlighted, for example, by Moses’s liberation of his people from Egypt as well as various myths, including Samson’s killing of the lion with his bare hands and Münchhausen’s celebratory poems, “The Triumphal Song of the Jews” and “The Sabbath of all Sabbaths.” Lilien’s extraordinary illustration of Samson tearing apart the head of a lion (Fig. 3.6) underscores the ancientness of the “muscle Jew” tradition, while also using the visual techniques of *Jugendstil* to depict the sensual eroticism of Samson’s sinewy body and the verdant organicism of the enveloping foliage. Samson’s muscular heroism, an emblem of past national greatness, is now transported to the fantastic space of the *Jugendstil* landscape.⁷⁸

To further demonstrate this intersection between Zionism and the stylistic innovations of decadence, let me turn to Lilien’s work immediately after *Juda*. On the last page of Hirschfelder’s article on Lilien, the editors of *Ost und West* included a photograph of the artist in his atelier. Lilien is smartly dressed in a suit, with his arms crossed, looking at the photographer. He is surrounded by at least 13 of his illustrations, as well as several photographs and two small lion sculptures on a mantle. On the easel, we can make out one of his most challenging illustrations from this period, *Trugland* (Land of Deception) (1901), a mystical depiction of the cosmological mysteries of love (Fig. 3.7). This illustration, originally conceived as part of a cycle called “Liebe” (love), was published the following year in the *Juedischer Almanach*, a 300-page compendium of Jewish art and literature produced to evoke Jewish national pride. The literary part of the almanac was edited by Berthold Feiwel and featured short stories, poems, critical essays, and dramatic pieces by some of the best-known Jewish modernists, including Buber, Bialek, Scholem Aleichem, Peretz, Herzl, and Zweig.⁷⁹ Lilien was responsible for editing the artistic part of the Almanac, which featured many of the artists whose work had been shown the year before in the first Zionist art exhibit. Three of Lilien’s drawings (two illustrations from *Lieder des Ghetto* and *Trugland*) were also included in the book.



Figure 3.6 E. M. Lilien, "Samson," *Juda* (1900), 54.



E. M. LILIEN.

TRUGLAND.

BERLIN.

Figure 3.7 E. M. Lilien, *Trugland* (1901).

I would like to pause on *Trugland* because I think it represents a particularly important example of Lilien's decadent Judaism and will allow us to recognize the limits of conventional understandings of decadence as simply synonymous with sickness, decline, and degeneracy. The picture depicts a gigantic musclemán standing firmly on the earth, holding a piece of ground that he has torn free, upon which two lovers, probably Adam and Eve, are embracing. All three are naked, and the musclemán smiles deviously, with tiny animal fangs protruding from his mouth, while the sign of the sun smirks and that of the moon frowns. The strangeness of this fantastic scene is mirrored by the equally strange space of the illustration itself, which is, at once, highly compressed and indefinitely deep, depending on what part of the drawing a viewer privileges: if one looks only at the bottom, the earth appears to recede back beyond the houses, trees, and mountains; but if one looks at the starry sky, it appears almost flat, like an unfurled backdrop, even while the clouds provide a vague sense of depth as they envelop the musclemán. But because the scale makes no sense, a simple rational explanation of the scene before us is immediately foreclosed. What appears perfectly ordinary on the ground—houses, trees, rivers, and mountains—becomes decidedly otherworldly upon entering the celestial realm above.

Trugland is a mystical, phantasmagoric drawing, one that betrays a definite relationship to Lilien's earlier work published in *Jugend* and his affiliation with the Berlin avant-garde movement, "Die Kommenden." Hirschfelder, for example, described the musclemán as "a gigantic, satanically laughing demon," and he considered this illustration, with respect to Lilien's oeuvre as of 1901, to be his most characteristically "symbolist" achievement.⁸⁰ And Alfred Gold, in his study of Lilien for Buber's series, *Juedische Kuenster*, considered *Trugland* in the same vein as some of his hybrid human-animal pictures, such as *The Woman and the Faun*, a decadent vignette that Lilien produced for "Die Kommenden" in 1898. In both, the inversion of scale, the hybrid imagery, and the compression of space follow the reversal of a natural order: Lilien couples the ordinary with the otherworldly, the horror of the modern night with the sign of the artistic avant-garde, all in a space that refuses to be rationalized or logically adjudicated. Because of their Symbolist references, irrationality, and use of hybrid figures, Lilien's pictures would easily fall under Nordau's rubric of degeneration; however, I contend that he is using the stylistic innovations of decadence in an attempt to concretize the leap into the future.

Unlike the other two illustrations that Lilien published in the *Juedischer Almanach*, *Trugland* is not an overtly "Jewish" picture: the studious Jew of *The Light of Exile* and the Jewish gravestones of *After our Years* (both incorporated into his illustrations for *Lieder des Ghetto*) are nowhere to be found in *Trugland*. Instead, *Trugland* seems to represent the paradoxes and pitfalls of the Zionist idea, both the redemptive hopes and dangerous deceptions of rebirth, ones that could only be articulated using the contradictory stylistic features of decadence. As a kind of allegory of the Garden

of Eden resurrected in a new space of physicality and purity, *Trugland* represents the Jewish people beginning anew, propagating the world with a regenerated and revitalized race. But the illustration is not simply a mythic celebration of a primordial heterosexuality; it is also a recognition of the danger—articulated on a seemingly demonic plane—of the aesthetic dimensions of rebirth and regeneration.⁸¹

We might push this further by considering Lilien's illustrations within the ideological apparatus of the *Juedischer Almanach* itself, particularly as outlined by its literary editor, Berthold Feiwel. As the first publication of the newly founded "Jüdischer Verlag" (Jewish Press) in Berlin, the *Juedischer Almanach* was intended, according to Feiwel's introduction, to highlight the power of the Zionist "Jewish renaissance."⁸² Together with Lilien, who solicited and arranged the artworks published in the volume, Feiwel saw its tasks in September 1902 as follows:

The Jewish people, once the bearers of an unforgettable culture, have been subject to two thousand years of unparalleled physical and spiritual misery, hampered by the curse of homelessness and scattered in every kind of creation; in the future, they will transfer the liberated strengths of their race [*Rassenkräften*] to a new culture. The melding of the people [*Volk*] with the motherland [*Mutterboden*] will grow out of the new spirit [*Geist*], which, at the same time, shall be the unfettered, original spirit of the nation and the spirit of the new times [*der fessellose, ureigene Geist der Nation und der Geist der neuen Zeiten*].

(JA, 11)

By assembling the work of Jewish artists, authors, and scholars, the Almanac (and, more broadly, the Jewish Press) would serve "the preservation and development of Jewish racial strength [*jüdische Rassenkraft*] and Jewish *Volkspersönlichkeit*" (JA, 13), what he later calls "*Volksthum*" (JA, 15). Here, cultural production was clearly connected to racial and national destiny, a destiny that Zionist Jews could and must determine. Applying the *völkisch* concepts of contemporary pan-Germanism—"race," "strength," "ground"—to the Jewish cause, the goal, according to Feiwel, was to establish a Jewish culture that is both "national" and "modern." After all, "the spirit of the new times"—a decidedly modern spirit—simultaneously called upon a mythic past while moving to a future destiny. The way to do so, according to Feiwel, who presumably represented the views of many of the artists and authors collected in the almanac, would be to cultivate a kind of Jewish racial-ethnicity, or "*Volkstümlichkeit*," one that unequivocally cited and relied upon certain elements of the incipient *Blut und Boden* nationalism forming at this time in Germany.

The goal of the almanac, then, was to catalyze Jewish racial strength and bring this strength to bear upon cultural production. This, in turn, would

cultivate a sense of nationality and Jewish *Volkstümlichkeit*, something that had been lacking, according to the diagnosis of the editors, for thousands of years. Feiwel's application of *völkisch* rhetoric thus served to support the Zionist belief that the domain of the aesthetic and artistic production itself could secure nationality. Building on Buber's call for "aesthetic education," the *Juedischer Almanach* represented the very instantiation of the aesthetics of regeneration. In this respect, Lilien's decadence was rendered compatible with the Zionist concept of progressive regeneration, for what mattered first and foremost was that there was Jewish national art at all, that Jews had the "sensory perceptual talent" that Wagner had categorically denied them. In effect, because Feiwel and Buber believed that art created racial and national strength, even decadence—when situated within the Zionist call for return and its ideological apparatus of progress—was subsumed under the modernist rubric of regeneration.

Finally, let me turn briefly to the second book of poetry that Lilien illustrated during this period, *Lieder des Ghetto*, in order to draw some conclusions about how he brought *Jugendstil* and the visual rhetoric of decadence to bear on explicitly Zionist ideas and themes. Published in Berlin in 1903, *Lieder des Ghetto* is a fascinating and wide-ranging collection of feather-pen drawings created by Lilien for the German translation of a selection of Morris Rosenfeld's Yiddish poetry. The translation was done by Feiwel, who also wrote the introduction to the volume just one month before he penned his introduction to the *Juedischer Almanach*. *Lieder des Ghetto* was the first compilation of Rosenfeld's poetry to appear in German translation. The poems and pictures depict the suffering of Jews living in the ghettos and working in the sweatshops during the *fin de siècle*, focusing on the plight of the exploited worker and the utopian hope of Zionism. The poems are divided into three parts: "Songs of Work," "Songs of the Jewish People," and "Songs of Life."

Rosenfeld, born in Buksha, Poland, in 1862, immigrated to New York City in 1886 and worked most of his life in sweatshops on New York's East Side. During this time, he began composing Yiddish poetry about class struggle, the horrors of industrialization, and the misery of the Jewish ghettos in both America and in Europe, becoming actively involved in the burgeoning labor movement.⁸³ His poems, such as "Desperation," "The Workshop," and "At the Sewing Machine," depict—in the most brutal imagery possible—the dehumanization and humiliation of working in the sweatshop and living in the ghetto. Enframed by the tools of a garment worker and a punctured, bleeding heart, these poems detail the process of dehumanization in which workers, sick and near death, are transformed into nothing more than machines by greedy bosses who suck out their very lifeblood. In one such oft-reproduced and truly horrific image, Lilien literalizes the wealthy factory boss with a bulging stomach sucking the blood of the haggard worker, a picture that represents a clear citation of Beardsley's grotesque "Ali Baba."

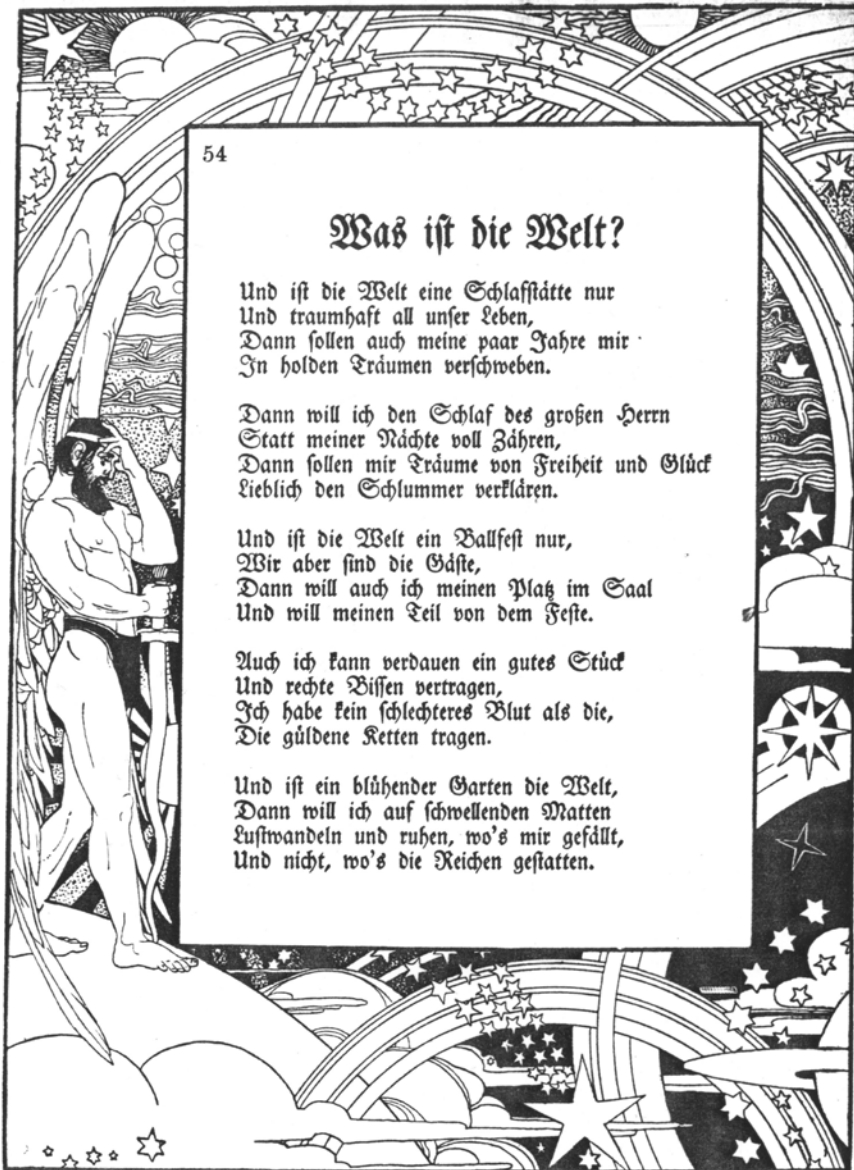
Lilien's factory boss is a hybrid figure, in this case an androgynous, vampire-man, with giant black wings that hideously envelope the hunched-over worker.⁸⁴ Through a pipe that runs directly into the worker's neck, the boss nourishes himself on the blood of the (Jewish) proletariat.

Here, Lilien's poems do much more than simply "paraphrase," to use Zweig's word, the poems that he illustrates. Lilien not only concretizes the exploitation through recourse to the imagery of decadence, but he also uses this very same visual vocabulary—particularly its mystical, utopian elements, such as those that we observed in *Trugland*—to imagine another world and another future. Lilien's Zionism thus operates as a kind of aesthetics of regeneration precisely in this gap between historical outrage and imminent redemption. In his illustrations for Rosenfeld's poem "What is the World?", Lilien places an erect "muscle Jew" on the edge of the earth against the starry backdrop of the cosmos (Fig. 3.8). In one hand, the muscle Jew holds a decidedly phallic (but strangely warped) sword, while the other hand props up his pensive head. The mystical backdrop—full of radiant stars, wild orbits, and gleaming rainbows—offers a peak into a celestial realm that transcends the gravity, dehumanization, and despair of this world. It is here that one can recognize the decidedly hybrid form of Lilien's techniques of representation: on the one hand, his illustration is indebted to the organicism of art nouveau and, on the other, a kind of crystalline, cosmological abstraction. The Zionist utopia is derived from the desperation of this world but seeks its transcendence by hurling the heroism of the past into a redeemed and regenerated future.

As Feiwei quite aptly writes in his introduction, *Lieder des Ghetto* depicts:

both the poor slave and the great hero who carries with him the burden of the Galut, the most terrible weight that presses down on human necks. It is not human beings who live in the ghetto, only the most tortured human life instincts . . . and the inextinguishable hope for the Messiah, for the redemption through Zion.⁸⁵

This collection of images and poems thus presents Western-European, German-speaking Jewry with the reality of "the soul of ghetto-Judaism," in all its desperation, hopelessness, and degeneracy. Far from simply a "lionization" of the authenticity of the Yiddish-speaking, "ghetto Jew," as Stanislawski argues, the book is an urgent answer to the question, "Why Zionism?" It confronts assimilated, German-speaking Jews with the suffering of the vast majority of impoverished Jews and urges them to become Zionists for the sake of the Jewish people who are scattered the world over. And it does this by appealing to a decidedly *völkisch* conception of nationality and race. At the same time, by employing the domain of the aesthetic, it combats one of the most prevalent stereotypes of all: that the Jews are a culturally barren people who cannot make art because of the degeneracy of their race. In this



Was ist die Welt?

Und ist die Welt eine Schlafstätte nur
Und traumhaft all unser Leben,
Dann sollen auch meine paar Jahre mir
In holden Träumen verschweben.

Dann will ich den Schlaf des großen Herrn
Statt meiner Nächte voll Zähren,
Dann sollen mir Träume von Freiheit und Glück
Lieblich den Schlummer verklären.

Und ist die Welt ein Ballfest nur,
Wir aber sind die Gäste,
Dann will auch ich meinen Platz im Saal
Und will meinen Teil von dem Feste.

Auch ich kann verdauen ein gutes Stück
Und rechte Bissen vertragen,
Ich habe kein schlechteres Blut als die,
Die güldene Ketten tragen.

Und ist ein blühender Garten die Welt,
Dann will ich auf schwellenden Matten
Lustwandeln und ruhen, wo's mir gefällt,
Und nicht, wo's die Reichen gestatten.

Figure 3.8 E. M. Lilien and Morris Rosenfeld, "What is the World?" *Lieder des Ghetto* (1903), 54.

way, Lilien's decadence, redeployed as evidence of national progress and racial talent, directly serves the Zionist cause as both political rejuvenation and cultural redemption.

Feiwei makes this Zionist interpretation of *Lieder des Ghetto* even more explicit in his introduction where he argues that Rosenfeld's poems not only justify Zionist ideology but that the very structure of the book follows the Zionist philosophy of progressive history:

From far away comes a light, a sound, and a smell: The shimmer of the sun and the sea, the sound of birds, and the smell of the forest—all the beauty, which he [a Galut Jew], happier than millions of his brothers, can still take in before the power of the ghetto envelopes him. But then it happens: This unbelievably sad melancholy carries him out of the past, through the pain and misery of the ghetto, to the incredibly marvelous empire of the future. . . . And the poet of the modern ghetto turns into a singer of modern Zionism, living Judaism's monumental movement for freedom, which will lead the Jews out of their current captivity into their old homeland in peace and in freedom.⁸⁶

Zionism—as a modern, non-eschatological philosophy—conceives of Jewish history as a process of evolutionary progress, a movement into the future that overcomes the misery of the present and rediscovers the greatness of the antique past. The “spirit of the ghetto”—in all its horror and desperation—will be transformed into a redemptive, celestial wonder called Zionism. And it is precisely for this reason, then, that Lilien's Jewish decadence—in its searching hybrid forms of the desolate and the boundless, the sensual and the abstract, the organic and the cosmological—has to be understood within the modern, Zionist ideology of progress and state formation, not within the eschatological rubrics of sickness, decay, decline, and degeneracy. He produced “Jewish national art,” and, within the Zionist imaginary, this irreducible fact was what undergirded Jewish physical strength, progressive regeneration, and, ultimately, a kind of Jewish ethnic-racial *Volkstümlichkeit*. In this regard, Lilien's decadence ultimately represents the regeneration of aesthetics and the aesthetics of regeneration.

THE GYMNASTICS OF REGENERATION

The anatomo-politics of the Jewish body

In May of 1909, the publishers of *Die jüdische Turnzeitung* (Jewish Gymnastics Journal) issued a commemorative volume called *Körperliche Renaissance der Juden* (The Physical Renaissance of the Jews), which celebrated the tenth anniversary of the founding of “Bar Kochba,” the Jewish Gymnastics Association in Berlin.¹ Adorned with a lithograph of a young, muscular rendition of Bar Kochba by the artist Hermann Struck, the volume consisted of twelve essays by various sports experts and medical doctors, who attested to the benefits of gymnastics, fitness, sports, farming, and military service for the regeneration of the Jewish people. A little more than a decade earlier, Richard Blum, Rabbi Wilhelm Lewy, and a number of their students and colleagues who were interested in promoting gymnastics for the improvement of the Jewish body established the first Jewish gymnastics association (*Turnverein*) in Germany. According to its membership charter, the purpose of the association was to sponsor and support Jewish gymnastics in order to strengthen the individual Jewish body as well as a broader sense of Jewish nationality. Calling upon the history of German gymnastics in the nineteenth century² as well as the history of Jewish heroism in antiquity, the founders believed that gymnastics would not only discipline and develop the body, but that it would also cultivate a sense of nationality, all things that would be important for the regeneration of the Jewish people as a whole. As Richard Blum recalled the ambitious goals of the Jewish gymnastics association and its “striving for corporeal regeneration” (*die körperlichen Regenerationsbestrebungen*): “We wanted to establish contact with our brothers in every country in order to bring us together in the cultivation of our national spiritual life and our national character [*Volkstum*].”³

In the foreword to the commemorative volume, Georg Arndt pointed out the tremendous successes enjoyed over the past decade in “training a race of upright and strong Jews” (KR, 1). Although “the haunt of degeneration” still lurked, the motivating question—“How do we create a healthy Jewish race?”—had been successfully answered: through “ironclad self-rearing” in gymnastics associations, extensive involvement with sports, and military training, Jews would become “muscle Jews” (KR, 1). In one of the

programmatic articles in the volume, “Muscle Jews and Nervous Jews,” M. Jastrowitz of the Berlin “Medical Council” tells the readership that “the desired results could be reached through fitness exercises, running, jumping, climbing, swimming, discus throwing, archery, and gymnastics” (KR, 14). As another contributor confidently declared: “The Jews shall become muscle men instead of nervous men [*Muskelmenschen statt Nervenmenschen*]” (KR, 12). Because of “the elasticity of our race” (something that Nordau had also pointed out), “the bent over, cowardly [Ghetto Jew] with a small chest and shortness of breath, with stunted bone growth and withered muscles” would be reborn in a heroic fashion and, through the power of “modern *Volks-hygiene*” (KR, 16), bring about a new race of Jews with “healthy nerves and healthy muscles” (KR, 13).⁴

The ultimate goal, as many of the contributors indicated, was not simply the cultivation of individual muscle Jews; rather it was the creation of a “muscle Jewry,” a new race of physically fit and mentally agile Jews. As Max Zirker argued:

The Jewish gymnastics associations do not want to create muscles of steel, sharpen mental presence, and increase courage and self-confidence for the sake of the individual. They are fighting for an idea . . . The Jewish gymnastics movement will serve Judaism in its entirety . . . and, therefore, carries a national-Jewish character.

(KR, 2)

The goal is to make the Jewish people as a whole “brave,” “courageous,” and “fertile” by cultivating the strength of the coming generations (KR, 2). To this end, in addition to sports, the Jewish people must develop a “class of farmers” who can till the ground, something that will counterbalance their “mostly intellectual work” (KR, 8). As such, they will develop the bones, musculature, and posture necessary for serving in the military and becoming national citizens able to defend a future homeland, while also honing their intellectual prowess and “mental hygiene” (KR, 14). Repeatedly citing the Germans as the precedent to be emulated, the authors point out how “the hardening and steeling of the body creates a powerful protecting wall” against the stresses of everyday life and any sort of physical or mental degeneration. The decisive Prussian victories at Königgratz and Sedan that led to German unification are invoked by Julius Moses as proof of the importance of learning mental and physical toughness for the sake of “Nationalbildung” (KR, 12).

In effect, what *The Physical Renaissance of the Jews* celebrated was not only the beginnings of muscular Judaism but also the beginnings of the age of modern Jewish bio-politics. While Michel Foucault famously traced the origins of European bio-politics to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a time in which the individual body began to be scientifically monitored and

interventions were made on behalf of the population,⁵ Jewish bio-politics did not begin in earnest until the very end of the nineteenth century with the creation of a discourse around muscular Judaism and the founding of the first Jewish gymnastics associations. According to Foucault, while “an anatomo-politics of the human body” focused on the disciplining, the optimization, and the usefulness of the individual body in order to assure its efficiency and docility, the regulation of the “species body” focused on the health and vitality of the race; and while the former is “individualizing,” the latter is “massifying” because it “is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species.”⁶

It is in this regard that we can make sense of Nordau’s extraordinary statement at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 on the necessity of knowing the vital signs and statistics of the Jewish people. Moving away from a strict attention to the individual body of the muscle Jew, he argued that the success of the Zionist movement was dependant upon knowing the birth and death rates of the Jewish people, their life expectancies, their patterns of diet and habituation, their marriage regulations, their susceptibility to illness, their contraceptive practices, and other statistical indicators of the population’s vitality. In his words:

A thorough statistical analysis of the Jewish people is of utmost importance for the Zionist movement. . . . We must reliably find out what the material of the people [*Volksmaterial*] is made of, to know what we will have to work with. We need exact anthropological, biological, economic, and intellectual statistics of the Jewish people. We need quantitative answers to the following questions: How are the Jewish people physically composed? How big are they on average? What are their anatomical characteristics? What are their sickness and mortality statistics? How many times per year is a Jew sick on average? What is their lifespan? From what diseases do they die? What are their figures for marriage and childbirth? How many criminals, mentally ill, deaf, crippled, blind, and epileptics do the Jewish people have? Do they have a particular kind of criminality? How many Jews live in the city and how many live in the country? What do the Jewish people do for a living? How do they work and what do they own? What do they drink and eat? Where do they live? How do they dress? How much of their income do they spend on food, clothing, housing, and spiritual needs? All this has to be known if one wants to really understand a people.⁷

Nordau’s questions thus refocused attention on the Jewish population as a whole—its composition in terms of vitality, productivity, living standards, and reproductive capacity. The discourse of muscular Judaism thus emerged from the desire to, at once, rejuvenate the physical body of the individual Jew and recreate a long-lost muscle Jewry. Not only did Nordau thus argue

for individual corporeal improvement through gymnastics, he was also the first modern Zionist thinker to articulate the necessity of knowing and monitoring the Jewish people as a whole, precisely in order to change and correct their constitution.

His questions about knowing the constitution of the Jewish population would be vigorously pursued over the following years, with numerous studies, journals, and associations emerging to analyze and document Jewish population statistics. In fact, in 1902, Alfred Nossig founded the Association for Jewish Statistics, and the following year issued the first compendium of “scientific” statistics of the Jewish people, *Jüdische Statistik*.⁸ In 1905, the first volume of the *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden* (Journal for Jewish Demographics and Statistics) was published in Berlin under the editorship of Arthur Ruppin. It existed until 1931, when the bureau for Jewish statistics was closed. The purpose of the journal was to cull statistics about the Jewish body—for example, its typical racial features, muscularity, mentality, and even average brain size—and, in a comparative fashion, begin to understand the composition of the scattered Jewish population. As for the latter, the journal sought to document marriage rates, criminality, suicide rates, education levels, lifespans, and drug and alcohol use, among other things, in major German and European cities, especially in comparison with Christians. The predominantly Zionist emphasis on statistical analysis of the Jewish population played an important role in the development of Jewish race science and hygiene discourses in the first decades of the twentieth-century,⁹ discourses that would later be taken up by state administrators and governmental bodies in Israel.¹⁰ As Mitchell Hart points out:

The establishment of institutions of Jewish social scientific research by practical Zionists can be understood . . . as one expression of the impulse to assume the role of a ‘government of the Jews,’ undertaking those tasks—census taking, the shaping of economic and social policy, concern over public health and hygiene—usually associated with political and official administrative bodies.¹¹

In other words, Nordau’s questions not only illustrate how he believed that “Jewish statistics” could help improve the Jewish people, but also point to the ways in which Zionism was to make use of the logic of bio-power to legitimize its claims to a state. Rather than beginning with the preexistence of the state as both an object of knowledge and dispenser of power, Nordau and his Zionist colleagues called for the study of the anatomo-politics of the scattered Jewish people precisely in order to form a state. Because Nordau’s call for the development of Jewish bio-politics adds a missing chapter to the history of bio-power, I would like to briefly summarize Foucault’s argument from the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* before proceeding with my discussion of the corporeal politics of Jewish regeneration.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault attempts to recast the repressive hypothesis by arguing that sex, far from being passed over in silence, is a powerful discursive fact that has been and continues to be openly regulated, administered, and controlled for the sake of preserving and perpetuating the state. Foucault famously seeks to displace the hegemonic explanatory power of the repressive hypothesis, which maintains that the history of sexuality is the history of its repression and confinement to specific private realms through denial, silence, and exclusion. Rather than chart the history of sexuality, then, as simply tantamount to the history of its prohibition and repression, Foucault shows how the hypothesis was a contingent formation that came into existence at a certain time and served specific social ends.¹² In short, it was a function of new linkages between knowledge and power, and that the history of sexuality bears witness to the wide-ranging and downright dangerous ways in which “sex is ‘put into discourse’ . . . [through] ‘polymorphous techniques of power’” (HS, 11). He proposes the term “bio-power” to describe this new discursive regime that, at once, combines sex, power, the body of the individual and the body politic of the state.

During the seventeenth century (what Foucault calls the Classical Age), sex began to be deployed as a discursive formation, one that was analyzed and, for the first time, according to Foucault, administered by the state. The state took an interest in “the manner in which each individual made use of his sex” (HS, 26) and, therefore, a whole web of discourses emerged around the ways in which sex was critical for maintaining “the population.” Legal, medical, moral, hygienic, and pedagogic discourses analyzed sex and, with the help of state institutions, intervened in its conduct. Foucault asks rhetorically:

All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?

(HS, 36–37)

Far from being simply repressed, sex was medicalized, legalized, and, ultimately, normalized such that desires, behaviors, and “new types” could be productively isolated and tightly controlled. Through its vociferous, discursive deployment, sex became inextricable from power.

In sketching out this genealogy of sexuality in Europe over some four centuries, Foucault turns to “the deployment of sexuality” in order to underscore the multiplicity of ways in which techniques of power proliferated, annexed, penetrated, and controlled both individual bodies and populations as a whole (HS, 107). Here, he introduces the critical concept of “bio-power” to illuminate how the “anatomy-politics” of the human body came together with the administration of the species body or the body politic. Technologies

of discipline and disciplinary power, as analyzed, for example, in *Discipline and Punish*, are shown to operate in ever more subtle ways to create “docile bodies,” subjugating both the sex of the individual and that of the population. From the seventeenth century on, this process of subjugation is the touchstone of “the era of bio-power” (HS, 140): sex was not only “a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species” but was also “put forward as the index of a society’s strength, revealing both its political energy and its biological vigor” (HS, 146). And it is for this reason that the state took such an interest in the harnessing, calculating, and regulating of sex. At the same time, information about the state’s environment, resources, demography, climate, and geography all played a critical role in administering the population within “this new complex of power and knowledge.”¹³ In Foucault’s words:

It was essential that the state know what was happening with its citizens’ sex, and the use they made of it. . . . Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it.

(HS, 26)

This web of discourses and injunctions addressed the bio-politics of the population through analyses of births and mortality, propagation, life expectancy, health and disease, progeny, racial characteristics, hygiene practices, fertility, and eventually eugenics. In effect, the state’s power became both a function of and contingent upon how effectively it administered sex.

In invoking Foucault’s argument here, I am interested in how his genealogy of bio-power can help illuminate the specifically historical—and, to a certain extent, unique—ways in which early Zionists sought to know and regulate both the individual Jewish body and the Jewish population as a whole. In the case of *fin de siècle* Zionism, of course, a state cannot be presupposed; yet, at the same time, a multiplicity of Zionist organs—ranging from gymnastics associations and statistical bureaus to scientific journals and medical exhibitions highlighting the uniqueness of Jewish hygiene, body types, corporeal practices, and race science—emerged to deploy sex explicitly *for the purpose of state formation*. In this respect, bio-power functions not only according to how the state extends its power over a given population through forms of regulatory knowledge, but also according to the ways in which regulative discourses on sexuality consolidate the will to a state. Indeed, to the extent that these discourses have participated in the formation of a state, Foucault’s point about the violent and destructive capacities of bio-power has been proven over and over again: in the post-1948 incarnation of the Jewish state, there is but a small step between muscular Jewry and militarized Jewry. As I mentioned in the introduction, perhaps this attention to the cultural and

social origins of the muscle Jew might shed some light on the tragic and grim consequences of any investment in the disciplinary governing structures of bio-power.

Using Foucault's analysis of bio-power as the conceptual-historical background that points to the tragedies of the present day, I argue that Zionist thinkers in the first part of the twentieth century were not only interested in physical fitness and the re-creation of the muscle Jew but were also interested in studying, exhibiting, monitoring, and, ultimately, correcting and disciplining the Jewish population as a whole. In this respect, muscular Judaism constitutes an unwritten and largely overlooked chapter in the history of bio-politics. In what follows, I contextualize this discourse by showing how it drew upon and was in contact with several other international movements of corporeal regeneration: first, the European-wide fitness, health, and hygiene movement throughout the nineteenth century and its relationship to the cultivation of nationality; second, the emergence of "muscular Christianity" in England and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century; and, third, the "Lebensreform" movement in Germany, of which the *Körperkultur* movement was a key part. As we already saw in Chapter 2, each of these discourses was suffused with racial determinations variously invested in social Darwinian principles.

After that, I turn to the emergence of the muscle Jew discourse on the pages of German Zionism's most significant publication on body culture, *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*. Here, I show how a range of discourses on regeneration and physical rejuvenation—including biological, therapeutic, nationalist, and colonial discourses—deployed sex to reform and regulate both the individual body of the Jew and the "species" as a whole. In the last part of this chapter, I turn to the emergence of Jewish hygiene and eugenics discourses prior to World War I. Here, I focus on the controversial work of Felix Theilhaber, arguably the most important Zionist race scientist, alongside the staging of the first International Hygiene Exhibition in 1911. Not entirely fortuitously, Theilhaber published his apocalyptic book on the end of the Jewish race, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden* (The Destruction of the German Jews), in the same year that Max Grunwald organized the "Jewish section" of the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden. The Zionist engagement with bio-power received one of its most significant pre-war expressions with the controversy surrounding Theilhaber's book and the display of the history of Jewish hygiene at the exhibition. I conclude by returning to Foucault and summing up how Zionists deployed sex and the techniques of bio-power in order to legitimize the founding of the Jewish state.

Cultivating the body/cultivating the nation

Shortly after the fall of Prussia to Napoleon in 1806, Johann Gottlieb Fichte gave a series of famously chauvinistic speeches: *Reden an die deutsche Nation*

(*Addresses to the German Nation*).¹⁴ Delivered during the winter of 1807–08 to standing-room-only crowds in Berlin’s Academy of Sciences, Fichte argued that despite their present suffering and fragmentation, the German people were actually “a single body” (A, 96) and “a single nation” (A, 3). German unity already existed, he maintained, because Germans shared a common cultural tradition, a common language, a common history, and a common place. Using an extraordinary metaphor of the body, he tells his defeated and demoralized audience that the present age is fixated on “weeping over its own corpse,” when in fact the body of the nation is already being reassembled, resurrected, and given new life (A, 18). To illustrate this, he juxtaposes a telling passage from Ezekiel on corporeal regeneration with his own belief in the resurrection of the German nation: in the same way, he declares, that God breathed new life into dead bones, laying them with muscles, flesh, and skin such that they “stood upon their feet, [as] an exceeding great army,” the scattered “bones” of the German nation would soon have new life breathed into them, such that “the quickening breath of the spiritual world . . . will take hold, too, of the dead bones of our national body [*Nationalkörper*], and join them together, that they may stand glorious in new radiant life” (A, 51). In other words, the dead bones of the German people will be resurrected—muscles and all—such that the new Germany will be strong enough to exact revenge on France.¹⁵

What is striking about Fichte’s rhetoric is his use of the metaphor of the *Nationalkörper* or “body of the nation,” a metaphor that would return throughout the nineteenth century in various nationalist movements and later be taken up as the central metaphor of the Zionist project of Jewish regeneration.¹⁶ As Hinrich Seeba has cogently argued in his analysis of Fichte’s speeches, this linkage of “nation” and “body” was not only tied to Fichte’s belief in the Christian concept of resurrection, but it also represented “the founding eschatological metaphor of German nationalism.”¹⁷ This is because the German national body was analogous to a “real” body, able to be broken, die, and, ultimately, be resurrected. Of course, what differentiated the “national body” or the “people’s body” (*Volkskörper*) from a human body was precisely the fact that the former lived on beyond the singular death of the individual.¹⁸

Literalizing Fichte’s metaphor, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, the “father” of German *Turnen* (gymnastics¹⁹), turned his attention to the actual bodies of individual German citizens in order to “resurrect” the body politic of the German people. Not unlike the Zionists at the end of the nineteenth century, Jahn developed a theory of bio-power linked to the practice of gymnastics that did not begin with the state or extend its control but rather abetted the formation of the state itself. For him, a new citizenry of ‘muscle Germans’ would produce a new, unified national body. Because the ideas of Jahn exerted such a formative influence on the development of Zionism’s “body culture” (*Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* even ran a commemorative tribute to Jahn on the

fiftieth anniversary of his death in 1902), I would like to provide a brief background of the genesis and development of his ideas. Later in the chapter, I will discuss how his ideas were taken up and celebrated by Zionist gymnastics associations.²⁰

Born in 1778, Jahn was trained as a schoolteacher and assumed a post at a *Gymnasium* in Berlin shortly after witnessing the fall of Prussia to Napoleon. Imbued with nationalistic fervor after hearing Fichte's speeches, Jahn instituted and developed physical training programs for young men who were interested in cultivating their patriotism. He opened the first German gymnastics facility in Berlin on June 18, 1811, with the belief that physical fitness went hand-in-hand with a sense of national duty. Coinciding with the War of Liberation (1814–16), Jahn's *Turnen* quickly spread beyond Berlin, to places throughout Prussia and the Germanic states, with major facilities set up in Leipzig, Jena, Frankfurt, Mainz, Cologne, and many other cities. By 1818, there were nearly 150 German gymnastics associations (*Turnvereine*), with over 12,000 members.²¹ Berlin's *Hasenheide* alone trained more than a thousand gymnasts. It was also during this time that he wrote his major works on corporeal development and nationality, *Deutsches Volksthum* (1810), an examination of "Germanness" very much in the spirit of Fichte's speeches on nationalism, and *Die deutsche Turnkunst* (1816), a major treatise on German gymnastics, which argued that *Turnen* not only promoted the central virtue of bourgeois civility—self-discipline—but that it also cultivated national subjects.²² *Die deutsche Turnkunst* quickly became the authoritative guide for establishing German gymnastics schools, and it was circulated widely among politicians and school administrators. Like Fichte before him, Jahn went on to deliver lectures on German unity and national regeneration in Berlin and was even awarded honorary doctorates by the University of Kiel and Jena.²³

Although Jahn's reputation suffered during the 1820s due to his alleged involvement in a political scandal and the *Turnen* movement lost some of its momentum, the ideals of national unity and patriotism espoused by the *Turnvereine* were taken up in German fraternities (*Burschenschaften*) and somewhat later by dueling societies, both of which were intended to promote physical vigor, mental acuity, and moral probity.²⁴ In the 1840s, *Turnen* made a comeback in Germany and was even "formally recognized as a necessary and indispensable part of male education and received into the circle of means for popular education," according to a cabinet order of June 6, 1842.²⁵ The *Turnen* movement espoused a unique program of corporeal and moral *Bildung*, in which physical fitness, bodily conduct and appearance, and health inculcated morality.²⁶ Physical inactivity and weakness were associated with disease and degeneracy; licentious behavior and excess in any sphere of life were considered an affront to masculinity, morality, and patriotism.²⁷ Advocating the values of restraint, discipline, and self-regulation, "the moral masculinity of the imagined nation [was to be] made to perfection in the

physical exercise of the *Turnen*.”²⁸ It is precisely this strain of the German *Turnen* movement that Nordau and his Zionist colleagues would later pursue in their quest for the discipline of the muscle Jew.

As Svenja Goltermann has shown in her book, *Körper der Nation*, the German *Turnen* movement reached a zenith in terms of popularity shortly before German national unification in 1871.²⁹ At this time, hundreds of *Turnen* festivals, some of which attracted tens of thousands of spectators, were held throughout Germany, with performers showcasing their talents in massive displays of public exercise. The Leipzig “Turnfest” of 1863, for example, was attended by 22,000 gymnasts and more than 100,000 spectators.³⁰ Through elaborate stagings of precisely synchronized movements, the ideals of order, discipline, and virtue were performed, all things that were considered necessary for German national unity. Although women participated in the festivities as flag-bearers, wreath layers, and spectators, they were not allowed in the *Vereine*, and, hence, *Turnen* became a domain for the cultivation of masculinity and patriotism.³¹

It was only after the Prussians soundly defeated the French in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 that gymnastics and sporting clubs began to be seriously entertained in France “pour rendre aux français des muscles.”³² As Eugen Weber points out:

Everyone knew that Prussian schoolmasters had been the real winners at Sedan and, somehow, Father Jahn’s gymnastics seemed easier to imitate than the playing fields of Eton. So, after 1871, rifle clubs, gymnastic societies, and enterprises devoted to preliminary training spread to fulfill their patriotic mission.³³

Explicitly drawing on the teachings of Jahn and the German *Turnen* movement, the idea was to render the French youth “more virile, more apt to bear military life, more prepared to face a long conflict without discouragement.”³⁴ By the 1890s, gymnastics and sport not only became the means to create virile French soldiers but were also considered critical for the French colonial enterprise in Africa. As one chronicler put it: “Ce ne sont pas les beaux spirits qui partiront pour coloniser Madagascar. Il nous faut *du muscle*.”³⁵

In addition to this martial cultivation of virility, the confluence of the ideals of physical strength, masculinity, and virtue also became a paradigmatic part of another, virtually synchronic movement of corporeal reform: “Muscular Christianity” in Victorian England.³⁶ The term “muscular Christianity” originated in a review of Charles Kingsley’s *Two Years Ago* (1857) published in *The Saturday Review* by T. C. Sandars. In the review, Sandars underscores a new ideal of masculinity, which brings together the moral teachings of the Christian faith with physical strength and moral grounding. As Sandars wrote:

We all know by this time what is the task that Mr. Kingsley has made specially his own—it is that of spreading the knowledge and fostering the love of muscular Christianity. His ideal is a man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours—who, in the language which Mr. Kingsley has made popular, breathes God's free air on God's rich earth, and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker around his fingers.³⁷

Although considered by some contemporaries to be a derogatory term, “muscular Christianity” quickly came to signify a new Victorian ideal of masculine potency. Kingsley's writings emerged as the focal point of the movement to cultivate a “healthy and manful Christianity.”³⁸

As Norman Vance pointed out in his seminal study, *The Sinews of Spirit*, the historical conditions of possibility for the emergence of the movement are particularly important since they reflect a threat to British potency: “The sense of national emergency which was registered during the Napoleonic Wars was reawakened by a series of cholera epidemics, by the threat of French invasion in 1853, by the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny.”³⁹ These political conditions, coupled with the social and economic stresses of industrialization, including the reconfiguration of both the bourgeoisie and the working place as well as threats to the strength of the nation and the purity of the family, created the need to revitalize a weakened English identity.⁴⁰ And while these threats were certainly central to the development of “muscular Christianity,” the movement also gained a significant amount of momentum with the rise of modern nationalism and imperialism, both of which posited the regeneration of the nation and the race. Here, as C. J. W.-L. Wee points out, Kingsley sought to redeem “England's effete and fragmented condition” by looking for a “primitive vigor” from non-European lands and, thereby, “propagate the potent but unstable image of a masculine, charismatic, and authoritative Englishman who stands as a representative of a resolutely Anglo-Saxon and Protestant nation-empire.”⁴¹ In this regard, Kingsley and the masculinist ideal of the “muscular Christianity” movement cannot be separated from the rise of British expansionism, the imperial nation, and the image of the noble savage.

Vance, however, sees the movement as more of a religious one, and for this reason he underscores its chivalrous and moral traditions, ones which go back to medieval hunting and falconry and were variously reworked in the writings of figures such as Rousseau, Carlyle, Scott, Coleridge, and Hughes. According to Vance, “the trouble with the phrase ‘muscular Christianity’ is that it draws attention more to muscularity than to Christianity,” thereby downplaying the Christian virtue of discipline and an ethic of service at its core.⁴² What gets lost, however, in Vance's account is the very discourse of “muscularity”—that is to say, its ambivalently masculinist associations with physical fitness, health, hygiene, racial strength, and regeneracy. For this reason, very much

in line with Hall's decision to explore the "muscular" side of "muscular Christianity," my own study of muscular Judaism focuses on the ideology of muscle, something that is analogous to the "aggressively poised male body as a point of reference in and determiner of a masculinist economy of signification" in muscular Christianity.⁴³

Outside of England, "muscular Christianity" emerged as a cultural ideal in the United States during roughly the same period. It was taken up by the Protestant churches under the leadership of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a Unitarian minister, who recognized the connections between Anglicanism, health, and sanctity.⁴⁴ Higginson criticized what he saw to be the American "deficiency of physical health" and called for "more health and manliness in the churches." Together with Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, an early advocate of building gymnasiums in YMCAs, Higginson sought, in no uncertain terms, to rid the ministry of "pallid, puny, sedentary, lifeless, joyless little offspring" and, instead, fill it with "the ruddy, the brave, and the strong."⁴⁵ Through muscle-building sports, such as gymnastics, American men could be made more robust and the trend toward effeminacy and degeneracy could be curtailed. Here, we also see the beginnings of a connection between the cultivation of "Christian manliness" and the emerging science of race.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the emphasis on physical health and muscularity became inextricably linked with the medical discourses of hygiene and racial fitness.⁴⁶ This connection is recognizable throughout Western Europe and the United States. As Robert Nye has shown in his study of the concept of national decline in *fin de siècle* France, the French "reacted favorably to a 'hygienic' physical culture that promised some hope of national regeneration" in light of the ever "deepening sense of anxiety about the biological (and therefore moral) health of the national stock."⁴⁷ Degeneracy was no longer considered to affect just the poor, inferior, or disenfranchised; rather it could strike any individual, class, or nation. With the anxiety over degeneration in almost every sphere of social and culture life, the attack on disease, weakness, effeminacy, deviancy, and criminality also prompted a renewed attention to the possibilities of national regeneration, which were most often articulated in racialized terms.⁴⁸ Far from a uniquely "German" phenomenon, as we already saw in Chapter 2, the discourse on health and fitness turned into a discourse on blood and racial hygiene through the logic of Social Darwinism.⁴⁹ Muscularity no longer simply signified fitness and strength but also racial superiority and the right to survive. As one speaker at the American Physical Education Association maintained in 1910: "We need in America an aristocracy of blood . . . the aristocracy of strength, of health and of efficiency."⁵⁰

Harkening back to Jahn's emphasis on cultivating both the individual body and the body of the state or nation, we now see—in the European and American *fin de siècle*—a racial foundation for thinking about the vitality

of the body politic. As Foucault argued, the shift in emphasis focused on monitoring and correcting the strength and vigor of the population and, hence, the themes of progeny, racial fitness, the future of the species, birth and death rates, and other statistical indicators of social health took center stage.⁵¹ Extensive statistical studies of national and non-national populations followed, all with the goal of determining the vitality of the population and the threats to its constitutive health.⁵² In Germany, the Society for Racial Hygiene (*Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene*), established by Alfred Ploetz in 1905, put forth a proactive plan for regenerating the German people as a whole, which included, among other things, the opposition to the two-child system (in order to foster larger families and, hence, more offspring), the means to support “the reproduction of the fit” while preventing “the reproduction of the inferior,” the introduction of measures to fight disease (such as tuberculosis and syphilis) as well as social diseases (such as alcoholism), the protection of the population from “inferior immigrants,” the preservation and increase of the peasant class, the institution of favorable hygienic conditions in urban and industrial areas, the elevation of the fitness and strength of the individual, and the expansion of the military capacity of the nation.⁵³

Significantly, degeneration—far from simply a “Jewish” problem—was considered to be an issue for everyone and, hence, the politics of the German “Lebensreform” (life reform) movement were directed at the German people as a whole. As Matthew Jefferies indicates:

[The] origins of *Lebensreform* lay in the numerous closely related strategies for self-improvement that emerged in Europe during the nineteenth century: abstinence, dietary reform, vegetarianism, natural health, and homeopathy. The reformers therefore began with the idea of reforming society through the individual, and as such reflected the enduring influence of both the Reformation and of German Idealism, with its notion of the perfectibility of the individual through self-cultivation (*Bildung*).⁵⁴

Between 1880 and 1933, an extensive and varied series of reforms were introduced in domains as wide-ranging as nutrition, hygiene, clothing, sexuality, schooling, and land.⁵⁵ They included individualized practices such as abstinence and vegetarianism as well as broader reforms to protect nature and the environment, to create sanitary living conditions and cleaner working spaces, and to promote natural health. Although ultimately concerned with the regeneration of the population as a whole, “lifestyle reform,” as Friedrich Landmann, a Wilhelmine reformer put it, “has to begin with one’s own body and in one’s own home.”⁵⁶ Although many of the “life-reformers” were anti-capitalist and even anti-modernist in their advocacy of a return to nature and restoration of lost harmonies, the reform movement itself, as Kevin

Repp has elegantly shown, cannot be dismissed as simply “backward facing” or presaging the extremes of the Nazi state.⁵⁷ Instead, Imperial Germany generated many possibilities and “alternative modernities,” which did not lead inevitably to fascism. The muscle Jew discourse, as I have already indicated, is one such “alternative modernity” and, therefore, must be reintegrated not only into the cultural histories of modern Germany but also into the cultural histories of modern bio-politics.

Within Germany, the “*Körperkultur*” (body culture) movement, as Michael Hau has shown, was a significant part of the broader life-reform movement of bourgeois culture during the *fin de siècle*.⁵⁸ By focusing on diet, health, sex, marriage, exercise, cleanliness, and hygiene, the ills of “degeneration,” supporters maintained, could be staved off. In this regard, the *Körperkultur* movement was significantly broader than the German *Turnen* movement, which focused exclusively on gymnastics; the former embraced the latter but was also interested in all-round physical reform, which included a holistic approach to exercise, health, mental well-being, and beautification. As the central journal of the German *Körperkultur* movement, *Kraft und Schönheit* (Strength and Beauty), articulated the goals:

We see the corporeal degeneration of a large portion of our people, and we want to work against it, to the extent possible. In gymnastics, performed in the nude, we see the best means for hardening the skin, strengthening the nerves, and steeling the muscles. Through targeted education of all available facilities, we strive for a harmonious corporeal strength and beauty. We fight all harm from our one-sided culture and hold up “body culture” as one of the decisive demands of individual and state life. We work for explaining the important questions of physical being and promote every healthy life-reform. In the framework of our progressive culture, we demand a “human culture,” which does not bring about mental or technological progress at the cost of corporeal development, but rather allows us to achieve an ever higher development of the self.⁵⁹

For the advocates of *Körperkultur*, the well-being and strength of the individual body are the prerequisites of the well-being and strength of the national body.

At the same time that the *Körperkultur* movement supported a broad range of proactive, life reform measures focused on the physical health of the body, the rhetoric of reform also moved in a direction that embraced the benefits of racial hygiene and eugenics. As Michael Hau writes:

Few life reformers would have found something wrong with the eugenicists’ utopian goal of rationalizing reproduction in order to create a society in which people could live free of disease and mental

or physical impairments. Life reformers therefore advocated positive eugenic measures in order to encourage the reproduction of the fit as well as negative eugenic measures to prevent the reproduction of the unfit.⁶⁰

Once again, it is the specter of degeneration that motivated these measures to preserve and strengthen the vitality of the race and secure the fitness of the progeny. Far from univocally pointing toward the violent deployment of the eugenicist paradigm by the Nazi state, the bio-politics of modernity, particularly the “life reform” movement in Germany, engendered a wide field of possibilities and responses, including being taken up by Zionist thinkers who would extend its ideals to the cause of Jewish regeneration.

Given the incredibly rich, international development of the regenerative discourses of fitness, health, and racial hygiene in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is no coincidence that the Zionist calls for Jewish regeneration were inspired by and cited their European and American predecessors to establish an extensive network of Jewish gymnastics associations and a broad array of corporeal reforms focused on the Jewish body and the Jewish body politic. At the center of the movement for Jewish regeneration was the discourse around the muscle Jew, something that adds another layer of complexity to the historiography of modern “body reform” movements. Surprisingly, however, the muscle Jew is almost completely ignored in studies of *Körperkultur* and body reform, including, for example, the otherwise comprehensive collection edited by Diethart Kerbs and Jürgen Reulecke, *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen, 1880–1933*, as well as recent studies such as that of Michael Hau.⁶¹ In this respect, one of my ambitions is to write the missing “Jewish” chapter of the *Körperkultur* movement and integrate it back into the complex cultural and social history of regeneration and the bio-politics of modernity. I will now turn to the discursive organs of muscular Judaism in Germany.

The anatomo-politics of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*

Preceding Nordau’s call for “muscular Judaism” by some three years, the first Jewish gymnastics association was founded in Constantinople in 1895. In fact, Jewish athletic associations had already existed in England and the United States for decades, something that indicates that Jewish corporeal regeneration was not limited to or strictly defined by an ideological affiliation with Zionism.⁶² But what Nordau’s call for “muscular Judaism” did in 1898 was to give a name to and help catalyze a broader trend of Jewish regeneration that sought to articulate a national and decidedly modern solution to the Jewish question. Almost immediately, gymnastics associations began to spring up across the European continent and beyond. By 1903, when the Jewish Gymnastics Federation was established, nearly 30 Jewish

gymnastics associations existed throughout central Europe, from Berlin, Vienna, and Munich to Bucharest, Sofia, Cracow, and Bern, many with a strong Zionist constituency. Altogether, by 1903, the associations had about 2,000 members. Although men made up the vast majority of the members during the first decade, by 1912 80 percent of the Jewish sports clubs affiliated with the Federation had women members.⁶³ At this time, overall female membership was about 38 percent (JTZ, 1912, 7/8: 142). Berlin's Bar Kochba organization had set the precedent for female membership with more than a third of its members being women as early as 1903. As we will see, the articulation of a kind of "female muscle Jew" tradition originated from members of Bar Kochba and was first expressed on the pages of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*.

By the tenth anniversary celebration of Bar Kochba in 1909, there were already 57 Jewish gymnastics associations, with 18 in Germany and 19 in Austro-Hungary (KR, 6). Following the German model, Jewish gymnastics associations rapidly spread across Western and Eastern Europe, the near East, and North America, with several eventually developing membership numbers in the thousands. At this time, broad-based Jewish sports clubs were also established throughout Central Europe, the most famous being the Hakoah Club of Vienna. Established in 1909, it opened the door to Jewish participation in competitive sports throughout the world, including soccer, polo, swimming, fencing, and wrestling.⁶⁴ In the United States, the first Young Men's Hebrew Association was founded in the mid-nineteenth century, and the first independent Young Women's Hebrew Association came about in 1902. In England there was the Jewish Lads Brigade and the Jewish Athletic Association.⁶⁵ With nineteen companies in London alone, the Jewish Lads Brigade, modeled after British infantry regiments, sought to "inculcate military discipline" to the youth (KR, 25).

As an umbrella organization, the "Jewish Gymnastics Federation," a general body representing most of the individual gymnastics associations, was created on March 22, 1903, "with the goal of [supporting] the corporeal rebirth of the Jewish people."⁶⁶ The second paragraph of its constitution read:

The purpose of the Jewish Gymnastics Federation is to cultivate gymnastics as the means of corporeal improvement of the Jewish people in the sense of the national-Jewish idea. By the term national-Judaism [*National-Judentum*], we mean the consciousness of belonging together of all Jews due to their shared descent and history as well as the will to preserve the Jewish racial community [*die jüdische Stammesgemeinschaft*] on this basis.⁶⁷

In other words, Jewish gymnastics will not only facilitate corporeal improvement; it will also cultivate a shared sense of heritage through racial and national pride.

In the same year that the Federation was created, members began performing regularly at Zionist congresses, showcasing their talents for the delegates across Europe and also making regular trips to Palestine. International “Jewish Gymnastics Days” were organized by member associations, with the first occurring in Basel at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903 and the second in Berlin in 1905. In front of the delegates and distinguished guests at the Sixth Zionist Congress, including Nordau, Herzl, Bodenheimer, and Mandelstamm, several dozen young Jews performed various gymnastics feats “with agility” and “ease,” according to the report published in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* (JTZ, 1903, no. 11:189). Quite in contrast to both the anti-Semitic stereotype and the Zionist diagnosis of Jewish “degeneracy,” the young gymnasts did “not have pale faces, hunched-over backs, and broken hearts and chests; instead, they were healthy, ruddy men with strong muscles, young men whom, up until now, we were used to encountering only among the non-Jewish people of the world.” Characterized by their exemplary strength, courage, and discipline, these performers embodied “muscular Judaism.” Their physical prowess and individual “inner strength” were seen as the prerequisites of the Jewish people as a whole “becoming a nation like all others” (JTZ, 1903, 11: 189).

In tandem with such live performances of Jewish gymnastics, the most important discursive organ for disseminating the ideas of Jewish corporeal and national regeneration was *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*, founded in Berlin in May of 1900.⁶⁸ As the “official organ” of Berlin’s Jewish Gymnastic Association, Bar Kochba, *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* would become the most widely read and circulated journal dedicated to Jewish corporeal regeneration. Over the course of more than three decades of existence, the monthly journal published a wide range of materials—from historical, scientific, and sociological articles to exercise programs and documentation of muscle Jews—all of which was meant to inspire and evoke Jewish heroism, strength, health, and potency. After 1903, it carried the subtitle “monthly for the corporeal improvement of the Jews,” a subtitle that was dropped in 1913 when the journal sought to mainstream its focus. It changed its name to *Jüdische Monatshefte für Turnen und Sport* (Jewish Monthly for Gymnastics and Sport). During World War I, the journal came out sporadically and changed its name again in 1919 to *Jüdische Turn- und Sportzeitung*. After another hiatus between 1920 and 1922, the journal was resurrected in 1923 under the name *Makkabi Blätter* and, after 1925, continued to exist as *Der Makkabi* until 1935.

In the opening statement of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* published in May 1900 (which actually predated the opening statement of *Kraft und Schönheit* by about a year), the editors, Hermann Jalowicz, Richard Blum, and Max Zirker, articulated the goals as follows:

What we want! Healthy minds live in healthy bodies! Although we never contested it, this old Latin word never found suitable observance by us Jews. It was recognized in theory, but thought never

became deed. The one-sided education of the mind, which caused our nervousness and mental fatigue, is what we are fighting! We want to give the limpid Jewish body back its lost vigor, to make it fresh and robust, agile and strong. We want to achieve this in a Jewish association, so that at the same time we can strengthen our unity and raise our self-consciousness, two things that have been dwindling. We want to show how old Jewish ideals, which in our young people seem to have been almost entirely lost, can once again give us an advantage and bring honor upon us. We want to stand up to anti-Semitism with courage and energy . . . We want to cultivate a noble national feeling, which is free from every sort of arrogance and in no way excludes work for all of humanity.

(JTZ, 1900, 1: 1)

As the first journal dedicated specifically to the physical improvement of the Jewish body, the editors of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* articulated a clear program for corporeal regeneration that not only included the cultivation of Jewish strength but also entailed the fighting of anti-Semitism and the development of latent feelings of Jewish nationality. The one-sided cultivation of the mind—to the detriment of the body—had taken its toll: Jews had become mentally fatigued, constitutionally nervous, and physically enfeebled.⁶⁹ A new consciousness of health and physical fitness would strengthen the unity of the people and tap latent feelings of national belonging. Significantly, the editors of the journal expressly avoided the articulation of any sort of nationalist platform and, instead, sought to place the journal's ideals within an open, universalist framework. In their vision for both the journal and the establishment of Jewish gymnastics associations, the strengthening of the Jewish body did not entail a dogmatic adherence to nationalist doctrines, something that certainly countermanded the contemporary political climate in both Germany and Austro-Hungary.⁷⁰

In its fourth year, upon adopting the new subtitle—"monthly for the corporeal improvement of the Jews"—the editors exclaimed that the "bold origins" of journal were "to educate an entire people [*ein ganzes Volk erziehen*] by cultivating and improving its corporeal strengths" (JTZ, 1903, 1: 1). The corporeal improvement of the Jews was now considered "a national task," which began with the individual gymnasts learning the rudiments of "discipline" and ended with the "spread of the important doctrines of hygiene" to the Jewish people (JTZ, 1903, 1: 2). In so doing, the health and strength of the individual was explicitly linked with the health and strength of the Volk, race, tribe, people, or nation, terms that would all be deployed (often interchangeably) to designate the new Jewry of muscle. Not far from Foucault's analysis of bio-politics and "the future of the species" (HS, 147), the concern was "the future of our tribe" (*die Zukunft unseres Stammes*) (JTZ, 1903, 1: 3).

Up through the outbreak of World War I, *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* would distinguish itself by disseminating an extraordinary range of articles and ideas on Jewish “body culture,” many of which (but not all) were in accord with the emergence and development of Zionist politics. Over more than three decades, the journal published historical articles on ancient Jewish greatness, heroic personages, exercise and training routines for the improvement of musculature (Fig. 4.1), photographs of the gymnastic associations and muscle Jews (Fig. 4.2), inspirational fitness stories, military battle songs, schedules and results of various gymnastics competitions, hygiene programs, and medical discussions of the benefits of sun, light, and movement for a healthy body and a potent sexuality. In 1902, the journal profiled three “outstanding Jewish gymnasts”—Max Abraham, Alfred Flatow, and Richard Genserowsky (Figs 4.3 and 4.4)—each of whom had distinguished himself in world gymnastics competitions. Flatow had received the most acclaim, having won the gold medal on the parallel bars in the 1896 Olympics in Athens and first place in the German Gymnastics Festival in Hamburg in 1898 (JTZ, 1902, 6: 101).⁷¹

A leitmotiv that ran throughout the journal was the “physical improvement” of the Eastern European Jew, often pejoratively characterized as the *Jammergeschlecht* (wretched race), with a hunched-over body, crooked posture, awkward gait, underdeveloped musculature, and nervous disposition. Pictures of strong Jewish gymnasts with upright postures, elegant movements, developed muscles, and assured confidence were not only meant to provide inspiration and reclaim an ancient, heroic ideal; the bodies they depicted were also hailed as the precondition of a successful project of nation building.

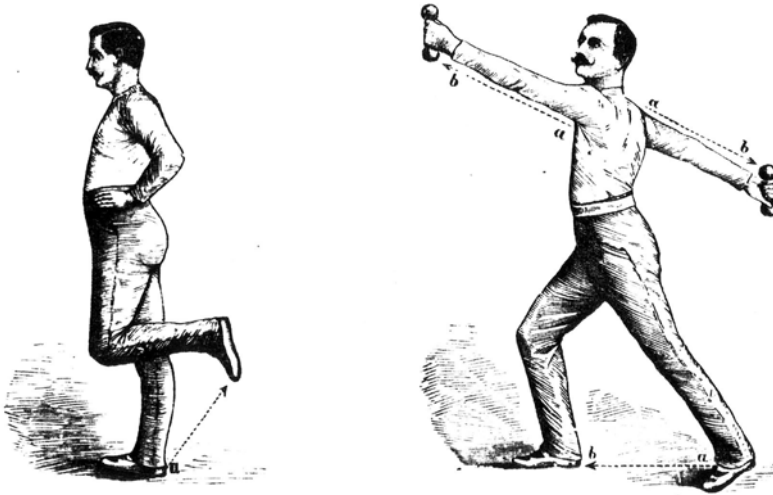
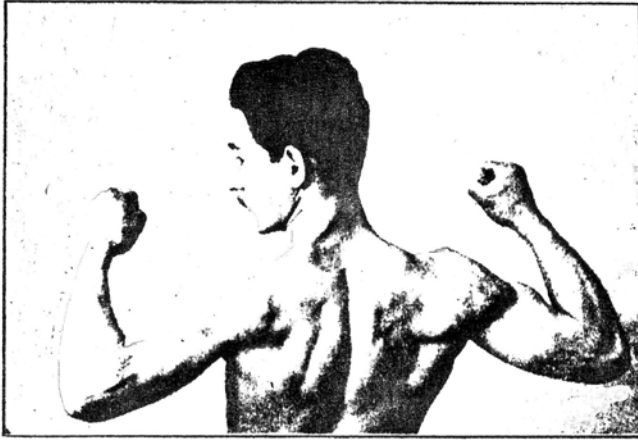


Figure 4.1 “Gymnastics Exercises,” *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* (May 1907).



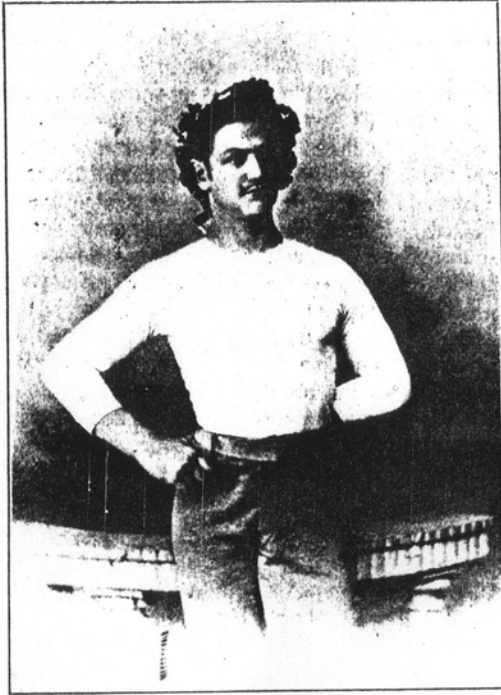
Gut durchgebildete Rücken- und Armmuskulatur.
(Max Cohn, „Bar Kochba“-Berlin).

Figure 4.2 “Well-trained back and arm muscles,” *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* (May 1904).

A strict binary thus emerged on the pages of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*: on the one side was degeneracy, characterized by diasporic wandering, physical weakness, disease, mental nervousness, and particularity; on the other side was regeneracy, characterized by national groundedness, physical strength, health, mental agility, and universality.

Together with a number of Zionist thinkers engaged with the “question of the Eastern Jew,” the editors wrote a series of short articles that brought the diagnoses of degeneracy and nervousness to bear upon the corporeal reform of the Jewish race. Richard Blum, the first member of the Jewish Gymnastics Association in Berlin to pass the state exam for becoming a gymnastics instructor in 1902,⁷² published an article entitled “Discipline” in which he argued that gymnastics combated nervousness by teaching military discipline, order, and strength (JTZ, 1900, 2: 14–15). The following month, Max Zirker published an article on gymnastics trips, arguing that such outdoor journeys not only strengthened lung capacity and increased blood circulation but would also, in the words of Jahn, the early nineteenth-century German patron of gymnastics, cultivate a “renewed masculinity [*Männlichkeit*]” (JTZ, 1900, 3: 21). The Jewish gymnastics associations—although politically distant from their German counterparts due to the prevalence of

Hervorragende jüdische Turner.



Richard Genserowsky.

Figure 4.3 “Outstanding Jewish Gymnast,” *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* (June 1902).

anti-Semitism and outright legislation banning Jewish participation—often drew explicitly, as we will see, on the German national tradition of gymnastics and hiking clubs as articulated by men such as Jahn and Hans Blüher.⁷³

But the most trenchant critique of the “degeneracy” of the Eastern Jewish body came from Mandelstamm, a Zionist delegate and Professor from Kiev, in a three-part article entitled, “The Question of the Corporeal Improvement of the Eastern-European Jews.” In this article, he describes how the body of the so-called ghetto Jew “vegetates” in a wretched, filthy environment, “teeming with millions of microbes,” without freedom, light, or air (JTZ, 1900, 5: 52). According to Mandelstamm the historical circumstances of the

cramped ghetto cannot bear all the blame for the “corporeal misery” of the Eastern Jew; the exacting nature of the orthodox Jewish tradition, from its methods of schooling to its dictates about early marriage, is also culpable⁷⁴:

The narrow, stinking room, the lack of adequate ventilation, the awful lighting, the absence of hygienic school benches, and, as a consequence, the crooked body posture, the bent-over head while reading; and, on the other hand, the enormous number of hours in the classroom—often from nine in the morning until nine at night —, with scarcely an hour for recreation. All this would have been enough to ruin the gentle body of these little cosmopolites [*Weltbürger*], but on top of this, is the teaching itself . . . the instruction without plan, the regurgitation of the Bible.

(JTZ, 1900, 6: 63–64)



**Hervorragende jüdische Turner.
Alfred Flatow.**

Figure 4.4 “Outstanding Jewish Gymnast,” *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* (June 1902).

All this is to blame for “the exhaustion of the Jewish brain and that of the entire nervous system.” It also explains “the significantly higher number of nervous diseases and mental disturbances” among Jews in comparison with other races (JTZ, 1900, 6: 66). Extending Nordau’s critique of degeneration directly to Jews, Mandelstamm calls upon vitalist discourses, particularly the notions of energy and exhaustion popularized by psychologists and scientists during the *fin de siècle* such as Charcot, Bergson, and Freud, to critique the corporeal constitution of the Eastern Jew. The “pathological curvature” of the spinal cord that was studied, for example, by Charcot is not only used to explain nervousness and mental diseases but was now linked explicitly to the Jewish corporeal condition.⁷⁵ Although Mandelstamm believed that a multi-faceted program of economic, social, and educational reform would ultimately be necessary to overcome degeneracy, it was precisely through “obligatory gymnastics” that the Jewish body could become upright and strong, such that, one day, even Eastern Jews could become “competent soldiers” and, at last, “devote themselves to the colonization of Palestine” (JTZ, 1900, 7: 77, 78). From the journal’s very first year, then, corporeal regeneration was connected to nation building and colonization.

In discussing “The Tasks of the Jewish Gymnast” in November of 1900, Emanuel Edelstein, echoing Nordau and Mandelstamm’s ideas, also postulated that Jewish strength is the prerequisite of the “favorable solution to the Jewish question.” He situates the Jewish question—“at once a social, racial, and national question”—within a neo-Hegelian framework, which holds that world history, as it plays out in its particular national inflections, is nothing but a history of opposition, “a battle for nationality and a race war” [*ein Nationalitätskampf und ein Racenkrieg*] (JTZ, 1900, 7: 73–74). He sees these battles for recognition occurring all over the world: in Asia, China, the Philippines, as well as the Spanish–American War, the impending war between England and Russia, and, of course, the Zionist cause. Citing Nordau’s concept of muscle Jewry directly, he places the solution to the Jewish question within these historical lineages of bellicosity. In order to overcome the nervousness, degeneracy and weakness of the Jewish race and form a robust nation, Jews needed to “become men!” [*werdet Männer!*] (JTZ, 1900, 7: 74). Edelstein calls upon the heroic male tradition in ancient Judaism, but in contrast to the singular phallocentrism of Nordau’s muscle Jew, he is also the first author in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* to draw attention to the heroic female tradition, something which he links to a historical argument for creating a stronger Jewish race:

Daughters of Israel, whose beauty has radiated across all time since Sara and is still today uncontested, recognized, and sung; there is a Miriam, a Deborah, a Judith, a Ruth and an Esther for you to emulate, names that can never be erased. Take part in everything that endows your body with power, agility, and grace. Become a strong and

healthy sex [*ein starkes und gesundes Geschlecht*] and you, too, will play an important part in helping to solve the Jewish question.⁷⁶

(JTZ, 1900, 7: 75)

Although the discourses of Jewish regeneration and nationality were almost completely dominated by men, the necessity of “female gymnastics” was recognized in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* from the very start. In answering the charge that “gymnastics is unfeminine . . . [that] we don’t need strong females [*weibliche Kraftmenschen*],” the editors retorted:

Is it unfeminine to improve the functioning of the heart and lungs, the circulation of the blood and the metabolism through purposive, strength movements (if possible in the open air), to toughen the muscles, and awaken an enthusiasm for movement, a sense of well-being, and a gaiety in play and hiking?

(JTZ, 1901, 9: 118)

Although the editors demurred somewhat with respect to the question of creating female muscle Jews, they did argue unequivocally that “it pays off for everyone when we recognize that one of the first tasks of today is to strengthen and preserve the health of the female sex by giving the most serious attention to gymnastics” (JTZ, 1901, 9: 119–120).

Support for female gymnastics among the male representatives was never, however, entirely liberatory since the discussions in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* quite clearly limited the social role of women to healthy reproduction and motherhood. Richard Blum, for example, in comparing antique and modern gymnastics, explained that female gymnastics was important to the Spartans because, like today, “the strength and health of the nation is vitally dependent upon the strength and health of the mother” (JTZ, 1902, 2: 32). In a follow-up article entitled “Girl’s and Women’s Gymnastics” (1902), he argued that gymnastics was crucial for the health and strength of the female body and, by extension, the Jewish nation. Blum’s concern was not with women’s liberation per se but with the role of women for the fertility of the nation. Women needed to “liberate” themselves, he argued, from the crutch of the “corset” by strengthening their own “back muscles” and assuming a healthy posture; this would enable, in his medical opinion, healthy Jewish women, with strong back muscles, powerful lungs, and freely circulating blood, to produce stronger children, in turn, “serving your sisters, your families, your communities, and your nation!” (JTZ, 1902, 5: 80) (Fig. 4.5).

Indeed, for the majority of the first decade of the journal’s existence, the theory of female gymnastics was primarily articulated by men. In fact, it was not until 1911 that the journal published a speech by Betti Eger of the women’s division of the Jewish Gymnastics Association in which she argued, on behalf of the female members: “We want to contribute to the health of



Figure 4.5 “Free Exercises” (Women’s gymnastics club of Bar Kochba, Berlin), *Ost und West* (November 1901).

our people’s body [*Volkskörper*]. We want to become strong muscle Jews [*kräftige Muskeljuden*]” (JTZ, 1911, 4: 75). Confirming the significant health benefits of gymnastics that her male colleagues consistently emphasized, Eger argued that gymnastics would not only produce healthier mothers but also beget stronger children. For this reason, she maintained, female muscle Jews were just as important as male muscle Jews for the creation of the new state.

Within the *fin de siècle* German context, it was Gertrud Bäumer who most fervently advocated for the necessity of producing strong mothers in order to strengthen the German nation. Bäumer, elected the Chairwomen of the *Bund deutscher Frauenvereine* (League of German Women’s Associations) in 1910, articulated a platform of liberal humanism coupled with social Darwinian principles and the science of eugenics. In a programmatic article of 1913, “To What Ideals Should the Modern German Woman Strive?”, Bäumer argued that female gymnastics would create women who:

could no longer stand fearful, helpless, and faint-hearted before the challenges of life. The energy, the consciousness of one’s strength, the self-assurance that would come to them through this command of their bodies, all this would harden them and guide them in the intellectual tasks before them.⁷⁷

Gymnastics would essentially inculcate female “true moderns,” who could adapt to and confront the pressures of modernity. As she wrote in another article shortly before World War I: “In its connection with eugenics, this old ideal [liberal humanism] becomes more corporeal, more concrete. Even now it retains its universally valid, all-encompassing significance. Because the improvement of the race means the improvement of all.”⁷⁸ Bäumer placed motherhood within a universalist framework derived from the Enlightenment investment in social progress: the improvement of the strength and vitality of the progeny would, in turn, strengthen the vitality of the nation. It was through a specifically feminine attentiveness to the maternal instincts of life and culture that would be necessary, she thought, for Germany to overcome the sterility and degeneracy of modern civilization.⁷⁹

Very much in line with its twentieth-century German counterpart, muscular Judaism explicitly linked corporeal training—of both men and women—to nationality, whether through overcoming nervousness and mental diseases or through strengthening musculature in order to give birth to and rear stronger children. Within German Zionism, this connection between corporeal regeneration and nationality consistently derived both its theoretical program and historical legitimacy from the German “father” of gymnastics, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. Applying Jahn’s ideas of nationality and nationalism directly to the Jews, Blum points out that modern Jews cannot afford “to close their eyes to the successes which the German people recorded with its gymnastics associations.” To support his point, he quotes Jahn with approbation: “Only the beneficial education [*Ausbildung*] of the entire human being [through gymnastics] protects against any sort of corporeal and mental crippling and deformation” (JTZ, 1900, 6: 62). In the same way that Jahn believed gymnastics to be necessary for the “inner elevation of the German fatherland and people . . . in order to build up a new Germany,”⁸⁰ Zionist members considered gymnastics to be necessary for the rebirth of their own heroic nationality and the prerequisite for the colonization of Palestine.

It was this notion of “embodied” nationality stemming from Fichte and Jahn that the Zionists adopted and applied to their own cause. Transferring Jahn’s ideas of German fraternity, unity, and nationality to Zionism, Felix Meyer, in an article entitled the “Hygienic Value of Gymnastics,” quite clearly connects the anatomo-politics of German nationality to that of Jewish nationality:

After Prussia was defeated by the hand of the great Napoleon . . . men like Jahn came forward . . . [and] recognized that the foundation for a moral rebirth of the people was to be found in personal self-defense, that a strengthening of the courage of the individual [would do the same] for the nation.

He then draws a parallel between the situation of the German people after 1806 and that of contemporary Jews who “have a right and a duty to be a nation” (JTZ, 1901, 4: 46). The scattered Jewish “national body” would similarly be reassembled and resurrected once the individual bodies of the Jews were strengthened and regenerated.

This parallel between the development of German nationality and Jewish nationality vis-à-vis gymnastics is nowhere more pronounced in the pages of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* than in the commemorative article written by Theobald Scholem honoring the fiftieth anniversary of Jahn’s death in 1902. Although the article itself is hardly an unreserved paean to Jahn’s greatness (in contrast to the legions of tributes paid to Jahn in 1902 by German gymnastics associations), Scholem clearly posited that “the father of universal, strictly nationalist gymnastics” paved the way for the development of Jewish gymnastics and the cultivation of Jewish nationality. He concedes that Jahn “never spoke good of Jews”; however, he does point out that Jahn’s book, *Die deutsche Turnkunst*, provided “systematic instructions for all branches of gymnastics,” instructions that are now being carefully followed by Jewish gymnasts (JTZ, 1902, 10: 167). And if there was any doubt about his influence, the article was typeset around a photograph of nine muscle Jews posing on the parallel bars with a Star of David banner emblazoned with “JTVBK,” Jüdischer Turnverein Bar Kochba (Fig. 4.6). Like the defeated Germans before them, Jews would rise up—first by strengthening their individual bodies through gymnastics—to become a unified and formidable national body.

Not only were the ideas of Jahn adopted to achieve national unity, the staging of the photographs and the gymnastics performances themselves fostered a kind of male-bonding among the Jewish gymnasts, which represented an important means of achieving unity. We must take these photographs as snapshots of a greater and more complicated phenomenon, namely the way in which Jewish gymnastics associations participated in the creation of male-oriented and, as was predominantly the case, male-centered social formations that, like their German counterparts, were meant to stir patriotic feelings precisely through their homoerotic impulses and bonds. Jewish gymnasts exercised and performed in same-sex groups as well as undertook same-sex hiking trips and other outdoor journeys while singing military songs that celebrated their masculinity. Moreover, a whole array of male-centered, Jewish “Wanderklubs” came into existence all over Europe during this period, many of which took the German youth and body reform movements, such as the *Wandervogel*, as their shared starting point. As Hans Blüher, the founder and the primary exponent of the German *Wandervogel* movement, later argued in his book, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* (The Role of the Erotic in the Male Society), “erotic,” male-bonding experiences such as those experienced in sports competitions and the German youth movement, were a necessary prerequisite for both patriotism and state formation.⁸¹ Despite Blüher’s well-known anti-Semitism,

Zur 50. Wiederkehr des Todestages von Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.

Am 15. Oktober des Jahres sind es 50 Jahre, seitdem der Vater der deutschen Turnkunst Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, in's Grab gesunken ist. Überall wo es Turner giebt, wird dieses Tages gedacht und dieses Mannes dankbar Erwähnung gethan; daher ist es auch eine Pflicht für uns jüdische Turner, dem Gedächtnisse des „Alten im Barte“ einige Worte der Erinnerung zu widmen.

Es ist schwer, die turnerische und politische Wirksamkeit Jahn's streng von einander zu trennen. Beides geht so sehr bei ihm in eins auf, dass man seine Persönlichkeit nicht von der einen Seite allein betrachten kann. Die Zeit seiner Grösse und



Bedeutung fällt in die Jahre 1806 bis 1819. Nachher hatte sein Wirken keine grundlegende, einschneidende Bedeutung mehr. Als er den Turnplatz in der Hasenheide zu Berlin eröffnete, wurde er in Wirklichkeit der Vater des

allgemeinen, streng volkstümlichen Turnens. Seine Persönlichkeit war eine absonderliche, nicht nur für uns heute, sondern auch für seine Zeitgenossen. Jahn war ein Mann von rauen Sitten, streng gegen sich selbst und gegen andere, von ungestümer durchaus eigenartiger Beredsamkeit. Sein Äusseres bekundete den Sonderling, der sich an so nebensächliche Dinge wie Moden nicht kehrte. Seinen turnerischen Grundsätzen ist er stets treu geblieben bis an sein Lebensende. Mochte ihn auch das Schicksal schwer heimsuchen, und die Unduldsamkeit seiner zahlreichen Feinde ihm Gefängnis und Verbannung bringen, er ist nicht schwankend geworden in seinen Thun. Rücksichtslos ist er seinen Widersachern entgegengetreten und hat mit ihnen mehr als drei Jahrzehnte gekämpft. Ein harter, starrer Sinn, ein durchaus unpolitischer, unnachsichtiger und unnachgiebiger Kopf war ihm

Figure 4.6 "On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Death of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn," *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* (October 1902).

Jewish gymnastics associations nevertheless applied these aspects of his theories about hiking clubs, physical fitness, and the erotic development of patriotism to the Zionist cause.

In trying to elucidate the multiplicity of ways in which sex was put into political and social discourse during the *fin de siècle*, Magnus Hirschfeld, the Jewish cofounder of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the first homosexual rights organization in the world, placed the birth of the German homosexual emancipation movement in the context of several other “body” reform movements at the end of the nineteenth century:

It is no coincidence that the Wandervogel movement and the first country boarding schools were founded during the same brief time span when, quite independent of one another, a number of sexual reform movements took shape. We might mention: the Society for the Control of Venereal Diseases, which dared to call an evil by name when it was almost considered worse to mention it than have it; the movement for the protection of maternity, which took up the cause of unwed mothers and illegitimate children, regarded as social pariahs no less than those afflicted with venereal diseases; the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, which took up the struggle for the justification and defense of congenital homosexuals against legal and social persecution . . . And above all there appeared on the scene the pioneers, then called “radical,” of women’s emancipation.⁸²

Although Hirschfeld was never a committed Zionist, it is striking that he fails to mention the ways in which Zionism and Jewish gymnastics associations attempted to reform the Jewish body, and were, therefore, also part and parcel of this *fin de siècle* lineage. As we have already seen, Zionism emerged in a richly complicated period in which body reform movements—from the more general “life-style” reform movements to the homosexual and women’s emancipation movements and the youth, sports, fitness, and nudist movements—were gaining both social recognition and political momentum.⁸³

It should come as no surprise, then, that Jewish hiking trips organized by and for the male members of the Jewish gymnastics associations started to become popular during the same years that the German youth movement took off. In one of its first descriptions of a Jewish “Gymnastics trip,” *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* published a short travelogue of Bar Kochba’s journey to the Harz mountains in Thuringia. After concluding with a tribute to the “most important men” who came from this region—von Scheffel, Goethe, and Bismarck—a song celebrating their masculinity was reproduced. This so-called “Männerlied,” first dedicated in 1896, was a typical military song replete with socially appropriate images and expressions of masculinity and was probably sung by both Jewish gymnasts and members of the German youth movement. Its last stanzas, meant to evoke a masculine heroism, went like this:

Men, even then,
 we will not despair like cowards,
 but take the punches of destiny
 we will be patient, without complaining.
 Strong is the man.
 Step forward men!
 Don't tremble before the future!

(JTZ, 1901, 7/8: 101)

Virility was a function of how well men absorbed “the punches of destiny” without complaint, fear, or trembling. In this way, masculine bravado, patriotism, and male-bonding were historically linked on the pages of the journal.

Over the course of the next decade, as the German youth movement burgeoned, Jewish gymnastics associations established their own “Wanderklubs.”⁸⁴ Although Jews were not always outright banned from the German youth movement, the prevalence of anti-Semitism kept most Jews from participating in German gymnastic associations and hiking clubs. In 1908, Georg Arndt officially called for the establishment of Jewish hiking clubs in a lead article published in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*, “Gründet Wanderklubs!” (Found Hiking Clubs!), in which he argued that such clubs would extend “the kernel of a disciplined, goal-conscious team,” something that was important for “every national gymnastics” group (JTZ, 1908, 7). The same year, Theobald Scholem argued that Jewish “body culture” (*Körperkultur*) must not restrict itself to indoor activities since the “gymnastics hall is only a substitute means” for nature: “Above all, we need light and air and forest and fields.” Responding to some reservation on the part of Jewish gymnastics associations to support patriotic hiking trips analogous to their German counterparts, Scholem critically asked:

We Jews are scattered throughout the world and forced, because of our fate, to eternally wander. Why do we not go outside in nature? Is it that we have lost the desire to wander because of our incessant search for a home, because wandering has become a symbol of our misfortune? . . . There must not be any Jewish gymnastics association which refuses to undertake hiking trips . . . In the forests and fields, in rain or in sun, the Jew will get to know what he has lost for millennia, namely love of mother earth.

(JTZ, 1908, 6: 112)

He emphasizes light, air, and free movement in nature, all things that were constitutive of the rhetoric of contemporaneous German body reform movements. In essence, he is calling for a Jewish version of the *Wandervogel*.

In the years immediately preceding World War I, a significant backlash against Jews developed within the German *Wandervogel* movement, leading Zionist Jews to establish their own version of the *Wandervogel*, “Blau-Weiss” (Blue-White), a youth association dedicated to scouting, fitness, and Jewish patriotism.⁸⁵ Although Felix Rosenblüth maintained in 1913 that the initial impetus for founding “Blau-Weiss” was not anti-Semitism but rather “to awaken a Jewish community consciousness in children at an early age,” he argued that it had recently become clear to him that the *Wandervogel* conceived of “German nationality” more and more as tantamount to being anti-Jewish (JTZ, 1913, 7: 213, 209). In describing the founding of the “Blau-Weiss” hiking club in Vienna, Otto Gersuny argued that the new group fits within “a series of institutions whose goal is the corporeal and national education of the Jewish youth and thereby fulfills one of the most noble tasks of the Jewish renaissance movement.” Not only will “the body be strengthened” through Jewish hiking and scouting trips, he maintains, but a sense of nationality will also be cultivated in “an ever more perfect system of Jewish-national welfare for the youth” (JTZ, 1913, 7: 214).

Although a full-fledged theory of male-bonding and Jewish state formation never emerged on the pages of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*, the homosociality of the hiking clubs—both the Jewish and the German incarnations of the *Wandervogel*—cannot be denied. After all, the cultivation of masculinity and male-bonding was always a significant part of muscular Judaism, from its very first conceptualization by Nordau in 1898 through its various permutations in the Jewish gymnastics associations and hiking clubs of the early twentieth century. This is evident in the belief that gymnastics promotes masculinity and nationality, the songs to manhood, the photographs of muscle Jews and male-bonding, and the modeling of Jewish hiking clubs after their German antecedents vis-à-vis same-sex groupings and the erotics of patriotism.

Perhaps even more telling, it was in 1912—the year in which the Jewish *Wandervogel* association Blau-Weiss was founded—that Hans Blüher published his influential and highly controversial history of the German youth movement, *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen* (The German Wandervogel Movement as Erotic Phenomenon), in which he asserted that homoerotic bonding explained the exclusivity and popularity of the movement. His words could arguably apply to Blau-Weiss as well: “The youth in the *Wandervogel* can do without women” because “the friendship between [men] of the same sex gains an erotic tone, which enters the consciousness and also turns into desire there.”⁸⁶ Linking women with weakness, Blüher later asserts the *Wandervogel* was “a *völkisch* occurrence” that, with its “heroic tone,” “contradicted all hasty associations with femininity or softness” and instead “represented a strongly emphasized Germanic racial type.”⁸⁷ In other words, the cultivation of masculinist, same-sex desire—far from feminine, weak, or unheroic—is the central way in

which Blüher historicized the movement's popularity and described its inhering "Germanic" strength. Here, völkishness and homosexuality are deeply intertwined.

By 1917, in his magnum opus, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*, Blüher argued that the "Männerbund" (male-bond) was the critical fundament for establishing a State. For Blüher, the "männliche Gesellschaft" (male society)—not the heterosexual family—creates the only possibility of supporting a state structure through its institution of homosocial bonds:

The family can be a constitutive element of the State but nothing more. Wherever nature has created a species that is really capable of establishing a state, this has only been achieved by smashing the dictatorship of the family as well as the male-female sexual urges themselves.⁸⁸

In other words, neither women nor heterosexual relationships, according to Blüher, form the basis of the state. As Andrew Hewitt has argued in his analysis of the masculinist tradition, this is because "Blüher dissociates the structure of the State from the structure of the family and resituates homosocial relations within the field of an Eros constitutive of the State."⁸⁹ Homosocial male-bonding—as exemplified by the *Wandervogel* or the male gymnastics associations—is necessary for state formation.

In an extraordinary footnote in the second volume of his book, Blüher argues that Jews do not have a state precisely because they "suffer from a weakness of male-bonding [*Männerbundschwäche*] and at the same time, a hypertrophy of the family. . . . allegiance, alliances, and bonds are not Jewish affairs" (RE, II:170). This overemphasis on the family—and under-emphasis on male-bonding, homosexuality, and institutions of homosociality—has condemned Jews to have strong familial, racial, and ethnic ties, but no state: "World history has cursed them always to be a *race* and never a *Volk*" (RE, II:170).⁹⁰ In other words, far from being too homosexual, as Weininger and other anti-Semites consistently labeled Jews,⁹¹ Blüher posited that Jews were not homosexual enough! He continues by describing certain "characteristics" of the Jewish race, including their refusal to obey a leader as well as their penchant for monetary exchange and hedonism, characteristics that he attributes to Jews being merely a race. Blüher points out that with Herzl's famous declaration, "Wir sind ein Volk!" (We are a people!), which he quotes, and the founding of Zionism, Jews have begun to awaken their "male-bonding instinct" (RE, II:172). Although he does not mention muscular Judaism or the Jewish gymnastics associations and "Wanderklubs," new organizations of male-bonding that were not centered on the heterosexual family had already begun to develop. Perhaps because of his anti-Semitism, Blüher, however, is not exactly optimistic about the prospects that

Jews will become a “Volk” and form a Jewish state through the institutions of male-bonding since he sees Zionism as “already on its way to being jewified [*verjuden*]” by ethnic Jews who are “organizing, making deals, politicizing, and speculating” (RE, II:172). By this logic, then, Zionism is actually “un-Jewish” because it not only calls for the rootedness of a state but also awakens the homosocial “Männerbund.” Blüher predicts that Zionism will fail precisely by becoming “Jewish,” that is, in his terms, by becoming speculative, exchange- and money-oriented, racial, familial, and, ultimately, heterosexual.

Although the Jewish gymnastics associations and hiking clubs certainly drew inspiration from the male-bonding activities of the *Wandervogel* and its patriotic homosociality, German Zionism never “awakened male-bonding” in quite the way that Blüher thought necessary for Jews to become a Volk.⁹² On the pages of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*, for example, the theorization of sex was primarily limited to debates over how early marriage should take place and how healthy, heterosexual reproduction paralleled the fertility of the future Jewish state. Far from the homoerotics of the state, these issues were largely thematized under the overlapping rubrics of sexual hygiene and colonization, the latter of which I will explore in Chapter 5. In the last part of this section, I want to indicate how it was heterosexuality—not male-bonding, despite the important alliances with the German *Wandervogel*—that was redeployed for state formation. Then, in the second part of this chapter, I will turn to the discourses of Jewish hygiene and reproductive sexuality in more detail by focusing on Jewish race doctors and the Jewish section of the Dresden Hygiene Exhibition.

As muscular Judaism moved from the regeneration of the individual body to that of the Jewish people as a whole, the logic of bio-power likewise shifted to address questions of monitoring, administering, and maximizing the fertility and strength of the Jewish population. That is to say, the emphasis moved from the regeneration of the individual to the regeneration and relocation of the “species body.” This is because the corporeal preparation of the Jewish people had to precede the colonization of the new land. In an article entitled “The Colonization of Palestine,” which appeared in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* of 1908, Aron Sandler discussed the importance of “fertility” [*Fruchtbarkeit*] for both the colonizers and the cultivation of the land. The Jewish settlers would first have to be strong and sexually potent as a “people” to cultivate the arid land, and, later on, the cultivation of the land would keep the colonists strong and sexually potent. The creation of muscle Jews was not an end in itself, he maintained, but rather a means toward permanently overcoming the affliction of degeneracy and building a new nation through fertility, colonization, and agriculture.

Indeed, this ideological association of reproductive sexuality with the cultivation of the land has received a kind of iconic status in Israeli-Zionist discourses, perhaps most emblematically represented by strong, Jewish

farmers tilling the arid ground.⁹³ In fact, these representations can be found as early as 1900 in the official postcards of the Zionist congress.⁹⁴ Here, representations of salvational female figures often appear side-by-side with muscular, male farmers, visualizing the Zionist colonial dream of returning to Palestine together with the ideology of fertility and sexual reproduction. The Jewish state emerges simultaneously from the cultivation of the Jewish body and the ground for the population to prosper.

It was precisely this concept of fertility—understood both as the cultivation of the land and as an ideal for the strengthening of the Jewish family and the Jewish people through the ideology of reproduction and sexual hygiene—that provided the rationale for Jewish race doctors, such as Elias Auerbach, Albert Baer, and, most famously, Felix Theilhaber, to consider Zionism as a form of “hygiene” for the Jewish people.⁹⁵ The male and the female muscle Jew, brought together by the strictures of early marriage, increased birth rates, and monogamy, would be, according to Theilhaber and other doctors who published in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*, necessary if the Jews were to produce progeny who would prosper as a colonial Volk. With respect to muscle Jews and Zionist gymnastics associations, Theilhaber affirms, “we have a true movement which is seriously interested in the corporeal well-being of the Volk” (JTZ, 1911, 10: 189). However, he insists that “the national [völkisch] health of the Jews” is nevertheless endangered by many things, ranging from mental and physical diseases to socio-economic conditions, sexually transmitted diseases, and even “the two child system of modernity,” that latter of which he considers to have “racially-damaging [rassenschädigende] consequences” (JTZ, 1911, 10: 191). In effect, he calls for a scientifically systemic approach to regenerating the Jewish race and its reproductive sexuality. In no uncertain terms, he labels this approach “Jewish eugenics [jüdische Eugenik]” (JTZ, 1911, 10: 190).

In what follows, I will examine Theilhaber’s theory of “Jewish eugenics” within the context of the “hygiene” movement before World War I, with a particular focus on the 1911 International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden. What I want to probe in the second part of this chapter is how the muscle Jew discourse moved from the regeneration of the individual body to the regeneration of the population as a whole. The Zionist concept of bio-power did not emerge from a preexisting state but rather developed—through the condensation of multiple, *fin de siècle* discourses that put sex into discourse—precisely in order to give form to the Jewish state.

Jewish population politics: Felix Theilhaber and the International Hygiene Exhibition

Shortly after completing his doctorate degree in medicine, Felix Theilhaber published an alarmist book in 1911 called *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden* (The Destruction of the German Jews), in which he prophesied the

extinction of the German-Jew.⁹⁶ Using statistics to study population trends and Jewish demography, Theilhaber argued that, since the nineteenth century, German Jews were essentially committing race suicide. Due to, among other things, their high rates of assimilation, intermarriage, conversion, infertility, degeneracy, and sexual practices, the German Jews would probably not last through the twentieth century. Prior to modernity, Theilhaber argued, Jews had been the exemplars of a sound eugenic tradition, with codified practices of sexual hygiene and reproduction, which explained their uncanny survival throughout the millennia. Indeed, he was not alone in this belief. Many other contemporaneous Jewish race doctors such as Elias Auerbach, Ignaz Zollschan, and Alfred Nossig also stressed the uniqueness and the importance of Jewish health and hygiene during the pre-modern period for the perpetuation of the Jewish people.⁹⁷ But at the start of the twentieth century, Theilhaber maintained, the Jewish population in Germany (as well as other Western European countries) found itself in a steady decline due to the seemingly ineluctable pressures of modernity, the abandonment of their religious traditions, and the rapid spread of degenerative diseases. In Theilhaber's apocalyptic words, "the German Jews are a people going under [*ein untergehendes Volk*]" (U, 154).

Indebted to other, roughly contemporaneous studies of populations (such as those pioneered by Alfred Nossig and Arthur Ruppin⁹⁸), Theilhaber's methodology for studying the so-called "destruction" of the German Jews was strictly quantitative and relied on the seemingly objective certainty of scientifically determined numbers and statistical analyses. It was exactly a decade earlier that Nordau first called for the statistical analysis of the Jewish population at the Fifth Zionist Congress, demanding answers to scores of questions including Jewish marriage and fertility rates, child-bearing statistics, demographic trends, mortality rates, and so forth. And in January of 1905, the Bureau for Jewish Statistics began publishing the *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden*, replete with comparative statistical analyses of Jewish physical and racial characteristics as well as Jewish demographics, education levels, religious practices, migration trends, and population data. In terms of methodology, Theilhaber's quantitative-scientific approach in *The Destruction of the German Jews* was anything but innovative. But what was new and decidedly influential about his book was the way in which he synthesized a fascinatingly wide-range of material on Jewish "bio-power" in order to give tacit credence to the Zionist project of forming a Jewish state. By placing a renewed emphasis on the study and management of the Jewish population, Theilhaber showed that sex is not only something deployed to reform the individual Jewish body but also to regenerate the hygienic potential of the Jewish people as a whole. As we will see, his warning of imminent destruction must also be interpreted as the legitimization of the Zionist state.

When Theilhaber published his argument that the German Jews were on the verge of extinction, the study of hygiene had already turned into a

“science.” The health of both individuals and the population as a whole was something that could be medically studied, sociologically known, and even historically determined. Sexual hygiene, fertility, reproduction, racial strength, eugenics, and physical and mental fitness were all part of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses on scientifically managing populations. For this reason, as John Efron has pointed out, Theilhaber’s own ideas about “sexual hygiene must be seen in the context of contemporary developments in German and, more broadly, European medicine at the time.”⁹⁹ Indeed, it is no coincidence that Theilhaber’s scientific study of Jewish hygiene was published in the same year that the doors to the International Hygiene Exhibition opened in Dresden, and the curators of the exhibition trumpeted Franz von Stuck’s depiction of a giant, knowing “eye” as the symbol of the study of hygiene. The gigantic eye, which both looks and knows at the same time, stared directly at visitors from the transcendental perspective of the infinite sky and starry heavens. On the ground, a classically symmetrical building with Ionic columns—what is certainly meant to be a reference to the classical idea of perfect architecture reflecting perfect human dimensions—housed the exhibit. By replacing superstition and divine intervention with the knowing eye, the science of hygiene exemplified the convergence of power and knowledge. Hygiene was now a modern science built upon the resurrection of the classical order of perfection.

While Theilhaber’s thesis of imminent destruction caused an immediate stir within the Jewish community, the International Hygiene Exhibition opened on May 6, 1911, to eagerly curious crowds.¹⁰⁰ In fact, by the time the exhibition closed at the end of the year, more than 5.5 million visitors had come through its doors. Having been in the planning since 1903, the exhibition was the largest and most comprehensive display of the history and importance of hygiene ever undertaken in Germany. Its 320,000 square meters of ground included more than 50 exhibition buildings and halls divided into 6 general areas: science, history, popular hygiene, sports, statistics, and industry. The individual displays explored the historical, medicinal, and sociological aspects of comparative hygiene, and included information about health and well-being, the etiology and spread of diseases (such as cancer, tuberculosis, syphilis, alcoholism, and even tooth decay), the nourishing of the body through proper diet and exercise, the proper care and preparation of food, and appropriate hygiene practices at home, in school, in the military, and in colonial lands. Historical and national pavilions detailed the uniqueness of hygiene practices from antiquity to the present and featured country-specific exhibits ranging from Hungary, Spain, and Brazil to Russia, China, and Japan. Finally, there was also ample space for athletics and physical fitness, with gymnastics and sports halls, tennis courts, swimming pools, and even bowling lanes available to visitors.

In the same way that Stuck’s poster for the exhibition depicted the knowing “eye” of hygiene gazing onto classical architecture, visitors who came to the

exhibition entered the grounds through neo-classical colonnades, ready to discover what the science of hygiene could reveal. Beyond the entrance colonnades, visitors could see the circular architecture of the monumental “popular hall,” housing an exhibit on “Der Mensch.” Inside the main room, at the end of the symmetrical corridor was an apse, upon which a sculpture of a nude man raising his head and hands toward the sky was installed (Fig. 4.7). The classically perfect musculature—with a sculpted chest and hard abdominal muscles, powerful arms and muscled legs—illustrated the ideal man of hygiene. On the sculpture’s pedestal was an inscription that read: “No richness compares to that of health.” As a kind of religious icon set above and dwarfing the eager masses, the “hygiene man” represented both the health of the individual and a regenerative injunction for the health of the species body.

In his foreword to the official catalogue, Karl Lingner, the chief curator and organizer of the exhibition, pointed out that hygiene—far from a technical matter reserved for scientists and doctors—impacted everyone since the health and welfare of the individual directly correlated with the health and welfare of the people and the state. This is because “a State is nothing more than a community of human beings, whose well-being, happiness, and longevity is dependent upon the composition of its individuals.”¹⁰¹ The health

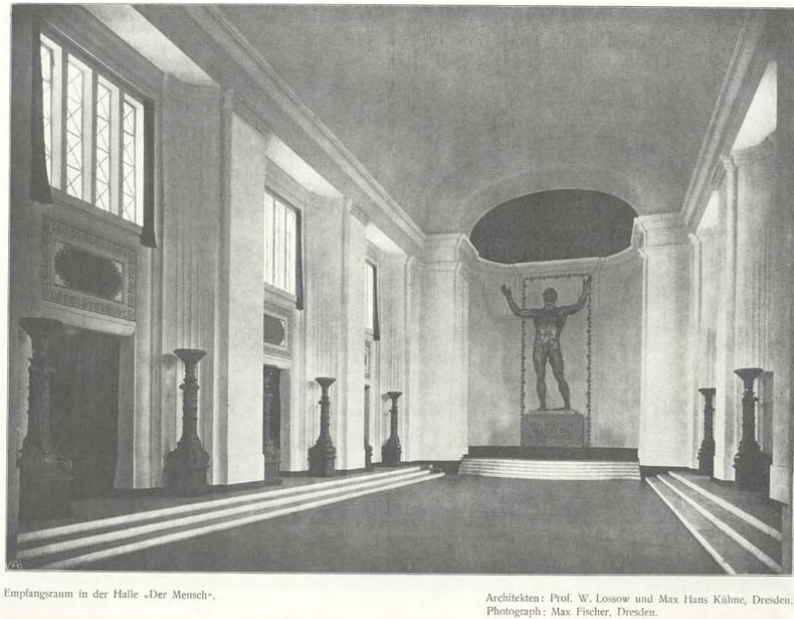


Figure 4.7 “Main room of ‘Der Mensch,’” Dresden Hygiene Exhibition, 1911.

of the individual members, their life spans, fertility rates, and codes of conduct and behavior—in short, what Lingner terms their “hygienic system” (OK, 11)—determine the health, lifespan, fertility, and conduct of the state. Much as Foucault would later propose in his discussion of the sexual roots of bio-power, Lingner argued that the health and longevity of the state was a function of the health of both the population as a whole and its composite individuals.

However, unlike Foucault, Lingner did not limit the discourses of hygiene and the deployment of sex to the administrative domain of a preformed state. In both his program for the planning of the hygiene exhibition written in 1910 and in his reflections on the exhibit composed in 1912, Lingner argued that Jews—a people without a state—have survived for so long “thanks to their physical composition and their racial-hygienic [*rassenhygienisch*] laws.” Without mentioning Zionism by name, he continues by positing that Jews “exist today in full splendor, with an undiluted national strength [*ungeschwächter Volkskraft*] and—one can think what one wants—take a strong interest in the rule of the world.”¹⁰² Because of his definitive support for a “Jewish section” of the hygiene exhibition, Lingner’s comments, I believe, should be interpreted as a clear acknowledgment of what he considered to be a kind of racial and hygienic strength worthy of emulation. In this respect, he makes an important, although almost completely forgotten, break with the dominant tradition of racially-motivated anti-Semitism espoused by the likes of Wagner, Dühring, and Chamberlain. For Lingner, Jews “take a strong interest in the rule of the world” not because of their wily racial characteristics or monetary interests but rather as a people with a long and important tradition of care for the body and hygiene, something that has, in turn, placed them on par with other great peoples.

Both Theilhaber and Lingner were thus concerned with how individuals make use of specific hygiene practices and, simultaneously, how the health and well-being of a given population is a function of those practices. Although Theilhaber and Lingner certainly recognized the agency of the state in enforcing, regulating, and administering hygiene and in deploying sexuality, neither limits the purview of “bio-power” to a preexisting state. This is evident in Lingner’s recognition of the history of the Jews’ “strict racial-hygienic laws,” something that was highlighted in the two separate rooms dedicated to Jewish hygiene as part of the “historical section” of the Dresden Hygiene Exhibition. It is also evident in Theilhaber’s argument that pre-modern, pre-Zionist Jews actually exhibited some of the highest levels of hygiene and racial strength of any people, with or without a state. It can be perceived as an ironic reversal, then, that it is Theilhaber—the Zionist race doctor—who argues that the German Jews are rapidly becoming extinct due to their abandonment of hygiene practices, while Lingner—the German curator of the international hygiene exhibition—suggests that stateless Jews are, in fact, still the exemplars of a hygienic, racially fit people. Despite this strange reversal, which I will discuss in more detail below, Theilhaber and Lingner both deploy sex in order

to stress the importance of hygiene for the maintenance of the health of the population as well as the “fitness” of a given race.

Indeed, it was Lingner’s idea to feature “Jewish hygiene” in the historical section of the International Hygiene Exhibition. In a letter written on November 30, 1909, to Max Grunwald, a rabbi and historian from Vienna, Lingner invited Grunwald to curate this part of the exhibit on the “history of the hygiene of the Jews.”¹⁰³ Grunwald’s initial suggestion was to construct a separate “Jewish pavilion” in which Jewish hygiene would be displayed from the biblical and Talmudic times to the post-Talmudic period and into the modern era. He was convinced that “the hygiene of Jews in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modernity had to be represented in a coherent fashion,” concluding with “the Jewish gymnastics and sports movements, the entire area of modern Jewish health, and the achievements of modern hygienicists of Jewish descent” (MG, 5). However, for various reasons (including the lack of material and political support), a free-standing Jewish pavilion was ultimately not possible; instead, only two exhibition rooms illustrating Jewish hygiene in biblical times and Jewish hygiene in the Middle Ages were constructed. As for the first, the hygienic customs of biblical Judaism were displayed in the area of “pre-antiquity,” alongside the “Pre-historic German-Celtic,” “Babylonian and Assyrian,” and “Egyptian” cultures. In the second room, Jewish religious rituals from the Middle Ages were illustrated alongside general hygienic practices of the medieval period, including living conditions (such as housing and heating), nourishment, clothing, the rearing of children, washing and bathing, health regulations, and state-sponsored regulations regarding hygiene (such as burial). Tellingly, although a couple of references were made to Jews in present-day Palestine, Jews were not featured in any portion of the exhibition dealing with “modern” and contemporary history.¹⁰⁴

The two rooms dedicated to Jewish hygiene were housed in the expansive Steinpalast, the main building that featured the scientific and historical-ethnological exhibitions. Using nearly 150 objects, Jewish hygiene laws and traditions from the biblical period were displayed in Room 3. Beginning with the codification of Jewish hygiene as articulated in the Torah, its origins were presented using historical models, sketches, and contemporary photographs as well as authentic objects from various Jewish rituals. Maps showed the history of the region and traced the wanderings of the Semitic tribes throughout Egypt and Palestine. Historical plans of Jewish settlements, including the construction of the temples, canal systems, drainage, and water conveyance, were also highlighted. About 40 different models of various aspects of everyday living conditions and activities such as nutrition, housing, and burial were also part of the exhibit. These included models of corn presses, cooking and baking utensils, tools for harvesting crops, as well as the processes of wine distillation and storage. Models of burial chambers, graves, and catacombs were paired with biblical injunctions about the proper treatment and handling of the deceased.¹⁰⁵

Although there is ample documentation of the contents of the Jewish section of the exhibition, unfortunately, no surviving photographs of it are known to exist.¹⁰⁶ Given the sheer quantity of material on display, we can nevertheless assume that the Jewish rooms were organized much like the rooms dedicated to other “pre-antique” peoples, such as the Egyptians (Fig. 4.8), with the walls covered with pictures and glass containers used for displaying objects and models. In the official catalogue, the short description of the “Jewish” room reads as follows:

Many biblical passages written on venerable Torah scrolls decorated with expensive ornamentation demonstrate the significance of ancient Jewish hygiene in their instructions regarding the treatment of food and its preparation, cultic bathing, rules for sexual intercourse, the handling of bodily waste, the burial of corpses, as well as much more, above all the regularly occurring day of rest on the Sabbath, which has spread across the world, and the prevention of illnesses . . . colorful sketches, photographs, and models tell us of great hygienic-technical undertakings. Three containers full of little models of houses, wells, baking rooms, and other devices used for the preparation and storage of food from the life of people in present-day Palestine provide us with forms that have changed little in over two or three thousand years.¹⁰⁷

All in all, this part of the exhibit presented to a broad public the ancient tradition of Jewish hygiene laws regarding cleanliness, nourishment, religious ritual, sexual hygiene, and the care of the sick and deceased.

The second room dedicated to Jewish hygiene addressed the medieval period and was part of the same room as “the education of doctors.” Its nearly 250 objects were on display in Room 26.¹⁰⁸ Again, although no surviving photographs of the room exist, one can surmise that the organization of the material for the room was similar to that of an extant photograph of Room 28 on “nursing” and a photograph of a model of a medieval city, complete with a public bathing facility, also featured in this section. The main attraction of Room 26 was a replica of the Sabbath service, including Sabbath candles and lamps, table settings, inscriptions of the blessings, and information pertaining to “clean” and “unclean” animals. In addition to the Sabbath, the room also featured an extensive display on circumcision, including more than ten circumcision knives as well as numerous pictures and paintings depicting the procedure.¹⁰⁹ Finally, aspects of sickness and death were also treated, including the training of Jewish doctors, the treatment of lepers, the ritual cleansing of the body, and life in major Jewish ghettos, such as those of Vienna and Frankfurt (including some historical mortality statistics). Confirming the prevailing opinion that the particularity of Jewish

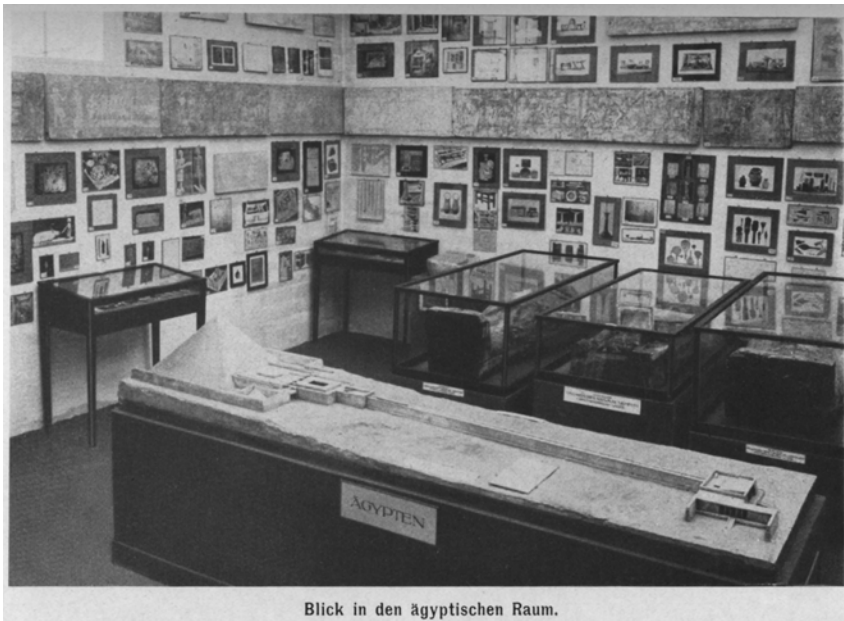


Figure 4.8 “View of the Egyptian Room,” *Historische Abteilung mit Ethnographischer Unterabteilung*, Karl Sudhoff and O. Neustätter, eds (Dresden: Verlag der Internationalen Hygiene-Ausstellung, 1911), between pages 32 and 33.

hygiene practices helped Jews to survive throughout the ages, the editors of the catalogue wrote: “Despite all the obstacles and oppression, [Jews] still tried to preserve their uniqueness and follow the teachings of their great thinkers. One cannot deny that given the immense pressure on the people, the preservation of their particularity must evoke astonishment.”¹¹⁰ As Lingner had also argued, it was their unique hygiene practices that accounted for their survival as a people.

Within the Jewish press, Grunwald’s curatorial skills were widely praised and numerous commentators pointed out that Jewish hygiene practices regarding cleanliness, health, and nutrition had in fact formed the fundament of Western hygiene. As one professor from Vienna put it:

[When considered] next to the Pavilion “Der Mensch,” . . . it is quite obvious that fundamental hygiene teachings were already a common good for the Jews, that they are completely contained in Mosaic law, that they took cleanliness as the highest principle, that they articulated and adhered to appropriate rules to protect against the spread of infectious diseases . . . In the same way that

they preserved monotheism in its purity and bequeathed it to the world, Jews are also the master teachers of hygiene.

(MG, 19)

Similarly enthusiastic, the cultural periodical *Ost und West* published a review of the Jewish section of the hygiene exhibition in June of 1911, arguing that the installations and teachings could very well cure present-day Jews of their degeneracy. Everything in the medieval hygiene room around the Sabbath service:

breathes calm, peace, and joy; to be really hygienically healing, our poor brothers who work the whole week with heavy bundles on their backs moving from town to town ought to spend twenty-four hours in this room; it would also be hygienically beneficial for our Jewish brothers in these nervous, agitated, and agitating times.¹¹¹

In other words, modern-day Jews, having become nervous, degenerate, and even infertile, ought to spend some time in the medieval installation in order to revive their ancient therapeutic traditions of sexual and religious hygiene.

Although the Jewish sections of the International Hygiene Exhibition were limited to ancient and medieval times, it was clear from Lingner and Grunwald's remarks as well as the organization of the exhibition itself that the curators believed that the unique health, religious, sexual, and social practices of the Jews had not only ensured their survival as a people but probably strengthened their fitness as a race as well. Nevertheless, one has to ask: Why were Jews not featured in the "modern" and contemporary parts of the exhibition, as Grunwald had originally wanted? That is to say, why were Jews treated as strictly "historical"? After all, the exhibition could have featured contemporaneous Jewish gymnastics associations, the regenerative potency of Zionism, Jewish race doctors, or the strength of the modern Jewish population. Instead, Jews were conspicuously absent from other parts of the exhibition where they might have also been expected to appear, such as the halls dedicated to statistics, sports and hiking, gymnastics, sexual hygiene, and racial hygiene. Indeed, the muscled hygiene man in the pavilion "Der Mensch" was probably not a contemporaneous muscle Jew.

I would suggest that these decisive omissions can be explained by looking at the way in which the exhibition itself mirrored race-based philosophies of world history, such as those made popular in Germany by Herder, Hegel, and, most recently, Chamberlain.¹¹² In all three, Jews are circumscribed to a particular "place" in the progress of world history: they are an ancient people bound to Law, who, despite their survival throughout the millennia, do not qualify as "modern" precisely because they do not have a state based on the principles of civil society, the polis, the community of reason, and the development of a political subjectivity. As we will see in more detail in

Chapter 5, according to Hegel, because Abraham refused to enter into any kind of property or national ties, Jews are condemned to “their original fate,” namely to wander and remain forever at the first stage of world history, “in the mean, abject, wretched circumstances in which they still are today.”¹¹³ Hegel considers Abraham’s “original” severance as an Israelite to be a transgenerational, “Jewish” trait that explains the pitiable state of Jews in nineteenth-century Europe. Jews may have survived because of their unique hygiene practices and strict adherence to Law, but they are anything but a “modern” people and must be ethnographically studied as strictly “historical.” They have never progressed past the first stages of world history. It is therefore no coincidence that this idea is reflected in the organization of the exhibition: due to their hygiene, Jews would not perish as a race, but they would not progress either.

In his *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden*, Theilhaber begins his argument by addressing precisely this curiosity: namely, the apparent fact that Jews—as a “species”—would never die out but, at the same time, could never become “modern” and establish their own state. Despite the millennia of anti-Semitism, the expulsions, the pogroms, and the growing tendency for Western Jews to assimilate into their “host” nations, both anti-Semitic thinkers such as Hegel, Wagner, Gobineau, and Chamberlain, as well as various stripes of Jewish and German intellectuals ranging from Marx and Heine to contemporary hygienicists and Zionists, maintained that Jews were “immortal” as a group, even though (or precisely because) they did not have a state. As to the latter, Theilhaber quotes Bernhard Münz on the astonishing survival of the Jews: “A people [*Volk*] walks right through the history of humankind, is reflected in the large part of its development, and always arises from all tests and upheavals of the time more toughened and strong” (U, 5). Echoing Lingner’s opinion, the Jews, as more than one professor of hygiene averred, “could not have survived these centuries of constant fighting for their existence if they did not have a naturally healthy instinct and an amazing capacity for self-sacrifice for the preservation of their people” (U, 6–7). Rather than calling upon the biblical injunction that God would not let the chosen people become extinct as evidence for their “immortality,” these thinkers sought to explain the survival of the Jews by appealing to their unique racial-hygienic disposition. In so doing, Jews were endowed with a hygienic quality, which, despite their seeming inability to adapt to modernity, found a state, and overcome their trademark “degeneracy,” was enviable and even worthy of display. Far from simply “degenerate,” Jews were also—as proven by history—the most regenerate of all people!

Theilhaber, however, did not subscribe to the thesis that Jews were immortal as a species due to their sexual hygiene, nor did he believe that Jews were merely “historical,” stateless people. In fact, his book caused such a stir precisely because he argued that Jews were on the verge of extinction and, within the foreseeable future, would not even be worthy of exhibition as a “historical” people. Due to a range of modern pressures, Jews had abandoned

the distinctive hygienic and sexual practices that had, up until then, preserved their fertility. The only solution that he sees is the cultivation of a population politic aimed at establishing a Jewish state. In so arguing, Theilhaber departs from the prevailing opinion that Jews are immortal as a race so that he can underscore the urgency and modernity of the Zionist project.

Although Theilhaber limits his analysis to German Jews, he is confident that his methods would yield similar results if applied, for example, to the Jewish communities of France, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, and even Australia (U, 2). In Germany, even though the absolute number of Jews increased from 512,000 Jews in 1871, the year of German unification, to just over 600,000 in 1905, Theilhaber maintains that this growth actually belies several fundamental problems about the health of the Jewish population as a whole. In 16 German states, the percentage of Jews, when measured against the non-Jewish population, had actually decreased, as in the case of Hamburg where it fell from 4.07 percent to 2.24 percent, despite a modest growth in absolute numbers (U, 18–19). But even more telling is the dramatic decrease in the growth of the Jewish population in major German states such as Prussia: when examined in ten-year intervals from 1861 through 1900, the percentage by which the Jewish population grew went from a high of 22.5 percent in the decade before unification to a nadir of 2.4 percent between 1881 and 1890, to a rate of just about 5 percent for the following years (U, 21). In other words, despite the absolute increase in the number of Jews, something that Theilhaber rightly attributes to massive immigration of Eastern Jews to Germany due to widespread pogroms and expulsions,¹¹⁴ the Jewish population was increasing at a far slower rate than it had previously grown and, moreover, when compared to the non-Jewish population, its rate of increase was markedly outstripped.

After discussing patterns of Jewish migration from the provinces to large cities, Theilhaber then turns to a discussion of birthrates and marriage statistics. In Prussia, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, Jewish births steadily decreased from a high of 11,133 in 1875 to an absolute low of 6,854 in 1903, a level that they stayed at through 1908, a year with 6,876 births (U, 54). While the birthrates for Jews and Christians were about the same for the first half of the nineteenth century (between 35 and 40 births per one thousand people), after 1880 the number of Jews born decreased drastically to 24.81 per thousand through 1900 to 17.45 per thousand in 1908. By contrast, the number of births for Christians decreased only slightly to 35.44 per thousand at the beginning of the twentieth century (U, 54). Although Theilhaber mentions certain biological explanations for this decrease, such as impotence and female infertility, he believes that the socially enforced and economically necessitated “two child marriage” bears a large part of the blame for “the quantitative decrease [in the number of Jews] and the qualitative deterioration of the race” (U, 61). But not only did Jews have fewer children than their Christian counterparts, they were also getting married, if at all, at an older age than

Christians. Of the 16- to 30-year-olds in Berlin, for example, only 6.89 percent of the male Jews were married compared to 15.56 percent of the male Christians. Although not as pronounced as with men, fewer Jewish women in this age bracket were married than their Christian counterparts, 20.41 percent versus 24.34 percent (U, 72). All in all, Jews were remaining single for much longer than Christians and producing quantitatively fewer children than they had in decades past.¹¹⁵

Far from cultivating a uniquely protective sexual hygiene, then, German Jews, Theilhaber maintained, were actually well on their way to extinction. He explains the decrease in Jewish birthrates and marriages by pointing out how Jews had succumbed to many of the pressures of modernity, rather than becoming stronger and more physically fit as Nordau had imagined they would through their social-Darwinistic “capacity to adapt.” Intermarriage, conversion, late marriage, lifelong bachelorhood, mental and physical degenerative diseases, impotence, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, and even the mechanistic structure of capitalism are some of the many reasons that he cites. Very much in line with the ideals espoused by the eugenicists in Alfred Ploetz’s Society for Racial Hygiene, Theilhaber directs the brunt of his critique at intermarriage, what he considers to have deadened the racial strength and the historically safeguarded hygiene of the Jews.¹¹⁶ Traditionally, through religious decree and custom, Theilhaber writes:

inbreeding [*Inzucht*] guaranteed the only objectively Jewish characteristic, preserving what was racial about Jews . . . The preservation of the family of blood . . . was considered self-evident for centuries and was only overtaken in our own day by the strong movement to assimilate. But the recognition of the importance of inbreeding, which was only apathetically felt, resulted in no organized protective devices to maintain the unity of the race. Without a fight, the German Jews gave themselves over to intermarriage and thus their emasculation [*Entmannung*].

(U, 102–103)

In this extraordinary statement on the necessity of Jewish eugenics, Theilhaber argued that Jewish sexual hygiene, something that was secured through the strictures of Jewish marriage and child-bearing, was precisely what had preserved the integrity, unity, and purity of the Jewish race. Not only did intermarriage contaminate and weaken the Jewish race, but, astonishingly enough, it also resulted in the “emasculation” of the Jewish people. Jewish racial strength, preserved by the discipline (*Zucht*) of inbreeding (*Inzucht*), is connected to the phallus by way of the lineage of blood.

Although Theilhaber may have been one of the first eugenicists to explain the weakness of the Jewish race by way of their self-castration (after all, in

his opinion, Jews gave themselves over to intermarriage and, hence, “emas-culation” without a fight), the link between the strength of the Jewish people, particularly the ideal of the Jewish state, and the phallus has a long tradition that stretches back to antiquity. The “covenant of blood,” exacted on the penis, assures the perpetuation of the race across generations.¹¹⁷ As we have already seen, it was precisely this tradition that Nordau referred to in his call for muscle Jews to show off their circumcised penis with pride. Moreover, male potency, exhibited by the great kings of Israel, was always connected with both the blood lineage and the right to rule the Jewish state. In the story of the last days of King David’s rule, for example, his “fitness” for being the King of Israel was determined by his ability to engage in sex. The fact that he could not have sexual intercourse with either a young virgin or Bathsheba indicated to Solomon that his father was no longer fit to rule. Giving up the throne to his son, David’s final words to Solomon were:

I am going the way of all the earth; *be strong and show yourself a man*. Keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and following His laws, His commandments, His rules . . . Then the Lord will fulfill the promise that He made concerning me: “If your descendents are scrupulous in their conduct, and walk before Me faithfully, with all their heart and soul, your line on the throne of Israel shall never end.”¹¹⁸

In other words, male potency was not only connected to the perpetuation of the Jewish lineage but was also a measure of the strength of the Jewish people.

In the modern era, however, Jewish sexual hygiene and Jewish potency have become contaminated through intermarriage, assimilation, degenerative diseases, and other “racially damaging” problems. In Theilhaber’s words:

The milieu of the big city, the peculiar social structure, capitalism (or prosperity), voluntary or involuntary celibacy, marriage at a late age, physical inferiority (mental and sexual diseases, impotence, alcoholism), individualism and feminism [*Feminismus*], susceptibility to suggestion or the moral laxity with respect to questions of family life and fertility, and countless other things are to blame for the degeneration of reproductive activity.

(U, 149)

According to Theilhaber, this motley group of problems accounts for the imminent destruction of the Jewish community in Germany predicted by his statistical analyses. Employing some of the same rhetoric and rationales that Nordau gives in *Degeneration* and applying them to the Jewish people, Theilhaber argues that the strength of the race has been compromised by moral laxity, the breakdown of the family, mental and physical degeneracy,

and even “feminism,” something that seemed to reflect his anxieties about the burgeoning women’s movement in Germany.¹¹⁹

And like Nordau, Theilhaber places his hopes for the regeneration of Jewish racial strength in a Zionist form of eugenics, something that certainly informs his argument throughout the book but only becomes explicit in the final chapter. Here, he explains to his readership that “eugenics (reproductive hygiene) is the science which occupies itself with all the influences that improve the innate characteristics of a race and tries to develop these characteristics to its greatest possible advantage” (U, 161). In order to return the Jewish people to their prior strength, he calls for “a system of inbreeding,” which fosters, among other things, “a rational birth-politic,” extensive financial support, including tax breaks, for families rearing children, and “the corporeal regeneration of the Jews,” while, at the same time, staving off conversion, intermarriage, and assimilation (U, 164–165). He believes that the infighting among contemporary Jews—something that always happens “in times of the decline of a people” (U, 159)—fails to recognize that “Zionism” is the only viable possibility for realizing these eugenic goals. As he remarks in a telling footnote on Zionism’s salvific potential:

One need only think of the hateful malice propagated precisely by Jews against the Zionists. It is obvious that the Diaspora conditions the destruction of the Jews, especially in the West, and, at the very least, creates a rotten, constantly decomposing body, which, with the loss of its uniqueness, is fundamentally mixed and also receives the internal legitimacy for its destruction. It can scarcely be contested that the repatriation of the homeless, Eastern-European Jews is a commendable job. One cannot do much for the Western Jews doomed to their own death.

(U, 159–160)

In effect, his polemic is that the Eastern Jews—those Jews who are more “authentic” because they are still wed to their medieval hygienic traditions—can still be saved, whereas the Western Jews may already be beyond help.

When Theilhaber’s book was published, its apocalyptic thesis set off a controversy throughout the Jewish communities in Germany and abroad. The book was copiously reviewed and debated in the popular press. It was dismissed by anti-Zionists Jews, while largely embraced by Zionists in its broad articulation of the importance of Jewish fertility and sexual hygiene for the founding of a Jewish state. As John Efron has shown in his discussion of the reception of Theilhaber’s book, the thesis was consistently critiqued for reducing the complexity of the Jewish people to a set of statistics.¹²⁰ Regardless of its possible statistical flaws and hasty conclusions, Theilhaber nevertheless succeeded—arguably better than any other contemporary Jewish race scientist—in shifting the focus of Jewish bio-power to the cultivation

and management of the population. He introduced a new way to put sex into discourse by applying the scientific methodology and conceptual terms of eugenics to the Zionist cause. This is both the originality of his argument and its discursive importance. It is also something that his critics participated in, precisely by engaging with Theilhaber on the question of Jewish population politics.

Theilhaber's argument for studying, analyzing, and ultimately managing the Jewish population must therefore be interpreted as a discursive confluence of power with sexuality. As Foucault argued in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*:

Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke *of* and *to* sexuality; the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object and a target. Moreover, its importance was due less to its rarity or its precariousness than to its insistence, its insidious presence, the fact that it was everywhere an object of excitement and fear at the same time. Power delineated, aroused it, and employed it as the proliferating meaning that had always to be taken control of again lest it escape; it was an effect with a meaning-value.

(HS, 147–148)

Sex—both the sex of individuals and the regulation of the sexual hygiene of the population—was now an object of study, an effect of certain discourses that sought to deploy sexuality for particular ends, with a particular meaning. In the case of Zionism, sex was put into discourse precisely through the logic of bio-power in order to found a state. As I have argued here, far more interesting than whether Theilhaber was right or wrong is the irreducible fact that he put sex into discourse and that Zionism sought to give form to the future Jewish state via the management and deployment of a regulated reproductive body. This is also the significance of the Dresden Hygiene Exhibition: the practice of hygiene was part of a broader social and political discourse of deploying sex for strengthening the health of the individual and that of the population. Even though the exhibition of Jewish hygiene served to historically delimit the potency of the population, hygiene, fertility, population politics, and racial fitness were all things that could now be quantitatively studied, scientifically administered, and publicly exhibited through measurements, calculations, statistics, displays, and, most of all, interventions aimed at regulating the individual and the social body. It is here—in this expansion of bio-power—that the rhetoric of *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* converges with that of both the hygiene exhibition and Theilhaber's population statistics: sex was deployed to regenerate the state, and Zionism became a vehicle for bio-power.

In this regard, the Zionist obsession with physical fitness, hygiene, population management, and eugenics betrays a deep imbrication with a whole network of *fin de siècle* ideologies of race and policing practices, all of which had their “dark side.” Indeed, the eroticized nationalisms and typologies of fitness and health would all be used to justify the purity of the German state and, later, the birth of the Israeli state. Foucault’s argument for the emergence of this confluence of discourses charged with regulating and disciplining sex is thus relevant not because of its strict application to Zionism but because it allows us to assess the ideologies of the twentieth century, particularly those concerned with corporeal regulation and discipline, from the perspective of the tragedies that they wrought. After all, bio-power is never innocent or free from destruction.