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*Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of
Regeneration* (review)

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sion of Nietzsche's overdetermined question—"welcher gute Schauspieler ist heute nicht Jude?" (187)—Shahar examines how theater seemed to epitomize the so-called "schauspielerische Fähigkeit der Juden" (189) in so far as acting was based upon the ability to transform oneself and become another. Shahar places Nietzsche's rhetorical question in the civil and cultural context of the German avant-garde where Jews were not only gifted actors on the Weimar stage, but the Jewish body also was seen to typify the very mission of the avant-garde in its mission of cultural critique. Alexander Granach's crooked legs, for example, were appropriated in anti-Semitic discourses on the malformed Jewish body while his "otherness" was simultaneously celebrated by the avant-garde. Granach's "eastern-Jewish" screaming is analyzed next to Max Pallenberg's stuttering and the strange repatriations of Shylock on the German and Yiddish stage. Shahar's point: "Der Modernismus sprach nicht 'jüdisch', aber die jüdischen Schauspieler sprachen als Avantgardisten" (205).

To conclude, Shahar's book is sure to have a wide readership by virtue of its deft maneuverings among literary and aesthetic modernism, German-Jewish studies, theater studies, and even interdisciplinary studies of the body and corporeality. It represents one of the best books in German-Jewish cultural studies and truly opens the field in a productive direction by shedding new light on the German-Jewish project of modernity.

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—Todd Samuel Presner

Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration.

By Todd Samuel Presner. New York: Routledge, 2007. 279 pages. \$125.00.

German studies in the United States are reaching a certain maturity as the field implodes. The relative decline in numbers of students studying German, being taught German, and using German (according to the 2006 MLA evaluation of enrollment) as opposed to the growth of non-European languages seems to be matched by a growing sophistication in the scholarly work of the best of the younger scholars in the field. Their work spans not only the traditional literary sphere but also is suddenly of interest to scholars (and general readers) across the humanities and social sciences. Todd Presner's second book (as well as his first: *Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, and Trains*, Columbia UP, 2007 [ed. note: see review in *Monatshefte* 99.4, 590–91]) is an indication of this extraordinary leap of scholarship.

Muscular Judaism is a study of the development of a culture of masculinity among European Jewry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. An answer to the work of Daniel Boyarin, it examines the development of a culture of the body as part of the rise of Zionism in the context of theories of regeneration. Solidly located at the intersection of cultural and intellectual history, this major work by a Germanist shows how very necessary it is to locate cultural artifacts (such as the writings of Martin Buber or the art of E.M. Lilien) in the debates of their times. The "healthy" body, as Mitchell Hart has shown in his recent book *The Healthy Jew: The Symbiosis of Judaism and Modern Medicine*, is the subject of much debate in the medical sphere and yet there is serious thought and action beyond the limits of the world of biomedicine.

It is in the world of cultural politics that Presner dominates the discussion. From the debates about gymnastics, of great interest to the historians of sport and politics, to the realm of myth-making and the reinvigoration of the Maccabees (the Taliban of Jewish history) into the model for healthy, military, or quasi-military idealization, Presner is able to outline a compelling case for the creation of an idealized body in a health-obsessed world. A healthy body in a healthy land, as Sandra Sufian shows in her brilliant *Healing the Land and the Nation*, was the central mantra of political Zionism in the Middle East. Make the land of Palestine healthy (drain the swamps, as Mussolini did in Rome) and its people (both Jews and Arabs, often the same people) healthy, and you have the basis for a new state. Presner shows how this debate has its origins in the world of European Jewish thought that demanded the ability of degenerate or decadent peoples (as at one point or another every people or "race" were labeled) to regain their fabled state of health and power. But more importantly he shows how it impacts on the self-image, the "real" bodies, of Jews. As George Mosse argued more than a decade ago in *The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, all of the political moments of the nineteenth century, from Fascism or Zionism to Communism, demanded such malleability. Presner outlines how this worked in real, historical time in a real cultural space.

Presner's book is full of the sort of details that have been missing in this discussion. His complex but completely comprehensible account of the construction of the very notion of regeneration, which opens his book, is a monument to serious and accurate cultural history. Any writer who takes *both* Max Nordau and Julius Langbehn seriously in the twenty-first century is to be commended. But indeed this is what Leonid Pasternak did a hundred years before without any question. Presner asks hard questions: how does a notion of "regeneration" link philo-Semite and anti-Semite in their search for redeemable and healthy bodies?

This is a seminal book. It is a book that any one interested in European thought from the 1860s to the Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel must read. It is a book of depth and breadth; one that reflects the inordinate strength of a discipline about how to "flex its muscles" without embarrassment.

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—Sander L. Gilman

Music, Theatre and Politics in Germany: 1848 to the Third Reich.

Edited by Nikolaus Bacht. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006. 328 pages. \$99.95.

A National Acoustics: Music and Mass Publicity in Weimar and Nazi Germany.

By Brian Currid. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 312 pages + 13 halftones. \$23.00.

The two studies under review represent a broad spectrum of new approaches to bringing music and politics together, and, as may be expected, the results vary widely in their ability to synthesize the two successfully. In his introduction to the collection of essays contained in *Music, Theatre and Politics in Germany*, editor Nikolaus Bacht informs us that the authors "do not attempt a neat separation of these and related issues here—it is their amalgamation, their complex interplay, that alerts our critical faculties and unifies our intellectual efforts" (1). We soon learn that the volume is in fact a Fest-