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The Trouble with Love. Sexual Crises and the Young Jewish Woman in Lilly Fenichel's Diaries and Novellas 1915-18

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English abstract: This article examines sexual crises of the young Jewish woman during the fin-de-siècle period as discussed in Lilly Fenichel's (i.e. married Alice Aschner, 1894-1925) unpublished diaries and novellas written between 1915 and 1918. Her writings draw on Freudian psychoanalysis and Zionist tropes, pointing to the triple sexual burden of the young Jewish woman as adolescent, Jew, and woman. With a focus on social implications, Lilly Fenichel addresses sexual trauma and agency, as well as female desire and problems of disembodied sexuality, issues that also fueled heated feminist debates about the New Woman at that time. In her novellas, Lilly Fenichel creates young female Jewish characters who are ultimately driven to suicide by love trouble.

In her youth, Lilly Fenichel was an avid reader of psychoanalytic literature as well as an active diarist and ambitious writer.¹ She wrote several (unpublished) novellas and plays that she and her friends staged on private occasions in her home city of Vienna. In her novellas and diaries, Lilly Fenichel evokes the circulating figure of a *fin-de-siècle* middle-class girl in sexual crisis, a figure common in both modern Viennese literary works as well as early psychoanalytic case studies. While in these texts Jewishness was largely rendered invisible or only present in circumscribed codes, Lilly Fenichel uses this figure to draw attention both subtly and explicitly to the triple sexual burden young Jewish women face as adolescents, Jews, and women.² This triple burden is mainly addressed in the struggle to own and control one's own sexual

¹ The sources I use are unpublished and in the hands of Lilly Fenichel's granddaughter Susanna C. Schwarz-Aschner and great granddaughter Vera Schwarz. I wish to thank them for their trust and for generously providing me the opportunity to work with these materials. Lilly Fenichel's first name was actually Alice and when she later married, her last name was Aschner. Throughout this article, I will use the name Lilly Fenichel. Translations of quotations from Lilly Fenichel's diaries and novellas and all subsequent English translations are my translation.

² For the encoded or absent crisis-ridden young Jewish woman in psychoanalysis and literature, see Ann Pellegrini: *Performance Anxieties. Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race*, New York 1997; Alison Rose: *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, Austin 2008; Andrew Barker: *Race, Sex and Character in Schnitzler's Fräulein Else*, in: *German Life and Letters* 54 (2001) 1, p. 1-9.

body apart from gendered patriarchal discourses, in debates on Jewish difference, and in (Jewish) generational conflicts.

In her novellas and diaries, Lilly Fenichel repeatedly cites Freudian psychoanalysis, albeit from a social rather than a psychological perspective, to address the sexual crisis of the young Jewish woman. Although Sigmund Freud consistently rejected the notion put forward by Jewish critics and anti-Semitic commentators that psychoanalysis was in any way a 'Jewish science' originating in a particular 'Jewish psyche', Lilly Fenichel locates her writings precisely within this discourse. At that time, it was young Zionists in Lilly Fenichel's immediate environment who claimed psychoanalysis for their purposes and who saw psychoanalytic theories as a chance to understand the complex psychological processes of Jewish childhood and youth, helping to free young Jews from the (sexual) bourgeois 'assimilationist neuroses' that were often understood as bodily manifestations of 'degeneration'.³ Sexuality and the body were an integral part of the Zionist project. Likewise, Lilly Fenichel channels Freudian theories of female sexuality, such as 'hysteria' and 'virginal anxiety' [virginale Angst] as typical sexual afflictions of the young Jewish woman.⁴ Although she did not follow any obvious Zionist agenda, I will argue that proper contextualization shows that Lilly Fenichel, particularly in her novellas, used psychoanalytic concepts to highlight 'young Jewish women's illnesses' in the diaspora.⁵ Zionism and psychoanalysis can be understood as different, yet overlapping strategies that dealt with pathologized 'Jewish illnesses', rejecting theories of biological heredity and instead pointing to socio-cultural problems faced by Jews in the modern age.⁶ In addition, both

³ See Siegfried Bernfeld: *Die jüdische Wissenschaft und ihre psychologischen Aufgaben* (1917), in: Werner Fölling / Maria Fölling-Albers / Ulrich Herrmann (eds.): *Werke*, vol. 3: *Jugendkultur und Zionismus*, Gießen 2011, p. 182 ff.; Dodi Goldman / Alex Liban: *Freud Comes to Palestine. A Study of Psychoanalysis in a Cultural Context*, in: *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 81 (2000) 5, p. 893-906; Eran Rolnik: *Freud auf Hebräisch. Geschichte der Psychoanalyse im jüdischen Palästina*, Göttingen 2013.

⁴ This article will not engage in controversies brought up by scholarly and feminist critics of Freud. In this article, I have sought to understand how Lilly Fenichel thought about sexuality and what she did with this sexual knowledge. Furthermore, although the article deals with psychoanalysis, it will not adopt a psycho-historical approach. For a feminist approach, see for example Hannah Decker: *Freud, Dora, and Vienna 1900*, New York 1991.

⁵ For the importance of contextualization in German-Jewish History, see Lisa Silverman: *Reconsidering the Margins. Jewishness as an analytical framework*, in: *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 3 (2009) 1, p. 103-120.

⁶ See for example Eliza Slavet: *Racial Fever. Freud and the Jewish Question*, New York 2009; Daniel Boyarin / Jonathan Boyarin (eds.): *Jews and Other Differences*, Minneapolis 1997; Sander L. Gilman: *Freud, Race, Gender*, Princeton 1993. Although most Zionists drew primarily on medical discourses such as social Darwinism and eugenics, socio-

movements were attractive to young Jewish women because they provided a framework for exploring their specifically adolescent female Jewish identity.⁷ However, Lilly Fenichel cannot be regarded as a Zionist. Instead, her writings show an idiosyncratic engagement with Jewish difference and key Zionist tropes.⁸ Lilly Fenichel also did not use psychoanalytic concepts professionally, but rather appropriated popular psychoanalytic ideas that permeated everyday life, discourses, and practices in Vienna around 1900. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that she moved in psychoanalytic circles and that she used her writings for self-analysis and as a basis for future psychoanalytic treatment.

Scholars have already pointed out that although Freud's female patients were mostly Jewish, he universalized his theory of femininity and applied it to female sexuality in general, with the Jewish woman appearing as either a "Jewish man or 'whitened', presumptively Gentile, woman".⁹ Lilly Fenichel's paper records refer to this absence of Jewish women and trace the repression of the young Jewish woman in Sigmund Freud's theory of femininity. Thus, they not only provide insight into the inner-Jewish reception and practice of psychoanalysis, but also into Jewish self-images that correlated with prevailing speeches and ideas, walking a fine line between adopting and rewriting gendered and racist (body) images.

Psychoanalysis and Youthful Body Politics

Lilly Fenichel was born on March 11th, 1894 as the second of three children into an acculturated Viennese Jewish middle-class family and died early at the age of thirty-one in a car accident on February 13th, 1925.¹⁰ Lilly Fenichel had a very close relationship with her brother Otto. In their youth, they together read Otto Weininger's influential book *Sex and Character*, which not only played an enormous role in the turn-

cultural influences were also discussed, see for example Raphael Falk: *Zionism and the Biology of Jews*, Cham 2017; Dekel Peretz: *Zionism and Cosmopolitanism*. Franz Oppenheimer and the Dream of a Jewish Future in Germany and Palestine, Munich / Vienna 2022.

⁷ See Alison Rose: *Femininity, Feminism, and Jewish Identity Redefined*. *Jewish Women in Viennese Zionism, Psychoanalysis, and Culture*, in: transversal. Zeitschrift für jüdische Studien 6 (2005) 2, p. 59-74.

⁸ For a return to subjectivity in German-Jewish History, see Scott Spector: *Forget Assimilation: Introducing Subjectivity to German-Jewish History*, in: *Jewish History* 20 (2006) 3/4, p. 349-361.

⁹ Pellegrini: *Performance*, p. 28. [emphasis in original].

¹⁰ For more information on the Fenichel family, see Elke Mühlleitner: *Ich - Fenichel. Das Leben eines Psychoanalytikers im 20. Jahrhundert*, Vienna 2008.

of-the-century debates about the ‘sexual question’ and within modern Viennese sexology, but also had a particularly dramatic impact on young Jewish women due to its misogynistic and anti-Semitic claims about sexuality.¹¹ More than that, the siblings were both interested in psychoanalysis and problems of adolescent sexuality. Lilly Fenichel was not just the older sister of the well-known psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel, but also an enthusiastic supporter of the radical, German-Austrian, bourgeois, pre-war youth movement, the so-called *Jugendkultur-bewegung* [Youth Culture Movement].¹² Inspired by Freudian insights into the meaning of sexuality, this youth movement, especially its Viennese branch, heavily criticized prevailing sexual morals and traditional gender boundaries. While an overwhelming majority of the youth movement proclaimed sexual abstinence, the *Jugend-kulturbewegung* publicly discussed sexual problems and the latest developments in sexology in its journal *Der Anfang* [The Beginning] and regular discussion evenings, sparking an enormous social outcry in the years 1913 and 1914, in which the discourse on deviant Jewish sexuality played a role.¹³ Despite its many Jewish members, the *Jugend-*

¹¹ See *ibid.*, p. 37; Otto Weininger: *Geschlecht und Charakter. Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung*, Vienna 1908. On the Suicide epidemic among Jewish young women after reading Weininger’s book, see David Lester: *A Possible Suicide Epidemic after Weininger’s “Sex and Character”*: A Comment on Thorson and Oberg, in: *Archives of Suicide Research* 8 (2004) 3, p. 293-294. For Vienna as an important center for modern sexology, see Britta McEwen: *Sexual Knowledge. Feeling, Fact and Social Reform in Vienna, 1900-1934*, New York 2012. For interventions of feminist sexual theorists, researchers, and activists, such as Rosa Mayreder, Grete Meisel-Hess, Sofie Lazarsfeld, see Kirsten Leng: *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science. Women Sexologists in Germany, 1900-1933*, Ithaca / London 2018.

¹² For a general overview of the *Jugendkulturbewegung*, see Peter Dudek: *Fetisch Jugend. Walter Benjamin und Siegfried Bernfeld - Jugendprotest am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Bad Heilbrunn/Obb. 2002.

¹³ See Ulrich Linse: *“Geschlechtsnot der Jugend”*. Über Jugendbewegung und Sexualität, in: Rolf-Peter Janz / Thomas Koebner / Frank Trommler (eds.): *“Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit”*. Der Mythos Jugend, Frankfurt a.M. 1985, p. 245-309; Klaus Laermann: *Der Skandal um den Anfang. Ein Versuch jugendlicher Gegenöffentlichkeit im Kaiserreich*, in: Janz et al. (eds.): *Zeit*, p. 360-381. See also John Alexander Williams: *Ecstasies of the Young: Sexuality, the Youth Movement, and Moral Panic in Germany on the Eve of the First World War*, in: *Central European History*, 32 (2001) 2, p. 163-189. The *Jugendkulturbewegung* can be categorized as the emancipatory and progressive wing of the general bourgeois youth movement that objected to nationalistic, anti-feminist and anti-Semitic ideologies. For right-wing movements in the German bourgeois youth movement, see the anthology Gideon Botsch / Josef Haverkamp (eds.): *Jugendbewegung, Antisemitismus. Vom “Freideutschen Jugendtag” bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin / Boston 2014. For Hans Blüher’s use of psychoanalysis to legitimate *Männerbünde*, mysogyny, and anti-Semitism, see Claudia Bruns: *Eros, Macht und Männlichkeit. Männerbündische Konstruktionen in der deutschen Jugendbewegung zwischen Emanzipation und Reakti-*

kulturbewegung was open to Jews and non-Jews alike and manifested no explicit markers of Jewishness. Nonetheless, contemporaries saw it as an essentially Jewish phenomenon. While anti-Semites constantly railed against the *Jugendkulturbewegung* and its 'Jewish character', for many of its members, the *Jugendkulturbewegung* became an informal space in which Jewish belonging and emotionality were made visible.¹⁴ For girls and young women, the *Jugendkulturbewegung* and its journal *Der Anfang* provided a forum to draw attention to the particularly severe sexual burden of young, unmarried and intellectual women who were compelled to hide their sex and love life more so than their male counterparts. Referring to Freud's writings, Elfriede Friedländer-Eisler (later known as Ruth Fischer), an especially dedicated activist in the *Jugendkulturbewegung*, emphasized that a young woman always feared having her love affairs, which society despised, exposed. And that fear, she continued, "fakes her whole being, and often depresses and constrains her."¹⁵ Similarly, being very well acquainted with the Freudian conception of the unconscious, Lilly Fenichel warns against the dangers of repressed libidinal urges that can manifest themselves in a wide range of symptoms. In a diary entry on May 31st, 1915 she writes:

A sign of decline is the contempt for sexuality. [...] There are still people – alas! And there are almost only those – who despise their liveliest instinct (even if they satisfy it with pleasure; yes, then even more) who gag it, hide it, curse it and cover it with a thousand lies and hypocritical phrases. But the mistreated instinct takes terrible revenge. In the dark, under the veil of hypocrisy and "morality", it really becomes what it was thought to be: dirty and mean.¹⁶

on, in: *Historische Jugendforschung. Jahrbuch des Archivs der deutschen Jugendbewegung* 7 (2010), p. 25-54.

¹⁴ For the concept of Jewish belonging: Sarah Wobick-Segev: *Homes Away from Home. Jewish Belonging in Twentieth-Century Paris, Berlin, and St. Petersburg*, Stanford 2018.

¹⁵ See Elfriede Friedländer-Eisler: *Sexualethik des Kommunismus. Eine prinzipielle Studie*, in: idem / Alexandra Michailowna Kollontaj / Otto Rühle (eds.): *Zur Sexualethik des Kommunismus*, Vienna 1920, p. 1-59, here p. 20: "sind sie gezwungen, die Jungfrau zu spielen"; "fälscht ihr ganzes Wesen, bedrückt und beengt sie auch oft selbst." Friedländer-Eisler began writing this pamphlet in 1915, still in the spirit of the *Jugendkulturbewegung*, before she gradually became part of the communist movement in Germany.

¹⁶ Alice (Lilly) Aschner-Fenichel: *1894 bis 1925. Tagebücher. Gedichte. Briefe*, p. 63 ff. "Ein Zeichen des Verfalls ist die Verachtung des Geschlechtlichen. [...] Es gibt noch immer Menschen – ach! Und es gibt fast nur solche – die ihren lebendigsten Instinkt verachten (auch wenn sie ihn mit Genuss befriedigen; ja, dann noch mehr) ihn knebeln, verstecken, verfluchen und ihn mit tausend Lügen und Heuchelphrasen behängen. Aber der misshandelte Trieb rächt sich furchtbar. Im Finstern, unter der verhüllenden Decke von Heuchelei und 'Moral' wird er wirklich zu dem, wofür man ihn hielt: schmutzig und gemein".



Figure 1: Lilly Fenichel, 1916, Private Archive, Vera Schwarz, Vienna.

While the alliance between early feminists and psychoanalysis had been ambiguous, the latter offered scientific support to feminist claims and inspired hope among many feminists that longstanding inequalities could be resolved.¹⁷ Furthermore, psychoanalysis and sexology enabled (young) women to engage openly in public debates about sex and sexuality without compromising their respectability.¹⁸ Many girls and young women of the *Jugendkulturbewegung* showed a keen interest in the contemporary bourgeois and socialist women's movement and were particularly impressed by feminists like Rosa Mayreder or Grete Meisel-Hess who dealt openly with psychoanalytic theories of sex and sexuality.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the *Jugendkulturbewegung* fell apart and many of its members became politicized. The arrival in Vienna of Jewish refugees from Galicia and Bukovina, fleeing the advance of the Russian army, had triggered an outburst of violent anti-Semitism and prompted some members of the *Jugendkulturbewegung* to pay greater attention to the 'Jewish question' and Zionism.¹⁹ As a result, some joined the (socialist) Zionist youth movement and heeded the calls of the cultural Zionist Martin Buber for a *Jewish Renaissance*. However, Zionist ideas had already occupied the *Jugendkulturbewegung* in the pre-war years. Some members had been involved in the Zionist youth movement *Blau-Weiß* [Blue-White] and others had met with the radical Zionist youth group *Jung Juda* [Young Judea].²⁰ Zionists like Otto Lehman and Paul Michaelis had tried to recruit the Jewish members of the *Jugendkulturbewegung* and of *Der Anfang* for the Zionist youth movement and new national-Jewish schools in Palestine.²¹ But the war posed daunting challenges to young Jews. The psychoanalyst,

¹⁷ Harriet Anderson: Psychoanalysis and Feminism. An Ambivalent Alliance. Viennese Feminist Responses to Freud, 1900-30, in: Edward Timms / Ritchie Robertson (eds.): Psychoanalysis in Cultural Context, Edinburgh 1992, p. 71-80.

¹⁸ Leng: Politics, p. 10.

¹⁹ See David Rechter: Galicia in Vienna: Jewish Refugees in the First World War, in: Austrian History Yearbook 28 (1997), p. 113-130. For a general background of Jewish youth movements in inter-war Vienna, see David Rechter: "Bubermania": The Jewish Youth Movement in Vienna, 1917-1919, in: Modern Judaism 16 (1996) 1, p. 25-45. See also Siegfried Bernfeld: Zionismus und Jugendkultur (1915), in: Fölling / Fölling-Albers / Herrmann (eds.): Werke, vol. 3: Zionismus, p. 291-302.

²⁰ See Anne Salomon: Die neue Jugend, in: Jüdische Rundschau 19 (1914) 24, p. 225. On the Zionist youth movement *Blau-Weiß*, see Ivonne Meybohm: Erziehung zum Zionismus. Der jüdische Wanderbund Blau-Weiß als Versuch einer praktischen Umsetzung des Programms der Jüdischen Renaissance, Frankfurt a.M. 2009. On the meeting between the *Jugendkulturbewegung* and *Jung Juda*, see Gershom Scholem: Walter Benjamin – die Geschichte einer Freundschaft, Berlin 2016, p. 10.

²¹ Paul Michaelis: Die Neue Jugend, in: Jüdische Rundschau 19 (1914) 21, p. 221; Otto Lehmann: Die neue Jugend. Eine Entgegnung, in: Jüdische Rundschau 19 (1914) 30, p. 325-326.

pedagogue, and leading figure of the *Jugendkulturbewegung* Siegfried Bernfeld, for example, not only became an energetical theorist and organizer of the Zionist youth movement, but was also the founder of several Jewish educational institutions, in which some former members of the *Jugendkulturbewegung* found their place.²² Like some other Jewish thinkers, Bernfeld adopted the Freudian concept of repression to point out the identity problems of Jewish youth.²³ According to Bernfeld, the problem was that the Jewish youth suffered from the necessity of keeping their Jewishness secret, which led to inner inhibitions and repression. For him, West European Jewish youth was caught up in a historical process of (especially bodily) self-alienation as a result of ‘assimilation’, from which only new pedagogic concepts would free them.²⁴

The Zionist youth movement *Hashomer Hatzair* [The Young Guard], whose members had arrived as Galician war refugees and advocated Jewish emigration to Palestine, became aware of Siegfried Bernfeld and the *Jugendkulturbewegung*. Deeply impressed by the open discussions about adolescent sexuality and psychoanalysis, members of *Hashomer Hatzair* embraced Freudian ideas about repressed libido, hoping to overcome the stigma of the diasporic Jew within their community life in the *kibbutzim*.²⁵

Triple Bodily Otherness

In her writings, Lilly Fenichel discussed child and youth sexuality within the framework of turn-of-the-century reform pedagogy, the youth movement, the sexual reform movement, the women’s movement, Zionism, sexology, and psychoanalysis.²⁶ She devoted herself to the adolescent sexual body at a time when, to an extraordinary degree, youth had become synonymous with vitality and renewal, while also being seen as a source of social danger to bourgeois morality. Thus, youth was located at the epicenter of a crisis of the sexual body. Various

²² For Siegfried Bernfeld’s Zionist years, see Peter Dudek: “Er war halt genialer als die anderen”. Biografische Annäherungen an Siegfried Bernfeld, Gießen 2012, p. 169 ff.

²³ See Rolnik: Freud, p. 56.

²⁴ See Siegfried Bernfeld: Die Assimilation um der Menschheit willen (1917), in: Fölling / Fölling-Albers / Herrmann (eds.): Werke, vol. 3: Zionismus, p. 191-220.

²⁵ See Ofer Nordheimer Nur: Eros and Tragedy. Jewish Male Fantasies and the Masculine Revolution of Zionism, Boston 2014, p. 34 ff.

²⁶ See Lutz Sauerteig: Loss of Innocence: Albert Moll, Sigmund Freud and the Invention of Childhood Sexuality Around 1900, in: Sexology, Medical Ethics and Occultism. Albert Moll in Context: Medical History 56 (2012) 2, p. 156-183.

bourgeois circles, including the youth movement, tried to counteract this crisis-ridden young sexual body, postulating an ethical, aesthetic, and purely 'natural body' to be acquired through sport, dance, and diet.²⁷ The 'natural body' was mostly juxtaposed with an 'unnatural body' – often associated with the 'Jewish body' and with assumptions about its supposedly widespread physical deficiencies. Moreover, anti-Semitic discourse assumed that Jews were lustful, impulsive, and reached sexual maturity early.²⁸ While many youth groups generally excluded girls due to their supposedly excessive sexual desire, Jewish girls and young Jewish woman in particular were considered precocious and hypersexual because they personified the essence of "femininity" and the "eternally female".²⁹

The Zionist sports movement attempted to regenerate the (male) Jewish body. In response to the stereotype of the Jewish body as 'degenerate', as propounded in racial science and medicine, the Zionists juxtaposed a 'muscle Jew'.³⁰ At that time, Zionists repeatedly called for Jewish women to overcome their 'mental diseases' through childbirth and motherhood.³¹ The sex life of unmarried young Jewish women in particular was seen as a threat to the Zionist project of 'regeneration'. In his book *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden* [The Downfall of the German Jews] published in 1911, the physician and Zionist Felix

²⁷ See Jens Elberfeld: *Jugendliche Körper. Aufbrüche, Anforderungen und Ambivalenzen der Moderne*, in: Holger Zaunstöck (ed.): *Moderne Jugend? Jungsein in den Franckeschen Stiftungen 1890-1933*, Halle 2019, p. 126-137.

²⁸ See Rudolf W. Linke: "Die Judenfrage als Problem der Ausdruckskultur", in: Friedrich Fulda (ed.): *Deutsch oder national! Beiträge des Wandervogels zur Rassenfrage*, Leipzig 1914, p. 25-28, here p. 26.

²⁹ See Ulrike Brunotte: "All Jews are womanly, but no women are Jews." The "Femininity" Game of Deception: Female Jew, femme fatale Orientale, and belle Juive, in: idem / Anna-Dorothea Ludewig / Axel Stähler (eds.): *Orientalism, Gender, and the Jews. Literary and Artistic Transformations of European National Discourses*, Berlin / Munich / Boston 2014, p. 195-220. The pedagogue Karl Wilker claims that because of their 'hypersexuality', Jewish girls were often excluded from schools. See Karl Wilker: *Das übernormale Kind und seine Bedeutung für die Schule*, in: *Festschrift zum 50. Semester des Päd. Universitäts-Seminars unter Prof. D. Dr. W. Rein*, edited by former members, Langensalza 1911, p. 87-96, here p. 96. See also Marion E. P. de Ras: *Body, Femininity and Nationalism. Girls in the German Youth Movement 1900-1934*, New York, p. 195.

³⁰ Daniel Wildmann: *Der veränderbare Körper. Jüdische Turner, Männlichkeit und das Wiedergewinnen von Geschichte*, Tübingen 2009.

³¹ See Todd Samuel Presner: *Muscular Judaism. The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*, New York 2007, p. 141.

Theilhaber criticized that “among the rich Jewish girls in West Berlin the old chastity was completely broken”.³²

Body Transformation

One of Lilly Fenichel’s novellas tells the story of the *fin-de-siècle* schoolgirl Susi from a Viennese Jewish middle-class family. Written between 1915 and 1917 and set prior to the First World War, the novella recounts Susi’s experiences between the ages of six and fifteen. It tells of a series of painful crises in her sexual development that ultimately lead to suicidal hysteria.³³ In the contemporary imagination, hysteria was not just the classic ‘female malady’, which primarily affected (young) middle-class women, but also an important component in the modern construction of Jewishness. (Young) Jewish women were considered particularly prone to hysteria.³⁴ The 19th and early 20th century medical discourse about innate Jewish tendencies to hysteria informed the development of racial anti-Semitism, as well as Jewish self-criticism. Zionists largely associated hysteria with a ‘degenerated’ ‘feminized’ Jewish male body – a body that had for them come about because of the separation of Jews from the soil of *Eretz Israel*, the Jew’s preference for intellect over the body, and a lack of physical labor.³⁵

The novella’s narrative is interwoven with Freudian theories about the conflict-ridden and gradual restructuring of female sexuality from childhood to puberty through a series of fixed stages (oral, anal, phallic/oedipal, latency, genital). In other words, Fenichel’s novella is a psychoanalytic coming-of-age story that emplots the psychosexual stage-model of Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie] (1905). In true Freudian fashion, Fenichel traces the source of her protagonist’s suicidal hysteria back to sexual repression and childhood trauma. She draws selectively on the various explanations advanced by Breuer and Freud, seeking to explain the etiology of (what was then known as) hysteria in the young Jewish woman: Susi’s hysteria stems essentially from a sexual trauma caused by moral injury and troubled innocence. Triggers are an oedipal crisis

³² Felix A. Theilhaber: *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden. Eine volkswirtschaftliche Studie*, München 1911, p. 78. “unter den reichen jüdischen Mädchen von Berlin W[est] mit der alten Keuschheit gänzlich gebrochen wurde”.

³³ In the fragmentary novella, Lilly Fenichel sometimes uses the name Susi and sometimes the name Edith. For easy readability, I will use the name Susi throughout this article. Moreover, the novella has no title.

³⁴ See Rose: *Women*, p. 154.

³⁵ See Boaz Neumann: *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, Waltham 2011, p. 116 ff.

brought on by a lack of Jewish traditions in her 'assimilationist' home, an internalization of gendered and Christian notions of moral purity, and an unwanted, misguided, and unscientific sex education that ultimately ends in bodily self-alienation and destruction.³⁶

In addition to psychoanalytic theories, Fenichel also relies on other scientific data. Around the time she was writing the novella, her brother Otto had been working on a survey about sexual education. In May 1916, he published his results in the journal *Schriften der Jugendbewegung* [Writings of the Youth Movement], edited by the German sexual reformer and educator Max Hodann. In his article, Otto Fenichel gives voice to girls recounting their lack of sexual knowledge. One girl stated that, when she was eleven years old, she thought that children were created by people touching each other's feet, followed by a bubble growing in the chest from which a child emerged. Another girl reported that, after her sexual education, she needed to think a lot about it and sexuality appeared to her to be something very ugly and disgusting. Still, she was very interested in sexuality, although for many years terribly afraid of being a woman and having children. Yet another girl reported that she had no one to speak to about sexual matters. At sixteen, a friend finally offered to share her sexual knowledge, but full of shame and fear, she refused.³⁷

Susi's sexual crisis begins at school. For many Jewish girls, school was the place where they experienced exclusion and difference, and where they were often subjected to anti-Semitic attacks. Catholic religious education in particular seemed to be a source of confusion and discomfort.³⁸ In her first year of school, Susi learns about the biblical story of paradise and feels that the expulsion of Adam and Eve was unfair. If God was omnipotent, she explains to one of her maids after school, Adam and Eve would not have been able to defy his will and eat from the forbidden tree. In addition, the fallibility of the human couple would have been God's own fault since he himself created the first humans. But the Catholic maid is soon tired of Susi's irreverent doubts and cuts her off, later remarking that "these Jewish children were already heretics at the age of seven". In search of answers, Susi seeks advice from her parents, who pay no more heed to her questions than the maid had. While Susi's mother enjoys her daughter's cleverness, her

³⁶ On trauma theory in early psychoanalysis, see Diederik F. Janssen: Kränkung and Erkrankung: Sexual Trauma before 1895, in: *Medical History* 63 (2019) 4, p. 411-434.

³⁷ See Otto Fenichel: "Sexuelle Aufklärung", in: *Schriften zur Jugendbewegung* 1 (1916) 2, p. 55, 57.

³⁸ See Siegfried Bernfeld: *Vom Religionsunterricht an den Mittelschulen* (1917), in: Fölling / Fölling-Albers / Herrmann (eds.): *Werke*, vol. 3: *Zionismus*, p. 449-456; Rose: *Women*, p. 17 f.

father warns that she should not get too smart, because this is “nothing for a beautiful girl” to be concerned about.³⁹

According to psychoanalytic theory, all questions children pose originate in questions about sexuality.⁴⁰ By introducing the paradise story, with its emphasis on nudity and temptation, Lilly Fenichel adds an erotic if not sexual tone to her protagonist’s questions. Furthermore, it was very common at that time for girls to try to obtain information about sexual matters by reading the (Hebrew) Bible or consulting domestic servants.⁴¹ Additionally, for Freud, the biblical story of paradise was related to the awakening of conscious sexual knowledge as well as the associated rise of sexual inhibitions, such as shame and disgust, and thus the loss of childlike naivety. Consequently, for Freud, the *Garden of Eden* encapsulated the “mass-fantasy” of childhood as a state of the shameless, liberated, and naked body.⁴²

While the Catholic maid cannot tolerate such questioning of biblical texts – questioning that was characteristic of traditional hermeneutic methods in the rabbinical interpretation of the scriptures, the *Midrash* – Susi’s parents likewise deviate from Judaism and are simply unable to educate their daughter in religious matters. Susi lacks any Jewish tradition in her own home, which can be read as Fenichel’s critique of Jewish ‘assimilation’ and similar notions of ‘Jewish amalgamation’ and the disappearance of Jewish traditions. Confused about her own religious identity, and in search of a firm foothold and orientation, Susi overcomes her sense of being lost and eventually turns to Catholicism, planning to convert once she reaches adulthood. In a diary entry in May 1915, Fenichel accuses Christianity of being hostile to the human body and to human pleasures, blighting all of humanity for thousands of years.

I am not educated enough to be able to say when and where in the history of mankind this deep rift appears for the first time between the will of nature and human dreams. In any case, Christianity has cleaved it bloodily, opening a gaping wound of thousands of years: the dichotomy between body and “soul”, between worldly and “divine”, between instinct and spirit, between animal and God. [...] Unity is redemption. So our instinct and will must become one: this is how the bloody

³⁹ Aschner-Fenichel: *Tagebücher*, p. 101 f. “dass diese Judenkinder schon mit sieben Jahren Ketzer waren”; “nichts für ein schönes Mädel”.

⁴⁰ See Freud: *Abhandlungen*, p. 57.

⁴¹ See Fenichel: “Aufklärung”.

⁴² Sigmund Freud: *Die Traumdeutung*, Vienna 1914, p. 184. For an English translation, see Sigmund Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, New York 1950, p. 143.

crack is healed. Why do you actually resist the sacred command of your nature within you?⁴³

The paradise story which Lilly Fenichel introduces to her novella clearly serves to mark the difference between the Jewish and the Christian – especially the Catholic – sexual body. It is important to note that Judaism does not share Christianity's philosophical-theological understanding of the story of paradise as a story about humanity's Fall from divine grace. Although for both Christian and rabbinic exegesis the *Garden of Eden* was similarly tied up with sexuality, Judaism rejected the doctrine of original sin, including its hostile attitude toward the body and sexuality, which came to dominate Christian thought. Instead, Judaism followed laws of procreation and regular marital intercourse.⁴⁴ According to Christian doctrine since Augustine and the medieval Christian theologians, sex had become identified with original sin, and platonic celibacy was regarded as the ideal.⁴⁵

In her novella, Lilly Fenichel then proceeds to identify a fatal correlation between the 'assimilation' of modern Jewry and the sexual crisis in the young Jewish woman, which goes hand in hand with the transformation of the protagonist's sexual body. Susi internalizes Christian notions of guilt, sin, and shame, falling more and more into a process of bodily self-alienation. The modern Jewish family was often portrayed in contemporary Jewish press reports and literature as a site of increasing Jewish self-alienation, threatened by declining birth rates, excessive care, and at the same time an indifferent attitude on the part of Jewish mothers or absent fathers. The generational conflict between the Jewish youth and their parents was often sparked by criticism of bourgeois lifestyles, sexual morals, and meaningless Judaism.⁴⁶ For Lilly

⁴³ Aschner-Fenichel: *Tagebücher*, p. 63. "Ich bin nicht gebildet genug, um sagen zu können, wann und wo in der Geschichte der Menschheit zum ersten Mal dieser tiefe Riss auftaucht zwischen Naturwillen und Menschenträumen. Das Christentum hat ihn jedenfalls tief bis auf's Blut gerissen und nun klafft er schon jahrtausendlang: Der Zwiespalt zwischen Leib und 'Seele', zwischen Weltlichem und 'Göttlichem', zwischen Trieb und Geist, zwischen Tier und Gott. [...] Einheit ist Erlösung. Also muss unser Trieb und Wille eins werden: so wird der blutige Riss geheilt. Warum sträubt ihr euch eigentlich gegen das heilige Gebot eurer Natur in euch?" [emphasis in original].

⁴⁴ For a more ambivalent view, see Ruth Berger: *Sexualität, Ehe und Familienleben in der jüdischen Moralliteratur (900-1900)*, Wiesbaden 2003, especially p. 25-56. See also Peter Brown: *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York 2008; Gail Hawkes: *Sex and Pleasure in Western Culture*, Cambridge 2004.

⁴⁵ See the anthology Barbara Feichtinger / Helmut Seng (eds.): *Die Christen und ihr Körper. Aspekte der Körperlichkeit in der christlichen Literatur der Spätantike*, München 2004.

⁴⁶ See Ulrike Pilarczyk: *Gemeinschaft in Bildern. Jüdische Jugendbewegung und zionistische Praxis in Deutschland und Palästina/Israel*, Göttingen 2009, p. 14.

Fenichel's protagonist, conversion to Catholicism seems ultimately a means of escaping the loneliness of her hollow and alienated secular home. Conversions, which at the time usually led to interreligious marriages, were hotly debated in the Jewish public and were often associated with death and illnesses.⁴⁷ Drawing on the psychoanalytic concept of repression, Susi's original Jewish sexual body, coded as childishly naive, liberated, and shameless, is pushed into the unconscious, transforming it into an 'assimilated' and ill, Christianized sexual body. Susi experiences what was known in the Zionist narrative as 'degeneration'. Even if Lilly Fenichel in a way reproduces the contemporary body dualism by clearly coding the 'uncivilized' sexual body as Jewish and the 'cultivated' sexual body as Christian, she gives the former a positive and the latter a pathological twist. In this reading, the *Garden of Eden* is reminiscent of *Eretz Israel* – a utopian place of longing often imagined in Zionist discourse, where the exiled and dysfunctional Jewish sexual body used to be healthy and can be healed. For Lilly Fenichel, however, healthy sexuality meant neither excessive sexual desire nor excessive abstinence, but instead sexual harmony – as a remedy against young Jewish women's illnesses. On May 31st, 1915, in an especially critical diary entry, she describes male sexual behavior that pursues women for either just their souls or just their bodies. As we will see, Lilly Fenichel faced this same problem in her own prosaic life.

The aesthete, who wants rather "higher things" from women than sex, is just as decadent and degenerate as the brutal "enjoyer", who satisfies his need for "love" in the nightclub. Both – seemingly opposites – are one in their view of love: it is a dirty trick to them, which the weaker one – averts indignantly. Both are to be despised because they are detrimental to development.⁴⁸

Following Freud, Lilly Fenichel fears that complete drive affirmation would lead to a lack of culture and total sexual inhibition to the extinction of mankind.

The novella also points to another reason for Susi's body transformation. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, for a girl's sexual development to reach adult 'normal', 'female-passive' vaginal sexuality,

⁴⁷ See Theilhaber: *Untergang*.

⁴⁸ Aschner-Fenichel: *Tagebücher*, p. 63 f. "Der Aesthet, der vom Weibe 'Höheres' will als das Geschlecht, ist ebenso dekadent und entartet wie der brutale 'Geniesser', der seinen Bedarf an 'Liebe' im Nachtlokal deckt. Beide – scheinbar Gegensätze – sind eins in ihrer Anschauung von Liebe: sie ist ihnen eine schmutzige Gemeinheit, die der eine schwächere – sich entrüstet abwendet. Beide sind verächtlich, weil sie entwicklungsfeindlich sind."

she must renounce the masculinity associated with the clitoris.⁴⁹ The *Garden of Eden* thus stands for the girl's pre-oedipal sexuality, which, according to Freud, is 'male-active'. Lilly Fenichel makes use of these psychoanalytic theorems to frame the *Garden of Eden* as a place of 'male-like' self-determination, autonomy, and equality, where the young Jewish woman's sexual body was subjective and active, and free from male domination and desexualization. It is a place where young women have not yet been made shameful and ignorant of all sexual matters for the sake of 'feminine honor'.

Looking desperately for answers to her (sexual) questions at the age of twelve, upon her precarious start into puberty, Susi accompanies her friend to a church service, where she is impressed by the Christian liturgy, by Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and humans, and by the Christian Godfather:

A thousand times more infinite than the one who was addressed in dull temples and crooked Hebrew phrases, appealing to him for a long and healthy life. [...] And those who brought him incense in dusky, vaulted churches and set flickering candles on shimmering altars and sank down on their knees in devotion before him – they came closer to his holy being than the Jews, who saw Susi sitting down murmuring their prayers when she occasionally came to the temple for the holidays. [...] The image of Christ seized Susi to the point of passionate tears. [...] Between her, the searching human child and mediator whom she loved – how bleak was the rational faith of her fathers! And no one there to bring it closer to her – because little Susi was all alone on this deep question. At that time, she heard talk of many people being "baptized" – Jews like her who converted to Christianity. That made a big impression on her. [...] "When I grow up, I am going to get baptized too" says Susi to her friend, who took her to church.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ See Freud: *Abhandlungen*, p. 57 f. Luce Irigaray in particular dealt with this construction when she satirized the „baby-clitoris-penis“. See Luce Irigaray: *This Sex Which Is Not One*, in: idem: *This Sex Which Is Not One*, New York 1985, p. 23-33.

⁵⁰ Aschner-Fenichel: *Tagebücher*, p. 106 f. "Tausendmal unendlicher als Der, den man in dumpfen Tempeln und hebräischen Schnörkelphrasen anredete, um ihn um langes Leben und Gesundheit zu bitten. [...] Und die ihm in dämmrigen, säulenhohen Kirchen Weihrauch brachten und flackernde Kerzen auf schimmernde Altäre stellten und auf ihren Knien in Andacht vor ihm versanken – die kamen seinem heiligen Wesen näher, als die Juden, die Susi sitzend ihre Gebete murmeln sah, wenn sie zuweilen in den Feiertagen in den Tempel kamen. [...] Das Bild Christi ergriff Susi bis zu leidenschaftlichen Tränen. [...] Zwischen ihr, dem suchenden Menschenkind und Mittler, den sie liebte – wie kahl war dagegen der vernünftige Glaube ihrer Väter! Und niemand da, der ihn ihr näher brachte – denn auch in dieser tiefen Frage war die kleine Susi ganz allein. Damals hörte sie von vielen Leuten sprechen, die sich ‚taufen‘ liessen – Juden gleich ihr, die zum Christentum übertraten. Das machte grossen Eindruck auf sie. [...] ‚Wenn ich gross bin, lass‘ ich mich auch taufen‘ sagt Susi zu ihrer Freundin, die sie in die Kirche mitnahm." [emphasis in original].

Unlike Judaism, which the novella's protagonist describes as bare, rational, and abstruse, Christianity is referred to as being warm-hearted, all embracing, and protective. Similar to the Freudian understanding, the novella presents religion as an expression of an infantile longing for a father. Susi recognizes abandonment and the weakness in life caused by the absence of Judaism; she seeks to overcome her feeling of loneliness through a regressive renewal of the infantile desire for protection with the help of Christianity and looks for the idealized father image in the Christian god.⁵¹ Susi turns to Christianity to find answers to her deep questions; still, the only questions that are posed throughout the novella are sexual ones.

Fenichel's novella explores the Oedipus complex, which Freud saw arising in infancy and undergoing a revival during puberty, when the child needed to abandon incestuous parental love objects and find new instinctual ones outside the family. But according to Freud, there is no escape from incestuous fixations, and the (post-)pubescent object choice can partly be understood as a recovery or reproduction of the infantile object choice. That is why, Freud maintained, young men turned mostly to an older woman, while young women looked for an older man endowed with authority.⁵² Thus, in applying Freud's theory, Lilly Fenichel describes Susi's search for a new instinctual object not only outside her family, but also outside her faith, wishing ultimately to leave the paternal Jewish faith by baptism. At the same time, the novella associates the Oedipus complex with the dwindling paternal authority of the protagonist's secular Jewish home. Franz Jungmann, alias Franz Borkenau, who himself was in close contact with former members of the *Jugendkulturbewegung* after the First World War, put Lilly Fenichel's suggestive fictional remarks more explicitly in his study on sexuality and the pre-war German bourgeois youth movement, published in 1936. Franz Borkenau saw the formation of the *Jugendkulturbewegung* as a generally post-assimilatory reaction.⁵³ In his study, he explained that the lifestyle of modern secular Jewry was "not accepted internally, but only imitated". Alienation from Jewish tradition had led to "a complete lack of ties in the parental home". And because there was no "authoritative

⁵¹ See Sigmund Freud: *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo Da Vinci*, Vienna 1910, p. 56 f.; Anna Freud: *Das Ich und die Abwehrmechanismen*, Vienna 1936, p. 176 ff.

⁵² See Freud: *Abhandlungen*, p. 88.

⁵³ Retrospectively, Siegfried Bernfeld points out that there was a proportionally high involvement of the Jewish youth in the *Jugendkulturbewegung*. See Siegfried Bernfeld: *Die Schulgemeinde und ihre Funktion im Klassenkampf*, in: Ulrich Herrmann (ed.): *Werke*, vol. 8: *Sozialistische Pädagogik und Schulkritik*, Gießen 2016, p. 75-172, here p. 87.

system of norms” in Jewish families, oedipal forces would “flare up with immediate force”.⁵⁴

On her day in church, Susi and her friend enthusiastically tell each other stories about the monastic life of nuns, who are completely aligned with God and faithful to the vows of chastity. Both are impressed by the “[y]oung girls who had left wealth and worldly joy in order to give their whole being to their heavenly bridegroom”.⁵⁵ Susi is fascinated by the chaste nuns, as well as by Jesus, who overcame his sexuality: He was born of a virgin and without sexual desire. The narrative strand here is twofold. Not only do the protagonist and her friend cheerfully fantasize about their new instinctual object, the Christian Godfather, but their fantasies of celibacy point to developing sexual inhibitions, as the psychoanalytical stage-model suggests.⁵⁶ These strong sexual inhibitions lead not only to feelings of disgust and shame towards sexuality, but also to what Freud termed ‘virginal anxiety’, triggered by a specifically moral upbringing.⁵⁷ Lilly Fenichel emphasizes the concrete difficulties of Susi’s sexual-moral upbringing as a woman and Jew. Just as in paradise, Susi starts to lose her childish innocence, her bodily naivety, and thus her shameless nakedness. At the same time, she starts to lose her original Jewish sexual body, but is never able to fully accept her new body, which manifests as ill and hysterical.

The Absent Body

When Susi is eleven years old, a friend, Annelies Hofinger, brings her an “exciting” [reizend] romance novel that Annelies’ older sister borrowed from the library. Susi starts reading and is thrilled by the love story of a lonely young girl. The girl is joined by a lovable and smart young man who had always been waiting for her and who would always love and kiss her, so that she never again had to be alone. Here, Lilly Fenichel

⁵⁴ Fritz Jungmann [Franz Borkenau]: Autorität und Sexualmoral in der freien bürgerlichen Jugendbewegung, in: Max Horkheimer (ed.): Studien über Autorität und Familie. Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung, vol. 5, Lüneburg 1987, p. 679-705, here p. 689. “nicht innerlich angenommen, sondern nur nachgeahmt”; “eine vollständige Bindungslosigkeit des Elternhauses”; “autoratives Normsystem”; “muss die Ödipodie mit unmittelbarer Wucht aufflammen”. In his article, Franz Borkenau contrasts the *Jugend-kulturbewegung* with the *Wandervogel* and other conservative youth movements.

⁵⁵ Aschner-Fenichel: Tagebücher, p. 107. “[j]unge Mädchen, die Reichtum und weltliche Freude verlassen hatten, um ihr ganzes Sein ihren himmlischen Bräutigam hinzugeben”.

⁵⁶ See Sigmund Freud: Zwangshandlungen und Religionsübung, in: idem: Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre, Vienna 1912, p. 128.

⁵⁷ See Janssen: Kränkung, p. 419.

draws on the common contemporary trope of girls and women being fatally attracted to books. It was assumed that female readers became too easily lost in an illusory world of sexual excitement, masturbation, and lesbian infatuation.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in contemporary pedagogy and adolescent psychology, the girl's enthusiasm [Schwärmen] was seen as a typical female adolescent stage of development that tended to include an erotic component.⁵⁹ For the contemporary neurologist and teacher Else Volk-Friedland, enthusiasm was associated with the awakening of sexual maturity and could easily lead to sexual perversions.⁶⁰ And according to the observations of the educator and journalist Helene Glaue-Bulß, middle-class teenage girls [höhere Tochter] were generally inclined to emotional exuberance; and for girls "who come from foreign races and for those who have the hot blood of a southern people or of another race", the enthusiasm arose even earlier due to their precocity.⁶¹ Although there is no explicit Jewish content in Glaue-Bulß' findings, in contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish pseudo-scientific studies, Jewish girls were said to mature earlier than non-Jewish girls.⁶² Furthermore, it was claimed that there was a correlation between Jewish hypersexuality and their Mediterranean heritage. The novella indicates here that Susi does not understand the sexual allusions or sexual scenes of the romance novel, but instead succumbs to excessive romantic passions.

In the next scene, Susi attends the wedding of Annelies' older sister Grete. Grete cries terribly. Susi is astounded to see her so sad on such a supposedly happy day. People have to love each other terribly when they get married and Grete must have been happy after all but why isn't she, Susi thinks. Then Annelies approaches her. "Do you know what it's like to be married?", she asks Susi. "Of course I know that. You love each other very much and always stay together – a whole life – always –". "And you think that's all?" Annelies provokes triumphantly. "What

⁵⁸ See Weininger: *Geschlecht*, p. 349. See also Thomas W. Laqueur: *Solitary Sex. A Cultural History of Masturbation*, New York 2003.

⁵⁹ Edwin Dillmann: *Schwärmen für die Lehrerin. Zur weiblichen Sozialisation am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: Eva Labouvie (ed.): *Ungleiche Paare. Zur Kulturgeschichte menschlicher Beziehungen*, Munich 1997, p. 175-197, here p. 184 ff.

⁶⁰ See Else Volk-Friedland: *Über jugendliche Schwärmerei*, in: *Die Frau und Mutter. Zeitschrift für Kinderpflege und Erziehung sowie für Gesundheit in Haus und Familie* 3 (1917), p. 48-50, here p. 50.

⁶¹ Helene Glaue-Bulß: *Das Schwärmen der jungen Mädchen*, Leipzig 1914, p. 9 f. "aus fremden Völkern stammende Mädchen und für solche, die ihrer Abstammung nach das heiße Blut eines südlichen Volkes oder einer anderen Rasse besitzen".

⁶² See Wilker: *Kind*, p. 96; Theilhaber: *Untergang*, p. 78; Veronika Lipphardt: *Biologie der Juden. Jüdische Wissenschaftler über "Rasse" und Vererbung. 1900-1935*, Göttingen 2008, p. 161.

else?”, says Susi astonished. “Yes – right – then you have children when you are married.”, she adds. “But how to get them – you see, you don’t know!”, Annelies replies. Annelies begins telling Susi everything she learned from the maid about procreation and sexual intercourse. But Susi doesn’t believe it. She is shocked and finds something terribly ugly in it.⁶³ Lilly Fenichel’s protagonist then approaches her teacher to find out if Annelies’ claims were true. Her teacher dismisses Annelies’ account and assures Susi that marriage and having children is just as romantic as Susi had imagined. And so, Susi begins forgetting what Annelies told her.

Although sex education literature was widespread around the turn of the 20th century, sexual education in school and at home was mostly insincere, and above all was conveyed with emotions such as fear and disgust. The sexologist Albert Moll maintained that girls in particular, on account of their upbringing, were taught that sex was something dirty, disgusting, and shameful, which could lead to debilitating inhibitions that preempted sexual enjoyment.⁶⁴ Educators also tried to prevent girls and young women from inappropriate sexual behavior and sexual intercourse by describing in detail the risks of pregnancy and birth pains.⁶⁵ Lilly Fenichel’s novella criticizes girl’s sex education for being too romantic, mostly emphasizing love and gentle caresses, but never penetration.⁶⁶ But Fenichel promoted a more enlightened form of sex education based on Freudian theories of libido. The novella also points to the fact that girls are kept in great ignorance and are often poorly

⁶³ Aschner-Fenichel: *Tagebücher*, p. 105. “‘Weisst Du, wie das ist, wenn man verheiratet ist?’ fragte Annelies. ‘Natürlich weiss ich das. Man hat sich sehr lieb und bleibt immer beisammen – ein ganzes Leben – immer –’ ‘Und das glaubst du, ist alles?’, fragte Annelies triumphierend. ‘Was denn noch?’ sagte Susi erstaunt. ‘Ja – richtig – dann bekommt man auch Kinder, wenn man verheiratet ist.’ ‘Aber wie man sie bekommt – siehst du, das weisst du nicht!’”

⁶⁴ Albert Moll: *Sexuelle Erziehung*, in: *Zeitschrift für pädagogische Psychologie, Pathologie und Hygiene* 10 (1908) 3, p. 145-216, here p. 156.

⁶⁵ See Lutz D. H. Sauerteig: *Representations of Pregnancy and Childbirth in (West) German Sex Education Books, 1900s-1970s*, in: idem / Roger Davidson (eds.): *Shaping Sexual Knowledge. A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe*, London, p. 129-160, here p. 133. For the long tradition of rationalization and hostility to pleasure in the so-called “black pedagogy” [*“schwarze Pädagogik”*] of the 18th and 19th century, see Jana Johansson: *Der Körper als Kriegsschauplatz von Erziehung - ein historischer Exkurs*, in: Claudia Mahs / Barbara Rendtorff (eds.): *Erziehung, Gewalt, Sexualität. Zum Verhältnis von Geschlecht und Gewalt in Erziehung und Bildung*, Opladen 2016, p. 37-56.

⁶⁶ See Marina Schuster: *Sexualaufklärung im Kaiserreich*, in: Anja Bagel-Bohlan / Michael Salewski (eds.): *Sexualmoral und Zeitgeist im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Opladen 1990, p. 71-81, here p. 79 f.; For more on sex education and venereal diseases, see Lutz Sauerteig: *Krankheit, Sexualität, Gesellschaft. Geschlechtskrankheiten und Gesundheitspolitik in Deutschland im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1999, p. 187-264.

prepared for what is to come. Actual sexual intimacy contradicted the romantic fantasies girls had grown up with, often resulting in great pain and trauma.

In the 1920s, the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel analyzed the wedding night trauma, arguing that it could result in neuroses or psychosis. Stekel assessed the case of a girl from a simple Jewish family for whom a future husband had been arranged through a Jewish matchmaker, a *shadkan*, and for whom the engagement itself provoked a severe crisis. Female patients told Stekel that the wedding night was especially distressing and traumatic because they lacked sufficient sex education, they didn't love their husband, or because their husbands questioned their virginity, insulted, or mistreated them. One woman for example reported that on her wedding night her husband proclaimed: "You have betrayed me! You are no longer a virgin!". Another woman reported being insulted: "Oh! What short, fat legs you have."⁶⁷ Another woman, who had had a very strict upbringing and no sex education, responded to aggressive penetration with vaginismus.⁶⁸

After a while, Susi begins to suffer headaches, exhaustion, memory loss, and nightmares. Conforming with the psychoanalytic theory of repression, Susi's unpleasant or painful sexual experiences are pushed into her unconscious and thereby censored. In turn, this fundamental defense mechanism leads to distorted and unrecognizable displacements of the repressed. In one dream, Susi "breaks a twig from a tree, in her fingers it turns into a worm, which writhes smoothly, warmly and disgustingly." She tries to shake it off "but it sticks to her terrified hand, she cannot get rid of it, she feels its disgusting warm smoothness all over her body". In another dream, a man enters with a sword while she is sitting in the garden and tells her she is going to die. She begs for mercy but then he thrusts "his sword into her poor heart, her blood flowed red over her white dress ..."⁶⁹ In these psychosexually freighted dreams, Lilly Fenichel portrays her protagonist as a nearly passive object of male sexual domination. It is the turning point of her transformation from childlike independence, activity, and bodily ownership to female passivity and submission, and ultimately to the

⁶⁷ Wilhelm Stekel: *Die Geschlechtskälte der Frau (Eine Psychopathologie des weiblichen Liebeslebens)*, Vienna 1921, p. 76 ff. "Du hast mich betrogen! Du bist keine Jungfrau mehr!"; "Ach! Was hast Du für kurze dicke Beine."

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶⁹ Aschner-Fenichel: *Tagebücher*, p. 207 f. "Sie bricht von einem Baum ein Zweiglein, in ihren Fingern verwandelt sich's in einen Wurm, der windet sich glatt, warm und eklig. Sie will ihn wegwerfen, aber er klebt an ihrer entsetzten Hand, sie wird ihn nicht los, im ganzen Körper fühlt sie seine widerliche warme Glätte. . ."; "Dann stiess er sein Schwert in ihr armes Herz, ihr Blut floss rot ueber ihr weisses Kleid..."

painful injury of her own female body. In her novella, Lilly Fenichel entangles penetration, injury, and moral offense, showing how they result in great anxiety. She refers to the vulnerability of female bodies in sexual encounters. Penetration is here only conceivable as a traumatic injury. This stands in radical contrast to romantic ideals of loving and sexual encounters between men and women as a positive convergence of the sexes: instead of lust and desire, there is negativity and trauma, male fantasies of submission, rape scenes, and contempt.

In her diary, Lilly Fenichel presents Susi's fear of male domination as part of her own biography. Around 1915, Lilly had a liaison with a nineteen-year-old man called Stefan. They could barely meet, and when they could, then only for fifteen minutes under parental observation. As soon as Lilly Fenichel's parents realized how close the relationship between the two had become, they forbade the meetings. They found Stefan too young and boyish and were afraid for their daughter's reputation. "You want to forbid my will?", Lilly Fenichel wrote rebelliously in her diary, "[o]ha! So I stubbornly insisted [ertrotzte], swindled, secret meetings. And fear and defiance and romance were welcome charms to Eros. Hasty kisses glowed in dark portals, and it is often nice to feel sinful and humiliated."⁷⁰ It was his boyish behavior that drew Lilly Fenichel to Stefan, assuaging her fear of men. "Yes – the fear of the man – which drove me to the boys, to the weakling who never took possession of me – whom I owned!", she noted.⁷¹ Although she found that Stefan's "boyish caresses were tasteless" and their conversations were flat and banal, she enjoyed this relationship.⁷² Lilly Fenichel enjoyed the boy's weakness and her own dominance and liked to call herself "mistress" [Herrin].⁷³

How longing and fear glow in your eyes! How your boyish longing trembles under my touch! What a weakling you are! See: That's why I love you. Because I completely despise you and therefore – don't have to despise myself. Because I don't lose myself

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 149. "Man will mir den Willen binden? Oha Also ertrotzte, erschwindelte, verschwiegene Zusammenkünfte. Und Angst und Trotz und Romantik waren dem Eros willkommener Reiz. In dunklen Haustoren glühten hastige Küsse und es ist oft schön sich sündig und erniedrigt zu fühlen."

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 157. "Die Furcht vor dem Mann, den man so gern verlieren möchte. Ja – die Furcht vor dem Mann – die mich zu den Knaben trieb, zu dem Schwächling, der nie von mir Besitz ergriff – den ich besass [sic!]"

⁷² Ibid., p. 151. "knabenhaften Zärtlichkeiten waren geschmacklos".

⁷³ Ibid., p. 149.

when I give myself away to you. I am so much stronger. I can get up and leave at any time and it was a game for me and I haven't lost anything.⁷⁴

The liaison with Stefan seemed to be attractive to Lilly Fenichel because she could enter an erotic relationship without marital obligations and without fear of giving up on her bodily autonomy. The boy stood juxtaposed to the "man", "the master" [Herr], "the sure one"⁷⁵, "the noble, the ruled and ruling gentleman"⁷⁶ – the much older engineer Emil Aschner whom she came to know in the Austrian spa resort Semmering and who would later become her husband.

Even though Lilly Fenichel was attracted by Stefan's boyishness, she eventually ended the relationship. She was quite happy about this decision, as she had been forced "again and again to lie about the 'great love'". She feared that "the poor stupid boy would have despised" her "if there wouldn't have been something 'emotional' involved". Lilly Fenichel thought that Stefan should rather have been just as proud of her "physical affection" as of her "'harmony of the soul'".⁷⁷ Women who violated sexual standards were prone to stigma, loss of status, and discrimination. More than that, (young, bourgeois) men could indeed fall in love with a 'respectable' woman, but often could not have sexual intercourse with her, since they would respect her too much and would not want to harm the woman's social status. Thus, there were two types of girls for him: one for the body and one for the soul. The young bourgeois man desired a girl of his own class but would never humiliate her by sexual intercourse. Instead, he satisfied his sexual desires with prostitutes, housemaids, or office workers.⁷⁸ Asexual comradeship was what Lilly Fenichel was left with. When she and Emil Aschner became closer, Lilly Fenichel wondered about his extreme restraint: "... never again a word of 'feelings'", she wrote in her diary, "never again the

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 147 f. "Wie glüht in deinen Augen Verlangen und Angst! Wie erzittert deine Knabensehnsucht unter meiner Berührung! Was bist du für ein Schwächling! Siehe: Darum lieb' ich dich. Weil ich dich ganz verachte und drum – nicht mich verachten muss. Weil ich mich nicht verliere, wenn ich, wenn ich mich an dich verschenke. Ich bin ja so viel stärker. Ich kann ja jederzeit wieder aufstehen und weggehen und es war mir ein Spiel und ich bin um nichts ärmer geworden."

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 148. "der Sichere".

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 150. "der Beherrschte und Herrschende".

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 134 f. "Aber jedenfalls ist es jetzt aus, die grosse sinnliche Erregung vorüber, die mich immer wieder zwang, die 'grosse Liebe' zu lügen. Denn der arme dumme Junge hätte mich verachtet, wenn nicht was 'Seelisches' dabei gewesen wäre. Und doch hätte er mit eben soviel oder so wenig Recht auf meine physische Zuneigung stolz sein dürfen, wie auf jene 'Seelenharmonie', an die ich nur sehr kurz glaubte, viel, viel kürzer jedenfalls als ich sie ihn glauben machte."

⁷⁸ See Wilhelm Reich: *Der sexuelle Kampf der Jugend*, Berlin, 1932, p. 78.

slightest physical approach, not a step over this limit: comradeship". She wondered, "why had not the man taken me by storm back then, on the Semmering, when my last desperate defense would have loved to be silent!"⁷⁹

Lilly Fenichel's biographical notes illustrate a discrepancy between sexuality, love, and unfulfilled sexual desire that was characteristic of young intellectual women, especially young Jewish women who had often frequented schools and universities. In her study on sexual ethics in communism that was published 1920, although already written in 1915, Elfriede Eisler-Friedländer reports about the fate of the intellectual modern woman. "The small number of intellectually working and living women have the most difficult time also to conquer a part of erotic happiness for themselves", she writes and explains further: "because of their differentiated personality, their new position towards the man, they see in him not the superior but the equal, that makes it very difficult to find the right partner. Because they want to combine physical attraction and passion and intense and harmonious friendship in love." Hence, intellectual women "tend to err from disappointment to disappointment in love; the type of man that corresponds to them is still very rare."⁸⁰ In her book *Studierte Mädel* [University Girls] from 1906, the writer Else Ury similarly tells the story of a female student who falls in love but is not loved because of her intellect.⁸¹ In March 1914, the women's rights activist and socialist Hulda Maurenbrecher published a short article in *Der Anfang*, drawing attention to the problems of intellectual women and their love lives. For her, the intellectual woman needs an individual lifestyle, intellectual conversations, and mutual erotic relationships.⁸²

⁷⁹ Aschner-Fenichel: Tagebücher, p. 156 f. "Nie wieder seither ein Wort von 'Gefühlen', nie wieder eine geringste körperliche Annäherung, kein Schritt über diese Grenze: Kameradschaftlichkeit."; "[...] warum hatte der Mann nicht damals, auf dem Semmering, mich im Sturm genommen, damals, als mein letztes verzweifertes Wehren so gerne verstummt wäre!"

⁸⁰ Friedländer-Eisler: Sexualethik, p. 20 f. "Die kleine Zahl geistig arbeitender und lebender Frauen hat es am allerschwersten, auch ein Teil von erotischem Glück für sich zu erobern; denn ihre differenzierte Persönlichkeit, ihre neue Stellung zum Mann, die in ihm nicht den Übergeordneten, sondern den Gleichgeordneten erblickt, macht es sehr schwer, den passenden Partner zu finden. Denn sie wollen in der Liebe körperliche Anziehung und Leidenschaft und intensive und harmonische Freundschaft vereinigen; "irren in der Liebe meist von Enttäuschung zu Enttäuschung; der ihnen entsprechende Mannestyp ist noch sehr selten."

⁸¹ See Else Ury: *Studierte Mädel. Eine Erzählung für junge Mädchen*, Stuttgart 1906.

⁸² See Hulda Maurenbrecher: Echo. Die Antwort einer Frau an Friedrich Mono, in: *Der Anfang. Zeitschrift der Jugend* 2 (1914) 11, p. 141-143.

While many (Jewish) intellectual women criticized men for not being ready for their new roles as sexual partners and companions, some young men bemoaned the desexualization of young Jewish women through intellectualism. In 1916, the former activist of Berlin's *Jugendkulturbewegung*, Franz Sachs, who had joined the Zionist youth during the First World War, wrote in Martin Buber's journal *Der Jude* [The Jew], that young Jewish men were more likely to fall in love with Christian girls. A friend, he explained, had told him that he did not like being with Jewish girls because "they are so inharmonious; they are usually so torn and clumsy; they lack something – it is difficult to express – cheerfully naive, natural." For Franz Sachs, young Jewish women were unhappy and depressed. The reason for this lay in the "fate of the Jewish people. [...] This Jewess is too plagued by the fate of Jewishness in her body and in herself."⁸³

The Self-destructive Body

In the further course of the novella, Susi's family soon becomes indignant about her meetings with her close friend, Robert, considering them inappropriate and even dangerous. Susi wonders what they fear. Robert wants to calm her down and assures her that there is nothing dangerous about their relationship. He takes her hands and then "something sudden, deeply frightening happened: suddenly something painfully forgotten woke up and now stared, naked and ugly at Susi's confused face". All of a sudden, she realizes that what Annelies had told her was true: "she knew with a shudder: it is true! and she bowed her head to the ground, in painful shame – – –".⁸⁴ Again aligning with Freudian assumptions, the previously censored, unconscious sexual knowledge now becomes conscious sexual knowledge associated with rising sexual inhibitions. Susi loses her shameless and liberated naked body and is cast out of the paradise of childhood, pursuing the path of a Christianized and female-gendered sexual body as a young Jewish woman.

⁸³ Franz Sachs: Von deutschen Jüdinnen, in: *Der Jude. Eine Monatsschrift* 1 (1917) 10, p. 662-664. "sie sind so unharmonisch; sie sind meist so zerrissen und schwerfällig; es fehlt ihnen etwas – es läßt sich schwer ausdrücken – fröhlich Naives, Natürliches."; "Schicksal des Judentums. [...] Diese Jüdin ist an ihrem Körper und in sich selbst zu sehr heimgesucht vom Schicksal des Judentums."

⁸⁴ Aschner-Fenichel: *Tagebücher*, p. 213. "ihre Hände nehmen wollte, da geschah etwas Plötzliches, tief Erschreckendes: Schmerzhaft jäh erwachte etwas Vergessenes und starrte nun, nackt und hässlich [...]"; "sie wusste schauernd: es ist wahr! und sie senkte den Kopf zur Erde, in weher Scham – – –".

Susi's story ends in suicidal hysteria. On a warm summer day, her dead body is found floating on the famous Austrian bathing lake Wörthersee. In *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, newspapers frequently reported about female suicides by drowning. When the terribly disfigured body was pulled from the lake, a suicide note addressed to her parents was found:

Don't be mad at me. I cannot live. It is quite impossible for me. I imagined everything very differently. You have always been very kind to me and I was so looking forward to life. But I can see now that it is not worth the effort. Everything is so terribly ugly. Maybe I should have been prepared in good time. But I was always told fairy tales. Now I see everything that I was taught as a child is a lie. Papa himself said that I will never be good for life if I don't change myself. But I don't want to be different. So I prefer not to live. – I thank you for everything and forgive me that I cause you sorrow.⁸⁵

Student suicides were often followed by heated debates about the purported failing of parents and the educational system. In the case of schoolgirls, their deaths were frequently associated not only with emotional motifs such as lovesickness, lost innocence, or inappropriate sexual behavior, but also with 'Jewish suicides'.⁸⁶ Contemporaries, like the German social hygienist Julie Dorothea Wessinger, noted a particularly high suicide rate in the pre-war years with a dramatic rise in cases of girls under the age of fifteen.⁸⁷ In her study on female

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 97 f. "Seid nicht böse auf mich. Ich kann nicht leben. Es ist mir ganz unmöglich. Ich habe mir das alles ganz anders vorgestellt. Ihr wart immer sehr lieb zu mir und ich hab' mich so auf das Leben gefreut. Aber ich sehe jetzt, dass es nicht der Mühe wert ist. Alles ist so furchtbar hässlich. Vielleicht hätte man mich beizeiten darauf vorbereiten müssen. Aber man hat nur immer Märchen erzählt. Jetzt seh' ich, alles ist eine Lüge, was man mich als Kind gelehrt hat. Der Papa hat ja selbst gesagt, ich werde nie fürs Leben taugen, wenn ich nicht anders werde. Ich will aber nicht anders werden. Also mag ich lieber nicht leben. – Ich danke Euch für alles und verzeiht mir, dass ich Euch Kummer mache." [emphasis in original].

⁸⁶ For historical background on turn-of-the-century debates on student suicides, see Joachim Noob: *Der Schülerselbstmord in der deutschen Literatur um die Jahrhundertwende*, Heidelberg 1998; Thomas Lange: *Der "Steglitzer Schülermordprozeß" 1928*, in: Janz / Koebner / Tommler (eds.): *Zeit*, p. 245-309. For the interpretation of student suicide as "Jewish suicide", see Darcy C. Buerkle: *Nothing Happened. Charlotte Salomon and an Archive of Suicide*, Michigan 2013, p. 111 ff. For a contemporary assessment of girls' suicidal motives, see Albert Eulenburg: *Kinder- und Jugendelbstmorde*, Halle 1914, p. 29.

⁸⁷ See Julie Dorothea Wessinger: *Über den Selbstmord bei Frauen in den ersten zehn Jahren nach dem Kriege*, Berlin 1933, p. 14. Although Wessinger's study dealt mainly with German cases and statistics, a similar situation can be assumed for Austria. Wessinger also found a generally high suicide rate in pre-war Germany and Austria alike. Because Wessinger continually compares pre-war with post-war suicide rates, her study is a useful source for my purposes. For Austrian suicide statistics and contemporary dis-

suicides, published in 1933, Wessinger strongly connected suicidal behavior with the sexual awakening of adolescent girls and the female premenstrual and menstruating body. She shared the views of contemporary leading gynecologists and obstetricians, explaining that menstrual bleeding came along with “mental deficiency” [“geistige Minderwertigkeit”], a decrease of intellectual inhibitions and thus a high level of impulsiveness that all give rise to suicidal thoughts.⁸⁸ Wessinger also stressed the fact that women who evaded prescribed gender roles and forewent pregnancy and childcare in favor of a profession were very likely to commit suicide, as were young married teenage girls in general. Furthermore, Wessinger recognized a generally high suicide rate among Jews due to a lack of religious observance, and above all a disproportionately high rate among Jewish women, which she attributed to love trouble. By associating Jewish female suicides with single and divorced women, she inevitably aligned suicide with common contemporary perceptions of the *New Woman*: an independent, marriage-negating, childless, and ultimately ‘manly’ intellectual.⁸⁹

Lilly Fenichel’s protagonist commits suicide at the age of fifteen, an age when girls are not only about to finish school and begin preparing for marriage, but also when they usually anticipate experiencing their first sexual intercourse on the wedding night. Susi’s suicide note indicates that she imagined her life to have been different. Likewise, she imagined love differently. It is the horror of penetration and the attack on her body, as well as inadequate sex education and the Christian moral upbringing and the repression of her original Jewish sexual body, that drives her to her death. In the statistical categories of Julie Dorothea Wessinger’s study, Susi would have been a Jewish girl under fifteen, unmarried, bereft of religion and tradition, who committed suicide

cussions on suicide see Hannes Leidinger: Die Bedeutung der SelbstAuslöschung. Aspekte der Suizidproblematik in Österreich von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Zweiten Republik, Innsbruck 2012; Norbert Ortmayr: Selbstmord in Österreich 1819-1988, in: Zeitgeschichte 17 (1990) 5, p. 209-225.

⁸⁸ Wessinger: Selbstmord, p. 11. Wessinger refers here to the gynecologists and obstetricians Hugo Sellheim (1871-1936) and Paul Straßmann (1866-1938). During the Nazi-Regime, Sellheim was a member of several Nazi organizations. See also Hugo Sellheim: Gemütsverstimungen der Frau. Eine medizinisch-juristische Studie, Stuttgart 1930; Hugo Sellheim: Schonende Entbindung, in: Archiv für Gynäkologie. Organ der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Gynäkologie 144 (1930/31), p. 1-33; Paul Straßmann: Gesundheitspflege des Weibes, Leipzig 1933.

⁸⁹ Wessinger: Selbstmord, p. 15 ff. Wessinger saw religion as an important prophylactic against suicide. While Catholics, according to Wessinger, had the lowest and Protestants the second lowest rate of suicide, Jews and atheists had the highest. See Darcy Buerkle: Historical Effacements. Facing Charlotte Salomon, in: Monica Bohm-Duchen / Michael P. Steinberg (eds.): Reading Charlotte Salomon, Ithaca 2006, p. 73-87, here p. 80 f.

denying the womanly body of pregnancy and social norms; hers would be suicide by love trouble.

Conclusion

In her diaries and novellas written between 1915 and 1918, Lilly Fenichel makes the sexual crises of the *fin-de-siècle* middle-class girls a subject of discussion and addresses the triple sexual burdens of young Jewish women. The author points to the problem of their sexual body in the diaspora, which is constantly endangered by the 'assimilationist' tendencies of the parental home and the Catholic environment, leading to an oedipal crisis and strong sexual inhibitions. Using Freud's concept of repression, Fenichel traces the origins of 'hysteria' and 'virginal anxiety' in the young Jewish woman and sees them caused by bodily self-alienation. Lilly Fenichel draws attention not only to the problematic influence of Christian sexual morals on the young Jewish woman, but also to the wider consequences of the restrictive gendered sexual morals she is confronted with: growing up in sexual ignorance, sex education that is too romantic and unscientific, and the objectification of the body through male dominance. The love trouble afflicting young Jewish women appears again and again in Lilly Fenichel's diaries. And that trouble was compounded by the problems facing the intellectual *New Woman*, who was not only struggling for acceptance in society, but also confronting prejudices of 'unwomanliness' and desexualization.

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