

# The Travel Issue

## Imagining the Haifa Bay from the Schlachtensee: Arnold Zweig and Hermann Struck's *New Canaan*

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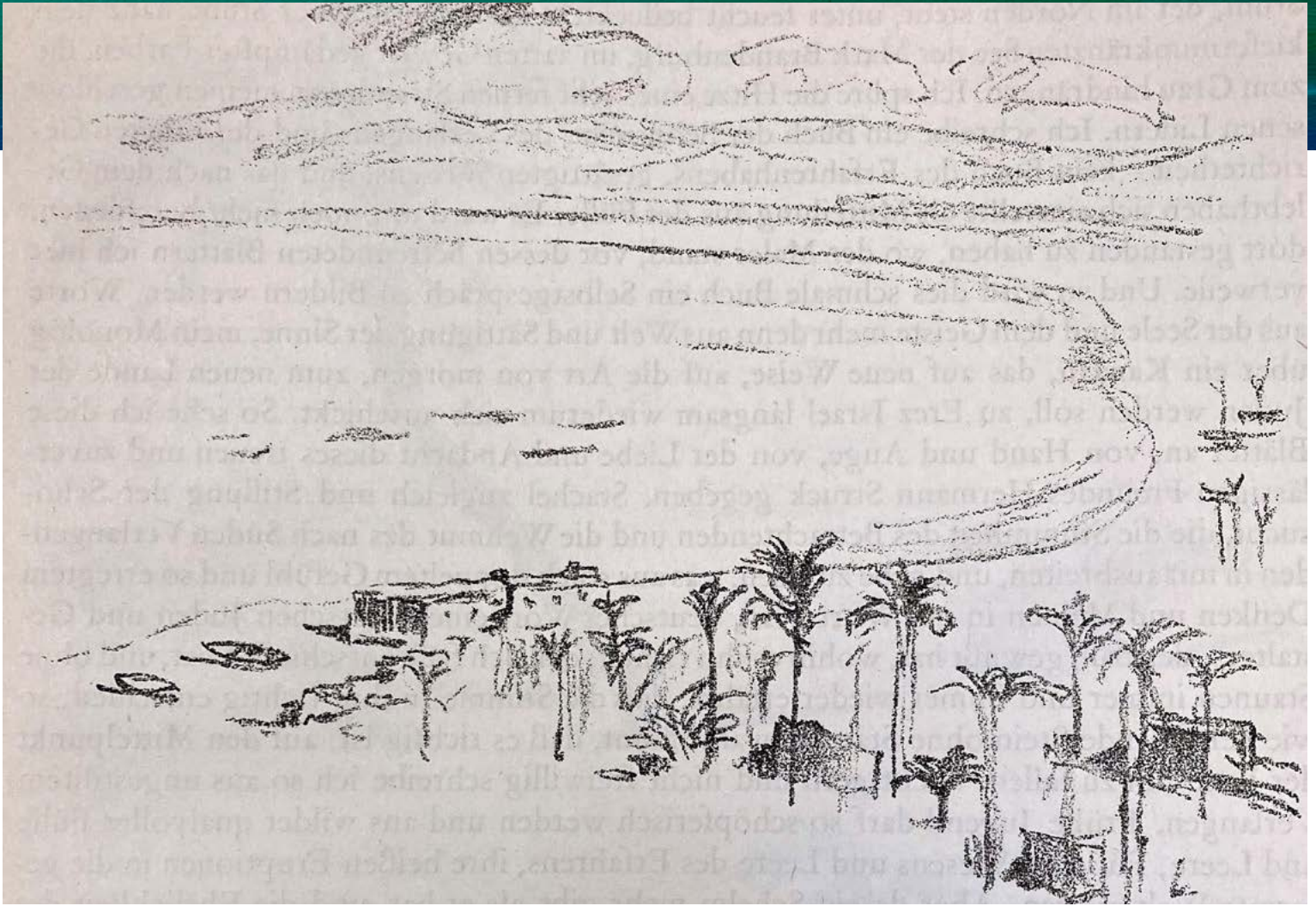
In March 2020, as borders closed and travel was arrested by the spreading coronavirus, the *New York Times* published a piece by writer Jordan Kisner. In it, Kisner recalled her childhood love for books because they “mimicked travel.” “In a book,” she went on to write, “I could go anywhere and be anyone.” While admitting, “I haven’t read with that primary motivation in a long time,” she allowed that in a time of pandemic, this mode of reading felt “especially attractive again.” As a scholar working on German Jewish literature in the age of early Zionism, Kisner’s words resonate with me and call to mind a work from nearly a century earlier, entitled *The New Canaan*.

*The New Canaan* is a thin, oversized volume, first released in 1925, a travelogue of sorts through Palestine. The famous artist Hermann Struck, perhaps best known for his portrait of Theodor Herzl, contributed fifteen lithographs to the project, mostly images of the landscape of Palestine, including Haifa, where he was then living. The author Arnold Zweig, however, who wrote the accompanying essay, was far from the shores of the Mediterranean. As he readily admits in the book’s first pages, he is near the Schlachtensee, just outside Berlin, “eyes closed, reclining in a stool,” beholding Palestine’s landscape “in its vastness.” Indeed, up until that point, Zweig had never stepped foot in Palestine.

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Thus, to categorize *The New Canaan* as simply a travelogue is to miss something critical that the text performs: for, in this case, not only the reader, but also the writer, is on an imaginative journey. Several years later, Zweig would rerelease *The New Canaan*, together with his earlier collaboration with Struck, *The Eastern European Jewish Countenance*. This time, the original images were omitted. The collection, newly entitled *Origin and Future*, included an afterward, in which Zweig reflected on the two works. About the absence of Struck’s images, he wrote: “They served me as an impulse, to say what was within me ... [but] perhaps no one will miss these illustrations, but let himself be transported by his own imagination hence, where the description wishes to take him.” On contemporary Palestine, he then added that, unfortunately, “its actualization has only come a little bit closer in the four years that have passed since I completed this writing.” Zweig’s afterward thus explicates the very work his essays perform: the use of imaginative faculties to access a far-off place in some future temporality, just as the new title suggests. Here, physical distance is not the only impediment Zweig seeks to overcome in his writing. Since Palestine has not yet reached its ideal state, prose is no substitute for “real” travel. No, it is the *only* way to reach one’s destination.

Understood on its own terms, *The New Canaan* begins to bear a striking resemblance to another, better-known



*Hermann Struck's depiction of the Haifa Bay and the opening lithograph of The New Canaan, 1925.*

work of early Zionism: Theodor Herzl's utopian novel *Old-New Land*. Given the utopian genre's kinship with travel narratives—Thomas More's *Utopia* is connected to Amerigo Vespucci's voyages through the "New World"—this relationship is no surprise. Moreover, if we read *The New Canaan* together with the earlier Zweig-Struck collaboration about *Ostjuden*, we discover a similar narrative arc to Herzl's: one that embraces the old—"origin"—and heralds the new—"future."

Critics often dismiss the literary value of Herzl's utopian novel, and it may be tempting to write off the Struck-Zweig project as some flight of fancy, too. But by dismissing these literary projects, we miss the powerful role they played in the early decades of the Zionist movement. In a time when more Jews called Berlin home than Tel Aviv and Jerusalem combined, books were often

the means by which many experienced this future Jewish state; on the sturdy ships of prose, readers set sail for Palestine. Works like Herzl's and Zweig's connected European and American Jewish readers to the Zionist project and fired their imaginations, even if they could never attend a Zionist congress or board a train for distant lands. Through their use of fantasy, books became the means for authors to help readers—and themselves—imagine a far-off Palestine, not as it was, but as it *could* be in the near future.

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