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Vienna and the Decadent movement

- 1 The turn of the 19th to the 20th century marks the final detachment from a linear sequence of artistic periods toward the diversified movements of modernity. What Impressionists had already preluded in the second half of the 19th century by devoting themselves to a subjective depiction of reality, thus breaking with traditional formal parameters, was to become one of the main characteristics of modern art and literature. This stylistic liberation came along with technological, economic, political and social changes that provoked incertitude as to future living and identity. Both visions of ending and beginning are encompassed by the generic term 'fin de siècle', which covers the years from about 1880 until the outbreak of the Great War. In his essay *Die Moderne* (Modernity), first published in 1890, the Austrian writer and critic Hermann Bahr phrased this ambivalent condition as follows :

Es kann sein, dass wir am Ende sind, am Tode der erschöpften Menschheit, und das sind nur die letzten Krämpfe. Es kann sein, dass wir am Anfange sind, an der Geburt einer neuen Menschheit, und das sind nur die Lawinen des Frühlings. Wir steigen ins Göttliche oder wir stürzen, stürzen in Nacht und Vernichtung – aber Bleiben ist keines.¹

- 2 The juxtaposition of antithetic words like 'end' and 'beginning', 'death' and 'birth', 'extermination' and 'spring' vividly illustrate the feelings of disruption present at the turn of the century that found its artistic expression in the Decadent movement. Bahr's article appeared in the first volume of *Moderne Dichtung* (Modern Literature), launching the creation of the group 'Jung-Wien', an informal league of young Viennese poets treading in the footsteps of the French 'décadence.' While it may be claimed that Paris

was the epicenter of decadent writing and aestheticism, the movement's anti-naturalistic and sensuous spirit also made its way to other European cities. Hermann Bahr was to play an important role as intermediary, introducing French literature to Vienna, which is where he returned to in 1889, following a one-year stay in Paris.² Bahr aimed at promoting an internalized mode of writing that would suitably capture the nervousness and unsteadiness of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which at that time was already in decline and politically preceding the very path of decadence that was to become investigated by artists. In Vienna – the administrative and cultural center of the multiethnic Habsburg state – social tensions increased threateningly around 1900. The continuous influx of migrants, further incorporations of municipalities and insolvable problems of language and nationality established an atmosphere fraught with conflict.

- 3 Since unstable times facilitate the susceptibility to fundamentalist mindsets, anti-Semitism increasingly expanded and consolidated when its most ambitious spokesman and leader of the Christian-Social Party, Karl Lueger, was inaugurated by the Emperor as Vienna's mayor in 1896.³ Rightwing extremism and anti-Semitism put particular strain on Viennese writers as a large number of them had Jewish roots. Consequently, they not only experienced the overall fin de siècle crisis, but they also felt a concrete threat to their cultural identity and even legal security.⁴ Peter Altenberg, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Felix Salten and Arthur Schnitzler, who rank among the most famous Young-Vienna Jewish writers, withdrew from any literary involvement in political and social affairs. Instead, they embraced aestheticism and concentrated on the study of interior worlds. They took their place among other young Viennese poets like Leopold Andrian, Hugo von Hofmannsthal or Felix Dörmann, who all followed the aesthetic concepts of internalized literature, as Bahr has suggested. Through analysis of individual psychological and emotional dimensions in their works, they grappled with the entanglement of life, love and death, the power of dreams and imagination, as well as a permanent quest for identity. With the latter mostly came anguish and nervous irritation, often leading to a feeling of being alienated from reality and turning towards artificial lifestyles, resulting either in isolation or in a dandyish appearance. The turn of the century's emotional disturbances that Peter Altenberg poetically diagnosed as "Krebs der Seele" (soul cancer)⁵ was accompanied by the emergence of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, which a fortiori proved the relevance of Young-Vienna writings with regard to the turn of the century's disturbed social and intellectual condition.

Theodor Herzl : writer or politician ?

- 4 While the majority of Young-Vienna poets avoided openly discussing their Jewish identity – they preponderantly considered themselves as assimilated citizens⁶ – one of their colleagues, the playwright and journalist Theodor Herzl, eventually found his vocation in giving a political as well as a literary voice to the Jewish people. Shortly after Hermann Bahr had returned inspired from Paris, Herzl also spent an influential period in the French capital. In fact, Herzl's and Bahr's careers display parallels that have hitherto rarely been broached. They both played leading roles at the turn of the century in Vienna's cultural development, and it seems symptomatic that their ideological commitment began at the same institution, namely in the student league 'Albia' at the University of Vienna. In his memoirs, Bahr recounted about the young Herzl : "Wissen Sie, was Theodor Herzl war, wie ich ihn kennengelernt habe ? Er war ein deutsch-

nationaler Burschenschafter.”⁷ Until his first years of studies, Herzl did not demonstrate any particular ambition to deal with his religious background. He was born in Pest to German-speaking Jews and moved to Vienna with his family in 1878, at the age of eighteen. Although the young Herzl had aimed to become a writer, he began studying law.⁸ Just as he chose this subject out of social calculation, he also joined the nationalist student league, where Bahr, after all, got to know him as a passionate member. It is most likely that Herzl had begun searching as soon as he could for an outlet for his desire and energy for political participation. This commitment, however, met with profound anti-Semitism. Only shortly after Herzl had joined Albia, Jews were no longer admitted to the league. Even though Herzl was allowed to stay, he eventually resigned. The incident certainly lasted in his memory. Herzl then concentrated on his journalism; he was already writing for the famous Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* and simultaneously drafting his first comedies. In 1891, Herzl was appointed the coveted position of foreign correspondent in Paris.⁹ Through close observation of political and social events in France and perceiving an increase of anti-Semitism, he progressively became aware of the significance and dimension of the Jewish issue.

- 5 Opinions vary about which specific event during Herzl's time in Paris caused him to develop his Jewish Nationalism and Zionist program. Certainly, the Albia experience was still on his mind. Herzl and his Zionist companions would later declare the Dreyfus affair as the pivotal moment in realizing the essential need for a Jewish nationhood. In the majority of cases, scholars willingly adopt this popular version of events.¹⁰ There is no doubt that Herzl was influenced by his coverage of the Dreyfus case. However, during the Panama scandals two years prior to this, in 1892, Herzl had begun to experience anti-Semitism at an alarmingly close range. Jewish financiers were declared responsible for the bankruptcy of the French company entrusted with building the Panama Canal, and for the first time the slogan ‘à mort, à mort les juifs’ was to be heard on the streets of Paris. Herzl soon realized that the discrimination against Jews in France would shortly occur in Austria as well.¹¹ Meanwhile, he still followed the political events from a journalistic point of view and simultaneously pursued his career as a writer, beginning to succeed in staging some of his plays at the famous ‘Burgtheater’ in Vienna.
- 6 However, young Herzl did view combining artistic and political vocations with disdain, a view made clear in a comment about his French colleague Maurice Barrès in March 1894. In his article ‘Der Feind der Gesetze’ (The enemy of laws), Herzl drew the conclusion “that the political mendacities of Barrès the politician have effectively killed the artist in him” and that “[a]ny ‘artist-politician’ who attempted to make art serve the rebellion against that legal culture, such as Barrès, was in effect committing moral, and hence artistic, suicide.”¹² Ironically, only about one year later, Herzl himself was to step into this very antagonism of using his literary skills for a political goal.
- 7 That is, in the spring of 1895, Theodor Herzl entrenched himself in his hotel room in Paris and within a two-week period of “hallucinatory graphomania” framed the concept of a Jewish state in his work *Der Judenstaat*. Cut off from any contact with his family and friends, even going as far as staying away from his office and neglecting his appearance, Herzl laid the foundation for his Zionist mission.¹³ Unlike with the case of Barrès, Herzl did not see any conflict in his political commitment. Upon returning to Vienna in July 1895 in order to become the feature editor at the *Neue Freie Presse*, he already spoke of his life story as a ‘Lebensroman’ and ‘Roman meines Lebens’ (novel of my life) and compared

his life to a book.¹⁴ Herzl's poetic understanding of his Zionist work is also depicted in his diaries, which he diligently kept as a testimony to the literary rudiments of his activities.

Zionism between fact and fiction

- 8 In the preface of *Der Judenstaat*, Herzl emphasized the realistic character of his ideas and forestalled any possible demurring of the utopian quality of his writing:

Ich erfinde nichts [...] weder die geschichtlich gewordenen Zustände der Juden noch die Mittel zur Abhilfe. [...] Will man also diesen Versuch einer Lösung der Judenfrage mit einem Wort kennzeichnen, so darf man ihn nicht « Phantasie », sondern höchstens « Kombination » nennen. Gegen die Behandlung als Utopie muß ich meinen Entwurf zuerst verteidigen. [...] Ich könnte mir auch einen leichteren literarischen Erfolg bereiten, wenn ich für Leser, die sich unterhalten wollen, diesen Plan in den gleichsam unverantwortlichen Vortrag eines Romans brächte.¹⁵

- 9 Given that he scorned any plan to give his Zionist concept the shape of a novel, how is it then possible to explain why only four years later Herzl begins to draft out the idea of a Jewish state in the very fictional genre he once objected to? Does he thus not confirm the once vehemently denied fantastical nature of his Jewish state when publishing his utopian novel *Altneuland* (The Old New Land) in 1902? Potentially, his first national draft would have been scrutinized more intensively for its fictional content or would just as well have gained a utopian label, had not the course of history effectively led to the founding of Israel after World War II. In view of the fact that Herzl's visions partially became reality, the fictional style that had already appeared in *Der Judenstaat* is mostly ignored. In many sections of his text, Herzl makes use of metaphors and allegoric language. A case in point is Herzl's botanic allusions. The chapter about how the Jewish emigration is to be transacted reads 'Die Verpflanzung' (transplantation). Herzl writes:

Wir wollen aber den Juden eine Heimat geben. Nicht, indem wir sie gewaltsam aus ihrem Erdreich herausreißen. Nein, indem wir sie mit ihrem ganzen Wurzelwerk vorsichtig ausheben und in einen besseren Boden übersetzen.¹⁶

- 10 Herzl visibly enriched his Zionist agenda with poetic content. This not only became clear in his texts, but likewise in his political operations. Carl Schorske was the first scholar to call attention to the specific aestheticism of Herzl's politics and asserted that Herzl's "commitment as aesthete to the power of illusion affected his style as political leader." Comparing the founder of modern Zionism with Goethe's Prometheus, Schorske saw him "shape a new race of men in defiance of reality and out of his power as an artistic creator."¹⁷
- 11 Indeed, Herzl placed a high value on symbols and visual poignancy in his Zionist activities. In 1896, he founded his weekly newspaper *Die Welt* (The World) and decided on a provocative design for it. It appeared on a yellow cover – yellow being the color conventionally assigned to Jews – and showed the Palestinian map framed by the Star of David in its title logo.¹⁸ When Herzl organized the First Zionist Congress in Basel the following year, he created strict guidelines for the delegates' dress code. All members had to wear "swallow-tails and white ties", and Herzl was afterwards quite satisfied with his sartorial requirements, as they had had the desired effect of the attendees feeling as if they were in the real parliament of an already existing Jewish state.¹⁹ Moreover, Herzl was always attentive to his own appearance and aesthetic appeal. The fact that many Jews idolized the Zionist leader and even considered him a messianic character and modern Moses, was spurred on by Herzl's own dramatic tendencies. Ephraim Lilien, the most

famous Zionist artist and illustrator, was jointly responsible for turning Herzl into an emblem of the modern heroic Jew. In Lilien's work, Herzl appeared as having the same strikingly muscular body as angels and Biblical heroes.²⁰

- 12 Even though Herzl himself disapproved of being deemed a prophetic leader, he undoubtedly took a shine to the dandyish spirit of his time. His sensibility to fin de siècle symptoms becomes evident by taking a closer look at his literary accomplishments. Herzl's novel *Altneuland* features numerous motifs characteristic of the decadent movement. In the following, several such aspects shall be explored and contrasted with a number of Young-Vienna writings.

Herzl's novel *Altneuland* and its decadent content

- 13 Herzl began working on his novel about the Jewish state in the final year of the 19th century. *Die Welt* mentions Herzl's preoccupation with a 'Zionist futuristic novel' for the first time on October 20th 1899. Barely one year later, excerpts from the book were pre-published in the journal's feature pages and the novel eventually came into print in the fall of 1902.²¹ Herzl opens his story with the portrayal of his emotionally disturbed protagonist Friedrich Löwenberg, a Young Viennese Jew who has just completed law school and who would be at the starting point of his career, were he not entrapped by the inescapable doom and gloom of the fin de siècle. The very beginning of the novel reads as a model of decadent literature:

Dr. Friedrich Löwenberg saß in tiefer Melancholie an dem runden Marmortische seines Kaffeehauses. [...] Der blasse, kranke Kellner begrüßte ihn ergebenst. Löwenberg machte eine höfliche Verbeugung vor der ebenfalls blassen Kassiererin, mit der er nie sprach. Dann setzte er sich an den runden Lesetisch, trank seinen Kaffee, las alle Zeitungen durch, die ihm der Kellner beflissen brachte. Und wenn er mit den Tages- und Wochenzeitungen, Witzblättern und Fachjournalen fertig war, was nie weniger als anderthalb Stunden in Anspruch nahm, kamen die Gespräche mit Freunden oder die einsamen Träume. Das heißt : ehemals waren es Plaudereien gewesen, jetzt waren es nur noch Träumereien, denn die zwei guten Gesellen, die jahrelang mit ihm diese eigentümlich leeren und charmanten Abendstunden im Café Birkenreis verbracht hatten, sie waren beide in den letzten Monaten verstorben. Beide waren älter gewesen, als er, und es war, wie der eine, Heinrich, in seinem Abschiedsbrief an Löwenberg schrieb, bevor er sich eine Kugel in den Kopf schoß : „es war sozusagen chronologisch begreiflich, daß sie früher verzweifelte als er.“²²

- 14 The text creates an air of loneliness and dejection, and the whole of Friedrich's environment is filled with distress ; even the waiter and waitress are pale and ailing. Friedrich turns to his dreams as the sole source of escape from a dismal daily routine, especially given he had recently lost his two only friends. Significantly, one of them resolved to die by a shot to the head as a means to end his ordeal in a world that apparently lacks any positive future prospects. Although Friedrich's friend leaves him a parting letter, the reader does not learn of his exact motives for suicide. Instead, he simply seems to have passed away as a consequence of the inescapable anguish awaiting every (Jewish) intellectual at the turn of the century. In Arthur Schnitzler's novella *Der Empfindsame* (the sensitive man), published in 1895, the story opens up with a comparable incident of a young man who is suddenly absent from coffeehouse meetings with friends after having killed himself just like Friedrich's companion:

Die jungen Leute waren heute sehr traurig. Sie dachten an den armen Fritz Platen, der so oft da neben ihnen gesessen war, plaudernd, lächelnd, Kaffee trinkend, Zigaretten rauchend. Eines Abends vor acht Tagen war er nicht gekommen, sondern war zu Hause geblieben, hatte sich vor seinen Schreibtisch gesetzt und sich eine Kugel durch den Kopf geschossen. Niemand wußte, warum.²³

- 15 Schnitzler's story reveals that disappointment in love was the reason behind the suicide. Similarly, Herzl's protagonist is well on the way to sharing the same fate, as he too is involved in an unhappy relationship. In the beginning, Friedrich's love is all that maintains his spirit and allows him to brave the oppressive atmosphere around him. He adores a wealthy Jewish girl, for whom he spends the last of his savings. However, when he dramatically learns of her engagement to another wealthy suitor – a rather unappealing businessman – life loses its appeal to him. Friedrich almost follows in the path of his deceased comrades, but then recalls an advertisement that had repeatedly appeared in Viennese newspapers. An anonymous person with the pseudonym Mr. 'N. O. Body' searches for an educated and desperate young man who is willing to undergo one last experiment with his life: "Gesucht wird ein gebildeter und verzweifelter junger Mann, der bereit ist, mit seinem Leben ein letztes Experiment zu machen."²⁴
- 16 Friedrich fits this profile perfectly, as would a number of turn-of-century literary characters. Herzl's protagonist applies for this dubious venture and so gets to meet the elderly Mr. Kingscourt, a German nobleman formerly known as Adalbert von Königshoff, who has come to amass a considerable fortune overseas. Also despairing over life and love, Kingscourt has in the meantime withdrawn from society and chosen a solitary existence on his yacht. He has reached the conclusion that all of his monetary resources and social efforts have proven futile and has come to praise the "wirkliche, echte, tiefe Einsamkeit, ohne Wunsch und Ringen. Die volle wahre Rückkehr zur Natur."²⁵ He thus resembles, by way of example, the protagonist in Hermann Bahr's story *Der Garten* (the garden). This text portrays a man equally advanced in years who has escaped from the worldly hustle and bustle, to instead concentrate on cultivating his own private garden by favor of inner exile:
- Die Menschen sind so dumm und glauben immer, man müsse sich nur recht viel von der Welt erwerben, um glücklich zu sein. Die Welt kann einem aber gar nichts geben, sondern jeder hat die ganze Welt in sich.²⁶
- 17 This misanthropic and hostile attitude toward people and society combined with a retreat into complete solitude is equally characteristic of Mr. Kingscourt. Herzl rounds off these fin de siècle criteria by making Kingscourt and Friedrich Löwenberg move to a lonely island in the South Seas, where they plan on spending the rest of their lives in isolation, surrounded solely by aesthetic and scholarly pleasures. This move is the 'last experiment' Mr. Kingscourt advertised, which Friedrich had blindly applied to. He thoroughly embraces once Kingscourt divulges what it is. Herzl's narrative strategy of sending the two men to a region detached from civilization is of course a typical device found in utopian genres²⁷, enabling the author to skillfully transport the story to a different time and space where he can commit himself to expatiating on an ideal Jewish state. However, this first utopian setting on the island is only adumbrated and not specified. Having been called 'the big break' by Herzl in his notes,²⁸ the two men's activities while in shared reclusion over the period of twenty years are left to the reader's imagination. Meanwhile, this blank space invites a homoerotic constellation, typical of the decadent movement. Hugo von Hofmannsthal's play *Das Bergwerk zu Falun*, written in 1899, depicts a comparable situation where two men cultivate an amorous relationship that stems from

an intimate shared time on a ship.²⁹ Kingscourt and Friedrich's equivocal intimacy has indeed been referred to in academic research, yet only with regard to Jewish stereotypes. Mikhal Dekel hence recognizes in Herzl's protagonists the fin de siècle cliché of the "schwächliche, verweiblichte Jude mit homosexuellen Tendenzen,"³⁰ which nevertheless confirms the entanglement of aestheticism and a Jewish identity crisis.

- 18 As a matter of course, *Altneuland* is essentially a Zionist novel and therefore concentrates extensively on the discovery of the old new land of Palestine where at the time of Kingscourt and Friedrich severing all ties with civilisation, the Jewish state has been put into effect. Herzl ensures his two dropouts visit the holy land before and after their twenty-year timeout on the island. When stepping on Palestinian soil for the first time on their way to the South Seas, the two men discover the Jewish state as already having been colonized by various ambitious Zionists and yet the overall impression it gives is of being neglected and run-down. One may argue that Herzl has decided on first showing the land of Zion as being in a desolate condition in order to enhance its appeal when visited for the second time and by then have his characters return to a transformed prosperous Jewish nation. Concurrently, however, Friedrich and Kingscourt's first tour through a still derelict Palestine offers a perfectly decadent surrounding in which both depressed and euphoric moods intertwine. As Friedrich sets sight on Jerusalem for the first time, he is overwhelmed by its mysterious, nightly beauty :

Ach, der Glaube war tot, die Jugend war tot, der Vater war tot – und vor ihm ragten die Mauern von Jerusalem in märchenhaftem Mondesglanz. Heiß strömte es ihm [Friedrich] in die Augen. Es überwältigte ihn. Er blieb stehen, und die Thränen flossen ihm langsam über die Wangen.³¹

- 19 Death and excitement unite in Friedrich's thoughts. Looking at Jerusalem's city wall, a typically decadent yearning for an undefined desire descends over him. At daylight, Jerusalem becomes shrouded in shouting and fetidness, and Friedrich's nightly perspective takes on a dreamlike quality. The exotic atmosphere that surrounds Herzl's protagonist during his discovery of his ancestors' land is markedly lyrically described, which may be one of the reasons for Dekel having called *Altneuland* "a fin-de-siècle work par excellence : fantastical, Orientalist, and sentimental."³² Indeed, the cited passage contains the Symbolist image of the magical moon and its embellished brightness serves as a common motif prevalent in modern Viennese texts. Richard Beer-Hofmann's work is an example of this. In his novel *Der Tod Georgs*, depictions of the moon are embedded in comparable wistful scenes. Just as the novel's protagonist experiences "das sehnsüchtige Empfinden das manchmal über ihn kam,"³³ he looks up to the sky and "[z]wischen regenschweren rostbraun gerandeten Wolken schwamm der Mond, und von ihm floss Licht über die Dächer."³⁴ Both Herzl and Beer-Hofmann combine this lunar atmosphere with beauty and horror. While Friedrich's thoughts center on death as he delightfully observes the illuminated nocturnal Jerusalem, the moonlight depicted in Beer-Hofmann's work is combined with the baneful symbol of a snake, lending tree trunks the appearance of serpent bodies : "Schlangenleiber gefleckt vom Mondlicht."³⁵ Herzl's moonlight scene, like several other parts of Friedrich and Kingscourt's first tour around Palestine, portrays a very ambivalent mood of both joy and sorrow, and both revival and decay - also characteristic of modern Viennese texts.
- 20 By the time the two men visit the once undeveloped country for the second time, considerable changes have taken place. Friedrich and Kingscourt expect to see the same decadent civilization that they had once willingly left behind, and plan to return to their

isolated island after a short interval. By reason of the novel's Zionist dramaturgy, they do of course not expect to instead find a flourishing Jewish nation, having already desecrated it from the ocean. Approaching Haifa's shore, Friedrich and Kingscourt catch sight of the area's reconstruction and beauty. Finally setting foot on the old new land, Herzl makes his protagonist clearly separate this time from his former twilight experience in Jerusalem:

Doch war es eine andere Stimmung, als in jener Nacht von Jerusalem, zwanzig Jahre früher. Damals hatte er [Friedrich] den mondbeglänzten Tod vor sich, und jetzt ein sonnenfreudiges Leben.³⁶

- 21 In addition to the change from a mournful to a joyful mood, this scene, which takes place just as the discovery of the newborn country begins, is also temporally detached from the decadent era. While the novel's opening is set at the very turn of the century, time has now moved on to the year 1923. Nevertheless, *Altneuland* does still exhibit symptoms of a fin de siècle mentality, albeit more subtly. Herzl noticeably focuses on the arts as an essential aspect of the new nation. In fact, the Jewish state is revealed to be a dandyish society to some extent, as, for instance, men are required to wear white gloves to the opera, and British aristocrats request to be painted by renowned Jewish artists.³⁷ Since Herzl's cultural scene is largely based on European models, it has also provoked Zionist criticism: "Europäer, europäische Sitten, europäische Erfindungen. Nirgends eine besondere jüdische Spur."³⁸ In fact, the new cultural setting is strikingly similar to Europe, France in particular, given the importance of the 'Jewish Academy', predicated on the 'Académie Française' with its forty immortal members and aesthetic authority. When the president of the Jewish Academy, Doctor Markus, talks about his assignments, he drifts off into a philosophical discourse reflecting on art's supremacy and its eternal beauty:

Es ist mein Trost, daß alle Dinge, die waren, da sind. [...] Dann sind sogar meine Träume ewig, denn andere werden sie träumen, wenn ich nicht mehr da bin. Schönheit und Weisheit gehen nicht verloren, auch wenn ihre Hervorbringer sterben. [...] Und was folgt daraus? Daß wir es uns sollen angelegen sein lassen, die Schönheit und Weisheit auf dieser Erde zu vermehren, bis zu unserem letzten Augenblick. Denn die Erde sind wir selbst.³⁹

- 22 Although it shall not be concealed that Herzl attempts to combine Doctor Markus' reflections with religious allusions – referring to the idea of earthly eternity as taught by Salomo in Ecclesiastes – the speech displays a poetical quality akin to the cultural and aesthetic discourse of Viennese modernity. The cited passage can be read in accordance with the turn of the century's aesthetic discourse. Richard Kralik, a modern Viennese writer and cultural theorist, writes in *Weltschönheit* (worldly aesthetics),⁴⁰ published in 1894, about the dedication to art and poetry in a comparable manner:

Wir leben um schön zu leben, schön zu handeln, schön zu sterben, um den Künstler zu loben, der dieses Wunderwerk erdacht hat [...]. Du kannst den Tod nicht aus der Welt schaffen, nicht das Uebel, nicht die Ungleichheit, nicht die Ungerechtigkeit; aber du kannst die Welt mit dem Zauberlicht der Schönheit vergolden und durch dein Gedicht zum Paradies machen.⁴¹

- 23 Doctor Markus and the Jewish Academy may be understood as representatives of a like-minded ideology that certainly bears comparison with humanistic values. It is striking, especially vis-à-vis otherwise lengthy administrative descriptions throughout the book, that Herzl's *Altneuland* is sustained by an elitist circle of aesthetes who devote themselves to their artistic dreams, separate from any political anticipation. Moreover, Herzl's artists are given the privilege of withdrawing into their own hermetic spheres. When Friedrich

is invited to visit one of the nation's most famous painters, he enters the "Palast eines Fürsten der Kunst" (the palace of a prince of art) and marvels at the richly furnished and decorated place which is evocative of a perfectly decadent lifestyle. Everywhere is marble and sculptures; a pleasure garden with fountains and columns and lavishly carved doors and gilded objects.⁴² The fin de siècle seems to have survived in these palatial surroundings.

- 24 However, not only the art scene harbors the decadent spirit. In the course of discovering the old new land's scenic beauty, Friedrich partly reverts to combining blooming and decay. There is a noteworthy sequence in which Friedrich visits Mrs. Littwalk, who is lying in her sickbed in the city of Tiberias. The old woman, who dies toward the end of the novel, is already seriously ill and knows, just as everyone else does, that she will soon pass away. While Friedrich remains in her room and looks outside the window, sentiments of death and nature's beauty mingle as follows:

Frau Littwalk lächelte wehmütig: „Mein gut' Kind [Friedrich], ich bin schon so auch zufrieden. Ich bin ja beinah schon im Garten Eden. Schau'n Sie da hinaus, Herr Doktor, was ich da vor mir hab'. Nicht wahr, der Garten Eden?“

Friedrich trat, wie sie ihn anwies, an die Brüstung der Veranda und blickte in die Landschaft hinaus. Da schimmerte der See von Genezareth. Vom Frühling weich die Umrisse der Ufer und fernen Höhen. Jenseits die steilen Abhänge des Dscholan, die sich in den Wassern spiegelten. [...] Und hier zur Linken, immer näher die milden Buchten, die lieblichen Gestade, die Ebene von Genezareth, Magdala, Tiberias, das neue steinerne Juwel, überragt von den dunklen Mauern der Burgruine auf dem Berge. Und überall ein Grünen und Blühen, eine junge, duftende Welt.⁴³

- 25 Death is embellished by its being equated with the Garden of Eden. Wistfulness and contentment band together in Mrs. Littwalk's feelings and Friedrich's perception. Herzl's protagonist views both the calm Sea of Galilee and the steep declivity of the Golan Heights, thus sensing both nature's peace and danger at the same time. He lays his eyes on a romanticized landscape and observes a lovely, flourishing environment in the beginning of spring, surmounted, however, by a castle ruin clearly alluding to decay. Several symbolic contrasts intertwine in the above passage. The words "water," "declivity" and "ruin" all have connotations of fate, while "garden," "spring" and "blossom" represent vitality. Embellishing death and combining it with beauty in such an antithetic manner is a technique also frequently employed in writings at the turn of the century. Peter Altenberg's prose sketch *Die Natur* (nature), for instance, features a scene that similarly takes place in a seascape and simultaneously reveals both waning and prospering details:

Am nächsten Abend ruderte Frau E. allein in einem kleinen Boote - - -. Sie fuhr langsam das Ufer entlang - - -. Da kam die dunkelgrüne dicke Linie der Kastanienbäume an den grauen cyclopischen Quai-Mauern, dann eine kleine hölzerne Villa, in der ein sterbender Dichter lag, dann eine große aus Stein mit schmiedeeisernen Kandelabern, in der eine sterbende Ehe lag und zwei blühende Kinder, dann kam der Garten der Herzogin, die einen Sohn verloren hatte, den sie nie besessen hatte. Da hingen schwarze Haselstauden in's Wasser. Dann kamen Wiesen mit feinen Sumpfräusern und goldenem Löwenzahn [...].⁴⁴

- 26 The lonely Ms. E. floats along the shore and passes mansions that tell stories of death as well as of thriving and prospering children. Altenberg's nature is depicted in an equally peaceful manner analogous to Herzl's seascape. Although the imagery of the two texts does of course vary, both reveal a picturesque reconciliation between death and beauty.

- 27 Possibly, as illustrated in the above examples, Herzl's tendency to feature – even unwittingly – characteristics of fin de siècle writings in his novel may have been one of the reasons *Altneuland* was largely rejected by Zionist readers. For the majority of Jews, this idealized version of their homeland represented a rather un-Jewish fiction that was understood to be in homage to a modern European spirit.⁴⁵ Herzl intended to depict his people as progressive and elitist, believing in their ability to build a state of technological and artistic augustness. However, he was unaware of his ideology being expansively influenced by his education as a writer. Herzl was, most importantly, a man of letters who had committed himself to the aesthetics of politics. Posing as a politician operating with literary means, he remained a writer philosophizing about politics. Undoubtedly, Herzl did not feel any inconsistency in his parallel activities, and as Johannes Wachten has put it, “gibt es keinen scharfen Bruch zwischen dem Zionisten und dem Literaten Herzl.”⁴⁶ If the entire scope of Herzl's work is to be understood, both Zionist and poetic investigation is required. Until now, it is the former that has predominately been considered, whereas, having been outlined in this essay, the latter still holds a range of modernity's influences that as yet have remained undiscussed.

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NOTES

1. Bahr, Hermann, "Die Moderne," *Moderne Dichtung. Monatsschrift für Literatur und Kritik*, 1.1 (1890) : 13.

"We are likely to be at an end, at death of an exhausted mankind, and these are but the last convulsions. We are likely to be at a beginning, at birth of a new mankind, and these are but the avalanches of spring. We ascend toward God or we fall, fall into night and extermination – yet, there is no persistence."

2. Cf. Bachleitner, Norbert, "Hermann Bahr und die französische Literatur in den Jahren 1889/90," *Hermann Bahr – Mittler der europäischen Moderne*, ed. Johann Lachinger, Linz : Adalbert-Stifter-Institut des Lands Oberösterreich, 2001, 145-159.

3. Haupt, Sabine and Stefan Bodo Würffel, ed., *Handbuch Fin de Siècle*, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2008, 165.

4. Jacques Le Rider was the first to allude to the correlation of anti-Semitism and aestheticism, arguing that the problem of Jewish identity, which many Young-Vienna authors had to face, drove them even deeper into an escapist style of writing, sealing themselves off from a disagreeable and conflict-prone reality. Cf. Le Rider, Jacques, *Modernité viennoise et crises de l'identité*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1990 ; and recently *Les juifs viennois à la Belle Epoque*, Paris : Éditions Albin Michel, 2013.

5. Altenberg, Peter, *Ashantee*, Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1897, 127.

6. Some Jewish writers, like Karl Kraus and Otto Weininger, even took up an anti-Semitic stance, becoming striking examples of so-called 'Jewish self-hatred'.

7. Bahr, Hermann, "Der junge Herzl," *Der jüdische Student*, 10.5 (1913): 171. "Do you know, what Theodor Herzl was, when I first met him ? He was a member of a German-national fraternity."

8. Dethloff, Klaus, ed., *Theodor Herzl oder Der Moses des Fin de Siècle*, Wien et al : Böhlau, 1986, 13.

9. Ibid. 15.

10. Cf. Stanislawski, Michael, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle*, 13f. The Dreyfus affair was an anti-Semitic motivated conviction and later rehabilitation of the French captain Alfred Dreyfus between 1894 and 1906. It ignited strong public interest in France and most European cities.

11. Dethloff, Klaus, ed., *Theodor Herzl oder Der Moses des Fin de Siècle*, 18f.

12. Beller, Steven, "Herzl's Tannhäuser: The Redemption of the Artist as Politician," *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich, New York : St. Martin's Press, 1992, 45.

13. Pawel Ernst, *The Labyrinth of Exile. A Life of Theodor Herzl*, New York : Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989, 226.

14. Dethloff, Klaus, ed., *Theodor Herzl oder Der Moses des Fin de Siècle*, 29.

15. Herzl, Theodor, *Der Judenstaat. Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage*, Zürich : Manesse, 1988, 7.

"I'm not inventing anything [...] neither the historical Jewish condition nor its ways to be resolved. [...] In order to describe this attempt of answering the Jewish Question with one word, it must not be called a 'fantasy', but at most a 'combination'. I have to defend my concept against its treatment as utopia. [...] I could easily choose to gain literary success by less effort, if I made this plan into the irresponsible lecture of a novel, for a public that wants to be entertained."

16. Ibid. 75. "We want to give a new home to the Jews. Not by violently pulling them out of their grounds, but instead by carefully digging them out with all their roots and transplanting them into a better soil."

17. Schorske, Carl, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture*, New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1980, 164. Schorske also points to the close connection between Zionist and anti-Semitic fascistic aesthetics, contrasting Herzl with his political counterparts, the national socialists Georg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger.

18. Bachleitner, Norbert, "Zionistische Propaganda durch literarische Fiktion. Die Belletristik in Theodor Herzls Zeitschrift *Die Welt* (im Vergleich mit Dr. Blochs *Österreichischer Wochenschrift*),"

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19. Wistrich, Robert S., "Theodor Herzl: Between Myth and Messianism," *Theodor Herzl: From Europe to Zion*, ed. Mark H. Gelber and Vivian Liska, Tübingen : Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007, 8.

20. Cf. Stanislawski, Michael, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle. Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, Berkely et al, University of California Press, 2011, 112f. According to Stanislawski, Lilien was positively obsessed with stylizing Herzl as the perfect athletic and vital Jew of modern times, shaping his body according to the concept of Max Nordau's 'Muskeljude' (muscular Jew), a well-trained and fearless Jew, ready to fight for his rights, and member of an offensive Zionist policy.

21. The following editions of *Die Welt* trace the novel's development: 3.42 (1899): 7, 4.32 (1900): 13-15, 5.14 (1901): 19-21, 2.5 (1902): 18, 6.41 (1902): 11.

22. Herzl, Theodor, *Altneuland*, Berlin/Leipzig: Hermann Seemann, 1902, 1f. "Dr. Friedrich Löwenberg was sitting at the round marble table of his coffeehouse in deep melancholy. [...] The pale, sick waiter welcomed him sincerely. Löwenberg took a polite bow to the likewise pale till girl with whom he never talked. He then sat down at the round reading table, drank his coffee, read all newspapers that the waiter offered him assiduously. And after having finished the daily and monthly journals, comic papers and trade journals, which would never take less than one and a half hours, he would talk to friends or pass on to lonely daydreams. More precisely : there once had been talks, now it was but reverie, since the two good fellows, who used to spend these peculiarly hollow and charming evening hours in the Café Birkenreis with him, had both passed away within the last two months. Both of them had been older than him and like the one, Heinrich, wrote in his suicide note to Löwenberg before shooting a bullet in his head : "it was, so to speak, chronologically consequent for them to become desperate sooner than him."

23. Schnitzler, Arthur, *Der Empfindsame*, Gesammelte Werke. Die erzählenden Schriften, Bd.1, Frankfurt a. Main : S. Fischer Verlag, 1961, 255. "The young people were quite distressed today. They were commemorating Fritz Platen who had a good many times sat next to them, talking, smiling, drinking coffee, smoking. One evening, eight days ago, he did not show up, but stayed at home, sat down at his desk and shot a bullet into his head. Nobody knew why."

24. Herzl, Theodor, *Altneuland*, 21.

25. Ibid. 33. Kingscourt praises "the real, genuine, deep loneliness, without desire and combat. The completely true return to nature."

26. Bahr, Hermann, *Der Garten*, Wirkung in die Ferne und anderes, Wien: Wiener Verlag, 1902, 66. "People are downright silly and always believe to only having to acquire as much as possible in order to be happy. However, the world is unable to endow us with anything and the whole world lies within ourselves."

27. Cf. Hadomi, Leah, "Altneuland. Ein utopischer Roman," *Juden in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Stéphane Mosès, Frankfurt a. Main : Suhrkamp, 1986, 210-226.

28. Clemens Peck, in his detailed illustration of *Altneuland*'s genesis, evaluates its utopian location in the Cook archipelago as part of a colonial discourse. Peck also alludes to Herzl's unaccomplished plan of writing a comedy called 'Die Männerinsel' (Island of Men) that the Viennese author outlined in the same year of 1899, while starting to work on *Altneuland*. Herzl's 'Island of Men' was, however, planned to be invaded by shipwrecked women. Cf. Peck, Clemens, *Im Labor der Utopie. Theodor Herzl und das Altneuland-Projekt*, Berlin : Jüdischer Verlag, 2012, 263ff.

29. Cf. Rieckmann, Jens, "Ästhetizismus und Homoerotik : Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Das Bergwerk zu Falun*", *Orbis Litterarum* 44 (1989) : 97. The corresponding scene from *Das Bergwerk zu Falun* can be found on page 131 in : Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, *Gesammelte Werke. Dramen II*, ed. Bernd Schoeller, Frankfurt a. Main : S. Fischer Verlag, 1979.

30. Dekel, Mikhal, *The Universal Jew. Masculinity, Modernity and the Zionist Moment*, Evanston, IL : Northwestern University Press, 2010, 107.
31. Herzl, Theodor, *Altneuland*, 47. "Alas ! Faith had died, youth had died, the father had died – and before him loomed Jerusalem's city walls in a magical lunar brightness. Hot tears welled in his eyes. He was overwhelmed. He stopped, and tears slowly rolled down his cheeks."
32. Dekel, Mikhal, *The Universal Jew. Masculinity, Modernity and the Zionist Moment*, 99.
33. Beer-Hofmann, Richard, *Der Tod Georgs*, Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 1900, 8. "[...] the wistful longing that sometimes befell him."
34. Ibid. 9 "[...] the moon floated in between clouds filled with rain, framed by a rusty brown and its light poured down the roofs."
35. Ibid. 9. "[...] serpent bodies spotted with moonlight."
36. Herzl, Theodor, *Altneuland*, 78. "However, it was a different atmosphere than during that very night in Jerusalem twenty years earlier. Back then, Friedrich saw the moonbright death in front of him, and now a sunelighted life."
37. Cf. Ibid. 108 & 295.
38. In his elaborate review of Herzl's book, Achad Haam deplores the lack of Jewish culture in the old new land. Haam was Herzl's Eastern European adversary who is known for establishing a so-called 'Cultural Zionism' that intended to foster Jewish culture instead of founding a Jewish nation as aimed for by political Zionism. Haam, Achad, "Altneuland," *Die Welt* 3.4 (1903) : 241. "Europeans, European habits, European inventions. No particular Jewishness."
39. Herzl, Theodor, *Altneuland*, 301f. "I take comfort in the fact that everything, that was, still exists. [...] This means, that even my dreams are eternal, since other people are going to dream them, once I have departed. Beauty and wisdom do not disappear, although their creators eventually die. [...] What is the consequence ? That we shall seek to propagate beauty and wisdom on this earth until our last moment. After all, we ourselves are the earth."
40. This work was the third volume of Kralik's threepart philosophic compendium entitled *Weltweisheit* (worldly wisdom), consisting of *Weltwissenschaft* (worldly metaphysics), *Weltgerechtigkeit* (worldly ethics) and the mentioned *Weltschönheit* (worldly aesthetics).
41. Kralik, Richard, *Weltschönheit. Versuch einer allgemeinen Ästhetik*, Wien : Carl Konegen, 1894, 222f. "We live for the sake of living beautifully, acting beautifully, dying beautifully, and to praise the artist who conceived of that wonder [...]. You cannot abolish death, neither the evil nor inequality nor injustice ; however, you can gild the world by dint of the magic light of beauty and turn it into paradise through your poem."
42. Cf. Herzl, Theodor, *Altneuland*, 294f.
43. Ibid. 183. "Mrs. Littwalk smiled lugubriously : "My dear child [Friedrich], I am quite contended. I am, after all, almost in the Garden of Eden. Look outside, Doctor, what lies in front of me. Is it not the Garden of Eden ?" As she had told him, Friedrich went to the balustrade and gazed at the landscape. There lay the shimmering Sea of Galilee. Spring had softened the water's edges and distant heights. Beyond the steep declivity of the Golan Heights, mirrored in the Sea. [...] And to the left, still closer the peaceful bays, the lovely beaches, the land of Galilee, Magdala, Tiberias, the new lithic jewel, surmounted by the dark castle ruin's walls on the mountain. And verdancy and blooming everywhere, a young, fragrant world."
44. This prose sketch is part of Altenberg's first publication *Wie ich es sehe* (1894): Altenberg, Peter, *Wie ich es sehe*, 4. Aufl., Berlin : S. Fischer Verlag, 13. "The next evening, Ms. E. paddled alone in a small boat – – – . She floated slowly along the shore – – – . There was the dark green and thick line of the chestnut trees next to the gray Cyclops-like quay walls, followed by a small wooden mansion with a dying poet inside, followed by another one out of brick with wrought-iron candelabra and a dying matrimony and two blooming children inside, followed by the garden of the duchess who had lost a son that she had

never possessed. There were black hazelnut bushes hanging into the water, followed by meadows with fine swamp grass and golden dandelion [...].”

45. Cf. Beller, Steven, “Herzl’s Tannhäuser: The Redemption of the Artist as Politician,” 50f.

46. Wachten, Johannes, “Theodor Herzl als Literat,” *Theodor Herzl und das Wien des Fin de Siècle*, ed. Norbert Leser, Wien et al.: Böhlau, 1987, 158. Wachten concludes that “there is no deep rift between Herzl as Zionist and writer.”

RÉSUMÉS

Theodor Herzl est surtout réputé pour avoir ravivé le sionisme à la fin du 19^{ème} siècle. Cependant ses activités politiques font partie de son identité d’auteur. L’article traite de la carrière de Herzl en lien avec l’esthétisme de la modernité, et propose un tour d’horizon de la culture « fin de siècle » viennoise en s’appuyant sur Hermann Bahr et le groupe des poètes ‘Jung-Wien’. Après un bref aperçu des critères factuels autant que fictifs du livre *Der Judenstaat* (*L’État des Juifs*, 1894), l’article analyse le roman utopique de Herzl, *Altneuland* (*Terre ancienne. Terre nouvelle*, 1902), dans lequel on trouve des marques distinctives de l’époque, notamment de la modernité viennoise.

Theodor Herzl is best known for having revived Zionism at the turn of the century. However, his political occupation was mainly sustained by his activities as a writer. The article outlines Herzl’s career in terms of modernity’s aestheticism. It will also offer an overview of Vienna’s fin de siècle culture, with Hermann Bahr as its spokesman and the so-called “Jung-Wien” group of poets. After a brief discussion of *Der Judenstaat* (1896), questioning its positioning between fact and fiction, the article expatiates on Herzl’s utopian novel *Altneuland* (1902), which reveals a number of decadent characteristics also found in modern Viennese writings.

INDEX

Mots-clés : Sionisme, Herzl, Vienne, modernité, utopie, L’Etat des Juifs.

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