

Haifa, Mount Carmel, Wollstein House
Palestine 21.I.34

*A Letter from
Arnold Zweig to
Sigmund Freud*

Translated from the German by
Elaine and William Robson-Scott.
From *The Letters of Sigmund Freud
and Arnold Zweig*, Ernst L. Freud
(ed.), Harcourt, New York, 1970.

Dear Father Freud,

In the centre of Haifa, smoking my last French cigar, at last I can settle down to write to you. I just cannot tell you how many mornings I have longed to get in touch with you by means of pen and paper, but every time some irritation of the daily round has prevented me. At one moment the central heating did not function, at another the oil stove was smelling, at another the rain was coming in through the door and I had to stop it up. Then the wind changed, the rain came in through the window without its being blown out. At the moment the Carmel is an impressive, desolate landscape, almost Scottish; situated between the bay and the open sea, it is full of pines, stones and puddles of rain, and above the grey, wind-swept sky is occasionally broke by sunshine. We are living, not in barracks, as you might perhaps imagine, but in the most modern hotel up here; central heating means that it is Order of the Eagle, first class, black, with oak leaves and swords¹. But the engineer who installed the central heating left the builder out of his reckoning and he forgot the chimney. When this was added later it was too narrow, and now, in the middle of the rainy weather, it has had to be widened and replaced by another. And even the wind that whines and howls round the hotel seldom permits the heating to function properly.

You will find, dear Father Freud, that I am expatiating too much upon the central heating, but these questions of practical life, where the apparatus of civilization functions only creakingly, are the main problems in this country. We are not prepared to satisfy it. And since the Palestinian Jews are rightly proud of what does exist and since we are rightly irritated about what does not, there is much friction on the quiet, especially among the women, much vexation about the immense expense of effort these trifles demand. So far I have not done a stroke of work, apart from reading the proofs of the *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*². Dita and I are living in one room; another unheated room has been put at Dita's disposal as an atelier and here

1. The highest German military decoration.

2. Insulted and Exiled. The Truth about the German Jews. John Miles, 1937.

Lily and I often write our letters as well. You will doubtless remember Lily Offenstadt. She is now married to a young friend of mine and her name is Lily Leutcher- Offenstadt. [...]

I am unusually well, to give you some quick news about myself. All the depressions which have often tortured me so terribly in recent years have vanished. The Fatherland, the Father State, the economic burden, concern about the preservation of my property – all this has dropped away from me and with it have gone any tensions and compulsive ideas. I don't care any more about 'the land of my fathers'. I haven't got any more Zionistic illusions either. I view the necessity of living here among the Jews without enthusiasm, without any false hopes and even without the desire to scoff. I am grateful for the stroke of fate which united us as young people with this remarkable phenomenon here and which forced us to come here for the sake of our children and our young friends. But Dita and I are just as much, or as little, emigrants here as we were in the South of France. The affinity between the two regions and the easygoing nature of life in the two places have marvelously facilitated the transition from one the other, and the landscape which surrounds us here appeals to us just as much as Provence or the Wienerwald. I am sure that things will settle down all right and that we will establish a happy relationship with the country and its inhabitants and that we will grow to appreciate the many fine and charming people that we find here. Our faith in the use of reason in human life cannot be destroyed, either, by this terrible return to barbarism, just because we were wrong in our calculations about time and thought we were living in the modern age, whereas in the execution of poor van der Lubbe³ we see the return to the Middle Ages. Our brave and sensible children in their children's hostel and children's village community respectively make it easy for us to adapt ourselves here. It is just my enthusiasm, founded as it was on a pleasant illusion, that is gone and I do not shed a tear at its departure. More about this another time; first I would like to send you my *Bilanz*. Unfortunately it cannot appear before the end of February and I hope to hear from you before then. Kind regards to you all, especially to your wife and yourself, and I hope the ignominy of Austria leaves you more indifferent than you were six months ago, and that in spite of everything you find consolation in the importance of your work for the fact that even you are forced to waste your substance in this, the most stupid of all epochs.

Ever your faithful,
Arnold Zweig

3. Marinus van der Lubbe: Accused and convicted of setting fire to the Reichstag in Berlin in 1933; guillotined 1934.