

Article

Writing the Displaced Person: H. G. Adler's Poetics of Exile [†]

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Abstract: This article discusses the work of the Prague Jewish writer H. G. (Hans Günther) Adler (1910–1988) as an important contribution to the poetics of German-Jewish displacement in the wake of World War II. It demonstrates the significance of Adler's early response to questions of refugee status, displacement and human rights in literature. The article argues that Adler's work can be seen as providing in part a response to the question raised by Hannah Arendt, Joseph Slaughter and other recent theorists of literature and human rights: what poetic form is adequate to give literary expression to the mass displacements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century? Adler's short story 'Note of a Displaced Person' and his lengthy novel *The Wall* demonstrate the role that modernist poetics of fragmentation, in particular the legacy of Kafka, can have in bearing witness to this experience. They also demonstrate that the space of exile and displacement provides Adler with a vantage point from which to comment on the rights catastrophe of the twentieth century. Adler's work develops a theological understanding of the crisis of displacement, a crisis that can only be resolved by restoring a relation between the divine and the human.

Keywords: H. G. Adler; Shoah; displacement; exile; witness; Hannah Arendt

1. Introduction

I understand enough English to know that Displaced Person means a person who has forfeited their place, their position, their situation. Such a person therefore knows nothing right, at least nothing about themselves or anyway very little, which is why it also can't be worth saying what they nonetheless are capable of testifying about themselves. (Adler 1969, p. 9)

H. G. Adler's short story 'Note of a Displaced Person' ('Aufzeichnung eines Displaced Person'), first published in *Merkur* 57 in November 1952, highlights the paradoxes facing German Jews after the end of Nazism. The quote at the beginning of this article sums up the narrator's plight. As a designated Displaced Person, he has forfeited his place and situated knowledge about the world. Further, he is also displaced in language from his native German into English: 'a language that I do not command and which I also don't want to know more about'. The story is written, as is almost all of Adler's literary work, in German. The narrator nonetheless tells the reader 'in fact all languages are strange to me. I mostly speak German now, because I am used to it [. . .] but if I continually hear English around me, then that would be different' (Adler 1969, p. 9). As well as this linguistic displacement, his identity has also been displaced. The narrator is taxonomized as a Displaced Person, an administrative category, rather than as a sovereign individual. As such, he has no place in society or in any nation. Possibly worse, his testimony is de facto invalidated by virtue of this placelessness. Adler's Displaced Person no longer is held to have adequate knowledge of his own self and his own

experiences, nor is he able to give an authentic account of himself. Instead, he is required by the British receiving authorities to produce a variant of what Agnes Woolley has described as the 'asylum story'. This story is 'an idealized version of refugeehood on which the civic incorporation of the asylum seeker depends and which circulates in a narrative economy that sets the terms for the enunciation of refugee experience' (Woolley 2017, p. 378). In fact, Adler's protagonist must produce an even more paradoxical narrative, as the legal category of post-war 'Displaced Person' is different to that of a 'refugee'. 'I am not a refugee and also do not want to be fugitive, but since they have dissolved the international aid agency, the refugee office is responsible for displaced persons and therefore also for me' (Adler 1969, p. 9). The position of Adler's protagonist is yet more unmoored than that of a refugee. He is located in a narrative, linguistic and legal limbo. This limbo seems to be existential, but is also circumscribed by a very particular set of historical circumstances in the late 1940s.

In this article, I examine Adler's fictions of displacement and exile to answer the questions: what forms of narration does he find for the predicament of radical displacement in the wake of the Holocaust? And how does his literary work add to and complicate Hannah Arendt's secular theories of displacement as advanced in her *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*? Adler's work shares many similarities with Arendt's thinking. However, he goes beyond her work to develop a theological understanding of the crisis of displacement. For Adler, this is a crisis that can only be resolved by restoring a relation between the divine and the human. Adler's 'Displaced Person' articulates a plight that has recently returned to critical view. Potter and Stonebridge argue that the question of the relation that the humanities bear to human rights has come into recent focus, as a result of the current perceived crisis of humanitarianism. At the same time, Arendt traces the problem of the failure of human rights to at least the Peace Treaties of 1919 (Arendt 1973, p. 270). The plight of the displaced person is not just the difficulty of ensuring the 'right to have rights', as Arendt famously defined it (Arendt 1973, p. 296). The displaced person in the modern era also faces the impossibility of mobilizing pre-existing narrative forms to articulate their experience (Arendt 1973, p. 296). Stonebridge accordingly argues, with Joseph Slaughter, that the rise of the novel, and in particular the rise of the German *Bildungsroman*, is coeval with the rise of the nation. It is also coeval with the articulation of a human rights discourses that grants rights to a human only *as* a citizen of a nation.

Hence, the twentieth-century breakdown in nationhood and rights marks the limit of existing literary forms to adequately narrate this dislocated state of being. Potter and Stonebridge, with Arendt, draw on Franz Kafka's work to name this problem as a 'K-shaped hole in the fantasy that the state can legislate for our persons' (Potter and Stonebridge 2014, p. 1). Stonebridge explains:

Like many refugees today, K exposes the fiction behind human rights simply by having the audacity to believe that as a human person he is entitled to them. Arendt later famously argued that the 'paradox' revealed by the stateless is that the loss of human rights coincides with 'the moment a person becomes a human being in general'; in *The Castle* the human being in general is the Jew-stranger, the outsider who exposes this paradox through his struggle to live it. (Stonebridge 2018, p. 39)

Kafka, a fellow Prague Jew, was a touchstone for Adler all of his life, although they never met. Kafka's modernist poetics of fragmentation and alienation formed a model for Adler's own poetics of displacement (Creet et al. 2016). As Slaughter argues, because 'human rights legal discourse and the novel genre are more than coincidentally, or casually, interconnected' (Stonebridge 2018, p. 39), the crisis of rights coincides with a crisis in the narrative forms available to the novelist. In particular, this crisis affects a German-Jewish novelist like Adler educated in the *Bildungsroman* tradition, which assumes a harmonious resolution between an individual subjectivity and a regulated society (Swales 2019, p. 116).

The fragmented and alienated personalities of modernist and avant-garde texts refuse the link between individual and community necessary for the rhetorical claims of human rights.

Instead, these texts envisage universal rights as a horizon of meaning viewed from a position in which politics has failed. (Potter and Stonebridge 2014, p. 10)

As a survivor of the Shoah, Adler experienced the failure of politics in the most violent of forms. He was therefore confronted with a poetic as well as a political challenge. What forms and what language might be available to a modernist German-Jewish writer such as Adler when faced, after 1945, with the multiple displacements of statelessness, exile, linguistic displacement and the legacy of deportation to the camps? In what follows, I will show that his debt to Kafka meant that formal experimentation, satire and grotesque allegory were ways for Adler to explore extreme predicaments. They allowed him to move beyond existing narrative forms, and beyond the realistic conventions of German literature in the 1950s, while still drawing on German poetic tradition.

Although Adler was a prolific German-speaking Jewish intellectual and writer, his literary work was widely neglected during his lifetime. Born in Prague in 1910, Adler started a career in letters before being deported to Theresienstadt in February 1942. After deportation to Auschwitz in 1944, and subsequently to a number of sub-camps of Buchenwald, Adler returned to Prague but soon fled the increasingly hostile communist regime for London in 1947. During a period of exceptional productivity between 1947 and 1956, Adler produced an extraordinary body of work. This included six novels with an average length of over 300 pages and a monograph of over 800 pages, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945: The Face of a Coerced Community* (Adler 2017), which became a standard work on the camp. He continued as a polymathic freelance scholar, novelist, sociologist, musicologist, philosopher, theologian, broadcaster, poet and photographer until his death in 1988. He was active in literary circles, and corresponded with many influential German-Jewish writers of the 1940s, 50s and 60s, among them Hermann Broch, Theodor W. Adorno, Elias Canetti and Ilse Aichinger. However, the two novels he published in his lifetime, both using a different modernist form, had only a narrow reception. *The Journey. A Novel* (first published under the title *Eine Reise. Erzählung* in 1962) used a complex balladic form to tell the story of the Lustig family's deportation and murder in the Shoah (Adler 2009). *Panorama. A Novel* (first published under the title *Panorama. Roman in zehn Bildern* in 1968) uses the trope of the static panorama to present ten scenes from the life story of Joseph Kramer, a Shoah survivor. Adler also published poems and short stories throughout his life, but these too had only a small readership.

Hence, although Adler was engaged in the German-Jewish literary world of the mid-twentieth century, and frequently commented on German literature in radio programs and essays, his contributions to that literature have only now begun to be recognized. 'In rejecting Adler's literature, the West German public missed a unique opportunity', Kramer rightly says (Kramer 2006, p. 230). Adler remains a minor figure in the canon of post-war letters (Horowitz 2016). His history of forced and voluntary displacement goes a long way to explaining his almost complete exclusion from this canon. In Kramer's phrase, Adler wrote in a 'belated exile' (Kramer 2006). Unlike other influential German-speaking Jewish writers and friends, he did not manage to flee Central Europe before the onslaught of the Shoah. Rather than becoming part of literary exile networks in London or the U.S.A., Adler spent three years in Nazi concentration camps. Displaced from his Prague German modernist literary tradition, his destroyed Jewish community, his home country and his linguistic community, Adler and his works were dismissed by reviewers and publishers as 'untimely' or 'unwelcome', both in England and in West Germany.

In the past ten years something of an Adler revival has taken place, with the publication of, among others, two biographies, several English-language translations of his novels by Filkins, a collection of his poetry and several scholarly volumes on his work (Krämer 2012; Finch and Wolff 2014; Adler and Dane 2014; Wolff 2019). This scholarship draws on his extensive archive, and has to date investigated Adler's contribution to the literature of the Shoah, as well as his relationships with other German writers, the contexts of his artistic production, and his reception. As well as forming an important contribution to German modernist literature, Adler's profoundly researched scholarly work helped pioneer what became known as Holocaust studies. Filkins, Adler's biographer and translator, rightly calls his literary and scholarly oeuvre a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Adler intended this *Gesamtkunstwerk* to

'present the evolution of, the social implications of, and finally my direct experience of the views, events and problems of recent Central European history, as well as the ethical consequences tied to them' (Filkins 2018, p. 242). Recent Adler scholarship has explored the unique 'double gaze' that Adler brought to this problematic, that of the sociologist and of the poet (Filkins 2018). Adler declared his intention both to undertake scholarly research into his experiences of persecution and deportation, and to represent it in poetic form (Krämer 2012, p. 23).

In this article, I argue that Adler's portrait of the central European Jewish experience of the mid-twentieth century, and his theological view of human displacement, forms a unique contribution to the writing of displacement, statelessness and exile. These are topics that have taken on a recent importance during the 'turn' to human rights and in particular to the work of Arendt (Potter and Stonebridge 2014, p. 2). In doing so, Adler's work also can be read in the tradition that Arendt names as that of 'conscious pariah' Jewishness. Arendt's 1943 essay 'We Refugees' suggests that the problem of placelessness, while it was at that moment particularly urgent for Jewish people, at the same time opens a particular insight into the general displacement of peoples and rights that has come to characterize European history. For Arendt, the narrative position of the 'conscious pariah' allows a unique insight into the creeping universalization of the condition of displacement in Europe. 'Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of "indecent," get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of gentiles' (Arendt and Kohn 2007, p. 274). Adler's fearless truth-telling in literature and scholarship meant that his work rarely received the recognition it deserved. His work nonetheless made important interventions into postwar history, perhaps most prominently when his monograph on Theresienstadt was used to provide key evidence in the Eichmann trial of 1961 (Filkins 2018, p. 287).

I focus on two of Adler's literary works, both written in the immediate aftermath of Adler's departure from Prague, 'Note of a Displaced Person' and his lengthy novel *The Wall* (Adler 2014), first published as *Die unsichtbare Wand* in 1989. Both texts attempt to articulate experiences of displacement from a pariah position. The 'Note' satirizes the bureaucratic absurdity and cruelty that displaced people are subjected to. *The Wall* uses fragmentation, satire, allegory and grotesque humor to show the effects of memories of persecution in the Shoah on the experience of exile and displacement. It is the first-person fictional narrative of a survivor of the Shoah, Arthur Landau, who attempts to find friends and family in his European home town before moving to a Western metropolis (very like London). Here, he attempts to gain entrée into academic circles and to seek support for his work of sociology, *Sociology of Oppressed People*. He is met with cynicism and dismissal by established academics and donors, and finally gives up hope of publication in favor of retreating into private life with his second wife and two children. *The Wall* itself was completed in 1955, but was only published posthumously in 1989. It is thus a text which is itself displaced in time. By the 1950s, while he was writing *The Wall*, Adler's displacement was final. Return to Prague was impossible; as a camp survivor, and one openly critical of the communist government, he was in danger of arrest if he reentered Czechoslovakia (Filkins 2018, p. 197). The title of a 1987 volume celebrating his work, *Zu Hause im Exil* (At Home in Exile) demonstrates the way in which the position of displacement became, over the course of Adler's lifetime, not just a necessity, but also an ethically and artistically productive space (Adler et al. 1987). These two early writings nonetheless bear witness to the professional, emotional and artistic strain brought on by the initial experience of displacement in a way that both provides answers to some of the questions raised by Arendt and Slaughter and goes beyond them.

Each of Adler's novels uses a distinctive formal and poetic mode, and also incorporate the ethical and literary influence of Kafka, a fellow Prague German writer whom Adler never met. Adler described his sociological monograph *Theresienstadt 1941–1945: The Face of a Coerced Community* as 'a Kafka novel with reversed signification' (Filkins 2019, p. 49). By combining precise sociology with a reversed Kafkaesque literary mode, Adler's work provides a response to the problem of how to narrate lives that are not coextensive with or protected by the nation but, instead, displaced from it. As he was frequently

told by editors in literary publishing houses, Adler's style and context of writing is distinct from that of other canonical German writers of the 1950s and early 1960s. Rather than deploying the stark, unadorned prose that was felt to be suitable for 'serious' post-war German literature, Adler insisted on using complex methods such as allegory, fragmentation, satire and humor to demonstrate the damage done by trauma (Finlay 2014). He developed his writing not in 'inner emigration', like Gottfried Benn, Wolfgang Koeppen or Alfred Andersch, nor in exile during the war, like Thomas Mann, Anna Seghers or Stephan Zweig, but in the camps and in solitary exile. Almost incredibly, Adler commenced the research for *Theresienstadt 1941–1945* while himself interned in Theresienstadt (Adler and Adler 2012, p. 703). He continued to write poetry during his time in the camps, and his novels and monograph were completed after he fled Prague for London on a temporary entry permit in 1947, during a period of radical legal, financial and cultural displacement.

Adler's experiences of displacement, persecution and exile compounded the difficulties faced by all German-Jewish writers in finding publishers and readers in the 1950s. As Kirsten Gwyer sums up, 'Any form of German-Jewish post-war writing, especially if it was produced abroad, was often not published in Germany until years later, and sometimes not at all' (Gwyer 2014, p. 2). The so-called 'coming to terms with the past' in literature of the post-war years was conducted almost exclusively by German writers, such as those of the *Gruppe 47*, and from a perpetrator perspective. While memoirs and diaries of Jewish victims of the Shoah found a certain German audience, literature on the Shoah by German or Austrian-Jewish writers found no place in the German post-war literary canon (Bos 2005, p. 4). Even studies that belatedly championed Adler's literary work tended to view it, not as a literary achievement in its own right, nor as an intervention into important literary and cultural debates of the twentieth century. Instead, Gwyer argues, it is subtly diminished as 'the product of a purely personal attempt to come to terms with his traumatic past, or even as a conciliatory counterpoint to the 'unbearable objectivity' of his scientific project' (Gwyer 2014, p. 61). Adler's literary work is displaced both within the German-language literary canon, where he hoped to be placed, and within its scholarly reception. By reflecting on this displacement, *The Wall* is both a modernist literary achievement in its own right, and also a commentary on the effects that exclusion from the canon and belittling of their work had on survivor-authors like Adler.

The short story 'Note of a Displaced Person' reads both like a Kafkaesque allegory and as a barely satirical documentation of Adler's initial experiences in Britain. It took a year for Adler to be granted permanent residency in Britain, and with it the permission to undertake salaried work (Filkins 2018, p. 222). Nonetheless, Adler was still stateless, and as an exile who had survived the camps, rather than a refugee from Nazism, not entitled to reparations or support in this time.

By the time Günther [Adler] arrived in Britain the focus of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund had shifted to supporting those who had fled the Communist putsch rather than survivors of the camp. Since he was deemed to be a Czech victim of the camps, not a German, he was disqualified from reparations or assistance from Germany, while Czechoslovakia did not recognize him as a citizen, since he had registered as a German in the 1930 census. With so little to help those who actually survived the war and the camps, they were, in essence, persons who had disappeared, treated by friends and government as the walking dead. (Filkins 2018, p. 224)

The traumatic memory of the camps adds another complication to the problem of narrative displacement for the exile in postwar London. As scholarship into the writing of traumatic experience has shown, the problem of narrating that trauma itself pushes up against existing forms of narrative and forms of language. An aporetic view of the Holocaust, grounded in trauma theory and psychoanalysis suggests that the survivor who attempts to give their testimony literary form faces from the beginning an impossible task, as no words or structures of language exist that are adequate to say the unsayable (Felman and Laub 1992). For who can testify on behalf of the dead? In the German cultural sphere, this crisis of legitimacy has commonly been referred to not in theological terms, but in aesthetic and political ones, via the shorthand of 'Adorno's dictum' in his essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society'

(Adorno 1955). This postwar crisis of writing and of rights exposes the cleft between the citizen of the nation who is imbued with human rights, and the displaced person who has none. Similarly, the crisis of language and representation ‘after Auschwitz’ (and Adler was himself in Auschwitz for fourteen days) creates, for Adler, a cleft between the self-in-memory and the survivor self. *The Wall* deploys the allegory of an invisible wall to describe the separation that this cleft causes, both between the survivor Landau and the rest of society, and between Landau and his own past. ‘Although he is physically alive, Landau counts himself among the dead’ (Kramer 2006, p. 228).

As Michael Schaich argues, Arendt and Adler at times come close to each other in their analysis of the roots of German antisemitism, and, as I argue, in their analysis of the problems of placelessness (Schaich 2019, p. 180). Nonetheless, in discussing the literary paradoxes facing Adler as a displaced person using ideas in part developed by Arendt, it should be noted that Adler’s personal relationship with Arendt was fraught. Arendt in 1949 gave some support to Adler’s attempts to publish *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, at Hermann Broch’s request, Adler and Arendt parted intellectual ways soon after (Filkins 2018, p. 243). H. G. Adler’s son, Jeremy Adler, argues that Arendt borrowed insights from *Theresienstadt 1941–1945* without acknowledgement for the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1950). She also misrepresented H. G. Adler’s analysis of the culpability of the Jewish Council of Theresienstadt in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) (Adler 2019, p. 164). H. G. Adler in fact demonstrates in scrupulous scholarly detail the chain of command that made Hitler, Eichmann and the SS Camp Commander’s Office directly responsible for the ‘transport lists’ and deportations of prisoners from Theresienstadt. Arendt, by contrast, claimed that Adler’s book in fact showed that the Jewish Elders in Theresienstadt were responsible. Jeremy Adler therefore calls Arendt’s book a ‘farrago’, and H. G. Adler himself retorted with an article entitled ‘Was weiß Hannah Arendt von Eichmann und die Endlösung?’ (What does Hannah Arendt know about Eichmann and the ‘Final Solution’?). This refuted key arguments from Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Adler 2019, p. 165). Arendt insisted on the individual responsibility of Jewish functionaries for their decisions to carry out Nazi orders, whereas Adler ‘preferred to view the Shoah as a tragic fate set in motion by powers larger than the individuals’ (Filkins 2018, p. 293).

2. Displaced Personhood: Adler’s Poetics and the Crisis of Rights

‘Notes of a Displaced Person’ articulates the predicament of displacement through a particular Adlerian critique of administration by oppressive authorities. The short story purports to be the ‘refugee story’ produced by the nameless Displaced Person in response to the request of the authorities. His ‘displaced person’ names exactly the problem that Arendt also identified: ‘the international protection that I am always reproached with just consists of being a creature that is tolerated and hence pretty much without rights’ (Adler 1969, p. 15). Only a little satirical exaggeration is required for the story to draw out the Kafkaesque conclusion of this situation. The Displaced Person is a Gregor Samsa in reverse: he may look human to others, but is legally and subjectively speaking vermin. ‘As far as the refugee office is concerned, but also according to my own conviction, I am not a human, although in my outer appearance it is hard to distinguish me from a human (Adler 1969, p. 11). Adler’s formulation echoes Arendt’s own framing of the problem of displaced people. By having no rights but human rights, they are reduced to ‘bare life’ or an inhumane condition:

The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships—except that they were still human. (Arendt 1973, p. 299)

Adler’s narrator probes the displacement of his humanity further in saying ‘For this reason I do not belong to any species, I am a sexless person, who knows, how I came to this world, at least I descend from no ancestors, I never had any parents [. . .] I am neither man nor woman’ (Adler 1969, p. 11). This sentence plays on the German word *Geschlecht*, which can mean variously sex, species, human

race, family or generation. To be displaced means to be displaced from ‘all other qualities and specific relationships’, as Arendt says, and Adler adds to these qualities that of gender. Whereas the German term for human rights, *Menschenrechte*, is gender-neutral, the French term *droits des hommes* implies that the subject of rights is in fact a man. Slipping outside the regime of human rights also means slipping outside the regime of human gender, to become instead ‘a male Displaced Person’—between the genders, as the German word *Person* is feminine in gender. The status of displaced *person* erases the specific gendered *humanity* of the narrator. The narrator calls himself a ‘legal person’ (*juristische Person*), to demonstrate his ‘inhuman condition’ (Adler 1969, p. 12). Slaughter notes that, under human rights law, there is a particular juridical meaning of the word ‘person’. ‘From the point of view of the law, “person” is a technical term designation “a right -and-duty-bearing unit”; it has no necessary relation to the human being’ (Slaughter 2007, p. 58). Adler’s satire draws out the dehumanizing implications of being reduced to legal *personhood*, ‘an image of the human person that is neither fully natural nor fully artificial—a figure that is, like international law itself, an “intermediary between natural law and positive law” (Slaughter 2007, p. 63).

Throughout the story, Adler’s poetics serve as a form of resistance to this legalistic dehumanization. Adler achieves this double movement of satire and resistance in several ways. Firstly, the style of the short story is characterized by frequent parataxis. Sentences often extend over half a paragraph, rambling between dependent and coordinating clauses, disorienting the reader as they attempt to follow the train of thought and subject of the verb through a series of associations. This parataxis means that the reader, subject and objects of narration alike are constantly displaced. It is a form specifically chosen by Adler for this story, rather than a habitual style. (For instance, *The Wall* often uses much shorter sentences). This disorientating style provides one poetic answer to Slaughter’s question about the form of narrative adequate to the experience of displacement. In Kafkaesque style, it replicates the experience of displacement without resolving it as in the *Bildungsroman*: it makes evident the K-shaped hole in the fantasy of human rights. At the same time, as we saw from the citation above discussing the Displaced Person’s *Geschlecht*, this disorientation takes place within the labyrinth of the German language. At the same time as the narrator affirms that he is displaced in language, his narrative demonstrates quite the opposite. He shows a sophisticated understanding of the cultural implications of German lexis and syntax. The etymological link that the narrator draws out between *Geschlecht*, meaning human race, *Geschlecht*, meaning sex, and *Geschlecht* meaning generation, makes the word a profound synecdoche for the multiple, overlapping biopolitical displacements suffered by the narrator. This is a form of structural irony that further responds to the condition of displacement: The very sophistication of the narrator’s wordplay demonstrates that he is in fact entirely at home in the German language. However, in a further ironic twist, the political circumstances of his displacement mean that this linguistic home does not translate into belonging to any *Heimat* (Adler 1969, p. 24)

This ironic poetics means that the story can respond both to its historical moment and to more universal questions of displacement in general. Adler’s style in this piece is often allusive, refusing the language of racialization—the words *Jew* or *Nazi* do not appear anywhere (as they do not in *The Journey*). Specific historical references, such as one to the narrator’s liberation by ‘the Americans’ in 1945, do appear (Adler 1969, p. 22). His style here works simultaneously indexically and allusively. The parataxical journey through the various meanings of the word *Geschlecht* is in itself an allusive history of persecution and displacement: the narrator is displaced from any the human race, from embodied gender, from his family and from his lineage. The Displaced Person’s plight can be seen as the logical endpoint of a process that Adler painstakingly analyzed in *Administered Man* (Adler 1974). At the beginning of the process of bureaucratized mass murder, Adler reports, Jewish deportees were instructed to relinquish their personal documents, such as birth and marriage certificates, to the authorities in advance. He points out that ‘with the withdrawal of ‘personal documents’ it was already established that the deportees, even if they were still put “on ice” in Theresienstadt, for reasons that are now known, should no longer live (Adler 1974, p. 408). The Displaced Person has been subjected to a lethal bureaucratic process. By stripping him of his individual characteristics and

civic personhood, this rendered him, in Agamben's terms, 'bare life' or 'a life lacking every political value' (Agamben and Heller-Roazen 1998, p. 132). Adler shows that the inhumane bureaucracy of modernity did not end with the Displaced Person's liberation from the camps and the defeat of the Nazi regime. It continues in the callous system of the British refugee office which denies the Displaced Person the human right of self-determination. As Agamben writes, 'Humanitarian organizations [. . .] can only grasp human life in the figure of bare or sacred life, and therefore, despite themselves, maintain a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight' (Agamben and Heller-Roazen 1998, p. 133). Concretely, this 'secret solidarity' is shown when the refugee office refuses the Displaced Person not only the right to work, but also the right to pursue his creative passion of music: 'that is apparently no subject for a Displaced Person' (Adler 1969, p. 13). Once more, Adler's structural irony at once reveals the limit condition of the Displaced Person and affords him individual dignity. The narrator may be forbidden by the British authorities to practice music, but the poetics of the short story demonstrate the Displaced Person's creative and subversive potential. 'I will of course only write nonsense, politely and modestly, only a few drops of sadness flowing in [. . .] otherwise I will colour everything optimistically [. . .] I have no reservations in pulling the wool over the eyes of the clever psychologists and sociologists' (Adler 1969, p. 25).

The Displaced Person's ability creatively to subvert the oppressive mechanism of bureaucracy shows that he still retains a modicum of autonomy. Adler makes clear that, while the deathly bureaucracy of biopolitics still governs the displaced person, displacement is still a less annihilating state either than an existence as a concentration camp inmate or as a refugee.

Things haven't always gone as well for me as in the last few years, because before this time I was neither displaced nor a person, I was actually nothing, or perhaps yes, I was something, maybe a curse, a piece of rubbish, but my memory fails me there; it was a condition about which I cannot say anything any more, or perhaps yes, but it isn't much: I wasn't my own master, not capable, not able, I was a sacrificed object and belonged to no-one. (Adler 1969, p. 19)

For Adler, displacement is thus not precisely the same condition as 'bare life' or, in Agamben's formulation, '*Homo sacer*'—'life which can be killed but not sacrificed' (Agamben and Heller-Roazen 1998, p. 83). *Homo sacer*, or sacred life, echoes the Displaced Person's description of his condition in the camp as *ein hingegebenes Stück*, a sacrificial or sacrificed object. Being a *Person* is not precisely the same thing for the Displaced Person as being a *Mensch*. At the same time, *Persönlichkeit*—personality—carries, for Adler, the sense of *legal* personality, a person who potentially does have the right to have rights. Heinrich Hubmann argues that for Adler, 'personality' is characterized by freedom of choice, particularly the moral freedom of choice (Hubmann 1987, p. 90). Adler opposes the individual *Persönlichkeit* to immersion in a *Masse* (mass society), a state of subjection which neither lends people rights nor protects their rights (Hubmann 1987, p. 90).

Thus, the Displaced Person is not entirely rightless. Because Britain is at least to some extent democratically governed by the rule of law, displacement in Britain is far preferable to the condition of being reduced to part of a *Masse*, either in the camps or in communist Czechoslovakia, which Adler could no longer call 'home'. Accordingly, Adler's Displaced Person is irritated by the constant suggestion that he might have an originary 'home' to which he wishes to return: 'I only want to stay where I am already' (Adler 1969, p. 18). This formulation chimes with Adler's own ultimately positive experience of British exile, summed up in part by the title of the 1987 collection of essays and interviews on his life and work, *At Home in Exile (Zu Hause in Exil)* (Adler et al. 1987). Displacement in Britain is a state of creative potential and legal liberation as well as precarity, a state that allows displaced people to create a trajectory towards self-realization. As Anthony Grenville argues, Adler had a Burkean appreciation of British parliamentary and social institutions. He held that in England above all countries in Europe 'the tolerance of one human being for his fellow human beings allows the individual a unique state of liberty of expression and conscience' (Grenville 2019, p. 45). Arendt, too, drew on Burke's critique of human rights, though Bernstein notes that her Burkeanism is limited to

supporting his opposition to the 'abstract' human rights of the French revolution. 'Although she does not endorse Burke's appeal to tradition and inheritance as a source of the legitimacy of a person's rights, she does think that he perceived the 'arbitrariness' of appealing to universal rights which presumably belong to us in our 'abstract nakedness of being human' (Bernstein 2005, p. 56).

3. Mechanical Materialism: Adler's Theology of Displacement

It is here, I argue, that Adler parts company with Arendt's analysis: Arendt is concerned only with the secular dimension of displacement and personality, whereas for Adler these have a spiritual and theological dimension. For this reason, Adler went further than Arendt in endorsing Burke's positive view of the traditional and organic nature of British society. In an essay from the late 1940s, he agrees with Arendt that Enlightenment individualism led not to protective collectivism, but to the 'extinguishing of all personality through mechanical materialism' (Adler et al. 2013, p. 127). Britain, and the other Western democracies, he argues, offer a framework that not only guarantees some human rights, but also a certain measure of human freedom and the possibility for spiritual development. The problem of displacement, thus, was not for Adler simply a legal problem, but also a social and spiritual one. A favorable British polity did, eventually, grant Adler leave to remain and then, in 1956, citizenship (Filkins 2018, p. 270). Nonetheless, much of Adler's sociological and literary work demonstrates that displacement is not a condition that can be resolved solely through a change in an individual's legal status and the vindication of human rights.

Adler's condition of multiple and radical displacement persisted, despite a secure legal status, for all of his life after liberation from the camps. Adler no longer was rooted in a family of origin, and his Prague Jewish community of origin had been destroyed: his close relatives had all been murdered in the Shoah, including his first wife, Gertrud Klepetar (Filkins 2018, p. 171). He could no longer return to his native Czechoslovakia, but nor was he prepared to return to a Germany or an Austria where Nazi criminals still lived unprosecuted. This caused a profound linguistic and artistic displacement, which as Katrin Kohl argues was particularly evident in his poetry:

During his life in exile, his poetry was consequently at odds with the language and poetic tradition of his environment. This tension precluded widespread reception in Britain, and there was also a tension with poetic developments in Germany and Austria, where audiences in the post-war decades were not attuned to the deep sense of tradition that underpinned Adler's use of language and form, or to the allegiances within the German poetic tradition which he had established in Prague. (Kohl 2019, p. 81)

To some extent, Adler's home and creativity in exile was made possible precisely because of this displacement. Indeed, Adler was convinced that 'a Jew should never really feel at home except in the hand of God and within himself', meaning 'wherever I am, I am at home' or put another way, 'someone like me indeed belongs nowhere' (Filkins 2018, p. 204). As Alfred Otto Lanz concludes, exile was an existential life experience that proved fruitful for Adler's scholarly, literary, philosophical and theological work (Lanz 1987, p. 139).

As we have seen already through the Kafkaesque elements of the 'Note of a Displaced Person', modernist poetics become the way in which Adler makes trauma and exile creatively productive. Adler's fiction deploys 'the forms of modern literature itself, its focus on estrangement, absence, ellipses, groundlessness, otherness, the giddy freedoms and deep despair of rootlessness, [which] were all nurtured by the larger history of alienation and deracination' (Stonebridge 2018, p. 8). Displacement provided the conditions that enabled him to produce a corpus of novels and short stories in this tradition. At the same time, these novels track the effects of this displacement on its already traumatized protagonists. In particular, they respond to the challenge of the identity between the protagonist and the nation-state as guarantor of human rights that Slaughter identified as constitutive of the German tradition of the *Bildungsroman*: 'Human rights and the *Bildungsroman* are mutually enabling fictions: each projects an image of the human personality that ratifies the other's vision of the ideal relations

between individual and society' (Slaughter 2006, p. 1413). If the experiences of modernity between the wars already disrupt this identity in European modernist fiction, as Stonebridge suggests, the ruptures of the Shoah and of exile entirely pull apart this identity.

Martin Swales notes Adler's departure from the bourgeois novel tradition in Adler's second novel to be published, *Panorama*. Swales demonstrates that *Panorama* is a meta-text that is a sustained acknowledgement and critique of the German genre, 'one that remains obstinately a Bilder-Roman [Image-Novel] rather than a *Bildungsroman*' (Swales 2019, p. 113). The modernist, image-rich style of *Panorama's* prose demonstrates the bruising force of material reality when it comes in contact with the serene aspirations of the *Bildungsroman*. Far from allowing the reader to empathize with the protagonist in order to emulate him, *Panorama*, like all of Adler's novels, 'resist the classic literary consolation of identification' (Filkins 2019, p. 50). As Arendt says, fiction that forecloses identification exposes the 'naked structure of events': 'mere receptive reader of novels, whose only activity is identification with one of the characters, is at a complete loss with Kafka' (Arendt and Kohn 1994, p. 77). Thus *Panorama* continues the mission of Kafka in showing the way in which the common man is caught in the motor of the machinery of modernity. At the same time, the final chapter of *Panorama* ends hopefully. Its protagonist is safely in English exile and awakening to a sense of his own humanity. Displacement is here the condition of escape and insight. England provides a vantage point from which the protagonist, Josef, can come to a provisional sense of clarity about the meaning of the totality of his life experience, including his time in the camps.

The Wall, by contrast, formally disrupts the identity between the displaced subject and any stable vantage point or home. It also demonstrates the radical displacement of the survivor in an emotional and spiritual sense. By the time Adler came to write the novel in 1954, his own experience of displacement had turned bitter. He had not succeeded in gaining professional or financial security. He was particularly disappointed that the existing circle of Prague Jews in London had dismissed his intellectual and artistic ambitions. He was struggling without cultural or linguistic roots in England, as 'learning English went much more slowly than he had thought' (Filkins 2019, p. 50). Under such circumstances, the hopeful trajectory of his earlier novels *The Journey* and *Panorama* was no longer adequate. Instead, *The Wall* creates a new formal structure to bear witness to the disruptive intersection of displacement and trauma. Adler intended it to encompass 'thematically, stylistically, and formally, a broad spectrum', and initially felt it was so experimental that it might not be destined for publication (Vogel-Klein 2016, p. 231).

The Wall leaves behind the linear trajectory of *The Journey*, which narrates the journey of a family's deportation to the camps and the sole survivor's escape from them. It also abandons the technique of a series of static but temporally sequential images that make up *Panorama*. These novels both end with a sense of hope that the protagonists might at some point vindicate their human rights. Consequently, both hint at a form of reintegration, if not of the survivor with the nation-state, at least of the survivor's identity as a human. The form of *The Wall*, by contrast, is non-linear, mirroring the protagonist's inability to integrate both his traumatic experiences into a coherent narrative and his self with the society around him. The action switches between countries, settings and time periods without any chapter markers or clear structure. Indeed, Filkins provides a synopsis of 'principal events' at the end of his translation of *The Wall*, to avoid the reader becoming too disoriented. Further, again unlike *Panorama*, the protagonist's experiences of the camps are no longer integrable into a coherent narrative. Rather than ever being described, they form a 'blind spot', the vanishing point of the novel's action (Vogel-Klein 2016, p. 241). In having survived the camps at all—in not having died despite having been destined for death—Landau is temporally and existentially displaced. 'You yourself are a piece of a past that no longer exists', a former teacher tells him (Adler 2014, p. 391).

The formal strategy of *The Wall* reveals the tension between legal and poetic displacement. The constant disruption of the protagonist's self and of the novel's structure demonstrate that a human-rights approach to solving the problem of displacement is inadequate. A human rights happy ending is placed, disconcertingly, at the very beginning of the novel. Landau and his wife are

summoned to an appointment with the immigration police. Instead of being required to produce a mendacious 'refugee story', however, Landau is allowed to 'offer a picture that explained why I had left there and come here', with almost no official interruption to his narrative. He is then immediately granted leave to remain:

"Now your stay in this country is at last officially legal." I looked at the official questioning, since I didn't understand. He smiled in response. "When you first arrived here, you didn't inform us, and perhaps didn't yet know, that you wanted to remain as our guest. At that time, we didn't worry about it. We allow foreigners to visit, as long as there is no reason not to. Only when someone wants to stay do we look at the matter more closely." (Adler 2014, p. 32)

Legally, Landau is no longer a refugee nor an illegal immigrant; instead of being officially displaced, 'things were falling into place' (Adler 2014, p. 33). Structurally, however, his grant of residence takes place at the very beginning (page 33 in the English translation) of a novel over six hundred pages long. The disruption of the linear order of the text indicates that the legal resolution is no narrative resolution.

Landau's temporal displacement means that he, like the *Displaced Person* of the short story, is too late to find a place as a refugee and a place in the social order, because he arrived in the metropolis after the war.

Unfortunately, I was too late. The time for refugees was past; they had all attached themselves to something or someone, and there was nothing left for foreigners [. . .] Chased from one place to another, I soon appreciated that there was one too many people in the world, and that was me. (Adler 2014, p. 361)

'Refugee' is not just a spatially precarious category of life, one which is supposedly protected by rights outside citizenship; it is also a temporally precarious one. Refugees may only expect social refuge while their cause coincides with that of the nation-state, or while the resources of empathy of the hosts are not yet drained. Although Landau may indeed gain legal protection as a displaced person, he is now socially displaced. Arendt argues that 'the fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective' (Arendt 1973, p. 296). Landau's right to remain in the metropolis does not restore such a 'place in the world' to him. Instead, his intellectual projects are dismissed as old-fashioned and his professional documentation is deemed insufficient to apply for funding. The powerful head of an academic foundation, on hearing that Landau's documents did not survive the process of deportation, exclaims that 'without documents, I'm telling you, you don't even exist' (Adler 2014, p. 343). Emotionally, too, he is displaced from the circle of his former friends who settled abroad before the war. 'Had they, after having escaped, written me off in their hearts and now felt their peace had been violated because I had been allowed to survive the war?' (Adler 2014, p. 439) Throughout the novel, the allegory of the 'invisible wall' is used to show that Landau feels simultaneously legally and existentially unmoored, as though 'I had no right and was not entitled to one!' (Adler 2014, p. 439). His existential displacement is also a spiritual one. Repeatedly in the novel, he compares his state to that of Adam after the fall, 'having been catapulted from Paradise like Adam, onto the abandoned field, precipitously, as if thrown from a tower, from the Tower of Babel' (Adler 2014, p. 499). Here, spiritual displacement is allied to the biblical figure of the Tower of Babel. This connotes both linguistic unsettlement and the breakdown of human community. The biblical references also invoke the otherwise unnamed Jewish cultural and spiritual hinterland of the protagonist.

It is here that Adler's analysis of the roots of the problem of displacement departs from that of Arendt. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and elsewhere, Arendt is interested in the legal and poetic condition of displacement. In *The Wall*, and elsewhere, Adler adds to these concerns that of spiritual

displacement. Landau's struggles with the divine in *The Wall* are not a metaphor; they are to be taken seriously. In a posthumously published essay, written at the same time, as the 'Note of a Displaced Person', 'Mechanical Materialism' ('Der mechanische Materialismus'), Adler advances the theory that he develops throughout his life: that totalitarianism is at root a consequence of modern society falling away from the divine. Hence, he describes National Socialism as an exemplar of 'mechanical materialism', described as a 'way of thinking that is devoid of ideas, colorless and coarsely sensual, and that exists in poor, rigidly rational forms that are unable to see or accept the potential of life' (Adler et al. 2013, p. 139; Filkins 2018, p. 233). An eschatological horizon beyond the social is necessary for a just society and the creative unfolding of the divinely interpellated personality (Adler et al. 2013, p. 124). Ned Curthoys argues that Arendt's account of modern Jewish identity is, by contrast, 'more focused on diasporic relational characteristics and socially performed arts of living than an essentialist interpretation of Judaism's religious and historical content' (Curthoys 2011, p. 77). Both Adler's essay on 'Mechanical Materialism' and *The Wall* make it clear that, for Adler, human personality in general and Jewish identity in particular is necessarily related to the divine. It does not exist merely socially and relationally, as Arendt suggests, but also theologically. In the essay on 'Mechanical Materialism' Adler refers variously to the 'numinous', the 'noumenon' the 'eschatological', 'myth' and 'theocracy' as necessary elements for a human being that is 'called to or able to be called to autonomy' (Adler et al. 2013, p. 136). For Adler, the human exists not only by the grace of love, but also by divine grace. 'Mechanical materialism' represents a fall from grace that is an ultimate, theological displacement. He therefore understands the Shoah in the context of this overall fallenness of modernity (Krämer 2012, p. 21).

4. Conclusions

Arendt argues, in the conclusion to the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, that totalitarianism isolates the individual to such an extent that they lose trust in themselves as the partner of their own thoughts (Arendt 1973, p. 477). This enforced isolation is not creative solitude, but existential loneliness, a distinction that Landau also is alive to in *The Wall*. Arendt argues that only friendship, sympathy or 'the great and incalculable grace of love' can redeem the loneliness of the stateless (Arendt 1973, p. 301). In harmony with Arendt's ideas, *The Wall* concludes with a sort of resolution of Landau's placelessness. In exile, Landau has married a fellow-refugee and now has two children, a family life which sustains him emotionally. He has learned to live in the 'dungeon of my breast' (Adler 2014, p. 617): 'Rejected by all, alienated by people and their coveted status, I have been relegated to a place of my own' (Adler 2014, p. 616). Although he has been exiled from the streets of his childhood, and is confused and lost within the streets of the metropolis, he has still found a local home in the few streets around his current address of West Park Row.

Yet Adler's theological critique of modernity means that he cannot share Arendt's optimism about beginnings (Arendt 1973, p. 479). Landau's new home too is precarious. Addressing his children in the future, he can only hope that the neighborhood will still be there when they have grown, that they will still be able to visit 'the houses where you ran around with the Stonewood and Byrdwhistle children', 'the shops around the corner on Truro Street', 'a ragman like old Ron' (Adler 2014, p. 618). This precarious local sense of place and home is by no means the same as regaining a *Heimat*, a homeland. After this litany, one of the very last lines in the book metonymically recalls the radical trauma that underlines Landau's provisional new sense of place: 'Only the heavy smoke from the squat chimney will faintly drift smoky and dark over the streets.' While Landau has found a place to end his narrative, the metonym of the smoking chimney suggests that the horrific memories and losses from the extermination camps will continue to disrupt his fragile identity. The survivor is always out of place.

There is much that is Kafkaesque about *The Wall*, not least its title, which deliberately echoes such stories by Kafka as 'The Great Wall of China' or 'Before the Law'. The wall of Adler's novel refers to the 'invisible wall' that Landau constantly feels between his self and the rest of human society. The wall is

an artefact of trauma, but, as we have seen, by the end of the novel it also comes to provide a refuge around Landau's wounded self. The poetics of the text resist both the consolations of identification and, with Kafka, 'the calamitous homogenizations of European nationalism' (Stonebridge 2018, p. 53). *The Wall* shows Landau's continued isolation despite his official enjoyment of human rights, his unique suffering and his commitment to a Jewish theology and history. It also commits uncompromisingly to a modernist poetics of fragmentation and disorientation, carrying out both the poetic tradition of Kafka and his forensic critique of the failings of human rights. Further, it demonstrates Adler's commitment to a theological understanding of the crisis of displacement, a crisis that can only be resolved by restoring a relation between the divine and the human. Adler's novel transcends the normative poetics of the German *Bildungsroman*, and of German literature in the 1950s, to provide a uniquely ethical record of the damage done to German-speaking Jews at a time when no literary language or conventions had yet been developed to do so.

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