

Poetry in Exile – H. G. Adler’s Dialogue with Past and Present

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H. G. Adler wrote poetry throughout his life – during his early years in Prague, during his internment in concentration and death camps, and during his many decades in London from the late 1940s until his death in 1988. The diversity of the poems with respect to their geographical and cultural origin interacts with a consistency of linguistic choice for his verse: his poetic medium is always German. He occasionally toyed with writing in English, and in 1981 he composed a cycle entitled ‘České vzpomínky’ [Czech Reminiscences] in a language that had surrounded him in his youth, but this group of ten poems marks the only foray into a language other than German in the collected edition of poems he designated as his poetic legacy.¹ Moreover, while he was widely read, and worked with English verse by poets such as T. S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas, the poetic tradition that above all sustained and inspired him was poetry in German – by Luther and Gryphius, Klopstock and Goethe, Hölderlin and Eichendorff, Alfred Mombert and Georg Trakl. During his life in exile, his poetry was consequently at odds with the language and poetic tradition of his environment. This tension precluded wide-spread 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. Even more than his work in other genres, Adler’s poetry is thus characterised by the exile condition. Yet his poetry does not exist in a

¹ Adler included this cycle of ten poems in the edition of collected poems which he compiled in the course of his lifetime: ‘České vzpomínky / Tschechische Erinnerungen’, with German translations by Eva Adler. See H. G. Adler, *Andere Wege: Gesammelte Gedichte*, ed. by Katrin Kohl and Franz Hocheder, with Jeremy Adler. Afterword by Michael Krüger. Edition Milo 25 (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2010), pp. 946–53. This edition is hereafter abbreviated AW.

vacuum, and it does not seek hermetic inwardness. Rather, it is suffused with a spirit of dialogue that challenges the confines of spatial, temporal and cultural context.

Adler strove not for an international medium but rather exploited the specific features of the German language and poetic tradition to withstand the regime that sought to appropriate German culture for a momentous crime against the Jewish people and humanity itself. The purpose of this essay is to explore the significance of Adler's inventive engagement with the voice of the German language for an understanding of his verse. His work with his linguistic medium and its communicative strength affords an insight into the deeply meaningful ways in which he deploys the interaction between language, poetic tradition and cultural context to respond to the cataclysmic historical moment he experienced first-hand. Writing poetry in German became the most direct means of resisting the powers that exploited a shared human medium for murderous purposes. More than that, it became a means of forging an independent identity that would outlast the regime, and a voice that would bear witness to the crimes that had been committed.

In an interview in 1981, Adler defined himself as a 'deutscher Schriftsteller jüdischer Nation, der aus der Tschechoslowakei kommt, dem österreichischen Kulturkreis angehört und loyaler britischer Staatsbürger ist' [a German writer with Jewish nationality who comes from Czechoslovakia, belongs to the Austrian cultural area, and is a loyal British citizen).² He thereby highlights the complexity of his roots in the Austro-Hungarian Empire with its many cultural groups and wealth of identities, and connects his identity with the country in which he then made his home. National identity is ironically acknowledged only for his Jewishness, while Czech, Austrian and British elements are associated in each case with a specific cultural or political allegiance. German is strictly confined to, and reserved for, his authorial identity.

² "“Da gäbe es noch viel mehr zu berichten ...”. Interview mit H. G. Adler von Friedrich Danielis [1981]', *Zwischenwelt* 25, No. 3/4 (Dec. 2008), 19–27 (p. 20).

Writing in German was not a choice for Adler but a necessity – it was his native language, and when political circumstances divested him of the opportunity to make his career as a scholar and writer in Prague, he devoted himself to forging German into an expressive instrument that could articulate a response to the holocaust. From the start, however, the language he grew up with was part of a culturally complex environment in which it was the medium of the German-Jewish community, shared with other parts of the cultural elite, accorded high status owing to its administrative role and connection with the language of Vienna and Berlin, but part of a linguistic mix in which Czech was the language spoken by the majority. During the years of internment in Theresienstadt, Niederorschel and Langenstein, German was the language used by the Nazi regime, and Adler looked to poetic tradition and the morphological and syntactic possibilities deeply embedded in the German language to forge an idiom that would act as a counterforce. This spirit of writing against the grain remained a characteristic of his poetry in the exile years.

Adler would regularly visit Austria and Germany to keep in touch with the living German language while remaining firmly committed to living outside the German-speaking territories. Conversely, he never changed the language of his verse as he made a new life in Britain and engaged with English poets. In an essay entitled ‘Zu Hause im Exil’ [At Home in Exile) published in 1981, he comments on his initial intention to start writing in English, a project he quickly recognised as impossible to implement. In this context, he stresses that the single exception was to be his poetry: ‘meine Lyrik [... sollte] unbedingt deutsch bleiben’ [my poetry was definitively to remain German).³ His reflections take account of constraints arising from lacking familiarity with the English language but the central criterion arises from the fundamental interdependence between language and innermost personal identity:

³ H. G. Adler, ‘Zu Hause im Exil’, in *H. G. Adler – Der Wahrheit verpflichtet: Interviews, Gedichte, Essays*, ed. by Jeremy Adler (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1998), pp. 19–31 (p. 26).

Sicher bietet auch das Englische sehr viel, was mich sprachlich außerordentlich fesselt, mir lieb und angenehm ist, sowie anderes, was mich abstößt, aber im Innersten geht es mich doch nur wenig an, und nun finde ich Zeit und mit ihr Muße und Abstand, um mich, wenn ich so sagen darf, mit *meinem* Deutsch auseinanderzusetzen und es nach *meiner* Art zu pflegen.⁴

[Undoubtedly English also offers much that truly grips me linguistically, much that I like and find pleasurable, as well as other aspects I find repulsive, but in my innermost being it does not greatly concern me. Now I am finding the time, and with it the leisure and distance, to engage with *my* German, if I might put it like that, and to foster it in *my* way.)

Adler's metaphor of interiority indicates how closely the choice of language is bound up with other dimensions of his oeuvre. Language is fundamental to the intellectual ambition of his work, its spiritual dimension, and its ethical mission. In this statement he negotiates the tension between collectivity and individuality that is inherent in language: he is using a collectively established language that has evolved over time in the daily discourse of the people and peoples whose cultural identities it continues to define. For every individual who uses that language, it is both an internal and an external medium. Adler's sense of language as an inner resource gains depth over a lifetime of seeing language, and languages, being used and abused. Nurturing his very own German in all its facets is an expression of Adler's fierce spirit of independence forged in the face of catastrophic adversity. Developing German as an individual, personal medium gives the individual voice a supple strength that becomes a powerful means of resisting political and cultural pressures that seek to functionalise and subjugate the individual.

⁴ Adler, 'Zu Hause im Exil', pp. 25–26.

During his early years in Prague, Adler was beginning to establish himself as part of a literary circle that drew inspiration from the illustrious tradition of poets which he was later to portray in his essay ‘Die Dichtung der Prager Schule’ [The Literature of the Prague School].⁵ The Prague School’s identity was founded on the medium of ‘Prague German’ – characterised both by its proximity to Austrian German and by its role as a lingua franca that transcended the dialects and languages of the eastern part of the erstwhile Austro-Hungarian Empire. Prague German was the language of a cultural elite, noted for its stylistic refinement and clarity, and it was a medium shared by writers from different cultural groups such as Rilke, born into a Catholic family, and Kafka, a member of the German-Jewish community. German speakers in Prague valued their philological and literary heritage, and writers nurtured its expressive range and strength. Adler identified with this tradition and hoped to build his academic career on the strength of it, developing a profoundly learned approach to poetic language and form, extending his lexical range through the study of etymology, and refining his technique by working with the great poets of the German language. In the course of his writing life he continued to explore the German language in its most elevated manifestations and sophisticated written forms. However, it was equally typical of his love of the living language that during his later life in exile, he actively sought to keep in touch with the Austro-Bavarian dialect spoken in the region he grew up in.⁶ Especially during the early years of his internment, he also looked to the heritage of Expressionism with its evocative imagery and adventurous deployment of neologisms, sound repetition and form, in order to find a medium for conveying the experience of life in extremis. Instead of turning against the linguistic medium of the barbarous Nazis,

⁵ *Die Dichtung der Prager Schule*, mit einem Vorwort von Jeremy Adler (Wuppertal: Arco, 2010). First published in 1976.

⁶ See Adler, ‘Zu Hause im Exil’, p. 25. For examples of dialect elements in his poetry see ‘Es regnet am Schnürl’ [It’s pouring] in ‘Regen am Abend’ (AW, 732) and ‘Sei nun stad!’ [Be quiet now!] in ‘Ins Ferne’ (AW, p. 777). Neither is a poem in dialect: in both cases, the phrase appears in a context of standard German and without quotation marks. Rather than creating a naturalistic effect, the incorporation of dialect sensitises the reader to the complexity of language as it stretches across registers and transcends local limitations without losing touch with its cultural lifeblood.

Adler drew strength from his confidence in a language that had withstood the vicissitudes of territorial fragmentation, cultural division, and political strife on the scale of the Thirty Years War. Moreover, he could look to a tradition of language critique that had gained prominence in Vienna with Karl Kraus in the early decades of the century. Rather than turning his back on German, Adler dug deep into its structural resources and cultural heritage.

In defining his relationship with the German language and his motives for visiting German-speaking countries after the War, Adler elaborates on his relationship with German as follows, focusing on his emotional connection and response to it:

Diese häufige Konfrontation mit der Sprache, mit der ich zutiefst verbunden und für die ich auch besonders empfindlich bin (fast hätte ich ‘allergisch’ statt ‘empfindlich’ gesagt), so daß ich mich in der Annäherung ans Deutsche und der Aneignung ihrer jüngsten Neuerungen zugleich auch davon distanzieren kann: das ist mir überaus wichtig.⁷

[This frequent confrontation with the language, with which I am deeply involved and towards which I am also particularly sensitive (I almost said ‘allergic’ rather than ‘sensitive’), so that in approaching German and assimilating its most recent developments I can simultaneously also distance myself from it: that is enormously important to me.]

What Adler describes here is a process of research with controlled engagement that has features of anthropological participant observation. It differs fundamentally from the immersion in German culture and politics practised by his younger colleague Erich Fried, a German-Jewish poet who grew up in Vienna, emigrated to London in 1938, and became a highly visible political poet, writer of love poetry and translator of Shakespeare and other English literature

⁷ Adler, ‘Zu Hause im Exil’, p. 25.

from the 1960s onwards.⁸ Adler by contrast kept his distance, devoting much of his energy to researching and analysing the systems and processes that underpinned and defined the mass extermination of the Jewish people. His poetry is less directly political and at no point becomes keyed into the political debates of the student movement like Fried's. He similarly writes love poetry, but it is less 'transferable' than Fried's: for example, poems written in Theresienstadt to his first wife Gertrud and compiled in the cycle 'Zuversicht' [Confidence]⁹ gain their communicative significance from the interplay between the specific situation of joint yet separating internment, and the spiritual closeness with the beloved addressee. The oppositional force derives entirely implicitly from the tension between the actual conditions of the two prisoners and a light-heartedly conventional style reminiscent of German 18th-century Anacreontic verse. Love imparts a confidence in values that transcend the violent constraints imposed by the regime. The mission to bear witness runs through Adler's poetry, manifesting itself in complex ways that extend from the situationally specific to the existentially abstract, and at times his verse moves in other directions that assert a spirit of independence from circumstance. Moreover, while his verse draws its energy from dialogic intensity, Adler makes no concessions to immediate impact in his modes of communication and choice of linguistic means.

The reception of Adler's verse was – and remains – limited, and he did not present it at any major public readings; readings even to large groups of friends or colleagues were rare, though he set great store by reading his poetry aloud in smaller circles. Approximately two thirds of the 1200 or so poems he deemed worthy of publication remained unpublished during his lifetime, and volumes that were published appeared with small publishers. We may

⁸ Fried established a forum for emigré poets in London after the war. Adler and his friend Franz Baermann Steiner were part of this circle, with Adler being the only member to have experienced life in the death camps. See Jeremy Adler, 'Erich Fried, F. B. Steiner and an unknown group of exile poets in London', *Zwischenwelt 4: Literatur und Kultur des Exils in Großbritannien* (1995), 163–84.

⁹ AW, pp. 197–205; see also pp. 1090f.

speculate about the reasons for the low level of response, and the answers will coincide to a considerable extent with the explanations for the slow reception of his narrative works. We may also look to the ‘modernist’ quality of his poetry – not least its resistance to easy interpretation. This increases during the years in the camps, and Adler indeed comments on his aim to use technical complexity and timeless values as means of distancing his verse from the tribulations of their immediate context. He elaborates on this aim in an essay written for a PEN conference in 1980 on exile literature; the essay is entitled ‘Dichtung in der Gefangenschaft als inneres Exil’ [Literature during Captivity as Inner Exile].¹⁰ He there explains that following the initial traumatic ‘Einlieferungsschock’ [internment shock] experienced on his arrival in Theresienstadt, he had resolved to respond to what he was experiencing in two ways, and two modes: ‘Zeugnis ablegen’ [to bear witness] would be the purpose of his scholarly work while his literary writing would be devoted to transforming them into works of literature, ‘[sie] künstlerisch [zu] gestalten’ [giving them artistic form].¹¹ He goes on to highlight the formal techniques he used, such as complex rhyme schemes and stanza forms, and he then offers a rationale that guided his writing:

Technisch Kompliziertes und formal Konservatives wählte ich bewußt, um mich so weit, als es erlaubt schien, von der widrigen Gegenwart zu distanzieren und durch Hingabe an zeitlose Werte meine Menschenwürde zu behaupten.¹²

[I consciously chose technical complexity and conservative forms in order to distance myself as far as seemed permissible from the adversity of the present and assert my human dignity by devoting myself to timeless values.]

¹⁰ Adler, ‘Dichtung in der Gefangenschaft als inneres Exil’, in: *Literatur des Exils: Eine Dokumentation über die PEN-Jahrestagung in Bremen vom 18–20. September 1980*, ed. by Bernt Engelmann (Munich: Goldmann, 1981), pp. 18–28.

¹¹ Adler, ‘Dichtung in der Gefangenschaft’, p. 26.

¹² Adler, ‘Dichtung in der Gefangenschaft’, pp. 26f.

This indicates a profound tension in his verse. On the one hand the poetry responds to experienced reality. On the other hand, it counters that reality with a force of art conceived as independent of the constraints imposed by immediate reality, and independent of a rhetorical purpose. The implications of this tension may be traced in the quality of ‘voice’ that marks out his verse and embeds a dialogic dimension within the poem. Jeremy Adler reports that his father would regularly read his verse to himself during its composition, and would then, when a poem was finished, read it to his family and friends in order to test its aural form. Oral performance and aural reception, then, are part of the process of composition and built into the poem from its conception.

Adler developed his poetic writing from an early age, and the nine volumes of verse which he compiled and edited over the course of his life contain two volumes of poems written before his deportation, with the earliest poems having been written in 1927. He carried on writing poetry during his time in Theresienstadt, and indeed highlights that writing poetry was a popular communal activity among the prisoners:

Tausende von Insassen in Theresienstadt schrieben Gedichte. Ihre Verfassungen gehörten zu allen Schichten der Gefangenen, Greise und Kinder dichteten. Das Verseschmieden war fast so stark wie ein beliebtes Gesellschaftsspiel.¹³

[Thousands of inmates in Theresienstadt wrote poems. Their composition was in evidence among all the social strata of prisoners. Old men and children wrote poetry.

The craft of writing verse was almost as well developed as a parlour game.]

This experience of writing, and observing others write, in the face of the holocaust is reflected in Adler’s response to Adorno’s famous dictum of 1951 according to which writing poetry was now impossible because it had become a barbaric pursuit, ‘nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu

¹³ Adler, ‘Dichtung aus Theresienstadt’, in *Fruchtblätter: Freundesgabe für Alfred Kellertat*, ed. by Harald Hartung, Walter Heistermann and Peter M. Stephan (Berlin: Pädagogische Akademie Berlin, 1977), pp. 137–42 (p. 138).

schreiben ist barbarisch' [it is barbaric to write a poem after Auschwitz].¹⁴ In an essay on his poetics entitled 'Zur Bestimmung der Lyrik' [On the Definition of Lyric Poetry], Adler gives short shrift to Adorno's grandiose claim:

in den letzten Jahren [wurde] öfters nach der Möglichkeit des Gedichtes [...] gefragt [...]. Der Soziologe Adorno sprach nach Auschwitz dem Gedicht sogar die Berechtigung ab. Nun, die Möglichkeit einer Kunst läßt sich theoretisch nicht dekretieren. Solche Fragen mögen nahe liegen, doch werden sie weder von Überzeugungen noch von Wünschen entschieden. Antwort erteilt die Wirklichkeit. [...] Es gibt [...] deutsch und in anderen Sprachen gute neue Gedichte. Damit ist die Frage nach der Möglichkeit der Lyrik in der Gegenwart positiv beantwortet.¹⁵

[In recent years the possibility of poetry has often been called into question. The sociologist Adorno indeed denied poetry legitimacy after Auschwitz. Well, the possibility of an art form cannot be decreed theoretically. Such questions may seem obvious but they are decided neither by convictions nor by wishes. The answer is provided by reality. There are good new poems in German and in other languages. That means the question about the possibility of poetry in the present time has been answered in the affirmative.]

Reality, 'die Wirklichkeit', acts as a benchmark for what is possible in poetry and, as Adler's essay on 'Dichtung in der Gefangenschaft als inneres Exil' makes clear, the idealist poetics he develops in the essay 'Zur Bestimmung der Lyrik' is predicated on the pressure of real experience.

¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1970ff.), vol. 10.1, pp. 11–30 (p. 30).

¹⁵ Adler, 'Zur Bestimmung der Lyrik' (version: 'Fassung für den Vortrag in der Münchner Akademie am 20.10.58', dated 16–18.9.1958), pp. 1–30, unpublished typescript (Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, A: Adler, A II 22), p. 25.

The aural aspect of his verse that Adler tests when reading it aloud to family and friends points to a dialogic quality that depends on voice. This voice constitutes the nexus between the poem as art, informed by the idealist precepts that Adler increasingly espoused in the face of political pressures, and the poem as an embodied response to reality. While Adler rejects a rhetorical poetics that would give the poem the significance of a message, he invests it with the rhetorical force of ‘the moral character of the speaker’, which Aristotle highlights in his *Rhetoric* as one of the three ‘proofs furnished by the speech’, alongside ‘putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind’ and the proof furnished by ‘the speech itself, in so far as it proves or seems to prove’.¹⁶ The moral character manifested in the poet’s voice engages the reader, and provides an ongoing stimulus to pursue the pathways of interpretation it opens up, albeit often only in glimpses of meanings and arguments, images and visions. The energy of the voice expresses itself through alliteration and assonance, emphatic inversions and subtly modulated speech acts. It gains resonance from intertextual connections, and historic depth from a linguistic texture that carries its history within its etymology, and its future in the infinite morphological possibilities of the German language. The fabric of the language sets up correspondences of meaning that encourage exploration while resisting resolution. The voice engages the reader or audience in the poet’s reflections or visions, and in some poems it overtly draws persuasive strength from an authorial presence that has personally witnessed what is depicted or hinted at. The reader here becomes aware of a moral compass that has gained its dependability from the real world.

Adler occasionally sketches the situation of the speaker with autobiographical details that establish the voice as living in the circumstances of the author. In 1952, five years after his arrival in London, he wrote a series of poems to which he gave the title ‘Londoner Elegien’

¹⁶ Aristotle, *The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric*, with an English translation by John Henry Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 17.

[London Elegies],¹⁷ recalling Rilke's title *Duineser Elegien* for a cycle begun in Castle Duino. In both works, the actual place roots the poems in reality while also acting as a foil for themes that take the reader far beyond that place. Adler's group of 32 poems is more loosely composed than Rilke's cycle, and an allusion to the 'Auftrag' that is at the heart of Rilke's project in one of Adler's poems indicates that the poet's 'mission' here is more questioning and inconclusive: 'Wie aber soll da ein Auftrag ...?' [But how should a mission ...?].¹⁸ A wide range of themes are explored with occasional concrete elements that suggest a landscape and life context far away from the British city: the cable-car that gives the poem 'Berg- und Talbahn' its title,¹⁹ the carnival scenes in 'Aschermittwoch' [Ash Wednesday],²⁰ or the German nursery rhyme remembered from a childhood in a different country.²¹

The poem 'Bitte und Dank' [Request and Thanks]²² by contrast takes the reader into the immediate world of the poet and author, sketching a domestic scene in the second stanza that makes autobiographical reference to his wife and child, though as part of a scenario of gathering mourners who remain mythically indeterminate:

Die Gäste versammeln sich, Trauerbotschaften
 Schaben die rußige Träne vom Antlitz, während
 Dein Kind in die Stube stört, ein liebes,
 Da es nicht ahnt, nur eifert hinter der Mutter.²³

[The guests assemble, messages of mourning

¹⁷ AW, pp. 444–85

¹⁸ 'Des Heiles schwache Kunst', l. 29, AW, p. 446.

¹⁹ AW, pp. 453f.

²⁰ 'Hoppa hoppa Reiter ...', in 'Stimmen', l. 36, AW, p. 449; 'Aschermittwoch', AW, p. 458.

²¹ 'Hoppa hoppa Reiter ...', in 'Stimmen', l. 36, AW, p. 449; 'Aschermittwoch', AW, p. 458.

²² AW, pp. 447f. Adler was assiduous in documenting the dates on which he composed his poems and recorded that this poem was written on 11.2.1952 and revised on 3.2.1970. This poem and the poems below from *Andere Wege* are reproduced by kind permission of Jeremy Adler. The translations are by KK, intended to aid understanding of the original works.

²³ 'Bitte und Dank', ll. 21–24, AW, p. 447.

Scrape the sooty tears from the face while
 Your child brings disturbance into the room, a dear child,
 For it has no inkling, busily following its mother.]

The theme of mourning and the elegiac tone befit the title of the ‘London Elegies’, as does the reflective presence of the poet and the tension between perspectives. The cheerful energy of the busy child throws the deeper knowledge of the adults into sharp relief, with the child’s innocence sharpening the poignancy of lament rather than affording a glimpse of hope.

The insight into the poet’s domestic life in this second stanza of the poem follows a first stanza in which the tone is more bitter and shot through with hints of satire, conveying the poet’s lived experience through changing speech acts and a tension that arises from the conflict between word and thought, utterance and silence. The poet here evokes his own predicament in a strange city as he seeks elusive help from insensitive authorities. We may surmise that Adler is giving an insight into his early years in London with the daily experience of hardship and demoralising dependency following escape from a murderous regime:

Nimm es auf, fahre die Bitte an. Dank wird schon
 Hilfe im Atem, weiser Spruch vor Behörden
 Herzlich geboten. Ach schweigen, schweigen.
 Immer schweigen müssen und sich verkriechen
 In kalte Begeisterung, kahl vor den Herren
 Im Glanz ihrer Herrscherstuben. So unbehaust
 Ist die Bitte des Volkes, fehlerhaft die Bitte
 Des Verdammten. ‘Stirb!’ – Und wieder schweigen
 Und wieder seinen Mörder besprechen mit Lob.
 Und wieder warten Tag um Tag, dann in fremder

Stadt die Schritte zählen auf eisigem Grund
 Und verfremdet grübeln über lichtlose Taten.²⁴

[Take it up, approach the request. Thanks turn into
 Help in the breath, wise talk before authorities
 Warmly offered. Oh being silent, silent.
 Constantly having to be silent and retreat
 Into cold enthusiasm, bare before the gentlemen
 In the splendour of their power rooms. So homeless
 Is the plea of the people, flawed the plea
 Of the condemned one. ‘Die!’ – And again being silent
 And again talking about your murderer with praise.
 And again waiting day in day out, then counting
 The steps in the alien city on icy ground
 And ruminating estranged on lightless deeds.]

The vocal strength of the introductory exhortations is subtly undermined by linguistic elements that preclude easy assimilation. The introductory command ‘Nimm es auf’ is evidently addressed to the poet himself, suggesting a commencing project that is initially left indeterminate by the unspecific pronoun but then gradually gains shape with the noun ‘Bitte’ and the mention of authorities to whom the poet will address his petition. The verb ‘anfahren’ [to drive off, start a vehicle, or approach something in a vehicle] then introduces further nuances that slow down comprehension since the syntactic context brings different meanings

²⁴ ‘Bitte und Dank’, ll. 13–24, AW, p. 447.

into play:²⁵ the statement cannot be understood straightforwardly owing to the collocation with an abstract noun rather than a concrete vehicle. Once possible meanings are explored, it begins to make most sense as a neologism formed by analogy with ‘angehen’ [tackle]; we may then – in what is possibly an excessively literal reading – incorporate the association of traversing the city by public transport. We can here see Adler exploiting the spectrum of conventional meanings while taking the reader further into new semantic territory. While the poet is addressing himself, the reader becomes involved in a process of interpretation that replicates the difficulty of embarking on the daily grind of begging for assistance from people who speak an unfamiliar language and fail to empathise with the needs of the refugee. The significance of the autobiographical scenario is introduced in part through morphological processes: by making exceptional linguistic demands on the reader, Adler generates a spirit of exceptional thoughtfulness and imaginative engagement at the very beginning of the reading process. A further communicative nuance is then introduced through morphological irony in the word ‘Herzlich’, which ostensibly involves authentic expression ‘from the heart’ but actually highlights the hypocrisy to which the poet has to subject himself. This is then developed in the oxymoron ‘kalte Begeisterung’ [cold enthusiasm]. The vocal repetition of ‘schweigen’ [to be silent] runs counter to the meaning of the verb, making the reader aware of moving inside the poet’s thoughts, trapped as they are in existentially necessary dissimulation if the poet is to survive in the public world of alien speech.

It is typical of Adler’s poetry that even where we find autobiographical detail, this generates connections that take the reader far beyond the biographical. In this poem, the

²⁵ The meaning of the verb ‘anfahren’ is highly nuanced, ranging from intransitive to transitive uses, as is evident from the first four meanings given under the entry for the verb in *Duden*: 1. (von Fahrzeugen) zu fahren beginnen, losfahren; 2. fahrend näher kommen; 3.a. bei einer Fahrt einen bestimmten Ort als Ziel haben; 3.b. fahrend auf etwas zusteuern; sich in seiner Fahrweise auf ein kommendes Hindernis einstellen; 4. unter Überwindung einer entgegengerichteten Kraft fahren (<http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/anfahren>). Adler exploits this spectrum by creating a context in which none of these meanings apply literally, and the reader has to deploy interpretative thought to make sense of the statement.

experience of the impoverished exile in the alien city opens out into a symbolic juxtaposition of splendid buildings housing society's rulers and the plight of their subjects, with 'homelessness' standing for the absence of human security and dignity. Experience of life in the foreign city engenders alienated rumination on the dark deeds that destroyed a world that has been left behind. At the heart of the stanza is the stark command 'Stirb!' [Die!], in which the poet's voice takes on an alien role: that of the perpetrators who drove him into exile. The transition between the rulers to whom the poet addresses his petition and the rulers that condemned him and his people to die is made only implicitly: we can infer it if we draw on biographical knowledge from beyond the poem. The reader here becomes privy to the trauma of exile, which makes homelessness into an existential condition that suffuses the psyche. The domestic scene in the following stanza briefly counteracts that alienation, but the pleasure in the young child is obliterated by the mourning symbolised in the association with London soot ['rußige Träne' – sooty tears]. The actuality of the Great Smog of 1952 here fuses with the tears of the exiles as they lament the unfathomable loss of their people.

The arc of reciprocal speech acts evoked in the title 'Bitte und Dank' is completed in the third and final stanza of the poem. Here the word 'Dank' [thanks] comes to the fore as a running motif which reciprocates that of request and petition. But the gratitude is embedded in despair as it lacks the basis of something having been granted: the final words of the poem are 'Dank, Dank, verweigerter Bitte Dank' [Thanks, thanks, thanks of/for the refused request]. The concepts of request and thanks are thus reciprocal only in words, and a dislocated relationship between them is encapsulated in the possessive genitive that connects them illogically. The power of the poetic voice, traditionally celebrated both in the ode and the elegy as a medium capable of bringing inanimate things, and the dead, before the mind's eye as living beings, here remains unable to articulate more than the ineffectiveness of communication.

In ‘Bitte und Dank’, the poet’s voice is embodied in the figure at the centre of the poem reflecting on his predicament. As he paces the ‘icy ground’ of the city, the human tragedy that forms part of his life comes to the fore in glimpses as part of memories and lived experience. The incorporation of another voice in the word ‘Stirb!’ is here an isolated utterance, starkly effective as a command that is both disembodied and absolute. In a poem written much later, in 1979, Adler again includes the voice of a perpetrator in the poem, and it indeed provides the title: ‘Vielleicht daß ich vorbeigegangen bin’ [Perhaps it’s that I walked past].²⁶ Here, the incorporated voice forms part of a dialogue scenario in which an interlocutor opens the conversation with initial questions that prompt an answer consisting of several utterances. In between the perpetrator’s statements, the poet provides comments that are framed in similes and metaphors, probing significance from a perspective of ethically grounded reflection:

VIELLEICHT DASS ICH VORBEIGEGANGEN BIN

‘Hast du Schuld? Fühlst du Schuld?’ Die Frage

Lichtet den Vorhang. Die Antwort stockt. ‘Ich

Möchte daran nicht erinnert werden, an die

Sache.’ Und wie das Meer der Stimme blutschwarz

In die Stille bricht, weckt es sich hart. Da

Fügt es ungefragt hinzu: ‘Ich hab abgeschaltet.

Eine Zeit hab ich so nachgedacht, wissen Sie.’

Verhallt und grimm wie Salz. Vergeßlich auch,

Denn vergeßlich ist der Tod am nächsten Tag.

‘Ja, das kann ich wohl sagen. Das geht auf

²⁶ AW, p. 832. The poem forms part of the cycle ‘Nahe Entfernungen’ and is dated 4.6.1979.

Die Nerven.' Naßkälte schwemmt ein Sündenmeer

Heran. 'Na, hab ich gesagt, Mensch, die ganzen

Opfer. Was war, das brauchte nicht sein, sagen

Wir mal.' Und Schuld, Vorhalt und Schuld, gelitten

Versunken. Wir wissen nicht, wie sie versinkt

In Nacht und nicht vergeht und immer tiefer.

'Magenbeschwerden, die ich hab. Ja, auch dieses

Augenzwinkern, das ist darauf zurückzuführen.'

Zuletzt fremd: 'Das hab ich persönlich nicht

Gemacht. Vielleicht daß ich vorbeigegangen bin.'

[PERHAPS IT'S THAT I WALKED PAST

'Do you have guilt? Do you feel guilt?' The question

Raises the curtain. The answer falters. 'I

don't want to be reminded of it, of that

Issue.' And as the sea of the voice breaks into the silence,

blood black, it awakens itself hard. Then

It adds without being asked: 'I switched off.

For a while I kept on thinking, you know.'

Died away and grim as salt. Forgetful too,

For death is forgetful the very next day.

'Yes, I can certainly say that. It gets on
 Your nerves.' Damp coldness washes up a sea of sin.
 'Well, I said, goodness, all those

 Victims. All of the stuff that happened, it really wasn't
 Necessary, let's say.' And guilt, accusation and guilt, suffered,
 Sunk. We do not know how it sinks
 Into night and does not pass and deeper and deeper.

 'Stomach trouble, I've got that. Yes, and this
 Twitching eye, that's caused by it.'
 Finally distant: 'I didn't personally
 Do it. Perhaps it's that I walked past.']

The title of the poem 'Perhaps it's that I walked past' brings historical events into focus through the eyes of one who is being required to address the question of personal guilt, in a dialogue or perhaps interrogation. Adler here gives us utterances first-hand of the kind that are familiar from Peter Weiss's play *Die Ermittlung* [The Investigation] of 1965, which works with transcripts from the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials of 1963-1965, or Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), which presents interviews with victims, witnesses and perpetrators.

The colloquial phrasing of the title sets the tone for a poem in which the choice of words and juxtaposition of registers convey different perspectives on guilt. The formal simplicity of the introductory questions with their weighty differentiation between the verbs 'haben' [have] and 'fühlen' [feel] define the terms of what is at issue: objective presence of guilt, and subjective acknowledgement of personal guilt. The questions do not specify the crime, but the

answer makes clear that both dialogue partners and the poet share an understanding of the crime that is at the centre of the poem. It is thereby given a formal status that derives its communicative import from a firm basis in historical facts, a context of shared knowledge in which the reader also participates. This creates a solid foundation for interpreting communicative nuances: the reader's attention focuses not on the nature and details of the crime but on the responses of a perpetrator whose involvement is established by the poet's comment on the initial question and answer: 'Die Frage | Lichtet den Vorhang. Die Antwort stockt' [The question | Raises the curtain. The answer falters]. The metaphor of the curtain evokes the uncovering of a previously hidden scene, suggesting a process of actual revelation in which the perpetrator's inner eye participates while their conscious will blocks the process and inhibits the act of articulation. By means of an overtly poetic metaphor, the poet thereby establishes his voice as a benchmark for truth while the quoted utterances emanate from an unwillingness to access and acknowledge past actions. Rather than opening up the truth, they serve to obliterate it, using language as a means of abrogating individual responsibility in favour of collective convention that separates guilt from individual responsibility.

The perpetrator's reference to 'die Sache' [that issue] in the first stanza is so general as to convey a fundamental tendency towards evasion, which is matched by the declared unwillingness to remember. In this context, the speaker's conventionally informal mode of expression takes on special significance, for it indicates a lazy reliance on prefabricated language that precludes thoughtful, individual engagement with past actions. The effect of habitual and deliberate thoughtlessness derives from a cumulation of linguistic features typical of colloquial speech: the dropped ending in the auxiliary 'hab' (lines 7, 12, 17, 19), colloquial metaphors and idioms ('abschalten', l. 6; 'Das geht auf | Die Nerven', ll. 10f.), semantically empty conversational interjections ('wissen Sie', l. 7; 'Ja, das kann ich wohl sagen', l. 10; 'Na, habe ich gesagt, Mensch', l. 12; 'sagen | Wir mal', ll. 13f.), repetitious recapitulation for

emphasis ('daran ... an die Sache', l. 3; 'dieses | Augenzwinkern, das', l. 17f.; 'ich persönlich', l. 19), colloquial syntax ('das brauchte nicht sein' instead of '...zu sein', l. 13). The speaker's banal language corresponds to their trivialising collective reference to 'die ganzen | Opfer' [ll. 12f., all those victims] and the deliberately uncomprehending framing of the crimes as an unnecessary event (ll. 13f.). The bitter satire underlying the stereotypical linguistic routines gains additional resonance from the careful analysis of cause and effect which the perpetrator devotes to trivial personal afflictions (ll. 17f.).

By contrast with the superficiality of the perpetrator's utterances, marked out by quotation marks, the poet's interspersed comments are articulated beyond the dialogue scenario in an indeterminate space where reflection and language are at one with each other. The poet's words evoke highly individual, expressively original images, each opening up moral implications that the perpetrator seeks to close off and obliterate. The poet nowhere refers to the speaker with a personal pronoun: following the speaker's first utterance, their voice is metaphorically identified with 'das Meer' [the sea], and in the following two lines this noun becomes the reference point for the neuter pronoun 'es'. The guilt which the perpetrator seeks to hide comes to the fore in the complex metaphor of the voice as a 'blood black sea breaking into the silence', with a neologistic colour oxymoron fusing 'black' guilt with the 'blood' on the hands of the guilty. The metaphorical sea returns in the third stanza, now as an infinite 'sea of sin' associated with the simple, physical images of wetness and coldness, quite different from the meaninglessly abstract verbiage of the speaker. The perpetrator's trivialising reference to 'die ganzen | Opfer' [all those victims] is countered with weighty repetition of the word 'Schuld' [guilt] and the past participle 'gelitten', giving voice to the suffering that was ignored by the speaker.

The poet's careful choice of expressive words is evident in his use of the archaic forms 'grimm' [l. 8, grim], instead of the more usual 'grimmig', and 'der Vorhalt' [l. 14, reproach],

equivalent to ‘die Vorhaltung’. Adler is here working with a morphological technique commended by one of his poetic masters, F.G. Klopstock, who advocates it in order to create a poetic language that is distinct from the language of everyday prose.²⁷ While Klopstock is concerned above all to fashion a high style in the classical tradition that is suited to conveying metaphysical themes, the technique here serves to forge a linguistic medium that will draw strength from individual ethically grounded reflection. The poet concludes his own comments with images of sinking, depth and night, anchoring the guilt for past crimes in the human psyche, beyond the reach of knowledge. The final words are given to the perpetrator, who concludes his meandering answer with a rejection of personal guilt, followed by a tentative concession that he might have walked past – while leaving indefinite what it was that the speaker failed to acknowledge. The concession is further weakened by the introductory particle ‘vielleicht’ [perhaps]. As with earlier utterances, the phrasing is colloquial, and the statement hinting at potential guilt is left both indeterminate and syntactically incomplete, in stark contrast with the complete sentence rejecting personal responsibility.

The different voices in the poem provide complementary perspectives on the question of guilt, encompassing the factual introductory question, the evasive abrogation of personal responsibility that characterises the retrospective attitude of the vast majority of perpetrators, and the poet’s engagement of the moral imagination as he opens up the unfathomable implications of crimes that continue to be suppressed rather than acknowledged. Each of the three voices has a distinctive identity and a distinctive register. The features characteristic of oral speech that characterise the voice of the perpetrator serve to convey deliberate and chronic superficiality as the clichéd responses fail to connect with individual thought, personal memory

²⁷ See Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, ‘Von der Sprache der Poesie’, in Klopstock, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Karl August Schleiden, 2 vols, 4th edn (Munich and Vienna: Hanser 1981), pp. 1016–26 (p. 1017). See also Karl Ludwig Schneider, *Klopstock und die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1965), pp. 41–56 and passim.

or moral sensibility. By contrast, the poet's supple, colourful language with its creative use of morphology and rich metaphors is able to mediate between emotions, thought and language, relying on the imagination rather than articulated physical sound for its communicative resonance. The contrast between the different voices in the poem is here central to its meaning.

Adler's poems are mostly univocal, suggesting linguistically active reflection in a process that is shared freely with the reader or listener without explicitly involving them. The poem 'Heimat und Wandel' [Home and Transformation], written shortly after 'Vielleicht daß ich vorbeigegangen bin' in 1980, has none of that poem's rhetorical complexity. A simpler, homogeneous voice mediates between inner thought and external speech, communicating with the reader through statements and questions while evoking a poetic persona in a state of isolation:

HEIMAT UND WANDEL

Leicht führen alle Wege,
 Doch wohin? Aus der Heimat?
 In die Heimat? Welche Ziele
 Und wie weit sind buntbleich
 Sie über die Erde gestreut?
 Die Schilder der Gasthäuser laden
 Nicht ein ins Gemach zu Speise
 Und Umtrunk. Wohin also, wohin
 Sich wenden und wo das dürftig
 Verhandelte Gepäck dürr gegen
 Den Baum am Rande der Straße
 Aufrichten, dann schlafen
 Und diesen und alle Wege vergessen?

Wege führen nicht hin,
 Sie führen nicht her.
 Einsam behütet tasten die Füße
 Stein und Staub in zeitlosem Wandel.²⁸

[HOME AND TRANSFORMATION

Easily all paths lead,
 But where to? Away from home?
 Towards home? Which destinations
 And how far are they strewn across
 The earth, colourfully pale?
 The inn signs do not invite you
 Into the room for food and companionable
 Drink. So where to go, where
 To turn and where to prop up, sparsely,
 The suitcase meagrely negotiated
 Against the tree at the edge
 Of the street, then sleep
 And forget this and all paths?
 Paths do not lead there,
 They do not lead here.
 Lonely and protected the feet feel their way

²⁸ AW, p. 847. The poem is dated 2.3.1980 and forms part of the cycle 'Frühes spätes Erwachen'.

Stone and dust in timeless transformation.]

The central image of pathways opens up a space in which the speaker projects himself as exiled not only from a place of origin but from both origins and destinations. The images sketch a rudimentary inhabited landscape with a road, stones and dust, a tree, inns with signs that fail to communicate hospitality, and interiors that may provide food, drink and conviviality but are evoked only by negation. The embodiment of the speaker is conveyed directly only in the concluding image of feet, but beyond that through the activities of walking, sleeping and propping up an item of luggage. The imagery recalls the figure at the centre of the cycle *Eroberungen* [Conquests] by Adler's friend Franz Baermann Steiner: the first poem in the cycle is entitled 'Der schritt schwingt hin' [the step swings away] and this lonely figure, too, must walk without the direction and closure afforded by a destination.²⁹ There is no other sentient being in Adler's poem – the word 'einsam' in the penultimate line encapsulates an existence in which the individual is reliant entirely upon his own resources. The final word 'Wandel' ambiguously fuses the individual activity of walking ['wandeln'] with a universal condition of change ['Wandel' or, as a verb, 'sich wandeln']. The individual's life unfolds in a space of pathways without direction as he inhabits an existence that is 'zeitlos' [timeless]. While the first part of the poem conveys restless questioning, the final statement accepts a life without teleological purpose.

The poet's voice plays a vital role in giving coherence and meaning to the sparse physical images, communicating an intensely reflective sensibility at the heart of the poem. It gains resonance in questions that extend through most of the poem and establish the theme of pathways, origins and destinations. The three introductory questions are syntactically

²⁹ Franz Baermann Steiner, *Eroberungen. Ein lyrischer Zyklus*, ed. by H. G. Adler (Heidelberg: L. Schneider, 1964), pp. 12–13. Like Adler, Steiner lost his family in the holocaust, but he already spent the war years in exile in the UK. He did not complete the work, which was published only posthumously by Adler.

fragmentary, but integrated in a series which suggests a sustained process of searching that involves both mind and emotions, embodied in the physical activity of travel that enacts the condition of exile. The questions focused on the interrogative adverb ‘wohin’, twice repeated at the beginning of the long question in line 8, echo the ‘wo’ questions in the second stanza of Hölderlin’s poem ‘Hälfte des Lebens’: ‘Weh mir, wo nehm’ ich, wenn | Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo | Den Sonnenschein, | Und Schatten der Erde?’ [But oh, where shall I find | When winter comes, the flowers, and where | The sunshine | And shade of the earth?].³⁰ In both poems, the question word opens up a space that cannot be found. Hölderlin’s poem projects this into the future of old age, by contrast with the statements in the first stanza of his poem, which evokes a fulfilled youth. Adler’s poem by contrast offers no sense of temporal progression. The questions in his poem culminate in a statement that highlights not just the loneliness of the speaker’s condition, but also the absence of direction as the feet lose momentum in a movement that is tentative [‘tasten’] rather than purposeful.

The voice that sustains the poem draws subtly individual expressiveness from the lexical choices and use of syntax. The words are mostly simple and concrete: paths, inn signs, luggage, tree, feet, stone and dust. Where they hint at social life, Adler chooses words that are somewhat elevated, with a hint of the archaic that here imparts a sense of timeless human life: ‘Gemach’ rather than ‘Raum’ for the interior of an inn, ‘Speise’ rather than ‘Essen’ for food, and ‘Umtrunk’ conveying both drink and companionship. The morphology reveals occasional modifications of established patterns, notably in the phonetic interaction between ‘dürftig’ [meagrely] and ‘dürr’ [dryly]: they are morphologically unrelated but the sound

³⁰ Friedrich Hölderlin, ‘Hälfte des Lebens’, in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. by Jochen Schmidt, 3 vols (Frankfurt/M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992–94), vol. 1, p. 320. Translation in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, ed. and transl. by Michael Hamburger, bilingual ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 371.

Adler considered the poem to be the epitome of ‘das rein lyrische Gedicht’ (the purely lyric poem) (Adler, ‘Zur Bestimmung der Lyrik’, p. 10). He quotes the beginning of the stanza in the poems ‘Teile’ (AW, p. 881) and ‘Verschrittene Worte’ (AW, p. 898), both written in 1981.

correspondence points up a semantic similarity that allows both adverbs also to function as adjectives with an implied connection with both luggage and tree. The only striking neologism is the metaphor ‘buntbleich’, which confounds rational definition in a colour oxymoron fusing colourfulness [‘bunt’] with paleness [‘bleich’]. Simultaneously affirming and negating vividness, it engages the imagination in envisioning goals that are indeterminate, and conceptualising destinations that are randomly scattered across the earth. The alliterative neologism prompts the reader to dwell on the paradox of the human condition that palpably shapes the experience of the individual in exile.

The syntax is likewise simple, without striking inversions or subordination of multiple clauses. Throughout the poem, however, Adler creates idiosyncratic semantic and syntactic connections and eliminates expected objects, inviting the reader to explore unusual mental pathways. The theme of paths lacking a goal is established in the first line when the verb ‘führen’ [to lead] is initially given no direction complement to complete the first clause (the reader expects the verb to be followed by a prepositional phrase indicating the destination). Adler is here using a technique that Klopstock had introduced to enhance the expressiveness of poetic language: the unusual deployment of a verb enhances the reader’s awareness of its dynamic strength. The emphatic positioning of the adverb ‘leicht’ at the start of the sentence thereby takes on an unexpected ambiguity: welcome effortlessness in negotiating a path becomes unsettling disorientation when the path is divested of a goal. The proposed directions from and towards home are framed as free-standing elliptic questions and negated by the preceding question ‘Doch wohin?’ [But where to?]. The question runs through the first half of the poem, and it is picked up in the question ‘wo’ in line 9, which undermines the anchoring certainty afforded to the tree by its definite article. Adler’s technique of modifying the conventional syntactic connections of the verb returns in the final sentence, in the transitive use of the verb ‘tasten’ [feel (with the hands), grope (one’s way)]. The images of stone and

dust evoke a road and accord with the image of the feet, but the activity of walking is conveyed by a verb that is normally used either for an activity of the hands, or used reflexively and with a prepositional construction if it refers to an activity of the feet (e.g. ‘sich an etwas entlangtasten’). The associations evoked by the unconventional use of the verb give the movement of the feet a holistic quality that involves the whole body as they tread the earth. The earth (line 5) and the road (line 11) are fused in the archetypal images of stone and dust on which the exile must travel without direction, and without meaningful past or future.

One word only in the poem hints at confidence in a dimension beyond the poet’s lonely and exposed existence. No security is afforded by buildings or human company, but the participle ‘behütet’ intimates that the wanderer carries spiritual protection with him. The verb is central to the Priestly Blessing given to Moses for his brother Aaron and the children of Israel, ‘Der Herr segne dich und behüte dich [...]’ [The Lord bless thee, and keep thee), and it affords protection for the exile when Jacob is given the following promise: ‘Und der Herr [...] sprach [...] Und siehe, ich bin mit dir und will dich behüten, wo du hin ziehst’ [And [...] the Lord [...] said, [...] And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest’).³¹ The participle ‘behütet’ is unequivocal in giving the concluding words ‘zeitloser Wandel’ [timeless change) positive value. It is the word used in Luther’s translation of the Old Testament – a word that might be seen as a living link between the Jewish and German people notwithstanding the cultural catastrophe that severs them. Adler’s willingness to work freely with German in all its facets is testimony to the confidence he places in language to overcome cultural limitations. It is a medium that is owned as much by the individual as by the cultural group.

³¹ Num. 6, 24 and Gen. 28, 13–15. According to his son Jeremy Adler, H. G. Adler used the Bible in Luther’s translation in his work (see AW, pp. 1110f.).

The concluding focus on timelessness recalls Adler's essay 'Dichtung in der Gefangenschaft als inneres Exil' where he projects a commitment to timeless values as an assertion of human dignity in the face of barbarous violence. In this late poem, the poet is engaging not with imprisonment but with life that has been divested of its cultural roots. While the long heritage of the Jewish people and the political exile of Adler's personal life may be seen as part of the poem's cultural context, the elements of the poem connect the isolated poet with the archetypal human condition. The poet uses the conventions of the German language in ways that dissolve established connections, run counter to expectations and take the reader along unexpected mental pathways. The words are in some cases conservative and the techniques are complex. But this is not the striking conservatism or overtly crafted complexity we find in some of the poetry Adler wrote in Theresienstadt. The archetypal quality of the images is matched by simple diction and a syntax that is easy to follow. Sound effects and figures of repetition are straightforward, and the poem is relatively short and formally simple as the free verse unfolds.

The sense of live voice in Adler's poems gives them a human depth that invites ongoing engagement and exploration rather than a reading that delivers a stable meaning. The voice provides a way into the poem and a human point of reference that guides the reader to resist the unquestioning platitudes Adler satirizes in 'Vielleicht daß ich vorbeigegangen bin'. It enables the reader to accompany the poet on a journey into a realm in which the individual is on his own, and the dimensions of space and time that govern our lives cease to give it meaning. The imaginative process stimulated by the poet's voice sustains the reader on a journey in which exile gains symbolic depth, drawing moral resonance from real experience while also moving beyond historical space into realms beyond history.

More than any other part of Adler's richly diverse oeuvre, his poetry draws its communicative force from the interdependence of the German language, the German poetic

heritage, and the moment in German culture and time within central Europe that defined his mission as a scholar and writer. Rather than turning his back on German as a medium contaminated by barbaric speakers of the language, Adler worked with the unique semantic substance embedded within it, with its malleable morphological and syntactic structures, and its richly expressive poetic tradition. Like his scholarly works, his poems bear witness to the crimes perpetrated by the National Socialists against his own person and family, his people and humanity. But just as he refused to let internment silence the playful articulation of love, he would not allow his poetry to be limited to the cultural and political catastrophes that engulfed his people and divested him of his 'Heimat' and his people. Adler never left the themes behind that drove him into exile, but he probes them in ways that go beyond the historical event and often extend to existential questions that transcend history. The spaces of meaning Adler opens up by unconventional use of language and cryptic comment will often preclude straightforward understanding. But the poetic voice consistently engages the reader, prompting exploration and interpretation with its energy and ever-changing communicative force, its precision of expression and imaginative reach. In this way it counteracts the destructive impulses Adler witnessed so directly, embodying an indomitable spirit of humanity.