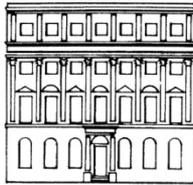


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BULLETIN

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Jeremy Adler:

*Response to Mr Barkow's Review of Theresienstadt 1941-1945*

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*Reply to Jeremy Adler*

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## RESPONSES

### Response to Mr Barkow's Review of *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*

JEREMY ADLER

May I comment on the review of the translation of my late father's book on *Theresienstadt 1941–1945* in your latest issue? It is most gratifying to read Mr Barkow's encomium. He has written finely and generously about this great book, and his essay must count as one of the first scholarly appreciations of the work in an English journal. He is surely right to class this monograph as a work from the 'heroic age' of scholarship on the Shoah—an era which created Holocaust Studies. Yet while this assessment shows him finely attuned to the book's qualities, offering your readership a welcome insight into its achievement, his judgement goes curiously adrift when reviewing the English-language version. Thus I find myself bound to comment on the latter part of his review.

After his adulatory opening, Mr Barkow launches an unparalleled attack on the award-winning English edition of a book brought out by the world's oldest academic publisher, Cambridge University Press (CUP), and one of the world's premier academic institutions, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). CUP has an experience and a set of quality controls second to none. The USHMM is equally rigorous when it comes to its imprimatur. Yet Mr Barkow damns the book in every respect, ranging from the pricing to the design, binding, editing, inclusion or exclusion of sundry material, down to the title, the translation and even the index. There is not a single aspect of the book that escapes his censure. This is not so much a review as a demolition. It is hard to believe that an edition

Editorial Note: In the last issue of the *GHIL Bulletin* we published a review of the English translation of H. G. Adler's *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945* (*GHIL Bulletin*, vol. XL, no. 1, May 2018, pp. 86–98). After publication we received a communication from Jeremy Adler which we publish here. We offered our reviewer the opportunity to reply and his response is also printed below.

brought out by CUP and USHMM and which owes its appearance in English to the support of the great father of the discipline, the late Raul Hilberg, could really be so bad. The translation was enabled by the labours of Amy Loewenhaar-Blauweiss, who tirelessly promoted H. G. Adler's work through the Terezin Publishing Project, New York, long before his novels were translated, and thus created the context for the reception of this book, as well as ensuring its passage to publication. In so doing, she won over the American academic community, which invested its intellectual capital in the venture. Can it really be so riddled with faults? Does it really lack even a single redeeming feature?

Let us begin with the book's author. It is regrettable that in just one sentence of about two lines the reviewer makes five mistakes about H. G. Adler's life. An accurate appreciation of the heroism of his wife and the details of the camps where he was detained are essential to the book's context. Mr Barkow also mocks two of the acknowledged masters of the social sciences, Georg Simmel and Franz Steiner, whose writings contributed seminal ideas that helped H. G. Adler shape the complex monograph that laid the foundations for Holocaust studies—an achievement Mr Barkow praises so highly. These errors raise doubts about the accuracy of the rest of the review.

Now let us consider the placing. The book appeared in 1955, after many years when H. G. Adler sought a publisher in America, England and Germany. To describe it as being from '1960' is quite a *faux pas*. That was the second edition. True, this was greatly expanded, but all of the important arguments are already present in the original. To give the latter date skews the nature of the achievement, and presents the work as if it were quite a latecomer, rather than of the first moment. It was in fact the very first account of the camps to use the principles for historical research laid down by Leopold von Ranke in the early nineteenth century, involving the exhaustive use of documentary evidence of every kind. It was not until Saul Friedländer's *magnum opus* almost exactly half a century later that anything comparable was attempted. Why not say so?

Next the historical context. The review sets it in the Cold War. As is well known (and as Mr Barkow could have read in the afterword), *Theresienstadt 1941–1945* was originally conceived in late February 1942, just a few weeks after Adler was first imprisoned. The war then raging, by all accounts, was pretty hot. The first draft was finished in

1948. Although H. G. Adler revised the text, in no way can it be regarded as typical of the Cold War. This was a voice and witness from the camps—but also a work of history, fully formed.

Now, consider the genesis. Mr Barkow states that it was indebted to archival research. But the book was written long before the days of the archive-jetting scholar. What enabled Adler to write this work (as it says in the afterword) was his own archive, including many materials taken from the camp administration while he was incarcerated, but preserved on his behalf by Rabbi Leo Baeck when he was shipped to Auschwitz. It is this small collection, now in the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, which gave the author such an insight into the workings of the camp. The other archives he consulted were the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Wiener Library in London. It was Mr Barkow's own predecessors, Dr Alfred Wiener and Dr Eva Reichmann, who encouraged Adler's research.

Then let us consider the publication history. The Wallstein edition of 2005 is not—as Mr Barkow wrongly states—out of print. The book is currently available from the publisher in a printing dated 2018 and at the bargain price of Euros 40. It is therefore incorrect to say that it is only available second-hand and 'much more expensive'. For a few clicks, it can be bought anywhere. It is unfortunate that your review should be marred by such incorrect bibliographical information. Furthermore, whilst it is true that the second volume of this book, *Die verheimlichte Wahrheit: Theresienstädter Dokumente* of 1958, has never been translated, it is misleading to say that it has never been reprinted. It never needed to be. For the simple reason that it has never been out of print. It is obtainable from the publisher (Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen) or via Amazon or ZVAB. All of this information is readily available online and can easily be accessed.

Mr Barkow also assails the decision not to translate the glossary. However, this would have led to an absurd conclusion: the translator would have had to explain a lengthy list of German words to an English native-speaker, unfamiliar with the German language. This would have provided a serious barrier to the book, unnecessarily detracting from its readability. Consider the comparable case of *Lingua Tertii Imperii*. This book arraigning the language of the Third Reich in a manner very similar to Adler was originally published in German in 1947. Yet it took until 1998—over 50 years!—for an

English edition translated by Dr Martin Brady to appear. That became possible not because the British public had miraculously learned to read arcane German words, but because its author, Viktor Klemperer, had become famous worldwide after the publication of his diaries, *I Shall Bear Witness*, in 1995. The public was ready to read *LTI* because it was already fully familiar with Klemperer. The opposite is the case with H. G. Adler. He is still an unknown quantity to most readers in England and America. To open this very demanding book with a technical glossary would surely have hindered the reception—and would have prevented the very thing Mr Barkow would like to achieve. That is a risk no sensible editor could take. For this reason both the Czech and the English editions have quietly dropped the word-list—*pro tem*. No doubt once the book has established itself, it will be appropriate to add the glossary, too.

Let us now turn to the accompanying matter. Mr Barkow is particularly troubled by the alleged absence of a plan of the Ghetto. He claims that this is only printed in a reduced format on the cover. If he had actually examined the edition, however, he would have found it printed on pp. 275–6. The plan has indeed been provided with a translation into English of all key terms, to make it accessible to an Anglophone audience.

Even the index comes in for censure. Yet the present index follows standard practice as found in countless works on the Holocaust and the Third Reich. The books by Christopher Browning, Peter Longerich, Götz Aly, Martin Broszat, Ian Kershaw, Richard J. Evans, Ulrich Herbert, Otto Dov Kulka, Yehuda Bauer, Saul Friedländer, Wolfgang Benz and many others are much the same. Why heap censure on this particular index when it is just like any other? The luxury days when publishers had the funds and scholars the time for triple indexing are a thing of the past.

The title particularly upsets Mr Barkow, who is vexed about certain supposed faults in the translation; but this critique is linguistically inaccurate. The German word '*Antlitz*' in the sub-title '*Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft*' is not, as Mr Barkow claims, 'slightly archaic' in this context. It is standard in modern titles such as '*Das Antlitz des Kriegeres*', '*Das Antlitz des Bösen*' or '*Das verschüttete Antlitz*', all of which are of recent origin. Using an elevated English term like 'visage' or 'countenance', as he proposes, makes no sense, and would give quite the wrong impression. He also criticizes the English for-

mulation 'coerced community' for '*Zwangsgemeinschaft*'. He notes that English cannot render H. G. Adler's remarkable neologism but then berates the translator for not finding a more appropriate version—yet has nothing to offer by way of a suggestion. He also claims that the English word 'coercion' does not exactly reflect the nature of the force imposed on the inmates of the camp. Once again, he is on shaky ground. He wrongly believes that in English 'coercion' only signifies 'social pressure'. OED is clear that it means 'the application of force to control an action' and hence a community. It can be the product of governmental action, too. The term is commonly employed in sociological writings in English in the same way as it is used here. The translation of the title proposed in your review is as inaccurate as it is misleading. In light of OED and standard usage in modern English-language sociology, there is nothing semantically wrong about the sub-title in this edition.

Mr Barkow uses a quite inaccurate image of the deportations to justify his interpretation, stating that the Jews were forced into camps 'at gunpoint'. This is doubly wrong: both as a description of the deportations, and as an account of the relevant vocabulary. The action he envisages would in fact not be '*Zwang*', but '*Gewalt*': once again he misconstrues the title. He is offering a cliché reminiscent of a Spielberg movie of the very kind this book deconstructs. We have records of the deportations. Sometimes, soldiers held weapons at the ready; sometimes, they carried rifles over their shoulders; sometimes, loosely in their arms; and sometimes, they had none at all. It all depended on the actual circumstances. Quite often there was no need for firearms—the victims were terrified enough. In Berlin if two policeman appeared at an apartment in the middle of the night, drawn pistols were hardly needed. When Prague Jews were detained for several days at the collection point, there was no need to intimidate children and the elderly, the sick and the frail, with a gun. It was a special feature of Theresienstadt, which H. G. Adler stresses in this book, that there was a surprisingly low number of armed guards. 'At gunpoint' therefore gives quite the wrong impression of deportations to Theresienstadt—we are not dealing with the terrifying deportations of huddled masses from the Warsaw Ghetto to a death camp, but of Jews transported from their bourgeois homes in Prague or Berlin or Vienna to a site that the authorities were trying to make them believe was a 'holiday spa' or a 'sunset home'. Under such cir-

cumstances the avoidance of a display of firearms must have been part of the Nazis' policy of deception. It was a remarkable feature of the deportations from Prague to Theresienstadt and of life in the camp itself that they managed without the kind of omnipresent naked violence invoked in the review.

Mr Barkow's main argument rests on his view of the translation, but, for all that he finds to berate, he offers barely a shred of evidence. His judgement is damning. Yet he only quotes one example of a paragraph he wrongly claims to make no sense, although it is perfectly comprehensible, being easy to grasp by parsing the complex syntax; and he offers only one other instance of a supposed error to support his allegations – a trivial mistake which has no bearing whatsoever on the main argument of the book. This is just one mistake in a total of 880 pages. That is a ratio of *ca.* 0.00378787 per cent. By any standard that would be an exceptionally accurate version.

Mr Barkow compares the translation unfavourably with the new edition of Primo Levi, the *Collected Works*. But today's translators of Primo Levi can draw on the resources of two scholarly institutions exclusively devoted to Levi and can check their versions against those in forty other languages. Indeed, the new edition of Levi builds on decades of research, was prepared by about fourteen translators and scholars, over 100 advisors, enjoyed the support of the Nobel laureate, Toni Morrison, and subsidies from three exceptionally well-endowed grant-giving agencies, the Guggenheim, the Rockefeller, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr Barkow even distorts the price comparison by citing the Amazon list, which discounts the Levi edition by about 30 per cent, and not the actual figures from the publishers' catalogues. The only sound basis for a comparison is to use the official prices. *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, like any other such academic book, had only a fraction of the budget and scholarly input of the Levi. It is unfortunate that your review should contain such a biased and misleading comparison.

The translator Belinda Cooper is an acclaimed specialist in her field, noted for her versions of such leading intellectuals as Dieter Grimm, who, as a teacher at Princeton, is well placed to assess her ability. The text has been examined word-by-word by a noted expert in Holocaust studies. Do his views count for nothing? Others have found much to commend. Consider the notices in *Choice* and the *New York Review of Books*. These trusted outlets lavished rare praise on the

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very book your reviewer trashes. If anyone is standing in the way of the book's reception in the English-speaking world it is not CUP or USHMM but Mr Barkow.

The acclaim accorded this English edition, which sold out in about three months, hardly supports his account. The translator, editor, copy-editor, expert reader, referees and publishers must have done something right. At the very least they deserve a fair and balanced review. Such is the success of this translation that a new edition is already in preparation. It will of course include any necessary corrections that its readers may supply.

JEREMY ADLER is emeritus Professor and Senior Research Fellow at King's College London.

Reply to Jeremy Adler

BEN BARKOW

My review has evidently caused Professor Adler distress and I regret that.

I will not deny fallibility and wherever my review contains factual errors, I take responsibility.

Prof. Adler's response to my criticism of the English language edition I find unsatisfactory. It strikes me as amounting to little more than saying that large, rich and powerful institutions cannot get things wrong; that well-connected translators and editors cannot get things wrong; and that a book bearing his father's name cannot be faulted. That is, in my personal view, problematic. What I did was to respond to what I found rather than bow to reputations. I believe that a comparison of the Cambridge University Press (CUP) edition with the 2005 Wallstein edition supports my view of the problems with the former. (Information about the availability of the Wallstein edition came from the publisher's website.)

I am happy for Prof. Adler that the book is selling well and hope that a new CUP edition will offer an opportunity to address some of the weaknesses I believe are [self-]evident in the current one.

While writing about H. G. Adler turns out to be bothersome, reading him remains very much worthwhile (for now, in the original).

BEN BARKOW is Director of the Wiener Library, London.