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★ H. G. Adler: A Life in Many Worlds

Peter Filkins
Oxford University Press (Mar 1, 2019)
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This book is an intimate, detailed, and emotionally charged look at the life and times of Hans Günther Adler (1910–1988), a pioneer in the field of Holocaust studies who devoted himself to keeping alive the memory of those who lost their lives in the twentieth century's most horrific events.

Born in Prague to a mother who became hospitalized for severe depression and a father who was unable to care for him, young Adler boarded with various families, resulting in an unstable, unhappy childhood. Withdrawing into himself, he discovered a love for literature and nature that sustained him throughout his life. With racial and nationalist tensions flaring, Adler, a Jew, felt himself to be an exile in his native land, writing that "the very ground that one so casually refers to as one's 'homeland' sank away beneath my feet." To protect his inner life from the harshness of a world in turmoil and despair, he learned to find or create an oasis around himself no matter where he was; this ability was to prove essential to his surviving several concentration camps, including Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. Compounding his suffering, the writer, scholar, radio essayist, and key contributor for the prosecution in the trial of Adolf Eichmann lost his beloved first wife to the gas chamber when she refused to let her mother die alone.

A deeply moving tribute to a man dedicated to keeping human dignity alive amid some of the greatest depravity the world has ever known, Filkins's abundantly researched, honest book reveals Adler as a wounded, flawed human being but also as a man gifted with inner strength, endurance, and the burning desire to take what he was given and make of his life an inextinguishable light for a world bound by darkness.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March/April 2019)

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