

CRITICAL INSIGHTS

The Diary of a
Young Girl

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Editors

Ruth Amir & Pnina Rosenberg

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About This Volume

Ruth Amir and Pnina Rosenberg

Sheets of papers written or painted clandestinely by incarcerated diarists and artists during the Holocaust document their Kafkaesque experiences and provide testimony for posterity. These are often the ONLY space upon which these diarist and artists obtained control over their otherwise vulnerable and fragile existence. Though Anne Frank's writing came to its abrupt end several days before her arrest, thus documenting "only" her life in hiding at the Secret Annex, her diary sheets provided her with a safe haven controlled by her.

Anne was confined to a very limited and claustrophobic space, with very little control over her daily routine; these conditions were imposed by the necessity of eliminating any trace of her public existence. Nevertheless, her diary not only enabled her to locate herself beyond her immediate concrete time/space through reminiscences of the past and plans for the future, but also to assert her being and gain some sense of control over her life. Her *licentia poetica* (poetic/narrative license) granted her a non-negligible dose of freedom, at least in the intellectual sense. She was able to write her life from her own vantage point and address it to her chosen audience; she was at liberty in her choice of words/languages, and she rejoiced in the freedom to write and re-write her diary/confessional memoir.

The Diary's manuscript reveals its massive rewriting and editing: she omitted, added, updated, and "rectified" her (hi)story. Thus, those sheets of paper were her vital tools for creating an alternative, self-controlled spatial reality to replace her otherwise chaotic living space. Ironically, this dynamic of perpetual editing and re-editing process also characterizes the Diary since its first publication in 1947, two years after her death in Bergen-Belsen. One might say that "the young girl's" haunted, agitated spirit continues to reveal "censored" secrets that were confided to those sheets some seventy years ago.

This volume sheds new light on the most recent engagements with this iconic Diary, including three-dimensional (3D) video representations, virtual reality (VR) films, applications, and escape rooms. These new technology-based adaptations mediate the Diary for contemporary audiences. The articles in this volume present a multi-disciplinary engagement that emphasizes the Diary as a living document that transcends its own genre, and its smooth transition into a new era.

Critical Insights: The Diary of a Young Girl is divided into four sections. Its introductory essay and the editors' article "From the Red-Checkered Notebook to Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*" consider the diary's unceasing evolution from a "traditional" black-and-white printed book to a cutting-edge filmic technology—a colored three-dimensional virtual reality movie. While the reader is metaphorically immersed and moved by Anne's book, the 3D and VR adaptations enable the viewer to visit the Attic and to virtually reconstruct life as a hider.

The next section, "Critical Contexts," presents four different approaches for analyzing the Diary. Ruth Amir, in her essay "Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Bergen-Belsen: Tracing Anne Frank's Dislocations," lays out the historical and economic background to Anne's passages of life. While the Diary was written in Amsterdam, it is contextualized by the Frankfurt and Bergen-Belsen chapters of Anne's life. The essay also deals with the modernist constructions of children and childhood and their deconstruction in the Diary. It traces the power relations and the development of Anne as a child-victim within the context of the politics of victimhood.

In the article "Anne Frank's Diary: Self-Portrait of an Artistic and Ethical Evolution," Rachel Feldhay Brenner discusses the maturation of the diarist in two major respects: her growth as an artist and her ethical evolution. Brenner relates to the poignancy of Frank's writing: a poignancy that emerges from her awareness of the terrifying historical reality against which she writes her life story and in which she must develop as a moral person. Brenner focuses on Frank's struggle to find the proper idiom to depict the reality that she wished to transmit to her readers: her life as a hider living

in the shadow of deportation and annihilation. The article shows that, in the reality of the Annex, art became a lifeline, that is, a life-sustaining system that enabled a momentary sense of control. The merging of Anne's self-definition as a morally responsible person with her development as an artist merged with her self-definition as a morally responsible person manifested itself in her constant examination of her guiding moral principles and ethics.

Margaret Sönsler Breen's article "Coming of Age within the Secret Annex: Dislocations and 'Frankness' in Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*" examines coming-of-age issues, though Anne Frank herself was not allowed to come of age. She argues that this tragic paradox, embedded in the historical events, characterizes Anne's most famous and fundamental activity—her writing. While discussing Anne's authority as a writer and her capacity for both self-representation and self-authorship, Sönsler Breen states that the Diary offers Anne emotional and intellectual breathing room and a space to record her specific loneliness, produced by the immediate context of living in hiding in order to escape annihilation. Contrasting sharply with the home that language and writing offer her as an author is her political homelessness. Reading the Diary without attention to this homelessness and, relatedly, the last seven months of her life, which the diary does not document, has led to the text's critical misinterpretation and caused a reductive treatment of the text.

"*The Diary of a Young Girl* and Children's Literature of Atrocity" by Sarah Minslow concludes this section. Drawing on Lawrence Langer's term "literature of atrocity," Minslow underscores the necessity of teaching young people about the Holocaust and other global conflicts and examines the body of children's literature of atrocity with particular attention to what authorial strategies are employed and to what potential effect. Minslow's chapter situates *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a useful text for teaching the Holocaust within a broader historical context and argues that it should be taught in conjunction with other sources in order to provide a complex and more complete knowledge of the various experiences of the millions

of victims of the Holocaust, genocide, and mass violence including the Frank family.

“Critical Readings,” the volume’s third section is comprised of nine articles representing various aspects of the Diary, based on its reception in various geographical and cultural topographies, across multiple media, and via young contemporary “Anne Franks.”

In “Confessional Writing: The Historiography and the Critical Reception of Anne Frank’s Diary,” Bill Younglove discusses the Diary’s various editions and versions. Younglove states that due largely to the US-produced and worldwide disseminated 1955 play and the 1959 film that followed it, the narrative of Anne’s teen romance came to obscure the diary’s fundamental story of Jewish captivity and extermination. Prominent Holocaust scholars have railed, particularly, against the decontextualization, de-Judaicization, and dehistoricization of this prevailing image of Anne as a love-struck teenager.

With his second essay, “Lessons and Legacy: Educational/Curriculum Development in Teaching the Holocaust through Anne Frank’s Diary,” Younglove responds to this reductive popular image of Anne. He directs readers’ attention to the vast and panoramic display of diverse educational tools that have developed through the many years of appreciating and teaching the Diary. He emphasizes that curricular materials linking Anne’s story to the larger Holocaust story abound and can be accessed via the Anne Frank House or Fonds-based multinational centers, exhibitions, worldwide museums, valuable electronic sites, and Anne’s diarist contemporaries.

With “Anne Frank: A Critical Deconstructive Reading of a Girl’s Diary,” Yoad Eliaz in turn inquires “Why was the literary text most identified with the Holocaust written in the genre of a diary, and why specifically a girl’s diary?” In an attempt to answer those questions, Eliaz analyzes childhood through ideas that are embedded in queer theory. His reading suggests that Anne’s diary should not be solely interpreted in a binary childhood-adulthood relationship but rather in a non-binary relationship. Eliaz concludes that childhood is not a substantial identity; it is, at most, a human condition that one can

encounter at all ages. So, too, adulthood is not a substantial identity; unrelated to age, it is a human condition defined by circumstances.

For her part, Anna-Leena Perämäki writes about “Contemporary Anne Franks: Zlata Filipović’s and Malala Yousafzai’s Wartime Diaries.” Her article focuses on the diary of the Bosnian girl Zlata Filipović, written during the Bosnian War in the beginning of the 1990s, and the autobiography/memoir of the Pakistani Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, who wrote a blog for BBC Urdu about her life under the Taliban occupation in 2009. Both texts, like the diary of Anne Frank, have gained wide readership among young people.

With “Anne Frank is Dead and is Living in New York,” volume editors Ruth Amir and Pnina Rosenberg in turn direct attention to the critical reception of Anne Frank’s myth in American Jewish Holocaust culture. Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer* (1979), Robert Skoold’s *If the Whole Body Dies: Raphael Lemkin and the Treaty Against Genocide* (2006), and Shalom Auslander’s *Hope: A Tragedy* (2012) “revive” Anne Frank by summoning and incorporating her as a fictional character into their texts. These works, which offer an alternative scenario in which Anne Frank had survived Bergen-Belsen and is living in America, participate in the “What if?” school of fiction, which explores imaginary alternative scenarios of “real” people and events. The phantasmic summoning of Anne in all three works not only suggests the prominence of Anne Frank and the Diary in the memory of the Holocaust, but also attempts to probe the boundaries of the authors’ hyphenated identity as Jewish-Americans.

In “Anne Frank’s Diary on Stage and Screen: Controversy, Consensus, and Adaptation,” Erika Hughes then considers the stories of the Diary’s numerous theatrical and filmic adaptations from the mid-1950s forward. She points out that much as the Diary itself has been edited, whitewashed, excerpted, and utilized, so too have the performed representations changed and altered the Diary. Hughes’ chapter presents a comparative analysis of not only the 1950s stage plays by Meyer Levin and Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett and the film directed by George Stevens, but also more recent small-screen productions, such as documentaries from

the 1990s and multiple miniseries from the 2000s. Hughes also discusses the numerous Anne Frank stage plays appearing in the 1990s and 2000s, including the 1997 revival of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, starring Natalie Portman, and *Tagebuch*, a 2006 one-woman show at the Berliner Ensemble.

The next essay shifts attention to the Diary's reception in Japan. In "*Hello Kitty: The Reception of Anne Frank's Diaries in Japan*," Julie Higashi offers a critical analysis of the uses to which Anne's diaries have been put, in and outside the Japanese classroom. Higashi analyzes the Diary's tremendous popularity since its first translation in 1952. She suggests that, as the Allied Powers' occupation of Japan ended, the urge to rebuild a more peaceful and democratic society inspired young people to identify themselves with Anne, who refused to give up hope and continued to have a positive outlook on life. Over time, the book has adapted for plays, animated films, and manga comic books. In the 1990s, with new translations of the Diary and with manga books specifically intended for young schoolchildren, a "new" Anne emerged, and readers were gradually encouraged to place the story in a historical context.

Anne Frank's Diary's adaptation into a graphic novel in 2010 is in turn the topic of Pnina Rosenberg's article "When History Becomes Her Story: Anne Frank's Diary as a Graphic Novel." The *Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography* by the American comics artists Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón is a rich account that goes far beyond the limits of the iconic Diary's and incorporates events that occurred prior to and after the Diary's last entry. Rosenberg focuses on the crucial role of the tangible objects—Anne Frank's Diary, the Annex, and the horse chestnut tree, which, over the course of the time, have attained the status of iconic symbols in Anne's story and in the graphic novel's imagery. Ironically, by skillfully weaving and intertwining the inanimate relic-like objects throughout the graphic novel, the artists, despite their goal of representing Anne as a person and not as the larger-than-life symbol, have also subtly depicted Anne's transformation from the short-lived adolescent into the universal and perpetual myth.

The section ends with Karen Frostig's essay on "The Anne Frank House: Memorial as Text," which traces the architectural development of the Secret Annex, its physical attributes in relation to Anne's writing. Elaborating on the structural layout of the space, Frostig explores the dynamic interplay between the annex as a claustrophobic environment and Anne's private and expansive ritual of journaling. Highlighting specific areas of the house, the essay posits a relationship between family life, the emotional experience of an adolescent coming of age, and the art and disposition of writing a diary in confinement.

Finally, the volume's "Resources" section provides the reader with chronological information about the Franks and the Diary as well as additional reading material—books, articles, plays, and children's and adult literature; these materials provide the readers with further insights into the evaluation of Anne Frank's Diary. It is the editors' hope that the volume will reflect the continued global interest in the Diary and its challenging adaptations in the twenty-first century.