

What Anne Meant:

Generic Instability and the Transmission of Anne Frank's Diary

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Deborah E. Lipstadt begins an appendix on the *Diary of Anne Frank* in her book *Denying the Holocaust*, by noting that Frank's work "has become one of the... most popular targets"¹ for neo-nazis, and other so-called "revisionists" interested in suppressing historical knowledge of the Holocaust. She goes on to add:

It would seem to be a dubious allocation of the deniers' energies that they try to prove that a small book by a young girl full of musings about her life, relationship with her parents, emerging sexuality, and movie stars was not really written by her.

(Lipstadt, p. 229)

But Lipstadt's characterisation is disingenuous. Anne Frank's *Diary* has never been just "a small book by a young girl." And the Holocaust deniers are not the only ones to have been impressed by the book's importance. From the time of its first publication in Dutch in 1950, and especially since the appearance of its English translation in 1952, Anne Frank's "small book" has become a massive international best seller. By 1993, Lipstadt reports, it had sold more than 20 million copies in over forty countries (p.230); at one point in its history, it was outselling all other books except the bible. And it has rarely dropped out of the popular and scholarly press. American discussion of the book began almost immediately after the Dutch text was published in 1950, and even sub-aspects of the *Diary's* transmission and reception – like its adaptation to the stage – have come to develop their own scholarly traditions and bibliographies.

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¹ Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust*, p. 229.

So what is it, then about the diaries that makes them so controversial? Why do Holocaust deniers consider it worth their while attempting to prove them to be a forgery? And why do legitimate scholars devote so much time and money to demonstrating their authenticity and arguing over their interpretation?

In the case of the neo-nazis, as Lipstadt has shown, the principal cause lies in their *falsus in uno; falsus in omnibus* approach to World War II history. By casting doubt on this one source of Holocaust historiography, the deniers hope to cast doubt on our whole knowledge of Nazi atrocities during World War II. To paraphrase (not unfairly) the argument of one prominent denier: by supposedly ‘proving’ that the Franks could not have run their vacuum cleaner on 5 August 1943 as Anne Frank’s Diary claims they did, the deniers hope to suggest that the entire *endlösung* never occurred.² Or in other words, if you can’t trust the portrayal of Franks’ cleaning schedule, how on earth can you trust the truckloads of documents, eyewitness accounts, and confessions presented at the Nuremberg trials.

As many scholars have demonstrated in the last few years, there is not much one can say in the face of this kind of silliness, except perhaps to reveal the factual inaccuracies from which the deniers are arguing, or point out the intellectual poverty and lack of sophistication in their historical method. Or in this specific case to show a) that Anne is careful to note throughout her diaries that the vacuum cleaner is only run when nobody is in the building – either at night, or during the lunch hour when everybody but Otto Frank’s most trusted employees are away, and b) that this fact ought now, according to the deniers’ reasoning, remove all further need to engage in the pseudo-historical ‘revision’ of our knowledge of Hitler’s anti-Jewish policies.

More sophisticated and better-trained scholars, for their part, tend not to dispute the over-all accuracy of Anne Frank’s diaries. They get instead involved in arguments about their

significance. About whether the Frank's story is typical of Jewish experiences during World War II? or about whether the iconisation of Anne Frank as *the* archetypal nazi victim has had a positive or negative effect on holocaust remembrance? They ask themselves about the reasons why the Diary has proven to be such a big hit with popular audiences, and wonder if there is a hidden anti-Semitism in our preference for this story of an assimilated and well-educated Western Jew over the equally (or even more) horrific stories told by less assimilated, less wealthy, or less well-educated.

As loath as most of us are to admit it, both sets of questions – those of the neo-Nazis who question the diaries' authenticity and those of the more legitimate scholars who debate their significance – have proved very productive. Questions about the diaries' historical meaning and reception have produced some fascinating research into how history is formed, the uses to which it is put, the way it is disseminated in mass culture, and the extent to which history and ideology are intertwined. And the attempts of the so-called revisionists to cast doubt on the diaries' composition have paradoxically given us a manuscript that can be more certainly ascribed to its author than any other literary or historical text I can think of. As a result of an extensive forensic examination of the manuscripts by Dutch Government crime labs in the early 1980s (an investigation which was conducted in direct response to the claims of holocaust deniers), we now know Anne Frank wrote her diaries more surely than we know Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales*, Will Langland wrote *Piers Plowman*, Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, and, I am willing to wager, more surely than we know Samuel Clemens wrote *Huckleberry Finn* or Byron *Don Juan* – after all, unlike Anne Frank, we rely simply on signatures and eyewitness accounts in these last two cases. Nobody I know has ever checked to see the postage stamps used by either writer have the right kind of glue, or that the ink in their manuscripts is titanium free.

² Faurisson.

This leads us back, however, to Lipstadt's original statement. Why has *this* particular diary proved so controversial? Even leaving aside the neo-nazis, why have so many people of *good* faith found so much to argue about in this particular work? In fact, I believe, the answer to these question lies in a fundamental misunderstanding about Anne's intentions in writing her diaries. A misunderstanding which has affected its entire transmission, and involves our recognition of the genre in which she was working. On the one hand, as was even recognised -- albeit in a limited way -- during the war itself, the enormity of Nazi crimes in Occupied Europe requires documentation. We want and need first person accounts of what happened to keep reminding us that it in fact did happen. On the other, however, there is considerable evidence to suggest that Anne Frank herself did not intend her book to fulfil this need; while she was in fact prompted into rewriting her diaries for publication by a call for such war memoirs by the Dutch government, Frank seems paradoxically to have seen this rewriting as an opportunity to turn her work into something greater than a mere record of what happened to whom (although I hasten to add that it is rigidly accurate in the historical details it recounts). Composed as a self-consciously literary memoir, Anne's Diaries have attracted so much controversy because we have consistently failed to treat them as such; in attempting to turn them into something they are not, subsequent editors and publishers have produced hybrid texts which ultimately fail to satisfy the historical demands placed upon them.

I have been speaking thus far rather non-committally of Anne Frank's "diaries." Before I go any farther, however, I need to clarify exactly which diaries I am referring to. For it is a poorly understood fact that Anne herself wrote more than one account of her life in hiding, and that considerable differences in organisation and -- to a lesser extent episodes and wording -- exist both among her various manuscript versions and between her manuscripts and their subsequent transcriptions, editions and translations.

Just before the Frank family went into hiding, Anne Frank was given a small plaid-covered diary for her thirteenth birthday. She began writing in it right away (the first entry is for June 12, 1942), and continued to do so on a near daily basis in this and subsequent notebooks right up until three days before her arrest on August 4, 1944. Approximately two months before they were discovered, Anne began to edit and rewrite this daily journal on loose pages of tracing paper given to her from her father's office. She entitled this revised version of her diary *Het Achterhuis*, or the Secret Annexe, and mentions several times the possibility of its publication. While it is possible to show that she began work on this revision after considerably thought in late May, 1944, its first entry is dated nearly two years earlier to June 20, 1942; in fact Anne was to maintain the pretence that her entries were being written as they occurred throughout the entire revision. The last entry in this revised text, presumably written about the time of her arrest in August, is March 29, 1944 – or the day she first mentions the possibility of revising her diary in her daily journal. Finally, in addition to these two versions of her *Diary*, Anne also compiled a third text: a collection of short stories and other sketches known as *Verhaaltjes van het Achterhuis*, or 'Stories from the Secret Annexe.' Some of these stories are based on incidents recorded in her daily journal or its revision; others have nothing obvious to do with her life in hiding.

Anne's papers were rescued from the Annexe and returned to her father and literary executor Otto Frank when it became clear that Anne had died in the German concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. Within days, he began to make a typewritten compilation from the surviving manuscripts which he then translated into German and sent to his mother in Switzerland as a his lost daughter. Both this typescript and the German translation appear to have been lost. Otto Frank then began a second typescript, this time intended for circulation within the Netherlands, and, perhaps, eventual commercial publication. Otto based his second typescript primarily on Anne's revised version in the "Loose papers," but both added material

from the unrevised daily journal and omitted various entries and elements he considered *unwesentlich*, egregiously insulting to the memory of his wife, or to contain unfair or unfounded rumours about third persons. This second compilation was edited for style by a playwright friend of the Frank family, Albert Cauvren, retyped and ultimately submitted to various publishing houses in the Netherlands for consideration. All printed editions and translations of the *Diary of Anne Frank* stem ultimately from this revised version of Otto Frank's second typescript. Until the publication in 1986 of a critical edition of the surviving manuscripts, no complete text of Anne's own revised version of the Diary was available to the general public.

A fourth and for our purposes today final complication in the textual history of the *Diary* came once it was accepted for publication – first by the Dutch publishing house Contact, and subsequently by publishing houses in France, Germany, and ultimately Doubleday in the United States. As with any work destined for commercial publication, Otto Frank's typescript was edited by the staff at Contact for style and content. Changes were made in language, punctuation, and paragraph division in order to bring the text in line with the publisher's house style, and more importantly, a number of entries (25 in fact) were deleted as either too uninteresting, or more often, too controversial for a general reading public (including some discussions of menstruation and a perhaps somewhat lesbian-like scene in which Anne touches a girlfriend's breasts and expresses a desire to kiss her). While his version of the *Diary* was being shopped around the Dutch publishers, Otto Frank also commissioned a new German translation of the complete transcription by his friend Anneliese Schütz. This version contained the scenes omitted by Contact's more prudish editors, but seems to have been relatively free with the Diary's specific wording – particularly its frequent negative references to German culture and people other than the Nazis. Anne's claim that "all civilized languages are spoken within the Secret Annexe – and so no German!", for example,

becomes “all civilised languages are spoken... but softly”; likewise, Anne’s “bravery in the war or against the Germans” becomes “bravery in war or in the struggle against the Occupation.” The final major translation, into English for Doubleday, was based primarily on the first Dutch edition and the copy-edited typescript used by Contact. To this were added some but not all of the episodes cut by Contact’s editors. The English edition is closer to the Dutch edition than the German in most readings, but, like all the major translations and editions of this work contains some sentences and passages of uncertain origin, presumably to be attributed to an editor at some point in the production.

The result of all this is that there are at least eight, and, if we go on and discuss the American stage and screen adaptations, perhaps as many as eleven or twelve different texts known in the popular imagination as “The Diary of Anne Frank.” I have gone through them in order both to clarify the distinctions I am about to make between Anne’s manuscripts, and to give you some idea of the motives behind the work of those responsible for preserving, compiling, publishing, and translating her work since the war. Since Otto Frank’s first attempt to share his daughter’s diaries with the surviving members of his family, editors and publishers have tended invariably to see the work as what Dutch historian Jacques Presser has described as an ‘ego-document’: an unadulterated, eyewitness account to Anne’s life and development as an adolescent coming of age during the Nazi occupation of Holland. While some attempts have occasionally been made to take her own express wishes for the documents into account – the Dutch edition of the *Diary* bears Anne’s preferred title, *Het Achterhuis*, and the list of pseudonyms used in all popular editions (the Van Daans, Dr. van Pels, Elli, Mr. Kugler) is ultimately derived from a list proposed by Anne herself – these wishes have nevertheless invariably been subordinated whenever they seem to clash with our own ideas of the works’ *real* value: as an historical document, as an adolescent diary, as a memorial to a lost daughter, or simply as an extremely lucrative commercial property. Otto Frank combines

parts of three distinct original manuscripts in order to give his friends and family a better picture of his dead child. The Dutch Government submits Anne's manuscripts to the type of forensic examination otherwise reserved for potentially fraudulent legal documents. Otto's typescripts are edited and translated by commercial publishing houses with one eye firmly kept on what the market will accept. And nearly all readers of the published editions mention how fortunate we are to have such a well-written, but apparently spontaneous account of the trials facing a young girl as she matures – in the words of Eleanor Roosevelt's preface to the American edition – during those "crucial years from thirteen to fifteen in which change is so swift and so difficult for every young girl."

My goal here is not to criticise these motives. With the exception of the Neo-Nazi attacks on the diaries' authenticity – which have frequently descended into the grossest of *ad hominem* attacks on Anne, her father, and various other people involved in the Diary's publication – each of these responses can be seen as a legitimate and appropriate response to Anne's work and our need for eyewitness accounts of Nazi barbarity in Occupied Europe. And as the rise of the racist right in Europe and the Canadian and U.S. West more than amply demonstrates, Anne's *Diary*, like it or not, still has a crucial historical and ideological role to play in countering attempts to excuse or contextualise Hitler's war-time policies.

What I would like to do, however, is point out the extent to which our need to use Anne's work as a historical text has obscured its very real literary value. In our fear of offending Anne's memory, or of giving the so-called revisionists ammunition for what is in fact simply a continuation the Nazi 'big lie', we have to my mind paradoxically suppressed Anne Frank's greatest achievement. By insisting that the *Diary* is real and unmitigated history, we have failed to appreciate the extent to which it is also a conscious and artificial literary construct – and in so doing so have failed to recognise what may be one of the greatest literary works written this century.

These are big claims, and I have time only to provide you with an outline of my hypothesis. In short, however, I will argue that the Anne Frank we all know and love is in fact a carefully and self-consciously created literary character; as worthy of respect in this regard as Stephan Dedalus in Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* or, perhaps even more appositely, the speaker of poems like Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and "Prelude". Using the entries of her daily journal as her raw material, Anne shapes and selects its entries to produce in the 'loose papers' an entirely new and extremely focussed account of her development as a woman and a writer. In this regard, her final draft, the so-called "loose papers," is in effect a true-to-life *Bildungsroman*: a *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl*.

Perhaps the first thing to realise about this literary *Diary of Anne Frank* is how seriously and self-consciously Anne set about revising and rewriting her text for publication. Although it is clear from entries dated throughout the first three months of 1944 that Anne had been going through her earlier diary entries for some time, the idea that she might be able to publish them as a book after the war appears to have come to her as she listened to a broadcast by Gerrit Bolkestein, the Dutch Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences on March 28, 1944 calling for the establishment a national library of diaries, letters, and other first hand material about life in the Netherlands under Nazi rule:

History cannot be written on the basis of official decisions and documents alone. If our descendants are to understand fully what we as a nation have had to endure and overcome during these years, then what we really need are ordinary documents – a diary, letters from a worker in Germany, a collection of sermons given by a parson or a priest. Not until we succeed in bringing together vast quantities of this simple, everyday material will the picture of our struggle for freedom be painted in its full depth and glory.³

As Anne notes in her daily journal for the following day, the inhabitants of the Secret annexe immediately saw the relevance of her journal to this proposal, and "rushed upon it." Anne's

³ English ed. p. 59

Peter van Pels [or Peter van Daans, as he is known in published versions of the book]. Like any person experiencing the ups and downs of a new relationship, Anne spends a lot of time gushing about her hopes and fears in her journal. She reports dreams of old boyfriends, wonders about the future with her new boyfriend, and spends an immense amount of time describing how she looked in Peter's eyes or placed her cheek beside his. A good writer by the beginning of 1944 – the time at which her affair reaches its height – these passages are almost invariably commented upon by readers and critics as being most characteristic of Anne's work.

The trouble is, however, that Anne in fact cut most of these passages from her revised text. While she acknowledges the beginning of the affair and subsequent rise in intensity in *het Achterhuis*, she nevertheless also remove most examples of her most 'adolescent' prose. The fact that we know them so well them is due to Otto Frank, who put them back in by copying the entries directly out of the original journal when he came to make his typescript compilation. The difference this makes in Anne's diary as a whole can only be appreciated in the critical edition, where one finds page after page of gushy descriptions of her love affair in the original diary and the first printed edition, but not in Anne's own revised manuscript. To give you an example of the type of thing Anne omitted, I have copied out the following passage showing her original and revised accounts of a dream she had about her first boyfriend:

[pp.450-451]

No matter how attractive and innocent we may find Anne's crush on Peter, it is clear that she herself did not want us to give it nearly as much prominence as we do.

There is one other significant fact about the passage I have just quoted, moreover: namely that the original version is from 1944, not 1942 – indeed within a couple of months of her decision to start her revision of the diary. Where the changes to the earliest entries from

response to this broadcast is more interesting, however. Instead of a call to preserve her daily journal as a witness to the occupation, Anne seems to have seen Bolkestein's announcement as an indication that there might be a market for a revised version of her work after the war. While she clearly recognises the value of her diary as an historical document, she begins almost immediately in this entry to think of it in publishing terms. She compares it to a "romance" and to a "detective story," and even in describing it as a sort of memoir, appears to be at least as concerned with its possible market value and audience reaction as its historical value:

Bolkesteijn, an M.P., was speaking in the Dutch News from London, and he said that they ought to make a collection of diaries and letters after the war. Of course they all made a rush at my diary immediately.

Just imagine how interesting it would be if I were to publish a romance of the "Secret Annex." The title alone would be enough to make people think it was a detective story. But, seriously, it would be quite funny 10 years after the war if we Jews were to tell how we lived and what we ate and talked about here. Although I tell you a lot, still, even so, you only know very little of our lives.... I would need to keep on writing the whole day if I was to tell you everything in detail.⁴

The idea that her 'book' might be more than a simple eyewitness account takes hold and grows in the course of the next few months. Consoling herself on April 5 after a fit of depression about the slow progress of the war, Anne mentally sums up her abilities as a writer, concentrating on her literary side – "the descriptions of the 'secret annex' are humorous and there's lots in my diary that speaks":

And now it's all over, I must work, so as not to be a fool, to get on to become a journalist, because that's what I want. I know that I can write, a couple of my stories are good, my descriptions of the "Secret Annex" are humorous, there's lots in my diary that speaks, but – whether I have real talent remains to be seen.⁵

By May 11, her planned book, now definitely to be called Het Achterhuis, has clearly come to be seen as a work distinct from her daily journal – which she now sees as containing an useful supply of her raw material:

⁴ pp. 578-9.

Where the original entry presents a rather confused account of the various rooms and features of their new home, the revised version offers a far more schematic presentation (indeed, in the published text this description is keyed without significant variation directly to a schematic diagram of the Annexe as well).

Other changes between Anne's original and revised versions of the Diary include an improved sense of story structure. Where her first account of events – appropriately enough for a journal – tends to concentrate on explaining simply *what* has happened, her more mature, revised version devotes a considerable amount of effort to the construction of a narrative line. Here again, are two examples from the original and revised versions of the Diary:

[pp. 206-210]

In addition to being longer, the revised version is also far more dramatic: there is more dialogue, there is less about the extraneous visit of Hello, and there is far more suspense: whereas we learn in the first version we learn immediately who has been called up by the Germans (Anne of course knew by the time she sat down to write the entry), the revised version builds suspense by withholding the information until much later – presumably until the point at which Anne had in fact originally learned it herself in real life.

Similar changes show up in the organisation of the work as a whole. Where the original journal records events as they happen or as its author has the time to write them down, Anne's revised text includes (and omits) items according to a definite plan. This is the area in which I need to do the most work, and, surprisingly, it is the area in which the least work appears to have been done by others; but I can give you one example: the affair with

1942 might be explained away as a natural reflection of Anne's greater maturity at the time of her revision, the changes she makes here are to material written almost coincidentally with her decision to revise her journal. The fact that she continues to write entries in a similar vein in her daily journal right up until her arrest but to omit them from her revised diary, indeed, suggests that she saw the two texts as complementary rather than simply separate drafts.

My hope is that this information about the extensiveness, coherence, and deliberateness of Anne's revisions to the *Diary* has come to you as a surprise. While most people I've spoken to informally about this paper have known about the additions and adaptations made by Otto Frank to his daughter's manuscripts, I've yet to meet anybody who realised that the majority of the text we know as the *Diary of Anne Frank* is actually based on an extensively revised text written by Anne over a two month period immediately preceding her arrest. The fact that we do not realise this, however, is the point – and evidence both of Anne's greatness as an artist, and the disservice we do to her memory when we insist on treating her diary as unmediated holocaust history – or a relatively straightforward if unusually well-written collection of teenage “musings about... life, relationship with... parents, emerging sexuality, and movie stars.” For what is so striking about Anne's revised work is the fact that she is so completely believable the whole time: as a newly-turned thirteen-year old who has just been forced into hiding, as a young adolescent who gets into terrible fights with her mother, as a surprisingly mature fourteen year old who can look back on the whole of her life in hiding with such shame for ‘how she was then’. Despite the evidence of self-conscious revision I have shown, Anne never lets on at any point in her revised text that the material we are reading was not in fact edited into its final form on the date given at the top of the page but by a nearly fifteen year old young woman who ‘wants to become a famous writer’.