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Holocaust Mothers and Daughters

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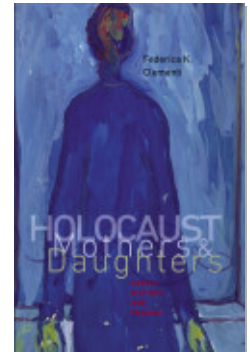
Published by Brandeis University Press

Clementi, K..

Holocaust Mothers and Daughters: Family, History, and Trauma.

Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013.

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CHAPTER 6

“I HAVE TO SAVE MYSELF WITH A JOKE”

Anne Frank and the Survival of Humor

The diary is a gem. Never before, I believe, has anything been written enabling us to see so clearly into the soul of a young girl . . . during the years of puberal [sic] development. We are shown how the sentiments pass from the simple egoism of childhood to attain maturity; how the relationships to parents . . . first shape themselves . . . how friendships are formed and broken. We are shown the dawn of love . . . so that the child suffers under the load of secret knowledge but gradually becomes enabled to shoulder the burden. Of all these things we have a description at once so charming, so serious, and so artless, that it cannot fail to be of supreme interest to educationists and psychologists.



SIGMUND FREUD, preface to *A Young Girl's Diary*

On the dreary morning of April 15, 1947, a man about to be hanged asked for four wishes to be granted. The first was for a cup of coffee, quite a luxury in those hard times. The war having recently ended, Europe was a pile of rubble, and economic (as well as spiritual) recovery was still out of most people's reach. As word of the request spread from the gallows, the crowd exchanged ideas about how to respect that highly honorable tradition in Western culture: the fulfillment of a condemned prisoner's last wishes. Eventually, a woman came forward and, in an act of mercy, admitted to having a little bit of coffee at home (possibly an implicit confession of black marketeering). She agreed to prepare some for the prisoner. It was thus that Rudolph Franz Ferdinand Höss, the Kommandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau, its creator and absolute ruler, sipped his last cup of coffee as the sun rose over the slightly frosted fields and meadows lined in the distance with old, lanky birch trees. Despite the sizable crowd that had spontaneously gathered at the execution site, all was quiet and still at the inoperative Auschwitz camp. For his second and third wishes, Höss asked for a priest and for a message to be delivered to his wife and children. Finally, he expressed his fourth and last desire: "I ask for the Polish people to forgive me for all I have done to them."¹

Thus disappeared, contrite for his sins, one of the most murderous figures of the twentieth century. Among those sins, Höss understood his gravest to be “that I believed everything faithfully which came from the top,” as he put it in his last letter to his family from prison, a day after his death sentence was pronounced. The Polish people undoubtedly had much to forgive the Germans for, after the devastating war waged on them by their insatiable Teutonic neighbors. But what of the Jews? In Höss’s missives from prison to his wife and children, he expresses repentance and a newly acquired understanding of how misspent his life had been. However, he makes no mention of the Jews. Here is a typical formulation that elides the ethnic component of his crimes: “It is tragic that, although I was by nature gentle, good-natured, and very helpful, I became the greatest destroyer of human beings who carried out every order to exterminate people no matter what.”² Yet despite his professed gentle nature, Höss had murdered before the Holocaust; he and a group of comrades who “had come back from World War I and couldn’t fit into civilian life anymore”³ demonstrated their passion for their homeland through the illegal and violent bravado of the paramilitary Free Corps (an organization opposed by the government). In one episode, they beat to death a man who had allegedly betrayed a German friend of Höss to the French. Höss was arrested for this crime in 1923, accused of being the ringleader of the attacking group, found guilty, and sentenced to ten years in prison. After that conviction, he proudly admitted to having committed the crime, claiming that the victim, named Parchimer, was a traitor and deserved no better. However, Höss complained of having been unjustly labeled the *Führer* of the group: “Then and even now, I am still firmly convinced that this traitor deserved to die. Since in all probability no German court would have sentenced him, we passed judgment on him by an unwritten law which we had instituted ourselves because of the need of the times.”⁴ Tough times, Höss suggests, call for tough measures. Yet what times could possibly call for the murder of 1.5 million children and millions of adults? At his Nuremberg trial, Höss was interrogated about the severity of the Nazis’ measures. “So a child of three or four years old was dangerous to the German people? . . . The German people could not rise at all because of the four-year-old Jewish children?” a lawyer asked him.⁵ Höss simply replied, “Yes,” an answer that most of us find fathomless to this day.

The truth is that tough times elicit different reactions from different people. In the harsh conditions and shifting moral climate of wartime Europe, some Christians responded heroically rather than immorally. More than 20,000 people in Holland, for example, hid Jews at the risk of their own lives. Perhaps the most famous among them was an expatriate from Vienna living in Amsterdam.

Her name was Hermine Santrouschitz, whose married name was Gies, but we all know her as simply Miep. Over the course of twenty-five months between 1942 and 1944, Miep was instrumental to the survival of three families in hiding and one memorable girl: Anne Frank. Miep writes: “I willingly did what I could to help. My husband did as well. It was not enough. There is nothing special about me . . . I was only willing to do what was asked of me and what seemed necessary at the time . . . My story is a story of very ordinary people during extraordinarily terrible times. Times the like of which I hope with all my heart will never, never come again. It is for all of us ordinary people all over the world to see to it that they do not.”⁶ Through her selfless, heroic, independent, and loyal behavior, Miep greatly impressed Anne Frank and won her deep affection and admiration. She was one of the many positive models through whom Frank had come to appreciate the better side of humanity. When she famously wrote in her diary that she believed “people are truly good at heart,”⁷ she probably had in mind people like Miep and her husband, Jan; her father’s other employees Johannes Kleiman, Victor Kugler, and Bep Voskuijl; the Dutch resistance fighters; or people like their neighbors who knew there were Jews hiding under the roof at 263 Prinsengracht but chose not to denounce them. Bruno Bettelheim skeptically responded to Frank’s optimism by noting that “if all men are good, there was never an Auschwitz.”⁸ Yet there was a Miep, and there was an Auschwitz. And Frank’s diary clearly reflects an awareness of this irreconcilable paradox.

Auschwitz has been the pervasive shadow that each memoir and life examined in this book has struggled to escape. “Auschwitz” is both the label of a literal place and the metonymy for the Shoah—the symbol of an event that far exceeds what went on within the 15.5 square miles of that infamous, barbed-wired camp next to the otherwise unknown town of Oświęcim. This book has explored the relationship between daughters and mothers, and between young girls and the female world around them, from the perspective of stories built around the legacy of Auschwitz. Within the plethora of possible variants—we have seen girls who witnessed their mothers’ murder, mothers and daughters surviving the camps together, mothers hiding with their daughters, Kindertransport orphans displaced forever in a new country, and Shoah second-generation women working through their parents’ trauma—there is at least one more case that needs to be acknowledged and without which this volume could not conclude. This last variant encapsulates and exemplifies the Shoah tragedy and is itself a synthesis of ultimate horror: it is the story of a girl who dies in the Shoah with her mother.

THE ANNEX ROMAN

I have already explored the evocative, as well as invocative, power of the epistolary genre, particularly when imbedded in war memoirs (chapter 1). With Frank's diary, we return to this genre and further illustrate its complexity. There are several reasons why this diary has enthralled the hearts and minds of millions of people all over the world since its publication.⁹ I believe that, at least in part, the secret of its uninterrupted success and immediacy arises precisely from that epistolary apostrophe, "Dearest Kitty." Letters have been an important presence in this book: they are part of the fictional conversation between Edith Bruck and her Auschwitz victim mother; and Milena Roth's polymorphous text, as we saw, owes its unique witnessing power to the inclusion of her mother's letters. As I argued in regard to Bruck, the apostrophe creates an ethics of presence by which we, the called-on, become responsible for preserving the memory of the past. In her diary, I argue, Frank deploys the epistolary genre as a fictional decoy through which the author (and victim) shapes her story into a work of art that, thanks to the power of her apostrophe to the outside world, incontrovertibly records for posterity the brutality of history and forces the addressees of her letters to reckon with the burden of this dreadful past.

The choice of the imbedded fictional correspondence turns the traditional diary into a more creative work of writing, a girl's autobiographical epistolary production. Anne could not send letters or receive them while in hiding. Therefore, when she pretends to write to real people (such as her friend Jacqueline) and to have heard back from them, it is just a fiction within her diary. Frank's stroke of literary genius is to invent an imaginary addressee for her book who is neither her actual best friend nor a projection of herself. At first, Frank had addressed her entries to various imaginary characters (one of whom was named Kitty) borrowed from a famous storybook from those days, *Joop ter Heul*, by Cissy van Marxveldt.¹⁰ However, after hearing the announcement of Gerrit Bolkestein, the Dutch Minister (in exile) of Education, Art, and Science, on Radio Oranje that after the war, the government planned to collect diaries, letters, sermons, and other documents from the occupation years to paint a "picture of our struggle for freedom . . . in its full depth and glory,"¹¹ Frank immediately sensed that her diary, in which she had so passionately and tirelessly recorded her wartime story, would be her special contribution to this national effort. Nigel Caplan writes that she "began to consider writing . . . a 'romance of the "Secret Annexe"' . . . However, the original Dutch word *roman* is a 'romance' only in the sense of an imaginative prose narrative: that is, a novel."¹² Once she decided to turn her journal into a book (she promptly undertook an impassioned revision of her notes), Frank chose a single fictional addressee, Kitty, for

the narrator's letters and treated her with coherence and consistency as a person totally separate from the speaker—someone capable of being surprised, entertained, amused, informed, and even bored by her correspondent.¹³ Kitty is not Jewish; most important, she is not in Europe.¹⁴ The fact that Kitty is constructed as inhabiting a position outside of the catastrophe fully effectuates the fiction of the epistolary correspondence: Anne's letters survive because the fictional Kitty survives; Kitty's "answers" do not exist because Anne and all that belonged to her no longer exist. Kitty gives Frank an eternal, symbolic survival because she is a stranger: an addressee foreign to and detached from what her interlocutor, the real girl, the historical victim, is enduring.

In a compelling article that systematically compares the existing versions of the diary, Caplan writes: "The interactive style . . . distances the reader into the spectator role, by making the referent of the 'you' a figure from Anne's own fiction. Each entry thus begins with a salutation, which reminds us that we cannot participate in the relationship between the constructed letter writer and her fictitious correspondent."¹⁵ This is certainly the case with the epistolary genre used in utterly fictional works (such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*). But the historicity of the actual diary (which frames the fictional correspondence), combined with the reader's awareness of the intricate relationship between content and context, radically change the effect Frank's apostrophe has on the reader. On the one hand, Kitty's survival aligns us with her—all the time, with every reading, generation after generation. On the other hand, Kitty's sheer nominality, her lack of historical referent, allows Frank's apostrophe to turn "her" into a version of us all—those who, like Kitty, pick up Frank's diary anywhere in the world and at any time. Kitty is the cumulative name for those outside of the catastrophe. The reader might not have identified as intensely with the receiver of these messages had they been addressed to, for instance, Hanneli Goslar, Anne's real best friend and an Auschwitz survivor. By the time Frank chooses Kitty, the fictional addressee has become an allegorical figure for the outside world that the condemned fourteen-year-old desperately misses and to which she is trying to reconnect. "Dearest Kitty" is the empty place that waits to be filled by each reader. "Dearest Kitty" both lets us be present at the tragedy and distances us from it and its victim; it positions us, through the rhetorical figure of the apostrophe, in front of a terrible truth that unfolds before our eyes.

Rachel Brenner claims that "Frank's intention to share her experience with an addressee-outsider approximates the intent of Holocaust survivors-writers—for instance, Elie Wiesel, Pelagia Lewinska, Primo Levi, and others . . . Like them, she writes for a distant reader who is unfamiliar with the situation."¹⁶ Unlike Brenner, however, I believe that Frank's mode of address starkly

differentiates her text from the works of survivor writers. Wiesel, Levi, and other postwar authors write from a position of hindsight to a public often unaware of the events, or else they address an audience that knows, at least on the basic historical level, as much as the writer knows. In part, the irresistible attraction of Frank's diary is the perfect tragic irony that sustains it. Frank does not know what everybody else (we, "Kitty") knows: none of her hopes will be realized; she will see her mother starve to death, her sister die, and other innocent people murdered; and she will die herself of scabies, typhus, and malnutrition in Bergen-Belsen.

There is the diary and there is Anne Frank. For some, the story of the author is what legitimizes the significance of the diary; for others, it is the diary that posthumously calls attention to the significance of the writer's life and suffering. A certain tension persists in the evaluation of the diary as a literary product in its own right and in the debate over Frank's role as a Holocaust writer. For many critics and scholars, Frank's is the canonical voice of the Holocaust, more in a religious sense of the word (she has been canonized—that is, sanctified—through her martyrdom) than as part of an intellectually sanctioned group of Shoah witnesses, of which Wiesel, Levi, and Tadeusz Borowski form the core. The world has embraced Anne Frank and turned her into an immortal cultural icon. Audiences have often fallen in love with her symbolic character while overlooking or underplaying her ultimate credibility as a Shoah witness and the literary quality of her writing. The intellectual and academic world has chosen more often than not to ignore, minimize, marginalize, and diminish her contribution. Indeed, for some scholars, as Christopher Bigsby points out, it would have been better if the diary had never existed.¹⁷ Catherine Bernard insightfully writes: "The diary [as genre], after all, seems to be a perfect expression of the role to which women have been relegated time and time again: it is personal, emotional, unobtrusive, spontaneous, and without 'serious' literary pretensions. The idealizations of Anne Frank as a symbol of gentle forgiveness or as a touchstone for identification with the oppressed of the world do not challenge this role. Anne Frank herself ventured far outside these guidelines, but she was posthumously forced back into them." And more stringently she points out: "Ultimately, there is no room in the world for a living Anne Frank: the uses to which her diary and her persona have been put require her to be dead."¹⁸

The resistance to a reading of Anne Frank *qua* artist points us toward the difficult question at the very core of this book: how are we to read the testimony of women? I have worked to establish women's acts of witnessing on an equal footing with those of men, who are still posited as standard or universal speakers, and few works of literature can help us understand these ideologically

oppressive dynamics better than Anne Frank's diary. Only since the 1990s have feminist approaches to Frank's legacy finally begun to challenge the vision of male scholars such as Harold Bloom, who argued that the diary "is more of a historical emblem than a literary work";¹⁹ Edward T. Sullivan, who wrote that the diary is "more a coming of age story of a precocious young adolescent than an insightful look into the horrors of the Holocaust";²⁰ and Lawrence Langer, who claimed that "wisdom and spiritual insight rarely fall from the lips of a . . . fourteen-year-old girl."²¹ In addition, Bettelheim and others have denied Frank's literary importance, resented her utterly assimilated Jewish identity, suggested that her work does not belong under the rubric of Holocaust literature, or, more disturbingly, denied this young woman her role as a speaker and Shoah witness.²² As Caplan reminds us, it took the US Holocaust Memorial Museum ten years before acknowledging Frank's diary as one of its Holocaust artifacts, and only in 2003 did it finally devote an exhibition to it.²³ However, in recent years and especially from a feminist perspective, a new generation of scholars has engaged with Frank's legacy, producing a much-needed vindication of her paramount importance in the Jewish literary canon, not only as Shoah victim but also as a legitimate witness, speaker, and female artist. Two outstanding works in this new vein are *Writing as Resistance*, by Rachel Feldhay Brenner, in which the author comparatively examines Anne Frank, Edith Stein, Simone Weil, and Etty Hillesum, reclaiming for these women's intimate writings (their journals, diaries, and letters) a historical and intellectual weight as subversive female resistance to Fascism, genocide, and patriarchy; and Denise De Costa's *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum*, a compelling reading of Frank's diary through Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical theories on the mother-child bond.²⁴

My original plan was to open this volume with the chapter on Anne Frank. But as I struggled for a long time to organize the book around her, it seemed to me that her difficult presence stopped every other treatment from developing. It was as if writing about Anne Frank meant writing about the end of the story. The chapter on her refused to work as a beginning, partly because it—like its text—is *sui generis* in *Holocaust Mothers and Daughters*. Frank writes about a mother who is alive and being persecuted, but who is not yet a victim of the genocide. Furthermore, in contrast to the other texts examined here, the diary is not a *post factum* elaboration on events, yet the fact remains that Frank composes the diary as a literary creation. Her entries are not simply daily notations (as is the case, for instance, with the Łódź Ghetto diary of Dawid Sierakowiak,²⁵ which more closely reflects the traditional form of the genre). Instead, Frank consciously develops her narrative, using dialogue and carefully constructing interesting characters; she edits, rewrites, and cleans up her drafts to produce a good prose.

Moreover, the entries, in keeping with the fiction of the ongoing correspondence with Kitty, have a formal beginning and end, whereas a diarist might merely jot down a few haphazard lines one day, leave off an entry midsentence another day, repeat pieces of information that had been previously offered, and so on. Lastly, opening this book with a story of complete annihilation in Auschwitz and closing it with the chapter about life after Auschwitz in second-generation stories risked reproducing that dangerous hopeful vision (the clichéd light at the end of the tunnel) of the inevitable triumph of will and endurance over the murderous forces of human immorality: a vision that I worked hard not only at avoiding but at dismantling with this book.

Let's return briefly to the uniqueness of Frank's diary. As mentioned above, the fact that it is instrumentally and artificially constructed by Frank as a dialogue in letters with an imaginary friend points to its intentional literariness. Frank was consciously engaging in the practice of writing a book; she intended to publish it as a memoir of her war experience in hiding. Had she lived but failed to complete this particular project, she intended to write other books once the war's end would have returned life to normality. She tells Kitty that "to become a journalist . . . that's what I want! I know I can write. A few of my stories are good, my descriptions of the Secret Annex are humorous, much of my diary is vivid and alive, but . . . it remains to be seen whether I really have talent . . . But, and that's a big question, will I ever be able to write something great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer? I hope so, oh, I hope so very much" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 250–51). She developed a passion for writing and on various occasions expressed a desire to achieve fame from her craft. As she composed and revised her diary, Frank was exercising her literary and narrative skills with great craft and concentration, reediting, proofing, and constantly polishing her manuscript. This authorial effort is significant because, as Brenner points out, the act of diary writing in times of life-threatening hardship is a sure sign of psychological, ideological, moral, and even physical resistance to annihilation. Brenner wonders about Frank's and Hillesum's obsession with recording the horror rather than trying to keep their minds off of it for the sake of maintaining their sanity, especially given the claustrophobic (Frank) and overwhelmingly violent (Hillesum) circumstances they were forced to endure daily. "As a consciously made choice," Brenner proposes, "writing thus becomes a sign of vitality that counteracts the inertia of fatalism and fear . . . The diaries of the victims of the Jewish genocide present the 'improbable possibility' of art-as-life in the death-in-life reality of the implacable decree of the Final Solution."²⁶

As Brenner explains, resistance, especially by women, can occur in less obvious ways than armed fighting; resistance to mental annihilation can also take the

form of a victim's concentrating on remembering a poem (as when Levi recited Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Auschwitz and taught it to others). Drawing on and cultivating one's intellectual sophistication is one strategy for resisting morally bankrupt surroundings, in the same way that eating a piece of bread can stave off physical decline in the extreme circumstances of camp imprisonment. Holding onto any vestige of civilization was many victims' answer to the widespread savagery and immorality of surrounding societies. And the private daily act of writing (in hiding, in the camps, in Nazi-occupied Paris, and so on), of producing art, must be understood as a potent strategy of defiance on the part of Frank and other men and women of whom all that remained after the war were only their recordings of the injustice and atrocities, artifacts of their will to witness horrendous events as they were unfolding. "I note down the facts . . . in order not to forget them, because one must not forget," writes twenty-three-year-old Hélène Berr, a French university student and violinist, in her war journal.²⁷ Imbedded within each artistic, combative, and self-affirming act of testimony are multiple strategies of resistance. I will focus on one in particular that is often overlooked yet that is as ancient as the human community, one that is usually associated with men rather than women, a strategy that so obviously characterizes Frank's diary that critics' failure to appreciate it is ironically comical: the text's humor.

THE LAUGHING GIRL IN THE ATTIC : ANNE FRANK'S HUMOR

The topic of laughter and the Holocaust has been examined before. Usually, though, the focus is on the legitimacy of playing Holocaust situations for laughs,²⁸ as in the endless debate surrounding the 1997 film *La vita è bella* by Roberto Benigni. Much less attention has been paid to the survival of laughter during the Holocaust—in other words, to the power of laughter as an extraordinarily subversive technique of resistance against moral, psychic, and civic annihilation. An important exception is Steve Lipman's study of the uses of humor during the Holocaust. "Wit produced on the precipice of hell was not frivolity," Lipman writes, "but psychological necessity."²⁹ Like Lipman, I am not interested in the meaning and uses of Holocaust humor after the Holocaust; instead, I focus on the importance of laughter, the sophistication of humor, as a potent tool for self-preservation and as an ethical agent in response to mass-murderous hatred. Producing art—and laughter—during the war was a way for the victims to array creativity, civilization, and pacifism against the brutality of genocide. Therefore, humor can not be equated with "frivolity," as Lipman rightly points out; rather, it must be seen as a courageous protest against contemporary barbarism. The victims' recourse to humor should not be taken lightly (as humor often is). John

Morreall writes: “In this period [the Holocaust], humor had three main benefits. First was its critical function: humor focused attention on what was wrong and sparked resistance to it. Second was its cohesive function: it created solidarity in those laughing together at the oppressors. And third was its coping function: it helped the oppressed get through their suffering without going insane.”³⁰ The Nazis sensed the threat to their power that humor represented. Although private engagement with the arts was not expressly forbidden—Jews were allowed to play chamber music at home, write diaries and personal letters, and paint, before the deportations interrupted this appearance of normalcy—humor was officially censored and outlawed. Antonin Obrdlik remembers that during the occupation in Czechoslovakia, anti-German ridicule was met with “new waves of mass arrests” because “evidently this kind of humor was not very humorous to the Nazis.”³¹ In keeping with a long tradition of tyrants who dread humor more than revolt, Hitler immediately forbade political jokes against himself as soon as he gained power.³² Morreall writes:

One of the first actions of the new Nazi government in 1933 was the creation of a “Law against treacherous attacks on the state and party and for the protection of the party uniform.” As Hermann Goering reminded the Academy of German Law, telling a joke could be an act against the Führer and the state. Under this law, circulating and listening to anti-Nazi jokes were acts of treason. Several people were even put on trial for naming dogs and horses “Adolf.” Between 1933 and 1945, 5,000 death sentences were handed down by the “People’s Court” for treason, a large number of them for anti-Nazi humor.³³

Yet humor has a long-standing tradition of its own: not to let itself be silenced. Under Nazism, wit remained an annoying “cultured insolence,” to use Aristotle’s definition.³⁴ Not surprisingly, it is Sigmund Freud, a master of irony, who left us the most memorable jibe at the expense of the murderous and obtuse bullies ruling Europe. When the Germans annexed Austria, they arrested the internationally famous doctor and then released him, allowing him to leave the country as long as he signed a statement confirming that no harm had been done to him. So Freud wrote them the following note:

To Whom It May Concern:

I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone.

Sigmund Freud³⁵

There’s no stopping political jokes, especially under tyranny. Even if political jokes are forbidden in the newspapers and editors, writers, and comedians are

exemplarily sacked, imprisoned, exiled, or shot, jokes nevertheless survive them and keep cropping up in pubs, university corridors, and people's living rooms. If there is no other space for them to circulate, they're whispered in prison cells and on the gallows. Nazi-occupied Europe was no exception. Anti-Fascist activists, resistance fighters, and the victims themselves produced a vast repertoire of disobedient humor—a type of humor that breaks the law—in many forms and genres. Of course, “whether we, who did not share the victims' pain, can fully share their laughter is another question.”³⁶

I use the term “humor” here in its broadest sense, referring not merely to jokes or scripted slapstick but also to the capacity of the humorist to relieve her or his sense of oppression and anxiety—as well as the audience's—by employing irony, wit, and even mere cheerful optimism. Humor is one of “the great series of methods which the human mind has constructed in order to evade the compulsion to suffer,” Freud wrote.³⁷ “And what would be the point,” after all, Frank asks herself, “of turning the Secret Annex into a Melancholy Annex?” (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 70). Frank's diary is, in its humorous turn away from melancholy, a true masterpiece of rebellion and disobedience to a law that demanded her silence, suffering, and, eventually, death.

In July 1944, when a secret plot failed to free the world of Hitler, Frank reports: “An assassination attempt has been made on Hitler's life, and for once not by Jewish Communists or English capitalists, but by a German general . . . The Führer owes his life to ‘Divine Providence’: he escaped, unfortunately . . . Perhaps Providence is deliberately biding its time getting rid of Hitler, since it's much easier, and cheaper, for the Allies to let the impeccable Germans kill each other off” (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 335). She proceeds to make a joke out of Hitler's order that whoever in the army knows of a superior involved in the assassination must execute the “coward” on the spot:

A fine kettle of fish that will be. Little Johnny's feet are sore after a long march and his commanding officer bawls him out. Johnny grabs his rifle, shouts, “You, you tried to kill the Führer. Take that!” One shot, and the snooty officer who dared to reprimand him passes into eternal life . . . Eventually, every time an officer sees a soldier or gives an order, he'll be practically wetting his pants . . . (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 335)

Frank's fun at Hitler's expense is an effective way to highlight the baseness of the enemy (that “hideous puppet show,” as she calls the Führer and his propaganda [*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 90]).

It would be unrealistic to think that Jewish victims never cracked a joke or made a funny remark, a smug comment, or a sarcastic criticism that elicited

a smile from a listener, especially considering that the Jews' famous brand of humor was born precisely to alleviate the strains of persecution. Jewish humor has always been an analgesic for the pain arising from antisemitism and violent oppression. Jewish fatalism has birthed a famous brand of irony that works as a moral balm on the scars created by centuries of injustice and sufferance. For example, even in his apocalyptic journal that faithfully records the hopeless fate of hundreds of thousands of Jews trapped in the deathly Warsaw Ghetto, Emanuel Ringelblum weaves together tragedy and humor. On May 8, 1942, he writes: "They say that Churchill invited the rabbi of Góra Kalwaria over and consulted him on how to defeat the Germans. The rabbi gave him the following answer: There are only two possibilities: either by natural means or by miracle. The natural way: a million angels with flaming swords descend on Germany and annihilate it. The miracle: a million Brits fall on Germany and crush it."³⁸ The *chassidish rebbe* of this story forgets that where there are only two possibilities, the Jews will find a third: the Warsaw Ghetto prisoners took their fate into their own hands and fought the Germans on April 19, 1943, in what is famously known as the Ghetto Uprising. Alas, aided neither by God nor the Brits, they were defeated.³⁹

In Theresienstadt the Nazis had created a special center, the *Technische Abteilung*, to exploit Jewish artistic talent for the benefit of German propaganda, which the inmates were ordered to produce. This turned out to be a chance for scores of Jewish artists to use the resources willingly put at their disposal by the Nazis to make art (at the risk of being discovered and consequently tortured and killed) that would surreptitiously bear witness to the atrocities committed against them. The Czech caricaturist Bedřich Fritta was the central figure in the artistic life of Theresienstadt and director of the *Technische Abteilung*. This was a poor choice from the invaders' point of view, considering that Fritta had ended up in Theresienstadt (along with his wife and his three-year-old son, who were both later killed in Auschwitz) for having spread "horror propaganda" against the Nazis. Given this opportunity, Fritta could not resist, even under threat of death, the temptation to satirically denounce the oppressors. One particularly powerful piece of work that he produced testifies to the horrors of the camp and hurls the victim's accusatory laughter at the perpetrators. The work, in black chalk, pen, and ink wash (on abraded paper), is titled *Deluge* (1943–44). In this painting, Fritta stages a theater of the grotesque rife with bitter satire: against the backdrop of the concentration camp's brick walls and barbed wire, a saucy demoiselle toasts the crowds, lifting her flute of champagne in the air while mimicking the military salute with her right hand. Her public is a macabre crowd of skeletons, the zombies of Terezín, among whom a Nazi guard in

uniform and carrying a rifle conspicuously stands out. The stage is painted in an expressionist style, and on close inspection the soubrette turns out to be a one-eyed marionette. Her monocle is attached by a string to a saber, and, in an additional symbol of bourgeois masculinity and war, a medal is pinned on her naked breast over her nipple. She wears an exaggerated Tarbucket-style helmet with a Parisian flair. I see Brechtian cabaret where other commentators have seen cinema. “In *Deluge*,” writes Glenn Sujo, “the astounding contrast between the crowd of bedraggled, skeletal figures (film extras) and the hallucinatory vision of a svelte, fair-skinned doll, a poor relative of the silver-screen idols, bestows a dream-like intensity and unreality on the work.”⁴⁰ Regardless, black humor is the scene’s indelible feature. Using ridicule, Fritta attacks the pretence of normality and *Kultur* the Germans thought they could maintain while, out of sight, millions were being murdered. By incongruously bringing the city cabaret and the extravagance of civilized life (reduced to a grotesque mannequin) into the concentration camp, an accusatory satire is born. Fritta was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944.

Another example comes from Hillesum’s diary from the transit camp of Westerbork: “There are moments when my head spins with the wailing and the howling and the screeching all around . . . And yet now and then that bright and bubbling good humour of mine rises to the surface again, . . . and it isn’t gallows humor either.”⁴¹ If humor must have now and again inadvertently surfaced to bring some solace to those lucky enough to share in it, it is all the more extraordinary that some made a conscious effort to keep their comic sense alive in the face of tragedy and to incorporate it into their art. Some people wrote cabaret entertainment, composed irreverent anti-Nazi songs, or put on carnivalesque shows even in the concentration camps, thus hyperbolizing the grotesque reality of those places through caricature. Some, like Frank, wrote exquisitely funny short stories—in Frank’s case, to be read out loud for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Secret Annex, stories written in elegant, literary Dutch that, at times and not so subtly, parodied the people in the audience. And the German artist Charlotte Salomon composed the first Jewish graphic autobiography, in which art, music, and text were woven together in the author’s gently sarcastic style.⁴² To give another example, Berr attempted to maintain the illusion of normalcy for as long as possible by enjoying her days with a defiant insouciance and finding something comical to laugh about with friends and family despite the Nazi occupation of Paris. Indeed, a portion of her war journal—the only thing that remains of her—is infused with this lightness and *joie de vivre*.⁴³

Hillesum, Frank, Salomon, and Berr did not return from Auschwitz. Like many others, they left behind signs of resistance to its annihilating force, not

only in their acts of courageous recording (be it in writing, painting, or music) but also in leaving behind the image of a victim capable of laughing and making others laugh. Humor is a highly complex expression of the human mind, one that indicates the capacity to synthesize and transform and whose goal is to bond, commune, and—via the momentary relief that comedy affords—heal. Henri Bergson wrote: “We could not enjoy the comic if one felt isolated from others. Laughter seems to stand in need of an echo . . . Our laughter is always the laughter of a group.”⁴⁴ I am not talking about the smug laughter or the gallows humor of a condemned person, a guilty defendant who has lost his moral bearings and gives the world one last, spiteful kick before leaving it. Frank’s humor is self-preserving and stands on a solid ethical foundation: it is optimism’s answer to pessimistic circumstances; it originates from a world where laws and logic have been turned upside down, but it speaks for the rational vision of the humorist, who has kept her coherence and moral system in place and, through jesting, tries to make order out of chaos and brutality. In Frank’s diary, we witness Enlightenment humor with a distinctively female twist.

Some of the humor in the diary comes from the conversations and attitudes expressed by the adults around Frank. One can imagine that her quip about the “German wonder weapon” turning out to be “little firecrackers” (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 322)—referring to the Nazi army’s disintegration in the face of the Allied Forces’ attack—was probably born around the table, where everybody would gather once a day to listen to the BBC radio broadcasts with an almost religious concentration. Frank had grown up in a cheerful atmosphere of serenity and good humor. Ironically, her life had started with a bit of a joke, too: in the hospital files from the morning of June 12, 1929, “the birth of a male child” is recorded.⁴⁵ Edith Frank had had a difficult delivery, and in the commotion of that day, the doctor had simply made a mistake. Yet there was a touch of irony in the error: Kati, the Franks’ maid at the time, remembered that “after all there was something of the boy about Anne.”⁴⁶

One important distinction needs to be made. Humor in Auschwitz is not freeing for us, those who are after and outside of Auschwitz. Freud made us aware that a speaker uses humor to enlist his or her audience as an ally against a third party, but this dynamic is predicated on the notion that speaker and audience are contemporaneous—they share space and time. This dynamic fails to work here. The delay between the utterance of the Shoah performer and our receiving the message creates a vacuum of death and absence that can generate only horror in the receiver. It neither frees nor exculpates us; it is not cathartic. The laugh we hear from the Shoah past freezes the audience by revealing its truth, because its truth is death. It creates embarrassment, not relief. As we are

readying ourselves to be cathartically purged, these works suddenly break the illusion of art. Kafka's magnificent short story, "An Imperial Message"⁴⁷ (see chapter 1), comes to mind once again. That tale forces us to stare into an unbridgeable gap in communication: the addresser (the deceased emperor) is no longer there, the message is not interpretable or knowable, and the addressee is too far removed to attempt to understand it. Humor, an act of resistance and an expression of moral and intellectual superiority to the raw brutality of murderous hatred, reaches us long after its performers have been annihilated. It ends up horrifying, not amusing, by carrying to us the traces of humanity's horrible legacy: this genocide. Laughter from the dead, in such context, is therefore as distant and as unrecoverable as the emperor's last words.

When editing his daughter's manuscript for its first printing, Otto Frank censored some passages to make it less shocking to the public. He could not have guessed that what would have made the audiences uncomfortable in his daughter's diary were not the explicit references to her blossoming sexuality but her humor.

When we encounter a humorous passage in Anne Frank's diary, our awareness of the impenetrable and unbridgeable distance that separates us from the performer and her utterance is heightened. This distance is not emotional separation but an empathic awareness of Otherness. I consciously become aware of the radical Otherness of the victim: my distance from her does not leave me indifferent, but rather opens me up to bear witness to the crime committed against her. I form an active alliance with a subject that remains Other to me: I empathize (in German, *einfühlen*, to project oneself into the other's position), but with a movement toward the Other that requires an intellectual effort, a will to know and learn the pain of the Other. I am a bystander. I cannot overcome my position, but I choose to activate this position in the only way available to me: through intellectual and emotional engagement. "Empathy and reciprocity," Martin Hoffman notes in his study of the congruity of empathy with morality, "are orthogonal . . . they may combine to produce a powerful justice motive."⁴⁸ And Alison Landsberg observes: "Empathy recognizes the alterity of identification and the necessity of negotiating distances and is therefore essential to any ethical relation to the other."⁴⁹ By acknowledging the victim's act of resistance through the recognition of all its expressions, I am thus responding to the ethical imperative to hear and remember. Therefore, in hearing the victim's laughter, I become more aware of what was lost. Yet, despite ourselves, a smile emerges that reaffirms life against annihilation, even as it simultaneously reveals the obscenity of our being able to derive enjoyment after Auschwitz, or to be alive. But that is our conundrum, not the victims'. Even if only to take their minds

off the surrounding apocalypse for an instant, they were entitled to laugh. We are not.

FAMILY PORTRAITS

Before we can interpret Frank's humor and its function, we must situate it in the context of her family's dynamics both before and during the Holocaust. We must also consider the influence that the memories of those who knew the Franks and who after the war helped us construct a picture of their characters and lives has had on our understanding of Frank's diary and its humor.

The focus of *Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* is the mother-daughter relationship, and in Frank's case, I believe that the literary choice to portray her world humorously affects the way this relationship is constructed on the page. If the mother's negative portraiture is partly due, as others have argued, to the Oedipal crisis the teenage daughter experienced during her years in hiding, it also owes a lot to the artistic creativity of the daughter, who knew how to manipulate her *dramatis personae* in order to enrich her literary world. Humor plays a central role in the way this manipulation occurs and in the way the relationship with the mother (and the rest of the world) is eventually resolved. Therefore, to deliver Edith from the either negative or invisible position to which she has often been relegated, I want to open a parenthesis in this chapter in order to sketch a new identity for this Holocaust mother. We should not forget that it is in the nature of Anne Frank's journal (written with an eye toward future publication) to interweave real-life characters and literary characters—or, rather, to illuminate the characters in the diary in both a historical and literary light. A fair treatment of Frank's humor must take into account the textual people, whom this humor textually shapes, as well as the historical people to whom, as I will show, this humor binds and allies the writer.

Like all the other memoirs of war childhoods examined so far, Frank's diary testifies to a young woman's struggle to survive in two senses. On the one hand, the Jewish writer is doing her best to survive the Nazis; on the other hand, a girl is deploying, through her writing, psychological defenses and offenses aimed at surviving her mother—or, better, at surviving the passage from childhood to adulthood, a struggle that is played out against the often turbulent background of a daughter's relationship with her parental figures. One aspect of Frank's diary that has hardly escaped anybody's notice is the author's conspicuously harsh judgment of her mother. This would appear to be a classic case of the daughter-father idyll ruined by the interference of the "bad mother." We have already seen this dynamic (and its literary resolutions) in the memoirs of Ruth Klüger, Edith Bruck, Sarah Kofman, and Helena Janeczek (though less explicitly

in the latter's case). However, as demonstrated in these works, a girl's personal psychic drama is more complex than the Oedipal story rigidly formatted by traditional psychology. Like all the others, Frank's case is exceptional. It is surprising that virtually no attention has been devoted to the fact that the family triangle in her diary is complicated by the appearance, and quite literal interference, of another mother: Mrs. van Daan. To be clear, Mrs. van Daan is not a mother figure to Anne. But she is a mother (her son, Peter, is also one of the Annex characters), and as such she is compared and contrasted to Edith, and the two mothers compete against each other. As we have seen, Kofman lived in hiding with two mothers, and the child narrated in *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat* ends up rejecting her own *maman* and replacing her with the uncanny double of *Mémé* (chapter 2). Similarly, Roth was brought up by two different mothers, but unlike her French peer, she never quite emotionally united with her adoptive one (her Christian savior), while she remained very faithful to the loving memory of her biological mother. Frank introduces yet another variant: this time we have two mothers of two different sets of children, simultaneously present on the scene, both of whom are Jewish and both of whom are harshly criticized by the narrator. However, as soon as the second mother makes her entrance, she allows the writer to redirect the anger, anxieties, and frustrations previously channeled toward the biological mother to her instead. In a way, then, the appearance of the worse mother makes the bad mother look better.

Another exceptionality of Frank's diary is that the father figure in it is a significant presence, the all-important emotional north in the psychic and life compass of the daughter and, it would appear, of everybody else who came in contact with this extraordinary man. None of the fathers of the other authors we've examined were alive by the time the daughters were writing their memoirs, and with one exception (Janeczek's father), all of them perished in the Holocaust. Otto Frank was the only one of the eight people in the Secret Annex to return from Auschwitz.

Otto Frank adored his family, and his sweet temperament and love for people made him a paternal figure to all who knew him: even in the concentration camp, he showed kindness to others. One of the younger inmates even took to calling him *papa Frank* and did so for the rest of Otto's life.⁵⁰ In reading the diary for the first time after returning from internment, Otto was quite struck by his daughter's antipathy for her mother, and he initially thought it wiser and more respectful of the memory of the dead to omit those parts from the diary (along with the explicit bits about sex) when he edited it for publication in 1947. Critics have noted how Anne had started to censor herself on the subject of her mother about halfway through the diary by writing less about her; one explana-

tion is that, having decided to publish it one day, she began to think it would be inappropriate or uninteresting for such antimaternal rants to be made public. However, a more plausible explanation is provided by Dalsimer's psychoanalytical reading of the text, according to which, in the final entries of the diary, Anne "has less need to rail against her [mother], less need to repudiate her because their bond is now less frightening."⁵¹ According to this reading, Anne successfully concluded her passage from childhood through adolescence to the dawn of adulthood during her two years in hiding (which coincided with the two years of the composition of the diary). At this stage, the child grows to recognize her complete autonomy from her father and mother, who can now be safely seen as a (sexual) couple in their own right.

What interests me, however, is how the negative commentaries on the mother in Anne's diary shaped the way in which Edith has been understood by other people. This is apparent in the way in which the person of Edith is posthumously reconstructed by those who knew her. In the documentary film *Anne Frank Remembered*, one of Anne's childhood acquaintances tells the interviewer about a piece of gossip that bowls over all the adults in Frank's circle: "I remember very strongly that Mr. Frank was seen as an ideal daddy. That he was the daddy, because he was so much involved in his girls' education and then there was this story that he fixed his wife breakfast on Sunday mornings and brought it to her bedside which was unheard of in our circles! So the news made the round 'Oh, Mr. Frank does this for his wife! How great!'" Henk van Beersekamp, an employee of Otto Frank at the Dutch Opekta Company who was a young man at the time, remembers that "Mrs. Frank was different from Otto Frank. Otto Frank was a familiar, friendly man, who treated me as an equal, and with kindness. Mrs. Frank was a bit [here Beersekamp is stumped for words and begins to mimic through body language what he finds too difficult to verbalize; he stiffens up his body and pulls back from the interlocutor, signaling distance and haughtiness] . . . well, maybe she had been accustomed to better things in life in Germany, I don't know." The way this opinion is stated leaves the audience with the distinct impression that Edith Frank thought of herself as superior and belonging to a different—that is, better—category of people. "Margot was a bit subdued . . . but Anna was a dear," Beersekamp continues, and he tells the story of a game he used to play with Anne that amused her tremendously. "She was a great girl," he concludes, speaking much more tenderly than he had in recalling Edith or Margot.⁵²

The film *Anne Frank Remembered* is a phenomenally successful attempt at reconstructing the lives and deaths of the eight people in the Secret Annex of Anne Frank's childhood, as well as the world of those around her—children, adults,

friends of the family, employees of Otto Frank, fellow prisoners in Westerbork, Auschwitz, and Bergen Belsen. The documentary is based on the homonymous memoir by Miep Gies, who is the main narrator of the events in the film. Miep was the person who most often saw and interacted with the Franks in the last miserable years of their lives. She was the one in charge of bringing Margot to the hiding place where her parents and Anne were waiting for her: Miep rode her bike together with Margot to the designated place (taking a different route than the rest of the family did) and made sure to keep the girl safe from arrest. This is how Miep describes for Blair the Frank family's first day in the small and messy warehouse that was to become their home for twenty-five excruciating months: "Mrs. Frank and Margot were sitting down on the bed. They could not do anything. They could not accept this situation. But Anne and Mr. Frank were busy, very busy . . . The next day when I came, all was OK . . . Anne and Mr. Frank were busy the whole day!" The interviewer interjects: "Was this typical of the family?" to which Miep replies, without hesitation and with an insinuating smile, "Yes, that was typical for the family." Of that first day, Frank notes down in the diary: "Mother and Margot were unable to move a muscle. They lay down on their bare mattresses, tired, miserable and I don't know what else. But Father and I, the two cleaner-uppers in the family, started in right away" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 25). Despite the shock that, according to these reports, left the mother and older sister paralyzed before the enormity of the circumstances, that same day (July 10, 1942), Edith found the strength to cook split-pea soup, even if, in the surrounding chaos, she ended up burning it so irrecoverably that "no amount of scraping could get [the peas] out of the pan" (27). Yet, successful or not, she did do something. The following day, both Edith and Margot had "recovered somewhat." and when Anne grew frightened of sitting downstairs with the rest of her family listening to the British broadcasts on the radio, "Mother understood my anxiety and went with me [back upstairs]" (27). If one depiction ("Mother and Margot were unable to move a muscle . . . they [were] . . . miserable") tries to conjure up the state of shock felt by her mother and sister in reaction to an objectively terrifying situation, other details ("mother felt well enough to cook split-pea soup"; "We started off immediately the first day sewing curtains" [27]) construct a realistic scene where everybody busily did what they could to organize the place to make it suitable as a long-term dwelling. The writer accepts her membership as part of the group of scared women from which she had made a point to initially distance herself. But this balanced portrayal is obscured in Miep's memory.

In the first few days in their new hiding place, the Franks were alone. Soon, however, the van Pels were scheduled to join them, and Anne hoped their arrival

would bring joy and “much more fun” (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 27). The annex ended up hosting quite a diverse, and at times comedic, cast of characters. Miep describes the group of escapees thusly: “Margot and Peter were quite withdrawn . . . Mrs. van Daan was temperamental, flirty, chatty. Mrs. Frank, kind and orderly, very quiet but aware of everything that went on around her. Mr. van Daan was the joke teller, something of a pessimist, always smoking, and somewhat restless. Mr. Frank was the calm one . . . the most logical, the one who balanced everyone out. He was the leader, the one in charge. When a decision had to be made, all eyes turned to Mr. Frank.”⁵³

Subtly, Miep and others hint that Edith was something of a “Jewish princess,” a woman with feeble nerves, slow to react (even lazy), and certainly not a cutup like the others around her. However, two words that appear in many descriptions of her are “kind” and “quiet.” In the 1950s Schnabel interviewed forty-two people who had known the Franks to get as much information about their lives and deaths as possible. During her interview with Schnabel, Miep concedes that Mrs. Frank was the only person besides Mrs. van Daan to have a very clear premonition of how it would all end, although, as Schnabel paraphrases Miep’s testimony, Mrs. Frank, unlike Mrs. van Daan, “was not at all anxious, rather humorous and kindly, often very quiet. The great love Margot always displayed toward her would be proof that Anne was also unjust in her description of her mother.”⁵⁴ Miep eventually amends this statement to Schnabel in Anne’s favor. “Perhaps I ought not to talk about justice,” Miep tells Schnabel. “In her own way she [Anne] was just. You see, she was uncompromising . . . Still, she was the happiest of all of them. For the others, those twenty-five months were nothing but misery. Margot, too, was sometimes terribly depressed.”⁵⁵ We can infer that the “too” refers to Edith’s depression: mother and older daughter apparently were the least cheerful people in the hiding place. However, as we will see, various entries in the diary prove that Anne was not exactly “the happiest of all of them” either, in spite of Miep’s description. Nevertheless, the nobility of spirit and good cheer with which everybody tried to keep their chins up, especially in the presence of their Christian visitors from the outside, seem to have been traits common to everybody in the hiding place.

In the film *Anne Frank Remembered*, Miep sketches another singular scene for us, this one contradicting what she had reported to Schnabel decades earlier: “Mrs. Frank was the most depressed of all people. Sometimes . . . she went with me till the door—I did not understand . . . what did she want of me? And once again I go with her in her sleeping room and she closed the door and she said to me ‘Miep, I am so afraid . . .’ She told me all her troubles. But what could I do? I did not say anything, because I was in the same position as she.”⁵⁶ The same

scene is explained in much more detail in Miep's memoir. Edith was desperate for a confidante, someone on whom she could unload her worries:

As winter approached, Mrs. Frank began to act oddly. When I left the hiding place, she would follow me downstairs just as far as she could go . . . but then, rather than bid me goodbye, she'd just stand there and look at me, with an expression of wanting in her eyes. I'd stand and wait for her to say what it was that she wanted of me, but she wouldn't say a word, just stand there awkwardly. I began to feel very uncomfortable, standing face to face with her . . . It took a while, but finally I realized that what she wanted was to be able to talk with me in a confidential way.⁵⁷

Although Miep's partiality to Anne—to whose memory and legacy she devoted, like a priestess, her entire life—and to Otto (whom she thought of as her boss but “also [as] our father”⁵⁸) is deeply touching, her coldness toward Edith's despair as a woman and mother is somewhat puzzling.

Is it possible that people's testimonies about Anne Frank's world have been affected by the published diary? Could the witnesses' memories have been subconsciously manipulated by the writer's perspective on her mother? Anne saw herself in quite romantic and heroic terms as an objective, rational, and scientific observer of people and life. She was proud of her criticisms, which of course, given her age, were not always mitigated by tolerance or flexibility. However, one ought not to overlook the fact that her impatience with her mother is only one component of their relationship, which oscillates between frustration and admiration. At one moment Anne asserts: “I can't stand mother. It's obvious that I'm a stranger to her” (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 41). Yet in the same day's entry she also writes: “Father and Mother always defend me fiercely” (42). “I have loving parents” (6), she explains to Kitty, and proudly introduces her mother as “Mama Frank, the children's advocate!” (88).

Elli, Anne's friend and real-life confidant, tells Schnabel: “It was only natural for Anne to be most closely attached to her father . . . The two of them were alike. Mr. Frank, too, . . . is a person with the kind of understanding one mostly finds only in writers. He too, could be as affectionate as Anne, and he, too, was unsparing with himself.”⁵⁹ Yet Anne also had some of her mother's traits, and certainly much of her appearance, too. In a photo from May 1941 in which the whole family poses in the sun in front of their apartment at Merwedeplein, the mother-daughter resemblance is particularly noticeable. Equally noticeable is the emotional closeness of the four Franks: Anne is squeezed between father and mother; Edith holds her daughter's left hand very tightly; Anne's right arm is wrapped around her father, who in turn holds Anne under his right arm and

Margot under his left. However, despite this warmth, it is not an altogether happy picture. By then the Nazis had already been in Holland for a year, and the pressure shows on everybody's face: Otto and Margot try to smile, but Anne and Edith remain serious.⁶⁰ Another photo from happier days in 1936 shows Edith with her two daughters sitting on the grass and enjoying a sunny day in the park. The three of them radiate joy, their smiles hinting at traces of laughter lingering in the air. Although Edith sits between her two daughters, with her hands folded impartially on her lap, her body leans sideways toward Anne, which produces a sense of closeness and intimacy.⁶¹ In another photograph, a summer day at the beach in 1934 is immortalized in a beautiful shot that portrays Margot, slightly apart from the other women, voraciously enjoying an ice cream while Anne contemplates the stump of her cone with a delighted smile as she stretches her left arm to pull affectionately on her mother's right shoulder. Edith looks straight at the camera with an amused smile that is a faithful reproduction of the one on Anne's lips.⁶² Anne's gestures in these photos are very natural, not the product of the photographer's stage directions. The physical fluidity between Anne and the world around her, particularly between her and her mother, reflects a portrait of her confirmed throughout her diary and in the testimonies of those who knew her. She was extroverted, profusely affectionate, and not at all afraid of expressing her feelings through speech and body language—that is, she was the opposite of her reserved, shy, and very composed sister. But Edith appears in all of these photos to be comfortable in her surroundings as well; she is not caught looking away from the camera, she smiles elegantly but not stiffly, she holds her daughter by the hand, and she does not stand away from her husband or show any other body language that might indicate an off-putting, unsociable person.

Something about Edith apparently struck the family's new friends in Holland as unpleasant or diffident. However, she was obviously an open-minded, modern woman who, together with her husband, had opted more leading-edge child-rearing methods for the girls—reflected, perhaps, in the warm family photographs capturing the two happy daughters. The girls were much loved (Anne would have said “spoiled rotten” [*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 208]), and their parents had also created around them a healthy family environment in which laughter and good humor were the norm even when times turned for the worst. Hanneli Goslar—Anne's closest friend, to whom one of the most touching and almost mystical pages of her diary is devoted—tells about the time when her father had the silly idea of masquerading as Hitler, his pomaded hair combed stiff to one side, a Führer moustache, and so forth, and went next door to the Franks' as a joke. The impersonation was perfect, and “everybody was so scared

at first!" Goslar laughs at the memory of the prank and at the absurd idea behind it, that Hitler himself could knock at the Franks' door.⁶³ However, her anecdote also indirectly confirms the importance for the persecuted to joke and laugh even as the circumstances clearly caused most serious apprehension. The stunt apotropaically warded off for a moment the serious threat looming larger every day by diminishing and ridiculing it. But not forever: Goslar's father was murdered in Bergen-Belsen.

Growing up, Frank breathed in this atmosphere of good-humoredness and love, which makes one struggle to explain her later rants against her mother, the harshest of which is the following:

And yet Mother, with all her shortcomings, is tougher for me to deal with . . . I can't very well confront her with her carelessness, her sarcasm and her hard-heartedness, yet I can't continue to take the blame for everything. I'm the opposite of Mother, so of course we clash . . . She's not a mother to me—I have to mother myself. I've cut myself adrift from them . . . I have no choice, because I can picture what a mother and a wife should be and can't seem to find anything of the sort in the woman I'm supposed to call "Mother" . . . But . . . the worst part is that Father and Mother don't realize their own inadequacies and how much they let me down. Are there any parents who can make their children completely happy? (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 141)

It is important to notice that the girl slowly closes the gap she had set between her parents (a wide gap that separated the wonderful father from the terrible mother), and even Otto ("the most adorable father I've ever seen" [*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 7]) ends up falling off the pedestal on which the daughter had placed him. In one entry, surprisingly, we read: "This is a point I think about quite often: why is it that Pim [Otto] annoys me so much sometimes?" (331).⁶⁴

Written on October 30, 1943, the above entry about Edith is positioned in the middle of the diary, in the middle of the Franks' stay in the annex. As such, it depicts the climax of Anne's Oedipal drama just before it begins to be successfully resolved, and it unfolds in a denouement during the second half of the book. By January 2, 1944, Anne is ready to reassess the situation: "I tried to understand the Anne of last year and make apologies for her . . . I was furious at mother (and still am a lot of the time). It's true, she didn't understand me, but I didn't understand her either. Because she loved me, she was tender and affectionate, but because of the difficult situations I put her in, and the sad circumstances in which she found herself, she was nervous and irritable, so I can understand why she was often short with me. I . . . was insolent and beastly to her . . . We were caught in a vicious circle of unpleasantness and sorrow. Not a very happy

period for either of us, but at least it's coming to an end" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 158–59). Other outbursts occur, but they are farther apart, and the tension between Anne and her mother begins to be mitigated by the maturation of the daughter, who has come to better grasp the situation (both the interpersonal situation with her mother and the historical circumstances of the Shoah they all shared).

Throughout the diary, there are frequent swings between love and hate for the mother, between anger at her and admiration for her. Anne's own ambivalence certainly owed a lot, as Dalsimer explains, to the psychological metamorphosis she was experiencing as a teenager. However, Blair's documentary ends up highlighting only Anne's adoration for Otto and enmity toward Edith, despite the fact that this dichotomy was not that unambiguously delineated but full of gray areas. The writer of this diary was more complex than that.

In spite of its less than subtle take, Blair's film does thoroughly examine this mother-daughter conflict and tries to find out how the pair withstood the test of Auschwitz. Bloeme Evers-Emden, one of the survivors who knew the Franks before the war (she was a teenager at that time) and who was with them in the *Lager*, talked to both Blair and the writer Willy Lindwer about those days, highlighting the closeness and love among the three Frank women. They were together all the time, and they supported and gave strength to one another to the point that when a chance arrived for Edith and Margot to be transferred out of Auschwitz to a more benign camp without gas chambers, they decided unanimously, and without hesitation, to remain in Auschwitz with Anne, who had developed a terrible rash and was not selected for this lucky transport. Thus, Anne's mother and sister may have lost their only chance of surviving. Evers-Emden also explains that "they were always together—mother and daughters. Whatever discord you might infer from the diary was swept away now by existential need. They were always together. It is certain that they gave each other a great deal of support. All the things that a teenager might think of her mother were no longer of any significance."⁶⁵

To illustrate Anne's ability to transform the people around her to meet her narrative and literary goals, it suffices to consider a hilarious episode that occurred in school and that is reported in the entry for June 21, 1942.⁶⁶ Punished by her math teacher, Mr. Keesing, for talking too much in class, Anne is ordered to write an essay at home entitled "A Chatterbox." She turns this into an opportunity to compose a wonderfully self-referential (and also very funny) bit of storytelling. "I began thinking about the subject while chewing the tip of my fountain pen. Anyone could ramble on and leave big spaces between the words, but the trick was to come up with convincing arguments to prove the necessity

of talking" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 11). Wittily finding her way out of trouble, the writer comes up with a solution: "I argued that talking is a female trait . . . but that I would never be able to break myself of the habit, since my mother talked as much as I did, if not more, and that there's not much you can do about inherited traits" (11). Anne gets around a second "punitive" assignment from Mr. Keesing who, clearly tickled by his student's brilliance, further puts her to the test by ordering her to write a new essay, "Quack, Quack, Quack, Said Mistress Chatterback." Anne's reply is a most imaginative poem—"it was beautiful!" she assures us (11–12)—that wins her the permission to talk as much as she wants. I want to stop and consider for a moment what the girl said in the first essay: Was Edith a quiet woman or the chatterbox her daughter made her out to be? Could it be that the writer, in order to win her argument with the math teacher, needed a talkative mother and created one on the page, just as the witnesses describing Edith as quiet needed her to be a haughty, disdainfully aloof person in order to make their impressions align with Anne's negative portrayal of her mother? Were they, in their unsympathetic descriptions, subconsciously trying to match their idea of Jewish woman, or perhaps align their memories with the impressions Anne left us of her mother without factoring in their literarity?

I am not suggesting that we dismiss the reality of the conflict between the daughter and her mother. Matching what Dalsimer has clarified for us in her study on female adolescence, the diary records the step-by-step developmental stages, over a two-year period, of the teenage girl from a pre-Oedipal union with the parents, to complete Oedipal rejection of the mother and love for the father, and finally to a disengagement from both, achieving autonomy and getting to see (and accept) the parents as a couple formed of separate, independent beings. In the 1990s feminist scholarship began to consider the mother-child bond not as the root of a rigid principle of separation and individuation, but rather as the fundamental relationship from which is born our ability to commune with the Other, to recognize the Other's otherness and empathize with the Other. "The caretaker [of the child] is not only an 'object' to which the infant attaches," writes the clinical psychologist Janet Surrey, "but a subject with her or his own qualities that immediately begin to influence the relationship and determine its course. They both will proceed to become further defined as people as they change *because of* the relationship. Optimally, they both will grow toward more relatedness, not less; toward better relatedness, not separation." Surrey's definition of a relationship, "an experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity," is different from what is commonly referred to as an "attachment."⁶⁷ What I am proposing is that even understanding Frank's criticism of

the mother as part of a psychological and self-individuating process of subconscious rejection, we should not disregard her authorial agency, the artistic and literary constitution of her diary. In this view, we must take into account the fact that Frank chose humor as a crucial vehicle of literary and intersubjective expressiveness. Relatedly, we must remember that two of the privileged devices of humor are exaggeration and hyperbole—both of which she amply applies to the way she portrays everybody, including her mother, her favorite character.

USES AND ABUSES OF THE COMIC MOTHERS

Anne's opinions about her mother change for the better when the figure of Auguste van Pels appears. Mrs. van Pels immediately receives a droll pseudonym: Petronella van Daan. Most of the Secret Annex's characters are referred to by nicknames, which accentuate each persona's comic function: Fritz Pfeffer becomes Dussel, the van Pels are all renamed van Daan, she usually refers to her father as Pim and to Miep's husband as Henk, and the Opetka's employees are also all rechristened. The arrival of Petronella van Daan, also sarcastically referred to as Madame van D., allows the young author to shift her attention to a new comedic character and thus takes some of the pressure off her intense relationship with her mother. In fact, I argue that the new woman's arrival even allows Anne to ally herself with her mother.

When judging her mother against the rival figure of Mrs. van Daan, Anne can't resist taking her mother's side. "You must have a strange outlook on life to be able to say that to Anne," (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 45) Mrs. van Daan is reported as saying to the Franks in a pretentious tone after one of those famous discussions on the subject of Anne, the naughty child. She goes on: "Things were different when I was growing up. Though they probably haven't changed much since then, except in your modern household!" (45). Anne takes this to be an unsubtle swipe at her parents', particularly her mother's, modern child-rearing style. Her unruffled mother, Anne writes with evident pride, slashes back at Mrs. van Daan, and the following comedic, and highly theatrical, scene ensues:

"Well, Mrs. van Daan, I agree that it's much better if a person isn't over-modest. My husband, Margot and Peter are all exceptionally modest. Your husband, Anne and I, though not exactly the opposite, don't let ourselves be pushed around."

Mrs. van Daan: "Oh, but Mrs. Frank, I don't understand what you mean! Honestly, I'm extremely modest and retiring. How can you say that I'm pushy?"

Mother: "I didn't say you were pushy, but no one would describe you as having a retiring disposition."

Mrs. van D.: "I'd like to know in what way I'm pushy! If I didn't look out for myself here, no one else would, and I'd soon starve, but that doesn't mean I'm not as modest and retiring as your husband."

Mother had no choice but to laugh at this ridiculous self-defense, which irritated Mrs. van Daan. Not exactly a born debater, she continued her magnificent account in a mixture of German and Dutch, until she got so tangled up in her own words that she finally rose from her chair and was just about to leave the room when her eye fell on me . . . Mrs. van D. wheeled around and gave me a tongue-lashing: hard, Germanic, mean and vulgar, exactly like some fat, red-faced fishwife. It was a joy to behold . . . She struck me as so comical . . . I've learned one thing: you only really get to know a person after a fight. (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 46)

Mrs. van Daan is described as a truculent matron, pushy, unintelligent, a perfect yenta, and a masterpiece of *yiddishe mamehood* doting over her Jewish boy (Peter). Edith responds to her with moments of comedic Jewish-motherly *kveling*: "'You see, Mrs. van Daan,' Mother said, 'there's a big difference between Margot and Peter. To begin with, Margot's a girl, and girls are more mature than boys. Second, she's already read many serious books and doesn't go looking for those which are no longer forbidden. Third, Margot's much more sensible and intellectually advanced, as a result of her four years at an excellent school'" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 35). By using the comic mode, Anne is able to recast her mother in a more heroic light.

Aside from the diary, Anne also filled several notebooks with fictional and autobiographical stories. Published under the title *Tales from the Secret Annex*, these represent an important archive of finished and unfinished attempts at creative writing in which she tried her hand at dramatic stories focused on the war; some short fantasies, quite imaginative and intricate, almost dreamlike; and of course some excellent spin-offs on the domestic comedic sketches described in her diary. Most important, variations on the figure of the mother are found throughout the *Tales*. Frank demonstrates an ability to imagine different versions of maternal figures, but in those fictional experiments, fathers and fatherly figures remain conspicuously absent or secondary. In her notebook of short writings, for example, Frank describes her mother this way: "Mama: has a hearty appetite, but doesn't live up to her potential. I always have the idea that people forget she's there, since she's off in the corner. Whenever the conversation turns to literature, you can learn a lot. She has a vast knowledge and is well

read. No one has the impression, as they do with Mrs. van Daan, that she's a housewife."⁶⁸ This brief portrait reveals Edith as modest and reserved but also as an intellectually rich woman. She is someone Anne clearly admires, although she can only admit this admiration through a humorous comment. In contrast, "Mrs. van D. . . . [is] known to be exceedingly pushy, empty-headed and perpetually dissatisfied. Add to that, vanity and coquettishness . . . I could write an entire book about Madame van Daan, and who knows, maybe sometime I will."⁶⁹ The narrator then proceeds to find allies in support of her opinion: "Mother thinks that Mrs. van D. is too stupid for words, Margot that she's too unimportant, Pim that she's too ugly (literally and figuratively!) . . . Will the reader please take into consideration that this story was written before the writer's fury had cooled?"⁷⁰

Although Edith's frustration earned Anne's respect, it did raise eyebrows with other acquaintances. Miep recalls being somewhat scandalized by Edith's breach of decorum when, in one of those moments when Edith tried to unburden her heart, she confessed that she couldn't stand Mrs. van Pels because of the way she kept putting Margot and Anne down, which she found utterly unjust. "Sometimes," Miep writes, "she [Edith Frank] would complain about Mrs. van Daan—something no one else had ever done about anyone in the Annex for my ears . . . She'd complain that Mrs. van Daan was always impatient with her girls, especially Anne, complaining that the Frank girls were too free for her. It seemed that Mrs. van Daan was always bringing up her feelings about Anne and Margot at the dinner table . . . This criticizing of Anne and Margot upset Mrs. Frank very much."⁷¹ The fact that the van Pels and Pfeffer often criticized the Frank girls is confirmed in Anne's diary and *Tales from the Secret Annex*. Interestingly, most of this criticism refers to the unusual upbringing the girls had received from their lenient and modern parents. According to the van Pels and Pfeffer, the disciplinarian, Margot and Anne were allowed to read books inappropriate for their ages and gender; the very fact that they were allowed to spend so much time reading often provoked harsh censure. When Anne and Margot were thus attacked, it was almost always Edith who became heated and fiercely defended them. During one of the scenes in which Edith challenged the criticisms of the other refugees, "Mr. van D. yelped, Mrs. van D. yipped, Dussel shushed and Mother shouted. It was a hellish scene . . . The words flew thick and fast." As always, Anne was amused by the spectacle of adults fighting. She reports that Mr. van Daan insisted that "'It'd be better for the children [Anne and Margot] if they helped out . . . instead of sitting around all day with their noses in a book. Girls don't need that much education anyway!'" Anne continues: "'You're crazy!' Mother suddenly exclaimed. I was actually pretty startled. I didn't think she'd dare."⁷² She did dare on more than one occasion, and despite

the fact that such scenes are portrayed humorously by Anne, who takes a keen pleasure in the domestic comedy unfolding around her, they also indirectly sketch out the patriarchal context in which women had to battle for their right to intellectual and social freedom and show that this context is the same as it was before the war. The genocide that had forced the refugees into hiding had not broken the loyalty of some of them to old methods of oppression of women and girls. Anne responds to these patriarchal expectations characteristically, by cracking a joke: “Margot and I were supposed to be pressed into maid service in Villa Annex.”⁷³ Moreover, she unequivocally sides with her mother and turns her into a paladin of women’s rights: Edith is obviously the one who reacts the most strongly to people’s reactionary visions of femininity. Anne connects this ludicrous moment (in which her right to read is questioned) to what has become of the national and domestic patriarchal order that the captive van Pels and Dussel keep defending: “it would be better to remind them [van Pels and Dussel] in no uncertain terms that without us [the Franks] and the others they’d be facing death, in the truest sense of the word. In a labor camp you have to do a whole lot more than peel potatoes . . . or look for cat fleas!”⁷⁴

Also in *Tales from the Secret Annex* is a remarkable skit called “Evenings and Nights in the Annex,” in which Frank artfully blends the romantic, the comic, and the tragic. It begins with a jolly atmosphere: “It’s my turn for the bathroom. I wash myself from head to toe . . . I brush my teeth, curl my hair, manicure my nails and dab peroxide on my upper lip.” However, humor soon breaks the illusion of idyllic normality: “I wash myself from head to toe, and more often than not I find a tiny flea floating in the sink (only during the hot months, weeks or days) . . . The next [person] in line invariably calls me back to remove the gracefully curved but unsightly hairs that I’ve left in the sink.” To these two tones—idyllic and comic—a third one, the tragic, is added: “Ten o’clock: Time to put up the blackout screen . . . For the next fifteen minutes . . . the house is filled with creaking of beds and the sigh of broken springs, and then, provided our upstairs neighbors aren’t having a marital spat in bed, all is quiet . . . Sometimes the guns go off during the night . . . all of a sudden I find myself standing beside my bed, out of sheer habit.” Fear has become as much a resident of the annex as the Jews hiding there, but because months of similar scenes have accustomed the fugitives to their situation, the comic aspect creeps in again: “This is no fun, especially when it concerns a roommate named Dr. Dussel [with whom Anne had to share her sleeping quarters]. First, I hear the sound of a fish gasping for air, and this is repeated nine or ten times. Then, the lips are moistened profusely. This is alternated with little smacking sounds, followed by a long period

of tossing and turning and rearranging the pillows. After five minutes of perfect quiet, the same sequence repeats”⁷⁵

Though the situation in the annex was utterly miserable, Otto had made sure that the hiding place would have the minimum features required to guarantee its inhabitants the basics of dignified life—a way to wash, a table on which to eat properly, beds, a library in order to keep the children up to speed with schoolwork, and so forth. Keeping up with civilized modes of living may be incongruous in so uncivilized a context, yet it is also essential; this incongruity is highlighted by Anne’s humor, which—being a sign of a civilized life of intellectual refinement, critical observation, and objective criticism—ironically turns into something incongruous itself. The narrator of this sketch asserts the importance of aesthetics (through her hygiene and beauty routine) and humor as a way of showcasing human dignity in a crisis; by the same token, however, the tragic element she weaves into the piece undermines the power of her defensive strategies. Therefore, although humor is a way to momentarily take her mind off the tragedy or make the pain more bearable, her awareness of humor’s limitations never allows her to forget her objective circumstances.

Frank was able to locate the ridiculous in the frightful conditions of hiding and turn it to her own personal, psychic advantage: that is, by satirizing the adults around her and capturing the tragic absurdity of the situation in a way that did not diminish its seriousness but allowed the humorist to withstand it. For example, the eight refugees’ worst fear was of dying in the aerial bombardments, trapped and unable to run outside in case of fire. Notice how Frank recounts one such night of intense ground and air fighting when everybody was convinced the annex would burst into flame any minute:

We all rushed upstairs to see what was going on. Mr. and Mrs. van D. had seen a red glow through the open window . . . she was certain our house was ablaze. Mrs. van D. was already standing beside her bed with her knees knocking when the boom came. Dussel stayed upstairs to smoke a cigarette, and we crawled back into bed. Less than fifteen minutes later the shooting started again. Mrs. van D. sprang out of bed and went downstairs to Dussel’s room to seek the comfort she was unable to find with her spouse. Dussel welcomed her with the words “Come into my bed, child!” We burst into peals of laughter, and the roar of the guns bothered us no more; our fears had all been swept away. (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 102–3)

On other occasions, the teenage girl gets angry at the adult world for making her the center of their evening discussions. Yet she is still able to muster enough

aplomb to report everybody's poor opinion of her in quite hilarious terms: "We all decided I [am] an ignoramus . . . Then we discussed my ignorance of philosophy, psychology and physiology (I immediately looked up these big words in the dictionary!)" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 39). Frank cagily turns these criticisms of her into an opportunity for a joke at the expense of the critics (what she calls "giv[ing] them a taste of their medicine" [44]): "I should be used to the fact that these squabbles are daily occurrences, but I'm not and never will be as long as I'm the subject of nearly every discussion. (They refer to these as 'discussions' instead of 'quarrels,' but Germans don't know the difference!)" (43–44, emphasis added).

Parenthetically, it is worth noting how language itself becomes a subject of humor. No one in the annex was a native Dutch speaker, and although the adults tried hard, their repeated mistakes and gaffes were still made fun of by the children. Miep writes: "The new language had come hardest for Mrs. Frank, probably because she was at home so much. It had been much easier for Mr. Frank, out in the world of Amsterdam all the time, and the children had taken to it like ducks to water."⁷⁶ In contrast, Anne's diary suggests that Mrs. van D.'s Dutch was equally bad (and even that Mrs. van D. spoke the worst Dutch of them all). More interestingly still, the *Critical Edition* offers a different take on the men's Dutch fluency: "Please bear in mind, dear Kitty, that the two ladies here speak terrible Dutch. (I daren't say anything about the gentlemen, because they would be very offended.) If you could hear their bickerings you would burst out laughing: we don't pay attention to it any more, it's no good correcting them either" (*Critical Edition*, 253). Is this another case in which the writer manipulates her characters to make them fit her narrative? Or another case in which the memory of a witness (Miep, in this case) is subconsciously readjusted to fit a story that needs be repeated consistently—a story that demands that the real Edith Frank be as faulty as the textual Edith Frank?

To return to the issue of humor in tragic times, it seems clear that Anne is consciously using humor as a genre within her narrative, as a coping strategy that works on several levels. I must stress that by coping strategy I do not mean a form of denial that obscures the reality in which she lived. Rather, she is very much aware of the situation in which the Jews of the Secret Annex, Holland, and the rest of Europe find themselves; yet she composes her diary in a way that both honors the tragedy and uses irony and humor to narrate her situation effectively. Hers is neither gallows humor proper nor jejune insouciance. As Brenner points out, "in her 'good'—that is, hopeful—moments, Frank realizes that a representation of such a terrible reality requires a rhetoric appropriate for the 'uninitiated' person."⁷⁷

As late as the middle of June 1944 (two months before the eight refugees

were arrested), when everybody's threshold of tolerance for the conditions was about to be crossed, Frank chooses to make light of the situation rather than give in to it: "Peter's becoming insolent, Mr. van Daan irritable and Mother cynical. Yes, everyone's in quite a state! There's only one rule you need to remember: laugh at everything and forget everybody else! It sounds egotistical, but it's actually the only cure for those suffering from self-pity" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 321). Mrs. van Daan is predictably the most agitated: "Mrs. van D. is at her wits' end. She's talking about getting shot, being thrown in prison, being hanged and suicide. She's jealous that Peter confides in me and not in her, offended that Dussel doesn't respond sufficiently to her flirtations and afraid her husband's going to squander all the fur-coat money on tobacco. She quarrels, curses, cries, feels sorry for herself, laughs and starts all over again" (321).⁷⁸ This sketch of the hysterical bourgeois woman—which has illustrious fictional predecessors in Nicolai Gogol's Russian matrons, Franz Kafka's bossy inn proprietresses, and Robert Musil's opulent Viennese ladies—is in this context both funny and extremely tragic. Mrs. van Daan's fears are far from exaggerated. Auguste van Pels will be murdered in a concentration camp (which one and on which date is not yet known). Hermann van Pels, her husband, "melted away right away [in Auschwitz], two days and he was gone, he gave up" according to an eyewitness.⁷⁹ Peter van Pels, their eighteen-year-old son, died in Mauthausen.

Although by the middle of 1944, it was quite clear that the war was not going well for Germany and that the end was near, the danger faced by Jews in Europe had not abated; in fact, the implementation of the Final Solution had intensified. Trapped in a small space, without privacy, in conditions of forced gregariousness, deprived of all rights, aware that their fate as Jews and Europe's fate were not necessarily aligned, everyone in the Secret Annex was on the verge of losing their minds, the youngest among them included. "Let something happen soon," Frank prays in desperation one day, "even an air raid. Nothing can be more crushing than this anxiety. Let the end come, however cruel" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 308). Evidently, among other things, Anne had also inherited from her mother a profoundly sensitive and, at bottom, pessimistic streak.

I want to offer two final anecdotes to highlight how strangely conflicting the testimonies about Edith Frank's character can be—as opposed to the uniform image of Anne preserved in the mind of everyone who knew her. A woman who was with the Franks in Westerbork confirms the portrait of Edith as an uncommunicative woman, and of Anne as "lovely, so radiant." She continues: "You ask me what Anne's mother was like? There in Westerbork she was quiet; she seemed numbed all the time . . . She no longer talked very much . . . She said nothing at work, and in the evenings she was always washing underclothing.

The water was murky and there was no soap, but she went on washing, all the time.”⁸⁰ Again, a quiet woman who, we’re given to understand, likes to keep to herself. How can we blame her? Admittedly, there must have been little to say in those circumstances, in Westerbork, out of one trap (the Secret Annex) and into another (a transit *Lager*). Contrary to what Schnabel’s interviewee seems to suggest, Edith still had a voice. Another woman, a Mrs. de Wiek, remembers her using it at the most heart-rending moment imaginable: “On October 30 there was another ‘selection.’ There stood the doctor, and we had to step into the light . . . Then came Mrs. Frank—and she, too, joined our group at once. Then it was the turn of the two girls, Anne and Margot. Even under the glare of that searchlight Anne still had her face, and she encouraged Margot, and Margot walked erect into the light. There they stood for a moment, naked and shaven-headed, and Anne looked over at us with her unclouded face, looked straight and stood straight, and then they went on. We could not see what was on the other side of the searchlight. Mrs. Frank screamed: ‘The children! Oh God.’”⁸¹

BONDING HUMOR

Anne Frank’s diary is characterized by extreme sadness and anxiety. Unexpectedly, humor goes hand in hand with this profound desolation. Humor is a literary choice as much as a spiritual one—a conscious effort on Frank’s part to keep her spirits up even when she wasn’t writing. Shoah scholars and theorists have often feared that the lightheartedness of the comedic scenes in her journal could mislead readers or later interpreters to underestimate the terror in which she and the people around her lived. Lawrence Langer remains one of the most conscientious defenders against abuses of the diary and Holocaust representation in general. We must guard against approaching the diary through the lense of our feel-good Hollywood culture or the myth of the triumph of the unique individual so deeply engrained in the American ethos. The fourteen-year-old heroine of this story understood herself as neither unique nor alone; most of all, she was well aware of the tragedy of her circumstances, since in such conditions of constant proximity, the adults could not talk secretly and keep their worries hidden from children. Miep explains that during her daily visits, Anne would overwhelm her with questions, and that she did not keep anything from the child; rather, she informed her in detail about what was happening outside of the hiding place. Moreover, as soon as the van Pels arrived, they brought into the annex horrid reports about the *razias* (roundups) and deportations. “The Van Daans,” writes Miep, “told harrowing tales of how streetcar line number 8 had been used to transport Jews to the Centraal Station. Anne, Margot, and Mrs. Frank went gray as they listened. Some of the Jews sitting side by side on

these transports had been their own friends and neighbors.”⁸² On October 7, 1942, Anne writes: “We assume that most of them are being murdered. The English radio says they’re being gassed. Perhaps that’s the quickest way to die” (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 54). The arrival of Pfeffer brings fresh, grisly news from the outside: “We don’t really know how to react. Up to now very little news about the Jews had reached us here, and we thought it best to stay as cheerful as possible. Every now and then Miep used to mention what had happened to a friend, and Mother or Mrs. van Daan would start to cry, so she decided it was better not to say any more. But we bombarded Mr. Dussel with questions, and the stories he had to tell were so gruesome and dreadful that we can’t get them out of our heads. Once we’ve had time to digest the news, we’ll probably go back to our usual joking and teasing. It won’t do us or those outside any good if we continue to be as gloomy as we are now” (70). And yet the tone of her previous entry is far from upbeat: “I get frightened myself when I think of close friends who are now at the mercy of the cruelest monsters ever to stalk the earth. And all because they’re Jews” (70). Many such starkly realistic passages show that the witty and funny sections are not part of an escapist strategy, and that humor is a psychological tactic that allows the writer to connect to, not disconnect from, the world. The intention of being entertaining feeds the artistic necessity of providing a range of emotions (surprise, suspense, tears, and laughter) to her audience—both the contemporary one made of herself, the other refugees to whom she read her stories and on whom she practiced her entertaining skills and the future readers of her book, whom she didn’t wish to bore with endless brooding. The presence of the comedic van Daans and Dussel characters in the diary is fundamental to this end.

Humor in the diary fulfills three fundamental tasks: to reconnect Anne to her parents, in particular to bridge the distance that separates her from the mother; to allow her to begin to see herself as part of the larger world (that is, beyond the family circle) and to learn to both forge bonds in and erect boundaries within that world (functions fundamental to Freud’s model of joking); and last, to hold onto a humanist conception of society and history, one that, as Langer has cynically though correctly pointed out,⁸³ did not save her, but without which, I argue, life would have been inconceivable for her.

First, then, at a time when Anne feels as if she is being pulled away from her parents, humor allows her to reenter their camp, to reconstitute the secure nucleus in which she feels safer and in her own element, protected, and in a position of strength vis-à-vis the surrounding world, which is made to look comically small. “Thus,” Freud writes, “the humorist would acquire his superiority by assuming the role of the grown-up and identifying himself to some

extent with his father, and reducing the other people to being children.”⁸⁴ As I pointed out above, when compared to Mrs. van Daan, Edith Frank becomes an ally and no longer an enemy: Anne sees her family forming a separate camp (of superior people) from those fools with whom they must associate for the moment but who are also a key source of material for her storytelling. In her humorous sketches, we find the mother, father, and daughter on the same side of the good versus evil divide (within the limited annex universe), bonding and poking fun at the unreasonable and nonsensical other side. Her humor is a vehicle, not a screen. Humor allows for a reprieve in the conflict between the writer (the young teenager misunderstood by the grown-ups) and the adult world, between the youngest daughter and the mother, who—thanks to her own witticisms and the writer’s sense of humor—passes (if only temporarily) from *bad* to *good*. The first function of this humor, therefore, is to reconnect the humorist to her mother and father, to inscribe Anne into the Frank family circle from which she had begun to feel separated in her adolescence. In a way, it is her brilliant sense of humor (albeit at the expense of Mrs. van Daan) that allows Anne to forge a rapprochement and new identification with her mother.

Second, humor allows Frank to inscribe herself within the circle of a larger community, the human one from which she has been exiled. At this level, those who were previously vilified as separate (in order to strengthen the Frank clan’s cohesiveness) are now included in this larger human family. The writer broadens her circle of affiliation, and it is no longer the Franks against the other four people in the annex, but everybody in the annex (and in the world) against the oppressor, the Nazis. Frank was able and willing to look beyond her family boundaries and incorporate more members into her community of laughter. When she writes funny stories that she reads out loud to entertain the other refugees at night, or when she cracks jokes to lift up the sinking spirits of the adults around her, she is giving up her position of exclusivity with her mother, father, and sister to compose a larger resistance group against the ever-worsening situation. Take, for example, one classic *trait d’esprit*: “Fine specimens of humanity, those Germans, and to think I’m actually one of them! No, that’s not true, Hitler took away our nationality long ago” (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 55). She manages both to hold onto her national identity (she is German) and at the same time dissociate herself from the nation’s current regime thus indirectly assert its absurdity. “Hitler took away our nationality” is the truth, but it is also absurd, and in a world of sanity and justice it shouldn’t be possible—the factuality of where one is born being inalienable. Furthermore, by referring to the Nazi standards for judging who can claim German identity and who cannot (and considering that Hitler was not German-born himself), another absurdity in an irrational

reality, she indirectly states that not all Germans are “Germans”—which is to say that not all Germans are Nazis. These ironic lines provide a good example of how the author is able to pull herself away from any association with the barbaric Germans and implicitly associate herself not only with the Jews but also with all the victims and opponents of Nazism and Fascism. At this level, the van Daans and Dussel are included in her expanded group of allies: they become fellow victims and friends.

And last, by translating laughter into literature, Frank attains a twofold goal. First, she reinserts herself into the flow of civilized life, into a world outside the annex but unlike the contemporary historical one—a place without Nazis and gas chambers, where laughter reinstates human bonding, empathy, life-affirming principles, and ethical values. Through humor, she regenerates an ideal world in which everything once again makes sense, an ideal that affirms equality (she is particularly sensitive about gender issues),⁸⁵ freedom, and rebellion against the Nazi order. Second, she also incorporates us, the readers of her book, into her circle of like-minded citizens who, while forced to take the Nazi threat seriously, also protest the obscenity of war, cruelty, and genocide through her resisting and ridiculing laughter. We cannot turn the Holocaust into a joke, but we can share her perspective. After sixth grade, Anne was moved to the Jewish Lyceum, where her sister had also been a student. Perhaps there she had internalized one of the most profound lessons in Jewish ethics: *tikkun olam*, the mending of the world—an operation that demands everybody’s ethical engagement to heal and transform the future, one act of lovingkindness at a time.

Humor, in the sense I have explored it here, is not so much a tool with which to create pleasure in the midst of pain, but rather what Warren Poland calls the “gift of laughter,” which is the “capacity for sympathetic laughter at oneself and one’s place in the world . . . a regard for oneself and one’s limits despite pain.” We can identify Frank’s humor as “mature humor,” according to Poland’s definition: a humor that “exposes a mature capacity to acknowledge inner conflict and yet accept oneself with that knowledge, even when it is the knowledge of one’s narcissistic limits. Such humor, often linked to an appreciation of irony, requires a self-respecting modesty based on underlying self strength and simultaneous recognition of and regard for others.”⁸⁶ When considered in this light, the seemingly self-aggrandizing statements Frank makes to compare herself and her parents to the petty van Daans–Dussel group turn out to be moments of humorous reflection on her circumstances and the world inside and around her.

We must also consider the role that writing a diary plays in the psychological life of a teenager. In reference to the diary’s role as an interlocutor, Dalsimer writes that by “creating an imaginary being into whom she breathes life, the

adolescent attempts to fill the void left when the parents no longer hold the place they held in childhood, but new bonds have not yet been consolidated.” As for the strategy of writing a diary, Dalsimer observes: “Indeed, the diary is ideally suited to the narcissism and compensatory grandiosity of this phase . . . It is a literary mode whose legitimate subject is the self. It reflects the fluidity of self-esteem in adolescence—the vacillation between self-disparagement and self-aggrandizement—that the diary is valued both because it will guard one’s shameful secrets and also because it may one day be published. The imagined ‘other’ brought to life in the pages of the diary helps to ward off the depression associated with loss.”⁸⁷ The young girl “loses” her parents, who are about to be substituted (according to the Freudian and, in general, the patriarchal script) with a man, the love interest who will eventually come to dominate the adult woman’s life (her husband). Anne is in a transitional stage: the diary-writing time coincides with the psychological time at which a teenage girl returns to the narcissistic stage left behind in infancy and turns her libido toward herself exclusively, withdrawing it from other people and external things. The girl’s turning back into herself, according to Freud, is the important intermediary step that will force the boy or man to pursue her sexually—for he, the male, is capable of overcoming his narcissism and searching for a love object outside of himself.

Freud distinguished between two types of narcissism: a healthy one (primary narcissism, which responds to an impulse for self-preservation) and a pathological one (secondary narcissism). Polemically taking on Carl Jung and Sándor Ferenczi, Freud wrote in “On Narcissism” that women have an enviable capacity for narcissism. Although men are destined to love women—for a “man loves a woman as his infant self loved his mother”⁸⁸—women are programmed to continue to love themselves, a self-love especially strong in adolescence. Interestingly, Freud’s group of born narcissists includes, along with women, animals (cats, in particular), criminals, and humorists. And, mind you, not just any criminal or humorist, but “great criminals and humorists.” Narcissism in women, according to Freud’s analysis, is a sign of health: women are no longer defined by a void (the lack of a penis) but rather through a compensatory mechanism that becomes a positive attribute in its own right. Women will never grow a penis, but they can still love themselves. A primary narcissism maintained in adulthood is what allows women (only “the most beautiful,” Freud notes) to attract men: “Strictly speaking it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity equal to that of the man’s love for them. Nor does their need lie in the direction of loving, but in being loved.”⁸⁹ But Freud makes sure to throw in a corrective statement that counterbalances women’s fortunes so

that they do not threaten or overwhelm men's: once a child arrives, (even) the woman finally breaks the resistance of narcissism and pours her love onto an external object. As far as my analysis is concerned, the interesting question is why Freud would associate women and humorists in his discussion of narcissism. Is it because, like narcissism, humor seeks love and wants approval from an audience (the humorist's superego)? We should also consider another parallel between the humorist and women: the second wave of narcissism in the girl arises in puberty with the "loss" of the parents, and humor is also described as a tonic against the pain of something lost—control over a reality that has turned too painful. Thus both narcissism and humor are defense mechanisms against loss, and both rely on the capacity of the superego not only to punish but also to reward with a feeling of well-being.

The humorist wants to be loved, wants an alliance with the audience. Many people who knew her refer to Frank's clownish streak and recount that she loved to make people laugh, to be the center of attention in class, and to perform pantomimes arousing admiration and mirth in adults. Frank was a born spinner of tales and had a tremendous imagination. For example, it is reported that when she was invited to spend the night at the house of her friend Jopie, who lived a stone's throw from the Franks, she always brought a suitcase with her: "The suitcase was empty of course, but Anne insisted on it, because only with the suitcase did she feel as if she were really traveling."⁹⁰ Miep fondly remembers how great a mimic Anne was and her ability to make everybody laugh when she reproduced "the cat's meow, her friend's voice, her teacher's authoritative tone . . . Anne loved having an attentive audience, and loved to hear us respond to her skits and clowning."⁹¹ We know that humor pleases both the self and others, but its workings are too elusive and subtle to be comprehensively theorized, as are the workings of narcissism—which remained for Freud the least clear of the mind's mechanisms. By 1927, therefore, Freud decided to put the two together, and in his conclusive work on humor he wrote: "Like jokes and the comic, humour has something liberating about it; but it also has something of grandeur and elevation . . . The grandeur in it clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure. This last feature is a quite essential element of humour."⁹² Frank's humor is particularly complex because it follows two different trajectories at once, unlike, say, the more clear-cut political satire that a professional humorist might produce against a regime. Her humor allows her both to stand up against (which is the literal

meaning of the Latin *re-sistere*) public antisemitism and to fight the inner battle for self-definition waged in a private, familial setting. Through humor, she rebels against the patriarchal Father, whose oppressive rule is allegorized in the figures of Mrs. and Mr. van Daan and Dussel and their antiquated ideas about women and child rearing. Anne rightly understands them as part and parcel of a patriarchal conception of femaleness and family that she has decided to reject even at such a young age. Furthermore, her humor allows her to rebel against the broader symbol of paternity, which is the nation—the world of the Nazis, warmongers, pogromists, and all the “cruellest monsters ever to stalk the earth.”

However, as Freud demonstrates, humor is not born out of an appraisal of reality (that would be wisdom) but out of an appraisal directly counter to reality, a “rejection of the claims of reality.”⁹³ Thus in the old joke about the criminal who, being led out of his cell on the Monday of his execution, looks outside and says, “Well, the week’s starting nicely,” the humor comes, Freud explains, from the person’s incongruous assessment of his position in reality. He might be right that the week is going to be a good one, but it is certainly not going to be good for him. “Humour,” Freud says, “is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also the pleasure principle, which is able . . . to assert itself against the unkindness of the real circumstances.”⁹⁴

As we have seen, in writing about narcissism, Freud associated this special, healthy gift with women, humorists, and criminals. And we have seen how women’s humor is itself tied to criminality in that it breaks the law of the Father and, in our case, of the Nazis. We may perhaps dare add to Freud’s eccentric list the only type he left out: Jews—who have been traditionally enlisted as members of all the above categories. Jews are effeminate (women); they are immoral, and they are lecherous violators of Aryan women’s purity (criminal); and they are like rats (in that they overreproduce and carry infections fatal to the wholeness of nations)—these are some of the most common clichés of antisemitic propaganda. Freud himself, with *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, his masterpiece on (Jewish) Witz, opened the twentieth century with his own reactive, subversive, and resisting stance against antisemitism.⁹⁵ Frank, as a woman, humorist, Jew, and “criminal,” establishes herself as a militant agent against an antisemitism that feminizes the Jew, criminalizes him, and takes away the Jew’s humor—replacing it with its own crass and hateful verbal injuries in order, as Kofman wrote, to dismember the Jew’s identity so that he should never re-compose himself as a whole, never conceive of himself as an organic corpus.⁹⁶ Therefore Frank—again, as Jew, woman, and “criminal”—turned to the most adequate tool to disrupt further a law (the Nazi order) that has condemned her, in order to elevate herself above it.

Ultimately, by connecting humor to narcissism, Freud's system places the (symbolic) father at the origin of humor. "And finally, if the super-ego," he concludes, "tries, by means of humour, to console the ego and protect it from suffering, this does not contradict its origin in the parental [Freud undoubtedly means "paternal"] agency."⁹⁷ The superego thus engenders humor as a paternal way to soothe the ego: "The main thing is the intention which humour carries out, whether it is acting in relation to the self or other people. It means: 'Look! here is the world, which seems so dangerous! It is nothing but a game for children—just worth making a jest about!'"⁹⁸ According to this logic, Frank's humor might be read as a subconscious way through which the humorist attempts to become her own father, to tell herself those words of comfort that, given the unbearably fearful situation, she needs to hear so badly.

We saw how Otto Frank was the only one in the annex not to get himself involved in the daily quarrels between the other adults. He was the peacemaker while the mother was the fighter, the paladin of the children. Could it be possible, then, that instead of identifying with the father, Anne was taking over the role she would have liked him to play more actively—that is, fending off the attacks of the other adults as her mother was doing? What if the daughter were using humor to indirectly join forces with her mother by imitating Edith's resistance, a resistance Otto avoided? In this case, the mother and humorist would not be joining forces to win the love and attention of the man but rather to achieve their own mutual recognition.

Such female recognition is at the heart of Frank's diary. "There is a fiction," Dalsimer hypothesizes, "fervently maintained, that the diary is another person; yet this other person, like the mother of infancy, is continuous with the self."⁹⁹ According to De Costa, "in more than one way, Anne Frank's oeuvre can be interpreted as her attempt to position herself in a symbolic order in which exclusion mechanisms are at work . . . [H]er texts can be read as a representation of a mother-daughter dynamic in a patriarchal society that insists on a radical break between them."¹⁰⁰ By writing, and specifically by writing to Kitty, Frank fulfills Hélène Cixous's feminist vision: "It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence."¹⁰¹ I hope to have supplemented the conclusions of feminist scholars like Dalsimer, De Costa, Brenner, and others by adding the overlooked, forgotten, or underestimated mechanics of humor in Frank's understanding of herself, her mother, and their contemporary world. As De Costa observes, "the act of writing is in itself a way of maintaining contact with the semiotic [mother] while occupying the sym-

bolic order [father].”¹⁰² More subversively, I would add, this female author consciously repossesses a tradition of humor that has consistently posited woman as its object, not its agent, and from which women (with a superego feebler than that of man, according to Freud) had been altogether excluded.

In conclusion, I claim that Frank’s humor strives to seduce and attract the father, but she also succeeds in creating the conditions in which to identify with her mother. At the same time, she overcomes the adolescent impulse to isolate herself from the rest of the world and instead rationally faces her historical circumstances and preserves her bond with the human community inside and outside of the hiding place. And all of this happens in the diary, through writing, and with a feminine smile of recognition and defiance.

THE HIDING PLACE

This chapter opened with the death of Rudolf Höss. Höss spent his last days before his execution in captivity, and he devoted those days to writing. Höss had been totally free as he ruled and disseminated death and terror over his Nazi realm, yet his memoirs reveal that he had been a prisoner all his life in the rigid cage of a hateful worldview. In his last thoughts, Höss conspicuously avoided the Jewish question, except for saying the following: “Today I realize that the extermination of the Jews was wrong, absolutely wrong . . . The cause of anti-Semitism was not served by this act at all, in fact, just the opposite. The Jews have come much closer to their final goal.”¹⁰³ In brief, he was unrepentant. In a claustrophobic, mice-infested warehouse in Amsterdam that had been turned into a hiding place, a fourteen-year-old girl of boundless creative energy was able to transcend her limited experience and limiting circumstances and keep intact her moral values, a desire for self-improvement, and a vision of humanity still worth engaging. Two different deaths, two different faces of humankind. As Höss and the procession of defendants at the Nuremberg trials prove, the portrait of Nazism, and of any murderous totalitarianism, often features the vacant eyes and dimwitted expression of bureaucracy. The Nazi extermination plan was carried out efficiently by diligent citizens who did their jobs exceedingly well. Sometimes they were people who simply followed orders, with all the moral apathy required to liquidate millions of people without blinking.

Inspektor Karl Silberbauer, a former Nazi from Austria, kept working into the 1960s in the Viennese police force until Simon Wiesenthal uncovered him as the Gestapo man who had arrested the Franks in Amsterdam in August 1944. A reporter asked him, “What about Anne Frank? Have you read her diary?” The petty bureaucrat answered in a deadly serious tone: “Bought the little book last week to see whether I’m in it. But I am not.” When the interviewer asked him

about possible feelings of regret now that he had been suspended from his post and an investigation of his past loomed over him, Silberbauer's answer was: "Sure I feel sorry. Sometimes I feel downright humiliated. Now each time I take a streetcar I have to buy a ticket, just like everyone else. I can no longer show my service pass."¹⁰⁴ Dostoyevsky himself could not have written this script better. Here is a masterpiece of the bureaucratic mind, the unthinking official, a resident of that land where the light of wit cannot penetrate, where there is no autonomous observation and no will to commune with the human spirit, where the forgiving laughter of acceptance and inclusion has no oxygen to ignite.

Because of Silberbauer's diligence, the end of Frank's diary is not the happy one its author had so vehemently hoped for. Fate has it that the very last entry in the diary produced a passage of wrenching tragedy whose irony can hardly leave us untouched. As in the best comedic tradition, humor conveys profoundly sad thoughts about the human condition: "I'm what a romantic movie is to a profound thinker—a mere diversion, a comic interlude, something that is soon forgotten: not bad, but not particularly good either" (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 336). The closing paragraph of her journal rehearses that funny Jewish family shtick we have come to recognize from decades of sitcoms and Hollywood movies, but with a last sentence that leaves us no choice but to laugh and cry:

If I'm quiet and serious, everyone thinks I'm putting on a new act and I have to save myself with a joke, and then I'm not even talking about my own family, who assume I must be sick, stuff me with aspirins and sedatives, feel my neck and forehead to see if I have a temperature, ask about my bowel movements and berate me for being in a bad mood, until I . . . get cross, then sad, and finally end up turning my heart inside out, the bad part on the outside and the good part on the inside, and keep trying to find a way to become what I'd like to be and what I could be if . . . if only there were no other people in the world.

Yours, Anne M. Frank (*The Diary of a Young Girl*, 336)

Anne was teased in the annex for being so obsessed with writing. The others used to jokingly ask her "What do you have so much to write about?"¹⁰⁵ and she would defend herself with quick but mordant answers, blushing a little. When not laboring over it, she jealously hid her diary in her father's leather briefcase. When the Nazis arrested them and searched the annex for valuables, someone—who knows, perhaps it was Silberbauer himself—opened Otto Frank's old briefcase and shook its contents on the floor, hoping something worth looting would fall out. When the briefcase produced only a bunch of handwritten and typed pages, school notepads, and a girlish journal bound in a reddish orange,

checkered fabric, the Nazis left everything on the ground, looked elsewhere, and eventually left the scene. They were there to take lives and trample into oblivion all traces of their existence. Miep and the other Opetka employees had tried to save these eight lives. Failing everything else, they rushed to the hiding place once the ss men had gone to collect the few pieces of their friends' existence left behind and preserve them for when they would come back, or as an indicting record of their not coming back. In her quick-witted wisdom, Anne did not bring the diary with her but left it in the Secret Annex, where she used her creativity, her humor, and her tragedy to craft a literary work that still compels her addressee, Kitty—us—never to look away.

To end this hodgepodge of news, a particularly amusing joke told by Mr. van Daan:

"What goes click ninety-nine times and clack once? A centipede with a clubfoot."

 **ANNE FRANK**, *The Diary of a Young Girl*