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### [Review of: R. Ensel (2022) Anne Frank on the Postwar Dutch Stage: Performance, Memory, Affect]

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Remco Ensel, *Anne Frank on the Postwar Dutch Stage: Performance, Memory, Affect*. New York: Routledge 2022. ISBN 9781032034294. 134 pp.

In early 2022, new research by an international cold case team was published about one of the most well-known mysteries of the twentieth century: who betrayed Anne Frank? The book claimed that, with 85% certainty, a Jewish notary had betrayed the Frank family. This news was eagerly picked up by media worldwide after a successful marketing campaign by the American publishing house. In the ensuing days, historians, Jewish Studies scholars, and other experts from the Netherlands criticized the research for its weak evidence and unfounded accusation. Nevertheless, the damaging trope of a Jewish traitor was already circulating in the media. Emile Schrijver, director of the Jewish Cultural Quarter, was one of the consulted experts. He pointed out the commercial interests of the involved parties who benefited from any form of media attention and argued that in the future he and other experts should not give in to unrealistic deadlines and embargos. A few days later, the Dutch publishing house sent a letter to its authors apologizing for the commotion, putting blame on the American publisher while claiming their own role had been marginal. Though much can be said about our contemporary media landscape, in which outlets feel pressured to publish breaking news as quick as possible, this incident can also be placed within a longer history of Dutch claims about and American self-criticism of the supposed Americanization of the Holocaust: somewhat crude, ahistorical and not seldomly motivated by commerce. For many critics this appropriation started with *The Diary of Anne Frank* and its early theater and film adaptations. Their argument is that the diary sugarcoats the horrors of the Holocaust through its hopeful message and universalizes and trivializes the Holocaust, turning away from its specific European and Jewish context.

Remco Ensel's *Anne Frank on the Postwar Dutch Stage*, a self-professed microhistory, is placed precisely in this context, and to its great merit attempts to break with the rather unnuanced understanding of American

appropriation as opposed to European submissiveness. The famous 1955 Broadway theater adaptation by Frances Goodrich and Alfred Hackett was an important driving force in the global reception of Anne Frank's diary. The play's script was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and led to a boost in sales of the diary and a 1959 Hollywood feature film. Aside from its popular appeal, the play was criticized by Dutch and American critics for presenting Anne Frank as a universal teenager rather than a Jewish girl. Ensel meticulously examines the 1956 Dutch staging of the American play. He does so by studying not only the script, but also the production process, performances, and reception, and describes how director Karl Guttman and actor Rob de Vries, both Holocaust survivors, 'took up a Broadway play and, in an uphill battle, conjured up a troubling past that, through subsequent performative acts, contributed to widening circles of solidarity and empathic understanding' (2-3). Studying unique archival materials such as correspondence between Guttman, de Vries and Otto Frank, prompt books and blueprints of the set, interviews, and newspaper articles, Ensel paints a rich picture of this battle that was not merely one against an overwhelming American cultural force. Instead, this study enables us also to critically examine the Dutch context where in the 1950s the memory of the persecution of the Jews was barely acknowledged and this staging made big waves in otherwise still waters.

The problem of Eurocentric critiques of Anne Frank's diary as a form of American appropriation is that it provides a comfortable position for European critics of nearness to the events, both intellectually and emotionally. It puts the blame on the Americans but fails to reflect on the Dutch memory culture that at that time only articulated the persecution of the Jews as part of its own national and collective suffering. Ensel shows how Dutch critics were quick to express their doubts about the Dutch staging. The Jewish journalist Hans Gomperts stated even before the play had been staged that it was 'trite, Anne too glamorously portrayed and fictions had been added. ... Let's hope the country will be spared from this sentimental kitsch' (quoted in Ensel, 58). Ensel takes the time to carefully reconstruct all elements of the Dutch staging and demonstrates how Rob de Vries and Kurt Guttman did not simply bring an American play to the Netherlands, but 'appropriated' it. The choice of this word is apt: he does not claim that the Anne Frank play was originally Dutch, subsequently adapted by the Hacketts, and then 'returned home'. Instead, the popular American play had to be reworked for a Dutch context.

The result is not so much a more faithful staging because Anne Frank is supposedly Dutch, but rather an appropriation. Director Guttmann could not, nor intended to, rewrite the original script. However, he made crucial choices that changed much of the impact of the play. Emotionally charged words that had been anglicized such as *distributiekaarten*, *Grünen* and *moffen* were translated back to Dutch. The nationality of Dussel was changed; Hebrew was used as the ritual language instead English in the US version, and certain Hebrew prayers were followed by a Dutch translation. Ensel describes the opening night in the De La Mar Theater, in the center of Amsterdam, with several survivors, acquaintances of Anne Frank, and Queen Juliana present. The atmosphere was tense and many visitors left quickly after the curtain fell. Ensel also addresses the lack of applause. There is some debate whether this was orchestrated or not, but it remained the case in subsequent performances throughout the country. It had its effect on the cast, and Ensel mentions incidents with giggling actors on stage and describes how one actor was happy to be able to perform in another play. He concludes the cast struggled with performing such an emotionally charged play.

One part of the book that is not entirely convincing is the theoretical framework that references the works of for instance Sarah Ahmed on affect theory and Michael Rothberg on the implicated subject. It neither critically engages in their arguments nor puts them to work in relation to the case at hand. This does not diminish the value of the study that lies in its detailed historical and ethnographic reconstruction. Remco Ensel's book is a thoughtful and focused contribution to our understanding of the first theater staging of the Anne Frank diary in the Netherlands. As such, it allows us to critically reflect on the circulation and appropriation of Holocaust memory within and between US and European contexts, a topic that continues to be relevant in a time where the Anne Frank and the Holocaust continue to make headlines worldwide.

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