

Reading Etty Hillesum in Context



Reading Etty Hillesum in Context

Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author

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Table of Contents

Preface	9
Introduction	11
1 A Short Biography of Etty Hillesum (1914-1943) <i>Klaas A.D. Smelik</i>	23
The Diaries	
2 To Remember Is to Act From a Bundle of Notebooks to a Worldwide Publication <i>Klaas A.D. Smelik</i>	33
3 <i>Hineinhorchen</i> and Writing The Language Use of Etty Hillesum <i>Marja Clement</i>	51
War and Persecution	
4 Etty Hillesum's Choice Not to Go into Hiding <i>Klaas A.D. Smelik</i>	81
5 Agency within Nazi Constraints Etty Hillesum and Her Interpretation of the Jewish Fate <i>Lotte Bergen</i>	103
6 One Ought to Write a Chronicle of Westerbork <i>Jurjen Wiersma</i>	143
7 The Departure A Reconstruction of the Unexpected Deportation of the Hillesum Family From Camp Westerbork on Tuesday, 7 September 1943 <i>Gerrit Van Oord</i>	157

Reading and Writers

- 8 “Aesthetic Mirrors” 183
Etty Hillesum and Rainer Maria Rilke
Meins G.S. Coetsier
- 9 “I Keep Being Drawn towards Jung” 227
Good and Evil in the Work of Etty Hillesum and Carl Gustav Jung
Janny van der Molen
- 10 “To Realize That Life Is Truly Simple” 245
Etty Hillesum and Walther Rathenau
Jurjen Wiersma

Family and Friends

- 11 Romance Down by The River IJssel 259
The First Meeting between Etty Hillesum and Klaas Smelik Senior
Klaas A.D. Smelik
- 12 Etty Hillesum, A Devoted Student of Julius Spier 273
Alexandra H.M. Nagel
- 13 “With You, I Have My Anchorage” 285
Fifteen Letters From Etty Hillesum to Julius Spier
Alexandra Nagel and Denise de Costa
- 14 “Three Times Yes and a Thousand Fold No!” 303
Julius Spier Writes to Etty Hillesum
Alexandra Nagel and Ria van den Brandt

Reception of Hillesum’s Diaries and Letters

- 15 Etty Hillesum in Jewish Contexts 315
Piet Schrijvers
- 16 From Separation to Communitas 333
Etty Hillesum, A Jewish Perspective
Thalia Gur-Klein

17	The Invincible Hope of Christian de Chergé and Etty Hillesum <i>Yves Bériault</i>	361
18	Etty Hillesum Gender, the Modern and the Literature of the Holocaust <i>Mary Evans</i>	371
19	America in The Shade Etty Hillesum As Mediator Between the Cold War Perspectives on the Holocaust <i>Hans Krabbendam</i>	379
20	Perceptions of Etty Hillesum in Japan <i>Yukiko Yokohata</i>	395
21	Saint, Cyber Phenomenon, Thinker, or Poet Etty Hillesum in Portugal <i>Patricia Couto</i>	419
22	Bright Orange and Crimson How a Dutch Dissertation on Etty Hillesum Was Coloured by French Philosophy <i>Denise de Costa</i>	431
23	Ulrich Beck and Etty Hillesum <i>Klaas A.D. Smelik</i>	445
24	Loving-Kindness, Hatred, and Moral Indignation Etty Hillesum and Vladimir Jankélévitch, <i>Ordo amoris</i> <i>Ronald Commers</i>	459
25	A Woman's All-Embracing Search of "the Other" Etty Hillesum as the Basis of a "Pedagogy of Care and Attention" <i>Anna Aluffi Pentini</i>	479
	Acknowledgements	501
	Index of Names and Subjects	505
	Index of Citations	519



Preface

The diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum (1914-1943) have a special place among Dutch-Jewish testimonies of the Shoah (Holocaust). They not only contain a valuable account of the Westerbork transition camp during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, they also reflect the spiritual, philosophical, and literary dimensions of Hillesum's important existential search. More than 70 years after her death in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Hillesum's diaries and letters continue to receive worldwide attention and to inspire hundreds of thousands of readers.

In this work, we present a selection of articles originally appearing in Dutch in the nine volume series, *Etty Hillesum Studies*, published by the Etty Hillesum Research Centre. From this series, eighteen articles published since 2003, now translated into English, are included here. Our hope is that through them, researchers worldwide will become acquainted with a representative sample of the ongoing Hillesum research taking place within the Dutch language area.

This volume also includes revised and annotated versions of some of the papers delivered at the Second International Etty Hillesum Congress, organized in January 2014 by the Etty Hillesum Research Centre of Ghent University.

Our special thanks go to Caroline Diepeveen, Mijke van Leersum, Durk van der Meer, Fanny Mojet, Patrick Schetters, Ron van Uum, and Susan Waters for their help in translating the articles, and to Margaret de Boer, John Cartner, Carolyn Coman, and Ms. Michael Strange for editing the English texts. We appreciate very much their dedication to the project.

We are very grateful to Julie Benschop-Plokker, Louise Visser, and Jaap Wagenaar of Amsterdam University Press for their continued support and patience, and to Caroline Diepeveen for making the two indices.

Finally, an important note to the reader: The quotations from Hillesum's writings are taken from *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002). The abbreviation E.T. refers to Arnold J. Pomerans' complete English translation of Hillesum's literary heritage. In the footnotes, the reader will find the original Dutch (or German) text quoted from *Etty Hillesum, Het Werk*, edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik (Amsterdam: Balans, 2012). We hope that this will encourage readers to compare the translation with the original text.

Klaas A.D. Smelik, Gerrit Van Oord and Jurjen Wiersma
15 August 2017



Introduction

After the publication of *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life] in 1981, scholars around the world evinced a keen interest in the writings of Etty Hillesum. That volume – the first compilation of sections of Etty Hillesum’s diaries and letters – gave rise to an extensive examination of Hillesum’s written legacy. Her work became a distinct field of international research within the Humanities, and a new domain in the field of Holocaust studies. Academic interest in Etty Hillesum’s work was internationalized in a significantly short time span. By 1988, the first international seminar on Etty Hillesum was held, not in the Netherlands where she was born, but rather in Rome, demonstrating the breadth of her appeal.

In the early days, researchers had no other resource for their work but *Het Verstoorde Leven*, in the original Dutch version, or in translation. This had a rather unfavourable impact on the quality of research, since the diary entries and letters selected for that book gave a distorted view of Etty Hillesum and her writings. A complete, academic edition was in order. This task fell to Klaas A.D. Smelik and his staff at the Etty Hillesum Foundation in Amsterdam, which published the first edition of Hillesum’s complete works in 1986.

The objective in publishing the critical 1986 edition was to offer a text that would form a solid basis for further research. It is extremely important, therefore, that English, French, and Italian translations of the complete edition, including all annotations, have become available since – while a German edition is in preparation.

Still, it has remained difficult for scholars who do not know Dutch to investigate Etty Hillesum’s writings. Many of the existing translations are imprecise, and the English rendering is considered particularly weak. In response, in 2014, the Etty Hillesum Research Centre published a new, bilingual edition of Hillesum’s diaries and letters (Dutch-English), to enable non-Dutch scholars to consult the original texts with far greater ease and to extract meaning with greater precision.

Standing apart from Hillesum’s own work, however, yet nevertheless of great potential interest to scholars, are important studies on Etty Hillesum written in Dutch, and thus inaccessible to non-Dutch speakers. One might mention, for example, Piet Schrijvers’ essay, “Etty Hillesum in joodse contexten” [Etty Hillesum in Jewish Contexts], which was published in Dutch in 2003. In this article, the author clearly shows that Etty Hillesum is rooted in Judaism – a contentious issue from the beginning of the reception

of Hillesum's writings. The international discussion about whether or not Etty Hillesum should be considered a Jewish author, would have benefited greatly if this article had been available to readers outside the Dutch language area. Indeed, much of the discussion would have been superfluous.

Schrijvers' article appeared in the first volume of the Dutch-language series, *Etty Hillesum Studies* published by the Etty Hillesum Research Centre, and since 2003, the Centre has issued eight additional volumes. The staff at the Centre now feels the time has come to publish in English a selection of articles from this series in order to acquaint researchers worldwide with their content. The selections in the current volume are – as much as possible – a representative sample of research on Etty Hillesum within the Dutch language area. In total, eighteen contributions from the *Etty Hillesum Studies* series, translated into English, are included. They represent Dutch research on Etty Hillesum, and also demonstrate how research in the Netherlands fits into the global effort to understand Hillesum's written legacy.

In 2014, at Ghent University, the Second International Etty Hillesum Conference took place. Many of the conference presentations were published in the volume, *The Ethics and Religious Philosophy of Etty Hillesum* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 28] (Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill, 2017). Seven conference papers *not* in that volume, are included here.

The present volume opens with a short biography of Etty Hillesum by Klaas A.D. Smelik. In it, Smelik presents an overview of what is presently known about Hillesum's life. The biography is followed by the first section, which is devoted to the diaries.

Klaas A.D. Smelik, in his contribution, "To Remember Is to Act: From a Bundle of Notebooks to a Worldwide Publication", writes about the publication history of Hillesum's written legacy. The story charts Hillesum's close link to Smelik's parental home, up through his own work to get various editions translated and published. The history of these accomplishments is rather complicated, but it is nevertheless clearly elucidated here.

In her article, "*Hineinhorchen* and Writing: The Language Use of Etty Hillesum", Marja Clement poses the question: What are the characteristics of Etty Hillesum's language use? Although an extensive study is needed in order to describe the language use of Etty Hillesum in all its details, Clement's article offers a useful introduction by engaging with many quotations from the diaries. This preliminary research leads to the following conclusion: Etty Hillesum's work is rich in figurative language, including

metaphors and metonyms, subtle humour and irony, and is characterized by an original and unique style.

The next section of the volume deals with war and persecution. Essential to the aura of holiness ascribed to Etty Hillesum by some of her readers, was her choice to share the destiny of her people. Her choice is seen as a sacrifice by some, although Etty Hillesum herself did not use this term in this regard. Has she deliberately chosen death or did she feel that she would survive “Poland” too? Was Etty Hillesum fully aware of what would happen when she refused to hide? Opinions on this issue are divided. In his paper, “Etty Hillesum’s Choice Not to Go into Hiding”, Klaas A.D. Smelik adds clarity to this controversy by re-analyzing the available data. He concludes that some of Etty Hillesum’s critics have not read her texts correctly, while the martyr’s role that others have attributed to her needs relativization as well.

In her essay “Agency within Nazi Constraints: Etty Hillesum and Her Interpretation of the Jewish Fate”, Lotte Bergen takes the concept of “agency” as her starting point. The term agency, derived from sociology, refers to the freedom of people under limited circumstances. In this case, Bergen is dealing with the agency of the Jewish people during the Shoah. She asks if Etty Hillesum managed to achieve freedom of action for herself in her difficult situation. She distinguishes between Hillesum’s “inner-felt agency”, her choice to relate to the persecution in a certain way, and her “outer agency”, referring to Hillesum’s decision to work for the Jewish Council, as well as her request to be transferred to Camp Westerbork, and her decision to return to the camp after each period of leave. Bergen’s conclusion is that, in the face of Nazi horrors increasingly taking hold of Jewish lives, Etty Hillesum was able not only to experience life as beautiful and meaningful, but within the constraints imposed on Jews by the occupying power, she was able to take control of her fate. Her attitude towards the persecution of Jews and her voluntary choice to go to Camp Westerbork show – according to Bergen – Hillesum’s courage to determine her own course and become the chronicler of her time.

Camp Westerbork is the focus of Jurjen Wiersma’s paper, “One Ought to Write a Chronicle of Westerbork”. Westerbork was an unimaginable as well as exceptional concentration camp. Within its confines, various realities existed for inmates that could not be captured with a single narrative. It was “a world of its own”. On a summer evening in 1942, while eating in a dining barrack, Etty Hillesum was inspired to murmur, “One ought to write a chronicle of Westerbork.” The man eating next to her replied, “Yes, but to do that one would have to be a great poet.” Etty Hillesum agreed. Of course, she had already been writing about camp life in her diaries and

letters, producing a unique and wonderful constellation of “testimonials”. She was a teller of truths about the camp, but not (yet) a chronicler, a form that she felt had different requirements. In Wiersma’s essay, an effort is made to add crucial elements taken from the doctoral theses of two young Dutch historians, Eva Moraal and Marieke Meeuwenoord. Taken together, Wiersma, Moraal, and Meeuwenoord achieve a type of mosaic that can be characterized as a chronicle of Westerbork. The essay truly captures the plight and predicament of Camp Westerbork inmates, who included in their number Etty Hillesum herself.

In his contribution, “The Departure: A Reconstruction of the Unexpected Deportation of the Hillesum Family from Camp Westerbork on Tuesday, 7 September 1943”, Gerrit Van Oord spotlights the diary of Philip Mechanicus. Van Oord puts Mechanicus’ diary under a magnifying glass as it tells the story of the deportation of the Hillesum family from Camp Westerbork. After analyzing the Mechanicus text, and using various sources, including some letters from Hillesum’s environment unknown until now, Van Oord reconstructs the course of events that led to the unexpected, yet inevitable departure of four out of five members of the Hillesum family. Van Oord criticizes a number of assumptions about this departure. For example, he considers the well-worn testimony of Benno Stokvis unreliable, and attributes a greater power over the lives of the inmates of the camp to *Sachbearbeiterin* Gertrud Slotke than is usually recognized. In this way, he arrives at a thesis about the departure of the Hillesum family different from the prevailing one that places responsibility on mother Rebecca (Riva) Hillesum and her letter to *Generalkommissar* Rauter requesting more freedom of movement. In that narrative, Rauter ignites in anger at the presumptuous request of a Jewess, and issues a deportation order immediately. Van Oord believes, however, that this interpretation is untenable, and his essay invites the reader to take a fresh view on the matter.

The theme of the third section of this book is reading and writers. In his article “‘Aesthetic Mirrors’: Etty Hillesum and Rainer Maria Rilke”, Meins G.S. Coetsier analyzes Etty Hillesum’s intellectual engagement with the literary works of the Prague-born German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926). Coetsier offers the reader a glimpse into one of the most powerful, yet underrated influences on Etty Hillesum’s development as a writer. Coetsier does justice to the profundity of Hillesum’s insight into Rilke’s writings, and discloses some of the literary subtleties shared by Hillesum and Rilke. Coetsier draws three lines from Hillesum’s work to Rilke’s – gazing into three “aesthetic mirrors”: (a) “I am with you” [*Ichbinbeidir*]; (b) “God matures” [*Gott reift*]; and (c) “patience is all” [*Geduld ist alles*]. In addition, the

article claims that the works of Rilke and Hillesum are relevant today, and that war, terror, and genocide are bloody wounds still in need of “a balm”, and, where possible, a way to heal them. From this perspective, Coetsier’s scholarly contribution reveals that Rilke’s influence on Hillesum’s writings were displayed not only in her poetic quality, but also in her real and lived humanity, and in the unmatched grace and intelligence with which she met challenges. Rarely did two people write so much in such short life spans. How war, but also love, left their marks on the lives and writings of these two authors remains the mystery of what Rilke calls: *Weltinnenraum*.

In addition to Rilke, Carl Gustav Jung carried a special place of influence in Etty Hillesum’s oeuvre. After all, he had been Spier’s teacher and close associate, and Spier had taught Hillesum. In her article, “‘I Keep Being Drawn towards Jung’: Good and Evil in the Work of Etty Hillesum and Carl Gustav Jung”, Janny van der Molen demonstrates how Jung and Hillesum differ from one another, but also how close their thoughts were on questions of evil. For both, the question of evil was crucial to their philosophy of life, and they both conceived of evil in a way that deviated from the spirit of their time. Most intellectuals saw good and evil as consistently opposed to one another, representing one’s own good and the opponent’s evil. Today, at the beginning of the third millennium, we see that the contradiction between “good guys” and “bad guys” is once more determining our thinking. This makes understanding the connection between Jung and Hillesum all the more relevant.

Walther Rathenau (1867-1922) was a socially successful, prominent Jewish politician and German statesman, a courageous and tenacious personality, who remained standing in a chaotic and hostile world. Lore Karrenbrock (1895-1928) grew up in Essen. She began reading the works of Rathenau in the autumn of 1917. Subsequently, she wrote letters to *him* and when the author kindly replied, a loving relationship flowered between them, albeit platonic in nature. The love of the much younger Karrenbrock was, however, of a somewhat self-destructive nature. She wanted to exist solely for him. Having read Rathenau’s letters to Karrenbrock, Etty Hillesum became intrigued by the drama in this love affair and commented upon it. In his contribution, “‘To Realize That Life Is Truly Simple’: Etty Hillesum and Walther Rathenau”, Jurjen Wiersma depicts Etty Hillesum as the central figure in a triptych flanked by Rathenau and Karrenbrock. In this setting, we see three human beings brought together in dark times, facing complexities and extremes. In Hillesum’s reflections upon the delicate position of Rathenau and Karrenbrock, she makes up her mind. More important than life, suffering, or love, is simplicity, she confirms. This she feels she has

learned from Rathenau who said, "For me there will never be a happier moment, than to realize that life is truly simple."

The subject of the fourth section of this book is family and friends. One of Etty Hillesum's friends was the author Klaas Smelik Senior (1897-1986), to whom she entrusted her diaries. In his contribution "Romance Down by the River IJssel: The First Meeting between Etty Hillesum and Klaas Smelik Senior", Smelik's son, Klaas A.D. Smelik, looks to clarify the course of events during the first encounter between Etty Hillesum and father Smelik. A dedication written in a book, which Etty Hillesum gave to Klaas Smelik Senior and his second wife Mien, provides the basis for an analysis. The Hillesum/Smelik meeting was a notable one that would become even more meaningful as time went on.

When Etty Hillesum had her hands analyzed by the psychochirologist, Julius Spier, on 3 February 1941, she was deeply impressed. After an examination of the form of her hand and palm, Spier told her what he understood of her personality and the issues plaguing her. Soon after, Hillesum enrolled in Spier's course on Psychochirology in order to learn how to analyze hands. Until Hillesum began working at the Jewish Council, she spent a substantial amount of time engaged in reading hands. In her article, "Etty Hillesum, A Devoted Student of Julius Spier", Alexandra Nagel highlights a series of moments in which Hillesum followed Spier's footsteps and sought to become a hand-reading psychological therapist herself.

We get "a new perspective" on the relationship between Hillesum and Spier in the contribution of Alexandra Nagel and Denise de Costa, entitled, "With You, I Have My Anchorage: Fifteen Letters from Etty Hillesum to Julius Spier". The authors provide an overview of the Hillesum/Spier bond gleaned from "placing the texts in chronological order" and checking the letters against entries in Hillesum's diary. A key letter not yet included in the complete edition of Etty Hillesum's work was only discovered in December of 2012. This typed, unsigned sheet of paper, found in a folder in the archive of publisher Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, highlights Hillesum's interest in psychotherapy. Here, we also notice the gentle ribbing Hillesum gives Spier ("I must run, I have a course with a madman"), revealing just how much in love with him she was. These letters to Spier are written in German rather than Dutch and a close look shows that she put quite a bit of effort into composing them. Moreover, in these letters, Hillesum's thoughts and feelings on a variety of subjects are formulated with an utterly open and honest frame of mind.

Etty Hillesum and Julius Spier did not live together in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, they were in constant, lively contact with one another, calling each

other, meeting often, and writing letters. Indeed, the first diary notebook starts with a letter Hillesum wrote to Spier. During the summer holiday of 1941, Hillesum and Spier maintained an especially intense correspondence. A letter Spier sent to Hillesum resurfaced in December 2012, and it is this letter that Ria van den Brandt and Alexandra Nagel utilize in their paper, “‘Three Times Yes and a Thousand Fold No!’ Julius Spier Writes to Etty Hillesum”. The letter gives the reader a new glimpse into the unique relationship of the two. In it, the teacher/therapist Spier responds constructively to an issue Hillesum had brought to the fore and advises her to read a passage in Rittelmeyer’s *Briefe über das Johannes-Evangelium*. Moreover, the letter expresses Spier’s very personal, private feelings of affection and desire for Etty Hillesum and may hold a clue to the controversy about whether or not they were lovers.

The subject of the fifth and final section of this volume has to do with the reception of Hillesum’s diaries and letters. This section starts with the already mentioned article, “Etty Hillesum in Jewish Contexts”, by Piet Schrijvers. In this essay, a modern demographic survey of Dutch Jews from the year 2000 is utilized to reflect upon the Jewish character of Etty Hillesum’s life and writings. Her writings show a marked development away from assimilation, to a clear awareness of her Jewishness. In this, she was influenced by German Jews who had immigrated to Holland, and, of course, by the actual persecution of the Dutch Jews beginning mid-1942 (Diaries, notebook IX). Etty Hillesum’s concentration on her own spiritual life is comparable to the German concepts of *Innere Emigration* and *Innerlichkeit*. Schrijvers highlights other aspects of Etty Hillesum’s Jewish identity when he points to her obsession with language and text (literature as a second homeland), her self-imposed role of historical writer, and her dialogues with God. Post-war Jewish reactions to Etty Hillesum’s diaries were inevitably mixed given her controversial attitude to armed resistance, heroism, and her acceptance of the so-called collective fate of the Jews (*Massenschicksal*).

When Etty Hillesum started her work for the *Joodse Raad* [Jewish Council], she did so in the hope of avoiding deportation. In this way, she initially stood separate from the Jewish community and its fate. Her role meant complying with the Council’s dubious policy of assisting with deportations, evading the warning of Jews, preventing them (and herself) from hiding, and neither resisting, nor escaping the Nazi ordeal. In “From Separation to Communitas: Etty Hillesum, A Jewish Perspective”, Thalia Gur-Klein discusses Hillesum’s choice to volunteer with the Jewish Council as a social worker in Camp Westerbork in light of concepts and debates presented in Biblical and Talmudic ethics, and in Jewish mysticism. Gur-Klein considers

Hillesum's choice as an example of *communitas*, and sees her decision not as a separation, but rather as a renewal of empathy with the Jewish people, their fate, heritage, and covenant with God. Gur-Klein points out that the classical ethical texts hypothesize the exact moral dilemma Hillesum faced: separating from one's fellow human beings to save one's own life, or conversely, sharing a lethal collective fate because of love of others. Both choices are acceptable. Having situated Etty Hillesum within *communitas*, the second part of the article proceeds by invoking the mystical Judaism of Kabbalah and Hasidism, and focusing on the role of the *zaddik* – a righteous and God-inspired person, regarded holy in Judaism. Here, the author asserts that, through her choice of *communitas* with fellow camp inmates, Etty Hillesum rose to the role of a female *zaddik*.

In writing his essay, "The Invincible Hope of Christian de Chergé and Etty Hillesum", Yves Bériault makes the leap to another religious tradition. Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé of the Tibhirine Monastery in Algeria, shared a belief that God requires our help in this world and that He places His hope on us. Through their writings, Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé laid the foundation for a theology of hope. They embraced the concept of a God who asks of humans that they accompany Him to the margins of human existence and stand in solidarity with the many who are discarded. In this theology, humans are seen as the bearers of the message of hope, and builders of a better world. They are to act as witnesses to the greatness of human life wherever that life is violated.

In her article "Etty Hillesum: Gender, the Modern and the Literature of the Holocaust", Mary Evans points to a paradox. Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters, products of the Second World War, were written in a century that was widely assumed to be "modern", a world in which the legacy of the European Enlightenment would be manifested in rational and liberal policies. Amongst those policies would be the greater social and intellectual emancipation of women. Yet, Etty Hillesum – educated and with a liberated mind – was the victim of European fascism set on crushing all forms of political dissent and the Jewish people and their religion. The work of Etty Hillesum is like a fulcrum in this twentieth-century rupture. Etty Hillesum experienced education and untold forms of personal freedom and then pivoted to use these intellectual riches to document the murderous policies of the Holocaust. From Etty Hillesum's accounts of the persecution of Dutch Jews, we get a detailed chronicle of the ways in which the capacity for the rational was used not to emancipate, but to kill. The promise of human progress so closely associated with the Enlightenment was shown to be a very broken promise.

In his contribution “America in the Shade: Etty Hillesum as Mediator between Cold-War Perspectives on the Holocaust”, Hans Krabbendam draws our attention to the United States. He points out that Etty Hillesum hardly referred to the United States at all in her writing and yet, this country played an important role in the perception of her work. Krabbendam details three levels of influence involving the US and summarizes their functional impact. First, the fact that Hillesum wrote so little on the US encourages researchers to re-evaluate the expectations placed on America in occupied Europe during the war. Second, American reflections on Hillesum’s work focused on the psychological dimension of her work, and obscured the cultural context of her writings. Finally, Krabbendam sees Hillesum’s fascination with Russia as a welcome bridge between diverse approaches to the Holocaust articulated in the Soviet Union and the United States. By avoiding the fixed models that were the result of Cold War historiography, Etty Hillesum inhabits the role of mediator, a role that perfectly matches her aspirations as a writer.

Etty Hillesum paid little attention to the United States, but was captivated by Japanese culture. In turn, Japanese readers of Etty Hillesum’s diaries have responded with appreciable depth to her work. In her article “Perceptions of Etty Hillesum in Japan”, Yukiko Yokohata points to an intriguing difference that exists between Buddhist and Roman Catholic readers in Japan when they encounter Etty Hillesum’s diaries. In Yokohata’s view, the Buddhist context corresponds more closely to Hillesum’s core thinking than does the Roman Catholic perspective, which hews closer to views on Hillesum found in Europe. Etty Hillesum’s fascination with Japanese art appears to have been more than just an aesthetic experience. It was a relationship emerging from Hillesum’s essence, and one that gave rise to the close identity between her work and Japan’s Buddhist tradition.

In her paper, “Thinker, Poet, Cyber Phenomenon, or Saint: Etty Hillesum in Portugal”, Patricia Couto discusses the reception of Etty Hillesum’s *Diário* [Diary], and *Cartas* [Letters] published in Portuguese in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Couto demonstrates how a Roman Catholic readership appropriated Hillesum as their own in the predominantly Roman Catholic country. This was due, in part, to the source text for the translation, *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life], which was compiled by Jan Geurt Gaarlandt to emphasize the spiritual aspects in Hillesum’s writing while compromising the historical, philological, and material elements. In spite of this, one can still discern a secondary, less religious current in the Portuguese reception of Hillesum’s work, one motivated by a more philosophical and feminist perspective. Until today in Portugal, interest in Etty Hillesum’s

work is broadening. It has been discussed at universities, been the subject of various dissertations, and has inspired a generation of young Portuguese novelists.

In her contribution “Bright Orange and Crimson: How a Dutch Dissertation on Etty Hillesum Was Coloured by French Philosophy”, Denise de Costa addresses the complexity and ambiguity of Hillesum’s work. De Costa explains how her thinking about Etty Hillesum was shaped by a women’s studies perspective, and fed by French postmodern philosophers like François Lyotard and Hélène Cixous.

The chapter that Ulrich Beck dedicates to Etty Hillesum in his book *Der eigene Gott* has played an important role in the reception of Etty Hillesum’s work. Nevertheless, there are lingering doubts about Beck’s rendering of Hillesum’s image of God. Klaas A.D. Smelik investigates Beck’s vision in his essay, “Ulrich Beck and Etty Hillesum”. According to Smelik, it appears that Beck was fascinated by Etty Hillesum and her image of God, and he felt a strong affinity with her. Smelik points out, however, that having an affinity with someone does not create a sufficient basis for analysis, and he criticizes Beck for not examining Hillesum’s texts carefully enough to understand what Etty Hillesum really meant in her writing about God.

In his paper “Loving-kindness, Hatred, and Moral Indignation: Etty Hillesum and Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ordo amoris*”, Ronald Commers clarifies Etty Hillesum’s views on the ethical meaning of mercy and pardon in extreme situations, and Vladimir Jankélévitch’s philosophical stance on forgiveness and its limits. According to Commers, Jankélévitch argues that the “suspension of pardon” is crucial and is no less than a moral imperative. Etty Hillesum meanwhile, places loving-kindness and the absence of hatred at the core of morality. Are these views not contradictory? The study of pardon and forgiveness under extreme conditions of terror, persecution, and organized genocide is significant. Commers takes what seems to be a moral quandary, and, giving a closer look at Jankélévitch’s writings and Hillesum’s diaries, posits that the differences between the two authors are not as contradictory as they at first appear.

In the final contribution in the volume, “A Woman’s All-Embracing Search of the ‘Other’: Etty Hillesum as the Basis of a ‘Pedagogy of Care and Attention’”, Anna Aluffi Pentini introduces Hillesum’s words “hardy but not hard”. Aluffi Pentini maintains that these words – for her, the core of Hillesum’s writing and living – can act as a guiding maxim in the science of pedagogy. Making a distinction between the designations “hardy” and “hard”, is absolutely essential in the education of social professionals, and is at the heart of any process that requires resilience. But is resilience

essentially female? Several testimonies that emerged from the concentration camps seem to confirm that it is. Etty Hillesum, Milena Jesenská, and Helen Lewis all conveyed a type of female hope characterized by vitality and tenderness. The dialogical dimension of their lives was not merely historical testimony about tragic events, but also a hymn to life itself, a mental disposition to both engage and remain serene from the confinement of the camps. At the very ends of their lives, for example, these women consciously chose to pay attention to the smallest details, such as the colour of flowers. Today, educational work demands competencies built upon tender and careful attention to people and things. Etty Hillesum, so vividly described in her diaries and letters, can teach us how to cope; her very being clarifies the distinction between hardy and hard.

The 26 contributions in the present volume fulfil the aims of its publication. By making the essays available, we have demonstrated the diversity of research being done especially in the Dutch speaking countries, but also on an international scale to probe the depths of Etty Hillesum's writings. And we have pointed to the enormous potential for future research as well. Etty Hillesum's life was ended so abruptly by the very hatred that she fought against so passionately. Her cruel death stresses the importance of reading and rereading her words against enmity, as the unthinkable can always resurface in the realm of human interaction. Etty Hillesum may hold a key against just such a possibility:

I see no alternative: each of us must turn inward and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in others.



1 A Short Biography of Etty Hillesum (1914-1943)

Klaas A.D. Smelik

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Abstract

In this introductory contribution, the author presents an overview of what is currently known about Etty Hillesum's life, study, family, and friends.

Keywords: biography, Julius Spier, Camp Westerbork, literary legacy, Etty Hillesum, Hillesum family, diaries and letters

Esther (Etty) Hillesum was born on 15 January 1914 in her parents' home at Molenwater 77 in Middelburg, the capital of Zeeland, where her father Levie (Louis) Hillesum had been teaching classical languages (Greek and Latin) since 1911. In Amsterdam, on 7 December 1912, he had married Etty's mother, Riva (Rebecca) Bernstein, who went with him to Middelburg. Etty's father was born in Amsterdam on 25 May 1880, to the merchant Jacob Samuel Hillesum and his wife Esther Hillesum-Loeza; Etty, therefore, was named after her paternal grandmother. The family lived at the time at Sint Antoniesbreestraat 31, Amsterdam. Louis Hillesum studied classical languages at the University of Amsterdam. In 1902, he took his bachelor's, followed in 1905 by his master's (both degrees *cum laude*). On 10 July 1908, he defended his thesis *De imperfecti et aoristi usu Thucydidis* (also awarded *cum laude*).

Middelburg was his first teaching assignment. In 1914, he began teaching classical languages at the Hilversum Gymnasium [Grammar School], but, due to deafness in one ear and impaired vision, had trouble maintaining order in the large classes at that institution. That is why, in 1916, he moved to the smaller Gymnasium in the town of Tiel in the middle of the Netherlands. In 1918, he became teacher of classics and deputy headmaster in Winschoten in the north-eastern part of the Netherlands. In 1924, he was appointed to

similar positions at the Gymnasium in Deventer, where he became headmaster [Dutch: *rector*] on 1 February 1928. He remained there until his forced dismissal on 29 November 1940, at the request of the German occupier.

Louis Hillesum has been described as a small, quiet and unobtrusive man, a stoic, scholarly recluse with a great deal of humour and erudition. In the lower forms, he had at first experienced serious difficulties maintaining order and in response became an extremely strict teacher. In the higher forms, however, he came into his own. Although interested in Judaism, Louis Hillesum was highly assimilated; he worked, for example, on Saturdays. In Deventer, he was among the city's leading citizens, and even in Camp Westerbork he maintained these contacts and his cultural interests.

His wife Riva was born to Michael Bernstein and Hinde Lipowsky on 23 June 1881 in Pochep (Russia). Following a pogrom, she was the first person in her family to leave Surazh (Chernigol) and come to Amsterdam on 18 February 1907. She moved in with the Montagnu family, at number 21 on the Tweede Jan Steenstraat. Her profession at that time was recorded as Russian-language teacher. On 29 May of that same year, her younger brother Jacob, a diamond cutter, followed, and moved in with the Montagnu family as well. On 10 June 1907, her parents arrived in Amsterdam from Surazh. They moved into the second floor of the house on the Tweede Jan Steenstraat. On 9 January 1913, Jacob married Marie Mirkin, who had come from Warsaw to Amsterdam on 5 May 1913. Their daughter Rahel Sarra was born on 19 October of that year. Shortly afterwards, the entire family emigrated illegally to the United States; only Riva remained behind with Louis Hillesum, to whom she had been married on 7 December 1912.

Riva Hillesum-Bernstein has been characterized as lively, chaotic, extroverted, and dominant. Ety's relationship with her mother was a difficult one in the early years, but apparently improved while they were at Camp Westerbork. In addition to Ety, Riva Hillesum bore two more children: Jacob (Jaap), born in Hilversum on 27 January 1916 and named after Louis' father, and Michael (Mischa), named after Riva's father.

Jaap Hillesum completed the Gymnasium in 1933. He went on to study medicine, first at the University of Amsterdam and later at Leiden University. He was intelligent, wrote poems, and was attractive to women. Mentally, he was unstable: he was committed to psychiatric hospitals on several occasions. During the war, he worked as an intern at the *Nederlandsch-Israelietisch Ziekenhuis* (Jewish hospital) in Amsterdam.

Mischa Hillesum was born on 22 September 1920 in Winschoten. Even as a child, he exhibited striking musical talent. In 1931, he moved to Amsterdam, where he attended the famous Vossius Gymnasium for three years

and spent the rest of his time studying piano. His mentor was the famous Dutch pianist George van Renesse (1909-1994). Around 1939, he was committed to *Het Apeldoornsche Bos* (at that time the Jewish mental asylum in the Netherlands) and treated for schizophrenia. Even after his release, he continued to be extremely unstable. Mischa was not only an accomplished pianist, he also composed music (his compositions have been preserved).

Youth and study

Etty Hillesum spent her childhood years in Middelburg, Hilversum (1914-1916), Tiel (1916-1918), Winschoten (1918-1924), and Deventer, from July 1924 on, where she entered the fifth form of the Graaf van Burenschool. The family lived at number 51 on the A.J. Duymaer van Twiststraat (currently number 2). Later (in 1933), they moved to the Geert Grootestraat 9, but, by then, Etty was no longer living at home. After primary school, Etty Hillesum attended the Gymnasium in Deventer, where her father was deputy headmaster. Unlike her younger brother Jaap, who was an extremely gifted pupil, Etty's marks were not particularly high. At school, she also studied Hebrew, and for a time she attended the meetings of a Zionist young people's group in Deventer.

After completing her school years, she went to Amsterdam to study law. She took lodgings with the Horowitz family, at the Ruysdaelstraat 32¹, where her brother Mischa had been staying since July of 1931. Six months later, she moved to the Apollolaan 29, where her brother Jaap had been living since September 1933 while he was studying medicine. In November 1933, Jaap moved to the Jan Willem Brouwerstraat 22^{house}; Etty followed one month later. In September 1934, Etty's name once again appeared in the registry at Deventer. On 6 June 1935, she took her bachelor's exams at the University of Amsterdam. At that time, she was living with her brother Jaap at Keizersgracht 612^c. In March of 1937, she took a room in the house of the accountant Hendrik (Han) J. Wegerif, at Gabriël Metsustraat 6¹, an address also officially registered as the residence of her brother Jaap from October 1936 to September 1937. Wegerif, a widower, asked Etty Hillesum to take care of the household, but they also began an affair. It was in this house so dear to her that Etty Hillesum lived until her definitive departure for Camp Westerbork in June 1943.

Not much is known about Etty Hillesum's university years. She travelled in left-wing, anti-fascist student circles, and was politically and socially aware without belonging to a political party. After the publication of

her diaries, her acquaintances from this period were amazed to learn of Etty Hillesum's spiritual development during the war years, a period in which she clearly adopted different interests and a different circle of friends, although she did maintain a number of her pre-war contacts. Etty Hillesum took her master's exams in Dutch Law (public law in particular) on 23 June and 4 July of 1939. Her academic results were not striking. In addition, she studied Slavic languages at Amsterdam and Leiden, but the German occupation prevented her from completing this study with an exam. She did, however, continue to study Russian language and literature until the very end, and also gave lessons in these subjects. She taught a course at the Volksuniversiteit [Open University] and later gave private lessons until her definitive departure to Camp Westerbork. When she was deported to Poland, she had in her rucksack a bible and a Russian grammar.

Julius Spier

The diaries were written largely in her room on the Gabriël Metsustraat, where not only she and Wegerif, but also Wegerif's son, Hans, the German housekeeper Käthe Fransen, and a chemistry student by the name of Bernard Meylink were living. It was through Bernard that, on Monday, 3 February 1941, Etty went to serve as "model" for the psychochirologist Julius Spier, at the Courbetstraat 27 in Amsterdam.

Spier (who is almost always referred to in the diaries as 'S.') was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1887, the sixth of seven children. At the age of fourteen, he was apprenticed to the Beer Sontheimer trading firm. There he succeeded in working his way up to a managerial position. His original ambition of becoming a singer was foiled by an illness that left him hard of hearing. Spier enjoyed moving in artistic circles and set up his own publishing house, by the name of *Iris*.

In addition, from 1904 on, he had a pronounced interest in chiromancy. Following his 25th jubilee at Beer Sontheimer in 1927, Spier withdrew from business life to dedicate himself to the study of chiromancy. He underwent instructive analysis with C.G. Jung in Zurich, and at Jung's recommendation opened a practice in 1929 as psychochirologist in Berlin. The practice there was rather successful. Spier also taught courses.

In 1935, he divorced his wife, Hedl (Hedwig) Rocco, to whom he had been married since 1917, and left the two children, Ruth and Wolfgang, with her. He hired two rooms on the Aschaffenburgstrasse, where he had

his practice from then on. He had a number of affairs, but finally became engaged to his pupil, Hertha Levi, who emigrated to London in 1937 or 1938. Spier also left Nazi Germany, and came as a legal immigrant to Amsterdam in early 1939. After first living with his sister on the Muzenplein, and later in a room on the Scheldestraat, from late 1940 on, he rented two rooms from the Nethe family at the Courbetstraat 27 in Amsterdam-South. There he also set up practice and taught courses.

The students at those courses and their friends invited “models” whose hands Spier analyzed by way of practical example. Gera Bongers, the sister of Bernard Meylink’s fiancée Loes, was one of Spier’s students, and it was through Bernard Meylink that Etty Hillesum was invited to have her hands analyzed during a Monday evening class. This fairly chance encounter proved formative for the course of Etty Hillesum’s life. She was immediately impressed by Spier’s personality, and decided to go into therapy with him.

On 8 March 1941, she drafted a letter to Spier in an exercise book. The next day, she began on her diary, probably on Spier’s advice and as part of her therapy. Little wonder, then, that the relationship with Spier was a major theme in her diaries. For Etty Hillesum, however, keeping a diary was useful for more than therapy alone; it also fit well with her literary ambitions. She wanted to become a writer and her diaries could later provide material for a novel, for example. In this context, it is worth noting that some of her letters contain quotes from her diary. Moreover, she hoped in this way to find a way of describing her thoughts and feelings in a literary manner. That proved not to be easy, but gradually she developed her own style of writing and gained confidence in her abilities.

Although his patient, Hillesum also became Spier’s secretary and friend. Because Spier wished to remain faithful to Hertha Levi, and because Etty Hillesum already had a relationship with Han Wegerif, a certain distance was always present in the relationship between Hillesum and Spier, despite its importance to both. Spier had a very great influence on Etty Hillesum’s spiritual development; he taught her how to deal with her depressive and egocentric bent, and introduced her to the Bible and St. Augustine. Etty Hillesum had been reading other authors, such as Rilke and Dostoevsky, since her schooldays, but under Spier’s influence their work also took on deeper meaning for her. With the passage of time, the relationship with Spier assumed a less central position in Etty Hillesum’s life. When he died on 15 September 1942, she had developed enough to be able to assimilate his death with a certain ease – particularly because she realized the fate that would otherwise have awaited him as a Jew.

Camp Westerbork

In the diaries, one can clearly see how the anti-Jewish measures increasingly impacted Etty Hillesum's life, even though she had resolved to follow the line of her own spiritual development no matter what. When she was expecting a summons to report to Camp Westerbork, she applied – at the recommendation of her brother Jaap – for a position with the *Joodsche Raad* [Jewish Council]. Through patronage, she received an appointment to the office on Lijnbaansgracht (later Oude Schans) in Amsterdam on 15 July 1942. She performed her administrative duties for the Jewish Council with reluctance, and had a negative opinion of the Council's general role. However, she found useful the work she was to do later for the department of 'Social Welfare for People in Transit' at Camp Westerbork, where she was transferred to at her own request on 30 July 1942. There, she met Joseph (Jopie) I. Vleeschhouwer and M. Osias Kormann, two men who would go on to play a major role in her life.

Her first stay at Camp Westerbork did not last long; on 14 August 1942, she was back in Amsterdam. From there, she left on 19 August 1942 to visit her parents for the last time in Deventer. Somewhere around 21 August, she returned to Camp Westerbork. By early September 1942, she was back in Amsterdam again. On 20 November 1942, she came back to Camp Westerbork, but illness forced her to go home on 5 December 1942. It was not until 5 June 1943 that she had recovered sufficiently to be *allowed* to return to Camp Westerbork. For, contrary to what one might expect, she was very keen to get back to the camp and resume her work, to provide a bit of support for the people as they were preparing themselves for transport. It was for this reason that Etty Hillesum consistently turned down offers to go into hiding. She said that she wished to "share her people's fate".

Hillesum's departure from Amsterdam on 6 June 1943 turned out to be definitive, for on 5 July 1943 the special status granted to personnel at the Camp Westerbork section of the Jewish Council came to an end. Half of the personnel had to return to Amsterdam, while the other half became camp internees. Etty Hillesum joined the latter group: she wished to remain with her father, mother, and brother Mischa, who had meanwhile been brought to Camp Westerbork. Etty Hillesum's parents had moved on 7 January 1943 from Deventer to the Retiefstraat 11^{house} in Amsterdam, after having first attempted to use doctor's orders to circumvent their forced removal. During the great raid of 20 and 21 June 1943, they were picked up – along with Mischa, who had come to live with them – and they were transported to Camp Westerbork.

At the time this occurred, efforts were already being made to obtain special dispensation for Mischa Hillesum on the grounds of his musical

talent. The sisters Milli Ortmann and Grete Wendelgest in particular were behind these efforts. Both the famous conductor Willem Mengelberg and the director of the Amsterdam Conservatory Willem Andriessen wrote letters of recommendation for Mischa Hillesum, which have been preserved. These attempts proved fruitless, due to Mischa Hillesum's insistence that his parents accompany him to Camp Barneveld where some 700 prominent Dutch Jews were interned. This demand was not allowed. Mischa Hillesum did, however, receive a number of special privileges during his stay at Camp Westerbork.

When his mother Riva Hillesum wrote a letter to the *Höhere SS-und Polizeiführer* Hanns Albin Rauter in which she asked for a few privileges as well, Rauter was enraged and, on 6 September 1943, ordered the entire family to be immediately sent on transport. The German commander at Camp Westerbork, *SS-Obersturmführer* Albert Konrad Gemmeker interpreted this order to include Etty Hillesum, despite the attempts by her contacts in the camp to protect her. His superior, Rauter, had ordered the Hillesum family to be put on transport and Etty was part of that family – such was Gemmeker's simple reasoning. On 7 September 1943, Louis, Riva, Etty, and Mischa Hillesum left Camp Westerbork on their way to Poland.

Only Jaap Hillesum did not go with them; at the time, he was still in Amsterdam. He arrived in Camp Westerbork in late September of 1943. In February 1944, he was deported to Bergen-Belsen. When that camp was partially evacuated, he was placed on a train with other prisoners. After a journey full of deprivation and hardship, the train was finally liberated by Russian soldiers in April 1945. Like so many others, however, Jaap Hillesum did not survive the journey.

Louis and Riva Hillesum either died during transport to Auschwitz or were gassed immediately upon arrival. The date of their death was given as 10 September 1943. According to the Red Cross, Etty died at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 30 November 1943, but that date is only a guess. Her brother Mischa died on 31 March 1944, probably in Camp Warsaw.

The fate of the diaries

Before her final departure to Camp Westerbork, Etty Hillesum gave her Amsterdam diaries to Maria Tuinzing, who had joined those living at Gabriel Metsustraat in 1942. Etty Hillesum asked her to pass them along to the writer Klaas Smelik, with the request to publish them if she did not return. In 1946 or 1947, Maria Tuinzing turned over the exercise books and a bundle of letters to Klaas Smelik. His daughter Johanna (in the diaries:

Jopie) Smelik then typed out sections of the diaries, but Klaas Smelik's attempts to have the diaries published in the 1950s and early 1960s proved fruitless. However, two letters Etty Hillesum had written, at the end of December 1942 and on 24 August 1943, concerning conditions in Camp Westerbork, did get published. They appeared in the autumn of 1943 in an illegal edition by David Koning, at the recommendation of Etty Hillesum's friend Petra (Pim) Eldering. This edition, with a run of one hundred copies, was printed by B.H. Nooy of Purmerend under the title *Drie brieven van den kunstschilder Johannes Baptiste van der Pluym (1843-1912)* [Three Letters from the Painter Johannes Baptiste van der Pluym (1843-1912)]. The two letters were preceded by a foreword with a biography of the artist, and followed by a third letter, both written by David Koning to camouflage the true contents. The revenues from the publication were used to provide assistance to Jews in hiding. These letters have since been republished on several occasions.

In the autumn of 1979, I approached the Dutch publisher Jan Geurt Gaarlandt with a request to publish the diaries of Etty Hillesum, given to me by my father, Klaas Smelik. This resulted in 1981 in the publication of *Het verstoorde leven* [An Interrupted Life], and in 1986 in the publication of all of Etty Hillesum's known writings in Dutch. Since then, an English, French, and Italian translation of the complete Dutch edition have appeared; a German version is in preparation. All these editions and the many translations of excerpts of her writings are – in Horace's words – a *monumentum aere perennius* [a monument more lasting than bronze] to this woman who, along with so many others, fell victim to the greatest crime of the twentieth century. Her memory has become a blessing to us all.

About the author

Klaas A.D. Smelik (1950) studied Theology, Semitic Languages, Archaeology and Ancient History in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Leiden. He defended his PhD in Amsterdam in 1977. He taught Old Testament and Hebrew in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Brussels, Ancient History in Amsterdam and The Hague, Jewish History at the K.U. Leuven, and Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Ghent University. He is director of the Etty Hillesum Research Centre (EHOC) first in Ghent, now in Middelburg. Smelik edited the Dutch, English, French and Italian unabridged editions of Etty Hillesum's writings and is editor-in-chief of the *Etty Hillesum Studies*. He has (as writer or editor) published around 40 books and 250 articles on the Hebrew Bible, Ancient Hebrew inscriptions, Ancient History, Jewish Studies, Anti-Semitism, and Etty Hillesum.

The Diaries



2 To Remember Is to Act

From a Bundle of Notebooks to a Worldwide Publication

Klaas A.D. Smelik

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Abstract

This article deals with the publication history of Etty Hillesum's written legacy. The story charts Hillesum's path from the close link to the author's parental home, through the author's own work, to getting her various editions translated and published, and ending with Hillesum's worldwide renown. Though the publication history of Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters is rather complicated, it is elucidated here with great clarity.

Keywords: literary legacy, publication history, reception, international reception, Etty Hillesum Research Centre, Etty Hillesum, Klaas Smelik Senior

It is quiet in the room. I am crouching in front of my father's desk.¹ Carefully, I open the door to the left-hand cabinet. With the shy gesture of a ten year old who knows he should not be there, I pick up a pile of old notebooks. They do not all look the same. Some have rings, others are like the notebooks we use at school. I open one, ever so quietly, feeling as if, at any moment, someone of the living, or even the dead, might chance upon me here in the midst of my mischievous curiosity. I look at the first book, but, to my disappointment, I cannot decipher a single word of the closely written pages. All I can make out is one letter: a capital S with a dot after it. Would that be an abbreviation of my father's last name, our family name? The dotted S returns throughout the pages of the notebook. Is it possible Etty wrote

¹ Klaas Smelik Senior (Den Helder 1897-Amsterdam 1986) first worked as an engineer in the merchant navy. Later, he became a journalist and writer of radio plays and books. In 1936, he had an affair with Etty Hillesum that lasted six months. The affair ended harmoniously at Etty Hillesum's initiative. Afterwards, the two kept in touch until Etty Hillesum's death in 1943.

so much about my father? Quickly, I close the notebook and, gently, I put the pile back in its place. I think for a moment before I stand up. These are ETTY HILLESUM's journals and she expressed her wish to my father that they be published. But he has had little success in getting it done and his failure begins to feel like my failure.

Stories

My parents are sitting at the table with my half-sister Johanna.² Later, I will read in the diaries that ETTY HILLESUM called Johanna Jopie. Our housekeeper Rosa is at the table with us, as is my aunt Cato,³ and my uncle Jaap. Uncle Jaap is a disabled veteran, who had been maltreated by the Germans in a POW camp in France and never recovered. He can barely speak, but he can react to what others are saying.

The favourite topic of conversation at the table is the war. Time and again the stories are told as if for the first time. One of these stories is the story of how ETTY refused to go into hiding. My father tells – frequently interrupted by Johanna – about their plan to bring ETTY to safety. They had arranged everything for her arrival. Underneath the wooden floorboards of the villa in Hilversum⁴ where I grew up, there was a crawl space, which was tall enough for a person to stand. It was only accessible at a particular spot in the room covered by carpet, where the floorboards could be loosened and removed. Whoever was in the crawl space beneath the boards was well hidden, and practically impossible to find. This had already been proven by others who had been hidden there. Furthermore, the villa was facing one of the headquarters of the German Wehrmacht, and was located in the middle of an area with limited access known as *Sperrgebiet*. None other than Colonel-General Johann Blaskowitz, who would go on to sign the German capitulation at the Hotel De Wereld in Wageningen in 1945, would have become ETTY HILLESUM's neighbour had the plan gone ahead.

But ETTY HILLESUM would not have it. My father – an experienced dramatist – surpassed himself as he told this part of the story: “I gripped ETTY firmly and cursed: ‘You stay here!’ Then ETTY got a strange, almost hostile

2 Johanna Francisca Smelik (The Hague 1916-Voorburg 2008) was a good friend of ETTY HILLESUM. In the diaries, she is called Jopie. She is the daughter of Klaas Smelik Senior from his first marriage.

3 Cato Toet-Smelik (Den Helder 1904-Amsterdam 1990) was one of Klaas Smelik Senior's sisters. In the diaries, ETTY HILLESUM called her “Tante Totebel”.

4 Domeinweg 2, Hilversum.

look in her eyes. She replied, ‘You do not understand me. I want to share the fate of my people.’ And then I knew that all was lost.” After that, my father fell silent at our dinner table. He still had not come to terms with his defeat. Etty had eluded him by choosing the fate of her people over the preservation of her own life. She would take a path that he, as a non-Jew, would never be able to follow.

How could anyone choose death, when life is offered to her? It is a question that I, as a child, could not answer. And it still astounds me to this day when I think of how afraid I am of death. Yet, it is the way it happened. Etty had chosen death – consciously, since she knew that she had little chance of surviving deportation. My father knew this too; he even threatened Etty during their last conversation: “The Huns will kill you!” During the war, a German officer who had served on the Eastern Front, confirmed to my father how Jews were murdered in trucks by the fumes of the exhaust pipes that were purposely vented into the enclosed cargo space where the victims were trapped. When my father did not want to believe this, the officer insisted that he had seen it himself. The Germans were intent on the physical destruction of the Jewish people. Etty Hillesum was aware of this; yet, she chose to share the fate of her people. A few months later, she was dead.

No Interest

There were more stories told at the dinner table, about Etty as a student, about Etty as my father’s lover, about Etty as my sister’s dearest friend. And there was the story of how the diaries ended up in the locked cabinet of my father’s desk. Soon after the war, Maria Tuinzing⁵ contacted my father saying she had something for him. They were Etty Hillesum’s diaries, written in eleven notebooks, plus a bundle of letters. Maria Tuinzing had lived in the same house as Etty Hillesum, at Gabriël Metsustraat 6 in Amsterdam. Shortly before Etty’s last trip to Camp Westerbork, she handed the notebooks to Maria with the words: “If I do not come back, then please bring these journals to the writer Klaas Smelik. He should have them published.”

5 Maria Tuinzing (Wageningen 1906-Arnhem 1978), later Anhalt-Tuinzing. Maria worked in Amsterdam as a nurse and was Etty Hillesum’s housemate after 1942, when Hillesum rented a room from Han Wegerif. Maria Tuinzing became one of Etty Hillesum’s intimate friends and in 1944 she brought the diaries to the Sabarte Belacortu family in Wageningen, stating that these diaries were very important. Shortly after the war, Maria Tuinzing retrieved the diaries from the Belacortus and, in 1946 or 1947, brought them to Klaas Smelik Senior.

Maria Tuinzing conveyed that instruction to my father when she turned the notebooks over to him in 1946 or 1947.

Then, my father's story turned to the problems that faced him when he could not read ETTY's handwriting. Only Johanna could, and, at his request, she typed a part of the eleventh notebook. The transcription was sent to a number of publishers, none of whom wanted to publish these diaries. "Too philosophical!" they replied. These were the 1950s. The war was not being analyzed, it was being commemorated. People wanted to read about how bad the Germans were and how good the Dutch. People wanted to read about atrocities and were not interested in an appeal for love and reconciliation. When he got to this point in the story, my father's voice became grim. It was clear that it bothered him tremendously that he had not been able to find a publisher.

One day, in 1962, the outrage at the table was even greater than usual. Johanna had come home with a little book in her hand. It had a grey cover and was titled *Twee brieven uit Westerbork van ETTY Hillesum* [Two letters from Westerbork by ETTY Hillesum].⁶ Where my father had not succeeded, the journalist David Koning had. He had managed to get two of ETTY's letters from Camp Westerbork reprinted. They had been published illegally during the war, and now, here they were again, reprinted in a new edition by the publisher Bert Bakker. He was willing to publish these two letters, but not the diaries. As it turns out, David Koning's publication met with little success. It was not long before the edition could be found at De Slegte, a large discount bookstore in the Netherlands. Hence, the most valuable of ETTY Hillesum's texts, perhaps the best thing ever written about Camp Westerbork, remained in obscurity. People preferred to read the books of Ka-Tsetnik 135633,⁷ in which the horrors of the Shoah were extensively and mercilessly retold.

The last time my father attempted to get the diaries published, I was fifteen years old. We had gone together to the Andries Blitz publishing house located in a beautiful mansion in Laren. It was summer and we sat in the garden. The publisher seemed to be very interested in the diaries, assuring my father of his intentions. The conversation appeared to take a promising turn. He will read the excerpt, he said. We drink another glass. Sometime later, however, the sheets typed by my sister were returned in

6 *Twee brieven uit Westerbork van ETTY Hillesum* (Den Haag: Ben Bakker/Daamen, 1962).

7 Pseudonym of Yehiel Feiner, later Yehiel De-Nur (16 May 1909-17 July 2001). Well-known novels written by him include: *Moni: A Novel of Auschwitz*, *House of Dolls*, and *Sunrise over Hell*.

a large envelope with a polite refusal. In 1965, the time is still not ripe. My father never again seeks to fulfil Etty's last request.

For me, the question remains: what could have moved Etty Hillesum to reject opportunities to go into hiding especially since it could have saved her life? Apparently, for Etty Hillesum, the concept of the Jewish people had a value in itself that exceeded that of an individual human life. I conclude with my child's logic that this was the reason why Hitler was so determined to exterminate the Jewish people. Hitler wanted to destroy this value at all costs; I resolve to get to know it better.

My opportunity came a year later when my grammar school offered an elective course in Biblical Hebrew. I was the only student in the class. Through the language, I hoped to know the Jewish people and the depth of the connection that was so crucial to them that they would give their lives for it, even as others organized genocide to wipe it out.

The Breakthrough

When I met Jan Geurt Gaarlandt of De Haan publishing house⁸ in 1979, we sat comfortably in his living room while I interviewed him about his work as a publisher. Meanwhile, my lessons in Biblical Hebrew had given my life a true direction. I had graduated in Old Testament and Rabbinic literature, obtained a DD in the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, and published a book about the relationship between the church and the synagogue in the early Christian era.⁹ I had now studied thoroughly the essence of what Etty had understood and what I had so desperately wanted to know. I felt I understood why Hitler wanted to destroy the Jewish people; they represented the opposite of his ideology. I had also concluded that Hitler was not alone in his hatred, but that the entirety of Christian European culture was anti-Jewish to its core. The continued existence of the Jewish people presented Christian Europe with a perpetual challenge, a permanent reminder that the heritage of the Jews had been usurped by the church – a truth that nevertheless escaped the Christians. Meanwhile, I had reached the point where I could imagine why someone wanted to share the fate of her people, suffering at the nadir of 1,900 years of hatred and persecution.

8 Later: Uitgeverij Balans.

9 Klaas A.D. Smelik, *Saul: De voorstelling van Israëls eerste koning in de Masoretische tekst van het Oude Testament* (Amsterdam: P.E.T., 1977); *Hagar en Sara: De verhouding tussen Jodendom en Christendom in de eerste eeuwen* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1979).

Still, I had not yet accomplished the primary, practical task: the diaries remained unpublished.

In our interview, the subject of the Second World War cropped up. I had not experienced the war myself, but it nevertheless determined my life day-to-day. In answer to a not entirely random question of mine, Jan Geurt Gaarlandt revealed that he was particularly interested in the philosophical problems that had emerged from the war. At that moment, I understood that the time had finally come for the diaries. It was not the people who had experienced the war that would make Etty Hillesum's thoughts their own. It was going to be the next generation who craved to understand what had happened and why, and who wanted to grasp the essence of the struggle that was fought. I seized the opening to tell him about the diaries.

I had got to know Etty Hillesum without ever actually having met her. Like a sorcerer's apprentice, during that interview with Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, I had set in motion something the impact of which I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams. In the next phase of this story, however, I discovered, to my great disappointment, that the deceased woman that I sought to honour, and who seemed almost like family, had a completely different impact on others.

An Interrupted Life

After reading the excerpt from the eleventh notebook, Jan Geurt Gaarlandt responded enthusiastically. He wanted to publish the diaries, but not in their entirety. He wanted to publish only a selection of the texts, but, to do that, he needed the full text. Gaarlandt found some volunteers willing to decipher the diaries for him. For the title, he chose, *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life]. Only later would he understand that this title did not concur with what Etty Hillesum had meant to say.

On 1 October 1981, in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, a special meeting took place and *Het Verstoorde Leven* – a selection from the diaries – was finally presented. Before the programme began, the hall was astir. It resembled a school reunion with friends of Etty Hillesum who had not seen each other since the war, recognizing each other with great excitement. For this reason alone, it was a very special moment. The famous Dutch-Jewish author Marga Minco introduced the publication¹⁰ and read aloud some very

¹⁰ Reprinted in: J.G. Gaarlandt (ed.), *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn: Reacties op de dagboeken en brieven van Etty Hillesum* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1989), 1-5.

well chosen passages. After the ceremony, the guests all carried with them a copy of *Het Verstoorde Leven*. For some, it was the first time they had read what Etty Hillesum had written about them in her diaries 40 years earlier. What a remarkable experience this must have been, albeit not equally enjoyable for everyone.

On the train home, I immediately started to read the now-published diaries. Oddly enough, I had not yet read them. Only Jan Geurt Gaarlandt had actually seen the fully transcribed text of the diaries. I found – to my relief – that the text was surprisingly well written. Marga Minco had been right when she emphasized this aspect of the diaries in her introduction at the book presentation. If for no other reason than this, my quest for a publisher had been worthwhile. A major literary work had been rescued from oblivion. On further reading, I found, to my surprise, that Etty Hillesum had been a deeply religious person. I had never heard about this side to her before. From the stories my father and my sister Johanna told, I had got the impression that Etty Hillesum was a left-wing student, who led a free life without caring much for God or the Commandments. Now, it appeared that she had been a spiritual thinker, and was in constant dialogue with God as she wrote. Later, I would learn that this also came as a big surprise to my father when he read *Het Verstoorde Leven*. For him, however, as an atheist, this was an experience entirely different from my own, as I read the diaries as a theologian.

My surprise became even greater when I read a paragraph at the end of *Het Verstoorde Leven* that provided an answer to the big question that had, for years, dominated my thinking about God. What had been God's role in the years of darkness, when His people were systematically exterminated? Does the God of Israel exist if such a thing could happen to His people? Etty Hillesum provided me with an answer to these questions, and not from the perspective of looking into the past. She addressed this question while right in the middle of the persecution and terror, herself also awaiting the collective destiny (*Massenschicksal*) that struck her people:

Sunday morning prayer [12 July 1942]

Dear God, these are anxious times. Tonight, for the first time, I lay in the dark with burning eyes as scene after scene of human suffering passed before me. I shall promise You one thing, God, just one very small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow, although that takes some practice. Each day is sufficient unto itself. I shall try to help You, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch

for it in advance. But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible [...]. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.¹¹

Responses

No matter how much joy I felt upon the publication of *Het Verstoorde Leven*, three articles in the well-known Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, which appeared shortly after the book launch, gave me a taste of things to come.¹²

In the *NRC Handelsblad* of 11 December 1981, an article appeared with the suggestive title "The Saint of the Museumplein". In it, J.H. Heldring called Etty Hillesum a saint.¹³ Though canonization seems to be the prerogative of a pope rather than a journalist, his call struck a chord with what some readers of *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life] felt and still feel. Some Christians even seem to want to posthumously incorporate Etty Hillesum into the church.

11 E.T., 488-489. *Het Werk*, 516-517; Sunday morning, 12 July 1942: Zondagochtendgebed. Het zijn bange tijden, mijn God. Vannacht was het voor het eerst, dat ik met brandende ogen slapeloos in het donker lag en er vele beelden van menselijk lijden langs me trokken. Ik zal je een ding beloven, God, een kleinigheidje maar: ik zal mijn zorgen om de toekomst niet als evenzovele zware gewichten aan de dag van heden hangen, maar dat kost een zekere oefening. Iedere dag heeft nu aan zichzelf genoeg. Ik zal je helpen God, dat je het niet in mij begeeft, maar ik kan van te voren nergens voor in staan. Maar dit éne wordt me steeds duidelijker: dat jij ons niet kunt helpen, maar dat wij jou moeten helpen en door dat laatste helpen wij onszelf. En dit is het enige, wat we in deze tijd kunnen redden en ook het enige, waar het op aankomt: een stukje van jou in onszelf, God. En misschien kunnen we ook er aan meewerken jou op te graven in de geteisterde harten van anderen. Ja, mijn God, aan de omstandigheden schijn jij niet al te veel te kunnen doen, ze horen nu eenmaal ook bij dit leven. Ik roep je er ook niet voor ter verantwoording, jij mag daar later ons voor ter verantwoording roepen. En haast met iedere hartslag wordt het me duidelijker: dat jij ons niet kunt helpen, maar dat wij jou moeten helpen en dat we de woning in ons, waar jij huist, tot het laatste toe moeten verdedigen.

12 The three articles are also included in: *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn*, 22-24, 41-43, 44-47 respectively.

13 J.H. Heldring (1917-2013) was a famous columnist, whose texts were very much appreciated in that time.

On 12 January of the following year, the same newspaper carried a contribution by Henriëtte Boas with the telling title: “More selfishness than holiness”. This article presented a very different, and much less positive, picture of Ety Hillesum. In later publications, Boas elaborated her view, a view that resonated especially in Jewish circles. According to her, Ety Hillesum was barely Jewish and she was certainly no martyr. On the contrary, she had made every effort to avoid deportation.¹⁴

A few days before, on 9 January 1982, also in *NRC Handelsblad*, Karel van het Reve had written his response to *Het Verstoorde Leven*.¹⁵ The article showed his irritation with “the schoolgirl-like character at the beginning of the diary.” Somewhat aggrieved, he also noted that, during the war, Ety Hillesum had more to eat than he had. To top it off, according to this professor of Slavonic literature, her knowledge of Russian was poor.

These articles were one of the undesirable side effects of the diaries’ publication. For ever after, Ety Hillesum would be at the mercy of waves of uncomprehending criticism or the opposite: uncritical admiration. Perhaps a little naïve, I had not foreseen this unpleasant consequence in my eagerness to get Ety Hillesum’s notebooks published. I was convinced that other people would read the diaries with the same sense of awe and trepidation as I had once felt, kneeling in front of my father’s desk as a ten-year-old. Instead, it turned out that the overwhelming success of *Het Verstoorde Leven*, and later of the English translation, *An Interrupted Life*, had a less lofty effect on some people. Some envied the success of the publication and did everything possible to bring Ety Hillesum down. Others just wanted to secure a place under the sun of her posthumous fame and were simply being immodest. Ety Hillesum turned out to be a litmus test, inducing an excess of admiration or an overflow of annoyance.

After the diaries, the publisher decided to publish also a selection of the surviving letters under the title *Het Denkende Hart van de Barak* [The Thinking Heart of the Barracks] (1982). At one point, I got hold of a sixth notebook that had remained untouched with my half-sister, Johanna. That notebook ended up with Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, who decided to publish the

14 Compare Henriëtte Boas, ‘Ety Hillesum in niet-Joodse en Joodse ogen’, in: Lea Dasberg & Jonathan N. Cohen (eds), *Neveh Ya’akov: Jubilee Volume Presented to Dr. Jaap Meijer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1982), 255-279. Dr. Henriëtte Boas (1911-2001) was famous for her sharp criticism of many subjects related to Judaism and Israel.

15 Karel van het Reve (1921-1999) was a well-known professor of Slavonic literature in those days.

text in its entirety, in a separate book entitled *In Duizend Zoete Armen* [In a Thousand Sweet Arms] (1984). Meanwhile, the debate continued, and supporters and opponents of Etty Hillesum spoke out, not always from an informed position.

Complete Edition

While I had tried to remain in the background, it now seemed the time had come to become involved again. It was high time to publish the diaries and letters in a complete, scholarly edition. The text of *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life] was based on a transcription by well-meaning but error-prone amateurs. Even the title of the published sixth notebook – *In Duizend Zoete Armen* [In a Thousand Sweet Arms] – turned out to be based on a misreading. In the journal, it says: “in a thousand *soft* arms,” which may perhaps be less poetic than “In a Thousands Sweet Arms,” but is surely more to the point. Also, the passage in the notebook dated Friday morning, 27 February 1942 – a passage that is often quoted in order to prove Etty Hillesum’s extreme pacifism – turned out to have been changed considerably compared to the original text, resulting into a completely distorted picture of Etty Hillesum’s view on dealing with the enemy.¹⁶

Even more important was the fact that the selection of texts had resulted in a one-sided picture of Etty Hillesum. The focus came to rest on her spirituality, neglecting other aspects of her personality.

The members of the Board of the Etty Hillesum Foundation, which manages the copyright of Etty Hillesum’s works and of which I was the Secretary at the time, agreed that there should be a complete, scholarly edition of the texts. On advice from Dr. H.T.M. van Vliet of the Office of Basic Services

16 The English translation follows the altered text in *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life] reading: “[...] I know that pitiful young men like that are dangerous as soon as they are let loose on mankind. But all the blame must be put on the system that uses such people. What needs eradicating is the evil in man, not man himself.” (E.T., 259) The original text is quite different, however: “I am well aware that these boys are pitiful as long as they cannot do evil but that they are mortally dangerous and that they should be eradicated as soon as they are let loose on mankind. But criminal is the system that uses such people.” [Cf. *Het Werk*, 269: Me er zeer sterk van bewust zijnde, dat deze jongens beklagenswaardig zijn, zolang ze geen kwaad kunnen, maar levensgevaarlijk en uitgeroeid moe­­tende worden, als ze op de mensheid loskomen. Maar misdadig is alleen het systeem, dat deze kerels gebruikt. –] The last sentence of the passage in the version of *Het Verstoorde Leven* and the English translation *An Interrupted Life*, “What needs eradicating is the evil in man, not man himself,” does not appear in the manuscript and seems to have been completely made up by the person who produced the transcription.

for Text Editions of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences, I recruited a team of young researchers commissioned by the Etty Hillesum Foundation. Two Dutch linguistic researchers, Gideon Lodders and Rob Tempelaars, devoted their attention to the diary manuscripts and the letters in order to develop a text-critical edition, making significant corrections to the earlier publications. They were supported by Beate Giebner, a German language specialist, for the many paragraphs written in German (about ten per cent of the whole), and Duke Meijman, a specialist in Slavonic language for the few words written in Russian.

These four experts were also involved in subsequent research together with other members of the team. In addition to the text-critical work, they researched the contents of the diaries and letters resulting in about 100 pages of notes being added to the text for the complete edition. In doing this work, for example, they located the sources for the quotes in the diaries, not always an easy task. Nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of the whole team, the origins of most of the quotes were found. The historical circumstances, in particular the directives of the occupying forces against the Dutch Jews, had to be mapped out. Wally de Lang took on this task. Meanwhile, Els Lagrou focused on exploring the cultural context of Etty Hillesum's diaries.

In the midst of all this, the most important goal was still to learn more about Etty Hillesum herself and the numerous people mentioned in her writings. In the end, we were able to locate almost everyone. This would not have been possible without the cooperation of the many people we interviewed and who were willing to entrust their often highly emotional memories to team member Jan Willem Regenhardt. These interviews also led us to important documents and photos that we could not have found in another way.¹⁷

The two Dutch linguists periodically provided me with a transcript of the most recently transcribed notebook. I could then establish which paragraphs needed to be annotated, and divide the tasks among the team members. Thus, one draft after another arrived on my desk in order that I could compose the final text of the annotations. To my delight, my staff was very inventive in solving the problems that confronted them. For example, the phrase "Daan! Daantje"¹⁸ puzzled us, because none of us had any idea

17 The most important ones can be found in the photo book *'Wachten jullie op mij?' Etty Hillesum in beeld*, compiled by Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (Amsterdam: Balans, [2003] 2016²).

18 E.T., 278. *Het Werk*, 290; Thursday evening, 12 March 1942.

who this Daan person might have been. Yet, the riddle was solved when an alert researcher noticed another diary entry, “Daan dropped out of an aeroplane.”¹⁹ Daan turned out to be Daan Sajet, a Dutch Jew who had fled to England and enlisted in the RAF, unfortunately with fatal consequences.²⁰

At a certain point, the notebooks and letters had been transcribed, including letters that had emerged during our research. The overwhelming majority of names and quotes had been traced back to actual people. Interviews had been held with a large number of the people named in the diaries – at least, those who were still living. At last, I could start editing the final text. In this work, I was greatly assisted by the Secretary of the Etty Hillesum Foundation, Yvonne Goldstein.

One major challenge was keeping the annotations brief and readable, while at the same time providing all the rich information we had gathered. Another was describing in appropriate terms the many miseries we had uncovered in our research. Behind each name was hidden a personal history; lives had been suddenly broken off, just because they were Jewish lives. The fate of the Jewish people that Etty Hillesum so wanted to share, crept under our skin during this study.

For me, the breaking point came when I learned the story of Jacques Krijn, who was called *Hoele*. This young man, 20 years of age, wanted simply to go rowing with his classmates on the Amstel River near Amsterdam. By doing so, because he was a Jew, he violated a German regulation. He was arrested, imprisoned, deported, and murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Just because he had dared to go rowing on the Amstel River as a Jew.²¹ During the time I worked on the text, I myself owned a little row-boat docked in the Amstel marina. Thus, Jacques Krijn’s life penetrated the armour with which I was trying to protect myself while grappling with the realities in Etty Hillesum’s texts. This time, it had come too close.

The complete edition of Etty Hillesum’s writings was launched in 1986, at the Museum of the Resistance in Amsterdam. The mayor of Amsterdam, Ed van Tijn, who knew Camp Westerbork from within, gave a speech. What

19 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941. Cf. also E.T., 86: [...] a young man falling out of an airplane [...]; *Het Werk*, 92; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: [...] een jongen, die uit een vliegtuig valt [...].

20 Cf. the annotation in E.T., 690: Daan Sajet (b. Amsterdam 1920, d. England 1941). Sajet sailed from Holland to England with a friend in August 1940. There, he joined the RAF as a pilot. On 16 June 1941, however, his plane crashed. His father, Dr. Ben Sajet, managed to reach England on 18 June 1941, and broadcast his son’s death in a coded message on Radio Orange on 26 June 1941. Daan Sajet and his two brothers were all friends of the Hillesum children.

21 For further details: E.T., 733.

stood out for me in his remarks was how difficult it has been for Dutch Jews to determine their attitude towards the ideas of Etty Hillesum.²² The chairman of the Etty Hillesum Foundation, Rabbi Edward van Voolen, also spoke on this occasion, and dealt with what resistance against the Nazis had meant at the time. According to him, it was entirely appropriate that Etty Hillesum's complete works were presented at the Museum of the Resistance. Completely in opposition to the opinion that Etty should be criticized for choosing not to hide, now her work was presented as an act of spiritual resistance against a totalitarian regime and ideology.²³

Worldwide Research

Still, many readers continue to prefer *An Interrupted Life* to the complete edition. Since the eighteenth printing of *Het Verstoorde Leven*, its text has been amended to bring it more in line with the complete edition. The complete edition sold more copies than expected when the first printing appeared in 1986, and by 2012 was in its sixth revision, published with a new title *Etty Hillesum: Het Werk*.²⁴

In 2002, the English translation of the complete edition was published,²⁵ followed by the French translation in 2008,²⁶ and the Italian translation in two volumes in 2012-2013.²⁷ A German translation is in preparation. Additionally, a bilingual edition of Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters was published in 2014, with the original text on the left page, and the English translation with annotations on the right.²⁸

22 Cf. the contribution by Piet Schrijvers in this volume, "Etty Hillesum in Jewish contexts", 315-331.

23 Cf. *Het Werk*, VIII.

24 Etty Hillesum, *Het Werk 1941-1943*, edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik with the help of Gideon Lodders & Rob Tempelaars (Amsterdam: Balans, 2012).

25 *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*, edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik and translated by Arnold J. Pomerans (Ottawa/Grand Rapids, MI: Novalis Saint Paul University/William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

26 Klaas A.D. Smelik (ed.), *Hillesum: Les écrits d'Etty Hillesum: Journaux et lettres 1941-1943*, translated by Philippe Noble & Isabelle Rosselin (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008).

27 Etty Hillesum, *Diario: Edizione integrale 1941-1942*, edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik and translated by Chiara Passanti & Tina Montone (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 2012); *idem, Lettere: Edizione integrale 1941-1943*, edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik and translated by Chiara Passanti, Tina Montone & Ada Vigliani (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 2013).

28 *Etty Hillesum: The Complete Works 1941-1943: Bilingual, Annotated and Unabridged*, edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik & Meins G.S. Coetsier, 2 vols (Maastricht: Shaker Verlag, 2014).

Etty Hillesum's work is now available in eighteen languages, from Brazil to Japan, bringing us to another equally unforeseen development since *Het Verstoorde Leven* came out in 1981. Etty Hillesum's diary is not only widely read by a Dutch readership, it has travelled way beyond the borders of the Netherlands. This is what I call the third phase: After the stories about Etty Hillesum in my family circle and then the reception of the published diaries and letters in the Netherlands, a new dimension arrived: Etty Hillesum's writings have become important worldwide.

Remarkably, the research on Etty Hillesum seemed to develop abroad more than it did in the Netherlands. Certainly, studies on Etty Hillesum continued to appear in the Netherlands. For example, a companion dictionary to her work was published in 1999.²⁹ But conferences and symposia on her person and her work were held abroad, mainly in Italy and France, and in those countries one monograph after the other appeared on different aspects of Etty Hillesum's life and work.

Reservations about Etty Hillesum's work that have persisted in the Netherlands, intervene less abroad. Rather, it is the other way around. Authors tend to follow the approach introduced by J.H. Heldring in his 1981 article: sanctification of Etty Hillesum as a martyr. We see the nadir of this approach in the 1996 American book *Martyrs*, in which Etty Hillesum, who wanted to share the fate of her Jewish people, is boosted as one of the Christian martyrs of the twentieth century.³⁰ This tendency to post-humously incorporate Etty Hillesum into the church is especially strong abroad. In the Netherlands, the distinction between Jews and Christians is felt more sharply.

Nevertheless, foreign researchers have a useful distance from the subject, something that some Dutch researchers lack. As a result, these foreign scholars do not fall into the same traps in which some Dutch critics as Henriëtte Boas find themselves. I myself have gained much from a passage in Evelyne Frank's study of Etty Hillesum from 2002. In this study, published in French, Frank examines the Dutch character of Etty Hillesum's metaphors.³¹ As a Dutchman, this aspect had escaped me. But Frank has clearly demonstrated, through the study of Etty Hillesum's metaphors, just how well integrated this daughter of a Russian refugee was in Dutch society. One would easily

29 Tom Jorna & Denise de Costa, *Van aandacht en adem tot ziel en zin: Honderd woorden uit het levenbeschouwend idioom van Elly Hillesum* (Utrecht: Kwadraat, 1999).

30 Susan Bergmann (ed.), *Martyrs: Contemporary Writers on Modern Lives of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996).

31 Evelyne Frank, *Avec Etty Hillesum: Dans la quête du bonheur, un chemin inattendu* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2002), 118-119.

forget – while reading Etty Hillesum's works – that her mother had lived in the Netherlands for only seven years when she gave birth to her daughter in Middelburg on January 15, 1914.

Etty Hillesum Research Centre

It became clear to me that researchers worldwide were working along parallel lines, unaware of each other's activities. Each of them was trying to come up independently with a complete analysis of Etty Hillesum and her work. Once Etty Hillesum's reach was global, therefore, central coordination became highly desirable. To meet this demand, I established the Etty Hillesum Onderzoekscentrum (EHOC) [Etty Hillesum Research Centre] at Ghent University in 2006. In 2015, the centre moved to Middelburg, The Netherlands, Etty Hillesum's birthplace. There, the Zeeuws Archief [Archives of Zeeland] provided a warm welcome and a home. The centre, of which I am the director, has an extensive Etty Hillesum library and several staff members to take care of daily business and welcome the many visitors from various countries.

The Etty Hillesum Research Centre has a large number of affiliate members from the Netherlands and abroad, representing many disciplines, as research into Etty Hillesum's legacy can be undertaken from many different perspectives.³² The members give advice and bring interested students into contact with the Centre, which then arranges their tutoring. Our affiliate members, all of them already established as serious students of Etty Hillesum's legacy, come from countries such as The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, Colombia, and the United States. The number of members is growing and we continue to expand our contacts. Through close collaboration with the affiliated members and the research institutions they represent, we have succeeded in achieving the objectives of the Etty Hillesum Research Centre, as laid down in 2006:

- to provide a contact forum at home and abroad for researchers investigating Etty Hillesum's writings;
- to archive global research on Etty Hillesum and to update an Etty Hillesum bibliography;

32 Compare Klaas A.D. Smelik, "Perspectives of Research on Etty Hillesum's Writings", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Meins G.S. Coetsier & Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *The Ethics and Religious Philosophy of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, January 2014* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 28] (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2017), 11-19.

- to conduct our own research into Etty Hillesum;
- to publish the “Etty Hillesum Studies” with publisher Garant, Antwerp/ Apeldoorn;
- to initiate and guide translations of Etty Hillesum’s writings;
- to maintain a website that coordinates and enhances the visibility of the research activities and publications on Etty Hillesum worldwide;
- to act as a contact point for students and recent graduates around the world, who want to do research on Etty Hillesum, as well as for artists who are inspired by her;
- to organize symposia, conferences, lectures, and debates;
- to maintain contact with the various organizations dealing with Etty Hillesum.

In 2016, after the EHOc had been in existence for ten years, we took stock of our work. To our delight, we had realized most of our goals. The comprehensive international Etty Hillesum bibliography is now available; the Etty Hillesum Studies volume 9 was published in the autumn of 2017; two international conferences were organized in Ghent – in 2008 and 2014; the 2008 conference papers were published in 2010,³³ those of the 2014 conference in 2017;³⁴ numerous lectures and symposia on Etty Hillesum have been organized; there are lively contacts with researchers, but also with artists worldwide; several new translations and studies of Hillesum’s work have been published, and the EHOc now has close links with other organizations in our field.

Where do we go from here? In 1981, when *Het Verstoorde Leven* was published, I felt I had accomplished my task. This was a significant miscalculation. It immediately became clear that there was much more to do – and there still is. Almost everyone who has dealt in-depth with Etty Hillesum’s writings and legacy, has had this experience. I believe they would all say, there is always more to do. Etty Hillesum’s work continues to challenge. What she wrote, was way ahead of her time and is still relevant today. The mix of thoughts that were united within her, continues to intrigue. Researchers want to know how she came upon her ideas and especially what she did with them. Her words are fruitful for the daily lives of people

33 See: Ria van den Brandt, Klaas A.D. Smelik & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/ Boston, MA: Brill, 2010).

34 See note 32.

and can inspire all of us to make the right choices for society. Some readers follow her on her spiritual path; others are attracted to her outspoken vision of coexistence in a larger context. Her view of the events of the Second World War – far from being too philosophical as the publishers of the 1950s feared – show a way to grasp the ungraspable. Her description of the Westerbork transit camp remains a poignant and unforgettable testimony. What she wrote on 13 August 1941, describing what she hoped for herself, has finally been realized. She has “become the chronicler of the things that are happening now.”³⁵

About the author

Klaas A.D. Smelik (1950) studied Theology, Semitic Languages, Archaeology and Ancient History in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Leiden. He defended his PhD in Amsterdam in 1977. He taught Old Testament and Hebrew in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Brussels, Ancient History in Amsterdam and The Hague, Jewish History at the K.U. Leuven, and Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Ghent University. He is director of the Ety Hillesum Research Centre (EHOC) first in Ghent, now in Middelburg. Smelik edited the Dutch, English, French and Italian unabridged editions of Ety Hillesum's writings and is editor-in-chief of the *Ety Hillesum Studies*. He has (as writer or editor) published around 40 books and 250 articles on the Hebrew Bible, Ancient Hebrew inscriptions, Ancient History, Jewish Studies, Anti-Semitism, and Ety Hillesum.

35 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941.



3 *Hineinhorchen* and Writing

The Language Use of Etty Hillesum

Marja Clement

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Abstract

An extensive study is needed in order to describe the language use of Etty Hillesum in all its detail. Nevertheless, this article provides a substantial introduction to Hillesum's original and unique style. Based on a study of quotations from the diaries, the author concludes that Etty Hillesum's writing is rich in figurative language, includes metaphors and metonyms, and is replete with subtle humour and irony.

Keywords: style, figurative language, rhetoric, metaphor, irony, inner dialogue, grotesque, Etty Hillesum

The language use of Etty Hillesum is rich in figurative language, includes metaphors and metonyms, subtle humour and irony, and is characterized by an original and unique style.¹

Introduction

Etty Hillesum started writing her diary on 8 March 1941. From that date until 13 October 1942, she filled eleven journals, ten of which have been preserved, amounting to more than 1,200 handwritten pages. In these journals, she often mentions that she would like to become a writer in her later life. She struggles with language, with words. She regularly has the opinion that she is not able to express herself. For a long time, she has had the idea that she wants to become a writer, but she fears her efforts in this respect will not

1 I am very grateful to Patrick Schettters for translating my article into English.

be outstanding: “And if, at the end of a long life, I am able to give some form to the chaos inside me, I may well have fulfilled my own small purpose.”²

Etty Hillesum makes countless observations about not being able to write and frequently she trivializes her talent for writing: “I still can’t write. I want to write about the reality behind things, and that’s still beyond my knowledge.”³ She remarks: “there are still no words to shelter me,”⁴ and denounces the pages in her journal as “awkward stammering.”⁵ She states: “I can only find distorted images to describe it. Later, I shall no doubt find the right brushstrokes; later, when I really get down to writing.”⁶ Meanwhile, she undergoes a huge transformation as she writes and struggles. Etty Hillesum develops from a person with many physical and mental issues to a strong and powerful woman who has learned how to cope with the problems she faces, a woman with implicit trust in life. Likewise, she develops as a writer. Writing in her journals, she displays her own style, finds a unique manner of expressing herself and succeeds in finding the right words for her rich, inner world and for the circumstances and people that surround her.

Initial Exploration

The central question is, what are the characteristics of Etty Hillesum’s language use? An extensive study is needed in order to describe her language use in all its detail. This article must be seen as an introductory exploration.⁷

2 E.T., 116. *Het Werk*, 75; Monday, 4 August 1941: En wanneer ik, aan het eind van een lang leven, een vorm zal kunnen vinden voor wat er nu nog chaotisch in me zit, misschien heb ik dan m’n eigen kleine taak volbracht.

3 E.T., 120. *Het Werk*, 77; Tuesday, 5 August 1941: Ik kan nog niet schrijven. Ik wil schrijven wat achter de reële dingen ligt en dat kan ik nog niet grijpen.

4 E.T., 212. *Het Werk*, 138; Monday morning, 20 October 1941: [...] er zijn nog geen woorden die me herbergen willen.

5 E.T., 550. *Het Werk*, 358; Friday morning, 24 April 1942: onbeholpen gestamel.

6 E.T., 464. *Het Werk*, 300; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: Ik kan er alleen maar monstreuze beelden voor vinden, later vind ik wel de juiste penseelstreken, later, als ik echt ga schrijven.

7 See also Gerrit Van Oord, “Two Voices from Westerbork: Etty Hillesum and Philip Mechanicus on the Transport from Camp Westerbork on 24 August 1943”, in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 313-334; Jos Paardekooper, “Etty Hillesum”, in: Ad Zuiderent, Hugo Brems & Tom van Deel (eds), *Kritisch Lexicon van de Moderne Nederlandstalige Literatuur* (Groningen: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988); Debbie Pevenage, “‘There Was Little of that Harmonious Rolling Out of God’s Hand’: Struggle and Balance in the Diaries of Etty Hillesum”, in: *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 253-268.

Applying quotations from the diaries, the following remarkable aspects of Etty Hillesum's language use are considered: 1. Inner dialogue; 2. Figurative language, including: 2a. Metaphors, 2b. Metonyms, 2c. Personifications, 2d. Images of sensual perceptions, 2e. Images from nature, and 2f. Images for inner processes; 3. Impersonal constructions; 4. Enumerations; 5. Irony; 6. Grotesque elements; 7. German terms, and 8. Reflections on her own language use.⁸

Inner Dialogue

A common figure of speech in diaries is inner dialogue. It also appears in Etty Hillesum's diaries, which can be seen in the many sentences, in which she explicitly addresses herself. She speaks to herself kindly, using terms such as 'little one': "Are you quite sure of that, *little one*?"⁹ "You must keep watching your step, *little one*, but I am very pleased with you all the same, you're pulling through, truly, you are pulling through."¹⁰ Or, she calls herself by her name: "And yet, *Etty*, I have something very serious to point out to you"¹¹; or "Oh, *Etty*, *Etty*, what a lifetime of coping with you I still face!"¹² She repeatedly says: "Now sleep well, *my dear little one*,"¹³ in a soothing and encouraging tone. "Let life with all its complications be merry or sad, it doesn't matter which, and just allow it to wash about inside you, *my dear little one*."¹⁴ These inner dialogues also convey a sense of irony: "two days I have done nothing but work and ward off my moods. *You're a big girl!*"¹⁵ These inner dialogues often show a certain distance, self-awareness, and self-observation:

8 Italics in the quotations are mine, both in the English translations and in the Dutch original text [MC].

9 E.T., 56. *Het Werk*, 36; Wednesday evening, 19 March 1941: Weet je dat wel zo zeker *kleintje*?

10 E.T., 138. *Het Werk*, 90; Sunday, midnight, 10 August 1941: Houd jezelf verder in de gaten, *kleine*, maar ik ben toch wel tevreden over je, je slaat je er doorheen, waarachtig, je slaat je er doorheen.

11 E.T., 56. *Het Werk*, 36; Wednesday evening, 19 March 1941: En toch, *Etty*, moet ik je nog even heel ernstig op iets wijzen.

12 E.T., 180. *Het Werk*, 117; Monday morning, 29 September 1941: *O Etty, Etty*, wat zal ik nog een hoop met je te stellen hebben een heel leven lang.

13 E.T., 210. *Het Werk*, 137; Sunday, 12 October 1941: En slaap nou maar zacht, *lieve kleine*.

14 E.T., 222. *Het Werk*, 144; Wednesday afternoon, 22 October 1941: Laat het leven maar vrolijk en treurig, zoals het nu eenmaal is, in al z'n tegenstellingen, in je rondklotsen, *lieve kleine*.

15 E.T., 224 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 145; Friday, 24 October 1941: Al twee dagen alleen maar gewerkt en me niet verdiept in eigen stemmingen. *Grote meid, hoor!*

Spring really is here. I can tell from my sore throat and also from a wonderful sort of easy and over-confident, but also very serious, gaiety. Are you writing sheer nonsense, *my girl*?¹⁶

In many other cases, Etty Hillesum admonishes herself, encourages herself, and sometimes is highly critical of herself, at times in jest, or inclined to coarseness:

Come on, my girl, get down to work *or I will kill you*.¹⁷

And, for goodness' sake, stop looking at yourself in the mirror, Etty, *you fool*.¹⁸

When all is said and done, I must be grateful to have all this time to myself, so let me use it well in God's name, *stupid girl that I am*.¹⁹

And now that's enough fooling about, *you useless baggage*. You squander most of your time and energy on brooding and thinking about things of absolutely no worth.²⁰

She generally conducts such inner dialogue when she considers herself to be lacking discipline. Over the months, she has discovered that daily discipline cheers her up and that hard study, according to a strict daily regime, helps her to escape from the chaos of emotions and physical complaints.

No more feeble excuses now, get on with it, *my girl*, you've got the reins in your hands so don't let go of them. You never get anything for nothing,

16 E.T., 462. *Het Werk*, 298-299; Monday morning, 16 March 1942: Het is echt voorjaar. Ik merk het aan m'n keelpijn en ook aan een wonderlijk soort lichte en overmoedige, maar toch ook weer heel ernstige vrolijkheid. Schrijf je eigenlijk wartaal, *zusje*?

17 E.T., 10 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 7; Monday morning, 10 March 1941: Ziezo, *zusje*, nou wordt er gewerkt, *of ik mep je dood*.

18 E.T., 94. *Het Werk*, 60; Sunday morning, 8 June 1941: Ik zou je willen vragen niet zoveel in de spiegel te kijken, *stuk onbenul*.

19 E.T., 130. *Het Werk*, 84; Friday morning, 8 August 1941: Ik moet toch dankbaar zijn dat ik alle tijd voor mezelf heb, laat ik hem toch in godsnaam gebruiken, *kaffer die je bent*.

20 E.T., 268. *Het Werk*, 174; Thursday morning, 4 December 1941: En nu is het uit met het gedonder, *snertprul*. De meeste energie en tijd verspil je daarmee, door te piekeren en te denken over dingen, die geen nut hebben.

not for a single minute. But you are back on the straight and narrow now. That tidied-up kitchen is a reflection of your tidied-up mind.²¹

Enough's enough, damn it. I'm fed up with all your deeply significant thoughts and feelings. It's time you pulled yourself together again. *I shall be after you with a big whip.*²²

She even speaks sternly to herself or ask questions when she is not satisfied with her turn of phrase:

You've put that with disgraceful carelessness and sloppiness, *my girl*; the subject deserves better of you, but perhaps that is still to come.²³

You always talk so vaguely about "life". I know very well what you mean by it, *but couldn't you define it sometime?*²⁴

The inner dialogue with herself is especially clear in this last quotation; the writer splits into two. In terms of grammar, there is a first and a second person: the personal pronoun 'I' refers to the speaker whereas 'you' points to the addressee; in this case, speaker and addressee are unified in a single person.

Figurative Language

A striking characteristic of Etty Hillesum's writing is the original use of figurative language. She has a rich and expressive capacity and her diaries are full of examples of figurative language. It is an exception if she uses a particular figure of speech more than once. However, we can discover certain patterns.

21 E.T., 70. *Het Werk*, 45; Monday morning, 24 March 1941: En nu geen flauwsies, verder, *zusje*, je hebt nu de teugels weer in handen en houd ze vast. Je krijgt niets cadeau, geen enkele minuut. Maar je bent nu weer op het goeie pad. Die opgeruimde keuken, die de spiegel van mijn opgeruimd gemoed is.

22 E.T., 194. *Het Werk*, 126; Sunday morning, 5 October 1941: En nou is het uit, verdomme. Je verveelt me met je diepzinnige gedachtes en gevoelens. En nou zàl je weer gedisciplineerd worden. *Ik ga weer met de zweep achter je aan.*

23 E.T., 34. *Het Werk*, 22; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: Dit heb je schandelijk lui en slordig geformuleerd, *zusje*, de zaak is een beter neerschrijven waardig, maar dat komt nog wel eens.

24 E.T., 286. *Het Werk*, 185; Friday morning, 12 December 1941: Ik praat altijd zo vaag over "het leven". Ik weet wel wat je er mee bedoelt, *maar kun je het niet eens omschrijven?*

Metaphors

Clearly, Etty Hillesum has a perceptive mind and the ability to express her ideas concisely. This makes her language use compact, refreshing, and surprising. For example, she describes her parental home in a scathing manner:

*You trip over the unsolved problems here, over fast-changing moods; it is a chaotic and sad situation, which is reflected in the disorganized household.*²⁵

Our house is a remarkable mixture of barbarism and culture. – *Spiritual riches lie within grasp, but they are left unused and unguarded, are carelessly scattered about.* It is depressing, it is tragicomic, I don't know what kind of madhouse this really is, but I know that no human being can flourish here.²⁶

Such metaphors can be found throughout the journals, from the beginning to the end. In this regard, it is not a question of Etty Hillesum developing as a writer, since from the very first pages, she shows a natural ability to express herself and paint vivid scenes with words.

Metonymy

Etty Hillesum likes to use metonyms, short, cryptic descriptions referring to persons, things or situations by naming, for instances, a part for the whole (*pars pro toto*) or the whole for a part (*totum pro parte*).

Nine degrees of frost again. *Perhaps Enkhuizen won't turn up*, although we need to have a serious talk about those peas and beans.²⁷

25 E.T., 130 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 84; Friday morning, 8 August 1941: *Je breekt hier je nek over de onopgeloste problemen* over snel wisselende stemmingen, het is een chaotische en droevige toestand, die zich weerspiegelt in de uiterlijke chaos van de huishouding.

26 E.T., 132. *Het Werk*, 85; Friday evening, 8 August 1941: Hier in huis een allerwonderlijkst mengsel van barbaarsheid en hoge cultuur. *Het geestelijk kapitaal ligt hier voor het grijpen, maar het ligt er onbeheerd en onbewaakt, slordig te grabbel gegooid.* Het is deprimerend. Het is tragi-komisch, ik weet niet wat voor een gek huishouden dit is, maar een mens kan hier niet gedijen.

27 E.T., 408. *Het Werk*, 261; Saturday morning, 21 February 1942: Weer 9 graden gaan vriezen. *Misschien komt Enkhuizen niet*, hoewel ik het nu wel eens ernstig over die erwten en bonen wil hebben.

In this excerpt, Etty Hillesum refers to Douwe J. Vis, director of the seed business Gebroeders Vis NV in Enkhuizen, who learned Russian for business purposes. He had promised to bring along peas and beans.

I felt like *climbing into bed for just an hour with St. Augustine*, but my hands first wandered a little over the rows of books alongside my bed [...].²⁸

Etty Hillesum studies Augustine's *Confessions* in this period, and by referring to the autobiography in this way, she creates an amusing effect. It is almost as if she wants to share her bed with this saint.

Personification

A frequent figure of speech employed by Etty Hillesum is personification. Words uttered by a friend have qualities of a living being, or thoughts have certain behaviours:

We had been having a chat over a cup of coffee in the Café de Paris. *Her words and questions and problems had fluttered towards me*, a little uncertain and looking for something to hold on to, and I had caught them and tried to understand them and give them form.²⁹

This morning is all mine again. It takes so much effort each time and is such a personal struggle to make myself sit down in front of these narrow blue lines and to try gently to coax some thoughts out of myself – they still refuse to come meekly. *They jump about in my head sometimes instead, and elbow each other out of the way as if trying to get out from behind bars.*³⁰

She even personifies her fountain pen:

28 E.T., 602. *Het Werk*, 393; Sunday afternoon, 24 May 1942: Ik wilde *met de Heilige Augustinus een uurtje in m'n bed klimmen*, maar m'n handen zwierven eerst nog wat langs de boekenrijen langs m'n bed [...].

29 E.T., 410. *Het Werk*, 263; Sunday evening, 22 February 1942: We hadden een kop koffie gedronken in Café de Paris en wat gepraat. *Haar woorden en vragen en moeilijkheden fladderden naar mij toe*, wat onzeker en houvast zoekend en ik ving ze op en probeerde te begrijpen en vorm te geven.

30 E.T., 412. *Het Werk*, 264-265; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: Deze ochtend is weer voor mij. Het kost me iedere keer weer zoveel kracht en zelfoverwinning om me weer te zetten achter deze blauwe lijntjes en te proberen voorzichtig wat gedachten naar buiten te leiden uit mij, ze komen toch nog niet goed over. *Maar springen wel soms in me rond en staan zich te verdringen als achter traliewerk om naar buiten te komen.*

To put it very crudely, *which will probably cause pain to my fountain pen*: if an SS man were to kick me to death, I should nevertheless look into his face and wonder to myself, both in terrified amazement and out of human interest, My God, you poor fellow, what terrible things must have happened in your life to bring you to this pass?³¹

The above quotations are just two of the many examples of this technique to be found in the diaries, and they emanate a particularly suggestive effect. According to ETTY HILLESUM, the world seems to be spirited. Inanimate objects and elements surrounding her are presented as animate beings.

When I looked out of my window this morning at 6.30, *the Rijksmuseum was still half asleep* and the Skating Club *dozing away*, but my two trees stood there like two fierce, fully awake exclamation marks. Two pitch-black exclamation marks plain as plain written hastily on a page.³²

Pine cones lying on her small desk are talked to, as are flowers and chestnut twigs: “Good morning, little crocuses, we have had two degrees of frost, is that why you look so pathetic and disconsolate in that chocolate-sprinkle tin?”³³ “And my chestnut is lifting a host of small graceful hands from the brown earthenware jug, in supplication to the sky.”³⁴ She comments about the stars: “for a few nights, *some of them, lost, deserted, grazed over the wide, forsaken, heavenly plain.*”³⁵ Even something abstract like ‘disquiet’ is presented with the characteristics of a living being: “A small disquiet is bobbing up and down in me again.”³⁶

31 E.T., 36. *Het Werk*, 23; Saturday, 15 March 1941: Om het nu maar eens zeer cru te formuleren, *wat misschien wel pijn zal doen aan m'n vulpen*: Wanneer een S.S.-man me dood zou trappen, dan zou ik nog opkijken naar z'n gezicht en me met angstige verbazing en menselijke belangstelling afvragen: Mijn God kerel, wat is er met jou allemaal voor verschrikkelijks in je leven gebeurd, dat je tot zulke dingen komt?

32 E.T., 518. *Het Werk*, 335; Saturday morning, 4 April 1942: Toen ik vanochtend om ½ 7 door m'n venster keek, *lag het Rijksmuseum nog in een halfslaap verzonken*, de IJclub *doezelde ook nog*, maar m'n twee bomen stonden daar als felle, klaar wakkere uitroeptekens. Twee pikzwarte, duidelijke uitroeptekens op een ijl beschreven bladzijde.

33 E.T., 478. *Het Werk*, 310; Monday morning, 23 March 1942: Goeie morgen, kleine crocussen, het heeft 2 graden gevoren, doen jullie daarom zo zielig en ontroostbaar in dat hagelagbakje?

34 E.T., 568. *Het Werk*, 371; Wednesday afternoon, 29 April 1942: En m'n kastanje heft vele kleine sierlijke handen bezwerend ten hemel vanuit de bruine aarden kan.

35 E.T., 494. *Het Werk*, 319; Saturday morning, 28 March 1942: [...] voor enkele nachten *graasden er een paar achtergebleven verdwaalde sterren over de verlaten, wijde hemelvlakte.*

36 E.T., 476. *Het Werk*, 309; Sunday evening, 22 March 1942: Er danst weer een kleine onrust in me op en neer.

Images of Physical Perceptions

Another clear pattern in Etty Hillesum's writing is the use of metaphors and metonyms to depict something 'physical'.

I had the feeling that *I was resting against the naked breast of life*, and could feel her gentle and regular heartbeat. I felt safe and protected.³⁷

Here a physical, corporal sensation is described to express how she experiences life at that moment. Life is personified. In the following example, she compares her own problems with those of Julius Spier:

A fifty-four-year-old in whom the struggle between the spirit and the flesh is still in full cry. And it seemed as if I were being crushed under the weight of that struggle. I lay buried under his personality and could not get away; *my own problems*, which seemed to be much of the same kind, *lay there thrashing around on the ground*.³⁸

Abstract things such as 'problems' are personified. Here, Etty Hillesum wants to express that her own problems do not amount to anything compared to the fierce struggle of Julius Spier, her friend, model, and teacher. In the following example, she describes Spier's eyes:

But later, those marvellously human eyes, sizing me up from out of grey depths, rested again on my own. *I would dearly have liked to embrace those eyes*.³⁹

This is a characteristic expression. Etty Hillesum often reacts to the world, to events, and to the people surrounding her in a rather physical manner. Spier's eyes hold great attraction for her and she expresses this by means

37 E.T., 618. *Het Werk*, 404; Saturday morning, 30 May 1942: Ik had een gevoel *of ik rustte tegen de naakte borst van het leven* en haar zachte en regelmatige harteklop hoorde. Ik lag in de naakte armen van het Leven en het was er zo veilig en beschut.

38 E.T., 4 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 4; Sunday, 9 March 1941: De strijd tussen stof en geest, die bij deze 54-jarige man nog in volle gang is. En het lijkt of ik verpletterd word onder het gewicht van die strijd. Ik word bedolven onder die persoonlijkheid en kan er niet onder uitkomen; *mijn eigen problemen*, die ik ongeveer als van dezelfde aard aanvoel, *liggen daar maar wat te spartelen*.

39 E.T., 6 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 5; Sunday, 9 March 1941: Maar later waren er weer die verrukkelijke, menselijke ogen, die vanuit grauwe diepten peilend rustten in mij, *ogen, die ik graag had willen omhelzen*.

of the image of an embrace. This physical experience manifests itself most strongly when she undergoes inner struggles about her relationship with Spier:

Last Sunday (was it only a week ago?) I had the desperate feeling that I was tied to him and that, because of that, I was in for an utterly miserable time. But I pulled myself out of it, although I don't quite know how. Not by arguing it out with myself, *but by tugging with all my mental strength at some imaginary rope. I threw all my weight behind it and stood my ground, and suddenly I felt that I was free again.*⁴⁰

Also in this excerpt, the physical aspect is clearly present. She is very well aware of her sensual perceptions and her sensitivity to physical sensations:

Whenever I saw a beautiful flower, what I longed to do with it was press it to my heart, or eat it all up. It was more difficult with a piece of beautiful scenery, but the feeling was the same. I was too sensual, I might almost write too greedy.⁴¹

Last night, when I bicycled over to see S., I was filled with a warm, intense longing for spring. And as I rode dreamily along, over the asphalt of Lairesestraat, looking forward to seeing him, I suddenly felt the caress of balmy spring air. Yes, I thought, that's how it should be. *Why shouldn't one feel an immense, tender ecstasy of love for the spring, or for all humanity?*⁴²

40 E.T., 104. *Het Werk*, 66; Sunday, 15 June 1941: De vorige Zondag, (ligt daar pas een week tussen) had ik het wanhopige gevoel, dat ik aan hem vastgebonden zat en dat er daardoor een doodongelukkige tijd voor me zou aanbreken. Maar ik heb me losgerukt, ik begrijp alleen niet hoe. Niet door er over te redeneren met mezelf. *Maar ik heb gerukt met alle psychische krachten aan een denkbeeldig touw*, ik ben te keer gegaan en heb me geweerd en opens voelde ik, dat ik weer vrij was.

41 E.T., 38-40. *Het Werk*, 25; Sunday afternoon, 16 March 1941: Wanneer ik een bloem mooi vond, dan had ik die het liefst aan het hart gedrukt of opgegeten. Met een heel stuk natuurschoon ging dat moeilijker, maar het gevoel was hetzelfde. Ik was te zinnelijk, ik zou haast zeggen "hebberig" ingesteld.

42 E.T., 462. *Het Werk*, 299; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: Gisteravond, toen ik naar hem toefietste, was er een groot en vriendelijk voorjaarsverlangen in me. En terwijl ik naar hem verlangde en dromend over het asphalt van de Lairesestraat fietste, voelde ik me plotseling gestreeld door een lauwe voorjaarslucht. En dacht plotseling: zo is het ook goed. *Waarom zou men niet een grote en tedere liefdesroes kunnen beleven met een lente, en met alle mensen?*

Etty Hillesum likes to copy passages from other writers and poets who inspire her, and she sometimes apologizes and explains:

It may be odd, but I really love to write down sentences, passages, etc., that affect me deeply; whenever I do that I feel, so to speak, physically close to the words; it is *as if I were stroking them with my fountain pen* [...].⁴³

The words seem to be alive and the strong perceptibility to the senses of her personality rings through her language use. She caresses the words from the writers with her fountain pen while copying. Sometimes, these words seem to have a will of their own: "There is still something in my head that wants to be put on paper first"⁴⁴ and uttered words seem to be tangible: "Tonight, his words were once again *like a soothing hand laid upon my head*."⁴⁵ The fact that personification is employed so frequently is due to the strong physical aspect of Hillesum's experience. Many metaphors include physical-sensual perceptions. This not only relates to pleasant and gentle experiences, but also to hard and painful ones:

Am I too busy? I want to get to know this century of ours inside and out. I touch this century, every day anew, *I run my fingertips along the contours of these times*. Or is that pure fiction? But I always project myself back into reality. I make myself confront everything that crosses my path, *which sometimes leaves me feeling battered*. It is just as if I let myself crash violently into everything, *leaving dents and scratches*. But I imagine that it has to be like that. I sometimes feel I am in some blazing purgatory and that I am being forged into something else.⁴⁶

43 E.T., 22. *Het Werk*, 14-15; Wednesday evening, 12 March 1941: Het is vreemd, maar ik houd er zo van om zinnen, brokstukken enz., die me zeer treffen, over te schrijven; ik ben dan a.h.w. in de lichamelijke nabijheid van die woorden, het is *of ik ze streek met m'n vulpen* [...].

44 E.T., 32 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 21; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: Er is nog iets in m'n hoofd, dat op papier gezet wil worden.

45 E.T., 546. *Het Werk*, 356; Wednesday evening, 22 April 1942: Vanavond waren opeens weer zijn woorden *als een kalmerende hand die zich op mijn hoofd legde*.

46 E.T., 152 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 98-99; Thursday night, 4 September 1941: Ben ik te intensief bezig? Ik wil deze eeuw leren kennen, van buiten en van binnen. Ik betast deze eeuw, iedere dag opnieuw, *ik tast met m'n vingertoppen langs de contouren van deze tijd*. Of is dat maar een fictie? En dan verder slinger ik mezelf steeds opnieuw in de realiteit. Ik confronteer mezelf met alles, wat er op m'n pad komt. *Dat geeft me soms zo een bloedig gevoel*. Het is net of ik met geweld overall mezelf tegen op laat botsen *en dat geeft deuken en schrammen*. Maar ik verbeeld me dat dat moet. Ik heb soms het gevoel of ik in een smeltkroes zit. Of in een hels vagevuur en dat ik gesmeed word tot iets.

Great confidence, truly great confidence, has very slowly been maturing in me of late. [...] Nor do I still keep *bumping into the sharp corners of the day*.⁴⁷

In some cases, we can even talk of synaesthesia, a fusion of impressions from different senses. During a musical evening with the pianist Evaristos Edgar Glassner, the music is a tangible experience for her:

Oh yes, on Sunday afternoon when Glassner was being a teller of tales on the Grand Piano, I felt as if my heart were one great keyboard on which he was playing with his strong, gentle fingers – from so close by, from so deep down did the music come.⁴⁸

An extensive study on all the figures of speech created by Etty Hillesum's words may give additional insights into her personality and reveal a highly perceptive, ultra-sensitive individual impressed by things that immediately influence her physical constitution.

Images from Nature

Conspicuous in the different forms of figurative language used by Etty Hillesum is the remarkable sensitivity to nature and the many images from nature included in her use of language.

Until suddenly, a few weeks ago, I had a liberating thought that surfaced in me *like a hesitant, tender young blade of grass thrusting its way through a wilderness of weeds*: if there were only one decent German, then he should be cherished despite that whole barbaric gang, and because of that one decent German it is wrong to pour hatred over an entire people.⁴⁹

47 E.T., 322. *Het Werk*, 205-206; Sunday morning, 21 December 1941: Er rijpt heel langzaam, de laatste tijd, zo een "Zuversicht" in me, een werkelijk groot vertrouwen. [...] Ik stoot me ook niet meer voortdurend aan *de scherpe hoeken van de dag*.

48 E.T., 464. *Het Werk*, 300; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: En o ja, toen Glassner Zondagmiddag zijn verhaaltjes vertelde op de Vleugel, toen was het me, of m'n hart één groot toetsenbord was, waar hij op speelde met krachtige en met tedere vingers, *zó dichtbij, zó van binnenuit kwam de muziek*.

49 E.T., 30. *Het Werk*, 19; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: Tot opeens enige weken geleden plotseling de verlossende gedachte kwam, *die als een aarzelend piepjong grassprietje omhoog stak tussen een woestijn van onkruid*: En al zou er nog maar één fatsoenlijke Duitser bestaan, dan zou die het waard zijn in bescherming genomen te worden tegen de hele barbaarse bende en om die éne fatsoenlijke Duitser zou men dan niet zijn haat mogen uitgieten over een geheel volk.

Feelings and experiences are often expressed and presented as landscapes in which she dwells, shaping her way.

My life's priorities have been suddenly changed. In the past, I liked to start the day on an empty stomach with Dostoevsky or Hegel, and during odd, jumpy moments I might also darn a stocking if I absolutely had to. Now I start the day, in the most literal sense, with the stocking *and gradually work my way up through the other essential chores to higher planes*, where I can meet poets and philosophers again.⁵⁰

This excerpt shows an aspect of Etty Hillesum that makes her work attractive, namely her subtle humour. This struggle with the activity of darning appears many times in her diary, and likely makes the reader smile. When Etty Hillesum develops a growing trust and inner peace, she regularly describes it with images from nature:

Life grows slowly toward fulfilment – that sort of feeling. [...] But above all, clarity and peace of mind and also confidence in myself. *As if I had suddenly reached a clearing in a dense forest where I could lie down flat on my back and stare into the wide sky.*⁵¹

Etty Hillesum can also present the days as a landscape: “the days *stretched before me then like broad, open plains* that I could cross with great ease, that offered wide, unimpeded views. *And now I am back in the midst of the scrubland again*”⁵²; “back here each day are a thousand fragments, the great plain is no more, and God, too, has departed.”⁵³ In addition to the image of landscapes,

50 E.T., 38. *Het Werk*, 24; Sunday morning, 16 March 1941: De hiërarchie in mijn leven is wel iets veranderd. “Vroeger” begon ik op m’n nuchtere maag liefst met Dostojewski of Hegel en in een verloren, zenuwachtig moment stopte ik dan ook nog wel eens een kous, als het beslist niet anders kon. Nu begin ik, in de meest letterlijke zin des woords, met de kous en *klim dan, via de andere noodzakelijke bezigheden van de dag langzaam op naar de top*, waar ik weer de dichters en denkers ontmoet.

51 E.T., 246. *Het Werk*, 158; Sunday morning, 23 November 1941: “Haar leven rijpte langzaam naar de vervulling.” Zo een gevoel soms. [...] Maar nog het meest van alles die klaarheid en rust en ook dat vertrouwen in mezelf. Of ik in een dicht bos plotseling *op een open plek ben aangeland, waar ik me op m’n rug te rusten leg om in de wijde hemel te kijken*.

52 E.T., 66. *Het Werk*, 44; Sunday, 23 March 1941: [...] de dagen *lagen als open wijde vlaktes voor me* en ik kon vrij over die vlaktes gaan en die dagen waren wijd en onbelemmerd in hun uitzicht. *En nu zit ik weer midden in het struikgewas*.

53 E.T., 112. *Het Werk*, 72; Friday, 4 July 1941: [...] hier bestaat de dag uit duizend stukjes, de grote vlakte is weer weg en God is ook weer zoek geraakt.

other images are used to describe the days: “*The days slip by like sand through my fingers*”⁵⁴; “It was a day *that sailed through the sea of days like a serene and majestic ship*”⁵⁵; “*The day is galloping away*, I must try to tighten the reins.”⁵⁶

Images for Inner Processes

The diary is dominated by descriptions of inner perceptions, feelings, and emotions. Etty Hillesum uses many forms of figurative language for these inner processes. During the first months of writing her diary, she expresses her efforts to stay disciplined using the following image:

Only yesterday life was still one smoothly flowing whole for me, and I was flowing with it, if I may put it so impressively for once. But now everything has tensed up again. And I had such high hopes for my writing, but I can't tear anything out of myself, *it's as if everything were crushed between blocks of granite*.⁵⁷

In the following excerpt, she describes her inner self as a battlefield:

I said that I confronted the “Suffering of Mankind” (I still shudder when it comes to big words), but that was not really what it was. Rather *I feel like a small battlefield*, in which the problems, or some of the problems, of our time are being fought out. All one can hope to do is to keep oneself humbly available, to allow oneself to be a battlefield. After all, the problems must be accommodated, have somewhere to struggle and come to rest, and we, poor little humans, must put our inner space at their service and not run away. In that respect, I am probably very hospitable; *mine is often an exceedingly bloody battlefield*, and dreadful fatigue and splitting headaches are the toll I have to pay.⁵⁸

54 E.T., 122. *Het Werk*, 79; Tuesday afternoon, 5 August 1941: *De dagen glijden als zand door m'n vingers* [...].

55 E.T., 298. *Het Werk*, 193; Tuesday morning, 16 December 1941: Het was een dag, *die als een kalm en majestueus schip voer door het jaar van dagen*.

56 E.T., 314 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 202; Friday afternoon, 19 December 1941: *De dag galoppeert er weer vandoor*, ik zal zien, dat ik hem bij de teugels grijp.

57 E.T., 68. *Het Werk*, 44; Sunday, 23 March 1941: Gisteren nog was het leven één vloeiend geheel voor me en ik vloeiide mee, om het nu maar eens indrukwekkend te zeggen. En nu is alles weer krampachtig. En ik had zo een hoop te schrijven, maar ik kan niets uit me losrukken, *alles zit bekneld tussen granietblokken*.

58 E.T., 104. *Het Werk*, 67; Sunday, 15 June 1941: Ik zeg, dat ik me uiteengezet heb met “Het Lijden der Mensheid” (ik griezel nog steeds van die grote woorden). Maar dat is het toch eigenlijk niet. *Ik*

She describes difficult moments, moments of depression, chaos, and despair in an obtrusive manner.

This morning, rummaged about among the books again. And now I'm trying to put the pieces back together. Suicide is never an option – I've been trying to drive that home to myself all week. In my case it would be the act of a cowardly and spoiled child. I don't know, though, *there are times when I would like just to slip away out of this life*. [...] Come on, get down to work, you old bore. Work is what you need to keep your end up in front of the outside world. It justifies your existence. Yet time and again, you have to force yourself to get down to it. Oh well, enough of this moaning.⁵⁹

Sometimes I feel like letting myself down soundlessly into a muddy ditch and falling gently asleep.⁶⁰

This image of committing suicide by letting oneself down in a muddy ditch, is a recurring one in the diaries. Here, we see again how she talks to herself sternly in order not to give way to despair. This costs her a lot of strength. She regularly sees her inner self as a workshop:

It's true, I'm quite sure of it: I work very hard. My nearest and dearest would laugh if they heard this, but inside me, inside my brain, there is an enormous workshop *where fashioning, forging, labouring, suffering and sweating all go on*. But what the end product maybe, I do not know.

voel me veeleer een klein slagveld, waar de vragen of een enkele vraag van deze tijd uitgevochten wordt. Het enige wat je kunt doen, is je deemoedig ter beschikking te stellen en jezelf tot slagveld te laten maken. Die vragen moeten toch een onderdak hebben, moeten toch een plek vinden, waar ze kunnen strijden en tot rust komen en wij, arme kleine mensen, moeten onze innerlijke ruimte voor ze openstellen en niet weglopen. Ik ben misschien, wat dat betreft, wel heel gastvrij, *het is daar soms een allerbloedigst slagveld bij mij* en af en toe een overgrote vermoeidheid en zware hoofdpijn zijn de tol hiervoor.

59 E.T., 214. *Het Werk*, 140; Tuesday morning, 21 October 1941: Vanochtend weer zoek geraakt tussen de boeken. En nu zoek ik de stukken weer bij elkaar. Je mag nooit zelfmoord plegen, dat wilde ik je al de hele week nadrukkelijk zeggen. Het zou in jouw geval geloof ik de daad zijn van een laf en verwend kind. Ik weet het niet. *Soms zou ik zo maar weg willen glijden uit dit leven*. [...] Ga jij maar werken, zanikpot. Met dat werken houd ik m'n stand op voor de buitenwereld. Rechtvaardig ik m'n bestaan. Dat beetje ongelukkige werken moet ik altijd weer met kracht op mezelf veroveren. Nou ja, niet zeuren.

60 E.T., 230 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 148; Wednesday morning, 29 October 1941: Soms zou ik me geruisloos willen laten zakken in een modderige gracht en daar zachtjes inslapen.

It isn't just vague dreaming. Something is demanding to be given shape. Something is at work, and at moments like this I accept it without demur.⁶¹

The ten preserved journals that form Etty Hillesum's diary present a clear picture of the inner process of growth that she undergoes in those years and to which she relates in this excerpt. This 'work in progress' confirms to the reader the image of the workshop.

Etty Hillesum rarely uses an image twice, although there are exceptions. The diversity of images shows how she constantly experiences new struggles and how her experiences increasingly change character: "I feel just like a dustbin sometimes, what with all the murkiness, conceitedness, half-heartedness and inferiority inside me!"⁶² "I feel like a clenched fist"⁶³; "My head is the workshop, in which all worldly things must be thought through until they become clear. And my heart is the fiery furnace in which everything must be felt and suffered intensely"⁶⁴; "I feel just like a drizzle"⁶⁵; "Suddenly I have the feeling that living a balanced life means nothing more than walking a tightrope above the abyss"⁶⁶; "I feel just like a gramophone record, something keeps scratching me with a sharp needle"⁶⁷; "The mills of the brain will have to grind long and hard again this evening."⁶⁸

61 E.T., 244. *Het Werk*, 157; Saturday evening, 22 November 1941: En toch is het waar, ik weet het heel zeker: ik werk heel hard. M'n naaste omgeving zou lachen als ze dit hoorde. Maar in mij, in m'n brein is een geweldige werkplaats en daar wordt gewerkt en gesmeed en gezwoged en geleden en gezweet. Maar wat het werkstuk zal zijn weet ik niet. Het is niet alleen maar vaag gedroom. Er wil iets uitgekristalliseerd worden. Er is iets aan het werk en op een moment als dit aanvaard ik het ook zonder tegenstribbelen.

62 E.T., 118 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 75; Monday afternoon, 4 August 1941: Ik voel me soms net een vuilnisbak, er zit zoveel vertroebeldheid en ijdelheid en halfheid en minderwaardigheid in me!

63 E.T., 120. *Het Werk*, 77; Tuesday, 5 August 1941: Ik voel me als een samengebalde vuist [...].

64 E.T., 142. *Het Werk*, 92; Friday morning, 15 August 1941: Mijn hoofd is de werkplaats, waarin alle dingen van deze wereld tot klaarheid gedacht moeten worden. En mijn hart is de gloeiende oven, waarin alles doorvoeld en doorleden moet worden.

65 E.T., 158 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 103; Friday afternoon, 5 September 1941: Ik voel me net een motregen.

66 E.T., 166. *Het Werk*, 108; Wednesday morning, 24 September 1941: Opeens het gevoel dat dat evenwichtige leven toch eigenlijk voorzichtig koorddansen was boven afronden.

67 E.T., 192. *Het Werk*, 125; Saturday afternoon, 4 October 1941: Ik voel me net een grammofoonplaat, er wordt voortdurend met een scherpe naald in me gekrast.

68 E.T., 258. *Het Werk*, 166; Saturday morning, 29 November 1941: De hersenmolenstenen zullen weer lang te vermalen hebben aan deze avond.

Right now I feel like *some animal that wants only to creep into a quiet corner* and lie there hugging itself. Yes, exactly this feeling: not to want to hit out, but to stay quietly curled up in some corner.⁶⁹

This analysis of Hillesum's use of figurative language is by no means complete. It is rather an initial investigation, a description of the most striking patterns to be found in the work. The wide variety of images and the effortless use of diverse figures of speech form a picture of her rich sense of language and her unique imaginative power.

Impersonal Constructions

Another notable characteristic of Etty Hillesum's use of language is the use of impersonal constructions. She does not apply the personal pronoun 'ik' [I] but the impersonal 'men' [one], 'een mens' [someone], or passive constructions, or the definite articles 'het'/'de' instead of 'mijn' [my]. The following examples illustrate this:

The day began so well, with my head bright and clear, and I made up my mind to write it all down later. But later came a really bad fit of depression, an inescapable pressure in my skull and gloomy thoughts, much too gloomy to bear for long, and behind it all the emptiness of my quest; *but that's something else, which should be fought against.*⁷⁰

He seemed very preoccupied. I don't even know if he enjoyed having me along, his thoughts were very far away, but that didn't worry me very much, *one must not be too childish.*⁷¹

69 E.T., 552 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 359; Friday afternoon, 24 April 1942: Ik voel me nu net *een dier, dat stil ergens in een hoekje kruipt* en z'n poten vlak langs het lichaam gestrekt houdt. Ja, zo een gevoel: niet om zich heen slaan, maar opgevouwen blijven liggen in een hoekje.

70 E.T., 10 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 7; Sunday night, 9 March 1941: De dag begon zo goed, helder en klaar in m'n hoofd, dat moet ik later nog opschrijven, later heel erge inzinking, een druk om m'n schedel, waar ik niet onderuit kon komen en zwaar gedacht, veel te zwaar voor mijn gevoel en daarachter de leegte en het waarom, *maar ook daartegen zal gevochten worden.*

71 E.T., 20 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 13; Wednesday evening, 12 March 1941: Hij [...] was zeer afwezig, ik weet niet eens of hij het prettig vond dat ik met hem meehuppelde, hij was weer heel ver weg, maar daar maakte ik me niet al te beroerd meer over, *een mens moet niet al te kinderachtig zijn.*

[...] until in the end *one shall, perhaps, finish up as an adult*, capable of helping other souls who are in trouble, and of creating some sort of clarity through my work for others, for that's what it's really all about.⁷²

There are no wasted and boring minutes any longer, one has to keep learning how to take one's rest between two deep breaths or in a five minute prayer; despite the many people, the many questions, the varied studies, one must always carry a great silence within one, a silence into which one can always withdraw, even in the midst of all the hustle and bustle and in the midst of the most animated conversations. *One must always keep drawing fresh strength from within oneself.*⁷³

Etty Hillesum regularly writes 'men' [one] where she could use 'ik' [I]. She possibly avoided the use of 'ik', because she wanted to make a pronouncement, which, in her eyes, had universal validity. There might also be a certain influence from the German language.

Enumerations

Another figure of speech appearing relatively frequently in Etty Hillesum's work is the enumeration of things that, at first sight, do not seem related to each other. To illustrate this, the example below uses the rhetorical device of repeating conjunctions, in this case 'and [...] and [...] and [...] and [...]', also known as polysyndeton:

Käthe's drainpipe is frozen and women are walking about in trousers and men with scarves round their heads and we get green peas and potato flour in our bread and my little cyclist is so hungry and in Russia it is even colder. Tonight, it felt so nice and cosy to be back in my lonely narrow

72 E.T., 22 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 14; Wednesday evening, 12 March 1941: [...] en tenslotte wordt men misschien nog eens een volwassen mens, in staat om weer andere stervelingen op deze aarde wat bij te staan in hun moeilijkheden en wat klaarheid te scheppen door zijn werk voor anderen, want daar gaat het toch ook om.

73 E.T., 500 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 323; Sunday evening, 29 March 1942: *Men heeft* geen verloren en verveelde minuten meer, *men moet* steeds beter leren uit te rusten tussen twee diepe ademteugen in of in een klein gebed van 5 minuten, *men moet* ondanks de vele mensen, de vele vragen, de veelzijdige studie, altijd een grote stilte met zich meedragen, *waarin men zich steeds terugtrekken kan*, ook tenmidden van het grootste gewoel en midden in het intensiefste gesprek. *Men moet* steeds weer opnieuw de krachten uit zichzelf putten.

bed. I thanked God again, not for the warm bed and the pea soup but for wanting to dwell in me once more.⁷⁴

Such enumerations often form an expression of the abundance and diversity of everything she has to cope with during wartime. Another example of an enumeration, in this case using commas rather than conjunctions (*monosyndeton*), is:

I know that we live under a heavy cloud [...] It's all so strange. To me, the greatest reality is still the sun on the hyacinths, the rabbit, the chocolate pudding, Beethoven, the grey hair at his temple and his young neck.⁷⁵

These enumerations allude to a variety of impressions and experiences, which she does not want to describe in detail at that moment, and they can sometimes come across as slightly humorous.

Irony

A frequent narrative technique in Hillesum's work is irony. When she has to register because of the order published on 10 January 1941 for the compulsory registration of all those "of full or partial Jewish blood," she makes a very dry remark: "Just been to register my chosen blood group."⁷⁶ This ironic use of language is especially striking for the specification of a serious event. Etty Hillesum's use of language often has a humorous lightness when she speaks about problems or the seriousness of life:

Last night I really left the battlefield victorious. Washed all over in cold water, did a few exercises, applied a bit of mental self-discipline and

74 E.T., 384 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 246; Friday morning, 23 January 1942: Käthe's afvoerbuis is bevroren en de vrouwen lopen allemaal in broeken en de mannen met sjaals om het hoofd en we krijgen groene erwten en aardappelmeel in ons brood en mijn fietsenjongetje heeft zo een honger en in Rusland is het nog kouder. Het was vannacht weer zo goed en vertrouwd in mijn eenzame, smalle bed. Ik heb God weer gedankt, niet voor het warme bed en voor de erwtensoep, maar daarvoor, dat hij weer in me wonen wilde.

75 E.T., 408. *Het Werk*, 261; Sunday evening, 22 February 1942: Ik weet, dat we in de greep van een groot en dreigend lot zitten [...] Het is zo wonderlijk allemaal. Het reëelste is nog steeds voor mij die zon op de hyacinthen, het konijn, de chocoladevla en Beethoven en zijn wit haar bij de slaap en z'n jonge nek.

76 E.T., 52. *Het Werk*, 33; Wednesday, 19 March 1941: Zojuist even aangifte gedaan van m'n uitverkoren bloedsomloop.

regained much of my old clarity. I felt like shouting hip, hip, hooray, I've won. But – one should not praise the day before the evening, nor the evening before the next day, and so on and so on ad infinitum. *Life is difficult. So that's that!*⁷⁷

This kind of irony remains light and mild and never turns into sarcasm, cynicism, or other forms of vicious irony. “Life is difficult, it is true, a struggle from minute to minute (don't overdo it now, dear!), but the struggle itself is thrilling.”⁷⁸ Etty Hillesum uses a lot of German in her writing and at one point remarks ironically: “Yes, that is how I had ‘*zurecht-gemacht* [prepared]’ my address (my speech is getting nicely sprinkled with ‘our official language’ to be).”⁷⁹ In this respect, it is interesting to observe that her father also made such quasi-humorous remarks:

From a letter from my father with his inimitable sense of humour: – Today, we have entered the cycle-less age. I have delivered up Mischa's bicycle personally. In Amsterdam, I see from the paper, the Jews may still cycle about. What a privilege! At least we need fear no longer that our bicycles will be stolen. That is some balm for the nerves. In the desert we also had to do without bicycles, for forty long years.⁸⁰

These ironic jokes about the difficult circumstances they lived in, could have been a remedy to alleviate their lives.

77 E.T., 58 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 38; Thursday morning, 20 March 1941: Gisterenavond werkelijk als overwinnaar het slagveld verlaten. Met koud water helemaal gewassen, wat gymnastiek, wat zelftucht van de geest en er kwam weer veel klaarheid. Een gevoel om te roepen: hiep, hiep, hoera, ik heb gewonnen. Maar: men zal de dag niet prijzen voor het avond is en de avond niet voor het weer de volgende dag is en zo voort tot in het oneindige, *het leven is zwaar. O zo!*

78 E.T., 62 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 41; Friday morning, 21 March 1941: Het leven is inderdaad zwaar, een strijd van minuut tot minuut (nou niet overdrijven, schat!), maar die strijd is aantrekkelijk.

79 E.T., 64. *Het Werk*, 42; Saturday morning, 22 March 1941: Ja, zo had ik het mij “zurechtgemacht” (ik raak wel aardig doorspekt met “onze” toekomstige “voertaal”).

80 E.T., 712 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 469; Thursday afternoon, 25 June 1942: Uit een brief van mijn vader in zijn onnavolgbare humor: – Vandaag is hier het fietsloze tijdperk ingetreden. Ik heb de fiets van Mischa persoonlijk afgeleverd. In Amsterdam, zo lees ik in de krant, mogen de Jehodiem nog fietsen. Welk een voorrecht! We behoeven nu niet meer in angst te zitten, dat onze fietsen gestolen worden. Voor onze zenuwen is dat stellig een voordeel. In de woestijn hebben we het indertijd ook veertig jaar zonder fietsen moeten doen.

Grotesque Elements

Another characteristic of Etty Hillesum's language use, which can work comically, is formed by grotesque elements; that is to say, an unusual combination of everyday life and the sublime. Her language sometimes has grotesque features, and is unpredictable and fickle. For example, she remarks:

*You would actually be far better off as an out-and-out whore or a real saint. You'd be at peace with yourself then because you'd know exactly what you were up to. My ambivalence is shocking.*⁸¹

She is referring here, on the one hand, to her proclivity for eroticism, her sensuality, which she expresses towards different men; on the other hand, it expresses her highly developed spirituality and devotion. Another example appears in the next passage. Devout and humble words are followed by coarse and trite words:

Oh God, I thank You for having created me as I am. I thank You for the sense of fulfilment I sometimes have; that fulfilment is, after all, nothing but being filled with You. I promise You to strive my whole life long for beauty and harmony and also humility and true love, whispers of which I hear inside me during my best moments. And now to clear the breakfast table and make some preparation for the Levi girl's lesson and put a little paint on my gob.⁸²

Such an unusual combination of thoughts, the sudden transition from a pious prayer to an everyday action, indicated by the coarse word 'gob', can have a surprising effect. This narrative technique evokes a picture of a somewhat fidgety and fiery nature, which Etty Hillesum herself acknowledges: "My God, what a character! Just look at her jumping about on that divan! She must be a Russian. We don't do that sort of thing in Holland, do we?"⁸³ On the

81 E.T., 80. *Het Werk*, 51; Tuesday afternoon, 25 March 1941: *Je kan waarachtig beter een volledige straathoer zijn of een echte heilige*. Dan heb je rust en weet je waar je aan toe bent met jezelf. De ambivalentie bij mij is wel heel erg.

82 E.T., 286 [revised], *Het Werk*, 184; Friday morning, 12 December 1941: Mijn God, ik dank je er voor, dat je me zo geschapen hebt, als ik ben. Ik dank je er voor, dat ik zo vol wijsheid mag zijn soms, die wijsheid is toch niets anders dan een vervuld zijn van jou. Ik beloof je, dat m'n hele leven een streven zal zijn om tot die schone harmonie te komen en ook tot die deemoed en werkelijke liefde, waartoe ik de mogelijkheid in m'n beste momenten in me voel. En nu de ontbijttafel afruimen en nog even Levie prepareren *en wat verf op m'n smoel*.

83 E.T., 538. *Het Werk*, 350-351; Friday morning, 17 April 1942: Wat een type, mijnheer! Zoals ze daar op die divan springt! Dat is zeker russisch. Zoiets kennen wij hier in Holland niet.

other hand, another example of this technique illustrates the introverted and calm side to Etty Hillesum and her search for quiet and depth, when she remarks on the power of poetry: "I have become increasingly certain of this: a line of verse has as much reality as a cheese coupon or chilblains."⁸⁴

German Terms

Sometimes, Etty Hillesum uses German terms that she is not able to translate into Dutch. While writing her diary, a new experience enters her life, which she describes using the term 'hineinhorchen' [to hearken to].

What I do is *hineinhorchen* (to hearken to) (it seems to me that this word is untranslatable). Harkening to myself, to others, to the world. I listen very intently, with my whole being, and try to fathom the meaning of things.⁸⁵

Hineinhören (to listen to my inner voice), that's what I want. Yes, indeed. So I withdrew to the farthest corner of my little room, sat on the floor, squeezed myself in between two walls, my head bowed. Yes. And sat there. Absolutely still, contemplating my navel so to speak, in the pious hope that new sources of inspiration would bubble up inside me.⁸⁶

Later on, she gives the following explanation:

I know what the remedy is, though: just to crouch, huddled up on the ground in a corner and listen to what is going on inside me. Thinking gets you nowhere. It may be a fine and noble aid in academic studies, but you can't think *heraus* (your way out) of emotional difficulties.⁸⁷

84 E.T., 298. *Het Werk*, 193; Tuesday morning, 16 December 1941: En dit wordt steeds zekerder voor me: een dichtregel is een even grote realiteit als een kaasbon, of wintervoeten.

85 E.T., 148. *Het Werk*, 96; Saturday night, 23 August 1941: Wat ik doe is "*hineinhorchen*" (dit lijkt me onvertaalbaar). "*Hineinhorchen*" in mezelf, in de anderen, in de wereld. Ik luister heel intensief met m'n hele wezen en tracht te luisteren tot op de bodem der dingen.

86 E.T., 150-152 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 98; Thursday night, 4 September 1941: Ik wil *hineinhören*. Jawel. Nou, toen ben ik in de uiterste hoek van m'n kamertje op de grond gaan zitten, ingeklemd in een hoek tussen 2 muren, m'n kop heel diep naar beneden. Ja, en daar zat ik. Heel stil. A.h.w. sturende op m'n navel, in vrome afwachting, of er nieuwe krachten in me wilden opborrelen.

87 E.T., 154 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 99-100; Friday morning, 5 September 1941: Ik moet maar ineenhurken in een hoekje op de grond en zo in elkaar gedoken luisteren naar wat er binnen in me is. Met denken kom ik er toch nooit uit. Denken is een mooie en trotse bezigheid in je studie maar uit moeilijke gemoedsgesteldheden kun je je nooit "*heraus*" denken.

Etty Hillesum is finding a way to comfort herself, by crouching in a corner or kneeling on the coconut bath mat in the bathroom, focusing on her inner space and trying to unbend her mind. “The highest and best I can hope for is that ‘*ruhen in sich*’, being at rest in oneself. There is nothing else.”⁸⁸ The repeated appearance of certain German words is noteworthy and further research is needed to explore exactly which German terms regularly remain untranslated in the diary. It is not only words that are hard to translate: “[...] I have been so full of creative impulses, busy covering sheets of paper with a novel – the girl who could not kneel, or something like that [...],”⁸⁹ and later on she says “*Von dem Mädchen, das nicht knien konnte*” [From the girl who could not kneel].⁹⁰

In the past I, too, used to be one of those who occasionally exclaimed, “yes, I *actually am* religious, you know.” Or something like that. But now, I sometimes actually drop to my knees beside my bed, even on a cold winter night. And *in-sich-hineinhören* [listen into myself]; allow myself to be led, not by anything on the outside, but by what wells up from deep within.⁹¹

The threat grows ever greater, and terror increases from day to day. I draw prayer round me like a dark protective wall, withdraw inside it as one might into a convent cell and then step outside again, *gesammelter* [more joined] and stronger and more collected again.⁹²

88 E.T., 170 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 110; Thursday morning, 25 September 1941: Dit is het hoogste en beste wat ik voor mij bereiken kan: het rusten in mezelf, het “ruhen in sich”. Iets anders is er niet.

89 E.T., 238. *Het Werk*, 153; Friday, 21 November 1941: [...] terwijl ik de laatste tijd vol schepingsdrang zit en schrijven zou willen, een novelle: Het meisje, dat niet knielen kon of zo iets [...].

90 E.T., 324. *Het Werk*, 207; Monday, 22 December 1941: “Von dem Mädchen, das nicht knien konnte”.

91 E.T., 348 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 221; Wednesday evening, 31 December 1941: En vroeger hoorde ik ook tot de mensen, die af en toe het gevoel hadden: ja, *eigenlijk* ben ik *wel* religieus. Of zoiets positiefs. En nu moet ik soms opeens zomaar knielen, zelfs op een winternacht in de kou voor m'n bed. En het *in-sich-hineinhören*. Het je laten leiden, niet meer door dat wat er van buiten op je afkomt, maar wat er van binnen in je opstijgt. [The italics in ‘*eigenlijk* ben ik *wel* religieus’ are from Hillesum.]

92 E.T., 584 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 380; Monday, 18 May 1942: De bedreigingen van buiten steeds groter, de terreur stijgt met de dag. Ik trek het gebed om me heen als een donkere beschuttende muur, in het gebed trek ik me terug als in een kloostercel en treed dan weer naar buiten, “*gesammelter*” en sterker en weer bijeengeraapt.

For Etty Hillesum 'hineinhorchen' [to hearken to] seems to be an antidote that brings her in contact with the deepest sources of her inner self and that makes her stronger, 'gesammelter' [more collected]. Increasingly, she makes the gesture of kneeling, the contemplation in prayer.⁹³

Reflection on Own Language Use

Etty Hillesum often struggles with language and, in her opinion, she is not able to express herself: "No, I can't work it out, try as I may. This writing is a sort of rough draft"⁹⁴; "Silly, isn't it? At times, it is as clear as crystal inside me, but I make a mess of it like anything on paper."⁹⁵ The critical comments about her own language use are numerous:

Snatches of prose, upright and almost fully fledged, march through my head at times, though heaven only knows where they are going.⁹⁶

And yet, I sometimes wonder if I should not make a more determined effort to find the right words and expression for my thoughts and feelings. I really am terribly indolent and slovenly in that respect and still have a great deal of difficulty. [...] Years ago, I jotted this down on a scrap of paper: "Grace, on her rare appearances, must find a well-honed technique." A technique? A form? Faced with that, I gesture helplessly.⁹⁷

93 See also Pierre Bühler, "Het lichamelijke gebed bij Etty Hillesum", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Marja Clement, Meins G.S. Coetsier, Janny Van der Molen, Gerrit Van Oord & Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *Etty Hillesum weer thuis in Middelburg* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 7] (Antwerpen/Apeldoorn: Garant, 2015), 85-91.

94 E.T., 114. *Het Werk*, 74; Monday, 4 August 1941: Nee, ik kom er niet uit, ik kom er werkelijk niet uit. Dit is een soort kladschrift [...].

95 E.T., 248. *Het Werk*, 159; Sunday evening, 23 November 1941: Gek hè, het is toch soms zo glashelder en omljnd in me, maar op papier zou ik stoethaspelen van belang.

96 E.T., 308. *Het Werk*, 198; Friday morning, 19 December 1941: Soms lopen er van die prozazinnen in me, rechtop en bijna volwassen, maar waar ze naar toe wandelen, mag de hemel weten.

97 E.T., 512. *Het Werk*, 331-332; Wednesday afternoon, 1 April 1942: En toch vraag ik me soms af of ik me niet zou moeten gaan toeleggen op het vinden van de woorden en de vorm van m'n gedachten en gevoelens. Ik ben daarin eigenlijk zo gemakzuchtig en slampamperig en vind het nog zo moeilijk. [...] Ik schreef het jaren geleden eens op een papiertje: De Genade moet bij haar schaarse komsten een welvoorbereide techniek vinden. Een techniek? Een vorm? Daartegenover sta ik met volledig hulpeloos gebaar.

And there are also sudden bursts of creativity, but above all there is despair, so much despair at not being able to express any of the many vague and unclear things inside me.⁹⁸

She often remarks that she is going to become a writer later, in the distant future. These statements are remarkable in the light of my findings: Etty Hillesum shows all the characteristics of an accomplished writer. The language use of Etty Hillesum is rich in figurative language, includes metaphors and metonyms, subtle humour and irony, and is characterized by an absolutely original and unique style.

In Conclusion

The development Etty Hillesum undergoes, leads to the growth of a great inner trust, an inner confidence that life is beautiful. She often describes the expanse of her inner space:

I feel loose and free inside. And thus without pretensions. A little dreamy, no longer making tremendous demands on myself. In tune with the cosmos. Yes, that's right, I feel happy now, despite everything and everybody.⁹⁹

Gradually, she develops power and inner peace:

[...] and after a day like yesterday I feel entitled to say with some conviction: *peace reigns in my inner domain because a powerful central authority is in control there.*¹⁰⁰

98 E.T., 546. *Het Werk*, 355; Wednesday evening, 22 April 1942: Ook plotselinge scheppende momenten, maar vooral wanhoop, veel wanhoop nooit iets tot uitdrukking te kunnen brengen van het vele vage en onduidelijke wat er in me is.

99 E.T., 158. *Het Werk*, 103; Friday evening, 5 September 1941: Ik ben weer zo wijd en ruim van binnen. En zo pretentieloos. Zo verdroomd, zonder geweldig eisen aan mezelf te stellen. Ingeordend in de hele kosmos. Ja, het is waar, ik voel me gelukkig nu en dat ondanks alles en ondanks iedereen.

100 E.T., 364. *Het Werk*, 232; Friday morning, 9 January 1942: En na een dag als gisteren durf ik met een zekere overtuiging zeggen: *in mijn innerlijke rijk heerst vrede doordat er een krachtig centraal gezag is.*

In the past, I had to keep withdrawing from the world because its many impressions confused me and made me unhappy. I would have to escape into a quiet room. *Now I carry this “quiet room” inside me, as it were, and can escape into it at any moment – whether sitting in a crowded tram or out on the town.*¹⁰¹

Etty Hillesum leaves for the transit camp Westerbork to work and offer help there. In letters, she describes the everyday necessities the people there lack. At the end of her diary, she struggles with the things she has seen, and expresses a wish to give evidence of the time she is living in. She hopes to be able to write down everything later, when she has become a writer. She feels obliged to support others and to help them. She describes herself in her diary as “the thinking heart of the barracks.”

Why did You not make me a poet, oh God? But perhaps You did, and so I shall wait patiently until the words have grown inside me, the words that proclaim how good and beautiful it is to live in Your world, oh God, despite everything we human beings do to one another.
The thinking heart of the barracks. –¹⁰²

In the last year of her life, she might have written another diary, but we cannot be certain. We know that she devoted herself to supporting the many suffering people surrounding her in the last period of her life. The last line of the preserved journals reads:

We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.¹⁰³

101 E.T., 364. *Het Werk*, 233; Friday afternoon, 9 January 1942: Vroeger moest ik me iedere keer weer terugtrekken uit de buitenwereld omdat de vele indrukken me verwarden en ongelukkig maakten. En dan moest ik vluchten in een stille kamer. *Nu draag ik die “stille kamer” zagezegd steeds in me mee* en ik kan me er ieder ogenblik in terugtrekken, of ik nu in een volle tram zit of zwaar aan de boemel ben.

102 E.T., 824. *Het Werk*, 545; Tuesday afternoon, 15 September 1942: Waarom heb je me niet tot een dichter gemaakt, mijn God? Je hebt me wel tot een dichter gemaakt en ik zal geduldig wachten tot de woorden in me gegroeid zijn, die kunnen getuigen van alles waarvan ik meen, dat ik moet getuigen, mijn God: dat het goed en mooi is in jouw wereld te leven, ondanks alles, wat wij mensen, elkaar aandoen. Het denkende hart van de barak. –

103 E.T., 886. *Het Werk*, 583; Tuesday morning, 13 October 1942: Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn.

We do not know what she would have written had she not died so young. We only have these journals and the letters, but these bear witness to a born writer who knows how to use language in an enchantingly beautiful way, by means of exceptionally rich images and powerful words.

About the author

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War and Persecution



4 Etty Hillesum's Choice Not to Go into Hiding

Klaas A.D. Smelik

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Abstract

Essential to the aura of holiness ascribed to Etty Hillesum by some of her readers, was her choice to share the destiny of her people. Though seen as a sacrifice by some, Hillesum never used that term in this regard. Did she deliberately choose death or did she hope that she would survive “Poland”? Was Etty Hillesum fully aware of what would happen when she refused to hide? Opinions on this issue are divided. After re-analyzing the available data, the author concludes that both sides need some adjustment. Etty Hillesum's critics have not read her texts correctly, while the martyr's role that others attribute to her needs to be relativized.

Keywords: martyrdom, Massenschicksal, fate, Shoah, Camp Westerbork, deportation, Etty Hillesum

Etty Hillesum's choice not to go into hiding plays a significant role in the assessments of her as a person. There are two basic positions regarding her choice: according to the first, she shared the fate of the other victims of the Shoah (the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War) out of a sense of solidarity. This position often includes labels such as “sacred” and “martyr”.¹ The martyrdom sometimes carries a socio-political connotation,

¹ In 1996, in the United States, a collection of essays about 20 martyrs of the twentieth century was published. The editor, Susan Bergman, wanted to demonstrate that, also in the twentieth century, martyrdom can be a source of inspiration for religious persons. She gave her book the following dedication:

“For the true martyrs of our century who knew what it meant to love the cross.”
Amid these witnesses of faith, the reader will find – among chapters on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Simone Weil – a chapter on Etty Hillesum as well. Cf. Calvin Bedient, “Etty Hillesum: Outward

positing that it was solidarity with the Jewish proletariat that made her choose to follow them into death. In this regard, Jan Geurt Gaarlandt's remarks in his introduction to the first Dutch edition of *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life] determined the direction:

As her call comes, in early August, she travels to Westerbork without hesitation. She does not want to withdraw from the fate of the Jews, the *Massenschicksal* [common fate], which she sees as inevitable. She understands that the Jewish proletariat has no way to go into hiding and in solidarity she decides to depart.²

Martyrdom can also be coloured religiously, so much so that one might get the impression that Etty Hillesum has been posthumously incorporated into the Christian faith, especially the Roman Catholic Church.³ This interpretation connects her to Edith Stein, whom Etty Hillesum saw in Camp Westerbork, dressed in her habit with a Star of David sewn on it, on the road to destruction.⁴ Following the canonization of Edith Stein, for some authors it seemed only a matter of time before Etty Hillesum would share the same honour.

However, there is an opposing viewpoint regarding Hillesum's decision not to go into hiding. According to this opinion, Etty Hillesum was being selfish; she made every effort to escape the destruction but failed. Rather than saintliness there was "more egotism than holiness", the title of

from the Camps Themselves", in: Susan Bergman (ed.), *Martyrs: Contemporary Writers on Modern Lives of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1996).

2 Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, Preface to Etty Hillesum, *Het Verstoorde Leven* (Amsterdam: De Haan, 1981), 8.

3 Ria van den Brandt researched this remarkable phenomenon in the Netherlands and Flanders, and Gerrit Van Oord did the same for Italy. See Ria van den Brandt, "Etty Hillesum and Her 'Catholic Worshippers': A Plea for a more critical approach to Etty Hillesum's writings", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 215-231; and Gerrit Van Oord, "Italiaans enthousiasme: Het dagboek van Etty Hillesum in Italië", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in Facetten* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 1] (Budel: Damon, 2004), 111-127.

4 See also the contribution by Gerrit Van Oord in this volume: "The Departure: A Reconstruction of the Unexpected Deportation of the Hillesum Family from Camp Westerbork on Tuesday 7 September 1943", 157-180. Original Dutch version: "Het vertrek: Een reconstructie van de onverwachte deportatie van de familie Hillesum uit kamp Westerbork op 7 september 1943", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in discours* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 3] (Gent: Academia Press, 2011), 115-130.

Henriëtte Boas' review of *Het Verstoorde Leven* [An Interrupted Life] in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* on 12 January 1982.⁵ In a less hostile version of Boas' polemic vision, it is suggested that Etty Hillesum really had no idea of what awaited her in Poland.⁶ She did not voluntarily choose to die, because she reckoned she had a chance of surviving the concentration camp. According to this reasoning, she cannot be seen as a martyr, because she did not know what was awaiting her after leaving Camp Westerbork.

Because the points of view on both sides are based on statements by Etty Hillesum herself, it seems a worthwhile exercise to review this matter once more, with the aim of getting a clearer perspective on Hillesum's choice not to go into hiding.

Hiding

First of all, we will look at the options that Etty Hillesum had for evading the *Massenschicksal* [common fate], as she called the Shoah. These were legion. As an employee of the Jewish Council, she was initially *gesperrt*, which meant that she was exempt from deportation to the death camps. Even when she went to work for the Westerbork Department of the Jewish Council, she retained many of her privileges. She could go on leave from the camp from time to time and return to Amsterdam. But during her visit to Amsterdam in early December 1942, she fell ill. It was not until 5 June 1943 that she was sufficiently recovered to return to Camp Westerbork. She left Amsterdam on 6 June 1943, never to return.

During this half-year in Amsterdam, she had plenty of chances to disappear. Several people offered Etty Hillesum a place to hide. Klaas Smelik Senior (my father) and his daughter Johanna went furthest. When they understood that Etty Hillesum would not voluntarily go into hiding, they devised a plan to abduct her against her will from Han Wegerif's apartment on the Gabriël Metsustraat 6 in Amsterdam, and to bring her to their house on the Domeinweg 2 in Hilversum. Their villa was a very suitable hiding place, because it was located in the centre of a *Sperrgebiet* [restricted zone], where the German occupiers would not have expected anyone to hide.

5 Reprinted in: Jan Geurt Gaarlandt (ed.): *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn: Reacties op de dagboeken en brieven van Etty Hillesum* ['One would like to be a balm on many wounds': Comments on the Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum] (Amsterdam: Balans, 1989), 41-43.

6 Cf. the contribution by Piet Schrijvers in this volume, "Etty Hillesum in Jewish contexts", 315-331.

On one of the music afternoons in the salon on the first floor of Wegerif's house, not only was Johanna Smelik present, but also her father – rather unusually, given Pa Han's preference for not hosting any old rivals and Klaas Smelik's lack of interest in classical music. At one point, father and daughter made their move: Etty was lifted by Klaas from behind, while Johanna held her legs as they descended the steep stairs to the front door of the house. Outside, a taxi was waiting for them. The descent did not go smoothly. Etty resisted and said in her soft voice to Johanna: "You should not do this." The kidnappers then abandoned their plan and returned home empty-handed.

Etty Hillesum alludes to this event in a letter dated 21 February 1943, addressed to her friend Osias Kormann at Camp Westerbork:

As for me – most unexpectedly I am back home, 'kidnapped', so to speak, by my mother, because it looked as if I might otherwise be kidnapped by quite different people. We shall have to wait and see what happens next.⁷

My father reported another attempt to force Etty Hillesum to go into hiding, this time at his home in Hilversum. He held Etty and tried to convince her once again of the mortal danger she was in. But it turned out differently than he had hoped:

She wormed herself free and stood at a distance of about five feet from me. She looked at me very strangely and said, 'You don't understand me.' I replied: 'No, I don't understand what on earth you are up to. Why don't you stay here, you fool!' Then she said: 'I want to share the destiny of my people.' When she said that, I knew there was no hope. She would never come to us.⁸

From the testimonies of other friends and acquaintances as well, it is clear that Etty Hillesum was extremely determined not to choose the path that led to hiding. Her friend Leonie Snatager (1918-2013), who as a Jewish woman ran the same risks as Etty Hillesum, said in an unpublished interview that, in the summer of 1942, she consciously decided to distance herself from Etty, after her friend had almost convinced her that she should not go into

⁷ E.T., 594. *Het Werk*, 633; Letter 28, To Osias Kormann, Amsterdam, Sunday, 21 February 1943: Und ich – ich bin aufs Unerwarteste wieder zu Hause, sorgesagt "gekidnap't" von meiner eigenen Mutter, weil es aussah, daß ich sonst von ganz anderen Menschen gekidnap't werden würde. Und mal abwarten, wie das jetzt weitergeht.

⁸ Quoted in E.T., 761.

hiding, but should voluntarily go to Camp Westerbork.⁹ Thus, we see that the aversion Etty Hillesum had to going into hiding was not confined to herself; it applied to others as well. In a conversation with my father, she expressed her view as follows:

[...] It's the same with those Jews who go into hiding. They may say they're doing it because they don't want to work for the G[ermans], but it's not nearly as heroic and revolutionary as all that. All they're doing is using a high-sounding excuse to dodge a fate they ought to be sharing with the rest. And again there'll always be a lot of people who, when the time comes for them to be sent away, will trot out the old argument of, 'We're so essential to the *Wehrmacht* here, can't we stay?'¹⁰

Clearly, people who saved their lives by hiding during the war would not agree.¹¹

Why did Etty Hillesum want to share the fate of her people and why did she not try to save her life? What was the reason? The question becomes all the more pressing when we look at what happened to her when her day of deportation arrived.

Deportation

In the war memoirs of lawyer Benno Stokvis (1901-1977), we find a passage in which he indicates why the order was given to deport Etty, her mother, her father, and her brother Mischa from Camp Westerbork to Auschwitz on 7 September 1943:

The young pianist, together with his parents, was placed in the Westerbork transit camp. Mengelberg himself had written in a certified statement

9 The interview is kept in the Etty Hillesum Research Centre, Middelburg.

10 E.T., 523. *Het Werk*, 553-54; Sunday evening, 20 September 1942: Ik zei: het is precies hetzelfde als met de Joden die onderduiken: ze zeggen soms, dat ze dat doen omdat ze niet voor de D[uitsers] willen werken. Maar zo heroïsch en revolutionair ligt de zaak niet bij hun. Eigenlijk onttrekken ze zich, met een schoonklinkend excuus aan een lot, dat ze gemeenschappelijk met anderen hadden moeten dragen. En er zullen velen zijn, die als ze doorgestuurd zouden worden, met het verweer aan zouden komen zetten: we zijn zo onmisbaar voor de weermacht hier, mogen we blijven?

11 See the observation by Piet Schrijvers in his contribution in this volume, "Etty Hillesum in Jewish contexts", 315-331, especially p. 328-329: "With this remark, Etty Hillesum will without doubt have offended some Jewish survivors."

that this genius must not get lost. The small family lived *gesperrt* [exempt] in relative safety. Until such time as the mother was overcome by the unholy idea to write a letter, a letter to Rauter, with the humble request for more freedom of movement. A letter from a Jew to Rauter! It was *unvorstellbar* [inconceivable]: a Jewess wrote to the SS *Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Polizei*, Rauter, the incarnation of Arian heroism, whose fingers were tainted by the touch of this paper. *Unvorstellbar* [inconceivable]. *Grauenhaft* [horrid]. *Ein Verbrechen* [a crime]. “*Sofort verschicken nach Osten!*” [deport them immediately to the East!]. The telegram arrived a few minutes before the departure of the transport from Westerbork. Just in time. Within the hour the camp commandant, the *Brigade Führer*, could report *gehorsamst* [obeingly]: “*Verschickt nach Osten*” [deported to the East].¹²

Philip Mechanicus (1889-1944), a close friend of Etty Hillesum’s, also wrote about this event in his diary. Apparently, he was not fully aware of the background of this unexpected order from The Hague. But he clarifies who was ultimately responsible for ordering that Etty Hillesum was to be deported too despite her excellent contacts in the camp. It was Commander Albert Konrad Gemmeke (1907-1982) himself. Etty Hillesum’s friends and contacts had tried to persuade him to make an exception for her, but Gemmeke took no risks when obeying orders of the *höherer SS- und Polizeiführer* Hanns Albin Rauter (1895-1949).

On Monday, the order arrived unexpectedly from The Hague that Mischa Hillesum was to be sent on transport with his family. The commandant interpreted this to mean that the whole family must go. There was absolutely no way to make him change his mind. It is not known what exactly was the background to this intervention from The Hague. Presumably, the musician has ‘killed’ his case – this is the expression we use here. This has also happened to many others before him who tried to safeguard their position by appealing to The Hague.¹³

12 Benno J. Stokvis, *Advocaat in Bezettingstijd* [Lawyer during Occupation] (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennep, 1968), 95v [cited in E.T., 782-783]. Gerrit Van Oord doubts the reliability of this testimony, see his contribution in this volume: “The Departure: A Reconstruction of the Unexpected Deportation of the Hillesum Family from Camp Westerbork on Tuesday, 7 September 1943”, 315-331.

13 Philip Mechanicus, *In dépôt* (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennep, 1964), 152f [cited in E.T., 782].

A third testimony of the fateful events that led to the departure of the Hillesum family can be found in a letter from Etty Hillesum's good friend, Jopie Vleeschhouwer, in which he reports on what had happened. He did not know the exact reason for the decision from The Hague, but he did know that there was no longer a chance for Mischa and his parents to escape deportation.

The news from The Hague came fairly late on the Monday: Mischa's deferment had been cancelled, and he *and* his family had been put on transport on 7 September. Why? Well, that is the kind of question that cannot be answered. To begin with we all hoped and believed that it wouldn't come to that. And then we were certain that she [Etty Hillesum, K.S.] for one would be reprieved, as it had been agreed only today that the former J.C. [Jewish Council] workers, sixty in all, would be allowed to stay for the time being. So while it quickly emerged that little could be done for Mischa and the old people, Etty still seemed to have every chance.¹⁴

The hope that Etty Hillesum would not have to go on transport, became less realistic during the night, as Jopie Vleeschhouwer further clarifies:

Etty and I went back [...] to find out what chance there still was of Etty's own departure being deferred. We were astonished when it was finally brought home to us that her chances were virtually non-existent. [...] After the leaders of the J.C. had declared that nothing could be done for her, we wrote a letter as a last resort to the 1st *Dienstleiter*, requesting that he intervene personally. We felt that something might still be arranged on the train.¹⁵

In a postcard, which she threw off the train after the transport to Auschwitz had already left, Etty Hillesum is rather laconic about what had happened; she says only:

In the end, the departure came without warning. On sudden special orders from The Hague.¹⁶

14 E.T., 666. *Het Werk*, 710.

15 E.T., 667. *Het Werk*, 711.

16 E.T., 658-659. *Het Werk*, 702; Letter 71, To Christine van Nooten, Near Glimmen, Tuesday, 7 September 1943: Het vertrek kwam toch nog vrij onverwachts. Plotseling bevel voor ons speciaal uit den Haag.

Henriëtte Boas, however, was convinced that Etty Hillesum had no intention of sharing the fate of her people, pointing to the efforts to get her removed from the transport list. She writes:

Jopie Vleeschhouwer, who was a courier for the Jewish Council like Etty and a close friend of hers, wrote a letter to her friends in Amsterdam after the deportation. This letter was added to Etty's diary, and in it she describes how after Etty was marked for deportation on that particular Monday, she contacted every possible authority to try to undo this. Remarkably enough, this was overlooked by all reviewers.¹⁷

When we compare Boas' description of events with what is actually written in Vleeschhouwer's letter about the attempts that were made to get Etty Hillesum removed from the transport list, we notice how biased Boas was. After all, from Vleeschhouwer's letter, one gets the impression that Etty's friends were more concerned with getting her removed from the transport list than she herself was. Nowhere is it stated that Etty Hillesum contacted all the authorities, as Boas claims. Significantly, Boas takes Jopie Vleeschhouwer for a woman – using the Dutch feminine word for 'courier' – and grants him, and Etty Hillesum as well, positions with the Jewish Council which they never held.

The question of why Etty Hillesum did not want to go on transport together with her parents, as other daughters did, is answered by Boas in the same insinuating way:

However, she did not want to be transported in the same wagon as her parents and brother – but in a wagon almost at the other end of the train – a curious and almost adolescent attitude, especially at this *moment suprême* [very special moment].¹⁸

A moment suprême indeed! But isn't another interpretation of the facts possible?

17 Henriëtte Boas, "Etty Hillesum in niet-joodse en joodse ogen" [Etty Hillesum in non-Jewish and Jewish eyes], in: Lea Dasberg & Jonathan N. Cohen (eds), *Neveh Ya'akov: Jubilee Volume Presented to Dr. Jaap Meijer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1982), 255-279, especially p. 273.

18 *Ibid.*

Massenschicksal

We have asked enough questions for now. What are the answers Etty Hillesum herself provides concerning her place in what she calls the *Massenschicksal* [common fate] of her people? In the following long passage, she explains:

Many accuse me of indifference and passivity when I refuse to go into hiding; they say that I have given up. They say everyone who can must try to stay out of their clutches, it's our bounden duty to try. But that argument is specious. For while everyone tries to save himself, vast numbers are nevertheless disappearing. And the funny thing is, I don't feel I'm in their clutches anyway, whether I stay or am sent away. I find all that talk so cliché-ridden and naive, and can't go along with it anymore. I don't feel in anybody's clutches; I feel safe in God's arms, to put it rhetorically, and no matter whether I am sitting at this beloved old desk now, or in a bare room in the Jewish district, or perhaps in a labour camp under SS guards in a month's time – I shall always feel safe in God's arms. They may well succeed in breaking me physically, but no more than that. I may face cruelty and deprivation the likes of which I cannot imagine in even my wildest fantasies. Yet all this is as nothing to the immeasurable expanse of my faith in God and my inner receptiveness. I shall always be able to stand on my own two feet even when they are planted on the hardest soil of the harshest reality. And my acceptance is not indifference or helplessness. I feel deep moral indignation at a regime that treats human beings in such a way. But events have become too overwhelming and too demonic to be stemmed with personal resentment and bitterness. These responses strike me as being utterly childish and unequal to the "fateful" course of events. –

People often get worked up when I say it doesn't really matter whether I go or somebody else does, the main thing is that so many thousands *have* to go. It is not as if I want to fall into the arms of destruction with a resigned smile – far from it. I am only bowing to the inevitable, and even as I do so I am sustained by the certain knowledge that ultimately they cannot rob us of anything that matters. I certainly do not want to go out of some sort of masochism, to be torn away from what has been the basis of my existence these last few years. But I don't think I would feel happy if I were exempted from what so many others have to suffer. They keep telling me that someone like me has a duty to go into hiding because I have so many things to do in life, so much to give. But I know

that whatever I may have to give to others, I can give it no matter where I am, here in the circle of my friends or over there, in a concentration camp. And it is sheer arrogance to think oneself too good to share the fate of the masses. And if God Himself should feel that I still have a great deal to do, well then, I shall do it after I have suffered what all the others have to suffer. And whether or not I am a valuable human being will become clear only from my behaviour in more arduous circumstances. And if I should not survive, how I die will show me who I really am. It's no longer a question of not getting oneself into a certain situation, come what may, but of how, in whatever situation, one conducts oneself and goes on living.¹⁹

19 E.T. 487-88. *Het Werk*, 514-15; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942: Velen verwijten mij onverschilligheid en passiviteit en zeggen, dat ik me zo maar overgeef. En zeggen: ieder, die uit hun klauwen kan blijven, moet dat proberen en is dat verplicht. En ik moet iets dóen voor mezelf. Dit is een sommetje, dat niet op gaat. Iederéén is op het ogenblik n.l. bezig iets voor zichzelf te doen om er onder uit te komen en er moet immers toch een aantal, een zeer groot aantal zelfs, gaan? En het gekke is: ik voel me niet in hun klauwen. Niet als ik blijf en niet als ik weggetransporteerd word. Ik vind dat alles zo clichéachtig en primitief, ik kan die redenering helemaal niet meer volgen, ik voel me in niemands klauwen, ik voel me alleen maar in God's armen, om het nu eens beeldschoon te zeggen en of dat nu hier aan dit verschrikkelijk dierbare en vertrouwde bureau is, of over een maand in een kale kamer in de Jodenbuurt of misschien in een arbeidskamp onder S.S.-bewaking, in Gods armen zal ik me geloof ik altijd voelen. En men zal mij lichamelijk misschien te gronde kunnen richten, maar verder ook niet. En ik zal misschien aan wanhoop ten prooi vallen en aan ontberingen, die ik me zelfs tot in m'n vruchtbaarste phantasieën niet had kunnen voorstellen. En toch is dit alles zeer gering, gemeten aan die onmetelijke wijdheid van godsvertrouwen en innerlijke belevingsmogelijkheid. Het kan zijn, dat ik alles onderschat. Dagelijks leef ik met alle harde mogelijkheden, die zich ieder ogenblik verwerkelijken kunnen voor mijn persootje en die zich voor velen, voor veel te velen, al verwerkelijkt hebben. Ik geef me rekenschap van alles tot in de kleinste details, ik geloof wel dat ik, in m'n innerlijke "Auseinandersetungen", met m'n twee voeten staan blijf op de hardste bodem van de hardste realiteit. En mijn aanvaarden is geen resignatie of willoosheid. Er is nog altijd plaats voor de elementaire zedelijke verontwaardiging over een regiem, dat zó met mensen omspringt. Maar de dingen komen te groot en te demonisch over ons, dan dat men daar nog met een persoonlijke wrok en verbittering op zou kunnen reageren. Dat komt me zo kinderachtig voor en niet aangepast aan dit "schicksalhafte" gebeuren.–

Men windt zich dikwijls op, wanneer ik zeg: het is toch niet essentieel of ik ga of een ander, hoofdzaak is toch, dát er zoveel duizenden gaan moeten? En het is niet zo, dat ik regelrecht m'n ondergang in de armen zou willen lopen met een gelaten glimlach, dat is het ook niet. Het is een gevoel van het onafwendbare en een aanvaarden van het onafwendbare en daarbij het weten, dat ons in laatste instantie niets ontnomen kan worden. Ik wil niet uit een soort masochisme beslist mee gaan en afgerukt worden van m'n bestaansbasis der laatste jaren, maar ik weet nog niet eens of ik me prettig zou voelen, als ik verschoond bleef van datgene, wat zovelen moeten ondergaan. Men zegt tegen me: iemand als jij, is verplicht zich in veiligheid te stellen, je moet nog zoveel doen in het leven later, je hebt nog zoveel te geven. Wat ik allemaal al of niet te geven zal hebben, dat zal ik kunnen geven, wáár ik ook ben, hier in een vriendenkringetje of ergens anders

In Hillesum's experience, the Shoah is a destiny that affects the entire Jewish people.²⁰ Do individual Jews have the right to withdraw from this fate? Or do they break their solidarity with one another if they do? According to Hillesum, one could not escape the *Massenschicksal* [common fate]. She had a premonition that survivors would be plagued by what we have come to call "survivor's guilt". In her view, an individual destiny no longer matters once one is dealing with a *Massenschicksal*, no matter how difficult that is to accept:

A hard day, a very hard day. We must learn to shoulder our *Massenschicksal* [common fate]; everyone who seeks to save himself must surely realize that if he does not go another must take his place. As if it really mattered which of us goes. Ours is now a common destiny, and that is something we must not forget. A very hard day. But I keep finding myself in prayer. And that is something I shall always be able to do, even in the smallest space: pray. And that part of our *Massenschicksal* that I must shoulder myself; I strap it tightly and firmly to my back, it becomes part of me as I walk through the streets even now.²¹

In Etty Hillesum's vision of the *Massenschicksal* of the Jewish people, we can recognize an important principle in Judaism, expressed in the following

in een concentratiekamp. En het is een zeldzame zelfoverschatting, om zichzelf te waardevol te vinden, om een "Massenschicksal" samen mee te ondergaan. En als God vindt, dat ik nog veel te doen zal hebben, welnu, dan zal ik dat ook wel doen, na alles doorgemaakt te hebben, wat anderen ook door kunnen maken. En of ik een waardevol mens ben, dat zal pas blijken uit hoe ik me onder de veranderde omstandigheden gedragen zal. En ook als ik het niet zal overleven, dan zal de wijze, waarop ik sterf, doorslaggevend zijn om te weten, wie ik ben. Het gaat er niet meer om om zichzelf coûte-que-coûte uit een bepaalde situatie te houden, maar daarom hoe men zich, in welke situatie dan ook, gedraagt en verder leeft.

20 Compare also: Ton Jorna & Denise de Costa, *Van aandacht en adem tot ziel en zin: Honderd woorden uit het levensbeschouwend idioom van Etty Hillesum* [From Attention and Breath to Soul and Sense: Hundred words from the contemplative idiom of Etty Hillesum] (Utrecht: Kwadraat, 1999), s.v. 'lot', 294-300 (text De Costa).

21 E.T., 484. *Het Werk*, 511; Friday, 10 July 1942: Een zware dag, een heel zware dag. Een "Massenschicksal", dat men moet gaan leren mee te dragen, met uitschakeling van alle persoonlijke kinderachtigheden. En ieder, die zichzelf nog wil redden en die toch wel weten kan, dat, wanneer hij niet gaat, daarvoor een ander in de plaats moet gaan. En of het er veel toe doet of ik het ben of een ander of die of die. Het is nu een "Massenschicksal" geworden en dat moet men weten. Een heel zware dag. Maar ik hervind mezelf steeds weer in een gebed. En dat zal ik toch altijd nog kunnen blijven doen, ook in de kleinste ruimte: bidden. En datgene van dat "Massenschicksal" dat ik kan dragen dat gesp ik als een bundeltje steeds steviger en vaster op m'n rug en ik vergroei er mee en ga er nu al mee door de straten.

short Hebrew sentence *kol Yisrael arawiem zeh la-zeh* [whole Israel is responsible for each other]. According to this rule, the Jewish people are a unit, in which each Jew vouches for all other Jews. This sentiment was also firmly present in Etty Hillesum. Despite her assimilated upbringing, she spoke about “us Jews”:

I shall not burden others with my fears. I shall not be bitter if others fail to grasp what is happening to us Jews.²²

However, in her writings, she does not explicitly mention a common responsibility that Jews have for each other in the sense of *kol Yisrael arawiem zeh la-zeh* [whole Israel is responsible for each other]. She uses, in this context, the non-Jewish (German) term *Massenschicksal* [common fate], which confused later readers, as we have already seen.

There was also a practical reason, however, why Etty Hillesum considered flight and hiding antisocial behaviour. It is connected to the organization of the transports, which left nearly every Tuesday from Camp Westerbork. For every transport, the camp leadership received orders from the higher command to deport a set number of prisoners. Because some prisoners inevitably would die during transport, even more prisoners were added as a reserve, thereby assuring that the demanded number would be reached upon arrival. That is why more prisoners were put on transportation than was requested.²³

Numbers were valued greatly by the executors of the Shoah. Too few potential victims delayed the implementation of the *Endlösung* [final solution] but too many prisoners in the deportation trains could wreck the industrially organized mass murder in the extermination camps. These camps had only a limited capacity to kill people and it was dangerous to keep too many prisoners alive for a long time, considering the uprisings that

²² E.T., 461. *Het Werk*, 487; Friday, 3 July 1942: Ik zal anderen niet met mijn angsten lastig vallen, ik zal niet verbitterd zijn, als anderen niet begrijpen, waar het bij ons Joden om gaat.

²³ Compare this passage in Etty Hillesum's second letter on the situation in Camp Westerbork: “The train gives a piercing whistle. And 1,020 Jews leave Holland. This time the quota was really quite small, all considered: a mere thousand Jews, the extra twenty being reserves. For it is always possible – indeed, quite certain this time – that a few will die or be crushed to death on the way. So many sick people and not a single nurse [...]” (E.T., 654). *Het Werk*, 697; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Camp Westerbork, Tuesday 24 August 1943: De fluit slaakt een doordringende kreet, een trein met 1020 Joden verlaat Holland. De eis was dit keer niet eens groot: duizend Joden maar, die twintig zijn reserve voor onderweg, het is toch altijd mogelijk, dat er een paar sterven of doodgedrukt worden en zeker wel dit keer, nu er zoveel zieken meegaan zonder een enkele verpleegster.

took place in the death camps among prisoners who had not been murdered immediately. Exceeding the demanded numbers by a small amount did not cause problems, but significant overruns did.

This emphasis on the prescribed number meant that when someone managed to escape transport in one way or another, someone else had to take his or her place: someone who had, until then, been exempt from deportation. The total number had to be accurate. Moreover, if such an escape was due to flight rather than successful diplomacy among those who kept the list, even more people were added to the transport, as a punitive measure. Etty Hillesum describes the consequences of such an escape:

[...] the terrified young boy: he had thought he was safe, that was his mistake, and when he realized he was going to have to go anyway, he panicked and ran off. His fellow Jews had to hunt him down. If they didn't find him, scores of others would be put on the transport in his place. He was caught soon enough, hiding in a tent, but *trotzdem* [notwithstanding] [...], *trotzdem* all those others had to go on transport anyway, as a deterrent, they said. And so many good friends were dragged away by that boy. Fifty victims for one moment of insanity. Or rather: he didn't drag them away – our commandant did, someone of whom it is sometimes said that he is a gentleman.²⁴

Such an approach put pressure on all the inmates of Camp Westerbork: in this case, the boy's attempt to escape resulted in the deportation of 50 additional persons. This consequence was another reason that Etty Hillesum was of the opinion that no attempt should be made to evade the fate of the Jewish people. She was severely criticized at the time for holding this view (and after the publication of her diaries this kind of criticism reappeared), but she defended herself against it in the above cited passage. Indeed, it would be wrong to designate Hillesum's choice not to evade the

24 E.T., 645. *Het Werk*, 687; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Camp Westerbork, Tuesday 24 August 1943: En die geschrokken jongen: hij dacht dat hij veilig was, het was zijn fout, dat hij dat dacht; onverwachts moest hij toch mee, hij kreeg de kolder en liep weg. Z'n medejoden moesten een drijfjacht op hem houden, als hij niet gevonden zou worden, dan moesten er tientallen anderen voor hem mee op transport. Men omsingelde hem gauw genoeg, hij werd gevonden in een tent en *trotzdem* [...], *trotzdem* moesten de anderen mee op transport, om een afschrikwekkend voorbeeld te stellen, zoals dat heet. Verschillende goede vrienden sleepte hij op deze wijze met zich mee. Vijftig slachtoffers maakte hij door dat ene moment van verstandsverbijstering. Dat wil zeggen, hij maakte ze niet, onze commandant, van wie men dikwijls zegt, dat hij een gentleman is, maakte ze.

Final Solution as fatalism. Note also that, in this passage, she does not blame the young man who tried to escape; she blames the real culprit: the camp commander. In the many discussions on the Jewish Council's role in the deportation of the Dutch Jews, this is so often forgotten – it was the occupier who was ultimately responsible for the mass murder of the Jews in the Netherlands and no one else.

If Etty Hillesum wanted to share the fate of her people, why then did she agree to the efforts that were made to get her off the list as soon as Commander Gemmeke ordered her included on the transport of 7 September 1943? The answer can be found in an earlier letter by Etty Hillesum dated 10 July 1943 and addressed to Maria Tuinzing, who lived in the same house as Etty Hillesum in Amsterdam:

It will be my parents' turn to leave soon, if by some miracle not this week, then certainly the next one. And I must learn to accept this as well. Mischa insists on going along with them, and it seems to me that he probably should; if he has to watch our parents leave this place, it will totally unhinge him. I shan't go, I just can't. It is easier to pray for someone from a distance than to see him suffer by your side. It is not fear of Poland that keeps me from going along with my parents, but fear of seeing them suffer. And that, too, is cowardice.²⁵

Although she finds it cowardice on her part, she does not want to see the suffering of her parents, as she writes further on in this letter to Maria Tuinzing: "Yes, I feel perfectly able to bear my lot, but not that of my parents."²⁶ Hence, she did not want to go on this transport. That is also why she chose a different wagon from her parents – something that Henriëtte Boas held against her and described as adolescent behaviour. Hillesum's friend Jopie Vleeschhouwer, who would not survive the Shoah either, did not come to such an ethical condemnation, however. He merely noted,

²⁵ E.T. 628. *Het Werk*, 669; Letter 52, To Maria Tuinzing, Camp Westerbork, Saturday, 10 July 1943: Nu zullen m'n ouders ook van deze plek moeten vertrekken, als het door een wonder niet deze week is, dan toch zeker een volgende. En dit moet ik ook leren te aanvaarden. Mischa wil mee en het lijkt me toe, dat hij het dan ook maar doen moet, als hij z'n ouders vanhier zal zien vertrekken, raakt hij verbijsterd. Ik ga niet mee, ik kan het niet. Het is gemakkelijker om uit de verte voor iemand te bidden dan hem naast je te zien lijden. Het is geen angst voor Polen, dat ik niet met m'n ouders samen ga, maar angst om ze te zien lijden. Dus toch weer lafheid.

²⁶ E.T., 628. *Het Werk*, 670: Tegen m'n eigen lot voel ik me opgewassen, tegen dat van m'n ouders niet.–

I saw Mother, Father H., and Mischa get into Wagon No. 1. Etty finished up in Wagon No. 12, after having gone to look for a friend in Wagon 14, who was pulled out again at the last moment.²⁷

He had already stated earlier, regarding the sudden order from The Hague:

Etty's early departure, though, was completely unexpected; she did not want to travel with her parents and would have preferred to go through these new experiences without the pressure of family ties.²⁸

In her letter about the departure of the Hillesum family, Maria Tuinzing also shows full understanding of Etty Hillesum's choice not to be with her parents in one single wagon:

So Etty, too, has gone to Poland. Her parents and brother have gone as well, but she is alone in a wagon with strangers because she could not bear to see her parents' distress.²⁹

I see yet another reason for Etty Hillesum's wish to remain in Camp Westerbork, when the order came from The Hague. In this *Durchgangslager* [transit camp], Etty Hillesum had built a new life with friends and with protégés. It would be hard for her to give this up. It would be especially hard for her to leave her protégés, who now had to continue without her support, such as "her little Russian woman," whom we know only by her first name: Lyubotshka. However, by the time Commander Gemmeker's decision turned out to be irrevocable, Etty Hillesum had recovered from the shock. According to Jopie Vleeschhouwer, she had already adjusted to gaining new experiences:

But we go on, even as I write, everything goes on, and she herself is going on and on towards the East, where she so wanted to go. I think she was actually quite looking forward to this experience, to sharing anything and everything in store for us all.³⁰

When trying to break the deadlock, which is the theme of this contribution: martyrdom or selfishness?, I think that Etty Hillesum was in no hurry to

27 E.T., 668. *Het Werk*, 712.

28 E.T., 666. *Het Werk*, 710-711.

29 E.T., 669. *Het Werk*, 713.

30 E.T., 668. *Het Werk*, 712.

be transported to Poland, even though she was curious about the fate of the Jews there, as Jopie Vleeschhouwer writes. She saw it as her duty to continue her work offering social assistance in Camp Westerbork for as long as possible. She imagined ways in which she could make her stay in Poland meaningful – she would then be much closer to her beloved Russia – but on the other hand, she knew that it was quite likely that she would die in a concentration camp. When the time came, however, and the transport was inevitable, she adjusted to this new phase of her life – the final one, which would not even last three months...

The Future Fate

This brings us to another issue on which opinions are deeply divided. Did Etty Hillesum have any idea of what awaited her in the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau? From the transport of 7 September 1943, which consisted of 987 people in all, only eight survived – not even one per cent! The researchers who oppose the designation of Etty Hillesum as a martyr, state that she did not know the purpose of the extermination camps; that she imagined Auschwitz as a kind of continuation of Camp Westerbork. She expected that the Jews would have to work hard in Poland, but she would not have known about the mass killings. It is questionable, however, whether this is true.

It seems more likely that, in the course of 1942, she became increasingly aware of what the *Endlösung* [final solution] meant in reality. As early as 3 July 1942, she writes, “[...] the new certainty: that what they are after is our total destruction.”³¹

A week before that, on 29 June 1942, she wrote about a radio message reporting that 700,000 Jews had been killed since April 1941. This indicates that she was well aware of how threatened the life of Jews in occupied Europe was:

I know what may lie in wait for us. Even now I am cut off from my parents and cannot reach them, although they are only two hours away by train. But I know exactly where they are, and that they're not going short of food, and that there are many kind people all round them. And they know where I am, too. But I am also aware that there may come a time when

³¹ E.T., 461. *Het Werk*, 487; Friday, 3 July 1942: [...] die nieuwe zekerheid: dat men onze vernietiging wil.

I shan't know where they are, when they might be deported to perish miserably in some unknown place. I know this is perfectly possible. The latest news is that all Jews will be transported out of Holland through Drenthe Province and then to Poland. And the English radio has reported that 700,000 Jews perished last year alone, in Germany and the occupied territories. And even if we stay alive, we shall carry the wounds with us throughout our lives.³²

On 1 July 1942, she makes the following very brief entry in her diary: "In Poland the killers seem to be in full cry."³³ Moreover, the Nazi lie about the work camps in the East was fairly transparent. The idea that toddlers and the very old would dig tank trenches for the *Endsieg* [final victory] was, of course, ridiculous. Etty Hillesum certainly hoped she would be able to hold out for a while in Poland and that, in this way, she might even survive until the end of the war – nobody realized at that time that the war would last so long. The passage quoted above, in which she writes about her certainty that the Germans are aiming for the destruction of the Jews, can be found right in the middle of a paragraph dealing with her future after the war:

As for me, I still feel absolutely certain that my wish will be fulfilled, that I shall be going to Russia one day, that I shall be one of the many small links between Russia and Europe. This feeling is so strong that it cannot be upset by this new certainty: that what they are after is our total destruction, I accept it. I know it now, and I shall not burden others with my fears. I shall not be bitter if others fail to grasp what is happening to us Jews. The one certainty will not be corroded or negated by the other.³⁴

32 E.T., 455-456. *Het Werk*, 480; Monday, 29 June 1942: Ik weet, wat ons nog te wachten kan staan. Ik zit nu gescheiden van mijn ouders en kan ze niet bereiken, ook al zijn ze maar twee uur reizen van mij vandaan. Maar ik weet nog precies in wat voor huis ze wonen en dat ze geen honger lijden en dat er veel goedwillende mensen om hun heen zijn. En zij weten ook, waar ik ben. Maar ik weet, dat er een tijd komen kan, dat ik niet weet waar ze zijn, dat ze gedeporteerd zijn god weet waarheen en dat ze ergens ellendig omkomen, zoals er nu al zovelen ellendig omkomen. Ik weet, dat dat kan komen. Het laatste bericht is, dat alle Joden uit Holland weggetransporteerd zullen worden, via Drenthe naar Polen. En de Engelse zender zei, dat er sinds verleden jaar April 700.000 Joden zijn omgekomen, in Duitsland en de bezette gebieden. En als wij blijven leven, dan zijn dat even zo vele wonden, die wij ons hele leven met ons zullen moeten dragen.

33 E.T., 456. *Het Werk*, 481; Wednesday, 1 July 1942: in Polen schijnt de uitmoordpartij in volle gang.

34 E.T., 461 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 486-487; Friday evening, 3 July 1942: Het geldt nóg: het weten in mij dragen, dat m'n verlangen wordt vervuld, dat ik eens naar Rusland zal gaan, dat ik eens één van de vele kleine verbindingsschakels zal worden tussen Rusland en Europa. Dat is een zekerheid in me, die niet verstoord wordt door die nieuwe zekerheid: dat men onze vernietiging

Even so, in the end, she could not have had much hope of surviving, given the fact that in Amsterdam she entrusted Maria Tuinzing, who (as mentioned above) also lived in Han Wegerif's house, with eleven journal notebooks before she went back to Camp Westerbork. She gave her housemate the task of handing these notebooks over to the author Klaas Smelik if she did not return. She added that he had to take care of their publication. If ETTY HILLESUM had been convinced that she would survive the war, she would certainly not have done this. There are plenty of passages in her diaries that she crossed out because she was ashamed of their contents. Moreover, there are remarks about her former lover, which he certainly would not appreciate, such as, "But how do I keep the father [Klaas Smelik Senior, K.S.] at arm's length?"³⁵ Only the realization that she did not have much chance of returning from Poland would have driven her to take this emergency measure, taking the risk of hurting her friend's masculinity with what she had written about him.

Moreover, she had at least one source of information regarding her probable fate. In his attempts to persuade her to hide with him, Klaas Smelik would certainly not have spared her the information he had received from a German officer who had served on the Eastern Front before being transferred to the occupied Netherlands. He told Smelik how Jews were murdered in trucks: during the drive, the exhaust fumes of the car were led through a tube in the closed off cargo area, where the victims were kept. My father did not want to believe it, but the officer insisted. He had seen it himself, he assured him. This method of killing people was indeed applied by the Germans from December 1941 onwards, before the gas chambers were developed in the course of 1942. This suggests that Smelik heard this message in 1942 or early 1943 – in time to tell his former girlfriend that she would be gassed in Poland.

Contradicting this, however, is the following passage in her second letter about Camp Westerbork on 24 August 1943:

One more piece of our camp has been amputated. Next week yet another piece will follow. This is what has been happening now for over a year, week in, week out. We are left with just a few thousand. A hundred thousand Dutch members of our race are toiling away under an unknown sky or lie rotting in some unknown soil. We know nothing of their fate.

wil. Ook dat aanvaard ik. Ik wéét het nu. Ik zal anderen niet met mijn angsten lastig vallen, ik zal niet verbitterd zijn, als anderen niet begrijpen, waar het bij ons Joden om gaat. De ene zekerheid zal door de andere niet aangevreten of ontkracht worden.

35 E.T., 284. *Het Werk*, 295; Monday morning, 16 March 1942: Maar hoe houd ik die Pa [Klaas Smelik Senior, K.S.] van mijn lijf?!

It is only a short while, perhaps, before we find out, each one of us in his own time. For we are all marked down to share that fate, of that I have not a moment's doubt.³⁶

This passage shows that Etty Hillesum apparently had no knowledge of the practices in the extermination camps; she was not aware of the burning of the bodies of murdered prisoners, although the Nazis had done this already before the war with inmates of concentration camps. However, she did assume that some of the Jews deported from the Netherlands had long since died and been buried. How many, she does not say – she did not know, apparently. What she did know was that all prisoners in Camp Westerbork were destined to be deported to Poland. Through her choice not to hide, it was inevitable that this would also be her future fate.

In opposition to this text, however, there is yet another. In a letter, in a desperate tone, addressed to Milli Ortman and written on 6 July 1943, Etty Hillesum suggests that it might be possible to force Mischa to accept the offer to be transferred from Camp Westerbork to Barneveld, the prison for a privileged group of Jews. Mischa would only go if his parents could join him there, he had said, but can he not be forced to go? In relation to this, she notes:

What we really wanted is to get Mischa, who is determined to stick with his parents and face certain doom, away from here.³⁷

The important words in this sentence are: “face certain doom.” Etty Hillesum is apparently under no illusions that her parents or Mischa would have any chance of surviving ‘Poland’. But why, then, did she – with her delicate health – dare hope that she would escape the final destruction?

We could go on pitting one text against the other in this way, but, in fact, this entire debate is somewhat academic: the choice of Etty Hillesum not to evade the *Massenschicksal* [common fate] was a choice that, she knew, could

36 E.T., 654. *Het Werk*, 697-698; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Camp Westerbork, Tuesday 24 August 1943: Er is weer een stuk van ons kamp geamputeerd, de volgende week een volgend stuk, dit beleven we hier nu langer dan een jaar, week aan week. We zijn hier met enige duizenden achtergeblevenen. Reeds honderdduizend van onze rasgenoten uit Holland zwoegen onder een onbekende hemel of liggen te rotten in een onbekende aarde. Wij weten niets van hun lot. Misschien zullen we het binnenkort weten, ieder op zijn tijd, het is toch immers ook ons toekomstig lot, daar twijfel ik geen ogenblik aan.

37 E.T., 623. *Het Werk*, 664; Letter 48, To Milli Ortman, Camp Westerbork, Tuesday, 6 July 1943: We wilden maar, dat we Mischa, die beslist met z'n ouders mee wil, z'n definitieve ondergang tegemoet, hier weg konden krijgen.

mean her death, regardless of whether she was aware of what was actually happening in the extermination camps or not. Perhaps this becomes clearer when we ask ourselves the following question: Would Etty Hillesum indeed have opted for hiding if she had known of the gas chambers at Auschwitz? Given her attitude towards death, it seems extremely unlikely that even then she would have accepted the offer to hide. After all, she had made death part of her life³⁸ and, as a result, death had ceased to frighten Etty Hillesum, as is clear in the following passage from her diary of 3 July 1942:

By 'coming to terms with life' I mean: the reality of death has become a definite part of my life; my life has, so to speak, been extended by death, by my looking death in the eye and accepting it, by accepting destruction as part of life and no longer wasting my energies on fear of death or the refusal to acknowledge its inevitability. Through non-acceptance and through having all those fears, most people are left with just a pitiful and mutilated slice of life, which can hardly be called life at all. It sounds paradoxical: by excluding death from our life we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death into our life we enlarge and enrich it.³⁹

Conclusion

In summary, we can conclude that Etty Hillesum was certainly aware of the risk she was taking by not going into hiding, but that she saw it as her duty to continue with her social work in Camp Westerbork for as long as possible and, furthermore, not to shrink away from the following phase, which she experienced as the fate of her people. Furthermore, she had moral objections to hiding because doing so would mean that someone else had to take her place on the transport. In addition, in those days, there existed an almost mystical sense of shared destiny, which may seem strange to people

38 See also Jorna & De Costa, *Van aandacht en adem*, s.v. 'death', 122-128 (text De Costa).

39 E.T. 464. *Het Werk*, 488-489; Friday evening, 3 July 1942: Met: 'met het leven afgerekend' bedoel ik: de mogelijkheid van de dood zo absoluut in m'n leven opgenomen, mijn leven a.h.w. verruimd met de dood, met het onder de ogen zien en aanvaarden van de dood, van de ondergang, van iedere soort van ondergang, als behorende bij dit leven. Dus niet a.h.w. van dit leven nu al een stuk te offeren aan de dood, door de angst van de dood en het niet aanvaarden van de dood, door dat niet aanvaarden en door al die angsten hebben de meesten nog maar een armzalig en verminkt stukje leven overgehouden, wat nauwelijks nog leven te noemen is. Het klinkt bijna paradoxaal: door de dood buiten zijn leven te sluiten, leeft men niet een volledig leven en door de dood binnen zijn leven op te nemen, verruimt en verrijkt men zijn leven.

of the post-war generations, but which was rather characteristic of that time. There seems to have been a certain curiosity in Camp Westerbork about the fate of the Jews who had already been deported, if we rely on the above quoted words of Jopie Vleeschhouwer. The hope that she would survive, existed within her, along with the certainty that the Nazis would eventually spare none of the Jews in the Netherlands – no matter how many stamps *'freigestellt bis auf Weiteres'* [exempt until further notice] they handed out.

Therefore, Hillesum's desire to share the fate of her people was utterly sincere and certainly not a whim. Etty Hillesum consciously chose to run the risk of dying. If one wants to speak of martyrdom in this context, one must be aware that very many others made a similar choice in those years – a choice that very often led to endings as equally tragic as Etty Hillesum's. We think of Janusz Korczak (1879-1942), who refused to abandon the children of his orphanage in Warsaw when they were put on transport to the Treblinka extermination camp. He went with them towards their death. This observation in no way detracts from Etty Hillesum's courage in making her choice, but is important to bear in mind when assessing the hero worship and veneration as saint that have arisen around her person. If Etty Hillesum is declared to be a saint, then there are many other people from that time who are equally deserving of sainthood. She was not unique in this regard. But as one of the martyrs of the Shoah, she has left us a testimony that it is indeed unique and that is still as relevant today as it was more than 70 years ago: there is a path different from hatred and enmity, a path that begins in our inner selves.

About the author

Klaas A.D. Smelik (1950) studied Theology, Semitic Languages, Archaeology and Ancient History in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Leiden. He defended his PhD in Amsterdam in 1977. He taught Old Testament and Hebrew in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Brussels, Ancient History in Amsterdam and The Hague, Jewish History at the K.U. Leuven, and Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Ghent University. He is director of the Etty Hillesum Research Centre (EHOC) first in Ghent, now in Middelburg. Smelik edited the Dutch, English, French and Italian unabridged editions of Etty Hillesum's writings and is editor-in-chief of the *Etty Hillesum Studies*. He has (as writer or editor) published around 40 books and 250 articles on the Hebrew Bible, Ancient Hebrew inscriptions, Ancient History, Jewish Studies, Anti-Semitism, and Etty Hillesum.



5 Agency within Nazi Constraints

Etty Hillesum and Her Interpretation of the Jewish Fate

Lotte Bergen

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Abstract

While the Nazi horrors were increasingly taking hold of the lives of the Jewish population, Etty Hillesum still believed that there was room for everything in life: for the mistreated and the dying in Poland, but also for jasmine and blue skies. This striking attitude ultimately culminated in her decision to go voluntarily into transit camp Westerbork. This article focuses on “agency” when examining Hillesum’s attitude and her choice to go to Camp Westerbork. This term, derived from sociology, refers to the freedom of people in certain circumstances, in this case, the agency of the Jewish people during the Shoah. The main question then becomes: In what way did Etty Hillesum give shape to her own fate? The author distinguishes between Hillesum’s “inner-felt agency” referring to her choice to relate to the persecution in a certain way, and her “outer agency” which refers to her decision to work for the Jewish Council, her request to be transferred to Camp Westerbork, and her decision to return to the camp after each period of leave.

Keywords: agency, fate, Massenschicksal, Jewish Council, Camp Westerbork, Etty Hillesum, chronicler

But how shall I really feel and act, I keep wondering, with a call-up card for Germany in my bag and orders to leave in a week’s time? Supposing the card came tomorrow; how would I act then?¹

¹ E.T., 485. *Het Werk*, 513; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942: En wat zou ik nu wèrkelijk gaan doen, vraag ik me af, als ik met die oproepkaart voor D. land in m’n zak rondliep en over een week vertrekken moest? Stel, die kaart komt morgen, wat zou je dan doen?

Etty Hillesum asked herself this question only a few days before receiving her call-up card for Germany, on 11 July 1942. This was, however, only shortly after she had made the decision to participate in the Jewish *Massenschicksal* – the term she used to describe the common Jewish fate. Despite the possibility of going into hiding, Hillesum departed voluntarily to the transit camp Westerbork, earlier the same month. One week earlier on 2 July 1942, she wrote the following passage in her journal, while in her room in the Gabriël Metsu Street in Amsterdam:

I am in Poland every day, on the battlefields, if that's what one can call them. I often see visions of poisonous green smoke; I am with the hungry, with the ill-treated and the dying, every day, but I am also with the jasmine and with that piece of sky beyond my window; there is room for everything in a single life.²

This fragment is typical of Hillesum's attitude towards the persecution of the Jews. While the Nazi horrors were increasingly taking hold of the lives of the Jewish population, Hillesum still believed that there was room for everything in life; for the mistreated and the dying in Poland, but also for the jasmine and the blue skies. This attitude eventually culminated in her decision to go voluntarily to Camp Westerbork.

Several studies have been published about Hillesum's attitude and her decision to go to Camp Westerbork, instead of going into hiding. Klaas A.D. Smelik points out that the choice not to go into hiding plays a prominent role in the evaluation of her person.³ This evaluation is globally dominated by two positions: Firstly, Hillesum wanted to show solidarity with her people. From this point of view, Hillesum has been ascribed the role of saint or martyr. Jewish publicist Henriëtte Boas takes an opposite stand to this matter. According to Boas, Hillesum was mainly egocentric and was prepared to do anything in order to escape deportation and destruction. Another reason proffered by Boas suggests that after the death of Julius Spier, Hillesum's

2 E.T., 460. *Het Werk*, 485; Thursday morning, 2 July 1942: Ik ben iedere dag in Polen op de slag(cht)velden, zo kan men het noemen, er dringt zich soms een visioen van gifgroene slagvelden aan me op, ik ben bij de hongerenden, bij de mishandelden en bij de stervenden, iedere dag, maar ik ben ook bij de jasmijn en bij dat stuk hemel achter mijn venster, er is voor alles plaats in één leven.

3 See the contribution by Klaas A.D. Smelik in this volume: "Etty Hillesum's Choice Not to Go into Hiding", 81-101, especially p. 81. Original Dutch version: "De keuze van Etty Hillesum om niet onder te duiken", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in Context* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 2] (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2007), 59-73, especially p. 59.

great love and also her therapist, she could not see the purpose of her life anymore. Boas says that Hillesum's world had collapsed, and in order to still give meaning to her life she sacrificed herself for the inmates in Camp Westerbork.⁴ Smelik tries to break this impasse, as he calls it. Considering that both points of view are based upon Hillesum's own utterances, it would be of help, according to Smelik, to consider again Hillesum's motivations for going to Camp Westerbork by studying her writings.⁵

Three factors play a role in the issue of Hillesum's motivation to go to Camp Westerbork, Smelik argues. Firstly, Hillesum regarded her social work in Camp Westerbork as a duty of solidarity. The second reason was her moral objection to going into hiding. Going into hiding simply meant that somebody else would be deported in your stead. Deportation was a question of numbers: a required number of deportees were expected to be on a particular train. The number of deportees was fixed by the *Reichsicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA), the headquarters of the German Security Service in Berlin. Crucially, this number was linked to the camp capacities in the East, considering that the deportation of too few people would delay the extermination process. On the other hand, if too many people were deported at a time, the camps would become overcrowded. Besides the moral consideration of not going into hiding, Smelik points out that, in Hillesum's case, a sense of mystical solidarity had occurred. From this point of view, a common fate befell all Jews, and, according to Hillesum, an individual Jew would break this solidarity should he or she try to avoid this fate.⁶

The Dutch historian Bart van der Boom argues in his much debated book *Wij weten niets van hun lot: Gewone Nederlanders en de Holocaust* [We Know Nothing of Their Fate: Ordinary Dutchmen and the Holocaust] that Hillesum went to Camp Westerbork mainly out of solidarity with the Jewish proletariat.⁷ Another reason mentioned by Van der Boom is that Hillesum believed that if she wanted to be entitled to speak after the war,

4 Cf. Henriëtte Boas, "Meer egocentrisme dan heiligheid", in: J.G. Gaarlandt (ed.), *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn: Reacties op de dagboeken en brieven van Etty Hillesum* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1989), 44-47, especially p. 46.

5 Cf. Smelik, "De keuze van Etty Hillesum om niet onder te duiken" = "Etty Hillesum's Choice Not To Go Into Hiding".

6 Smelik, "De keuze van Etty Hillesum om niet onder te duiken", 66; "Etty Hillesum's Choice Not To Go Into Hiding", 91.

7 Cf. Bart van der Boom, *Wij weten niets van hun lot: Gewone Nederlanders en de Holocaust* [We Know Nothing of Their Fate: Ordinary Dutchmen and the Holocaust] (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), 398-399.

she would have to experience everything herself in order to become the chronicler of her time.⁸

The American Holocaust researcher Rachel Feldhay Brenner focuses on Hillesum's development as an artist, a "thinking writer." Brenner points out that, in the Jewish world of Holocaust studies, very few scholars have been engaged with Hillesum's writings, and of those who have, none related to her diary as a record of her development as a writer. Brenner distinguishes two stages: the stage of preparation and the stage of the test. The first stage occurred in Amsterdam, where Hillesum prepared herself to face the reality of the destruction through a process of self-exploration as thinker and writer. The stage of the test began with Hillesum's departure for Camp Westerbork, where she stayed at intervals. Due to her work at the Jewish Council, Hillesum had permission to go on leave. Thus, she returned to Amsterdam several times during that period. In this stage, Hillesum practises her art as a chronicler by trying to record the Jewish fate. Crucial in this stage, according to Brenner, is the relationship between the two roles Hillesum wished to fulfil: the desire to share in the fate of her people and be a form of support to her suffering fellow men, and at the same time, the role of literary chronicler recording the suffering that was taking place. In this role, it was of great importance that she did not let her emotions overwhelm her, because she wanted to record the events in the right words. Although seemingly contradictory, it was, however, the presence of her emotions that made it possible to produce a chronicle in a clear, literary style. It was a matter of head and heart which, although at odds, shared reciprocal functions, Brenner says.⁹

In this article,¹⁰ Hillesum's attitude and her choice to go to Camp Westerbork will be the subject of scrutiny again, wherein the sociological term "agency", i.e. the freedom of people in certain circumstances, is the primary focus. In his article "Agency, Structure and Jewish Survival of the Holocaust: A Life History Study",¹¹ the author Ronald J. Berger describes the image that

8 *Ibid.*

9 Cf. Rachel Feldhay Brenner, "Etty Hillesum: A Portrait of a Holocaust Artist", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 235-251.

10 This contribution is a reworking of Lotte Bergen, *Handelingsvrijheid binnen nazibegrenzing, 1941-1943: Amsterdam-Westerbork* (MA thesis, Leiden University, 2015).

11 Cf. Ronald J. Berger, "Agency, Structure and Jewish Survival of the Holocaust: A Life History Study", *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, 1 (1995): 16-17.

has long dominated scholarly research on Jewish victimization. Jews were viewed as accepting their fate passively, like “sheep going to the slaughter.” Berger refers to the book *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age*, by the Jewish author Bruno Bettelheim.¹² Bettelheim suggested that the camp inmates regressed to a state of childish dependency upon the SS guards; that they abandoned their own norms and values, and that, in the final stages, they identified with their oppressors. Other researchers characterized the Jewish behaviour as fatalistic, corrupt, and self-destructive.

Meanwhile, according to Berger, a more nuanced view has developed.¹³ The victims’ willingness to follow the orders of their oppressors remains a sensitive topic. According to Van der Boom, some believe that the powerlessness of the victims should be the focus of attention instead of the choices the victims made. Otherwise, the notion of “blaming the victim” could well be the result. Van der Boom states that it is indeed the victims who are being wronged. Their agency was limited and they themselves were not to be blamed for it. However, despite their limited agency, which in particular affected the poorer Jews, their agency was not entirely obliterated. If this had been the case, Van der Boom says, then all Jews who have kept a diary would have showed the exact same behaviour. This, however, was not the reality. The group of Jewish diarists researched by Van der Boom were all people in hiding. This makes apparent the fact that they indeed had some form of choice.¹⁴ Etty Hillesum, too, had a form of choice.

In this article, I will distinguish between Hillesum’s “inner-felt agency” and her “outer agency”. The “inner-felt agency” refers to Hillesum’s choice to relate to the persecution in a certain way. This sense of will deals with Hillesum’s inner struggle against feelings of hatred, which is typical in her attitude and discussed in detail by Klaas A.D. Smelik in his article “De houding van Etty Hillesum tegenover de vervolging van haar volk” [Etty Hillesum’s attitude towards the persecution of her people].¹⁵ Hillesum also kept her sense of humour and concentrated on the beautiful things in life. She chose to prepare herself for the Jewish fate, but did so without facing her destiny with passive submission. Hillesum’s “outer agency” refers to her decision to work for the Jewish Council, her request to be transferred

12 Bruno Bettelheim (1903-1990) was a Jewish psychiatrist and a writer. In 1938 and 1939, he was imprisoned in the concentration camps Dachau and Buchenwald.

13 Berger, “Agency, Structure and Jewish Survival of the Holocaust”, 16-17.

14 Van der Boom, *Wij weten niets van hun lot*, 387-388.

15 Klaas A.D. Smelik, “De houding van Etty Hillesum tegenover de vervolging van haar volk”, in: Klaas A.D. Smelik *et al.* (eds), *Etty Hillesum in relatie* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 5] (Gent: Academia Press, 2013), 17-42.

to Camp Westerbork, and her decision to return to the camp after each period of leave.

To interpret Hillesum's "inner-felt agency," I have made use of the psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl's study "De zin van het bestaan: Een psycholoog beleeft het concentratiekamp & een inleiding tot de logotherapie" [The Meaning of Being: A Psychotherapist Survives the Concentration Camp and an Introduction to Logotherapy]. Frankl, a Holocaust survivor himself, reflects that it was not so much the psychological and physical conditions that determined how the prisoners felt, but rather the lack of freedom in decision-making that determined their inner state. Frankl is referring to what he calls "the last of human freedom," namely the ability to choose one's own attitude in given circumstances, and to follow a self-chosen path.¹⁶

The main question of this article is: In what way did Etty Hillesum give shape to her own fate? Before further extrapolating on Hillesum's agency, let us first discuss the complex term 'fate' or *Massenschicksal*. What could Hillesum have known about the fate that awaited her? Much research has been devoted to determining the extent to which victims, bystanders, and perpetrators had actual knowledge of the true nature of the "industry of destruction" that the Nazi's had in store for them. In his extensive study, Van der Boom used one of Hillesum's quotes as the title for his book: "Wij weten niets van hun lot" [We Know Nothing of Their Fate]. According to Van der Boom, the term "to know" becomes complicated during wartime. The concept of "knowing" implies knowledge.¹⁷ But what could people have truly known, both Jews and non-Jews, during the war, about the Jewish fate?

Hillesum's Idea of the Jewish *Massenschicksal*

"We must count neither on being preserved nor on being destroyed. These are the extreme possibilities, but neither is a certainty."¹⁸ It was early July 1942 when Hillesum wrote this in her diary, and she continued:

16 Viktor E. Frankl, *De zin van het bestaan: Een psycholoog beleeft het concentratiekamp & een inleiding in de logotherapie* (Rotterdam: Ad. Donker, 1978), 86.

17 Van der Boom, *Wij weten niets van hun lot*, 367.

18 E.T., 474. *Het Werk*, 500; Sunday evening, 5 July 1942: Men mag zich niet instellen op het Wonder en ook niet op de Ondergang. Beide zijn als uiterste mogelijkheden aanwezig, maar op geen van beiden mag men zich instellen.

What matters are the concerns of daily life. Last night we talked about the labour camps. I said, "I don't have any illusions about them; I know that I shall be dead within three days because my body is so useless."¹⁹

Neither preservation, nor destruction; both are real possibilities. Hillesum had no idea how things would turn out. What we know of Hillesum's actual knowledge of the Jewish fate has been widely covered already. Smelik maintains that researchers who reject the idea of Hillesum as a martyr, assume that she did not know the true nature of the extermination camps.²⁰ It was assumed that the Jews had to perform hard labour in Poland, but Hillesum had no knowledge of the mass destruction that was taking place. Smelik, however, has his doubts about whether this is true. He refers to various passages in Hillesum's diary that demonstrate that she may well have known of the mass destruction.²¹ In addition, Smelik also points out that – shortly before her final journey to Camp Westerbork – Hillesum put her writings in the care of her friend Maria Tuinzing, so that she, in turn, could pass them on to the writer Klaas Smelik, who was also Hillesum's ex-lover, for publication.

This request suggests that Hillesum took into account the possibility that she might not survive the war. Smelik goes on to cite yet another event that may serve as further evidence of her knowing her fate, namely that of a conversation Smelik's father had with a German officer who had served at the Eastern front. This officer gave Klaas Smelik Senior a detailed account of the murder of the Jews in the East by exhaust fumes from trucks. Klaas Smelik Senior surely would have shared this information with Hillesum in order to persuade her to go into hiding. Klaas Smelik Junior recognizes that there are many contradictions in Hillesum's writings about what the fate of the Jews might be. Alongside writing of the destruction of her people, Hillesum also writes of a life after the war. Smelik concludes that Hillesum was aware of the great risks she took by refusing to go into hiding, and that she took into account her possible death. For Hillesum,

19 E.T., 474. *Het Werk*, 500; Sunday evening, 5 July 1942: Het gaat om de duizend dingen van iedere dag. We spraken gisterenavond over arbeidskampen. Ik zei: ik hoef me daar geen enkele illusie over te maken, ik weet, dat ik in drie dagen dood ben, omdat mijn lichaam niets waard is.

20 Smelik, "De keuze van Etty Hillesum om niet onder te duiken", 59-60 / "Etty Hillesum's choice not to go into hiding", 83.

21 E.T., 461. *Het Werk*, 487; Friday evening, 3 July 1942: Dat is een zekerheid in me, die niet verstoord wordt door die nieuwe zekerheid: dat men onze vernietiging wil. E.T., 456. *Het Werk*, 481; 1 July 1942: [...] in Polen schijnt de uitmoordpartij in volle gang [...].

however, besides the moral objections of going into hiding, her duty to share the common fate of her people and her task as a social worker were far more important.²²

Van der Boom poses the following question in his study: What did the ordinary Dutch people know about the Holocaust during the war? To answer this question, Van der Boom researched 164 diaries, including Hillesum's writings. With his study, Van der Boom also tries to end the so-called myth of the guilty bystander. Central to this myth is the notion that the Dutch people collectively turned their backs on their Jewish compatriots. Except for those coming from Poland and Lithuania, the highest number of Jews to be deported from a European country came from the Netherlands. In the examined diaries, it becomes apparent that there are contradictions about the extent of people's knowledge of the Holocaust. From the behaviour of both Jews and non-Jews, no consistency is shown when it comes to knowledge of the fate. Knowing implies knowledge, which is difficult to access in wartime. In addition, understanding the Holocaust cannot itself be reduced to one clearly defined event. Perhaps, Van der Boom says, people may have known about the life in the ghettos or of the deportation of the Jews, but the full extent of the Holocaust as such was not knowable. And this applied both to the bystanders and the victims.²³

Historians Remco Ensel and Evelien Gans criticize Van der Boom's use of the diaries.²⁴ According to Ensel and Gans, Van der Boom ignores the ambiguity of the texts and a thorough analysis of the diaries is lacking. Ensel and Gans support this claim with Hillesum's quote: "We know nothing of their fate." Van der Boom ignores what the terms "we", "their" and "fate" might refer to. He assumes that Etty Hillesum was referring to an ordinary Dutch citizen, whereas the term "we" could refer to the prisoners in Camp Westerbork, the Jews and the ones whose names were on the deportation list. Furthermore, interpreting the term "fate" in Hillesum's writings is complex, not least because she speaks not only about her own fate, but also the Jewish fate and the fate that awaits mankind.²⁵

In 'Treinen naar de hel' [Trains to Hell], the Dutch sociologist J.W. van Hulst firmly claims that Hillesum knew about the extermination. Hillesum gave a voice to this knowing. People did not know exactly how

22 Smelik, "De keuze van Etty Hillesum om niet onder te duiken", 72-73 / "Etty Hillesum's choice not to go into hiding", 100-101.

23 Van der Boom, *Wij weten niets van hun lot*, 367.

24 Remco Ensel & Evelien Gans, "De inzet van joden als 'controlegroep': Bart van der Boom en de Holocaust", *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 126, 3 (2013): 388-391.

25 Ensel & Gans, "De inzet van joden als 'controlegroep'", 391.

the annihilation was carried out, but that it was happening was certain. The presence of a spark of hope among people was mainly due to the hopeful expectation of a quick arrival of the Allied Forces and had little to do with the idea of any mercy on the part of the Germans.²⁶ Hillesum did not share this hope. She expected very little from the outside world.²⁷ Nevertheless, Hillesum does speak of a possible future. She writes about her own fate, sometimes with a clear expectation of the future:

Sometimes I walk through the camp laughing secretly to myself because of the completely grotesque circumstances. One would have to be a very great poet indeed to describe them; perhaps in about ten years I might get somewhere near it.²⁸

Van der Hulst ignores this. He states that Poland was the concept that gave tone and content to the annihilation, but Hillesum also writes that she saw Poland as the collective name for an unknown future.²⁹ In Camp Westerbork, Hillesum's idea of the Jewish fate was inconsistent. During her time in the camp, she was puzzled by certain occurrences, which made her doubt that all would end well. This was especially the case regarding the sick and elderly who were being deported as labour forces:

One summer morning I came upon a man mumbling to himself, "For heaven's sake, look at the kind of labour forces for Germany they've sent us now!" And when I hurried around to the entrance, masses of old people were just being unloaded from dilapidated trucks onto our heath.³⁰

26 J.W. van Hulst, *Treinen naar de hel, Amsterdam, Westerbork, Auschwitz: Een aantal beschouwingen die verband houden met de dagboeken en brieven van Ety Hillesum* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1983), 14-16.

27 E.T., 488. *Het Werk*, 516; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942.

28 E.T., 621. *Het Werk*, 662; Thursday afternoon, 8 July 1943: Soms loop ik in m'n eentje stilletjes te lachen door het kamp vanwege allergroteske situaties, men zou werkelijk een zeer groot dichter moeten zijn om deze situaties te beschrijven, misschien zou ik het over 10 jaar eens bij benadering kunnen.

29 E.T., 499. *Het Werk*, 528; Wednesday afternoon, 22 July 1942: (een soort verzamelnaam voor al het onbekende van de toekomst)

30 E.T., 587. *Het Werk*, 625; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: Op een ochtend in de zomer stuitte ik in de vroege op een man, die onthutst voor zich uit mompelde: 'Wat ze ons in 's hemelsnaam nou voor arbeidskrachten voor Duitsland gestuurd hebben!' En toen ik me naar de ingang van het kamp gehaast had, werden ze daar juist van wrakke vrachtauto's afgeladen op onze hei: vele oudjes.

The fact that elderly people were being deported to the East as labour forces would certainly have evoked some doubts. This claim that people were being deported for employment reasons must certainly have stretched the bounds of believability. Especially given that the sick were among those deported. Hillesum observed: "Some of the cars have paper mattresses on the floor. These are for the sick."³¹ Did this not mean that the sick were to endure the journey as comfortably as possible? One week before the departure of the Hillesum family to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Hillesum's father asked himself, astonished: "How can people who are near death in the hospital be forced to go? Surely that's against all medical ethics."³² The care for the sick on the one hand, even during deportation, and precisely the deportation of the sick on the other hand, created even more doubts about the future fate of the Jews.³³ On 24 August 1943, Hillesum wrote about what would happen to the people after Camp Westerbork. She presumed that they would be sent on to another transit camp, and then on again from there: "We are being hunted to death all through Europe."³⁴ On the same day, she also wrote: "There will be some who will laugh now and then in Poland, too, though not many from this transport, I think."³⁵ In Hillesum's idea of the future, hopefulness and annihilation coexisted as possible future realities:

As for me, I still feel absolutely certain that my wish will be fulfilled, that I shall be going to Russia one day, that I shall be one of the many small links between Russia and Europe. This feeling is so strong that it cannot be upset by this new certainty, the one certainty will not be corroded or negated by the other: that what they are after is our total destruction, I accept it. I know it now, and I shall not burden others with my fears. I shall not be bitter if others fail to grasp what is happening to us Jews.³⁶

31 E.T., 650. *Het Werk*, 693; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday 24 August 1943: In sommige wagens liggen papieren matrassen op de grond, deze zijn voor de zieken.

32 E.T., 657. *Het Werk*, 700; Letter 68, To Maria Tuinzing, Westerbork, Thursday, 2 September 1943: Hoe kan dat nou, dat men uit het ziekenhuis mensen laat gaan, die ongeveer dood zijn, dat is toch tegen de medische ethica?

33 Lotte Bergen, *Etty Hillesum: Haar voorstelling van het Joodse noodlot* [unpublished paper Leiden University, 2007], 21.

34 E.T., 650. *Het Werk*, 693; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday 24 August 1943: Wij worden doodgejaagd, dwars door Europa heen.

35 E.T., 644. *Het Werk*, 686; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday 24 August 1943: En in Polen zal er misschien af en toe ook nog wel eens iemand lachen, hoewel van dit transport: niet vele, denk ik.

36 E.T., 461. *Het Werk*, 486-487; Friday evening, 3 July 1942: Het geldt nòg: het weten in mij dragen, dat m'n verlangen wordt vervuld, dat ik eens naar Rusland zal gaan, dat ik eens één van

Agency within Nazi Constraints: “Inner-felt Agency”

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once stated: “He who has a reason to live, can bear almost any circumstances.”³⁷ Psychotherapist Viktor E. Frankl makes reference to this statement in his book. The experiences he had shared with his fellow prisoners meant that he could confirm the statement first-hand. The camp conditions caused psychic disruption. The prisoners were robbed of anything and everything familiar, as well as the very notion of a future. The only thing remaining, according to Frankl, was the freedom to decide one’s own attitude, given the circumstances.³⁸ Sometimes, one has to take fate into one’s own hands by acting. In a different situation, it is advisable to quietly reconsider without acting, and sometimes life just demands that the best thing to do is accept one’s fate, Frankl says.³⁹ In sociology, Frankl’s description is referred to as “agency”: the notion of the freedom of man to choose his own actions in certain circumstances. In this article, we deal with agency within the evil constraints of Nazi Germany.

The constraints laid out by the Nazis were implemented in phases. After the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, freedom of movement for Jews in the Netherlands was increasingly restricted and, as of January 1942, after the Wannsee Conference, the anti-Semitic regulations tightened once more. An all-time low was to follow on 15 July 1942, when the first deportation train from Camp Westerbork departed eastward.⁴⁰ Frankl had experienced the most extreme form of these restrictions, namely Auschwitz-Birkenau. The most extreme forms of human constraints described by Hillesum in her journals were the conditions found in Camp Westerbork. Making a comparison between Auschwitz-Birkenau and Westerbork is difficult. Westerbork was a transit camp, while Auschwitz-Birkenau functioned as an extermination camp, in which death was a daily reality. In Westerbork, camp conditions were relatively favourable.

de vele kleine verbindingschakels zal worden tussen Rusland en Europa. Dat is een zekerheid in me, die niet verstoord wordt door die nieuwe zekerheid: dat men onze vernietiging wil. Ook dat aanvaard ik. Ik wéét het nu. Ik zal anderen niet met mijn angsten lastig vallen, ik zal niet verbitterd zijn, als anderen niet begrijpen, waar het bij ons Joden om gaat. De ene zekerheid zal door de andere niet aangevreten of ontkracht worden.

37 Frankl, *De zin van het bestaan*, 12.

38 *Ibid.*, 86-87.

39 *Ibid.*, 100.

40 Bob Moore, *Slachtoffers en overlevenden: De nazi-vervolging van de joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1998), 320.

Hillesum had been in a privileged position for a time due to her position at the Jewish Council. Nevertheless, both camps were part of the same Nazi extermination policy, where psychological ruin and uncertainty about any future were all-encompassing. On the topic of the increasing limitations on human freedom, Hillesum wrote the following in June 1942:

This morning I cycled along the Stadionkade enjoying the broad sweep of the sky at the edge of the city and breathing in the fresh, unrationed air. And everywhere signs barring Jews from the paths and the open country. But above the one narrow path still left us stretches the sky, intact.⁴¹

These words testify to how Hillesum dealt with the persecution of the Jews. Her stance, as reflected in her diaries and letters, distinguished several characteristic aspects, showing that Hillesum chose to relate to the Holocaust in her own way.

Hatred Breeds Hatred

“It is the problem of our age: hatred of Germans poisons everyone’s mind.”⁴² It was 15 March 1941 when Hillesum wrote these words in her diary. Etty Hillesum wanted to fight the hatred in herself. She was convinced that hatred only breeds more hatred, adding to the hate already present in the world. Psychologist Hans Bendien points out that Hillesum’s attitude by no means implies that she had abolished within herself the ability to hate, in a superhuman kind of way.⁴³ Hillesum was human; not succumbing to hate was not always easy. At times, she too found herself engulfed with hatred against the occupier. “Sometimes when I read the papers or hear reports of what is happening all round, I am suddenly beside myself with anger, cursing and swearing at the Germans.”⁴⁴ Hillesum was ashamed for being so

41 E.T., 434 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 457; Saturday evening, 20 June 1942: Ik fietste langs de Stadionkade vanochtend en genoot van de wijde hemel daar aan de rand van de stad en ademde de frisse, ongerantsoeneerde lucht in. En overal bordjes, die wegen, de vrije natuur in, voor Joden versperd hielden. Maar boven dat ééne stuk weg, dat ons blijft, is ook de volledige hemel.

42 E.T., 18. *Het Werk*, 19; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: Dit probleem ligt in deze tijd. De grote haat tegen de Duitsers, die het eigen gemoed vergiftigt.

43 Hans Bendien, “Mythe-vorming over de heiligheid van Etty Hillesum”, in: *De Gids* 153, 3 (1990): 170-181, especially p. 180.

44 E.T., 19. *Het Werk*, 20; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: Loop ik soms plotseling vol haat, na het lezen van de krant of door een bericht van buiten, dan kan ik me soms opeens te buiten gaan aan scheldwoorden tegen de Duitsers.

openly disparaging toward the Germans, in particular when she knew that Käthe, the German housekeeper, could hear her. Hillesum admitted that her outright criticism was intentional, designed to hurt the housekeeper's feelings. Hillesum wrote that Käthe loved her homeland dearly and that she, Hillesum, could not bear that Käthe did not share her feelings of hatred. Later, Hillesum regretted her behaviour. She was aware that Käthe, like herself, abhorred the "new mentality".⁴⁵ Hillesum recounted how, on that same day in March, a liberating thought had emerged in her:

If there were only one decent German, then he should be cherished despite that whole barbaric gang, and because of that one decent German it is wrong to pour hatred over an entire people.⁴⁶

In this time, according to Hillesum, the right attitude was to "work on oneself." True peace can only emerge and spread when people first find peace within themselves and eradicate their hatred for the other. Nevertheless, Hillesum understood the hatred against the occupiers. She, too, struggled with these feelings, well aware that hatred would not bring a solution to any predicament. In Hillesum's mind, hatred not only bred hatred, but it also robbed one of one's energy.⁴⁷ This attitude did not imply that Hillesum wanted to see only the good in people, in this case in the enemy, at any cost. If this were true, she said, it would, in fact, have been testimony to a weak attitude:

But you can be very militant and act in a principled way without being crammed full with hatred, and you can be chock-a-block full of hatred without realizing exactly what it is all about.⁴⁸

Hillesum asked herself continuously where hatred originated in man. She imagined that if she were kicked to death by an SS-man, she would still wonder, in a state of terror amazement and interest: "My God, you

45 E.T., 19. *Het Werk*, 20; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941.

46 E.T., 18. *Het Werk*, 19; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: En al zou er nog maar één fatsoenlijke Duitser bestaan, dan zou die het waard zijn in bescherming genomen te worden tegen de hele barbaarse bende en om die éne fatsoenlijke Duitser zou men dan niet zijn haat mogen uitgieten over een geheel volk.

47 E.T., 434. *Het Werk*, 458; Saturday evening, 20 June 1942.

48 E.T., 21. *Het Werk*, 22-23; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: Men kan zeer strijdbaar en principieel zijn ook zonder volgepropt te zitten met haat en men kan tjokvol zitten met alweer die haat, zonder dat men precies weet waar het eigenlijk om gaat.

poor fellow, what terrible things must have happened in your life to bring you to this pass?"⁴⁹ Hillesum's decision to eliminate hatred is partly determined by her ideas about the functioning of the individual within a system.⁵⁰ Hillesum wrote that a system in itself is a man-made creation, and therefore seems familiar or trustworthy. The danger, however, according to Hillesum, is when a system transcends the people. When this occurs, both the engineers of the system and its victims become entangled.

In this scenario, Hillesum considered the engineers, or builders, of the system to be those more worthy of pity, at least, so long as they do no harm. "But," Hillesum continued, "they become mortally dangerous and must be eradicated when they are turned loose on humanity."⁵¹ This attitude would remain unchanged, even during her stay in Camp Westerbork. Indeed, Hillesum continued to banish the hatred within herself, but she emphasized that eradicating hatred is a different affair from passive acceptance. The absence of hatred did not imply she was not indignant about the German regime.⁵²

A Humorous Approach

"And my sense of humour is what gives me resilience, especially in times like these."⁵³ Early July 1942, Etty Hillesum wrote down these words. At that point, despite the fact that there was nothing much for Jews to laugh about anymore, Hillesum managed to keep – and make use of – her sense of humour in various situations. On a Wednesday morning in February 1942, for example, while at the office of the Gestapo, she was shouted at by an "unfortunate Gestapo boy" as Hillesum describes him. She writes:

49 E.T., 21-22. *Het Werk*, 23; Saturday morning, 15 March 1941: Mijn God kerel, wat is er met jou allemaal voor verschrikkelijks in je leven gebeurd, dat je tot zulke dingen komt?

50 See also Klaas A.D. Smelik, "Ik geloof eigenlijk helemaal niet in wat men noemt 'slechte mensen': Etty Hillesums visie op het kwaad in de mens", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, *et al.* (eds), *Etty Hillesum 1914-2014* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 6] (Antwerpen & Apeldoorn: Garant, 2014), 27-47, especially pp. 32-35.

51 E.T., 259 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 269; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: [...] maar levensgevaarlijk en uitgeroeid moettende worden, als ze op de mensheid loskomen.

52 E.T., 21. *Het Werk*, 19; Saturday morning, 15 March, 1941.

53 E.T., 470. *Het Werk*, 496; Saturday evening, 4 July 1942: En mijn humor is m'n veerkracht, vooral in deze tijden.

What the hell's so funny? I wanted to say, "Nothing's funny here except you," but refrained. "You're still smirking," he bawled again. And I, in all innocence, "I didn't mean to, it's my usual expression."⁵⁴

Instead of feeling intimidated and afraid of being shouted at, Hillesum observed to herself that the only laughable person in this situation was the "unfortunate Gestapo boy." Hillesum also regarded her job at the Jewish Council at times with a touch of the comical. When the Jewish Council abruptly had to relocate, Hillesum described it as a "crazy day" in which she asserted – in her own words – her "satanic sense of humour." Her colleagues, in particular, were the subject of her mockery. Hillesum warned: "God save me from one thing: don't let me be sent to a camp with the people with whom I now work every day. I could write a hundred satires about them."⁵⁵

Hillesum took her humour with her to Camp Westerbork. She wrote, for example, about a nature-loving camp guard who arranged a beautiful bouquet of purple flowers. Hillesum assumed that he hoped to impress a local farmer's daughter with it.⁵⁶ In letters to Han Wegerif and others, Hillesum joked about her lodgings in the camp, describing them as a combination of a boudoir and a storehouse. About the other residents, she writes: "[...] a couple of languid females in long silk peignoirs. Most astonishing." And Hillesum continued: "I share my place with a former beauty queen from *Het Leven*."⁵⁷ She goes on to describe how she had to share her bed that night with "a nearsighted lady with a pitch-black moustache from Lijnbaansgracht, a place I have never much liked. So then we lay side by side together on her narrow bunk – what you might call a piquant situation."⁵⁸

54 E.T., 258. *Het Werk*, 269; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: Was finden Sie lächerlich hier. Ik had graag gezegd: Außer Ihnen, finde ich nichts lächerlich hier, maar uit diplomatieke overwegingen leek het me beter dat achterwege te laten. Sie lachen ja fortwährend, brulde hij verder. En ik heel onschuldig: davon bin ich mir gar nicht bewusst, dat ist mijn gewöhnliches Gesicht.

55 E.T., 502-503. *Het Werk*, 532; Saturday morning, 25 July 1942: God, behoed me voor één ding: laat me nooit in één kamp komen met de mensen, met wie ik nu dagelijks werk. Honderd satires zal ik daar later over schrijven.

56 E.T., 602. *Het Werk*, 642; Letter 37, Probably to Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 8 June 1943.

57 E.T., 599. *Het Werk*, 639; Letter 36, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 7 June 1943: [...] een paar languissante vrouwelijke collega's in lange zijden peignoirs. Allerwonderlijkst. [...] Er huist bij mij een vroegere schoonheidskoningin uit "het leven".

58 E.T., 600. *Het Werk*, 639-640; Letter 36, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 7 June 1943: [...] een kippige juffrouw met een pikzwarte snor van de Lijnbaansgracht, waar ik nooit erg dol op was. En nu lag ik plotseling met haar in één smal bed, wat je noemt een piquante situatie.

With respect to humour, Hillesum had an ally in her father. She wrote how she still chuckled a lot with her father. Hillesum believed her father possessed a kind of “primal humour.” And as the circumstances became increasingly miserable, Hillesum watched how her father’s humour became even more sparkling.⁵⁹ According to Frankl, humour is a skill that one learns as one tries to master the art of living. Humour is a weapon in the struggle for self-preservation, Frankl says, and one that could offer the camp inmates the chance to place themselves above their own miserable situation for a while.⁶⁰ Humour helps to put things into perspective. Hillesum considered her sense of humour to be a form of resilience. She found it annoying when humour left her in the lurch, for example, when she was fatigued. “That is the worst thing about this tiredness of mine: my sense of humour has gone.”⁶¹

Nature’s Beauty Remains, Despite Everything

“This morning there was a rainbow over the camp, and the sun shone in the mud puddles.”⁶² It was 7 August 1943, when Hillesum mentioned this in a letter to Maria Tuinzing. She regularly described the environment in a poetic manner, praising nature’s beauty. In Amsterdam, she noted how her freedom had become more restricted, and that Jews were no longer allowed on “the paths and in the open country,” Hillesum wrote about “the broad sweep of the sky above,” “the one narrow path,” and “the fresh, unrationed air.”⁶³ Also the jasmine, which stood between the garage and the neighbours’ wall, often recurs in her diary. She compared the tree to a radiant young bride. For her, the tree is a miracle, and Hillesum believed that, even in the twentieth century, one may believe in miracles. “That jasmine, words fail me when it comes to that jasmine. It has been there a long time, but only now are words beginning to fail me about it.”⁶⁴

59 E.T., 632-633. *Het Werk*, 674-675; Letter 56, To Maria Tuinzing, Westerbork, Saturday, 7 August 1943-Sunday, 8 August 1943.

60 Frankl, *De zin van het bestaan*, 62-63.

61 E.T., 470. *Het Werk*, 496; Saturday evening, 4 July 1942: Dat is in zo een vermoeidheid het ergste: m’n humor is weg.

62 E.T., 631. *Het Werk*, 673; Letter 56, To Maria Tuinzing, Westerbork, Saturday, 7 August 1943-Sunday, 8 August 1943: Vanmorgen stond er een regenboog over het kamp en de zon scheen in de modderplassen.

63 E.T., 434. *Het Werk*, 457; Saturday evening, 20 June 1942.

64 E.T., 459. *Het Werk*, 484; Thursday morning, 1 July 1942: Die jasmijn, ik ben sprakeloos over die jasmijn. Hij staat er al heel lang, maar nu pas begin ik sprakeloos over hem te worden.

In the early spring of 1942, Hillesum wrote extensively about the events of the day, including her visit to the Lippman and Rosenthal bank⁶⁵ with Spier's wedding ring. But what she found most noteworthy, was the tree in front of her window. The branches had been lopped off: "The night before, the stars had still hung like glistening fruit in the heavy branches, and now they climbed, unsure of themselves, up the bare, ravaged trunk."⁶⁶ Referring to her love for the beauty of nature, Hillesum wrote that she still needed to be careful not to become overconfident. During a walk on the way to see her lover Julius Spier, she had lost herself in the deep red roses that grew along a wall, and the violets on a garden wall. Later, she would ask Spier if he did not find her frivolous because she still adored life so intensely.⁶⁷ Hillesum also enjoyed bringing nature into the home:

Last night, walking that long way home through the rain with the blister on my foot, I still made a short detour to seek out a flower stall, and went home with a large bunch of roses. And there they are. They are just as real as the misery I witness every day. There is room for many things in my life, so much room, oh God.⁶⁸

Later in Camp Westerbork, she regularly described the camp environs and nature. In a letter to Han Wegerif and others, she wrote in early June 1943:

Not much heath is left now inside the barbed wire; more barracks are always being added. Only a little piece remains in the farthest corner of the camp, and that's where I'm sitting now, in the sun under a glorious blue sky, among some low shrubbery.⁶⁹

65 Lippman, Rosenthal and Co.: Nazi looting bank. From August 1941, Jews had to register their assets and valuables. From May 1942, the assets and possessions with a value above 250 guilders had to be handed in.

66 E.T., 306. *Het Werk*, 319; Saturday morning, 28 March 1942: Nog een nacht te voren hadden de sterren als glanzende vruchten in de zwarte takken gehangen en een nacht later klommen ze, nog onzeker, langs de kale, beroofde stam.

67 E.T., 459. *Het Werk*, 484; Thursday morning, 2 July 1942.

68 E.T., 500. *Het Werk*, 529; Thursday evening, 23 July 1942: Toen ik gisterenavond dat grote eind door de regen gelopen had met die blaar onder aan m'n voet, ben ik toch op het eind nog een straatje omgelopen om een bloemenkar te zoeken en ik kwam met een grote bos rozen thuis. En daar staan ze. Ze zijn net zo werkelijk als al de ellende, die ik op een dag meemaak. Er is voor veel dingen plaats in één leven.

69 E.T., 601. *Het Werk*, 641; Letter 37, Probably to Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 8 June 1943: Er is niet veel hei binnen het prikkeldraad overgebleven, er komen steeds meer barakken. Alleen een klein stukje is er nog in een uiterste hoek van het kamp en daar zit ik nu, in de zon, onder een prachtige blauwe hemel, tussen wat laag struikgewas.

Frankl explains in his work that this focus on nature is associated with a process of internalization. The more internalization, the more consciously camp prisoners would experience the beauty of nature.⁷⁰ By focusing on that beauty, their own harsh conditions would become secondary. Hillesum was aware of her internalization process; she called it *hineinhorchen* [listening to one's inner self]. Hillesum regarded the Camp Westerbork landscape not as one landscape, but as consisting of several different landscapes together. Even the sun puts on a fresh sunset performance, every evening. The world is beautiful everywhere, Hillesum said. "Even the places that geography books describe as barren and dull."⁷¹ Moreover, this focus on nature and environment did not mean that Hillesum denied the fact that the conditions within the camp were miserable. In her letters that she wrote from Camp Westerbork, she also reported on the mud, the poor hygienic conditions, and the numerous barracks that increasingly displaced the heather. Hillesum believed that if someone really wanted to convey something of camp life, that it should be done in fairy stories. "The misery here is so beyond all bounds of reality that it has become unreal."⁷²

Preparing for the *Massenschicksal*

More arrests, more terror, concentration camps, the arbitrary dragging off of fathers, sisters, brothers. We seek the meaning of life, wondering whether any meaning can be left. But that is something each one of us must settle with himself and with God. And perhaps life has its own meaning, even if it takes a lifetime to find it.⁷³

In the fragment cited above, Hillesum writes about the roundups in Amsterdam in the first half of June 1941. Hillesum wonders whether one can

⁷⁰ Frankl, *De zin van het bestaan*, 57.

⁷¹ E.T., 641. *Het Werk*, 684; Letter 61, To Han Wegerif and others, Fragment, Westerbork, Undated; after 18 August 1943: Zelfs op de plekken, waarvan in de aardrijkskundeboekjes staat, dat ze dor en onvruchtbaar en zonder phantasie zijn.

⁷² E.T., 621. *Het Werk*, 662; Letter 47, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 5 July 1943-Friday, 9 July 1943: De ellende heeft hier zozeer alle grenzen der werkelijkheid bereikt, dat ze daardoor weer onwerkelijk wordt.

⁷³ E.T., 62. *Het Werk*, 65; Saturday evening, 14 June 1941: Weer arrestaties, terreur, concentratiekampen, willekeurig weghalen van vaders, zussen, broers. Men zoekt naar de zin des levens en vraagt of het überhaupt nog zin heeft. Maar dit is een zaak, die men alleen met zichzelf en God moet uitmaken. En misschien heeft ieder leven z'n eigen zin en duurt het een heel leven die zin te vinden.

still see the meaning of life in all the misery. At the same time, she believed that each individual life has its own meaning:

So many of our most promising vigorous young men are dying day and night. I don't know how to take it. With all the suffering there is, you begin to feel ashamed of taking yourself and your moods so seriously.⁷⁴

Hillesum remained convinced, however, that it was crucial, especially at that time, to take oneself seriously and to centre oneself within, without ignoring the miserable conditions and suffering. "You must come to grips with these terrible times and try to find answers to the many questions they pose."⁷⁵ Hillesum was determined to face everything. This situation of life and death belonged to the current time. She tried to accept the misery and suffering as part of life. Times were tough and Hillesum believed that it was vital to be well-prepared for the misery. If you have inner strength, then it will not matter that you live within the walls of a camp, is Hillesum's answer.⁷⁶ With a well-prepared mind, one can bear the *Massenschicksal*. According to Hillesum, physical and material things must be subordinate and one should be strict with one's body:

More and more we must learn to do without those of our physical necessities that are not absolutely vital. We must train our bodies until they expect no more than the absolutely essential [...]. We must grow so independent of material and external things that whatever the circumstances our spirit can continue to do its work.⁷⁷

The conditions for Jews were becoming more severe and Hillesum found it therefore important to gather inner strength. What fate awaits her, she

74 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: Er gaan zoveel van die levendige veelbelovende jongens ieder ogenblik van de dag en de nacht dood. Ik weet niet wat ik daarmee beginnen moet. Door het vele leed om je heen begin je je er voor te generen dat je jezelf met al je stemmingen au sérieux neemt.

75 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: Je moet je 'auseinandersetzen' met deze verschrikkelijke tijd en een antwoord zien te vinden op het aantal vragen op leven en dood die deze tijd je stelt.

76 E.T., 279. *Het Werk*, 289; Thursday evening, 12 March 1942.

77 E.T., 435-436. *Het Werk*, 459; Sunday morning, 21 June 1942: We moeten leren zeer onafhankelijk, steeds onafhankelijker te worden, van de lichamelijke behoeften, die iets boven het allernoodzakelijkste uitgaan [...]. We moeten zó onafhankelijk worden van materiële en uiterlijke dingen, dat, onder wat voor omstandigheden ook, de geest kan doorgaan zijn weg te gaan en zijn werk verder kan doen.

did not know, but she envisioned that it would be heavy and that the annihilation was a possible reality. She tried to prepare mentally for the Jewish situation by incorporating it into her life.

Not Going into Hiding but Going Purposefully to the Front

Many accuse me of indifference and passivity when I refuse to go into hiding; they say that I have given up. They say everyone who can must try to stay out of their clutches, it's our bounden duty to try.⁷⁸

Hillesum refused to go into hiding. She did not want to hide from the Nazis. Her friends' attempts to make her change her mind failed. Hillesum did not understand the reasoning "You must stay out of their clutches." She did not feel that she was in anybody's clutches at all: "Whether I stay or am sent away."⁷⁹ She believed she would always feel safe in God's arms, even in a labour camp under SS guards.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, she considered the possibility that she may be underestimating her fate and that the hardships would be far worse than she was able to imagine. However, she considered that this would be meaningless compared to her great faith in God and her own inner receptiveness.⁸¹ Hillesum did not regard her adjustment as an act of feeble surrender to the enemy. Her acceptance of fate was not passive capitulation. Hillesum rejected the regime that treated the people so terribly. She was certainly not going to stand by and face possible destruction, yet she also believed that it was destiny. It was a common fate that all the Jews had to share. You could not elude this predicament, Hillesum believed: "We now live side by side with destiny, or whatever you want to call it, we rub shoulders with it daily, and nothing is how we learned it from our books."⁸² Not getting oneself into a certain situation was no longer important, what mattered now was how one conducted oneself and continued to live.⁸³ In

78 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 514; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942: Velen verwijten mij onverschilligheid en passiviteit en zeggen, dat ik me zo maar overgeef. En zeggen: ieder, die uit hun klauwen kan blijven, moet dat proberen en is dat verplicht.

79 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 514; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942: Niet als ik blijf en niet als ik weggetransporteerd word!

80 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 514; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942.

81 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 515; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942.

82 E.T., 477. *Het Werk*, 504; Tuesday morning, 7 July 1942: Men leeft nu zij aan zij met het Noodlot, of hoe je het noemen wilt, men vindt er ook dagelijkse omgangsgebaren mee en het is alles heel anders, dan we het vroeger in alle boeken konden lezen.

83 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 515; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942.

addition to this belief that she had to share the fate of her people, Hillesum had set herself two other goals: She wanted to be entitled to speak after the war; therefore, Hillesum would have to experience everything herself in order to become the chronicler of her time:

I hope I shall remember everything that happens to us so that one day I'll be able to retell it all. It is so different from everything you read in books, altogether different.⁸⁴

Hillesum's second goal was to become a help to her people. She wanted to help the people to bear the inevitable. In July 1942, Hillesum wonders if she is already capable of doing so.

Have I really made so much progress that I can say with complete honesty, I hope they will send me to a labour camp so that I can do something for the sixteen-year-old girls who will also be going? And to reassure the distracted parents who are kept behind, saying, "Don't worry, I'll look after your children."⁸⁵

Hillesum accepted the *Massenschicksal* as inevitable and as something that needed to be shared, but how she would put that into practice, she would be able to largely decide for herself, for a while. She had determined to find herself in a situation that enabled her to achieve her goals. This meant avoiding the Nazi deportation machine for as long as possible.

"Outer Agency": Giving Substance to her *Massenschicksal*

In the previous section, we dealt with several typifying characteristics of Hillesum's "inner-felt agency", and her choice to relate to the conditions imposed upon the Jews under German occupation in a particular way. In the next part, we will focus on Hillesum's "outer agency". Hillesum had set herself a number of goals. She had refused to go into hiding, but she also

84 E.T., 478. *Het Werk*, 505; Tuesday morning, 7 July 1942: Ik hoop, dat ik alles mag onthouden uit deze tijd en dat ik er later iets van mag vertellen. Het is alles heel anders, dan het in de boeken staat, heel anders.

85 E.T., 483. *Het Werk*, 510; Thursday morning, 9 July 1942: Ben ik werkelijk voor mezelf al zover, dat het eerlijk is als ik zeg: ik hoop, dat ik meekom naar het arbeidskamp om iets te kunnen zijn voor de 16-jarige meisjes, die ook meegaan? Om van te voren tegen ouders, die achterblijven, te kunnen zeggen: wees maar niet ongerust, ik zal op jullie kinderen passen.

had no intention of passively falling into the hands of the Nazis. Hillesum wanted to be a chronicler and a social worker and later – when her family was to arrive in Camp Westerbork – she would have yet another purpose: taking care of her parents and her brother Mischa, and keeping them in Camp Westerbork for as long as possible.

Employee of the Amsterdam Jewish Council

Nothing can ever atone for the fact, of course, that one section of the Jewish population is helping to transport the majority out of the country. History will pass judgment in due course.⁸⁶

Etty Hillesum had a keen foresight. Many historians have examined the role played by the Dutch Jewish Council during the Shoah. Opinions differ and range from its condemnation to its defence. The Dutch-Jewish historian and journalist Loe de Jong reflected extensively on the Jewish Council in his magnum opus *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [The Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War].⁸⁷ The roles played by the presidents of the Jewish Council, Abraham Asscher and David Cohen, were much discussed and criticized. Had the Jewish Council not collaborated with the German occupiers? In his famous work *Ondergang: De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom, 1940-1945* [Decline and Fall: The Persecution and Destruction of Dutch Jewry],⁸⁸ the Dutch-Jewish historian Jacques Presser was highly critical of the Council and condemned the presidents. The Council was used by the Germans to exterminate the Jews, not only in the Netherlands, but also elsewhere in Europe where the Germans carried out their genocidal plans. Presser points out that the Jewish Council in Amsterdam was later to become involved in the genocidal plans of the Nazis than other cities, such as Berlin, Prague, and Vienna. Judging by the experience of other countries, could the Council's presidents not have been more suspicious about the role the Council played as the 'Jewish arm' of the Germans? In

86 E.T., 511. *Het Werk*, 541; Tuesday evening, 28 July 1942: Het is natuurlijk nooit meer goed te maken, dat één gedeelte der Joden meehelpt om de overgrote rest weg te transporteren. De geschiedenis zal hier later haar oordeel nog over moeten vellen.

87 Lou de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, volume VI (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij SDU, [1969] 1995), 247-255.

88 Jacques Presser, *Ondergang: De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom 1940-1945*, volume I (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij/Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 508-509.

Kroniek der Jodenvervolging 1940-1945 [Chronicle of the Persecution of the Jews 1940-1945], the Dutch-Jewish author Abel Herzberg was more lenient. He considers what might have transpired if the Jewish Council had never been founded. According to Herzberg, it is likely that a similar organization would have been established, but then with other leaders than Asscher and Cohen. Herzberg emphasized that it were the Germans who had ordered the creation of the Jewish Council to begin with. Resistance against it would not have improved the situation of the Dutch Jews.⁸⁹

The activities of the Jewish Council were not only criticized after the war; contemporaries also had their doubts, which grew stronger as conditions for the Jews became more unpleasant. Hillesum also criticized the Jewish Council. She compared it to a piece of driftwood floating in the wake of a shipwreck on the ocean. Everyone clings to it. This seemed pointless to Hillesum; moreover, she did not want to make use of any “connections,” so she said. Hillesum saw the Jewish Council as a “strange agency.” Working for the Jewish Council eventually meant nothing more than a stay of execution. “But, of course,” Hillesum stated, “by then the English may have landed.”⁹⁰ Yet this is, according to Hillesum, ultimately false hope. Only those who have not yet abandoned their hope in politics still expect something from the outside world.⁹¹ Despite her reluctance, Hillesum did, in the end, apply to the Jewish Council, upon the advice of her brother Jaap.⁹² A day later, Hillesum was recruited for labour deployment to Germany, the *Arbeitseinsatz*, as from July 1942 Jews were to heed the call of the occupying forces to be employed in Germany.⁹³ On this subject, Hillesum writes: “Dear God, what will happen to me?”⁹⁴ A day later she wrote about a miracle and God’s intervention: “Have You any other plans for me, oh God?”⁹⁵

Hillesum finally landed her job at the Jewish Council through the mediation of Leon de Wolff, a lawyer at the Council who held a high position. Hillesum saw this as a miracle that she had to accept.⁹⁶ Hillesum started at the office on the Lijnbaansgracht on 15 July 1942, where she did

89 Abel J. Herzberg, *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging 1940-1945* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1985), 254-255.

90 E.T., 488. *Het Werk*, 516; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942: Maar ja, dan kunnen die Engelsen misschien al geland zijn.

91 E.T., 488. *Het Werk*, 516; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942.

92 E.T., 491. *Het Werk*, 519; Tuesday evening, 14 July 1942.

93 Moore, *Slachtoffers en overlevenden*, 320.

94 E.T., 495. *Het Werk*, 524; Tuesday evening, 15 July 1942: Mijn God, hoe zal het met me gaan?

95 E.T., 496. *Het Werk*, 524; Thursday morning, 16 July 1942: Heb je dan toch andere plannen met me God? Kan ik dit aannemen? Ik blijf toch verder bereid.

96 E.T., 496. *Het Werk*, 525; Thursday evening, 16 July 1942.

administrative work. "I shall have to do a great many favours for a great many people after this."⁹⁷ She realized that the Jewish Council was not always honourable in its actions: "In any case, the Jewish Council seems to have become a hotbed of intrigue."⁹⁸ Hillesum described the Council as a madhouse,⁹⁹ the midway between an asylum and hell.¹⁰⁰ Hillesum would end up working in this madhouse for only two weeks. During that time, she made great efforts to go her own way and make her time there as pleasant as possible by reading the works of her favourite poet Rainer Maria Rilke between her administrative duties.¹⁰¹ Work ethics and her colleagues seemed of little interest to Hillesum. She requested time off to go to the dentist and describes how she then spends the day walking in the sun with "a neglect of duty and sunshine."¹⁰² At the Jewish Council, Hillesum made her own rules and went about as she pleased.¹⁰³ About the sudden relocation of the Jewish Council, Hillesum wrote:

Yesterday we were all moved out suddenly in the middle of the morning; tables and chairs were pulled from under us, people thronged about giving orders and counter-orders, even about the smallest chair, but Etty just sat down in a corner on the dirty floor between her typewriter and a packet of sandwiches and read Rilke.¹⁰⁴

Hillesum admitted she was not exactly collegial, but she found the administrative work simply stupid and she tried to extract herself from it as much as possible.¹⁰⁵ She did not always succeed. In her diary, she grumbled about a "somewhat vulgar and bossy girl" who intervened when Hillesum tried to slip away at five o'clock: "No, you don't, you can't possibly go before

97 E.T., 496. *Het Werk*, 525; Thursday evening, 16 July 1942: Ik zal heel veel goede dingen moeten doen later voor andere mensen, om dit alles weer goed te maken.

98 E.T., 488. *Het Werk*, 516; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942: Er schijnt daar trouwens heel wat gekonkeld te worden.

99 E.T., 502. *Het Werk*, 532; Saturday morning, 25 July 1942.

100 E.T., 498. *Het Werk*, 527; Tuesday evening, 21 July 1942.

101 E.T., 502. *Het Werk*, 532; Saturday morning, 25 July 1942.

102 E.T., 511. *Het Werk*, 539-540; Tuesday morning, 28 July 1942.

103 E.T., 502. *Het Werk*, 532; Saturday morning, 25 July 1942.

104 E.T., 502. *Het Werk*, 532; Saturday morning, 25 July 1942: Midden op de ochtend gingen we gisteren plotseling verhuizen, tafels en stoelen onder me weggetrokken, wachtende mensen dromden het vertrek binnen, iedereen gaf orders en tegenorders, zelfs over de geringste stoel, maar Etty zat in een hoekje op de vuile grond tussen haar schrijfmachine en pakje boterhammen en leest Rilke.

105 E.T., 504. *Het Werk*, 534; Monday morning, 27 July 1942.

that guide has been typed out, you're being inconsiderate."¹⁰⁶ Eventually, Hillesum had to type out the document twice, while she wanted nothing more than to go to her beloved Spier, suffering the whole time from pain in her back.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Hillesum admonished herself about her bad attitude: "You should remember that your typing is what allows you to stay on in Amsterdam with the people you love. And you honestly take things easily enough already."¹⁰⁸

On 28 July 1942, Hillesum received a form from the Jewish Council, which was meant especially for employees. The only thing she did not yet have was her identity number, which she was to organize imminently. "I shall take the few steps I have to."¹⁰⁹ One of those steps was that Hillesum requested that she be transferred to Camp Westerbork. The request was granted and she was appointed to the department of "Social Welfare for People in Transit."¹¹⁰

Hillesum in Camp Westerbork

In Camp Westerbork, Hillesum was able – just as during the brief period when she worked for the Jewish Council in Amsterdam – to determine her own course and pursue her goals. Her stay in Camp Westerbork, which was interrupted three times by furlough in Amsterdam, has been called by Rachel Brenner the "test phase". In this stage, Hillesum's literary and journalistic talents combined with her ability to be the compassionate participant in the Jewish fate came to the front.¹¹¹ As an employee of the Jewish Council, she was assigned to the department of Social Welfare for People in Transit. Because of her work for the Jewish Council, Hillesum was in a privileged position. Employees of the Council had a furlough regulation that enabled Hillesum to leave the camp. The Jewish Council staff was temporarily held back from deportation and they were allowed to write letters without restriction. This later changed and on 5 July 1943 restrictions were imposed and the special status of the members of the Jewish Council

106 *Ibid.*: Nee, hoor, dat is onmogelijk, die leidraad moet nog afgetikt, dat is heel oncollegiaal, dat je al weg wilt.

107 E.T., 504. *Het Werk*, 534; Monday morning, 27 July 1942.

108 *Ibid.*: Je moet bedenken, dat je, door daar aangenomen te zijn, nog in Amsterdam kunt blijven bij diegenen, die je dierbaar zijn. En je maakt het je heus al gemakkelijk genoeg.

109 E.T., 508. *Het Werk*, 538; Tuesday morning, 28 July 1942: Ik zal die paar stappen doen, die ik meen te moeten doen.

110 *Het Werk*, XIV.

111 Brenner, "Etty Hillesum", 235-251.

in Camp Westerbork expired.¹¹² When this happened, some of the staff members were sent back to Amsterdam while another contingent, including ETTY HILLESUM, remained in Westerbork, but now without the possibility of leaving the camp. Until June 1943, HILLESUM has made use of the leave regulation three times. During each period of leave, she stayed at Han Wegerif's old and trusty home at the Gabriël Metsu Street.

Her first stay at Camp Westerbork only lasted two weeks, from 30 July to 14 August 1942. She returned to Amsterdam and visited her parents, who then still lived in Deventer. On 21 August 1942, HILLESUM was back in Camp Westerbork. She was back in Amsterdam by 4 September 1942, and in that same month she took her leave of Julius Spier, who had died of cancer. HILLESUM would return to Camp Westerbork on 20 November 1942, but the work in the camp and Spier's death were altogether too much for her. HILLESUM wrote that she was reminded of the fact that a human being has a body too.¹¹³ She fell ill: "The doctor said yesterday that my inner life is too intense, that I must come down to earth, that I keep knocking at the gates of heaven, and that my physique simply cannot stand it."¹¹⁴ Therefore, it is good to recuperate in Amsterdam for a few weeks, she wrote, and then to return to Camp Westerbork with new strength.¹¹⁵ A few days later, HILLESUM was tormented by doubt and anxiety. She preferred to return the following Wednesday. At the same time, she was concerned about the growing risks: "there are more and more SS men in the camp, and there is more and more barbed wire all round, and everything is getting stricter [...]. Can I take that risk?"¹¹⁶ HILLESUM did not pursue this subject, but it seems that the question reflects her doubt about whether going back to the camp would be a good idea. She then discussed the intervention of the doctor. He was surprised that HILLESUM had not yet returned to the camp. HILLESUM, however, stated that she has nothing to do with that doctor: "Should even a hundred doctors pronounce me as fit as a fiddle and my inner voice tells me that I mustn't go, well then, I won't go."¹¹⁷ Thus, HILLESUM decided herself if and when she

112 *Het Werk*, XVII.

113 E.T., 514. *Het Werk*, 543; Tuesday morning, 15 September 1942.

114 E.T., 515. *Het Werk*, 544; Tuesday afternoon, 15 September 1942: De dokter zei gisteren, dat ik een te sterk innerlijk leven leid, dat ik te weinig op de aarde leef en al bijna aan de grens van de hemel en dat mijn fysiek dat alles niet dragen kan.

115 E.T., 532. *Het Werk*, 564; Friday evening, 25 September 1942.

116 E.T., 538. *Het Werk*, 570; Friday morning, 2 October 1942: Er komt steeds meer S.S. in het kamp en steeds meer prikkeldraad eromheen, het wordt alles verscherpter [...], kun je dat risico nemen?

117 E.T., 538. *Het Werk*, 570; Friday morning, 2 October 1942: Al verklaren honderd dokters van de wereld me voor kerngezond, als een innerlijke stem mij zegt, dat ik niet gaan moet, welnu, dan moet ik niet gaan.

would return to the camp. She intended to go the following Wednesday, but she was still waiting for a sign from God. She hoped for it very much, because she wanted to see everything and be among her people. She wanted to understand it all, so that she could describe and explain it all later.¹¹⁸

Back at Camp Westerbork, Hillesum wrote on 23 November 1942 in a letter to Han Wegerif and others: "It isn't as 'idyllic' as in the summer, nothing like."¹¹⁹ Now, mud, barracks and impoverishment characterize the camp. A week later, on 5 December 1942, she returned to Amsterdam. Again her health fared poorly and she had to stay in the Dutch Israelite Hospital for a while. It took half a year before she was recovered enough to pick up her work in helping the sick in Camp Westerbork. On 6 June 1943, Hillesum returned to the camp – now it was definitive. About her first encounter with the camp in Drenthe, in the summer of 1942, Hillesum wrote that she only knew Drenthe from its megalithic tombs. Now, there was a village on the heath, which consisted of wooden barracks. Hillesum had never realized that for years Camp Westerbork had the function of a "safe haven" for Jewish refugees from Germany. Of those first days in the camp, Hillesum wrote that she had the feeling that she was walking through the pages of a history book:

I met people who had been in Buchenwald and Dachau at a time when to us these were only distant, threatening sounds. I met people who travelled around the world on that ship. You must have heard of that; the papers were full of it.¹²⁰

Hillesum had the feeling that she was seeing a part of the Jewish predicament in tangible form despite the fact that, as she wrote, "we had thought there was nothing in Drenthe except megalithic tombs."¹²¹

118 E.T., 542. *Het Werk*, 574; Saturday morning, 3 October 1942.

119 E.T., 576. *Het Werk*, 612; Letter 20, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 23 November 1942: Het is niet meer zo "idyllisch" als in de zomer, o nee.

120 E.T., 580. *Het Werk*, 617-618; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: Ik trof er mensen aan, die al in Buchenwalde en Dachau gezeten hadden in een tijd, toen dit voor ons nog verre en dreigende klanken waren. Ik trof er mensen aan, die nog op dat schip hadden gezeten, dat rond de wereld voer en in geen enkele haven landen mocht, U weet wel, onze kranten stonden er toen nog vol van. [Etty Hillesum is referring to the St. Louis; cf. the contribution by Jurjen Wiersma in this volume, "One Ought to Write a Chronicle of Westerbork", 143-156].

121 E.T., 581. *Het Werk*, 618; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: En dat, terwijl men dacht, dat er in Drenthe alleen maar hunnebedden waren.

'Social Worker' in Camp Westerbork

On 7 June 1943, Hillesum wrote to Han Wegerif and other friends that she had had a pleasant journey and that it felt as if she had been in Camp Westerbork for a hundred years again, now that she was again absorbed in the great misery of the transports.¹²² That night, she had worked hard: "From four to nine I dragged screaming children around and carried luggage for exhausted women. It was hard going, and heart-rending."¹²³ Hillesum, however, stressed that she was glad to have returned to Camp Westerbork.¹²⁴ A day later, Hillesum reported again on her activities. That day, besides the dragging of children and luggage, Hillesum had not been given a particular assignment, which was to her liking. She just wandered about finding ways to be helpful.¹²⁵ Alongside the care for the luggage and the youngest inmates, Hillesum tried as best she could to be a sympathetic ear. One woman was able to share her story with Hillesum just before being deported. The woman embraced her and said: "Thank you for being such a help."¹²⁶ Hillesum also tried to be supportive by simply being there and by putting her arm around the shoulders of the crying and desperate people standing at the registration table.¹²⁷

In the middle of June 1943, Hillesum wrote to Maria Tuinzing of how happy she was with her work. She was now in charge of caring for four hospital barracks. She had to ensure that the people got their luggage and food provisions. What Hillesum appreciated most, however, was that she had free access to the entire complex of hospital barracks, and was able to do her work there at any time of the day. A while later, she observes, it did not feel like camp-life at all: "[...] I live just as I did in Amsterdam, really; sometimes I don't even notice that I'm in a camp, which is very strange."¹²⁸ In addition

122 E.T., 599. *Het Werk*, 639; Letter 36, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 7 June 1943.

123 E.T., 600. *Het Werk*, 640; Letter 36, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 7 June 1943: Van 4 tot 9 heb ik met kleine huilende kinderen gesjouwd en bagage gedragen voor uitgeputte vrouwen. Het was hard- en hartverscheurend.

124 E.T., 601. *Het Werk*, 641; Letter 36, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 7 June 1943.

125 E.T., 602. *Het Werk*, 642; Letter 37, Probably to Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 8 June 1943.

126 E.T., 602. *Het Werk*, 642; Letter 37, Probably to Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 8 June 1943: Ik dank U voor de steun, die U me gegeven hebt.

127 E.T., 545. *Het Werk*, 578; Thursday afternoon, 8 October 1942.

128 E.T., 603. *Het Werk*, 643; Letter 38, To Maria Tuinzing, Westerbork, undated; mid-June 1943: [...] ik leef eigenlijk net zo als in Amsterdam, soms merk ik niet, dat ik in een kamp ben, dat is iets heel vreemds bij mij.

to her work in the hospital barracks, Hillesum also occasionally worked in the penal barracks. She would take messages from the people there to family and friends in the camp. The so-called “S-Gevalen” – people with a “criminal record” – were housed in the penal barracks. The well-known journalist Philip Mechanicus was deported to Camp Westerbork as an “S-Geval”. Mechanicus’ crime was having dared to travel by tram without wearing the compulsory yellow star. He had been betrayed and subsequently arrested.¹²⁹ In August 1943, Hillesum wrote about a bizarre case of a nine-month-old infant who had entered the camp with a “criminal record”, the parents being unknown. The few-months-old girl was not permitted to be with the other babies in her cart, in the fresh air. She had to stay inside because, after all, she had a “criminal record”. Hillesum was truly amazed by this. She claimed, however, to have encountered many absurd situations in the camp.¹³⁰

On 6 July 1943, Hillesum reported to her friends in Amsterdam that her work was very demanding. The hospital barracks and the assigned work in the penal barracks required a lot of her. This was also due to a diminished work force, half of the Jewish Council employees having gone back to Amsterdam. One afternoon, while busy in one of the large barracks, Hillesum fainted. She, however, saw the incident as having an advantage: she had discovered the boundaries of her physical capabilities.¹³¹ The desperation she was witnessing among the people the night before their deportation, also weighed heavily upon her. Hillesum was faced with the realization that, ultimately, there was nothing she could do; in particular, she was saddened by the little old ladies who sought her consolation:

One after another they clutch at you and implore, “I don’t really have to go on this transport, do I?” and “Surely they won’t take us away from here,” and then always the same thing over and over, “Isn’t there anything you can do for me?” Yesterday a very old woman, sick, nothing but skin and bones, asked me, “Do you think there will be medical assistance in Poland?” In the face of something like that, I feel like running away.¹³²

129 Philip Mechanicus, *In Depôt: Dagboek uit Westerbork* (Hooghalen/Laren: Verbum, 2008²), 10.

130 E.T., 642. *Het Werk*, 684; Letter 63, To Han Wegerif and others, Fragment, Westerbork, Sunday, 22 August 1943.

131 E.T., 619. *Het Werk*, 660; Letter 47, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 5 July 1943-Friday, 9 July 1943.

132 E.T., 607. *Het Werk*, 646; Letter 42, To Han Wegerif and others, Fragment, Westerbork, Undated, after 26 June 1943: Iedereen klampt zich aan je vast en smeekt: ‘Ik hoef toch zeker niet mee op transport, hè’ en ‘ze zullen ons hier toch niet weghalen’ en altijd weer hetzelfde: ‘kunt U

Etty Hillesum sometimes felt that she failed to measure up to her task. She was often so overcome by exhaustion that she was unable to mean anything to others.¹³³ She began to ask herself what kind of help she actually had to offer her people. She wrote that, on the eve of their deportation, she intended to speak reassuring words to the mothers and clothe their babies, but in truth:

[...] we all know that we are yielding up our sick and defenceless brothers and sisters to hunger, heat, cold, exposure, and destruction, and yet we dress them and escort them to the bare cattle cars – and if they can't walk, we carry them on stretchers.¹³⁴

Hillesum could almost curse herself for that, and she wondered in what sort of fatal mechanism she had become enmeshed.¹³⁵

The “Guardian” of the Family

“Until further notice, I'm keeping them here for certain,”¹³⁶ Hillesum wrote of her parents at the end of June 1943, in a letter to Christine van Nooten. Her parents and brother Mischa had been staying in Camp Westerbork for several days at that point, and Hillesum puts herself forward as “the guardian of the family.”¹³⁷ She made a great effort to ease the conditions for her parents and brother Mischa, and tried to take the best possible care of them by contacting the outside world, to which she wrote regularly requesting food in order to supplement the camp rations. Hillesum's father refused warm meals. The alternative was bread. So Hillesum asked Christine van Nooten to be sure to send bread or rye bread. Hillesum informed her that

niks voor me doen.' Gisteren vroeg me een stokoud, broodmager ziek vrouwtje heel kinderlijk: 'Denkt U, dat er medische hulp is in Polen?' In zo een geval loop ik dan maar liever weg.

133 E.T., 657. *Het Werk*, 701; Letter 68, To Maria Tuinzing, Westerbork, Thursday, 2 September 1943.

134 E.T., 645. *Het Werk*, 688; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 24 August 1943: [...] we weten toch, dat we onze zieken en weerlozen gaan prijsgeven aan honger, aan hitte en kou en onbeschutheid en verdelging en we kleden ze zelf aan en geleiden ze naar de kale beestenwagens, als ze niet kunnen lopen, dan maar op brancards.

135 E.T., 645. *Het Werk*, 688; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 24 August 1943.

136 E.T., 605. *Het Werk*, 645; Letter 41, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, undated, postmarked 26 June 1943: Voorlopig houd ik ze zeker hier.

137 E.T., 604. *Het Werk*, 644; Letter 40, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Monday, 21 June 1943.

only parcels of up to five kilogrammes were permitted, and that it was safest to send them directly by registered mail to Hillesum's address: "Mr. E. Hillesum, Assistant, Jewish Council, Westerbork Camp, Post Hoog-Halen. O, Drenthe. Top left: Barracks 34."¹³⁸ Hillesum saw herself as the "family rations-distribution centre." Hillesum described how she walked about with little tin boxes from one person to the other and that doing so gave her real pleasure.¹³⁹ In her letters, Hillesum shows her gratitude when a package once again arrived:

Christine, that Groningen cake! It was princely. Altogether it was such a magnificent parcel. I immediately gave Father a few small slices and half a bar of chocolate. It's marvellous, I just run over to him, five minutes from my barracks, pass him something through the window, and run back again. By holding on to one's people here, you can look after them and keep them going – with the help of the outside world. Mischa was there when I unpacked the parcel; he beamed. You had prepared it with such care and love, it sustains us – not just the contents, but also the thought that there are people who so much want to help us.¹⁴⁰

Hillesum was, at times, burdened by the constant appeals she made to her friends for help. In this regard, she emphasized that it was not for herself that she was asking. Hillesum was prepared to do anything for her parents for some form of relief from camp life.¹⁴¹ She was thrilled when she received the anti-dust goggles Christine had sent.¹⁴² Thanks to Hillesum's work in the

138 E.T., 605. *Het Werk*, 645; Letter 40, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Monday, 21 June 1943: Mr. E. Hillesum, employé Joodse Raad, Kamp Westerbork, Post Hoog-Halen. O, Drenthe. Links boven: barak 34.

139 E.T., 630. *Het Werk*, 672; Letter 55, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, before Saturday, 31 July 1943.

140 E.T., 624. *Het Werk*, 665; Letter 49, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Thursday, 8 July 1943: Christine, die Groningerkoek! Vorstelijk was hij. Het was helemaal zo een prachtig pakket. Ik ben vader direct een paar plakjes van die koek en een halve reep gaan brengen. Dat is zo enig, ik ren even naar hem toe, 5 minuten van mijn barak vandaan, en geef hem iets door het raam en ren weer terug. En dat is het heerlijke ervan als je je mensen hier kunt houden, je kunt ze verzorgen en op peil houden met behulp van het achterland. Mischa was er bij, toen ik je pakket uitpakte, hij glunderde. Je hebt het met zoveel zorg en liefde samengesteld, het is werkelijk roerend, het is niet alleen de materiële inhoud, die zo sterkend is, ook de gedachte, dat er mensen zijn, die je er op die manier doorheen willen helpen, is heel troostrijk.

141 E.T., 612. *Het Werk*, 655; Letter 45, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Thursday, 1 July 1942.

142 E.T., 612. *Het Werk*, 652; Letter 45, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Thursday, 1 July 1942.

hospital barracks, she was able to visit her father when he became ill and ended up in the camp hospital. She required no special permission for her visits. Hillesum's father joked about the hospital: "You have to be as fit as a fiddle to survive in this hospital, [...] if you are sick you haven't a hope."¹⁴³ Hillesum did her utmost for her mother as well. The relationship with her mother had once been difficult, but here in the camp Etty Hillesum is a proud, caring daughter. She worried about her mother's bronchitis and her possible hospitalization, and cooked spaghetti for her.¹⁴⁴ Hillesum also asked the outside world to send earplugs for her mother. Her barracks are very noisy at night.¹⁴⁵ Besides the good care-giving, Hillesum was intent on keeping her family off the transport trains. To her friend Milli Ortman, Hillesum wrote about Mischa's "case". After first describing how tremendously brave her parents and brother had been, she continued:

The Jewish Council thinks it imperative that you pursue the Barneveld option strenuously with the *Zentralstelle*¹⁴⁶ on behalf of Mischa and the family (remember: not me!), and urges you to do so. Perhaps you will be able to get Mengelberg¹⁴⁷ to intervene personally with Rauter.¹⁴⁸

Hillesum emphasized that it was not about her, but about her family. For Mischa, there was the possibility of special dispensation on the grounds of his musical talent. Mischa refused transfer to the special camp for privileged Jews at Barneveld because he did not want to go without his parents. Hillesum found Mischa's attachment to his parents moving, and remarked on his fear that his parents would have to go to Poland, saying that everything will work out; "Until further notice I'm keeping them here

143 E.T., 633. *Het Werk*, 674; Letter 56, To Maria Tuinzing, Westerbork, Saturday, 7 August 1943-Sunday, 8 August 1943: Men moet kerngezond zijn, om hier het ziekenhuis te kunnen overleven, zegt vader, als zieke haal je het beslist niet.

144 E.T., 629. *Het Werk*, 671; Letter 54, To Maria Tuinzing, Fragment. Westerbork, undated; end of July 1943.

145 E.T., 639. *Het Werk*, 681; Letter 59, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Thursday, 12 August 1943.

146 Zentralstelle (Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung): The organisation responsible for the deportation of the Jews from the Netherlands.

147 Mengelberg: J.W. Mengelberg was conductor and led the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam.

148 E.T., 604. *Het Werk*, 643-644; Letter 39, To Milli Ortman, Westerbork, Monday, 21 June 1943: De Joodse Raad vindt het nodig en heeft er op aangedrongen, dat jij de zaak van Barneveld met betrekking tot Mischa en het gezin (- je denkt eraan: ik niet! -) bij de Zentralstelle met kracht blijft bevorderen. Misschien kun je nog bereiken, dat Mengelberg zich persoonlijk tot Rauter wendt.

for certain.¹⁴⁹ More than a week later, Hillesum wrote to Millie Ortman about an anxious transport night. Mischa had been deferred temporarily, and her parents who were on the “parents list” had escaped:

[...] the Zentralstelle must tell our camp commandant through official channels that my parents and Mischa are to be kept on here. Otherwise it won't be any use at all.¹⁵⁰

Hillesum explained in the letter that keeping them in Camp Westerbork was going to prove difficult. The “parents list” was not reliable. “Next week, the battle starts all over again [...].”¹⁵¹ In a letter to Christine van Nooten on 1 July 1943, she wrote that in Amsterdam the fight for Barneveld continues, and that she was grateful for not having been one of the Jewish Council employees to be sent back to Amsterdam. Hillesum was permitted to stay on in Camp Westerbork and she believed she could keep on protecting her parents.¹⁵² Two days later, she revealed to Klaas Smelik Senior and his daughter Johanna that her parents were being prepared for deportation, “unless something comes of Barneveld after all.”¹⁵³ On Monday, 5 July 1943, Hillesum discovered that her parents were on the list for the next transport. Hillesum wrote that she immediately hastened to the various authorities. She was informed that this time her parents were still safe, “but you can't be certain until the last minute.”¹⁵⁴

This time, Hillesum had succeeded, but it had been a great effort. She wrote extensively about it. She was not sure what she had done exactly, but suddenly a mysterious gentleman appeared. According to Hillesum, he looked like a white slave-trafficker in a French film. With this gentleman, she went to all sorts of camp VIPs, getting the feeling that a sort of “underworld”

149 E.T., 605. *Het Werk*, 645; Letter 41, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, undated, postmarked 26 June 1943: Voorlopig houd ik ze zeker hier.

150 E.T., 610. *Het Werk*, 650; Letter 43, To Milli Ortmann, Westerbork, Tuesday, 29 June 1943: De Zentralstelle moet langs ambtelijke weg aan de commandant hier meedelen, dat mijn ouders en Mischa hier opgehouden moeten worden. Anders helpt het alles niet.

151 E.T., 610. *Het Werk*, 650; Letter 43, To Milli Ortmann, Westerbork, Tuesday, 29 June 1943: Volgende week begint het gevecht om onze ouders opnieuw.

152 E.T., 612. *Het Werk*, 653; Letter 45, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Thursday, 1 July 1942.

153 E.T., 615. *Het Werk*, 656; Letter 46, To Johanna and Klaas Smelik and others, Westerbork, Saturday, 3 July 1943: [...] tenzij onverwachts Barneveld toch nog iets wordt.

154 E.T., 617. *Het Werk*, 658; Letter 47, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 5 July 1943-Friday, 9 July 1943: [...] maar tot de laatste minuut is dat niet zeker.

in Camp Westerbork was being revealed to her.¹⁵⁵ After being ushered into an interview with the “Registration”,¹⁵⁶ a little later she appeared before “a senile little man who presumably held a mysterious position of power and was able to keep people off the transports even after all seemed lost.”¹⁵⁷ That same day, an end was put to the special status granted to personnel at the Westerbork section of the Jewish Council. Hillesum had lost all of her privileges. A few days later, it also became clear that the Barneveld option was lost. In a letter to Milli Ortman, Etty Hillesum thanked her for all her efforts. In her letter, she wrote that she assumed that her parents will now have to go on a transport, and that there was probably nothing more to be done. Her brother Mischa had permission to remain, but declined. Etty Hillesum pointed out that it was necessary to keep a close eye on her brother because he was about to confront the commander by telling him that he was a murderer.¹⁵⁸ Their parents’ names had been removed from the transport list four times, due to the Jewish camp leaders’ intervention. It concerned two transports to Sobibor in July 1943, and two transports to Auschwitz-Birkenau in August of 1943.

On 1 September 1943, Hillesum wrote to Christine van Nooten that the family is still together, so far.¹⁵⁹ However, a week later the deportation order for the Hillesum family arrived from The Hague and there was nothing left to be done. On 7 September 1943, a train departed from Camp Westerbork destined for Auschwitz-Birkenau, with the Hillesum family on board.

The Chronicler of a Piece of History

In March 1941, Etty Hillesum started writing in her diary. Initially, she did not have the intention of becoming the “chronicler” of her age, but started writing to bring order and peace to her inner life, and it is most likely that she did so at Julius Spier’s advice, as part of her therapy. Hillesum saw the

155 E.T., 618. *Het Werk*, 659; Letter 47, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 5 July 1943-Friday, 9 July 1943.

156 *Registratur*: The department at Westerbork where it was decided which names were put on the transport list.

157 E.T., 618. *Het Werk*, 659; Letter 47, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 5 July 1943-Friday, 9 July 1943: [...] een seniel oud mannetje, die een geheimzinnige machtspositie schijnt te bekleden en die mensen van een transport vrij schijnt te kunnen krijgen.

158 E.T., 627. *Het Werk*, 668; Letter 51, To Milli Ortmann, Westerbork, Friday, 9 July 1943.

159 E.T., 655. *Het Werk*, 698; Letter 67, To Christine van Nooten, Westerbork, Wednesday, 1 September 1943.

usefulness of writing, and she believed that it would not be a bad idea at all to get an overall picture of an entire month, including all kinds of trivial details. It would provide a statistical overview of headaches, stomach upsets, and mood swings.¹⁶⁰ Hillesum writes regularly about these issues, but in her diary most of the attention went to her relationship with Julius Spier. Occasionally, some reflections on the war and the Jewish situation occur in her notes, yet she chose, especially in the first few months of writing, not to dwell on them for too long. However, as the anti-Jewish measures increased, Hillesum wrote more frequently about her view of the suffering, and of the fate that awaited the Jews. At the same time, she struggled with her alleged inability to write. She did not always succeed in finding a way to express herself, to find her own form.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, she expected that things would turn out fine in terms of her writing talent: "Later, I shall no doubt find the right brush strokes, later when I really get down to writing."¹⁶²

Hillesum wrote that already at an early age she had had the feeling that a life as a writer awaited her. She used to have a vision: "I always saw a slender hand and lots of paper and the hand kept writing, writing, on and on."¹⁶³ In August 1941, Hillesum wrote about the horrors of war that seized her, but that she insisted on remaining a witness. Beyond all her subjective suffering, as she described it, she kept an objective curiosity about everything in this world. Hillesum believed that it was her task to become the chronicler of a piece of history in which she herself participated.¹⁶⁴ In July 1942, a few days before starting work at the Jewish Council, she reflected again on her writing task:

And I shall wield this slender fountain pen as if it were a hammer, and my words will have to be so many hammer strokes with which to beat out the story of our fate and of a piece of history as it is and never was before.¹⁶⁵

160 E.T., 77. *Het Werk*, 82; Tuesday evening, 7 August 1941.

161 E.T., 169. *Het Werk*, 178; Saturday evening, 6 December 1941: [...] de eigen vorm te vinden.

162 E.T., 288. *Het Werk*, 300; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: [...] later vind ik wel de juiste penseelstreken, later, als ik ècht ga schrijven.

163 E.T., 117. *Het Werk*, 123; Friday morning, 3 October 1941: Ik zag altijd een smalle hand en veel papieren en die hand die schreef, schreef altijd maar door.

164 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941.

165 E.T., 484. *Het Werk*, 511; Friday, 10 July 1942: En met deze slanke vulpen zou ik nu moeten zwaaien als was het een hamer en de woorden zouden even zovele mokerslagen moeten zijn, om te vertellen over een lot en over een stuk geschiedenis, zoals het er voor dien nog niet was.

According to Hillesum, some people must survive in order to become the chroniclers of their time. Hillesum wanted to become one of them.¹⁶⁶ Her choice to go to Camp Westerbork puts her in the position of fulfilling her task as a writer. She had asserted her right to speak out due to her presence at the centre of all human suffering, at the front, in Camp Westerbork.¹⁶⁷ After her first stay at the camp, she had recognized her writing task as her life's duty: "But if I have one real duty in life, in these times, at this stage of my life, then it is to write, to record, to retain."¹⁶⁸

Because of her work for the Jewish Council, Hillesum was initially permitted to write letters without restriction. Her friends in Amsterdam often received post from her. In those letters, she reported with regularity on all camp events. In particular, with the illegal publication of two letters in the autumn of 1943 by David Koning, Hillesum had already begun to fulfil her duty as chronicler of her age. In these letters, she wrote extensively about the tragic history that took place on the heath. A letter dated December 1942, written in Amsterdam during her leave, was addressed to two sisters in The Hague. Hillesum reflected on her camp experiences and the transports in the autumn of 1942. It was not an easy task for her to express it all: "My fountain pen cannot form words strong enough to convey even the remotest picture of these transports."¹⁶⁹ At the end of the letter, Hillesum explained to the recipients that they may now be under the assumption that she has told them something about Camp Westerbork. Wrongly so, she insisted. While she recalled her memories, she was unable to describe all aspects of Camp Westerbork. She thought that her story is one-sided: "I could have told quite another, filled with hatred and bitterness and rebellion."¹⁷⁰ But hatred is the cheapest and easiest way, according to Hillesum, it would not improve the situation. Finding something to say about Camp Westerbork proved difficult also due to its ambiguous character, wrote Hillesum. Camp Westerbork was, on the one hand, a stable community in the making; on the other hand, it was a transit camp where people were constantly on the

166 E.T., 484. *Het Werk*, 511; Friday, 10 July 1942.

167 E.T., 531. *Het Werk*, 563; Thursday, 24 September 1942.

168 E.T., 537. *Het Werk*, 568; Wednesday, 30 September 1942: Maar als ik één echte plicht heb in het leven, in deze tijd, in dit stadium van mijn leven, dan is het: schrijven, noteren, vasthouden.

169 E.T., 584. *Het Werk*, 621; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: Mijn vulpen beschikt niet over die indrukwekkende accenten, om ook maar in de verste verte een beeld van deze transporten te kunnen geven.

170 E.T., 590. *Het Werk*, 629; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: Ik zou mij er een voor kunnen stellen, dat meer vervuld was van haat en verbittering en opstandigheid.

move, arriving in the camp one day and leaving on the next Tuesday, on a train bound for the East. Hillesum described how most people clung to Camp Westerbork and would rather have stayed behind barbed wire than be dragged away to unknown destinies, but she also reflected on the freedom that people took to make their own choices, despite the circumstances:

You can imagine how dreadfully crowded it is in half a square kilometre. Naturally, few follow the example of the man who packed his rucksack and went on transport of his own accord. When asked why, he said that he wanted the freedom to decide to go when *he* wanted to go. It reminds me of the Roman judge who said to a martyr, "Do you know that I have the power to have you killed?" And the martyr answered, "Yes, but I have the power of letting myself be killed."¹⁷¹

"This one man," who went along on his own initiative, whom Hillesum wrote about, was aware of his agency. Hillesum emphasized this notion of agency by referring to a martyr of Roman antiquity, who, in a sense, appropriated the power of his judge by turning the tables: the judge only had the power to kill because the martyr had the power to be slain. Indirectly, Hillesum seems to refer to her own situation. After all, she voluntarily chose to stay in Camp Westerbork, and she returned to the camp each time after her leave, and despite the pressure exerted upon her to go into hiding, she followed her own course. In a letter dated from August 1943 to her friends in Amsterdam, two weeks before her departure to Poland, Hillesum wrote about the night before deportation on Tuesday. She described the night as "hell." The chaos, despair, and fear among the people in the barracks were enormous. Hillesum wrote how she was squeezing tomato juice for the babies, so that they should at least have some form of nourishment on their journey, and about a woman having gone into labour, who was allowed to be carried to the hospital instead of the freight train. She wrote about a partially paralyzed girl who was helped in getting dressed, and about the piercing screams of the babies in the night. Hillesum also gave a detailed

171 E.T., 583. *Het Werk*, 621; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: U begrijpt, er is een groot gedrang op die halve vierkante kilometer. Want niet iedereen is natuurlijk als die ene man, die z'n rugzak inpakte en uit eigen beweging meetrok en op de vraag 'waarom' antwoordde, dat hij vrij wilde zijn te gaan, wanneer hij dat wilde. Ik moest toen denken aan die Romeinse rechter, die tegen een martelaar zei: 'Weet je, dat ik de macht heb om je te doden', waarop die martelaar antwoordde: 'Maar weet U, dat ik de macht heb, gedood te worden.

description of Commander Albert Konrad Gemmeker¹⁷² and how “he is inspecting his troops” on the morning of departure. He reminded Hillesum of a hairdresser’s assistant, but also of a stagedoor Johnny; his face seemed to her that of a joyless hypocrite.¹⁷³ Hillesum stated that a night like this cannot be described in words and images, but she felt that she must try to convey at least something of it: “One always has the feeling here of being the ears and eyes of a piece of Jewish history, but there is also the need sometimes to be a still, small voice.”¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

In this article, Etty Hillesum’s attitude and choice to not go into hiding were examined from the perspective of her agency. The main question was: In what way did Etty Hillesum give shape to her fate? In line with Klaas A.D. Smelik, I have highlighted some aspects of Hillesum’s attitude. Notable is that Hillesum rejected the hatred of the persecutors by first fighting those feelings of hatred within herself. This does not imply that she was blind to the evildoings of the Nazis, but, according to Hillesum, it was the malignant system in which individuals were ensnared that was to blame, and that these individuals were to be pitied the most. Her sense of humour and her focus on the beauty of nature are both aspects of Hillesum’s attitude. According to Frankl, these aspects testify to a degree of the “art of living” of which Hillesum was capable. People tend to use humour in difficult circumstances, as humour helps to put things into perspective and “lighten the load.” This also applies to her focus on nature, which Frankl connects to a process of internalization. The choice to focus on the beautiful things in life, in spite of all the misery, enabled Hillesum to deal with the persecution and to find means of coping. One of those coping methods was accepting her fate, which in Hillesum’s idea was ambiguous. Both, destruction and preservation were possible. According to Hillesum, the mental preparation

172 Albert Konrad Gemmeker (1907-1982) was commander of Camp Westerbork between October 1942 and April 1945. After the war, he was imprisoned for ten years, but with Queen Juliana’s accession to the throne he was pardoned for good behaviour. In 1951, the former camp commander was a free man again.

173 E.T., 653. *Het Werk*, 696; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 24 August 1943.

174 E.T., 644. *Het Werk*, 687; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 24 August 1943: Men voelt zich steeds oren en ogen van een stuk joodse geschiedenis, men heeft soms ook de behoefte een kleine stem te zijn.

for the Jewish fate was of the utmost importance. With a strong inner self, fate could indeed be dealt with.

Finally, I have considered Hillesum's choice to go to the "front". It was clear to her that she intended to share the fate of her people; thus, hiding was not an option. She did not want to evade a common fate, but she was also not intending to meet her fate passively. This becomes clear in the light of her "outer agency", by which I mean her decision to work for the Jewish Council, her request to be transferred to Camp Westerbork, and her decision to return to the camp after each period of leave. Etty Hillesum had set herself some goals. She did not just want to share the fate of the Jewish people, she wanted to stand tall with the Jews, and be of service to them. Furthermore, Hillesum wanted to be the chronicler of her age and be entitled to speak after the war. She wanted to experience everything and understand everything in order to be able to capture it later. By working for the Jewish Council, first in Amsterdam and subsequently in Camp Westerbork, she created the conditions to achieve these goals. Etty Hillesum did not achieve all of her goals. She did all that was in her power for her parents and brother Mischa: firstly, to ease their stay at the camp, and in going to great lengths to keep them out of the deportation train. Ultimately, she was unable to protect her family from their fate. Nevertheless, she did succeed in her mission of becoming the chronicler of her age. We are left with texts that not only are a testimony to her great literary talent, but also to her ability to continue to determine her own course in the midst of the most terrifying period in history, and to find means of coping with the Shoah.

About the author

Lotte Bergen (1978) studied History at Leiden University (Netherlands) with a specialization in Political Culture and National Identities. She obtained a Master's in Art in 2015 with a thesis on Etty Hillesum and her agency. In 2013, she wrote a book about the commander of the transit camp Westerbork entitled *Albert Konrad Gemmeke: Commandant van Westerbork* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2013). She wrote "Handelingsvrijheid binnen nazibegrenzing: Etty Hillesum en haar invulling van het 'Massenschicksal'" (2015) and "Etty Hillesum en Hélène Berr: Reflecties op het nazikwaad en de moed de eigen koers te varen" (2016). At the moment, she is a PhD candidate at the faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University. Her thesis will focus on the relationship between Hillesum's knowledge of the Jewish fate and her agency. She is working as a history teacher and student counselor at a high school in The Hague.



6 One Ought to Write a Chronicle of Westerbork

Jurjen Wiersma

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Abstract

Westerbork was a concentration camp with greatly varied realities. It was “a world of its own” and life there was difficult to describe. In summer 1942, Etty Hillesum was inspired to murmur: “One ought to write a chronicle of Westerbork,” to which her companion replied, “Yes, but to do that one would have to be a great poet.” Hillesum agreed. She had been writing about life in the camp in her journal and letters, but was not (yet) a chronicler, something that she herself realized – being a professional chronicler had different requirements. This essay explores crucial elements from the doctoral theses of two Dutch historians, Eva Moraal and Marieke Meeuwenoord. The result is a type of mosaic that could be characterized as a chronicle – adequately and truly capturing the plight and predicament of Camp Westerbork and its inmates.

Keywords: Camp Westerbork, chronicle(r), Holocaust/Shoah, concentration camp, personal history, Etty Hillesum

The Jewish Council in Amsterdam appointed Etty Hillesum to an administrative position in its organization in mid-July 1942. She did not remain long in that position, however, becoming a social worker in the transition camp of Westerbork by the end of her first month on the job. Her task: To take care of all the men, women, and children who were being deported to Eastern Europe. In the first year, remarkably, she was permitted to travel freely between Amsterdam and Camp Westerbork. In June of 1943, the door slammed shut on that privilege, Etty Hillesum herself was deemed a prisoner and had to remain in Camp Westerbork as an inmate.

Introduction

Etty Hillesum had a promise to keep. She had assured two sisters in The Hague (there is no record of their names) that she would write a letter telling of her experiences in Camp Westerbork.¹ She began her letter at the end of December 1942, but hesitated: “Now I am worried about just what I should describe to you about life in Westerbork?” The only thing that Etty Hillesum had known about the province of Drenthe, where the camp was located, was that it was the site of megalithic tombs. But what she found there – between the “heather and the sky” – was a village of wooden barracks, fenced by barbed wire. In those fields of heather, she discovered a bleak reality: German immigrants and refugees had been imprisoned in the camp already for four years. She notes the different sorts of people at Camp Westerbork, and realizes that all of them have a unique history.

She meets people who had spent time in Buchenwald and Dachau, “when these places were only distant and ominous sounds for us.” She even met people who “had been on that ship that travelled around the world without being able to dock at a single harbour.” This was a reference to the liner *St. Louis* of the Hamburg-America-Line, which, in 1939, transported Jewish refugees to Cuba, in the wake of the *Kristallnacht* of 9-10 November 1938. The liner, not allowed to dock in Havana, turned around, and eventually permission was granted in Belgium, England, France, and the Netherlands for the Jewish people to disembark. Hillesum recalls this lucky turn of events with great empathy: “All our newspapers spoke about it.” Etty Hillesum comments that in virgin-like Drenthe, so untouched, one could still see its megalithic tombs, one gets the feeling of what it is to be able to see, in a tangible way, a piece of the last ten years of the Jewish *Schicksal* [destiny]. She says that in the summer of 1942, the small settlement of Westerbork was turned upside down. According to Etty Hillesum, the older residents of the camp were bewildered by the mass deportation of Jews from Holland to Eastern Europe. They had been told that there was a need for volunteer workers, but on a daily basis they had to face the shattering reality of people being displaced.

On a summer evening, while eating red cabbage in a dining barrack overlooking a field of lupins, Etty Hillesum was inspired to murmur: “One ought to write a chronicle of Westerbork.” The man next to her, also eating red cabbage, replied: “Yes, but to do that one would have to be a great poet.” Etty

1 E.T., 579-591. *Het Werk*, 616-629. Letter 23, To two Sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942. The title of my contribution is a quote from E.T., 581; *Het Werk*, 618.

Hillesum concurred that yes, indeed, it would take a great poet. Journalistic stories were no longer enough, she affirmed. Stringing together hard facts or writing inquisitive journalism would not suffice under the circumstances. Of this, she was quite certain. Etty Hillesum had been writing about the camp and life in the camp in her journal and letters. But a chronicle, she knew, had different requirements. At least in theory, a chronicle should describe the facts in a poetic fashion so that they are lifted to the theological-philosophical level, to be understood and perhaps even withstood.²

Knowing that it would require a chronicle to truly capture Camp Westerbork, Etty Hillesum nevertheless considered herself quite incapable of writing such a thing. I would sink quickly, she feared, into “general reflections.” She probably could not envision the power of her words. It is striking here that she switches from the use of the word “I” to the more formal “someone/one.” “And *überhaupt*, when one is contemplative by nature, one is generally unfit to give characteristics of a certain place and event.” Yet, in the end, she ventures to describe her eventful life there. At an unexpectedly late hour, she finds herself in front of some blank pages of paper. She begins. “Let me give you a rough idea, an inventory...”

Agitated History

At first glance, Camp Westerbork was no more than a mini-society shut out of the larger world. There was an orphanage, an expanding hospital complex with over a thousand beds, a synagogue, a morgue, and even a cinema. A shoe sole factory, and an institution for the mentally ill were under construction. On closer look, besides these buildings, there was a great deal of mud, kilometres of barbed wire, and guard towers with guns on the four corners “of our wooden village.” Observing the many crowds in Camp Westerbork, Hillesum compared the sight of them to the last pieces of driftwood grasped by drowning people after their ship has perished and sunk.

Etty Hillesum finds her description of Camp Westerbork contradictory. On the one hand, there is a stable society, albeit a society under duress. On

² Cf. F.O. van Gennep, *Albert Camus: Een studie van zijn ethisch denken* (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennep, 1966²). Camus was the author of *La Peste* [The Plague] (1947). *La Peste* is, on the one hand, an allegory about the Second World War and, on the other, about the human condition. Camus called it a chronicle. A chronicle, notes Van Gennep, is a coherent report of facts and events, without comment, often an unconscious urge to record the facts and only the facts, so that they speak for themselves. Camus wanted to communicate an objective report without being too emphatic, so that the reader could interpret the facts himself, 152-156.

the other hand, there is a camp for people in transition towards an unknown destination. They live with hypernervous upheavals when crowds arrive, washed ashore from the cities and provinces, from every nook and cranny of the Netherlands. All of Europe slowly becomes a huge camp filled with the same bitter experiences.

It will become boring in the sense that people will become inured, notes Etty Hillesum, if we tell each other the naked truth of families torn apart, stolen possessions, lost freedoms, homes raided to deport people from the Netherlands and transport them to the East. Still, she tries. She mentions the deportations even though she understands that her pen does not possess sufficient “impressive accents, to describe a distant image of the deportations.” She remarks that one person is unclothed, another burdened by a large rucksack. Many are ill-equipped to face the winters in Eastern Europe.

There are crowds of people with shaven heads, beaten, abused, de-liced. Small children play soldier between the grown-ups or fall asleep on the wooden floor. What do we do with the elderly and the handicapped? The proletariat from the large cities enters. Those from Rotterdam are in a unique category; the bombing during the war has steeled them. Those from Haarlem notice glumly that those from Amsterdam seem to have a sense of gallows humour. A tall, grey-haired gentleman stares upon this infernal scene and mutters continuously, “A horrible day! A horrible day!” Meanwhile, Hillesum notes that the population of Camp Westerbork climbs from 1,000 to approximately 10,000 people.

The largest expansion of the numbers in Camp Westerbork was noted during the horrible days of October 1942. After a massive hunt for Jews in the whole of the Netherlands, the camp was flooded by a sea of humans and was almost inundated. After Hillesum had described many details in her letter to the two sisters, she turns to a rhetorical question for both women: Maybe I presume that I have been able to communicate something about Westerbork? What she has written, has become, she concludes, a one-sided tale. She did not give in to hatred, bitterness, or rebellion. “But when I let Westerbork rise up in my mind’s eye, in all its facets and with all its spiritual and material needs, I can see that success (in communicating) has eluded me.”³ Nonetheless, on the page she has revealed horrible and serious facts. She has been initiated as a teller of truths about the camp, but was not a chronicler. The latter identity was not granted to her.

Etty Hillesum’s letters sent from Camp Westerbork were personal epistles, intended to be methods of communication with her family and intimate

3 E.T., 590. *Het Werk*, 629.

contacts. The letters were of an informative, reflective or a witnessing character. The witnessing type of letter was intended to warn people and to move them. Dutch historian Eva Moraal calls these letters, “testimonials.”⁴

Moraal thinks that Ety Hillesum’s letter about the deportation of 23 August 1943 is probably the best example of her testimonials – a witness to what actually happened. The absurd reality of the camp was a constant factor in the journal notes. The deportations were also a major subject of every letter and every journal entry.

After all, that was the reality. Camp Westerbork existed for the purpose of deportation. Moraal describes how people wrote of the path to disaster, about the fear of inclusion on the list of transportees, that they recorded the departure of family and friends. Hillesum recognizes that words and images are inadequate, but still feels that the letters are the eyes and ears of a piece of Jewish history... “[T]here is also the need sometimes to be a still, small voice,” she says.⁵ In the evening of the night that she describes in her letter, Ety Hillesum was walking through the camp under a grey, cloudy sky. People clung together in groups as you would sometimes see after a disaster.

She wants to help clothe the infants, calm the mothers, comfort the ill and helpless who are soon to be abandoned to heat and cold. She expresses a desire to encourage those that are brought to the railway wagons like animals, even on stretchers when they are no longer able to walk. She suffers terribly. One time in the middle of the night, she soberly says to herself: “So that is what hell is like.”⁶

Hillesum believes that the people who are being driven into the trains will end up in other deportation camps. They are being rushed through Europe in overcrowded railway wagons. She keeps walking, lost between the barracks. The sights she sees are horrible. “I see... oh, I cannot describe it...” It is six o’clock in the morning and the train is set to leave at eleven. The loading of people and their belongings begins. Men in green uniforms with blunt, scornful faces arrive to control the business at hand. Right before their eyes, more and more people, young mothers with their infants, and others, arrive to fill the empty spaces in the railway wagons.

Suddenly, a child calls out: “The Commandant!” A man walks down the asphalt road in military style, like a great star arriving for his final appearance

4 Eva Moraal, *Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga ... Kamp Westerbork in beleving en herinnering* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2014), 30. Hillesum writes about the deportations in her letter of August 24, 1943 to Han Wegerif and others, E.T., 644-654; *Het Werk*, 686-698.

5 E.T., 644. *Het Werk*, 687: heeft soms ook de behoefte een kleine stem te zijn.

6 E.T., 646. *Het Werk*, 689: Zo, nu ben ik dus in de hel.

in a show. He pretends to be a gentleman, seeming to care about the Jews and being kind to their children. A voice behind Hillesum says: "Once upon a time we had a commandant who used to kick people off to Poland. This one sees them off with a smile."⁷ *Obersturmführer* [commandant] Albert Gemmeker once again passes the train, this time on a bicycle. "Transport Boulevard," says Hillesum out loud. The whistle screams. A train with more than one thousand Jews leaves the Netherlands. Hillesum observes, "One more piece of our camp has been amputated. Next week yet another piece will follow. This is what has been happening now for over a year, week in, week out."⁸

No Deportation, but Going to the Revue

Dutch historian Eva Moraal⁹ received her PhD in 2013 at the University of Amsterdam with a thesis entitled *Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga... Kamp Westerbork in beleving en herinnering* [If I am not Deported Tomorrow... Camp Westerbork in Diaries and Memoires]. The book she published with the same title is based upon her dissertation.

In this book, she lets the prisoners and survivors speak for themselves as they reflect upon what they experienced in the camp and later. Men and women, young and old, both Dutch and German Jews commit their shocking experiences to writing. These are their personal documents.

Eva Moraal studied 87 collections of letters from 45 women and 42 men. She read eight diaries, seven by men, one by a woman. And she researched and described 112 memoires. Eleven of the memoires were written during the war, 43 in the period of 1945-1950 and 79 in the years between 1960 and 2010. Women wrote only eleven of these 112 accounts. Moraal describes personal

7 E.T., 653. *Het Werk*, 696: We hadden vroeger een commandant, die trapte de mensen naar Polen, deze lacht ze naar Polen. He refers to the distinction between camp commander Dischner and his successor Gemmeker. J.H. Dischner was an alcoholic and a brute. He was drunk during each deportation, hitting people left and right. This caused great fear and unrest amongst the camp internees, which was something the German authorities wanted to avoid. Therefore, Dischner was transferred to Lemberg, on 9 October 1942, to do administrative work. Dischner's successor was A.K. Gemmeker (1907-1982), who was appointed on 12 October 1942 and was camp commander of Westerbork until the liberation. In contrast to his predecessor, Gemmeker was considered a gentleman by many people in the camp although not by Etty Hillesum.

8 E.T., 654. *Het Werk*, 697: Er is weer een stuk van ons kamp geamputeerd, de volgende week een volgend stuk, dit beleven we hier nu langer dan een jaar, week aan week.

9 Eva Moraal (born 1982) studied social history at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam and did doctoral research at NIOD [Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide studies] and the University of Amsterdam.

details about the authors she quotes in her text. For example, there are details about Esther “Etty” Hillesum (pp. 382-383), or Ed van Thijn (pp. 411-412). The reader can consult the entire list of authors in her thesis (pp. 360-417).¹⁰

Moraal paints an image of Camp Westerbork that is more difficult to grasp and more unruly than conventional impressions of the camp. Her book is touching and incisive, all the more so because the reader is again confronted with the fact that more than 100,000 people – Jews, Roma and Sinti – went from Camp Westerbork to their deaths in Eastern Europe, all within the space of two and a half years.

The title *Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga...* [If I am not Deported Tomorrow...] is taken from a stage production of the Westerbork revue, a contentious but popular source of entertainment in camp life. Gemmeker and the Jewish “elite” of the camp (*kamplleiding*) were part of the show. Was this not an unethical practice? one might ask. Was it not wrong to participate as a Jew? For others, the revue was seen as a diversion and an occasion to laugh, as laughter had almost been forgotten in the camp. Nurse Mania Krell saw it this way.

At first, nurse Krell was adamantly opposed to the revue. After a month in the camp, however, she writes, “Finally, if I am not deported tomorrow, in the evening I will go to the Nelson revue. Is that not insane?”¹¹ Moraal writes about the Westerbork revue, and deals with the contradiction between German and Dutch Jews in Westerbork (Part IV). In Part I, she describes the lives of “men and women in camp Westerbork.” Part II is dedicated to the theme “youth in Westerbork,” and the subject of Part III is “camp residents, offenders and bystanders.” Moraal presents four points of view.

I Camp life began in the barrack. In general, life in the barracks was filthy and noisy. There was no means for basic hygiene, and men frequently did the housekeeping. But the worst thing was the lack of privacy. In general, meal rations were adequate, the authorities sometimes even distributing cheese and jam.

Which barracks you lived in, depended upon your previous history. If you had committed a crime, you were registered as an “S case” and confined to the prison barrack. The infirm went to a hospital barrack, while most newcomers were allocated to one of the transition barracks. From its beginning in 1939, there were small, shared complexes called the “houses”. If you belonged to the *Transportfreien* [cleared for deportation], your life was uncertain and you could be deported in any given week.

¹⁰ Moraal, *Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga*, 43-51, 276.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163, 185-189, 209, 256-258.

Barnevelders and baptized Jews were on the list of exceptions. The former were a few hundred Dutch Jews who were exempt based on the grounds of their civil merits. Baptized – Protestant – Jews were kept together in one group and were *gesperrt* [exempt from deportation] until 1944. On 4 September 1944, they were deported to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in the Czech city of Terezín, where they either died, or were later transported to Auschwitz or Treblinka.

- II “Our youth is stolen,” a teenager in Camp Westerbork said. He was not the only one to experience the camp as a shocking fracture, literally and figuratively. Children who survived the camp and the war say they felt old before their time. Some children arrived without their parents. They were taken into the camp orphanage. If the family was present, their existence was a bit safer and more secure. Their life was determined by the daily routine of work, school, and play. Education was important. The children were kept occupied and off the streets. School was held 25 hours a week. By the end of 1942, there were 530 pupils in primary school and 255 pupils in secondary education. They made friends and sweethearts, and some teenagers had their first experience of intimacy with the opposite sex in Camp Westerbork. In general, the child survivors may have lost their youth, but they were somewhat able to lead a recognizably normal life despite “all the misery during and after the war.”
- III “We think of this as a large concentration camp without the beatings,” a young woman wrote to her family. Internees were treated decently, but fear was always in the air – fear of what they would encounter in Eastern Europe. Still, the actions of the German camp leaders, “perpetrators”, were described as beastly, perverted, crude, and cruel. Albert Gemmeker, the camp commander, was responsible for this seeming paradox. In comparison with the commanding officers at Camp Amersfoort¹² and Vugt, he was a good commandant who nevertheless ruled as a king over “his” Jews. He was well educated and business was conducted in the “German” fashion, orderly and precise. At the same time, Gemmeker could “rant and rave,” according to author and lawyer Abel Herzberg. Gemmeker was “the embodiment of the unpredictable, elusive, and ambiguous Westerbork” – a “gentleman rogue” characterized by whims, desires, and impulsiveness. He was the founder of the revue

¹² One of the commandants of the transition camp in Amersfoort was Joseph Kotalla, a cruel man who was accustomed to kicking and beating the prisoners.

that was “enormously popular with the camp prisoners.” The police guards, generally Dutch, were scorned by the German staff, and seen as inadequate. Mostly, they were just as hard and cruel as the SS. The memoir writers pondered questions such as, “Why did they do this work?” or “Could not they have chosen differently?”

The local residents, farmers, and businessmen living around Camp Westerbork belonged to a special category of people. Moraal calls them “bystanders”, even though this term had not yet been introduced in that period. In general, those who put their opinion in writing had a negative view of these non-Jewish Dutchmen, saying they showed no compassion and were indifferent. “It became increasingly frequent that the Dutch people were considered to be an accessory because of their negligence towards their Jewish countrymen.”

- IV German and Dutch Jews did not associate with each other in Camp Westerbork, even though they were in the same predicament. The prisoners were divided, and there were frequent flare-ups of hatred and jealousy. In fact, there was a problem between the Dutch and German Jews, because the latter were in charge of the day-to-day operations in the camp. The real problem was the corrupting strategy of divide-and-conquer, designed by the Germans and carried out by the camp hierarchy. There was a small but powerful clique of prominent men who exploited their authority. “Above us stood the high command of Westerbork, mostly German Jews, who decided as to who would be deported and who could remain,” writes Coen Rood, a tailor from Amsterdam.¹³ One of the writers quoted by Moraal voiced his opinion that there had been Jews in Westerbork “with an impure character, which brought a great deal of suffering upon the Jewish people during the period of the German occupation.” This person wanted them to be punished for their betrayal and sent back to Germany if they were not Dutch.

The Moral Order

In Moraal’s rendition of the experiences and memories of camp prisoners, it is obvious that not only the moral, but also the social order in Camp Westerbork was topsy-turvy. On the relatively small camp grounds measuring 500 by 500 metres, the victims sometimes resembled the perpetrators,

¹³ Moraal, *Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga*, 295.

the traditional roles of men and women were undermined, the distinction between right and wrong was blurred, and children were confronted with situations that were not appropriate for their eyes and ears.

From the outset, the reverberations in the personal letters and journals cry out about injustice, and express anger about the degradation of human beings and humanity itself through persecution and alienation. Almost immediately, the writers oppose the dehumanization by pointing out the value, dignity, and identity of human beings. They do not express themselves in a question à la Primo Levi and his famous book from 1947 *Se questo è un uomo?* [Is this a man?]. They express themselves in the affirmative: Yes, this is a man. An identity!

Camp Westerbork was a domain where personal identity was hollowed out. It was both camp and village where “one could simultaneously be themselves in a manner that would not have been possible in the concentration and death camps; the camp was entwined with contradictions.”¹⁴ It was not a camp of horror; there was mostly no use of violence and people were not systematically executed. Ironically, wrote Moraal, *Durchgangslager* [transit camp] Westerbork was one of the most successful Nazi camps in Europe.¹⁵ One could persevere in Camp Westerbork; it resembled normal life. This situation created the illusion for the Jews there that everything would turn out for the best. Temporarily, they were doomed to live withdrawn from society, but they would soon return from their isolation back into society. The apparently normal Camp Westerbork was actually an artificial society and the internees were mentally secluded from the normal world. They existed on an island.

Moraal calls Ety Hillesum and journalist Philip Mechanicus, who was murdered on 12 October 1944 in Auschwitz, atypical prisoners. They were the primary interpreters, the witnesses, of life in Camp Westerbork. They remained in the camp for quite some time, due to their temporary immunity from deportation [*Sperren*]. Their experiences and testimony about the facts of camp life greatly inspired the works by Jacques Presser, Loe de Jong, and Abel Herzberg and their description of the persecution of the Dutch Jews. In particular, historian Presser considered the personal letters (“ego documents”) a crucial if not primary source of historical writings about the Second World War.

Moraal reveals a noteworthy remark by Hillesum from her long letter of 24 August 1943: “The outside world probably thinks of us as a grey, uniform,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 292-296.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

suffering mass of Jews, and knows nothing of the gulfs and abysses and subtle differences that exist between us. They could never hope to understand.”¹⁶

Etty Hillesum wanted the identity of the inmates to be defined in a chronicle written about Camp Westerbork. She did not get that opportunity. It took Eva Moraal to complete the task for her. I suggest that her excellent book be considered a “chronicle of Westerbork” for the current generation, and be deemed a posthumous homage to Etty Hillesum.

Broader Context

Another remark by Moraal deserves attention. She writes that Camp Westerbork was, in the assessment of almost all of the authors of the letters and journals, experienced as a part of the Holocaust as it has come to be understood since the Second World War. She says that the phenomenon Camp Westerbork is difficult to grasp, and suggests that the experiences of the letter and journal writers can only be understood in a wider context.¹⁷ This proposition grants everyone the opportunity to broaden their interpretation of the events. To begin to do this, one can compare Camp Westerbork to Camp Vught.

In 2011, the Dutch historian Marieke Meeuwenoord presented her doctoral thesis at the University of Amsterdam based on her research on the concentration camp Vught, also called *Konzentrationslager Herzogenbusch*. Camp Vught was operational from January 1943 to September 1944. During that period, approximately 32,000 men, women and children were held at the camp, in captivity, until they were deported, liberated, or executed. Almost 12,000 of them were Jewish.

Meeuwenoord exposed the history of Camp Vught with the aid of hundreds of personal letters and penal files. She found greatly varied realities in this exceptional camp, where life was difficult to describe – “a world of its own,” as the imprisoned Dutch composer Marius Flothuis conveyed to his wife.¹⁸

16 Moraal, *Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga*, 221. E.T., 653, *Het Werk* 697: De buitenwereld denkt misschien aan ons als een grauwe, gelijkvormige, lijdende massa van Joden, ze weet niets van de kloven en afgronden en de schakeringen die er zijn tussen de enkelingen en de groepen. Zij zal dat misschien niet eens kunnen begrijpen.

17 Moraal, *Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga*, 295.

18 Marieke Meeuwenoord, *Het hele Leven is hier een Wereld op Zichzelf: De geschiedenis van kamp Vught* [Life Here is a World in Itself: The History of Camp Vught] (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2014), 333, 55, 320, 331.

Hanns Rauter wanted to make Camp Vught an example. He required that the leaders treat the prisoners decently and avoid violence. With the exception of the first five months, a period the prisoners called: "hell in the heather of Vught," the quality of life in the camp was less inhuman and murderous than in other German camps. Rauter's command limited the power of the camp leaders and SS guards. Just as in Camp Westerbork, the leaders permitted afternoon sports, film entertainment, music, and cabaret performances. They wanted to reduce boredom and possible opposition.

Unrest among the Jewish prisoners, harassed by the SS, was avoided by presenting Vught as a model Jewish work camp. Nevertheless, just as in Camp Westerbork, there was the constant threat of being deported. In fact, deportees from Camp Vught went through Camp Westerbork, where people secretly hoped to be able to remain.

Meeuwenoord notices that non-Jewish prisoners in Camp Vught remained ambivalent towards their Jewish countrymen. The deportations aroused feelings of compassion and horror, but only a few actually raised their voice against the injustice and inhumanity awaiting the Jews. Moreover, Meeuwenoord, quoting Moraal, notes that the Jewish prisoners in Camp Westerbork did not notice any difference in their treatment, whether they were confronted by the Dutch police force that guarded the camp, the local residents, or "even the rest of Holland." At the end of the day, everyone was oppressed by the Germans, even, and particularly, in a pseudo-model camp.

Whoever wants to seriously broaden their horizon, cannot overlook the important study by Nikolaus Wachsmann, Professor of Modern European History at the Birkbeck College of the University of London. Titled *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, the book received praise as the *magna charta* of research on Nazi concentration and extermination camps immediately after its publication.¹⁹ The book is 900 pages, and painstakingly documented, containing necessary appendixes, and many (often horrible) illustrations. The author previously wrote the much-acclaimed book, *Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany* (Yale University Press, 2004).

In Wachsmann's chapter called *Mass Deportations*, he refers to camps Westerbork and Herzogenbusch (Vught). He notes that deportations were routine after July 1942, and that in July and August 1942 alone, 60,000 Jews were deported from Belgium, Croatia, France, the Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Subsequently, there were deportations from Katowice (Upper-Silesia), Rome, and Saloniki. There were many Jewish

19 Nikolaus Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (London: Little Brown Group, 2015), 304-307.

camps throughout Europe. Among these, Wachsmann points out, such camps as Westerbork are still remembered, and others such as Žilina in Slovakia are long forgotten.

The circumstances differed from one camp to another, but one was not necessarily doomed to die in every circumstance. It is known that Camp Vught was not originally a concentration camp, but Hanns Rauter, the chief of the SS and Police Leader in Holland, built it into a major camp for Jews. The deportation camp for Jews was opened on 16 January 1943 and people were confined there before their “departure to the East”. It was quickly filled with Jewish prisoners, even though the facilities were not yet completed. At the beginning of May 1943, there were some 8,600 Jewish men, women, and children imprisoned in the camp.

The inmates hoped that Camp Vught would remain their home, or be at least a mainstream ghetto. It was an idle hope. Wachsmann uncovered this reality by reading Helga Deen’s secret diary. An eighteen-year-old young woman from Tilburg, Helga wrote that “it’s not all bad and dreary.” She had arrived on 1 June 1943 and, one month later, in July, Helga and her family were deported and murdered. The SS escalated the number of deportations in the summer of 1943 and sent more than 1,000 Jewish prisoners from Camp Vught to the extermination camp Sobibor. The remaining prisoners, including educated labourers who worked for Philips, for example, were sent to the East at the beginning of June 1944. “I am very sad,” one of them scratched on a small piece of paper while on the train to Auschwitz. One survivor expressed his opinion of the conditions in Camp Vught as “extraordinarily good” especially when compared to Auschwitz.²⁰

To Conclude, the Holocaust

Wachsmann determined that Auschwitz has become the symbol of the Holocaust for all time. The Nazi’s murdered a million Jews there. Undoubtedly, Auschwitz is unsurpassed when it comes to industrial executions. When the Russians liberated the complex in 1945, the infrastructure of the murder factory was still intact, and visible to the liberators. At Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, among others, the traces were carefully effaced. Wachsmann reminds us that Auschwitz fulfilled multiple missions. The mass destruction of the Jews was not the original reason for creating the camp. It became the objective only after the Wannsee conference of January

20 Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 306.

1942, in Berlin. It was there that instigator and high-ranking Nazi official, Reinhard Heydrich, decided to seriously tackle the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* [final solution to the Jewish question].

In other words, Wachsmann finds that the concept of the Holocaust has more aspects to it than merely the genocide for which it is so well known, and that other Nazi crimes, other sufferings, and other sacrifices have been cast aside and forgotten. The fact that six million Jews were exterminated during the Third Reich was unheard of and unequalled. Wachsmann nevertheless underscores that most of the victims of mass executions by the Nazi's, including Jews, were not killed in the death camps. They were shot to death or bombed in the war. They died of hunger and exhaustion. And disease took its toll. In short, the concentration camp is not synonymous with the Holocaust or the Second World War.

Following Wachsmann's ideas, it is worthwhile distinguishing the term *Shoah*, a Hebrew word that means "destruction" from the term *Holocaust*. Holocaust is a word of Greek origin and means "burnt offering." The expression Holocaust became popular in the United States and eventually found its way to Europe. It has generally become accepted as the term most commonly used to describe what the Jewish people suffered during the Second World War – as if Jews had been a burnt offering to God. In reality, Nazism, a criminal political system that found inspiration in a biological-racist ideology, is at fault. There is no element of mystery involved here. Even though humankind sometimes has a short memory, this historic truth must never be forgotten.²¹

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21 Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, chapter "Auschwitz and the Nazi Final Solution", 291-294. Cf. Richard J. Evans, "The Anatomy of Hell", *The New York Review of Books*, 9 July 2015. Do not underestimate the "extermination through labour." That was the "dual function" of Auschwitz according to a note in the *NYR*, 52.

7 The Departure

A Reconstruction of the Unexpected Deportation of the Hillesum Family From Camp Westerbork on Tuesday, 7 September 1943¹

Gerrit Van Oord

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Abstract

Etty Hillesum was deported to Auschwitz along with her family on 7 September 1943. Hillesum herself described the deportation order as “unexpected.” Throwing a light on that summer before the departure in September shows that there was more to it, and researchers may have to re-examine Hillesum’s personal account of what happened during her last days in Camp Westerbork. This article aims at formulating an answer to the question of just how unexpected the family’s departure really was. It analyzes the available historical record to get a clearer view of the decision making process and of the people who were involved in promulgating the order dispatched on Monday morning, 6 September from the Nazi headquarters in The Hague.

Keywords: Camp Westerbork, Philip Mechanicus, Benno Stokvis, Gertrud Slotke, Sperre, Etty Hillesum

On several dates in the diary he kept during his internment in Camp Westerbork, Philip Mechanicus writes about the Hillesum family. The diary,

¹ The original Dutch version of this contribution: “*Het vertrek: Een reconstructie van de onverwachte deportatie van de familie Hillesum uit kamp Westerbork op 7 september 1943*”, was published in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in discours* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 3] (Gent: Academia Press, 2011), 115-130. An Italian translation was published as: “La partenza: Una ricostruzione dell’inaspettata deportazione della famiglia Hillesum dal Campo di Westerbork il 7 settembre 1943”, in: Gerrit Van Oord (ed.), *Etty Hillesum: Studi sulla vita e sull’opera* [Con Etty Hillesum, 2] (Sant’Oreste [Roma]: Apeiron Editori, 2012), 148-166.

posthumously published as a book titled, in Dutch, *In Dépôt*,² is well known for its remarkable account of life in the transit camp. Still, without knowing the general outlines of the camp's history, it is hard to understand the events he describes. The same is true for his entries on the Hillesums. A careful comparison of Mechanicus' text to the letters Etty Hillesum wrote and sent from the camp in the summer of 1943, as well as to other documents, yields a significant amount of information on what happened to the Hillesum family during the three months before their deportation.³

In this contribution, I take a closer look at the last of the eight diary entries in which Philip Mechanicus is referring to the Hillesums. It is the last mention because they were "unexpectedly" ordered to board the train that left on Tuesday, 7 September 1943 at eleven o'clock in the morning. It was the 72nd outgoing transport headed for Eastern Europe and it carried members of the Hillesum family to Auschwitz-Birkenau: father Louis Hillesum, mother Riva Hillesum-Bernstein, the youngest son Mischa, and Etty Hillesum.

The other son, Jaap Hillesum, was still in Amsterdam when his family left Westerbork but would be interned in the camp by the end of September 1943. Jaap remained in the camp until 15 February 1944 when he was deported⁴ to the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen in the north of Germany. He remained imprisoned there till the beginning of April 1945, when he was put on one of the three trains with the destination Theresienstadt, the last one of which left Bergen-Belsen on 10 April 1945. The Germans abandoned the trains near the small town Tröbitz in view of the arriving Russian army.⁵ The Russians took care of the surviving deportees from 23 April 1945 on, but for many of them it was too late. Along with others,

2 Philip Mechanicus, *In Dépôt: Dagboek uit Westerbork van Philip Mechanicus, ingeleid door prof. dr. J. Presser* (Amsterdam, Polak & Van Gennep, 1964). Referred to as: Mechanicus, *In Dépôt*. The English edition used here: Philip Mechanicus, *Year of Fear: A Jewish Prisoner Waits for Auschwitz* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1968), translated by Irene S. Gibbons. Referred to as: Mechanicus, *Year*.

3 In her writings, Etty Hillesum mainly used the term "transport." In this essay, I use the term "deportation" with care, since it is difficult in our days to avoid its strong moral connotation. Hillesum uses a declined form of the word in six places in her diary and letters. Cf. *Het Werk*, 216, 480, 506, 548, 618, and 621.

4 Transport n° 82 carried 773 persons to Germany. Jacob Hillesum had identity number 237 on the transport list. "Medical doctor" was indicated as his profession. NIOD, Coll. 250i, Inv. 0318.

5 Abel J. Herzberg narrates this dramatic voyage in the penultimate chapter "The last train" of his beautiful book *Amor Fati: De aanhankelijkheid aan het levenslot: Zeven opstellen over Bergen-Belsen* [Verzameld Werk, 2] (Amsterdam: Querido, 1993), 47-57.

Jaap Hillesum did not survive. He died on 17 April of spotted fever.⁶ He was buried in a mass grave near Schipkau, a village 40 miles east of Tröbitz.⁷

I begin by discussing Mechanicus' diary entry written after the convoy with the Hillesum family left Camp Westerbork. I follow with a reconstruction of the events that lead to the unexpected yet inevitable, deportation of four of the five Hillesum family members.

Was It Unexpected and Inevitable?

Jopie Vleeschhouwer, a friend of Etty Hillesum also imprisoned in Camp Westerbork, wrote two letters regarding the departure of the Hillesums. He composed the first on Monday, 6 September, before the train left, and the second on Tuesday, 7 September. The first letter was addressed to Etty Hillesum's friends in Gabriël Metsstraat 6 in Amsterdam, and the second to Christine van Nooten in Deventer.⁸ Both letters are important to our analysis of the term "unexpected departure" – the same words used by Etty Hillesum when she wrote about her family leaving Camp Westerbork.

Keeping a written record of what was going on in the camp was prohibited and punishable by immediate deportation. In his diary entries before 7 September, Mechanicus had never mentioned the name of a camp inmate for safety reasons. He does, however, use the names of Jewish Council officials and Nazis running Camp Westerbork. In his diary entry of 7 September 1943, however, Philip Mechanicus⁹ mentions for the first time a Hillesum family

6 E.T., 796, note on page 647.

7 Enrika Arlt, *Die jüdischen Gedenkstätten des verlorenen Transportes: Langennaundorf, Mühlberg, Riesa, Schilda, Schipkau, Wildgrube, Zeithain, Ehrenmal und jüdischer Ehrenfriedhof Tröbitz* (Kulturamt des Landeskreis Elbe-Elster, 2012), 35-37, 65.

8 E.T., 710-713. In the first note, on page 713, Jopie Vleeschhouwer's letter to Christine van Nooten is indicated as a shortened version of letter no. 78 and therefore omitted. In the same note, there is a reference to a letter of Philip Mechanicus, which was in the possession of Maria Tuinzing, now apparently lost.

9 Philip Mechanicus (1889-1944) was a very well-known and widely read journalist active till the day the Germans occupied The Netherlands in May 1940. He was the first born of eight children in a very poor Jewish Amsterdam family. He grew up and learned journalism in the culturally and politically social-democratic world of his native city. He began his career in the Dutch East Indies, where he worked from 1910 to 1919. Coming back to Amsterdam, he started working for the national newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad*, specializing in foreign affairs. In 1936, he was appointed Chief Foreign Editor. He travelled widely in West and East Europe, going to Russia four times – he knew the language – between 1929 and 1934. In 1933, he went to Palestine. His numerous reports published in the newspaper were much appreciated by the public. The German occupation forced the work of this journalist to an end, and on 15 July 1941

member by name, referring to the youngest son, Mischa. Since the family had been deported to Eastern Europe on that very day, it was evidently no longer necessary to be discrete. In the entry quoted below, the reason for the deportation is important. Why exactly was the Hillesum family put on the transport list and why did they have to leave so suddenly? This is a significant question since those Jews who functioned in the camp as part of its staff, as Etty Hillesum did, tried in every conceivable way to stay there as long as possible hoping the war would soon come to an end. The Hillesum family's departure was interpreted as an anomaly, and understanding the family's forced departure was of great importance for the safety of others remaining in the camp.

Tuesday, 7 September 1943

[...] Each transport has its special tragic cases. The latest transport saw the disappearance of a young and gifted pianist called Mischa Hillesum who was under the august protection of Willem Mengelberg¹⁰ himself. The latter had written a letter¹¹ to Rauter¹² in which he drew attention to the

he was formally dismissed. Mechanicus was arrested in Amsterdam by the end of September 1942 and imprisoned in Camp Amersfoort. From there, he was transferred to Camp Westerbork in November 1942, where he, badly beaten from having been tortured or ended up in the hospital. He began writing his Westerbork diary in the spring of 1943.

10 Musical director Willem (Joseph Wilhelm) Mengelberg (Utrecht 1871-Zuort 1951). Found guilty for collaboration with the Nazis and sentenced to a lifelong ban on conducting in The Netherlands, later reduced to six years.

11 Cf. Jacques Presser, *Ondergang: De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom 1940-1945*, 2 vols., (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1965), vol. II, 132-133. Presser quotes from a copy of a letter according to which Mengelberg had pleaded with Rauter to stand up for Mischa Hillesum, considered "the greatest piano talent that had frequented the Conservatory." Note that Presser is not quoting from the letter by Mengelberg. In the NIOD archives there is a photo copy of a letter written by Willem Andriessen, dated 7 April 1943, in which we find the following words: "I consider this young man [Mischa Hillesum] as the greatest piano talent that frequented our institute in the last years. The director Prof. Dr. W. Mengelberg declared he was sure that this student had a great future ahead of him." (Cf. NIOD, Coll. 250i, inv. 890). This letter does not have a specific addressee, carries the abbreviation L.S., and was written by Andriessen on the request of Louis Hillesum in his efforts to convince Professor Van Dam to find a place for his family in Barneveld. Louis Hillesum included in his letter of 10 April 1943 to Christine van Nooten a photo copy of the "testimonium" he received from Willem Andriessen. For the transcription (in Dutch) of this letter cf. Van Oord, "Omnia salva: Brieven van Louis Hillesum en anderen aan Christine van Nooten", in Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Etty Hillesum in perspectief* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 4] (Gent: Academia Press, 2012), 120. The letter Mengelberg wrote to Rauter on 24 April 1943 is published in *Etty Hillesum in perspectief*, 155-156, in the German original and a Dutch translation.

12 Johan Baptist Albin Rauter (Klagenfurt 1895-The Hague 1949), *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer*; rank: *SS-Obergruppenführer*.

fact that Hillesum was a brilliant student of Willem Andriessen¹³ and that it was important for the artistic life of Holland to keep the gifted young man here. Rauter offered the musician a place at Barneveld,¹⁴ but Mischa said he preferred to follow his parents to Westerbork so that he could protect them to the best of his ability. He and his friends in Amsterdam did their utmost to ensure that they would remain together at Westerbork. The parents were, moreover, exempt (from deportation) because of their daughter who had gone voluntarily to Westerbork in the service of the Jewish Council and had been given the rights of a Long-Term Resident. On Monday, the order came unexpectedly from The Hague that Mischa Hillesum was to be deported with his family. The commandant took this to mean that the whole family had to go. There was nothing that could be done about it. The reasons behind this intervention by The Hague are not definitely known, but presumably the musician had, as people say here, “worked his case to death,” like many people before him who have tried to consolidate their position by contacting The Hague. The people in The Hague do not know exactly what is happening at Westerbork, but are glad to intervene in certain cases that come to their notice or in which they become directly involved. It is quite likely that the authorities¹⁵ in The Hague were angry because Mischa Hillesum turned down the privilege of going to Barneveld.¹⁶

13 Willem C. N. Andriessen (Haarlem 1887-Amsterdam 1964), composer and pianist. In 1942, Andriessen was imprisoned by the Germans in Camp Sint Michielsgestel. Cf. Lou de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Vol. 8. part 2: *Gevangenen en gedeporteerden* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), Vol. I, 199, 201.

14 We shall deal with this rather particular camp later in this paper.

15 *Reichskommissar für die besetzten niederländischen Gebiete* Arthur Seyss-Inquart and his four Commissioners-General, among them Rauter, had seats in The Hague, traditionally the residence of the Dutch government, and were the highest Nazi authority in the occupied Netherlands.

16 *Mechanicus*, Year, 149; *Mechanicus*, *In Dépôt*, 152-153; Tuesday, 7 September 1943: Elk transport heeft zijn bijzonder tragische gevallen. Het jongste transport zag een jonge geniale pianist verdwijnen, met name Mischa Hillesum, die onder de hoge bescherming van Willem Mengelberg himself stond. Deze had aan Rauter een brief geschreven, waarin hij er de aandacht op vestigde dat Hillesum een geniale leerling was van Willem Andriessen en dat het van belang was voor het kunstleven van Nederland de begaafde jongeling vast te houden. Rauter bood de musicus een plaats in Barneveld aan, maar laatstgenoemde gaf er de voorkeur aan zijn ouders naar Westerbork te volgen om hen voorzoveel in zijn vermogen lag te beschermen. Hijzelf en vrienden in Amsterdam hebben al het mogelijke in het werk gesteld om in Westerbork bijeen te blijven. De ouders waren bovendien gesperrt op hun dochter, die destijds vrijwillig naar Westerbork was gegaan in dienst van de Joodse Raad en de rechten kreeg van alter Kamp-Insass. Maandag [6 september] kwam onverwacht uit Den Haag het bevel, dat Mischa Hillesum met zijn familie op transport moest worden gesteld. De commandant [Gemmeke] vatte dat aldus op,

Note that Mechanicus refers to Etty Hillesum not by name, but only in terms of her position as an employee of the Jewish Council in the camp; he also refers to her being in Westerbork as a voluntary act. He does not mention their friendship at all. Mechanicus had also mentioned the delicate theme of Hillesum's voluntary presence in the camp in his first diary entry on her.¹⁷

In the cited entry, Mechanicus concentrates on Mischa Hillesum and on the reasons why deportation was inevitable. The use of the term "inevitable" can be understood from the two letters of Jopie Vleeschhouwer mentioned above. Vleeschhouwer made it clear that "an order from The Hague cannot be changed."¹⁸ Even the leadership of the Jewish Council declared themselves powerless and unable to intervene on behalf of one of its own employees. The letter written to the first *Dienstleiter* Kurt Schlesinger,¹⁹ (which Vleeschhouwer refers to as presumably written on behalf of the Hillesums) did not have any effect at all. Note that the letter was never found and as a consequence we ignore who wrote it.

Etty Hillesum also wrote to Christine van Nooten on 7 September 1943. On the postcard she threw from the train to Auschwitz, she wrote: "In the end, the departure came without warning. On sudden special orders from The Hague."²⁰ To fully understand these words we must take a closer look at how an order to prepare for transport was drawn up.

Berlin coordinated the deportation transports for the whole of Europe. The origin of each transport order was the sub-department of the Reich Main Security Office in Berlin, known as IVB4, and directed by Adolf Eichmann. That office transmitted its directives for transports to a subsidiary IVB4 office in The Hague. From The Hague, the order was subsequently sent, usually by telex to Camp Westerbork. The order contained the destination,

dat de hele familie moest verdwijnen. Er viel geen speld tussen te krijgen. Wat de achtergrond is van de interventie van Den Haag is niet precies bekend, maar vermoedelijk heeft de musicus, zoals men hier zegt, zijn zaak 'doodgewerkt', zoals menigeen, die zijn positie via Den Haag wilde versterken, vóór hem. Den Haag weet niet precies, wat zich in Westerbork afspeelt, maar grijpt graag positief in bepaalde gevallen in, waarvan het de lucht krijgt, of waarin het rechtstreeks gemengd wordt. Het is niet onwaarschijnlijk, dat de autoriteiten in Den Haag zich op hun teentjes getrappt voelden, omdat Mischa Hillesum de gratie van Barneveld had afgewezen.

17 Mechanicus, *Year*, 47; Mechanicus, *In Dépôt*, 41.

18 E.T., 667. *Het Werk*, 711; Tuesday, 7 September 1943: [...] dat een opdracht uit Den Haag hier niet te veranderen is [...].

19 Kurt Schlesinger, Chief Service Leader from 12 August 1943, which meant that he stood at the head of the twelve services and the service managers in Camp Westerbork. He was appointed by Commandant Gemmeke.

20 E.T., 658-659. *Het Werk*, 702; Letter 71, To Christine van Nooten. Near Glimmen, Tuesday, 7 September 1943: Het vertrek kwam toch nog vrij onverwachts. Plotseling bevel voor ons speciaal uit Den Haag.

the date of departure, and the number of Jews to be carried off. Such an order would be directed to the camp commandant, Albert Gemmeker, and would arrive a few days before the departure date. Gemmeker would then order the Jewish staff in the camp to prepare the transport lists, which were read aloud in the dormitories and huts the night before departure. The amount of time between the arrival of the order by telex, and the fatal date of departure made it possible for the *alte Kampinsassen*, the original Jewish inmates of Camp Westerbork, to work out a plan to keep friends and relations out of the trains. Mechanicus reveals in his diary how he himself was saved several times thanks to these internal camp dynamics. Hillesum's words "sudden special orders from The Hague" may now be somewhat clearer. This was a specific order from the IVB4 office in The Hague, communicated by telephone to Nazi camp officials that explicitly included the Hillesum family members in the transport of 7 September 1943. Just as the number of people forced to leave in a transport could not be changed – those taken from the list had to be replaced with others – neither could a specific order from the IVB4 office in The Hague.

Mechanicus questioned *why* this specific order for immediate transport was issued for the Hillesums. His query was meaningful. When answered, one could learn something about one's own security in the camp. In the literature, we encounter two explanations related to the behaviour of two persons. The first regards Mischa Hillesum, who declined to go to Camp Barneveld, a camp for "valuable Jews" who were safe for a time because they were exempt from transport. The second person is Etty Hillesum's mother, Riva Hillesum-Bernstein who was thought to have written a letter to the *höherer SS- und Polizeiführer* [Higher SS and Police Leader] Rauter. The letter was never found, which does not prove it was not written. Dutch lawyer Benno Stokvis stipulated to the existence of Riva's letter but his affirmation provides weak evidence. I take a closer look at Benno Stokvis' claim, and then turn to Mischa's refusal.

The Memoire of Benno Stokvis

The lawyer Stokvis launched his conjectures about Riva Hillesum's letter in his memoire published as a booklet in 1968, titled *Advocaat in bezettingstijd* [Being a Lawyer during Occupation],²¹ Stokvis gives an account of his work

21 Benno J. Stokvis, *Advocaat in bezettingstijd* (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Genneep, 1967). A translation in English or any other language has never been made.

during the Nazi occupation of The Netherlands, when he sought to verify the (partly) *Aryan* origins of Jewish persons. In his book, he states that Riva Hillesum wrote a letter to Rauter that roused his fierce indignation and directly caused the family's deportation order. All interpretations in the secondary Hillesum literature go back to Stokvis' statement and have, understandably, produced a very negative opinion of Riva Hillesum, even with no documentary trace or another reliable support for the lawyer's affirmation. Stokvis is very imprecise in his recollection of how things transpired and his presentation of the facts. This raises serious doubts about the value of his memoir including the story of the letter.

In the notes to the critical edition of Hillesum's diaries and letters, the two passages where Stokvis refers to the Hillesum family are quoted extensively. For example, the process of "aryanisation"²² for Hillesum's mother Riva is widely cited. Stokvis had been successful in obtaining the legal status of half-Jewish for his own mother, who was of Russian origin like Riva Hillesum. As a result, Stokvis' mother was never deported. Therefore, he was optimistic about proceeding in the same way for Riva. Stokvis' efforts on Riva's behalf were, however, interrupted by Louis Hillesum, Etty's father.²³

The second rich source for researchers has been the paragraph in which Stokvis mentions the Riva Hillesum / *höherer SS- und Polizeiführer* Rauter letter,²⁴ which also serves as the concluding paragraph of his book.²⁵ In writing his memoir, Stokvis tells us that he used his private archive when analyzing the cases in which he was involved as a lawyer. We must, then, take for granted that he used his files when writing on the Hillesum case. Unfortunately for Stokvis' argument, a search in the Collection Stokvis

22 This is Nazi terminology: *Arianisierung*, and means: to expropriate from the Jews their properties and put those properties into the possession of Aryans. In the specific case where Stokvis uses the term, it becomes a lifesaving procedure. In this essay, the terms of Nazi origin are printed in *italics*.

23 E.T., 742. *Het Werk*, 776.

24 E.T., 782. *Het Werk*, 810.

25 Stokvis, *Advocaat in bezettingstijd*, 95-96. This is the text in Dutch: De jonge pianist zat met zijn ouders in het Lager Westerbork. Mengelberg zelf had schriftelijk gecertificeerd, dat dit genie niet verloren mocht gaan. Het kleine gezin leefde 'gesperrt' in relatieve veiligheid. Tot het moment waarop de moeder door de onzalige gedachte werd bevangen een brief te schrijven, een brief aan Rauter, met het nederig verzoek om wat meer bewegingsvrijheid. Een brief van een jodin aan Rauter! Het was 'unvorstellbar'; een jodin schreef aan de SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Polizei; Rauter, de incarnatie van arisch heldendom, wiens vingers bezoedeld werden door de aanraking van dit papier. 'Unvorstellbar', 'Grauenhaft', 'Ein Verbrechen.' *Sofort verschicken nach Osten*. Dit telegram arriveerde enkele minuten voor het vertrek van het transport uit Westerbork. Nog juist op tijd. Binnen het uur kon de kampcommandant de Brigadenführer [Rauter] 'gehorsamst' melden: 'Verschickt nach Osten.'

held in the Amsterdam City Archive does not result in a single document, aside from a reference in a register book to a file named “Dr. L. Hillesum”.

It is striking that in the lawyer’s second reference to the Hillesums – the last paragraph of his memoir – he does not mention any Hillesum family member by name. The passage contains three parts, which I have indicated here as parts a, b, and c. In part a, Stokvis mentions the letter Willem Mengelberg wrote to Rauter.

- a. The young piano player was internalized in Camp Westerbork. Mengelberg himself had officially stated that this genial musician should not be lost for posterity. Being “gesperrt” [deferred], the small family lived in relative safety.²⁶

Note how much of Stokvis’ wording is in line with phrases used by Mechanicus when writing about Mischa Hillesum. Half of the words are identical, and it looks as if Stokvis is simply summarizing the journalist’s diary entry, published four years before Stokvis’ memoir. Stokvis continues with his statement on Riva’s alleged letter to Rauter:

Until the mother had the incredible idea, to write a letter, a letter to Rauter, with the humble request to have some more liberty of movement.²⁷

This affirmation lies at the root of Klaas A.D. Smelik’s statement in the introduction of Hillesum’s posthumous writings that Riva did ask Rauter, in a letter to him, for “some privileges,” which presumably caused him to react and “[...] on 6 December 1943 an angry Rauter ordered that the whole family should be put on transport immediately.” Stokvis’ words, “some more liberty of movement” become Smelik’s “some privileges.”²⁸ Since we do not know *if* or *when* Riva’s letter was written and there is no extant copy, it is impossible to study the text and know the veracity of either Stokvis’ phrasing or Smelik’s paraphrasing.

The lawyer continues – writing with some literary verve – that the Nazi official had a burst of anger. Consider the second part of his paragraph:

- b. A letter from a Jewess to Rauter. This was totally ‘unvorstellbar’ [unimaginable]; a Jewess writing to the SS-Gruppenführer und

²⁶ Stokvis, *Advocaat in bezettingstijd*, 95-96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

²⁸ *Het Werk*, XV: [...] enkele privileges [...].

Generalleutnant der Polizei Rauter, the incarnation of Aryan heroism, who's fingers were smeared by touching the piece of paper. 'Unvorstellbar' [unbelievable], 'Grauenhaft' [horrible], 'Ein Verbrechen' [a crime]. *Sofort verschicken nach Osten* [Send them immediately to the East].²⁹

Rauter's moral indignation, expressed here in Stokvis' recreation of events, seems to be based on his status as a high-ranking Nazi official. His lofty standing had been attacked by the very idea of a Jewish woman writing to him. The consequence, then, if Stokvis' scenario holds true, was inevitable: *Sofort....*

If one takes into account how the administration of The Netherlands was organized under the Nazi occupation, it is highly unlikely that a letter from a totally unknown Jewish woman would arrive on the desk of a high-ranking Nazi official. After 5 February 1943,³⁰ it was strictly forbidden for an individual Jew to contact Nazi institutions or officials. It was a matter that could be taken care of by an institution like the Jewish Council, a body constituted by the Nazis in February 1942. The Jewish Council was the only body allowed to conduct formal communications between the Nazi occupiers and the Jews in Holland.

Furthermore, an additional point that casts doubt on the existence of this letter, is that no mention of it can be found among the letters of Etty Hillesum. She does, in fact, report on her mother's letter of 16 July 1943 to Van Nooten asking her to contact the Couvert family. It is difficult to believe that Riva Hillesum would not have told her husband or daughter that she had written a letter to Rauter.

Part c of this crucial text by Stokvis deals with how Rauter's supposed deportation order for the Hillesums was executed:

- c. This telegram arrived a few minutes before the transport would leave Westerbork. Just in time. Within an hour, the commandant of the camp could let the Brigadenführer know: "*Verschickt nach Osten*" [Sent to the east.].³¹

There exists good information about how transports from Camp Westerbork to the East were organized. Philip Mechanicus' diary is a detailed and

29 Stokvis, *Advocaat in bezettingstijd*, 95-96. Italics in Stokvis' text.

30 For a complete list of the anti-Jewish measures taken by the Nazis see the introduction by Dick Houwaart to the re-issue of the Jewish weekly that the Nazis allowed to be published: *Het Joodsche Weekblad: Uitgave van den Joodschen Raad voor Amsterdam* (The Hague, Omniboek, 1979), Vol. I, 46-47. The first issue of the weekly appeared on 11 April 1941, the last on 28 September 1943.

31 Stokvis, *Advocaat in bezettingstijd*, 95-96.

worthy source of information, and it is not the only diary that deals with this topic. In Mechanicus' entry of 7 September 1943, we read that the "order" from The Hague arrived on Monday, and not "a few minutes before the transport would leave." Independent of Mechanicus' diary, letters from Jopie Vleeschhouwer, dated 6 and 7 September 1943, give the same account. Additionally, historians Loe de Jong and Jacques Presser have both carefully reconstructed the dynamics of the transports leaving the camp and nothing in their writing leads one to believe an order could arrive and be executed within minutes.³² Nonetheless, Stokvis' version has accumulated credit in the secondary literature on the Hillesum family.

A Negative Decision or the Mischa Motive

A more plausible explanation for the immediate departure of the family can be found in Mischa Hillesum's decision to decline the Barneveld option. It seems that Mischa's refusal – taken into consideration together with other factors – caused the deportation order. In his letters, Vleeschhouwer gives the "Mischa motive" as the direct cause for deportation. And Mechanicus was of the same opinion, witness his diary entry. His use of an expression current in the camp, *doodgewerkt* [worked his case to death], is a clue, and also that he writes: "that Mischa Hillesum was to be deported with his family." Given that these words are the essential terms with which Etty Hillesum's friends in Camp Westerbork summarized the order from The Hague, it seems reasonable that Mischa's refusal was the principal motive for the deportation. Mechanicus and Vleeschhouwer were not merely contemporary sources, they were eyewitnesses as well, and, as such, their words are of particular importance in any reconstruction of events.

Vleeschhouwer's second letter of 7 September 1943 provides a clue as to how the order from The Hague was transmitted to the camp leadership. In this letter, which he addressed to Christine van Nooten, he writes:

Yesterday, suddenly, there was a telephone call from The Hague in which it was stated that Mischa's "Sperre" [exemption from deportation] was no longer valid and as a consequence he and his family, that is father, mother and Etty, had to leave.³³

³² Presser, *Ondergang*, Vol. II, 372; De Jong, *Koninkrijk*, 725-767.

³³ I have published this letter in "Omnia salva", 122: Gisteren kwam uit Den Haag plotseling telefonisch bericht dat Mischa's "Sperre" was opgeheven en dat hij met zijn familie, dus met

There is no mention of this telephone call, however, in Vleeschhouwer's earlier letter of 6 September, published in Hillesum's posthumous works.

The news from The Hague came fairly late on Monday: Mischa's "*gesperrt*" had been cancelled, and he *and* his family had been put on transport for 7 September.

That an order from IVB4 was issued by telephone is not surprising since there was regular contact between The Hague and Camp Westerbork by both telephone and telex.

What is the backdrop to Mischa's story? Beginning with information available in Etty Hillesum's letters from Camp Westerbork, we see that on the very day that her parents and Mischa arrived in the camp, Etty wrote about a "Barneveld option." In a letter to Milli Ortman on 21 June 1943, Etty writes that the Westerbork branch of the Jewish Council "[...] thinks it imperative that you pursue the Barneveld option strenuously with the *Zentralstelle* on behalf of Mischa and the family (remember: not me!), and urges you to do so. Perhaps you will still be able to get Mengelberg to intervene personally with Rauter."³⁴ In this quotation, Hillesum refers to two Nazi institutions: the *Zentralstelle* in Amsterdam and the *Reichskommissariat* based in The Hague, where Rauter had his office. The director, Mengelberg, was a personal friend of Rauter and it was hoped he would intervene in favour of Mischa. Eight days later (29 June) in another letter to Ortman, Etty Hillesum writes that the *Zentralstelle* ought to formally communicate to Commandant Gemmeker:

The *Zentralstelle* must tell our camp commandant through official channels that my parents and Mischa are to be kept on here. Otherwise it won't be any use at all.³⁵

vader, moeder en Etty vertrekken moest. Cf. the published Dutch text in *Het Werk*, 710: Het kwam ook wel laat op de Maandag, het bericht uit den Haag dat de terugstelling van Mischa vervallen was en dat hij *met zijn* familieleden op 7 September op transport gesteld moest worden.

34 E.T., 604. *Het Werk*, 644; Letter 39, To Milli Ortmann. Westerbork, Monday, 21 June 1943: [...] de zaak van Barneveld met betrekking tot Mischa en het gezin (– je denkt eraan: ik niet! –) bij de *Zentralstelle* met kracht blijft bevorderen. Misschien kun je nog bereiken dat Mengelberg zich persoonlijk tot Rauter wendt [...]. Presser quotes a copy of Mengelberg's letter to Rauter, but does not give a date. Cf. Presser, *Ondergang*, Vol. II, 132-133.

35 E.T., 610. *Het Werk*, 650; Letter 43, To Milli Ortmann. Westerbork, Tuesday, 29 June 1943: De *Zentralstelle* moet langs ambtelijke weg aan de commandant hier meedelen dat mijn ouders en Mischa hier opgehouden moeten worden. Anders helpt het alles niets.

She writes this letter on a Tuesday afternoon, after transport number 66, with 2,367 people aboard departed for the death camp Sobibor. At that time, her parents were on the *Elternliste*,³⁶ while Mischa was for the time being *zurückgestellt* [deferred]. The *Elternliste* became unstable after 5 July 1943 when the Nazis cancelled the special status of about 60 employees of the Jewish Council in Camp Westerbork. As a direct consequence, family members of Jewish Council employees lost their protection and privileges, including members of the Hillesum family.

Etty Hillesum thought it very unlikely that her parents could be kept out of a next transport unless “some intervention from outside”³⁷ could change matters. Hillesum’s message to Milli Ortman, to be read as a cry for help, was very clear. In a letter of a few days later to Christine van Nooten, Hillesum writes, “In Amsterdam, the fight for Barneveld continues. I hope and pray that it will work out.”³⁸ And in a subsequent letter to Johanna and Klaas Smelik Senior, she writes that her parents prepare to leave “[...] unless something comes of Barneveld after all.”³⁹ In the letter to the Smeliks, she does not express much confidence in the way things are going. In her letter of 6 July 1943, she asks Milli Ortman if Mischa could go to Barneveld by himself and if there would be a possibility of forcing him to go there because, as she writes to her friend, “I know quite well that nothing will make him go without his parents.”⁴⁰ In her letter of 8 July 1943, Hillesum writes to Ortman that “the [Barneveld] papers are on the way”⁴¹ – information that had come to Etty Hillesum from Milli Ortman’s sister, Grete Wendelgeest.

On the crucial day of 9 July 1943, Hillesum writes to her friend Ortman: “Poor Milli, I am so sorry for you, you have done so much running about and worked so hard. Barneveld is off; and off for Mischa, too. Father and Mother

36 The family members of Jewish Council employees were placed on the Parents List (*Elternliste*) and temporarily exempted from transport. Like all lists it did not guarantee one could remain in the Camp.

37 E.T., 610. *Het Werk*, 650; Letter 43, To Milli Ortmann. Westerbork, Tuesday, 29 June 1943: tenzij er van een andere kant ingegrepen wordt.

38 E.T., 612. *Het Werk*, 653; Letter 45, To Christine van Nooten. Westerbork, Wednesday, 1 July 1943: In Amsterdam wordt hard gewerkt aan Barneveld. Ik hoop en bid dat het in orde komt.

39 E.T., 615. *Het Werk*, 656; Letter 46, To Johanna and Klaas Smelik and others. Westerbork, Saturday, 3 July 1943: [...] tenzij onverwachts Barneveld toch nog iets wordt.

40 E.T., 623. *Het Werk*, 664; Letter 48, To Milli Ortmann. Westerbork, Tuesday, 6 July 1943: [...] dat hij er toch niet zal gaan zonder z'n ouders.

41 E.T., 625. *Het Werk*, 667; Letter 50, To Milli Ortmann. Westerbork, probably Thursday, 8 July 1943: [...] dat de papieren onderweg zijn.

are on transport [...].⁴² Her parents were scheduled for the next transport, and her mother had been summoned to present herself to Fräulein Slottkke, who made all this very clear to her. Etty Hillesum also writes that, even though her parents are on the transport list, Mischa may stay at Westerbork, which he declared he would not do. He also threatened to mount a protest and is reported to have said:

“I’m going to go and tell the commandant he is a murderer.” We have to watch out that Mischa doesn’t do anything dangerous. [...] Rauter’s secretary is here in the camp at the moment, and Mother was specially summoned to be given the news.⁴³

Etty Hillesum uses with the word “secretary” for the Nazi functionary Fräulein Slottkke,⁴⁴ who was stationed in IVB4, at the department *Judenreferat der Sicherheitspolizei*, based in the Windekind Villa, in the Nieuwe Parklaan 76, The Hague. She was in charge of the so-called *terugstellingen* [temporary transport deferments].⁴⁵ Slottkke was not Rauter’s secretary as Hillesum writes. Etty Hillesum may have picked up this information from Mechanicus, who wrongly calls Slottkke “an agent of the *Sicherheitsdienst*, and secretary to Rauter.”⁴⁶

The word Mischa Hillesum used for Gemmeker – “murderer” – was prophetic. The notification from Slottkke to Riva Hillesum that she and her husband had become *transportfähig* [suitable for transport] was no more and no less than a death sentence. From two recently discovered letters, it becomes clear that both parents were very conscious of this. Both of these found letters were addressed to Christine van Nooten. The first was written

42 E.T., 626. *Het Werk*, 668-669; Letter 51, To Milli Ortmann. Westerbork, Friday, 9 July 1943: Arme Milli, het spijt me zo voor jou, je hebt er zoveel voor gelopen en geploeterd. Barneveld is afgewezen, ook voor Mischa. Vader en Moeder staan op transport [...].

43 E.T., 627. *Het Werk*, 668; Letter 51, To Milli Ortmann. Westerbork, Friday, 9 July 1943: Ik loop naar de commandant en zeg dat hij een moordenaar is. [...] De secretaresse van Rauter is hier in het kamp op het ogenblik en moeder werd speciaal ontboden om haar dit mee te delen.

44 Cf. Herzberg, *Amor Fati*, 23-24. Herzberg spells the name erroneously with ‘ch’: Schlottkke. Presser, *Ondergang*, Vol. II, 163-164, cites the same paragraph, and mentions as a second source for Slottkke an unidentified “eyewitness.”

45 *Het Werk*, 804. The addresses of the Jews who arrived in Camp Westerbork were filed in the *Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung* in the Van Eeghenstraat in Amsterdam. The head of this Nazi office was *SS-Sturmbannführer* Willy Lages, his substitute *SS-Hauptsturmscharführer* Ferdinand Hugo Aus der Fünten. This was the administration office for Jews living in The Netherlands that prepared their “emigration.”

46 Mechanicus, *Year*, 84. Mechanicus, *In Depot*, 77; 9 July 1943: [...] een agente van de Sicherheitsdienst, secretaresse van Rauter.

by Riva Hillesum on 15 July 1943 [postmarked 16 July 1943] and the second by Louis Hillesum on 22 July 1943. In her letter, Riva asks the addressee to make contact with the Couvert family in Deventer, who supposedly possessed diamonds that might buy her and her husband a place on the so-called Puttkammer list.⁴⁷ She used the words “last stage” and “rescue” to emphasize the nature of the emergency. Ety Hillesum was very negative about her mother’s letter and asked Christine van Nooten to simply ignore it:

The Puttkammer story has filled me with shame. It shows you just what mad antics people in need will get up to. But I’m sure there are limits. And a money business like that is certainly not for us. Don’t in heaven’s name worry your head about it any longer.⁴⁸

It is very difficult to interpret these statements, in particular with regard of the concluding phrase of her letter: “For us, I think, it is no longer a question of living, but of how one is equipped for one’s downfall.”⁴⁹ It seems that there was a great disparity in point of view between the parents and their daughter on what the immediate future would bring.

Louis Hillesum wrote the second recently discovered letter, dated 22 July 1943. He wrote it to his former colleague Christine van Nooten. They had both worked at the Deventer Grammar School. Louis’ words sound much like Riva’s, with the same urgent and serious tone. “My request to you is to try a last effort to keep us in the Netherlands.” He asks Van Nooten, “without a minute to lose” to contact the Secretary Generals Van Dam and Frederiks. The aim was to convince both men to ensure for him and his wife a place in

47 In 1939, Erich August Paul Puttkammer took the Dutch nationality. During the war, he lived in Amsterdam, and worked as a managing clerk in the banking business. He functioned as a go-between for Jews who were able and willing to pay a substantial price for a so-called *Sperre*, released by the Germans, to obtain a place on a list of those temporarily exempted from deportation. The payment had to be done in gold, diamonds, jewellery, paintings and the like. The so-called Puttkammer list turned out to be unreliable and most Jews who had paid Puttkammer, got no protection whatsoever. After the war, he was arrested, but afterwards released, since his guilt could not be proved.

48 E.T., 631. *Het Werk*, 672-673; Letter 55, To Christine van Nooten. Westerbork, before Saturday 31 July 1943: Ik heb me zeer geschaamd over die Puttkammergeschiedenis. Zoo zie je tot wat voor gekke bokkesprongen mensen in nood komen – maar ik vind dat er grenzen zijn. En zoo’n geldgeschiedenis ligt toch zeker niet in onze lijn. Breek er in ’s hemelsnaam niet verder je hoofd over. [...] Het gaat er voor ons geloof ik niet meer om dat men leeft, maar h e men ingesteld is op de ondergang.

49 E.T., 631. *Het Werk*, 673; Letter 55, To Christine van Nooten. Westerbork, before Saturday 31 July 1943: Het gaat er voor ons geloof ik niet meer om dat men leeft, maar h e men ingesteld is op de ondergang.

Camp Barneveld. To support his petition, he asks her to point to his merit and use the argument of his “[...] 30-year career in the public Grammar School [...]”.⁵⁰ Academics with similar histories had been admitted to Camp Barneveld, and Louis Hillesum thought he had a legitimate claim. In any case, his request to Van Nooten makes it clear that he was not only well aware, but also well informed regarding the seemingly only alternative remaining for the family: the Barneveld option.

In hindsight, we know that this effort was doomed to fail, as barely two months later (29 September 1943), Camp Barneveld was dismantled. Meanwhile, Slottké’s 9 July action had smoothed the way for the deportation of the Hillesums. The only thing left to do was to overrule the Jewish camp elite; this would become reality by the end of August 1943.

The Loyal and Zealous Nazi Employee Gertrud Slottké (1902-1971)

Who was Fräulein Slottké⁵¹ and what were her tasks inside the IVB4 offices? Gertrud Slottké was born in 1902 in the Prussian town of Sensburg and, with three younger sisters, grew up in Danzig, where her father was a miller. After high school and a one-year specialization in commerce, she found employment in the shipping business and international commerce. She never married and lived with her parents until her forties. In 1933, she became a member of the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazi Party-NSDAP) and, while working in Berlin in the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA), she applied for a job abroad. In the spring of 1942, at the age 40, she was stationed in The Hague.

Slottké’s job in the *Judenreferat* IVB4 concerned *Rückstellungen* [transport deferments]. The word refers to a complex system of deferments of transport that was based on twelve criteria designed by the Germans. Those Jews who were in line with the criteria were allowed to remain temporarily in The Netherlands. Employees of the Jewish Council, and the Council’s personnel in Camp Westerbork, belonged to the group with transport deferments. By the fall of 1942, the number of *Rückstellungen* had grown to somewhat more than 40,000. It fell to Fräulein Slottké to drastically reduce the number of

50 Both letters in my “*Omnia salva*”, 117 and 113-114. Dutch: [...] 30-jarige arbeid bij het Gymnasium Onderwijs.

51 See: Elisabeth Kohlhaas, “Gertrud Slottké: Angestellte im niederländischen Judenreferat der Sicherheitspolizei”, in: Klaus-Michael Mallmann & Gerhard Paul (eds), *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, [2004] 2011), 207-218. For more details: NIOD, Coll. 270g, Inv. 201.

people with deferments by systematically winnowing the lists through a re-evaluation of how well each person matched the criteria.

The *Judenreferat* IVB4 in The Hague was created at the beginning of 1942. Employing 35 people and headed by Wilhelm Zopf, the department was organized under the *Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei* [Commander of the Security Police] Wilhelm Harster. Slottké's place in the Nazi hierarchy meant that she was not in a decision-making position. Rather, her job was to prepare dossiers on individuals and families. Her work required the authorization of her direct superior, Zopf, and once his signature was on the dotted line, the document became a *Befehl*, an order – either for deportation or deferment. Zopf used the dossiers prepared by Slottké in his meetings with his superior Harster.

Over time, Slottké's competence and level of responsibility grew significantly. She travelled regularly to Camp Westerbork, participated in meetings at the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* [Imperial Head Office for Security Matters] in Berlin, and conducted correspondence with foreign embassies regarding the deported. She also handled questions regarding sterilized Jews, mixed marriages, and Jews to be deported to Bergen-Belsen, which she visited several times. Fräulein Slottké had four assistants at her disposal: two Dutch women and two men from the German SS. Once she formulated a recommendation, Zopf usually accepted it, but due to Zopf's frequent absences, Slottké in the end made the decisions. Elisabeth Kohlhaas states:

Particularly in Westerbork, her role was important and she decided – often after interrogating the people involved – on the main part of the waiting and transport lists. She regularly decided who had to leave with one of the next transports, and also where the person would be deported to.⁵²

Slottké's behaviour and her decisions regarding transports to the death and concentration camps match accounts in Mechanicus' diary. He himself was interrogated various times by this Nazi employee, Fräulein Slottké.

From the interrogation notes gathered in preparation for the trial against Harster, Zopf, and Slottké in 1967 in Munich, Germany, it is clear that each person tried to point the finger at the other. Slottké's direct superior, Zopf, tried to establish that Slottké, his one time employee, was a very competent

52 Kohlhaas, "Gertrud Slottké", 212: Und besonders in Westerbork spielte sie eine wichtige Rolle und verfügte – nicht selten nach Befragung der Betroffenen – über die Vielzahl der bestehende Warte- und Transportliste. Sie bestimmte regelmäßig, wer mit dem nächsten Transport wohin abzufahren hatte.

and loyal staff member. Slottke, in turn, tried to prove that her position in the IVB4 hierarchy did not allow her to take any decision whatsoever. She tried to minimize the importance of her role and responsibility, while Zopf made an effort to reduce his role by stressing the value and capacity of his former collaborator. Kohlhaas concludes succinctly, “Slottke’s performance can be valued as selection through bureaucracy.”⁵³ The Nazi perpetrator Fräulein Slottke was sentenced in Munich to five years detention, but was released for health reasons after three years.

The Barneveld Option

The name “Barneveld” was synonymous with temporary salvation from transport. One encounters the word in both Hillesum’s and Mechanicus’ diaries. Hillesum used the term with a positive connotation, since it could mean salvation for her brother and parents. Mechanicus’ view is rather different. He considered the Barneveld option an example of social inequality, and thought it represented a situation in which a few were granted significant privileges unavailable to ordinary Jews.⁵⁴ What is Barneveld, and what is the Barneveld group?⁵⁵

The “Barneveld group” consisted of a number of prominent Dutch Jews who were exempt from deportation to the East. The Nazis housed these Jews in the municipality of Barneveld, about 30 miles east of Utrecht, near the centre of The Netherlands. They utilized a castle called De Schaffelaer and a nearby building named De Biezen, which had once been a social work office, as their detention facility.

The idea for detention at Barneveld originated with the Secretary General Karel Johannes Frederiks, who pleaded for the protection of a small group of “deserving Jews” who, according to him, were worth saving. The Barneveld group had a certain value for the Nazi occupiers, therefore they protected them. *Reichskommissar* Seyss-Inquart officially declared that Jews in the Barneveld group would be permitted to remain in the Netherlands,

53 *Ibid.* German text: Slottkes Handeln kann als Selektion durch Bürokratie bezeichnet werden. It is not difficult to read in this conclusion a reference to the Eichmann trial at the beginning of the sixties of the last century.

54 Mechanicus uses the term “Barneveld” about 30 times in his diary, the word “barnevelders” – those internalized in Barneveld – almost 40 times.

55 Cf. the relevant literature: Abel J. Herzberg, *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging* (Arnhem/Amsterdam: Van Lochem Slaterus/J.M. Meulenhoff, 1950), 131-133; Presser *Ondergang*, Vol. I, 439-447; De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk*, 709-712, 771.

which explains the enthusiasm among the Jews for such an arrangement. The group began with only five persons given protected status. Frederiks proposed his idea to Rauter, who resolutely declined it. Frederiks did not give up though, instead turning to Commissar General Franz Schmidt, a strong rival of Rauter, who immediately accepted the plan. Without wasting any time, Frederiks went to work developing his list. The fast growing list was named after Frederiks and Van Dam. The latter was the Secretary General of Public Instruction and Culture and was favourable to the German policy during the years of occupation. Eventually, 700 Jews were internalized at Barneveld between December 1942 and the end of September 1943. Even after the transport of all the 700 to Camp Westerbork on 29 September 1943, Frederiks tried to add more people to the list.

The living conditions in Barneveld were good compared to Camp Vught and Westerbork, let alone Camp Amersfoort, which was notoriously cruel. According to Mechanicus, the inhabitants of Barneveld roused an enormous amount of envy among Dutch Jews. According to Riva Hillesum, not only did her son Mischa deserve to go there, but also her husband, by virtue of his work in the field of linguistics. Concerning Mischa, it is important to recall that the Nazis were willing to allow him, alone, without his family, to stay in Barneveld.

The initiative to create and to add people to the Barneveld list came directly from Frederiks and Van Dam. Rauter's opinion on Barneveld was well known from the outset; he thought it should be closed, and the sooner the better. The principal aim of Nazi policy was that the Netherlands had to be made *judenrein* [cleared of Jews]. To maintain a small camp in which a certain number of the Dutch Jewish elite was sheltered, was certainly not coherent with this policy. In spite of promises to Frederiks and Van Dam, The Hague had decided at the beginning of 1943 to bring the inhabitants of Barneveld to Camp Westerbork. The "natural" destination of these Jews was Bergen-Belsen or Theresienstadt. Fräulein Slottke undoubtedly knew about the plan to eliminate Camp Barneveld, and she knew about it months before 9 July 1943. She had even been a part of the decision-making process. Historian Jacques Presser has written on this point. Slottke and her colleague Fisher paid a visit to Barneveld on 11 May 1943, and afterwards she reported extensively to her superior Zopf. In the conclusion of her report, she stated that any evaluation of the position of the Jews in Barneveld, based on the *Sicherheitspolizei* criteria, would produce a negative verdict.⁵⁶ They were *transportfähig* [suitable for transport]. Presser also points out

⁵⁶ Presser, *Ondergang*, Vol. I, 444. Presser quotes the conclusion in German.

that Slottke was convinced that the *Protektionjuden* [protected Jews] were going to be removed and suggested calling in the *Einsatzstab Rosenberg*⁵⁷ to seize the goods and possessions of the inhabitants when the time came to move them out.

This happened four months later. On 29 September 1943, the *Ordnungspolizei* knocked on the doors of both De Schaffelaar castle and De Biezen building, summoning the inhabitants. They were told they had an hour and a half to prepare to leave for Camp Westerbork. Mechanicus wrote a fairly cynical entry in his diary about their arrival and subsequent installation in hut number 85. Almost a year later, the whole group of 640 persons was transported to Theresienstadt on the convoy of 4 September 1944.

The Barneveld group kept their privileged position until the end. Except for a few of the elderly, all of them survived the catastrophe. Abel Herzberg, writing on Barneveld, said, "They owe their lives to the lawyer Frederiks and Professor Van Dam."⁵⁸

Fräulein Slottke Closes the Hillesum File

Meanwhile, in Camp Westerbork on 9 July 1943, both Mischa and Ety Hillesum were *gesperrt*, meaning that they could stay on in Camp Westerbork. Ety Hillesum received her *Lagerkarte*, her camp identity card, with a red "Z" stamp that gave her the same status as the *alte Kampinsassen*, who were inscribed in a list named *Stammliste*.⁵⁹ The parents Hillesum had been cleared for transport for the following Tuesday, 13 July, but were taken off the list just in time. They were also saved from the transports on 20 July to Sobibor and those to Auschwitz-Birkenau on 24 and 31 August 1943. Between 20 July and 24 August 1943, no outgoing transports left Camp Westerbork.⁶⁰

57 The full name of the Dutch section of this Nazi institution was *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, Hauptarbeitsgruppe Niederlande*. It was a part of the *Zentralstelle* whose task was to lay hands on the household furniture of Jewish families in Western Europe and to ship them to the occupied territories in Eastern Europe. The operational arm was named *Hausraterfassungsstelle* [household furniture seizure department], of which a history has been written by Gerard Aalders in his book *Roof: De ontvreemding van joods bezit tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, The Hague: SDU, 1999. Ad van Liempt told a specific part of the story in his book *Kopgeld: Nederlandse premiejagers op zoek naar joden, 1943* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2002).

58 Herzberg, *Kroniek*, 133. Dutch: Zij hebben hun leven aan mr. Frederiks en Prof. Van Dam te danken.

59 Cf. Mechanicus, *Year*, 76-77. Mechanicus, *In Dépôt*, 69-70.

60 Cf. Hillesums well-known letter on the 24 August transport, E.T., 644-654. *Het Werk*, 686-698; Mechanicus' diary entry of that day, *Year*, 136-138; Dutch: *In Dépôt*, 135-136. Cf. Gerrit Van

After her letter of 9 July 1943, Barneveld is no longer discussed in Etty Hillesum's letters. She and her brother Mischa were in fact *gesperrt* [exempt of deportation] and the danger concerned their parents, whose position became trickier by the week. Hillesum makes it very clear in her letter to Maria Tuinzing of 2 September:

We have managed to get through another Tuesday. If there is a transport next Tuesday, the chances of keeping them [her parents] here will be slight.⁶¹

We may deduce from this that the Jewish camp staff had been able to offer a protective shield to the parents Hillesum for several weeks. This protection could only be ended by a Nazi order. This would happen quite soon.

It is likely that in August 1943 the IVB4 office in The Hague, in view of the weekly rhythm of transports being re-established, had reopened the Mischa Hillesum file. Evidently, the person most likely to have done this was Fräulein Slottker, who was in charge of the *Zurückstellungen*. Presser writes: "As a Polizei-Angestellte, she was, as it were, the bookkeeper of the dispensations of deportation and as it seems (she was) a relevant part in the decision making."⁶² Presser also quotes an eyewitness in Camp Westerbork, who declared that Slottker personally met each person who made a request for deferment claiming a field of competence.⁶³

The parents Hillesum had not been admitted to Barneveld. Only their son Mischa had a *Zurückstellung* [temporary transport deferment], but there was hope that it was possible to act in some way to safeguard the parents from transport. This could only be done with the help of the camp's Jewish

Oord, "Two Voices from Westerbork: Etty Hillesum and Philip Mechanicus on the Transport from Camp Westerbork on 24 August 1943", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 313-334.

61 E.T. 656. *Het Werk*, 700; Letter 68, To Maria Tuinzing. Westerbork, Thursday, 2 September 1943: Deze Dinsdag zijn we er weer doorgekomen. Als er a.s. Dinsdag weer een transport gaat, zijn de kansen heel klein om ze [Hillesums ouders] te houden.

62 Presser, *Ondergang*, Vol. II, 163: Zij had als 'Polizei-Angestellte' a.h.w. de boekhouding van de vrijstellingen van de deportatie en, naar het schijnt, een belangrijk aandeel in de beslissingen. Presser was correct, because Zopf also had the same view in the preparatory interviews for the trial.

63 Presser, *Ondergang*, Vol. II, 163. Dutch: Zij wou iedereen, die een request waarover zij te beslissen had, had ingediend, zelf zien en spreken.

leadership.⁶⁴ The authorities in The Hague, however, in issuing their order to Gemmeker, forced the decision to put the whole family on the next train. It was unimaginable to Gemmeker to let an order from his direct superiors in IVB4 be ignored by anyone in the camp. The deportation could simply be justified by Mischa's refusal to accept the proposal that he go to Barneveld by himself. The clearance for transport for the parents Hillesum – they were *transportfähig* – exposed the fact that anyone keeping individuals on hold week after week in camp Westerbork was in flagrant violation of the orders issued by the commanding Nazi authorities.

Furthermore, it seems that the differences in competences between the *Zentralstelle* in Amsterdam and the IVB4 office in The Hague were not altogether clear to Ety Hillesum. The decision to transport certain people was the work of the IVB4 office and Slottke was involved directly. Elisabeth Kohlhaas has shown in her article on Slottke that the Nazi functionary was increasingly in charge, because, as already remarked, Zopf was frequently absent and also because Slottke worked consciously on furthering her career within the *Sicherheitspolizei*. In her function as *Sachbearbeiterin*, she prepared the dossiers but did not sign transport orders that were to be executed by SS-*Obersturmführer* Gemmeker. The signature of *Judenreferent* Zopf, higher in rank than Gemmeker, was needed. Furthermore, it is very unlikely that Rauter would have been personally involved in such a detailed question as who was to be on which transport list, as was suggested by Benno Stokvis. After preparing the dossier containing the short list of deportees, it was signed off by Zopf and simply became an order for deportation. On Monday morning, Slottke communicated the decision by telephone to Camp Westerbork.

There is another aspect that may have influenced the course of events. The quantity of Jews to be carried off with the transport of 7 September 1943 was less than a thousand.⁶⁵ It could have been that The Hague decided to add the four members of the Hillesum family in order to arrive at the target number of 1,000 persons on each transport. From the point of view of *judenrein*, the Nazis' declared goal of clearing the country of Jews, each Jew counted. Mechanicus refers to *judenrein* in his diary entry of 21 July

64 This meant that other people had to go in their place since the quantities had to be respected. Note in this regard, Ety Hillesum's remarks in her diary on Saturday 11 July 1942: [...] everyone who seeks to save himself must surely realize that if he does not go another must take his place. E.T., 484. Dutch: En ieder, die zichzelf nog wil redden en die toch wel weten kan, dat, wanneer hij niet gaat, daarvoor een ander in de plaats moet gaan. *Het Werk*, 511.

65 It seems that 1,000 units was the minimum target number. Cf. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk*, 754-757. The historian also explains the dynamics of the transports.

1943. According to him, this goal was to be accomplished by 15 July 1943. He writes, "July 15th was the date on which Holland had to virtually be clear of Jews, *judenrein*. July 15th has come and the quota of 90,000 Jews demanded by Hitler has been handed over."⁶⁶ And Mechanicus writes about the hurry the Nazis were in to reach their goal, "It seems they have become obsessed by the idea to clear the country of the Jews as quickly as possible."⁶⁷

Conclusion

What Mechanicus termed *doodgewerkt* [worked his case to death] must be taken seriously. In other words, Mischa's refusal to accept the Barneveld option had become fatal for the entire family. Some might accuse him of negligence, but I do not think this is a correct assessment. His behaviour was motivated by his unshakeable will to protect his beloved parents, whom he refused to leave. ETTY HILLESUM mentions Mischa's affection for their parents in several entries of her diaries and in her letters.

I am inclined to believe that Mischa was convinced that the protection he had gained would also favour the position of his parents. If he had left for Camp Barneveld on his own, the parents would have been left with no hope at all. The way Mischa conceived of his own "protection" did not allow for any distance between them. He himself possessed an excellent *Sperre* [exemption from deportation], which can be deduced from the words on the postcard he wrote to Christine van Nooten: "[...] I am doing [...] quite well. Mengelberg's declaration has had a positive effect!"⁶⁸ The date of this postcard is important: 25 July 1943. His words give the impression that he felt relatively safe. His sister and his parents had quite another opinion.

It is clear that Mischa knew about the letter Willem Andriessen had written on his behalf after Louis Hillesum requested it on 7 April 1943.⁶⁹ It is difficult to know whether the initiatives the parents took to avoid their own deportation in the period after 9 July 1943 were discussed with

66 Mechanicus, *Year*, 97; *In Dépôt*, 90; 21 July 1943: Het is 15 juli en het quotum van negentigduizend Joden, dat Hitler had geëist, is geleverd.

67 This is my translation. This sentence is omitted from the translation I have been using so far. Mechanicus, *In Dépôt*, 90; 21 July 1943: Ze zijn nu blijkbaar ten offer gevallen aan de wens, zoveel mogelijk schoon schip te maken.

68 Postcard 25 July 1943: [...] – dat het mij, betrekkelijk gesproken, goed gaat. Mengelbergs verklaring heeft zijn uitwerking niet gemist! In: Van Oord, "Omnia salva", 121.

69 NIOD, Coll. 250i, Inv. 890. Louis Hillesum included in his letter of 10 April 1943 to Christine van Nooten a photo copy of the letter he received from Willem Andriessen.

the children Mischa and Ety. There is no mention in Ety Hillesum's correspondence of the letter her father wrote to Christine van Nooten asking her to immediately contact the initiators of the Barneveld list.

The conclusion might well be that Ety Hillesum still had – even on the very day the family left Camp Westerbork – a rather more positive idea of what she would find in the East. In addition to her diary entries reflecting this view, it is remarkable that, in her postcard to Christine van Nooten of 7 September 1943, Ety Hillesum does not express any sign of anguish, delusion, or fear. She concludes her message not with a farewell but with a sincere “Goodbye from the four of us.”⁷⁰

About the author

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⁷⁰ E.T., 659. *Het Werk*, 702; Letter 71, To Christine van Nooten. Near Glimmen, Tuesday, 7 September 1943: Tot ziens v. ons vieren.

Reading and Writers



8 “Aesthetic Mirrors”

Etty Hillesum and Rainer Maria Rilke

Meins G.S. Coetsier

Klaas Smelik, Gerrit Van Oord, and Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018
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Abstract

Etty Hillesum's personal engagement in her writings with the literary works of the Prague-born German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) is thought-provoking. Rilke's influence on Hillesum's writings brought out not only her poetic quality, but her real and lived humanity. In this article, the author offers the reader a glimpse into one of the most powerful and overlooked influences on Etty Hillesum's development as a writer. While doing justice to the profundity of her insight, the author discloses some of the literary subtleties shared by Hillesum and Rilke. With literary hermeneutics, the author gazes into three *ästhetische spiegel*s [aesthetic mirrors] and draws detailed, creative lines from Hillesum's work to Rilke's. Furthermore, the article claims that the works of Rilke and Hillesum are still relevant. The bloody tragedies of war, terror and genocide inflict deep wounds up to the present day. Rarely did two people write so much in such short life spans. How war, but also love, left their mark on the life and writings of these two authors remains a mystery they call... *Weltinnenraum*.

Keywords: Rainer Maria Rilke, *Weltinnenraum*, literary hermeneutics, literary influence, aesthetic mirror, Etty Hillesum

Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, daß
 sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie
 hinheben über dich zu andern Dingen? [...]
 Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt?
 Und welcher Geiger hat uns in der Hand?
 O süßes Lied.¹

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Liebes-Lied*

“Wie soll ich meine Seele halten” ... “How shall I hold my soul suspended above you so that it does not touch on yours?” ... “Wie soll ich sie hinheben über dich zu andern Dingen” ... “How shall I succeed in concentrating on other things?”² These are the aesthetic words of the Prague-born German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926). Like the diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum (1914-1943),³ his texts evoke questions. His poetry reflects [*spiegelt*]

1 I would like to sincerely thank Fanny Mojet and Durk van der Meer for their generous assistance and kind suggestions in translating the original Dutch publication: Meins G.S. Coetsier, “Esthetische Spiegels: Etty Hillesum en Rainer Maria Rilke”, in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, *et al.* (eds), *Etty Hillesum weer thuis in Middelburg* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 7] (Antwerpen/Apeldoorn: Garant, 2015), 107-134.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Selected Poems*, translated by Albert E. Flemming (New York: Routledge, 2011), 98; Manfred Engel, *et al.* (eds), *Rainer Maria Rilke, Werke: Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden und einem Supplementband* (Frankfurt a/Main & Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1996 & 2003), 450:

Liebes-Lied

Wie soll ich meine Seele halten,
 daß sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie
 hinheben über dich zu andern Dingen?
 Ach gerne möcht ich sie bei irgendwas
 Verlorenem im Dunkel unterbringen
 an einer fremden stillen Stelle, die
 nicht weiterschwingt, wenn deine Tiefen
 schwingen.

Doch alles, was uns anrührt, dich und mich,
 nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich,
 der aus zwei Saiten eine Stimme zieht.
 Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt?
 Und welcher Geiger hat uns in der Hand?
 O süßes Lied.

Love Song

How shall I hold my soul suspended above you
 so that it does not touch on yours? How shall I
 succeed in concentrating on other things?
 Oh, gladly would I hide my soul with
 something lost, somewhere in darkness in a
 totally strange place that would prevent my
 soul's vibrating, when yours vibrates in all
 its depths.

But everything that touches you and me
 takes us together, like the player's bow who
 out of two strings creates one melody.
 Upon which instrument are we then strung?
 Whose is the master-hand that holds the bow?
 O sweet song....

2 Rilke, *Selected Poems*, 98.

3 In order to compare and contrast, I also used for this article – that is, in addition to E.T. and the Dutch original *Het Werk* [The Work] – the bilingual edition: Klaas A.D. Smelik & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Etty Hillesum: The Complete Works 1941-1943, Bilingual, Annotated and Unabridged*, 2 vols (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2014); hereafter: *The Complete Works*.

the internal dynamics of the way of all beings.⁴ Yet, one wonders: What is this "inner way"? A path for writers only? A literary game played by artists and poets who strive for greater independence and high ideals, for love in general, and for literature in particular? Or can we speak of a universal Quest, a "love song" (*Liebes-Lied*) for all?⁵

Each person's life is worthy of being converted into a biography. Whatever the inner biographical drive, to find the courage to walk a spiritual path⁶ is for many an unspoken "struggle,"⁷ a clash of interpretative frameworks, a process of finding the right words.⁸ To be precise: the battle to write words that form clear sentences is the poet's struggle. Nonetheless, creating "word-symbols" that bring to life processes of the human spirit and/or philosophical insight is an exciting challenge! To poetically generate "aesthetic mirrors" [*ästhetische spiegels*] that are absorbed by the reader, unique, and that make the reader feel at home, is a real challenge and an art in itself.⁹

For Etty Hillesum, Rainer Maria Rilke was just such a unique, historic personality¹⁰ – a "wordsmith" [*woordkunstenaar*]. He was the kind of person

4 E.T., 387: At the end of the morning, just a few words from the middle of a Rilke letter: "[...] We project images from within us, we take every opportunity to be world-builders, we erect thing upon thing round our innermost being." *Het Werk*, 405; Saturday morning, 30 May 1942, around 7:30: Aan het eind van de ochtend, even een paar woorden midden uit een Rilke-brief: [...] Wir stellen Bilder aus uns hinaus, wir nehmen jeden Anlas wahr, weltbildend zu werden, wir errichten Ding um Ding um unser Inneres herum.

5 Cf. John J.L. Mood, *Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

6 Denise de Costa, Ton Jorna & Marijn ten Holt (eds), *De moed hebben tot zichzelf: Etty Hillesum als inspiratiebron bij levensvragen* (Utrecht: Kwadraat, 1999).

7 Debbie Pevenage, "There was little of that harmonious rolling out of God's hand': Struggle and balance in the diaries of Etty Hillesum", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 253-268.

8 Cf. Ton Jorna & Denise de Costa, *Van aandacht en adem tot ziel en zin: honderd woorden uit het levensbeschouwend idioom van Etty Hillesum* (Utrecht: Kwadraat, 1999).

9 Cf. Heide Eilert, 'Rilke und die bildenden Künste: Kunstkritische Positionen', in: Volker Kapp (ed.), *Bilderwelten als Vergegenwärtigung und Verratselung der Welt: Literatur und Kunst um die Jahrhundertwende* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1997), 217-229; H.E. Holthusen, *Rainer Maria Rilke in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958); Tom Hubbard, *The Integrative Vision: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Baudelaire, Rilke and MacDiarmid* (Kirkcaldy: Akros, 1997).

10 Cf. E.T., 683-684 (note): Rainer Maria Rilke (b. Prague 1875, d. Valmont near Montreux 1926). Rilke's rather disappointing military career was followed by a period at the University of Prague. In 1897, he met Lou Andreas-Salome with whom he later went to Russia in 1899 and 1900. By then, he had already written the poems that appeared in 1905 in *Das Stunden-Buch*, dedicated to Lou Salomé. In 1900, Rilke met Clara Westhoff at the Worpswede artists' colony. They married

who juggles language, who paints images with words that are replete with stirring and moving metaphors.¹¹ His words were words she wanted to “keep borrowing [...] to write down things for which [she] still [lacked her] own.”¹² For a time, the possibility of satisfying her “feeling of being starved” [*een soort uitgehongertheid*] and “most fervent desire” [*hartstocht*] was focused on “the whole of Rilke”:

[E]verything he has ever written, every letter – to take it all in, and then to cast him off, to forget him and to live on my own substance again. To tell one again when I am under his influence, and when his moods and mine coincide so much that there can be no question of being influenced. It is almost like a fever, and a feeling of being starved all the time of his voice, of which I cannot have enough until I have absorbed every word he ever spoke. And then forgotten it all again. Indeed, to grow more and more towards this: living on one’s own resources.¹³

in 1901. He met Rodin through his wife and in 1902 moved to Paris. Rodin’s sculpture had a profound effect on his literary work, as can be seen in his *Das Buch der Bilder* (1902). His extensive travels included visits to North Africa and Egypt, and he often accepted invitations to stay with friends and art lovers. Rilke had many friendships with women, and a subject he often dwelled on was that women have a far greater ability to love than men – a subject that also interested Etty. The First World War left Rilke a broken man, unable to write. After the war, he moved to Switzerland where, in 1923, he completed his *Duineser Elegien* (started in 1912) and his *Sonette an Orpheus*. These poems are far removed from his earlier work, which Etty often quotes. Rilke died on 29 December 1925 at Valmont sanatorium after having suffered from leukemia for several years. Apart from his letters, Etty quotes from a number of his books: *Das Buch der Bilder* (1902), *Auguste Rodin* (1903), *Geschichten vom lieben Gott* (1904), *Das Stunden-Buch* (1905), *Neue Gedichten* (1907), *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* (1908), *Requiem* (1909), *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), *Duineser Elegien* (1923), and *Gedichte 1906-1926*. In our notes, we refer to the *Sämtliche Werke*, reissued by Rilke-Archiv (1955). Rilke’s letters were published separately in: R.M. Rilke, *Briefe 1902-1906*, published by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1929); R.M. Rilke, *Briefe 1906-1907* (1930); R.M. Rilke, *Briefe 1907-1914* (1933); R.M. Rilke, *Briefe 1914-1921* (1937); R.M. Rilke, *Briefe 1921-1926* (1935); R.M. Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1929); R.M. Rilke, *Briefe an eine junge Frau* (1930); R.M. Rilke, *Über Gott, Zwei Briefe* (1933); R.M. Rilke, *Briefe aus Muzot* (1935); and R.M. Rilke, *Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit* (1931).

11 In his creative process of ‘painting’ [*schilderen*] with words, Rilke was inspired by the French artist and painter Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), the ‘father of modern painting’ and predecessor to the expressionists and cubists. Correspondingly, the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) had a big impact on Rilke’s work as well. Cf. *Rainer Maria Rilke, Werke*, Volume 4, 401-514 [Auguste Rodin] & 594-636.

12 E.T., 398. *Het Werk*, 417; Monday, 8 June 1942, at night: En zo blijf ik maar steeds de woorden van anderen lenen voor weergave van eigen dingen, waarvoor ik nog geen eigen woorden heb.

13 E.T., 337. *Het Werk*, 352; Wednesday morning, 22 April 1942, 12.00 a.m.: [...] de hele Rilke, alles van hem, iedere letter, te lezen en in me op te nemen en hem dan weer af te stropen, te vergeten en weer uit de eigen substantie te leven. Weer te ervaren, waar ik leef onder sterke

"Living on one's own resources" [*leven uit de eigen substantie*] – that is what she longed for! Nonetheless, she considered herself "too lazy." "Oh, you know what, just go on reading Rilke, you're too lazy to put it into words properly yourself, at least for now."¹⁴ ETTY HILLESUM described how she stared at her own desk: "There were the two volumes of Rilke's letters." She wanted to read them "systematically, and in the near future, too."¹⁵ In her thoughts, she was with him. "Rainer Maria Rilke! I'm quite convinced that I'll be writing an impressive paper about you in ten years' time. Right now I am merely living with you and enjoying you."¹⁶ She enjoyed Rilke as one of "those men," "who have a large dose of femininity – and are yet real men." He was, for her, one of those "signposts to the soul."¹⁷ And not, as she put it so courteously, "the he-men, those Führers and heroes in uniform. Not the so-called 'real men' – but perhaps the kind of men I have in mind only exist in the imagination of women."¹⁸ Where many considered Rilke the principal lyric poet of the German language, Hillesum was mainly moved by the creative power of this "poetic magician" [*poëtische goochelaar*]:

invloed van hem en waar stemmingen van hem en mij zó samenvallen, dat er niet van invloed sprake is. Het is bijna een koorts en een soort uitgehongertheid altijd weer naar zijn stem, waar ik niet genoeg van zal krijgen, voordat ik ieder woord, wat hij ooit gesproken heeft, in me heb opgenomen. En dan weer vergeten. En dan weer leven uit de eigen substantie.

14 E.T., 398. *Het Werk*, 417, Monday, 8 June 1942, at night: En zo blijf ik maar steeds de woorden van anderen lenen voor weergave van eigen dingen, waarvoor ik nog geen eigen woorden heb. Uit een brief van Rilke – Aber das Schonste ist ein Beet (rozen n.l.) La France, dessen Boden manchmal mit abgefallenen Blättern bedeckt ist; so ein Beet mocht ich mal haben, wenn ich alt bin, und davor sitzen *und es machen, aus Worten*, in denen alles ist, was ich dann weis. – (Om de onderstreepte woorden heb ik het opgeschreven).

15 E.T., 310. *Het Werk*, 323; Sunday evening, 29 March 1942, 9.30: Er lagen een paar banden Rilke-brieven, ik wil ze graag systematisch en binnen niet al te lange tijd grondig doorlezen.

16 E.T., 303. *Het Werk*, 316; Friday evening, 27 March 1942, 9.30: Rainer Maria Rilke! Over tien jaar schrijf ik een indrukwekkend opstel over je, ik ben er van overtuigd. Nu leef ik alleen nog maar met je en geniet van je.

17 E.T., 289. *Het Werk*, 301; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942, 9.30: [...] wegwijzers zijn naar de regionen van de ziel.

18 E.T., 289. *Het Werk*, 301; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942, 9.30: En niet die "hij"-kerels, die Führers en die geuniformeerde helden. Niet, wat men noemt: de echte mannen, maar misschien bestaat dat ook alleen maar in de phantasie van de vrouwen. Cf. E.T., 338. *Het Werk*, 353; Wednesday evening, 22 April 1942, 8.00 p.m.: Hij [Spier] is een man voor vrouwen, dat is waar, maar in die zin, dat hij waarschijnlijk datzelfde in zich heeft, waardoor zoveel vrouwen aan een Rilke hun diepste geheimen kwamen openbaren. Omdat hij zelf juist zoveel vrouwelijks heeft, dat hij een vrouw begrijpen kan. De vrouw, die met haar ziel toch meestal dakloos blijft omdat ze bij de mannen der schepping geen onderdak daarvoor vindt. En bij mannen als hem vindt de "ziel" der vrouwen een onderdak en een begrijpen. In zoverre: een man voor vrouwen, ja!

Time and again I end with you, Rainer Maria – one evening recently, while I was sitting at my desk, it suddenly struck me with great force that you are no longer among the living. I am sure I would have written you long letters. But it is good anyway. You are still amongst us.¹⁹

“You are still amongst us” [*Je leeft toch!*] – it was certainly true that Ety Hillesum felt his presence. She cited Fritz Klatt, “Rilke knows, more deeply than most masters of the past and than our contemporaries, what love really is.”²⁰ Rilke gave her a sense of knowing what love [*Liebe*] “actually is” [*eigentlich ist*].²¹ In Hillesum’s literary legacy, we notice a similar type of love (in Dutch: *liefde*). Furthermore, she had her own talent for confronting and interpreting reality by playing with language, namely by mirroring words [*spiegelende woorden*]. Her writings are marked by the events of the war, and by the experiences of her own personal life. For Hillesum, it became almost impossible not to imagine, and then put into words what was living inside her. Her writings reflect the weaknesses, strengths, and the resilience of the human spirit. They hold an impressive moral and creative *studia humanitatis* – in the midst of persecution and war.²²

19 E.T., 281. *Het Werk*, 292; Friday morning, 13 March 1942, 10.30: En altijd weer kom ik bij jou terecht, Rainer Maria – laatst op een avond achter dit bureau sloeg het me plotseling toch zo, dat je niet meer onder de levenden bent. Ik geloof, dat ik je lange brieven geschreven zou hebben. Maar zo is het ook goed. Je leeft toch.

20 E.T., 281. *Het Werk*, 292; Friday morning, 13 March 1942, 10.30: Rilke weiß in einer größeren Tiefe als die meisten Meister der Vergangenheit und als die Zeitgenossen, was Liebe eigentlich ist.

21 For Rilke see: Manfred Engel, *Rilke-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, in association with Dorothea Lauterbach (Stuttgart/Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2004).

22 Already in 1993, Michael Piechowski studied the experience of “moral creativity” in relation to Ety Hillesum. He wondered then: “is inner transformation a creative process?” His answer was “yes.” Piechowski concluded that inner peace is the basis for world peace. If this is true, writers like Rilke and Hillesum would be at the centre of an eventual (hypothetical) “world peace.” At least, they managed to create an expression of peace in themselves and in their readers. The concept of “world peace,” however, remains (and turns out to be) more complicated than we think. Michael M. Piechowski, “Is Inner Transformation a Creative Process?” *Creativity Research Journal, Special Issue: Creativity in the Moral Domain* 6 (1993), nos. 1-2, 89-98. [Abstract: After some musings, the answer to the title’s question is “yes.” Piechowski bases his argument on Dabrowski’s theory of levels of emotional development, Maslow’s concept of “self-actualization” and Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences. Within this frame he takes up three cases: Ety Hillesum, the Dutch woman whose inner growth, recorded in her diary, led her finally to volunteer for deportation by the Nazis, and to go off singing; a woman named Ashley, a fiercely devoted teacher who kept a diary recording her inner struggle for purification; and a woman known as “Peace Pilgrim” who covered 25,000 miles on foot, telling peace along the way. The article concludes on the note that inner peace is the foundation of world peace. – Editors].

"Now about what exactly should you talk," when you are being gruesomely persecuted and living in Nazi captivity? In the newly found letter²³ from Camp Westerbork (Monday, 24 August 1942) written to Hes Hijmans²⁴ and other acquaintances in Amsterdam, Hillesum stated clearly, "Of course, about Rainer Maria Rilke!"

I still have a few things to tell you. Yesterday afternoon, maybe it was the day before, I walked with my plate of red cabbage down the hallway, which leads to the barracks where we eat. I passed the small room where the Directorium meets (yes, that's what it is called). It still consists of two men, that Dr. Fraenkel about whom I wrote to you already and Vleeschhouwer,²⁵ my good brother in arms. The door was open. They called me in, cabbage and all and asked if I wanted to eat with them. Now about what exactly should you talk when you are full of concerns and responsibilities and when you sit on a few square metres of fenced off heathland in the poorest province of Holland? Of course, about Rainer Maria Rilke! His "Stundenbuch", which I always carry with me in my bag, was suddenly lying there on the wooden table between our plates of red cabbage that was getting cold. Fraenkel suddenly remembered that in the distant past that "Stundenbuch" had once laid for a year on his bedside table. He began to read to us as he recognized each poem and he became increasingly youthful.

"I am praying again, you blessed one, you can hear what I say in the wind; for my soul is enabled to capture again brand-new words that arise from within."²⁶

23 The newly found letters, lettered D to H in *The Complete Works* are translated from the original Dutch and German by Meins G.S. Coetsier in close collaboration with Carolyn Coman, Mary Lalor, Gabriel Slattery, and Klaas A.D. Smelik. Denise de Costa published the letters D to G in her book *Met pen en penseel: Levenskunst van Anne Frank, Ety Hillesum en Charlotte Salomon* [Ety Hillesum lecture] (Deventer: Thieme, 2003). The letters have subsequently been transcribed again by Rob Tempelaars. Cf. *The Complete Works*, 1110, n. 10.

24 Hes Hijmans (Amsterdam 1915), nicknamed "Hesje", was a good acquaintance of Ety Hillesum. Hes Hijmans apparently delivered a rucksack to Ety Hillesum, who had asked for this favour ("I rang Hesje to ask if she could get me a rucksack," diary entry 27 July 1942). Cf. *The Complete Works*, 1112, n. 14 [Monday morning, 24 August 1942].

25 Jopie Vleeschhouwer.

26 This letter is not included in E.T. but it can be found in *The Complete Works*, 1112; Monday morning, 24 August 1942, 11.00: Ich bete wieder, du Erlauchter, du hörst mich wieder durch den Wind, weil meine Tiefen nie gebrauchter rauschender Worte mächtig sind. Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Book of Hours: Prayers to a Lowly God*, European Poetry Classics, edited and translated by Annemarie S. Kidder (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 98-99. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Das Stundenbuch* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1926), 52.

When our barracks commander, the former inspector of police (you know him, Mr. Leguyt²⁷), came in, he reported, looking a little pale: Dr. Fraenkel, there are complaints that there is not enough food today. And Fraenkel said: Sure, there is enough; I've had as much as the others and there is enough. The inspector disappeared after this report and Fraenkel came across the poem: "Poverty is luminous from within."²⁸ And then he read²⁹

What will you do, God, when I die?
 I am your pitcher (when I shatter?)
 I am your drink (when I go bitter?)
 I, your garment; I, your craft.
 Without me, what reason have you?³⁰

This letter shows that Hillesum's approach in her diaries and letters was courageous. She was intuitive and realistic, with a strong visual and linguistic disposition. Etty Hillesum was able to transform her experiences and spiritual insights into writing, and communicate their depth. Even more

27 J. Leguyt was the companion of Han Wegerif.

28 Rilke, *Das Stundenbuch*, 94.

29 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Readings from the Prose, Poems and Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke*, translated by Anita Barrows & Joanna Macy (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 82. Rilke, *Das Stundenbuch*, 26.

30 *The Complete Works*, 1112; Monday morning, 24 August 1942, 11.00 a.m.: Ik moet jullie toch nog een paar dingen vertellen. Gisterenmiddag, het kan ook een dag eerder ge weest zijn, liep ik met m'n bord rooiekool door de gang, die naar de eetbarak leidt. Ik kwam langs het kleine kamertje van ons Directorium (ja, zo heet dat nou eenmaal), dat nu nog uit twee mannen bestaat, die Dr. Fraenkel, over wie ik jullie al eens geschreven heb en Vleschhouwer, m'n goede wapenbroeder. De deur stond open, ze riepen me, met rooiekool en al binnen en vroegen of ik met hun wilde eten. En waarover moet je nu praten als je met vele zorgen en verantwoordelijkheden op enige vierkante meters afgerasterde heidegrond zit, in de armoedigste provincie van Holland? Natuurlijk over Rainer Maria Rilke. Zijn "Stundenbuch", dat ik altijd in m'n tas meedraag, lag daar opeens op de houten tafel tussen onze rooiekool, die koud werd en Fraenkel herinnerde zich plotseling, dat dat "Stundenbuch" in een ver verleden eens een jaar lang op zijn nachtkastje gelegen had en hij begon ons voor te lezen en herkende ieder gedicht en werd steeds jeugdiger. "*Ich bete wieder, du Erlauchter, du hörst mich wieder durch den Wind, weil meine Tiefen nie gebrauchter rauschender Worte mächtig sind.*" Toen kwam onze barakkencommandant binnen, de vroegere inspecteur van politie (U kent hem wel, mijnheer Leguyt) en rapporteerde een beetje bleekjes: Dr. Fraenkel, er wordt geklaagd, dat er niet genoeg te eten is vandaag. En Fraenkel zei: het is wel genoeg, ik heb zelf evenveel gehad als de anderen en het is genoeg. De inspecteur verdween na dit rapport en Fraenkel ontmoette het gedicht: Denn Armut ist ein großer Glanz aus innen. En toen las hij: *Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe? Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?) Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?) Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe, mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.*

significantly, she could do this in readable sentences. It remains noteworthy, though not hugely surprising, that the reader can recognize something of themselves in her aesthetic mirrors [*ästhetische spiegel*s] – that is, in her vision of a more humane society.

With this article, I hope to do justice to the profundity of Etty Hillesum's insight, and to disclose some of the literary subtleties shared by Hillesum and Rilke.³¹ I will draw three lines from Hillesum's work to Rilke's – gazing into three "aesthetic mirrors" of the two authors.³²

Literary Hermeneutics

- a "I am with you" (*Ichbinbeidir*)
- b "God matures" (*Gott reift*)
- c "patience is all" (*Geduld ist alles*)

- a "I am with you" [*Ichbinbeidir*]

Etty Hillesum had been reading authors like Rilke and Dostoevsky since the 1930s. This pastime was something she considered a kind of "working," to be done often "before coffee." "And now before coffee I shall treat myself to an hour with Rilke's letters, that's working as well, after all."³³ And when she "had to find words for the mood" she was in, she preferred "to borrow

31 Scholarly research on Rilke and Hillesum is relatively rare in the international field of Hillesum Studies. See the recent works of Patrick Woodhouse, Maria Goetze and Fritz Grimmelikhuisen. Cf. Patrick Woodhouse, "The Influence of the Work of Rainer Maria Rilke on the Mind and Heart of Etty Hillesum", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Meins G.S. Coetsier & Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *The Ethics and Religious Philosophy of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, January 2014* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 28] (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2017), 285-298; Maria C. Goetze, "Etty Hillesums Rilke-Lektüre" (PhD thesis, Universiteit Utrecht, 2006); Frits Grimmelikhuisen, *Etty Hillesum leest Rainer Maria Rilke: De invloed van Rainer Maria Rilke op het kunstenaarschap van Etty Hillesum* (Deventer: Uitgeverij Oorsprong, 2016⁴).

32 Cf. Rilke, *Schriften*, part 4. *Rilke Werke*, Horst Nalewski (ed.) (Frankfurt a/Main: Insel Verlag, 1996); Rilke, *Werke, Kommentierte Ausgabe*; K. Hamburger, *Rilke: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976); Gerhart Söhn, "Rilke und die bildende Kunst", in: *Aus dem Antiquariat (Beil. zum Borsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel, Frankfurter Ausg.)* (1997), no. 3, 139-41; Simon Vestdijk, "Rilke als Barokkunstenaar" (1939), in: *Lier en Lancet*, part 1 (The Hague: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1960), 80-141.

33 E.T., 313. *Het Werk*, 327; Wednesday morning, 1 April 1942, 11.00: En nu onthaal ik mezelf, vóór de koffie, op een uurtje Rilke-brieven, dat is toch ook werken.

them again for the time being,” reaching “for the letters ‘to the young poet’.”³⁴ She read “the same words for the umpteenth time” and felt “the need to copy them out,” in the hope of finding “her own words.”³⁵ Even sitting “by the stove” at night,³⁶ she read “Rilke’s letters.”³⁷ “To me, the Rilke letters are like an ocean into which I swim ever deeper and ever further’ – I’ve put it in German because I can’t begin to express such a thing properly in Dutch.”³⁸ Under the influence of Julius Spier, this Rilke obsession gained “a deeper, spiritual meaning” [*een diepere, spirituele betekenis*]³⁹:

And things like that happen quite often. Right now I am deep in Rilke. He is constantly in my thoughts, I have never experienced anything like it before – to become so completely absorbed in a writer as to lose oneself in him, so to speak.⁴⁰

Regarding Spier, she wrote, “Who are you anyway, and who told you that you could meddle with me?”⁴¹ Immediately, she was thinking of the German poet again, “Rilke has written a beautiful poem about this mood of mine, I hope I’ll be able to find it again.”⁴² Rilke’s words helped her to express her personal experiences and “moods” and to “find clarity.” Rilke’s artistic way

34 E.T., 313. *Het Werk*, 327; Wednesday morning, 1 April 1942, 11.00: En wanneer ik nu woorden zou moeten vinden, die m’n stemming van dit ogenblik weergeven, dan leen ik ze zolang weer van een ander en grijp naar de brieven ‘an den jungen Dichter’ en lees voor de zoveelste keer dezelfde woorden en heb ook weer de behoefte ze nog eens over te schrijven (tot ik de eigen woorden gevonden heb? [...])

35 *Ibid.*

36 Hillesum sat more often “by the stove” reading Rilke and “scribbling away”: “[...] sees me scribbling away here by the stove” (E.T., 226); “I spoiled myself with Rilke by the stove” (E.T., 234); “with some Rilke letters by the stove” (E.T., 270); “I was sitting by the stove reading Rilke’s letters” (E.T., 321).

37 E.T., 321. *Het Werk*, 335; Good Friday morning, 3 April 1942, 8.30: Gisterenavond zat ik aan de haard en las de Rilke-brieven en Han zat over z’n krant met een pijp.

38 E.T., 321. *Het Werk*, 335; Good Friday morning, 3 April 1942, 8.30: Die Rilke-Briefe sind für mich wie ein Meer, in das ich immer tiefer und weiter hineinschwimme. Zoiets kan ik in het Hollands helemaal niet formuleren.

39 *Het Werk*, xvi.

40 E.T., 322. *Het Werk*, 337; Saturday morning, 4 April 1942, 9.00: En zo gaat het vaker. Ik beleef nu een tijd, waarin ik me steeds diepgaander en intensiever met Rilke bezighoud. Ik houd me eigenlijk ononderbroken met hem bezig, dat gaat zo helemaal vanzelf, ik heb dat vroeger nooit zo gekend, het volledig in zich opnemen van een schrijver, een vergroeiën er mee.

41 E.T., 47. *Het Werk*, 49; Monday morning, 24 March 1941, 9.30: Wie ben je eigenlijk en wie zegt je dat je je zo met me bemoeien mag?

42 E.T., 47. *Het Werk*, 49; Monday morning, 24 March 1941, 9.30: Rilke heeft over deze stemming een prachtig gedicht, ik hoop het nog eens terug te vinden.

of expression *mirrored* her own literary approach to reality. After some searching, she found Rilke's poem and had the feeling that he was with her. In her diaries, we find a passage about a summer's evening on the Zuidelijke Wandelweg, when her friend Abrascha read to her the following:

[A]t the time he felt it applied to me for some reason or other, probably because, despite our intimacy, I always thought of him as a stranger. That ambivalence in me is becoming clear to me now, thanks again to my clash with S. It is all in the last two lines:

Strangely I heard a stranger say: I am with you –

[Die Entführung. –

Oft war sie als Kind ihren Dienerinnen
entwichen, um die Nacht und den Wind
(weil sie drinnen so anders sind)
draussen zu sehn an ihrem Beginnen;
doch keine Sturmnacht hatte gewiss
den riesigen Park so in Stucke gerissen,
wie ihn jetzt ihr Gewissen zerriss,
da er sie nahm von der seidenen Leiter
und sie weitertrug, weiter, weiter:
bis der Wagen alles war.

Und sie roch ihn, den schwarzen Wagen,
um den verhalten das Jagen stand
und die Gefahr.
Und sie fand ihn mit Kaltem ausgeschlagen;
und das Schwarze und Kalte war auch in ihr.
Sie kroch in ihren Mantelkragen
und befühlte ihr Haar, als bliebe es hier,
und hörte fremd einen Fremden sagen:
Ichbinbeidir.]⁴³

Especially, the last sentence was significant for Hillesum, "Und hörte fremd einen Fremden sagen: Ichbinbeidir." [And heard strangely (enough) a stranger say: I am with you]. The being "*beidir*" was a kind of motto that

43 E.T., 47. *Het Werk*, 50; Monday morning, 24 March 1941, 9.30.

literally stayed with her, especially in Camp Westerbork. Rilke's "*Ich bin bei dir*" mirrored a deep desire in her: to be there for "you," "a stranger" – that is, for "the Other,"⁴⁴ for God and man. Rilke gave her the insight that *being-there-for-you*, as much as the *being-there-for-me*, was a central approach to becoming fully alive (see: Buber's *Ich und Du*). Moreover, one of the themes in Rilke's writings that appealed to her was the relationship between a man and a woman, namely, the *being there for each other*. This togetherness and meeting between the sexes mattered to her deeply. "In it Rilke says the time will come when man and woman will no longer stand face to face, but side by side, to share the heavy burden of their sexuality."⁴⁵

Although Spier had been "a stranger" (*einen Fremden*) to her, he was *there* for ETTY HILLESUM. Rilke too – albeit in literary form – managed to touch her with his poetic words, with his aesthetic mirrors. In this way, he too was *with* her. Spier and Rilke thus became her teachers.

My greatest teacher during this time, besides S., has been Rilke. He is not simply my relaxation for the hours when my work is done, but fills my days and is part of my being. A whole generation will have to discover him anew. And what Lou Andreas said of her friend is so true: "This hypersensitive poet had a robust side."⁴⁶

Rilke and S. had convinced her that writing is indispensable! Despite the difficulties of everyday life, a "poem" (for example one of Rilke's) "is just as real and important" as "a young man falling out of an airplane."⁴⁷ This she wanted to "engrave on her heart" [*op het hart drukken*].⁴⁸ In other words, "All that happens happens in this world of ours, and you must not leave one thing out

44 For "the Other" as a philosophical symbol, see the works of Emmanuel Levinas.

45 E.T., 269. *Het Werk*, 280; Tuesday morning, 3 March 1942, 10.30: Rilke zegt daar, hoe er een tijd zal komen, dat man en vrouw niet meer tégenover elkaar zullen staan, maar naast elkaar, om samen de zware opgave van het geslacht te dragen.

46 E.T., 447. *Het Werk*, 472; Friday evening, 26 June 1942, 9.00: Mijn grote leermeester door de dagen, naast S., is Rilke. Hij is niet een ontspanning voor uren ná het werk, maar hij doortrekt m'n dagen en vormt iets in m'n wezen. Een hele generatie zal hem weer opnieuw moeten ontdekken. En het is zo juist wat Lou Andreas van haar vriend zegt: iemandwo war dieser Dichter des Überzartesten robust.

47 Hillesum refers to Daan Sajet (b. Amsterdam 1920, d. England 1941), who had fallen to his death from an airplane. On 16 June 1941, his plane crashed. Cf. E.T., 690 (note).

48 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 92; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: En een gedicht van Rilke is even reëel en belangrijk als een jongen, die uit een vliegmaschine valt, dat wil ik je nog even goed op het hart drukken.

for the sake of another.⁴⁹ ETTY HILLESUM was convinced of her (re)discovered *Weltanschauung*, her "*Ichbinbeidir*". She passionately copied pieces from Rilke (*stuk uit Rilke overgeschreven*).⁵⁰ Later, in her diary, she confirms this once more, "A single line of Rilke's seems more real to me than moving a house or anything like that."⁵¹ HILLESUM realized that, "to understand ideas and people you must go out into the real world, onto the ground on which everything lives and grows."⁵² Rilke understood ideas and people, and penetrated their backgrounds. He put human experiences into words, which was extraordinarily appealing to HILLESUM. Especially with him, she felt as if she were looking into a kind of *seelische Spiegel* [mirror of the soul]: "The feeling that [she] could have put it just as well [herself], the feeling of knowing it all."⁵³

Only now, when I am 27, have I started to read more purposefully, I might say more independently of whatever it is I happen to be reading. And for me the writers' characters are beginning to emerge that much more sharply defined. Take Rilke. A single line is suddenly more important to me than – well, what? I have been living on a few lines of his Rodin book⁵⁴ for months now.⁵⁵

49 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 92; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: Dat alles is er nu eenmaal in deze wereld en je mag het ene niet wegcijferen voor het andere.

50 E.T., 88. *Het Werk*, 94; Friday afternoon, 15 August 1941: Stuk uit Rilke overgeschreven.

51 E.T., 94. *Het Werk*, 100; Friday morning, 5 September 1941: Een enkele regel van Rilke is voor mij iets reëlers dan bv. een verhuizing of zo. Cf. E.T., 311. *Het Werk*, 324; Sunday evening, 29 March 1942, 9:30: And now I still have this passage from Rilke to copy out: [...] a poem in which I succeed holds much more reality than any affinity or affection I may feel. Where I create, there I am true, and I want to find the strength to base my life wholly on this truth, on this infinite and joyful simplicity that is sometimes granted to me. [En nu moet ik dit nog opschrijven van Rilke: [...] in einem Gedicht, das mir gelingt, ist viel mehr Wirklichkeit als in jeder Beziehung oder Zuneigung, die ich fühle. Wo ich schaffe, bin ich wahr, und ich möchte die Kraft finden, mein Leben ganz auf diese Wahrheit zu gründen, auf diese unendliche Einfachheit und Freude, die mir manchmal gegeben ist.]

52 E.T., 94. *Het Werk*, 100; Friday morning, 5 September 1941, 9:00: Om mensen en ideeën te begrijpen moet je ook de werkelijke wereld en achtergronden kennen, waarbinnen alles leeft en gegroeid is.

53 E.T., 177. *Het Werk*, 186; Friday evening, 12 December 1941, by the stove: Het was het 0-ja-lezen. Bij veel het gevoel, het zelf net zo gezegd te kunnen hebben, het beleefd te kunnen hebben.

54 E.T., 177. *Het Werk*, 186; Friday evening, 12 December 1941, by the stove. R.M. Rilke, *Auguste Rodin* (Berlin: Marquardt & Co., 1908) [first edition by J. Bard (Berlin, 1903); starting from 1913 reprinted by Insel Verlag, Leipzig]. In the second edition, the text was expanded with a lecture given by Rilke in 1907 on the topic of Rodin (*Sämtliche Werke*, V, pp. 139ff.).

55 E.T., 177-178. *Het Werk*, 186; Friday evening, 12 December 1941, by the stove: Pas nu, nu ik toch al 27 jaar ben, begin ik bewuster te lezen, ik zou zeggen, onafhankelijker van wat ik lees. En beginnen de schrijversfiguren ook scherper omlind voor me op te rijzen. Bv. Rilke. Een enkele regel is wezenlijker

“A single line” of poetry was more real to her than many other things. She wrote emphatically that she had been living “on a few lines” of Rilke. Etty Hillesum was clinging to his words, living “das Dasein des Kernes in der Frucht” [the existence of the kernel in the fruit].⁵⁶ She held fast onto the reality that he described, and felt “a sudden urge to copy something from a letter Rilke wrote in 1903,⁵⁷ after a brief introduction to Rodin.”⁵⁸

What he sees, and surrounds with seeing, is always all there is for him, the world in which everything happens; when he shapes a hand it fills the whole of space and there is nothing but a hand; and in six days God created just one hand and poured the waters round it and arched the sky above it; and rested over it when everything was done, and it was a wonder and a hand.⁵⁹

Even while cataloging Spier’s books, she unexpectedly came across Rilke’s *Book of Hours* [*Das Stundenbuch*].⁶⁰ She was fascinated by the *klanken*, the

opeens voor me, dan – ja wat? Met enkele regels uit zijn Rodin-boek leef ik nu al maanden. Cf. E.T., 310. *Het Werk*, 323; Sunday evening, 29 March 1942, 9.30: And suddenly I was back behind my desk, and by chance my eyes fell on this passage of Rilke: [...] I realized then that I must follow him, Rodin: not by reshaping my own creation, but my creation into sculpture, but in my inner articulation of the artistic process: what I must learn from is not sculpting, but profound inner concentration for the form’s sake. I must learn to work, to work, Lou, I need to do so much! *Il faut toujours travailler – toujours* – he said to me one day, when I spoke to him of the awful chasms that have opened up between my good days. [En plotseling zat ik weer verschanst achter m’n bureau en kreeg toevallig dit uit Rilke’s brieven onder ogen: [...] wird es mir offenbar, daß ich ihm, Rodin, folgen muß: nicht in einem bildhauerischen Umgestalten meines Schaffens, aber in der inneren Anordnung des künstlerischen Prozesses; nicht bilden muß ich lernen von ihm, aber tiefes Gesammeltsein um des Bildens willen. Arbeiten muß ich lernen, arbeiten, Lou, das fehlt mir so! *Il faut toujours travailler – toujours* – sagte er mir einmal, als ich ihm von den bängen Abgründen sprach, die zwischen meinen guten Tagen aufgetan sind –]

56 E.T., 401. *Het Werk*, 423; Thursday evening, 10 June 1942: En nu heb ik deze gevonden uit een brief: – Immer mehr (und zu meinem Glück) lebe ich das Dasein des Kernes in der Frucht, der alles, was er hat, um sich herum anordnet und aus sich heraus in der Dunkelheit seines Arbeitens. Und immer mehr sehe ich, es ist mein einziger Ausweg so zu leben; anders kann ich das *Sauere um mich herum nicht in die Süßigkeit verwandeln, die ich dem lieben Gott von ewig her schuldig bin.*

57 Quotation from Rilke, *Briefe 1902-1906*, 111.

58 E.T., 365. *Het Werk*, 382; Tuesday morning, 19 May 1942, 12.00: Ik moet opeens iets overschrijven uit een brief van Rilke, uit 1903, na een vluchtige kennismaking met Rodin.

59 E.T., 365-366. *Het Werk*, 382; Tuesday morning, 19 May 1942, 12.00: ‘Immer ist ihm das, was er schaut und mit Schauen umgibt, das Einzige, die Welt, auf der alles geschieht; wenn er eine Hand bildet, so ist sie ein Raum allein, und es ist nichts außer einer Hand; und Gott hat in sechs Tagen nur eine Hand gemacht und hat die Wasser um sie ausgegossen und die Himmel gebogen über sie; und hat geruht über ihr, als alles vollendet war, und es war eine Herrlichkeit und eine Hand.’

60 E.T., 182. *Het Werk*, 191; Sunday afternoon, 14 December 1941, 2.00: Opeens vind ik bij het catalogiseren van S.’ bibliotheek ‘Das Stundenbuch’ van Rilke! Cf. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Das*

"strains" or "sounds" of *The Book of Hours*. Etty Hillesum sensed that her "soul," her "intellect" and her own human "understanding," was "something of all ages and all countries." Rilke's own inspiration too, drew for instance on strains reflecting the wisdom of Russia:

How lovely and hopeful these movements and alliances across all the frontiers are! The soul has no fatherland, when all is said and done, or rather it has so great a fatherland that there are no frontiers left. This holds the promise of mutual understanding and reconciliation, and I must contribute towards that because I feel that my soul and my intellect reflect all ages and all countries. Yes, that is what I want to do.⁶¹

In her diary Hillesum noted, "Remember Rilke, who was in Russia⁶² and always retained a nostalgia for her!"⁶³ "And this still remains my latest piece of wisdom: one line from Rilke has as much reality as a cheese coupon."⁶⁴ At the beginning of the diaries, Hillesum was seeking confirmation that reading and writing were "allowed" during wartime. Rilke "*ist*" so to say "*bei Ihr*" and gave her the affirmation and courage to continue her literary path and to develop her style of writing. She then quoted "just a bit more from Maurice Betz":

Stundenbuch: Enthaltend die drei Bücher: Vom mönchischen Leben / Von der Pilgerschaft / Von der Armut und vom Tode [Book of Hours: Monastic Life, Pilgrimage, Poverty and Death] (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1905) (*Sämtliche Werke*, I, 251ff.).

61 E.T., 270-271. *Het Werk*, 281; Tuesday evening, 3 March 1942, 10.00: Dit is zo mooi en zo hoopvol, deze stromingen en verbondenheid over alle grenzen heen. De ziel is toch vaderlandsloos of liever de ziel heeft één groot vaderland en daarin zijn geen grenzen. Er zijn de mogelijkheden van wederzijds begrijpen en toenadering en daaraan moet ik meewerken, omdat ik in mij mijn ziel en mijn begrijpen voel als iets van alle tijden en alle landen. Ja, dat wil ik.

62 E.T., 706 (note): In 1899, Rilke, together with Lou Andreas-Salome and her husband, visited Russia for the first time. The following year, Lou and Rilke went for the second time. Rilke came to feel that Russia was his true motherland.

63 E.T., 182. *Het Werk*, 191; Sunday evening, 14 December 1941, 11.30: Rilke, die in Rusland was en altijd een Heimweh daarnaar bewaarde! Cf. Hillesum's comment: 'I should like, for example, to take Rilke, too, back to Russia. After all, he always felt so much nostalgia for her. And I shall bring Russians to Europe. Be a mediator between these two worlds, which have so many things in common. But before I can do that, I still have a lot of learning, maturing, and understanding to do.' E.T., 324. *Het Werk*, 339; Saturday morning, 4 April 1942, 9.00: Ik zou bv. ook Rilke naar Rusland terug willen brengen. Hij heeft er immers toch altijd zo een Heimweh naar gehad. En Russen zal ik naar Europa brengen. Een bemiddelingsfiguur worden tussen deze twee werelden, die toch aanrakingspunten genoeg hebben. Maar daarvoor eerst zelf nog zoveel leren en rijpen en begrijpen.

64 E.T., 184. *Het Werk*, 194; Tuesday morning, 16 December 1941, 9.00: En dit blijft nog steeds mijn wijsheid van de laatste tijd: één regel van Rilke is een even grote realiteit als een kaasbon.

In August 1902, Rilke first took up residence in a hotel in the Quartier Latin, “and his first letters reflect the strength and maturity of the emotions that assailed him.”

And then there was this fragment of a sentence which suddenly opened up new vistas for me and accompanied me all day yesterday:

“After the immeasurability of Russian life he now confronted an immeasurability of faces...” etc.

On Rilke’s return to Paris after the war:

“He arrived by himself and wanted ‘to make a fresh start in Paris’ in an unknown hotel, much like the young man who had taken up residence eighteen years earlier in a furnished room in the Rue Toullier and had experienced Paris as one who serves an apprenticeship or suffers a disease.”⁶⁵

Hillesum noticed the “power and maturity of the emotions” in Rilke’s words. She also made a connection between Rilke and Dostoevsky. On the evening of 16 December 1941, she referred to the following text:

Rediscovered the idea of Dostoevsky’s “Grand Inquisitor” in a short poem by Rilke.⁶⁶

Gerüchte gehn, die dich vermuten,
und Zweifel gehn, die dich verwischen.
Die Trägen und die Träumerischen
mißtrauen ihren eignen Gluten
und wollen, daß die Berge bluten,
denn eher glauben sie dich nicht.

65 E.T., 185. *Het Werk*, 194; Tuesday morning, 16 December, 9.00: In Augustus 1902 richt Rilke zich voor het eerst in een hotelkamer in het Quartier latin in, ‘und seine ersten Briefe verraten die Kraft und Bewegtheit der Gefühle, die ihn bestürmten.’ En dan was het dit fragment van een zin, die opeens ruimtes voor me ontsloot en die me gisteren de hele dag begeleidde: – Nach der Unermeßlichkeit des russischen Lebens stand er nun einer anderen Unermeßlichkeit gegenüber, die aus Gesichtern [...] enz [...] bestand. – Na de oorlog kwam Rilke weer in Parijs. – Er kam allein und wollte in einem unbekanntem Hotel “ganz von vorn wieder mit Paris anfangen”, ähnlich dem jungen Menschen, der achtzehn Jahre vorher sich in einem möblierten Zimmer in der Rue Toullier niedergelassen und dort Paris erlebt hatte, wie man eine Lehrzeit durchmacht oder eine Krankheit. Quotation from Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, 47-48, 55.

66 E.T., 185-186. *Het Werk*, 195; Tuesday evening, 16 December 1941: Men kan het ook heel kort zeggen. In een klein gedicht van Rilke Dostojewski’s ‘Groot-Inquisiteur’ gedachte teruggevonden. Cf. E.T. 706 [note]: The foolish Lebedev from *The Idiot*; the drunkard Marmeladov from *Crime and Punishment*; the lusty old Fiodr Karamazov from *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Du aber senkst dein Angesicht.
 Du könntest den Bergen die Adern aufschneiden
 als Zeichen eines großen Gerichts;
 aber dir liegt nichts an den Heiden.⁶⁷

Similarly, she cited some words from Stefan Zweig's⁶⁸ "Farewell to Rilke" [*Abschied von Rilke*]:

He has been to Russia to let the Kremlin bells resound in his poetry; he has looked into Tolstoy's eyes to discover the visionary blue encompassing many thousand images of people and destinies.⁶⁹

Rilke was a "mirroring anchor point" [*spiegelend ankerpunt*] in her creative process of writing. "Creating" [*scheppen*], for Hillesum, did not mean taking "shorthand notes" [*het meestenograpieren*], but gaining "access to human beings as one might gain access to a house and to walk through every passage and room – how much one needs to do that!"⁷⁰ She was clear on this. "All the things 'Malte' needed for writing a short poem." Malte, the main character in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), inspired her.⁷¹ She wrote:

67 E.T., 185-186. *Het Werk*, 195; Tuesday evening, 16 December 1941. Cf. *The Complete Works*, 302, n. 31: Quotation from Rilke's *Book of Hours* (*Sämtliche Werke*, I, pp. 318f.). German. Translation: "Rumours are rife that forbode you, / and doubts abound that obscure you. / The idle and wistful / mistrust their own fervour / and call for the mountains to bleed / before they believe in you. / But you lower your face. / You could open the veins of the mountains / as a sign of Great Judgement; / but you are not in the least concerned / about heathens."

68 According to Hillesum, Zweig was "the man of far too many words who is cheapened as a result." Cf. p. 302, n. 34: The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) lived in Vienna until 1938. Then he went first to England and later emigrated to America. He committed suicide in Brazil.
 69 E.T., 186. *Het Werk*, 195; Tuesday evening 16 December 1941: Er ist in Rußland gewesen, damit die Glocken des Kremels tönten in sein Gedicht, er hat in die Augen Tolstojs geblickt, um von diesem schauenden Blau zu wissen, durch das tausende Bilder von Menschen und Geschicken gingen. Cf. p. 302, n. 35: Quotation from S. Zweig, *Abschied von Rilke* [Farewell to Rilke] (Tubingen: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag Hermann Leins, [1928] 1946), p. 18.

70 E.T., 190. *Het Werk*, 199; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 9.30: Toegang tot de mensen krijgen als tot een huis, waar men binnen gaat en door alle gangen en kamers loopt. Maar wat daar voor nodig is!

71 Rilke, *Werke*, Kommentierte Ausgabe, part 3, 453-660 [*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*]. Cf. August Stahl (ed.), *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, in: *Prosa und Dramen*, part 3 [Rilke Werke] (Frankfurt a/Main: Insel Verlag, 1996), 453-635; Manfred Engel (ed.), *Rainer Maria Rilke, Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* [Kommentierte Ausgabe] (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1997); Irmgard Wirtz Eybl, 'Zur lyrischen Gestalt von Rilkes Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge', *Quarto, Zeitschrift des Schweizerischen Literaturarchivs* (2012), nr. 35, 19-25.

Last night, Betz⁷² on Rilke:

“Rilke had this to say about F. A., a poet: ‘He was a poet and hated inaccuracy.’”⁷³

I am still surrounded by that inaccuracy myself, sometimes to a grotesque degree – but hush now. I have a host of vague and sombre feelings, but at the same time strive endlessly for Latin clarity.

Betz went on to say:

“When he was able to respond to the productive inspirations of his unconscious, then he also knew how to bring to bear upon his work the great patience of the artisan, having learned from Rodin⁷⁴ that love of and longing for beauty are of no avail unless one labours long and hard to create the special conditions that allow them to embody themselves in words or objects.”⁷⁵

72 Hillesum read “Maurice Betz’s *Rilke in France*.” Cf. *The Complete Works*, 282, n. 4: Maurice Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich: Erinnerungen-Briefe-Dokumente* (Vienna: Herbert Reichner Verlag, 1938). The book in question is the German translation by Willi Reich of Maurice Betz’s *Rilke vivant: Souvenirs, lettres, entretiens* (Paris: Editions Emile-Paul Freres, n.d. [1937]). See also *The Complete Works*, 292, n. 13: Quotation from Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, p. 11. The quotation is taken from the introductory chapter, entitled “Entdeckung der Poesie” [Discovering Poetry]. In this chapter, Betz narrates how in 1915 he discovered in the library of the medievalist Schneegans Rilke’s *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* [The Art of Love and Death of Cornet Christoph Rilke] (1906). This was his introduction to the work of Rainer Maria Rilke.

73 Cf. *The Complete Works*, 310, n. 45: Quotation from Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, p. 78. Betz is referring to a passage in Rilke’s *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, in which the dying poet Felix Arvers musters up the strength to correct a nun working in the hospital, who had called out “collidor” instead of “corridor”. After this, Arvers dies. The explanation follows: “He was a poet and hated inaccuracy” (Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, VI, p. 863).

74 Cf. E.T., 317. *Het Werk*, 331; Wednesday afternoon, 1 April 1942, 4.00: Something else from one of Rilke’s letters: “[...] But work above all. This is what one feels with Rodin: work is space, time, wall, dream, window and eternity. [...] Il faut travailler toujours [...]. The other day, Saturday, he said that, and with such deep conviction, so simply, so wrapped up in his work – it was just like a rustling and a movement of his hands. [En nog iets uit een brief van Rilke: [...] Aber vor allem die Arbeit. Was man bei Rodin fühlt: sie ist Raum, sie ist Zeit, sie ist Wand, sie ist Traum, sie ist Fenster und Ewigkeit [...] Il faut travailler toujours [...] Neulich, Sonnabend, sagte er das, und wie er das sagte, so tief überzeugt, so schlicht, so aus der Arbeit heraus – es war nur wie ein Geräusch und ein Rühren seiner Hände.] See p. 510, n. 30: Quotation from Rilke, *Briefe 1902-1906*, p. 43.

75 E.T., 190. *Het Werk*, 199; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 9.30: Gisterenavond Betz over Rilke: Over F.A., een dichter, zei Rilke: ‘Er war ein Dichter und haßte das Ungefähre.’ Ikzelf zit nog midden in het “Ungefähre”, op het groteske af soms, maar stil maar. Er zit een hoop vaag en zwaar gevoel in me, maar tegelijk is er een eeuwig streven naar contouren van latijnse klaarheid. Betz zegt dan: – Wenn er die ergiebigen Einfälle seines Unbewußten aufzunehmen wußte, so verstand er es auch, an sein Werk die lange Geduld des Handwerkers zu wenden, nachdem er von Rodin gelernt hatte, daß Liebe und Sehnsucht nach der Schönheit nichts nützen, wenn man

Hillesum remembered how she once wrote on a piece of paper, "when grace makes one of its rare entrances, it must be greeted with a well-honed technique."⁷⁶ Aesthetic mirrors do exactly that. They let "grace" flow, giving the Other the feeling "*Ichbinbeidir*". The writing process gave her the feeling that she was alive. She stated: "I am sailing full speed ahead again."⁷⁷ One could call it the "Rilke-mirror-effect" in her life.

Aesthetic mirrors, for Etty Hillesum, were attractive, sometimes even addictive. They stilled a spiritual hunger and desire in her, and evoked a divine spark that lives in each one of us, namely the desire to express ourselves, to transcend, to go beyond the self. Perhaps this explains why she studied Rilke's works so intensely, even in "the dentist's waiting room" – an interesting fact! She copied the following German text from his *Stundenbuch*:⁷⁸

Dann könnte ich in einem tausendfachen
 Gedanken bis an deinen Rand dich denken
 und dich besitzen (nur ein Lächeln lang)
 Ich lese es heraus aus deinem Wort,
 aus der Geschichte der Gebärden,
 mit welchen deine Hände um das Werden
 sich ründeten, begrenzend, warm und weise

.....

 Doch vor dem ersten Tode kam der Mord

.....
 Und was sie seither stammelten,

nicht in harter Handwerksarbeit zunächst die besonderen Bedingungen vorbereitet, die ihnen gestatten, sich in den Worten oder Dingen zu verkörpern. –

76 E.T., 190. *Het Werk*, 199; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 9.30: Ik herinnerde me hoe ik als gymnasiumzuigeling eens op een papiertje schreef: De genade moet bij haar schaarse komsten een welvoorbereide techniek aantreffen.

77 E.T., 190. *Het Werk*, 200; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 11.15: Ik koers weer in volle vaart. –

78 E.T., 191-192. *Het Werk*, 200-201; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 11.15. A series of quotations from Rilke's *Stundenbuch* [Book of Hours]. The page references are to the German edition of his collected works *Sämtliche Werke*, part I: "Dann könnte ich [...] lang)" from: 'Wenn es nur einmal so ganz stille wäre' (p. 256); "Ich lese es [...] Namens." from: 'Ich lese es heraus aus deinem Wort' (p. 257); "Der blasse [...] spricht." from: 'Der blasse Abelknabe spricht' (p. 258); "Ich glaube [...] befreien." from: 'Ich glaube an Alles noch nie Gesagte' (p. 259); "Ich bin auf [...] das ich begriff" from: 'Ich bin auf der Welt zu allein und doch nicht allein genug' (p. 260); "Du siehst [...] verrät." from: 'Du siehst, ich will viel' (p. 261); "Wir bauen [...] du Dom." from: 'Wir bauen an dir mit zitternden Händen' (p. 261); "Daraus, dass [...] Gott reift" from: 'Daraus, dass Einer dich einmal gewollt hat' (p. 262).

sind Stücke
deines alten Namens.—
Der blasse Abelknabe spricht—

Ich glaube an alles noch nie Gesagte.
Ich will meine frömmsten Gefühle befrein—

Ich bin auf der Welt zu allein und doch nicht allein genug,
um jede Stunde zu weihn.
Ich bin auf der Welt zu gering und doch nicht klein genug,
um vor dir zu sein wie ein Ding,

.....
.....
Ich will dich immer spiegeln in ganzer Gestalt
und will niemals blind sein oder zu alt,
um dein schweres schwankendes Bild zu halten.
Ich will mich entfalten.
Nirgends will ich gelogen bleiben,
denn dort bin ich gelogen, wo ich gebogen bin.
Und ich will meinen Sinn
wahr vor dir. Ich will mich beschreiben
wie ein Bild, das ich sah
lange und nah,
wie ein Wort, das ich begriff—

Du siehst, ich will viel.
Vielleicht will ich alles:
das Dunkel jedes unendlichen Falles
und jedes Steigens lichtzitterndes Spiel.....

.....
Du freust dich aller, die dich gebrauchen wie ein Gerät.

Noch bist du nicht kalt, und es ist nicht zu spät,
in deine werdenden Tiefen zu tauchen,
wo sich das Leben ruhig verrät.—

Wir bauen an dir mit zitternden Händen,
und wir turmen Atom auf Atom.
Aber wer kann dich vollenden,
du Dom.—

Daraus, daß einer dich einmal gewollt hat,
weiß ich, daß wir dich wollen dürfen.....

.....
.....

Auch wenn wir nicht wollen:
Gott reift.⁷⁹

And after reading this poem, she “had to have a tooth drilled.” But the reason why she “was so wild and unruly all day long was the reality of those, yes, poems (the word ‘poem’ is too crude and hackneyed to encompass these utterances) on a purple velvet chair in a dentist’s waiting room.”⁸⁰ Regardless of such “wild and unruly” [*wild en onstuimig*] thoughts and feelings, she carried one unceasing prayer and conviction with her: “*Ichbinbeidir*”!

b “God Matures” [*Gott reift*]

For Etty Hillesum, a word such as “poem” was already “too crude and hackneyed to encompass” human utterances.⁸¹ She was looking for the

79 E.T., 191-192. *Het Werk*, 200-201; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 11.15. Cf. *The Complete Works*, 314, n. 48: German. Translation: “Then could I in a thousand fold/ thought contemplate you to the brink/ and own you (for the length of a smile) I can tell from your word,/ from the tale of the gestures/ with which your hands have curved round/ what grows, delineating, warm and wise/ [...] / [...] / Yet before the first death there was murder/ [...] / [...] / And what they have stammered since/are fragments/of your ancient name. Abel, the pale youth says I believe in all that has not yet been said./I want to release my most pious passions – I am too alone in the world, yet not alone enough/ to hallow each hour./ I am too little in this world, yet not lowly enough/ to stand before you like a thing, [...] / [...] / I want always to mirror you full size/and never to be blind or too old,/ to hold on to your heavy, swaying image./ I want to unfold./ I do not want to keep living a lie,/ and I live a lie whenever I am bent./ And I want my mind/ to be true before you. I want to depict myself/ like a painting I saw/ for so long and close by,/ like a word I have grasped. You see, I want much./ Perhaps I want all:/ the darkness of every infinite fall/ and the light trembling play of every ascent/ [...] / You delight in all who use you/ as an instrument. Not yet are you cold, nor is it too late/ to plumb your growing depths,/ where life is calmly revealed. We build you with trembling hands,/ as atom on atom we pile./ But who can complete you,/ great church that you are./ Since one has once wanted you,/ I know that we may want you / [...] / [...] / Even if we do not want:/ God matures.”

80 E.T., 192. *Het Werk*, 201; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 11.15: En daarna moest er een kies worden uitgeboord. Maar misschien was ik daarom de hele dag zo wild en onstuimig, door de werkelijkheid van deze ja, gedichten (het woord “gedicht” is al een te grof en tegelijk versleten instrument om deze uitingen aan te vatten) op een paars fluwelen stoel in een tandartswachtkamer.

81 E.T., 193. *Het Werk*, 201; Friday morning, 19 December 1941, 11.15: het woord “gedicht” is al een te grof en tegelijk versleten instrument om deze uitingen aan te vatten.

experiences and meanings that lie “behind” the words. In relation to God and man, she wanted to find her own *Weltanschauung*, her own language.⁸² “At every turn recently, an appropriate Rilke sentence has demanded my attention.”⁸³ Reading Rilke made her increasingly inwardly attentive [*aandachtiger*].

Read some more Rilke last night. When one reads him, one does not always remember the details, but it is as if one grew more attentive all the time. As if you have to examine and approach everything reaching you from without much more attentively than you have ever done before, and as if everything welling up from within must be hearkened to more attentively, ever more attentively and earnestly.⁸⁴

In spite of this increasing attentiveness and seriousness, Ety Hillesum continued to experience a “lack of inner certainty” towards Rilke and towards “the deepest values he represents.” She wrote, however, that such “lack of certainty” was normally “vanquished within a few days.”⁸⁵ “To come back to Rilke: sensitivity rooted in the virgin soil of strength and of strictness with oneself.”⁸⁶ Rilke’s *Book of Hours* [*Das Stundenbuch*] had an especially strong

82 For example, Hillesum read Rilke’s ‘Über Gott’ [Rainer Maria Rilke, *Über Gott, Zwei Briefe* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1933)]. E.T., 400. *Het Werk*, 420; Wednesday morning, 10 June 1942, 7:30. Cf. E.T., 543. *Het Werk*, 575; Saturday morning, 3 October 1942, a little later than 6:30: I lie here so patiently and now so calmly again that I feel quite a bit better already, not pretend better, but really better. I’m reading Rilke’s letters *On God*, every word is filled with meaning for me, I might have written them myself, and if I had then I would have wanted to write them just like that and no other way. [Ik lig hier nu zo geduldig en tot rust gekomen, ik voel me ook al een stuk beter, niet geforceerd, maar echt beter, ik lees Rilke’s brieven ‘Über Gott’, ieder woord ervan is zwaar van betekenis voor me, ik had ze zelf geschreven kunnen hebben, àls ik ze geschreven had zou ik ze zó en niet anders geschreven willen hebben.]

83 E.T., 403. *Het Werk*, 423; Wednesday evening, 10 June 1942: En bij iedere beweging dringt zich de laatste tijd een zin van Rilke op, die van toepassing is.

84 E.T., 326. *Het Werk*, 340; Sunday morning, 5 April 1942, 9:30: Nog Rilke gelezen gisterenavond. Wanneer men hem leest onthoudt men niet altijd details, maar het is of men innerlijk steeds aandachtiger wordt. Het is, of alles wat van buiten daarna op je afkomt, weer veel aandachtiger bekeken en benaderd moet worden als je vroeger ooit gedaan hebt en of alles wat van binnen opstijgt aandachtiger beluisterd moet worden, steeds aandachtiger en ernstiger.

85 E.T., 273. *Het Werk*, 284; Sunday morning, 8 March 1942, 9:30: Het feit, dat ik me onaangenaam getroffen voelde, op de een of andere manier, door dat essay, en geprikkeld, bewees toch nog m’n eigen innerlijke onzekerheid tegenover een figuur als Rilke, of, in laatste instantie, m’n innerlijke onzekerheid tegenover de diepste waarden, die hij vertegenwoordigt. Maar die onzekerheid was in enige dagen overwonnen.

86 E.T., 448. *Het Werk*, 472; Friday, 26 June 1942, midnight: Nog eens over Rilke: een tederheid, die wortelt in een oerbodem van kracht en van strengheid jegens zichzelf.

"mirroring" attraction and a profound influence on her spiritual search. In the morning of Sunday, 21 December 1941, she cites various excerpts from his book:

Ich bin auf der Welt zu allein und doch nicht allein genug.
 —und dich besitzen (nur ein Lächeln lang)
 Ich will dich immer spiegeln in ganzer Gestalt.
 —Wer seines Lebens viele Widersinne
 versöhnt und dankbar in ein Sinnbild faßt,
 —Wenn du der Träumer bist, bin ich dein Traum.
 Doch wenn du wachen willst, bin ich dein Wille
 —Mein Leben ist nicht diese steile Stunde,
 darin du mich so eilen siehst.⁸⁷

The night before, Hillesum had briefly mentioned Münsterberger's "Freudian study" about Rilke. She described her discomfort with the author's conclusion, "I really [don't] see the joke in writing an exhaustive study of Rilke just to conclude that he was homoerotic. That's no way to approach him, is it? Etc., etc."⁸⁸ According to her, there is much more to discover about Rilke than the simple observation and/or misconception: "homoerotic."⁸⁹ It annoyed her. She was so aware of her own struggle to develop on a personal level that she believed no one should be put into a box. Spier and Rilke made her mindful of the inner life. Consequently, Etty Hillesum was convinced that within each human person a divine process takes place, one where

87 E.T., 196. *Het Werk*, 205; Sunday morning, 21 December 1941, 9.30. Cf. *The Complete Works*, 322, n. 62: A series of quotations from Rilke's *Stundenbuch* [Book of Hours]. The page references are to the German edition of his collected works *Sämtliche Werke*, part I: "Ich bin auf [...] allein genug", from: 'Ich bin auf der Welt zu allein und doch nicht allein genug' (p. 260); "und dich besitzen... lang)", from: 'Wenn es nur einmal so ganz stille wäre' (p. 256); "Ich will dich [...] Gestalt", from: 'Ich bin auf der Welt zu allein und doch nicht allein genug' (p. 260); "Wer seines Leben [...] Sinnbild fasst", from: 'Wer seines Leben viele Widersinne' (p. 263); "Wenn du [...] dein Wille", from: 'Ich bin, du Ängstlicher. Hörst du mich nicht' (p. 264); "Mein Leben ist [...] eilen siehst", from: 'Mein Leben ist nicht diese steile Stunde' (p. 264). German. Translation: "I am too alone in the world, yet not alone enough./ – and own you (for the length of a smile)/I want always to mirror you full size./ – Whoever manages to reconcile the many contradictions of his life/ and views them gratefully as one big theme/ – If you're the dreamer, I am your dream./But if you want to wake, I am your will/ – My life is not this rapid hour,/in which you see me hasten by."

88 E.T., 196-197. *Het Werk*, 205; Sunday morning, 21 December 1941, 9.30: ik snap er toch eigenlijk de mop niet van om een uitvoerige studie aan Rilke te wijden en tot de conclusie te komen, dat hij homo-erotic was. Daarmee is hij toch niet benaderd? Enz. Enz.

89 This was also said about the German author Thomas Mann (1875-1955).

“God matures” [*Gott reift*].⁹⁰ She sensed that a merely materialistic and rationalistic attitude towards reality was ultimately deficient. At times, she could be very passionate about this, even infuriated. In this regard, Spier agreed with her boldness:

Of course it springs from one’s own dissatisfaction, due to a materialistic and rationalistic attitude with which one tries to justify one’s existence by materializing everything, that is, by ‘decreating’ everything; everything is materialized and all that is creative becomes reduced to the materialized common denominator. The poet is insensitized and disqualified. They want to disqualify people like Rilke simply because he doesn’t fit into their philosophy.⁹¹

She rejected any disqualification of the poet [*Entnüchterung und Diskwalifizierung des Dichters*]! Etty Hillesum defended a philosophy [*Weltbild*] in which “God matures” [*Gott reift*]...⁹² She experienced God slowly maturing inside herself, that is, she was, with “Great confidence, truly great confidence” [*Zuversicht*], and a sense of security and trust [*werkelijk groot vertrouwen*] resting in the hands of God.⁹³ She speaks of a “deep undercurrent” [*die diepe onderstroom*] within her, and writes, “Rilke said it to God, but those lines were with me on the train and during the few days in Deventer whenever I thought of our friendship: ‘[...] to hold on to your heavy, swaying image’.”⁹⁴ It was not easy for her, to keep the “heavy, swaying image” in balance. At times, she felt really “itchy” with the term God or “*Gott*”.⁹⁵ Rilke’s words, then, were like a compass:

90 Quotation of Rilke. *Het Werk*, 19 December 1941, 314: Auch wenn wir nicht wollen: Gott reift.

91 E.T., 197. *Het Werk*, 205; Sunday morning, 21 December 1941, 9.30: Es ist natürlich eine Folge der eigenen Unbefriedigtheit durch die materialistische und rationalistische Einstellung, die, um die eigene Existenz rechtfertigen zu können, nun alles ebenso zu materialisieren sucht, also alles “entschöpferischt”; es wird alles materialisiert und eigentlich alles Schöpferische auf den materialisierten Nenner zurückgeführt. Es findet eine Entnüchterung und Diskwalifizierung des Dichters statt. Sie wollen solche Leute wie Rilke disqualifizieren, weil er einfach nicht in ihr Weltbild paßt.

92 See note 90.

93 E.T., 197. *Het Werk*, 206; Sunday morning, 21 December 1941, 9.30: Feeling safe and secure in Your hands, oh God. [Een zich geborgen voelen in jouw hand, mijn God.]

94 E.T., 202. *Het Werk*, 211; Monday morning, 29 December 1941, 9.30: Rilke zegt het tegen God, maar deze regels hebben me in de trein en die paar dagen in Deventer begeleid in verband met onze vriendschap: um dein schweres schwankendes Bild zu halten.

95 Günther Schiwy carefully discusses Rilke’s ‘Gott’: e.g. ‘die Vollendung Gottes durch den Menschen’ (pp. 84-98); ‘das Göttliche in den Menschen, Dingen, Bildern’ (pp. 99-115); ‘Gottes

In the small pocket diary Tide gave him for Christmas, she wrote the words "God be with you." And that irritated me again, all that casual dish-ing up of God all over the place, but then I suddenly recalled Rilke's words in the *Stundenbuch*: "You delight in all who use you as an instrument."⁹⁶

Not only at the dentist, but also after a visit to the pulmonologist, she engaged with Rilke's poetry. On Wednesday, 31 December 1941, we find a quote from Betz's *Rilke in Frankreich*.⁹⁷ She responded by reflecting on how "God matures" thanks to life itself. She was aware of a "continuous stream" that was flowing within her,

This, too, is one of my latest achievements: the realization that every moment gives birth to a new moment, full of fresh potential, and sometimes

Namenlosigkeit' (pp. 150-166). Günther Schiwy, *Rilke und die Religion* (Frankfurt a/Main: Insel Verlag, 2006).

96 E.T., 206-207. *Het Werk*, 216; Monday evening, 29 December 1941, 7:30: In de kleine zakagenda, die Tide hem met Kerstmis gegeven had, schreef ze de woorden 'Gott mit Dir'. En even werd ik weer kriebelig, overal God, dat familiale optrekken met God, maar toen kwamen opeens Rilke's woorden bij me op uit het 'stundenbuch': Du freust dich aller, die dich gebrauchen wie ein Gerät.

97 E.T., 211. *Het Werk*, 220; Wednesday morning, 31 December 1941, 10.00: A little more from Betz: "I have always written very fast," Rilke told me. "More or less improvising, I arrived at a rhythm that seeks to gain living expression through me. When this current courses through us then description is no more than paying heed. For instance, I wrote the *Cornet* in a single night by heeding an irresistible urge to describe the images produced by the reflection of the setting sun on the clouds passing before my open window. Many of my *New Poems* wrote themselves, as it were, in their final form, often several of them in a single day, and when I wrote the *Book of Hours* I felt the resolution come so easily that I could not stop writing. Incidentally, the *Book of Hours* is not an anthology from which one can pick a page or a poem as one plucks a flower. More than any of my other books it is a song, a single poem in which not a single stanza can be moved from its position, just as happens with the veins in a leaf or the voices in a choir." [Nog even dat uit Betz: 'Ich habe immer sehr schnell geschrieben', sagte mir Rilke, 'gleichsam improvisierend empfand ich einen Rhythmus, der durch mich lebendige Gestalt zu erhalten suchte. Wenn diese Bewegung in uns ist, dann ist die Darstellung nur mehr eine Sache des Gehorsams. So habe ich den Cornet in einer einzigen Nacht geschrieben, indem ich, einem unwiderstehlichen Zwange gehorchend, die Bilder wiedergab, die der Widerschein der untergehenden Sonne auf den Wolken, die an meinem geöffneten Fenster vorüberzogen, hatte entstehen lassen. Viele meiner Neuen Gedichte haben sich gewissermaßen selbst geschrieben, in endgültiger Form, oft mehrere an einem Tage, und als ich das Stundenbuch schrieb, hatte ich das Gefühl, daß sich die Auslösung so leicht vollzogen hatte, daß ich nicht mehr aufhören konnte zu schreiben. Das Stundenbuch ist übrigens keine Sammlung, aus der man eine Seite oder ein Gedicht entnehmen kann, wie man eine Blume pflückt. Mehr als jedes andere meiner Bücher ist es ein Gesang, ein einziges Gedicht, in dem keine Strophe von ihrem Platz gerückt werden kann, ebenso wie die Adern eines Blattes oder die Stimmen eines Chors.'] Cf. Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, 112.

like an unexpected present. And that one must not cling to moments of malaise and prolong them needlessly, because in so doing one may prevent the birth of a richer moment. Life courses through one as a constant current in a great series of moments, each having its own place in the day. Come on now, can't you do better than that? I can't help it, truly, I still can't put it into words. Hush, now. Be patient. And if you can't say it, then someone else will do it for you, Rilke or Beethoven, for instance. – Goodbye.⁹⁸

Especially the last sentence – “And if you can't say it, then someone else will do it for you, Rilke or Beethoven, for instance” – reflects Hillesum's urgent longing to communicate and to express life and reality, and the very moments when for her “God matures” (*Gott reift*). She desired to dive into the “undercurrent” and harmonize the contradictions within herself, which she describes as “Rilke and Marlene Dietrich.” In trying to find an emotional synthesis within, she thanks the “maturing God” in her “great inner Domain”:

Yesterday morning: at my desk, immersed in the undercurrent, and in the evening the theatrical atmosphere at the Levies'. At the Levies' I defended Tideman against all their criticism. There is no conflict in me any longer. Rilke and Marlene Dietrich⁹⁹ tolerate each other, as it were, wonderfully well in me, I don't have to deny either for a single moment in order to appreciate the other to the full. What a silly comparison really, how did that occur to me? And then that intense conversation with Jan Polak. It was only thanks to that that I realized I can put into words what touches me, have the courage to say what I feel. Almost to bear witness to it. A great deal happened yesterday, it was a rich day, full to overflowing again, too much to be written up in full. And now to work. – I thank You, God,

98 E.T., 211. *Het Werk*, 220-221; Wednesday morning, 31 December 1941, 10.00: Dit is ook een van de laatste verworvenheden: dat uit ieder ogenblik een nieuw ogenblik geboren wordt, dat nieuwe mogelijkheden in zich houdt en dat soms onverwachts een nieuw geschenk is. En dat men geen moment van onlust moet vasthouden en nodeloos verlengen, omdat men daarmee de geboorte van een rijker moment verhinderen kan. En zo stroomt het leven door je heen in een ononderbroken stroom, in één grote reeks van momenten, die ieder hun eigen plaats in de dag hebben – Nou ja, weet je niks beters. Ik kan er heus niets aan doen, maar formuleren kan ik het nog niet. Stil maar. Geduldig maar. En als jij het niet zeggen kan, zal een ander het wel voor je doen, zoals bv. Rilke of Beethoven. – Dag –

99 E.T., 223. *Het Werk*, 233; Wednesday morning, 31 December 1941, 10.00. Cf. *The Complete Works*, 364, n. 116: Marlene Dietrich (1901-1992), movie star and singer. Emigrated in 1930 to the USA. Sang during the Second World War for the Allies.

peace and quiet now reign in my great inner Domain, thanks to the strong central authority You exert. The furthest flung boundaries sense Your authority and Your love and allow themselves to be guided by You. –¹⁰⁰

c "Patience is All" [*Geduld ist alles*]¹⁰¹

The unique "process of gaining awareness"¹⁰² – through reading Rilke, "a solemn man, but very friendly"¹⁰³ – had given Etty Hillesum two fundamental insights: "*Ichbinbeidir*" and "*Gott reift*". Nonetheless, there was yet another elementary characteristic in this process, something she had to practice: patience [*Geduld*]. She wrote, "Patience is all. God, give me much

100 E.T., 223. *Het Werk*, 233; Friday morning, 9 January 1942, 9.30: Gisterenochtend: aan het bureau, gedoken in de onderstroom en 's avonds de theaterlucht bij de Levies. En bij de Levies verdedig ik Tideman, tegen al hun critiek in. Het leeft elkaar niet meer in de weg. Rilke en Marlene Dietrich verdragen zich zogezegd wonderwel in me, ik hoef de een niet voor een moment te verlochenen om de ander op waarde te kunnen schatten. Wat een flauwe combinatie eigenlijk, hoe kom ik daaraan? [...] En nu aan het werk. – Ik dank je, God, in mijn grote innerlijke Rijk heerst rust en vrede, dank zij het krachtige centrale gezag, dat jij uitoefent. De uiterste randgebieden spuren nog jouw gezag en jouw liefde en laten zich door je leiden.

101 E.T., 243. *Het Werk*, 252; Monday evening, 16 February 1942, 9.00. Cf. *The Complete Works*, 394, n. 1: Quotation from R.M. Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* [Letters to a Young Poet] (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1929), 19. Etty wrote this passage in her quotation album, *Levenskunst* (week 12).

102 E.T., 404-405. *Het Werk*, 424-425; Thursday morning, 11 June 1942, 9.00: 'I spoke to someone yesterday who had met Rilke a few times in the sanatorium at Valmont. The words in her account that made the strongest impression on me were "a gloomy man but very friendly". And isn't that how it should be? Not taking one's own gloominess, sadness or what have you out on others by being unfriendly to them? When we suffer, surely we don't have to make others suffer with us? If only people would begin to realize that! It is a process of growing awareness, one that every person must learn for himself. But those who have already made a start with that process must give the first push to others who are still "unborn". Ultimately that must be my way of doing "social work", I am unsuited to any other method. I am serving my apprenticeship, in these immeasurably rich years of being indentured to a man to whom I – really – do not want to get married.' [Ik sprak gisteren iemand, die Rilke meer dan eens had meegemaakt in het sanatorium Valmont. En deze twee woorden uit haar karakteristiek zijn me het sterkst bijgebleven: een somber man, maar heel vriendelijk. En zo moet het toch ook zijn? Dat men z'n eigen somberheid, treurigheid of wat ook niet wreekt op anderen door onvriendelijkheid? Wanneer wij lijden, hoeven we anderen toch niet mee te laten lijden? Wanneer op dit punt eens de opvoeding der mensheid ter hand genomen werd. Het is een bewustwordingsproces, dat ieder mens voor zich moet doormaken. Maar diegenen, die al een begin met dat proces gemaakt hebben, moeten de anderen, die nog "ongeboren" zijn, de eerste stoot geven. En dit zal op den duur mijn wijze van "sociaal werken" zijn, voor iedere andere wijze ben ik ongeschikt. En ik ben in de leerjaren, in de onnoemelijk rijke leerjaren bij de man, met wie ik – tòch eigenlijk niet zou willen trouwen.]

103 *Ibid.*

patience, always more patience. And relieve me of this touchiness.”¹⁰⁴ This ability to have patience, to wait, was not easy for her. On the contrary, “impatience” and “touchiness” [*prikkelbaarheid*] were experiences with which she was only too familiar. That is why she wanted to be gentle with herself, and read authors like “Rilke by the stove” at night, and dozed.¹⁰⁵ She felt the restlessness of life and stated, “And now to have a nap and then to learn a little about Rilke’s girlfriend.”¹⁰⁶ Life goes on, and why not!” Etty Hillesum thought she should write more regularly,¹⁰⁷ and she wanted to be more patient with herself and with others – not an easy task! Looking for a book by Rilke, she was anything but “patient”. She noted that she had “telephoned five large bookshops to ask for the *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* and for the *Briefe an eine junge Frau*.”¹⁰⁸ At that time, Rilke’s work was “no longer obtainable.” She was very disappointed not to be able to get what she wanted. In her impatience, she longed for his “words,” his “programme for life”:

“Briefe an einen jungen Dichter”¹⁰⁹ – I read that book some time ago, probably as a lyrical curiosity, as something of an indulgence in a spare hour or so. And now? Now I believe one can find one’s whole programme for life in it, and it contains words that ought really to stay with you for good.¹¹⁰

Maybe passion and patience [*Geduld*] do not go together, she realized. Hillesum could, for example, get very angry with those who called Rilke “soft”. For her, this poet was not a weak person. On the contrary, she believed, “He is nothing of the kind. There is a strength in him, diamond-hard strength.”¹¹¹ To Hillesum, Rilke was a diamond, a rock upon which she could

104 E.T., 271. *Het Werk*, 282; Tuesday evening, 3 March 1942, 10.00: Geduld, is alles. God, geef me veel geduld, steeds meer geduld. En neem die prikkelbaarheid van me af.

105 E.T., 234. *Het Werk*, 244; Monday morning, 19 January 1942, 10.00: met Rilke aan de haard.

106 Hillesum is referring to Ilse Blumenthal.

107 E.T., 245. *Het Werk*, 254; Thursday afternoon, 19 February 1942, 2.00.

108 E.T., 246. *Het Werk*, 256; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: 5 grote boekwinkels opgebeld om te vragen naar: Briefe an einen jungen Dichter en die an eine junge Frau.

109 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1929).

110 E.T., 247. *Het Werk*, 256; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: ‘Briefe an einen jungen Dichter’. Vroeger ook gelezen, waarschijnlijk als lyrische curiositeit, als wat luxe voor een vrij uurtje. En nu? Men vindt er z’n hele levensprogramma in terug en er staan woorden in, die je eigenlijk een heel leven lang niet meer verlaten mogen.

111 E.T., 247. *Het Werk*, 256; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: Hij is niet week. Er is een kracht in hem, zo sterk als diamant.

build her inner house. But occasionally, she simply lacked the patience to find the words to express the strength that she had discovered in him. She was convinced, however, that the day would come when she would be able to express herself, and be "patient". Nonetheless, she had no time for a woman like Ilse Blumenthal, who had corresponded with Rilke but who later reflected, "Yes, as a matter of fact he was soft."¹¹² Hillesum had strong affective views on Rilke, her main source of inspiration.

You can never "get away" from Rilke once you have read him properly. If you can't carry him with you all your life, there is no point in reading him. I am still at the stage of copying him out with pleasure rather than making commentaries of my own. But I *have* to copy out pieces.¹¹³

"You can never 'get away' from Rilke" – those are strong words. Etty Hillesum had hoped to carry him with her "all [her] life." She was impatient, so she needed "to copy out pieces" – which sounds almost compulsive. Rilke mattered to her! She not only defended his spiritual life. She saw his courage, the courage he had towards himself and towards his poetry. This was something Etty Hillesum was looking for in herself.

"You are so young, you have hardly begun, and I would beg you, dear Sir, as fervently as I can, to be patient with all that is unresolved in your heart, and to try to take pleasure in *the questions themselves* as you might in locked rooms and books written in a very strange tongue. Do not look now for the answers that cannot be given you because you could not live with them. What matters is to live with everything. *Live* with the questions now. Then perhaps one fine day you will find yourself living gradually, without noticing it, with the answers."¹¹⁴

112 E.T., 247. *Het Werk*, 256; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: Het is eigenlijk zo treurig. Een vrouw als Ilse Blumenthal, die met hem gecorrespondeerd heeft en die nu ook zegt, achteraf: ja, eigenlijk is hij toch wel week.

113 E.T., 247. *Het Werk*, 256; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: Van Rilke "komt men niet terug", als men hem werkelijk goed gelezen heeft. Wanneer men hem niet gedurende een heel leven met zich meedraagt, heeft het überhaupt geen zin hem te lezen. Ik ben nog steeds in een stadium van genietend overschrijven, inplaats van het geven van eigen commentaar. Maar ik *moet* er stukken uit overschrijven.

114 E.T., 247. *Het Werk*, 256; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: 'Sie sind so jung, so vor allem Anfang, und ich möchte Sie, so gut ich es kann, bitten, lieber Herr, Geduld zu haben gegen alles Ungelöste in Ihrem Herzen und zu versuchen, *die Fragen selbst* liebzuhaben wie verschlossene Stuben und wie Bücher, die in einer sehr fremden Sprache geschrieben sind. Forschen Sie jetzt nicht nach den Antworten, die Ihnen nicht gegeben werden können, weil Sie sie nicht leben

She felt “an affinity [...] with the one who is addressing the young poet.” Accordingly, she began to “live with the answer” [*in die Antwort hinein zu leben*]. She now *understood*, which was different from the time before, when she still had “to live with the questions,” not grasping “their meaning at all.” She increasingly felt an inner calling, a life’s task, especially in relation to young people.

I must give this little book to lots of young people and try to help them to understand it. You can only help others if you yourself live according to what you want to explain, and I feel that I am increasingly in a position to lend others a bit of a helping hand simply by making it clear to them that no one else can really help them and that they should accept that, not as something that makes one unhappy, but as something that may make one aware of one’s own strength and inner voice, to which one should listen patiently until one accrues certainties from within – but one must be patient.

“... comes only to the patient, who behave as if eternity lay before them, so carefree, still and spacious are they. Every day, I keep learning it, learning it painfully, for which I am grateful: *patience* is all!”¹¹⁵

könnten. Und es handelt sich darum, alles zu leben. *Leben* Sie jetzt die Fragen. Vielleicht leben Sie dann allmählich, ohne es zu merken, eines fernen Tages in die Antwort hinein’. Quotation from Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*, 23.

115 E.T., 247. *Het Werk*, 256-257; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: Ik moet dit boekje aan veel jonge mensen geven en ze proberen te helpen het te begrijpen. Men kan alleen helpen, wanneer men zelf leeft, wat men anderen wil duidelijk maken en ik voel steeds meer kracht in me groeien om anderen een kleine helpende hand te bieden, alleen al door ze duidelijk te maken, dat een ander ze eigenlijk niet helpen kan en dat ze dat moeten accepteren, maar niet als iets, dat je ongelukkig moet maken, maar als iets dat je bewust doet worden van de eigen krachten en van het eigen innerlijk, dat men met geduld beluisteren moet, totdat je zekerheden toevallen uit je eigen innerlijk, maar men moet geduldig zijn. ‘[...] kommt nur zu den Geduldigen, die da sind, als ob die Ewigkeit vor ihnen läge, so sorglos still und weit. Ich lerne es täglich, lerne es unter Schmerzen, denen ich dankbar bin: *Geduld* ist alles! Cf. E.T., 313-314, *Het Werk*, 327; Wednesday morning, 1 April 1942, 11.00: ‘There is no measuring of time then, a year does not matter then, and ten years are as nothing. Being an artist means not calculating and counting; coming to maturity like a tree which does not force its sap, which continues to stand confidently throughout the spring storms, never doubting that summer will come. It will. But it comes only to the patient, who behave as if eternity lay before them, so carefree, still and spacious are they. Every day I keep learning it, learning it painfully, for which I am grateful: *patience* is all!’ [Da gibt es kein Messen mit der Zeit, da gilt kein Jahr, und zehn Jahre sind nichts. Künstler sein heißt: nicht rechnen und zählen; reifen wieder Baum, der seine Säfte nicht drängt und getrost in den Stürmen des Frühlings steht ohne die Angst, daß dahinter kein Sommer kommen könnte. Er kommt doch. Aber er kommt nur zu den Geduldigen, die da sind, als ob die Ewigkeit vor ihnen

"Patience is all!" and "listening patiently" – this was something that needed time, but Rilke could help her. Patience or "being patient" became a fundamental theme in Hillesum's literary development, a "Leitmotif."¹¹⁶ Accordingly, we find citations from Rilke throughout the diaries and letters, especially from the *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*.¹¹⁷

läge, so sorglos still und weit. Ich lerne es täglich, lerne es unter Schmerzen, denen ich dankbar bin: *Geduld* ist alles!]

116 E.T., 314. *Het Werk*, 327; Wednesday morning, 1 April 1942, 11.00: 'Lately I have had a very strong feeling that leitmotifs are a growing part of my life. Time and again a leitmotiv will re-emerge, time and again there it is once more, and after periods of chaos, weariness or confusion, time and again a "Leitmotiv" will suddenly reappear.' [Dit voel ik heel sterk de laatste tijd: er groeien "Leitmotiven" in m'n leven. Een leidmotief, dat altijd weer opduikt, dat er altijd weer is, na chaotische of vermoeide of verwarrende momenten, altijd duikt er plotseling weer een "Leitmotief" op.]

117 Cf. E.T., 248. *Het Werk*, 257; Friday morning 20 February 1942, 10.00: "But everything that may one day be within the reach of many, can even now be prepared and built by the solitary man with his own hands, for they are led less astray. Therefore, dear Sir, cherish your solitude and bear the pain it brings you with mellifluous lament. For those nearest to you are far away, you say, and this shows that the distance round you is widening. And when what is nearest to you is far away, then what is distant from you is already among the stars and very great; enjoy this growth of yours, into which you can indeed take no one else, be kindly disposed to those who stay behind, be steady and calm with them and do not plague them with your certainty or joy, which they cannot grasp. Look for some simple and genuine common ground with them, which need not alter as you yourself keep changing; love life in a different guise in them". [Aber alles, was vielleicht einmal Vielen möglich sein wird, kann der Einsame jetzt schon vorbereiten und bauen mit seinen Händen, die weniger irren. Darum, lieber Herr, lieben Sie Ihre Einsamkeit, und tragen Sie den Schmerz, den sie Ihnen verursacht mit schönklingender Klage. Denn die Ihnen nahe sind, sind fern, sagen Sie, und das zeigt, daß es anfängt weit um Sie zu werden. Und wenn Ihre Nähe fern ist, dann ist Ihre Weite schon unter den Sternen und sehr groß; freuen Sie sich Ihres Wachstums, in das Sie ja niemanden mitnehmen können, und seien Sie gut gegen die, welche zurückbleiben, und seien Sie sicher und ruhig vor ihnen und quälen Sie sie nicht mit Ihrer Zuversicht oder Freude, die sie nicht begreifen könnten. Suchen Sie sich mit Ihnen irgendeine schlichte und treue Gemeinsamkeit, die sich nicht notwendig verändern muß, wenn Sie selbst anders und anders werden; lieben Sie an ihnen das Leben in einer fremden Form –]. See also E.T., 248. *Het Werk*, 257-258; Friday morning, 20 February 1942, 10.00: "Avoid adding substance to that ever-unfolding drama between parents and children; it consumes much of the children's strength and exhausts the love of their elders, which is effective and warm even when it is uncomprehending. Do not ask their advice and do not count on their understanding; but have faith in a love that is stored up for you as an inheritance, and have confidence that there is a strength and a blessing in this love which you do not need to abandon in order to go far afield!'. [Vermeiden Sie, jenem Drama, das zwischen Eltern und Kindern immer ausgespannt ist, Stoff zuzuführen; es verbraucht viel Kraft der Kinder und zehrt die Liebe der Alten auf, die wirkt und wärmt, auch wenn sie nicht begreift. Verlangen Sie keinen Rat von ihnen und rechnen Sie mit keinem Verstehen; aber glauben Sie an eine Liebe, die für Sie aufbewahrt wird wie eine Erbschaft, und vertraue, Sie, daß in dieser Liebe eine Kraft ist und ein Segen, aus dem Sie nicht herausgehen müssen, um ganz weit zu gehen!–]. Cf. *The Complete Works* p. 402, n. 20: Passages

Passion to order. No, my child, you can copy out magnificent passages about “patience” from Rilke as much as you like, but you have to *live* it, you understand, *live* it, or else it’s absolutely no use.¹¹⁸

In the process of copying literary passages, every now and then, Hillesum abbreviated the original text. Complete quotations were apparently too time-consuming for her, or maybe she just wanted to absorb only the most essential of Rilke’s thoughts. At times, Etty Hillesum was very tired in the evenings. Nonetheless, she was still willing to spend an hour or more to study some Russian and eventually read Rilke. She sensed that she had to get a grip on herself, and after that she would perhaps “have a free hand with Rilke again.”¹¹⁹ Apart from Rilke, Beethoven was another person to whom she suddenly had to “bow her head” [*het hoofd buigen*] and pray for all who were “lingering in freezing concentration camps”:

[I] prayed God to give them strength and wished they might remember the good moments of their lives, just as in hard times I shall remember this day and many days during the last year, and draw what strength I need from them lest I become embittered with life.¹²⁰

Etty Hillesum was motivated to *be* patient. She wanted to make sure that her strength grew so that she would be able to endure the unknown future.¹²¹ She was reminded of a passage from one of Rilke’s letters,¹²² and looked for

from Rilke’s previously cited *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*. Etty abridged the text twice. The complete quote would have been: “[...] quälen Sie sie nicht [mit Ihren Zweifeln und erschrecken Sie sie nicht] mit Ihrer Zuversicht [...]; [...] das Leben in einer fremden Form [und haben Sie Nachsicht gegen die alternden Menschen, die das Alleinsein fürchten, zu dem Sie Vertrauen haben]. Vermeiden Sie [...]”

118 E.T., 267. *Het Werk*, 277; Monday evening, 2 March 1942, 9.30: Hartstocht op bestelling. Nee m’n kind, je schrijft prachtige passages over over het “Geduld” bij Rilke, maar je moet het leven hoor je, leven, anders geeft het alles niets.

119 E.T., 250. *Het Werk*, 260; Friday evening, 20 February 1942, 7.30: de vrije hand voor Rilke.

120 E.T., 252-253. *Het Werk*, 262; Sunday evening, 22 February 1942, 9.00: [Vanmiddag onder Beethoven moest ik opeens diep het hoofd buigen en moest bidden voor allen, die in koude concentratiekampen zitten en] bad om kracht voor allen en wenste hun toe, dat ze zich de goede momenten uit hun leven zouden herinneren. zoals ik me later, in moeilijkere tijden, deze dag en vele dagen van dit laatste jaar, zal herinneren en ze me kracht zullen geven niet verbitterd te raken tegen het leven.

121 E.T., 252. *Het Werk*, 262; Sunday evening, 22 February 1942, 9.00.

122 Cf. E.T., 351. *Het Werk*, 368; Monday morning, 27 April 1942, 8.00: From a letter by Rilke written in 1906: “For the rest, I am utterly determined to shut myself up every day for a fixed number of hours, wherever I am and whatever the circumstances [...] for the work’s sake: whether

the kind of words that she could apply to her own life. Betz's book, *Rilke in Frankreich* (p. 233), gave her the inspiration.

"Of everything unforeseen life might hold in store for me, disappointment remains the most remote possibility; the many gifts of life I have been able to apply in my work have given me too much fulfilment and constant delight to let me question life's immutable generosity [...]"¹²³

She was determined not to become bitter. Rilke was with her, even as she worked for the Jewish Council. Her patience [*Geduld*] towards her fellow man was steadily growing. She described how she spoke about Rilke with a young civil servant:

There was another thing that struck me as being peculiar and worth mentioning; that discussion about Rilke at 8 o'clock in the morning with that young Jewish Council official. Later in the day, I said to somebody, "I can really cope with anything anywhere, so long as I'm there to do it in person."¹²⁴

it really comes to me or whether I am just making the appropriate gestures is yet to be tested. For, since I left Russia, I have not known with such great conviction that prayer and its time and its reverent and uncurtailed gestures are the condition of God and of his return to those who barely expect it and merely kneel down and stand up again and are suddenly filled to the brim [...]. So will I kneel down and stand up, daily, alone in my room, holding sacred all that befalls me there: even what has not happened, even disappointment, even desertion. There is no poverty that is not fullness, could we but accept it earnestly and worthily and not surrender or yield it up to anger." [Uit een brief van Rilke van 1906: Übrigens steht mein unbedingter Entschluß dahin, mich täglich und wo und unter was für äußeren Umständen es auch sei, für soundso viele Stunden einzuschließen [...] um der Arbeit willen: ob sie nun wirklich kommt oder ob ich nur die dazugehörigen Gebärden mache, unangefüllt. Wußte ich denn nicht schon seit Rußland mit so großer Überzeugung, daß das Gebet und seine Zeit und seine ehrfürchtig und unverkürzt weitergegebene Gebärde die Bedingung Gottes war und seiner Wiederkehr zu dem und jenem, der es kaum erwartete und nur niederkniete und aufstand und plötzlich voll war bis an den Rand...? So will ich niederknien und aufstehen, täglich, allein in meiner Stube, und will heilighalten, was mir darin widerfuhr: auch das Nichtgekommensein, auch die Enttäuschung, auch die Verlassenheit. Es gibt keine Armut, die nicht Fülle wäre, wenn man sie ernst und würdig nimmt und nicht zum Ärgernis macht und preisgibt.]

123 E.T., 253. *Het Werk*, 262; Sunday evening, 22 February 1942, 9.00: Von allem, was das Leben mir an Unvorhergesehenem zufügen könnte, bleibt die Enttäuschung die entfernteste Möglichkeit; manche seiner Gaben, die ich in meiner Arbeit verwirklichen konnte, haben mich zu sehr erfüllt und für immer entzückt, als daß ich jemals an seiner unwandelbaren Großmut zweifeln könnte [...].

124 E.T., 259. *Het Werk*, 270; Friday morning, 27 February 1942, 10.00: Eén ding was nog grappig en vermeldenswaard: dat gesprek over Rilke om 8 uur 's morgens met die jonge ambtenaar van

Etty Hillesum felt that she should not continue with “so much unassimilated material” in her “soul,” and “drag so many confused voices with her.” She explained, “To do that would be a pity when there are so many good things on the programme: tomorrow the Rilke letters at Ilse Blumenthal’s [...].”¹²⁵ Rilke put her in a “good mood” [*goed humeur*]. When she wanted to take care of herself, she took plenty of time to study his texts – she finally understood his message: “*patience* is all!”

What I want to do now, is copy out another passage from Rilke, just because I am in a good mood and feel like pleasing myself. I am quite curious to see if this good humour will last today. In any case, I should be prepared for any eventualities that might upset my equilibrium.¹²⁶

To Conclude

“Whose is the Master-hand that Holds the Bow?” [*welcher Geiger hat uns in der Hand?*]

Rilke put it well, “welcher Geiger hat uns in der Hand?” [Whose is the master-hand that holds the bow?]. Etty Hillesum, who had occasionally been “in two minds” [*in tweespalt*] whether “to do the washing up or to read Rilke,¹²⁷ could have mirrored him by answering this question with his own words: “I am with you” [*Ichbinbeidir*]! “God matures” [*Gott reift*]! and [...] “*patience* is all” [*Geduld ist alles*]! Rilke was there *with* her in everyday moments, for example during lunch. “I have pushed my plate to one side and am copying out bits of Rilke between the extremely good strawberries and the odd kind of rabbit food we are eating [...].”¹²⁸ or she would be “sitting

de Joodse Raad. En ik zei later op den dag tegen iemand: Ik vind het eigenlijk altijd en overal wel goed, als ik er zelf maar bij mag zijn...

125 E.T., 260. *Het Werk*, 270; Sunday evening, 1 March 1942, 8.30: Het zou jammer zijn, er staan zoveel goede dingen op het programma: morgen de Rilke-brieven bij Ilse Blumenthal [...].

126 E.T., 264. *Het Werk*, 275; Monday morning, 2 March 1942, 8.00: En nu wil ik nog een passage uit Rilke overschrijven, zó maar, omdat ik zo een goed humeur heb en mezelf iets vriendelijks wil aandoen. Ik ben wel benieuwd of dit goede humeur levensvatbaar zal zijn vandaag, ik moet er toch op voorbereid zijn, dat ik op alle manieren weer uit m'n evenwicht kan slaan.

127 E.T., 267. *Het Werk*, 278; Monday evening, 2 March 1942, 10.30: En toen heb ik even in tweespalt gestaan of ik zou gaan afwassen of Rilke zou lezen.

128 E.T., 431. *Het Werk*, 454; Friday morning, 19 June 1942, 9.30: [...] ik heb m'n bord terzijde geschoven en zit Rilke over te schrijven tussen de uitzonderlijke aardbeien en het vreemdsoortige konijnenvoer, dat we eten...

here again with Rilke among the crumbs and dirty napkins and that one red radish – how picturesque!"¹²⁹ One thing is clear. She "let it all soak in," and did with Rilke what was best for her own literary quest:

Slowly but surely I have been soaking the man, his work, and his life up these last few months: Rilke. And that is probably the only right way with literature, with study, with people, or with anything else: to let it all soak in, to let it mature slowly inside you until it has become a part of yourself. That, too, is a growing process. Everything is a growing process. And in between, emotions and sensations that strike you like lightning. But still the most important thing is the organic process of growing. And then: the sudden appearance of "Leitmotivs."¹³⁰

Hillesum was inspired by "the organic process of growing" [*het organische groeiproces*]. She made decisions about what she read. "Rilke. I am reading his letters now. Each and every day he discovered a few good, precious, original words for nature, for various people."¹³¹ On her inner path, she was inspired and guided by leitmotivs, by "a few good precious, original words" [*goede en lieve en nieuwe woorden*]. She encountered "her poet" whenever she wanted to. Hillesum felt most comfortable with writing, with Rilke, and with the Bible.¹³² She was honest about this *Rilke effect* in her life; she wrote under his influence, "yet genuinely from within [her]self."

I am so grateful that it has been granted to us to understand more and more, and to immerse ourselves in life day after day. I must grow still more in patience. One's feelings are deeper and more profound than

129 E.T., 431. *Het Werk*, 454; Friday morning, 19 June 1942, 9.30: En nu zit ik hier weer met mijn Rilke tussen de kruimeltjes en de vuile servetten en die ene rooie radijs, voorwaar zeer pittoresk.

130 E.T., 315. *Het Werk*, 328; Wednesday morning, 1 April 1942, 11.00: Langzaam maar zeker zuig ik het in me op, de laatste maanden, de man en zijn werk en zijn leven: Rilke. En dit is misschien de enige goede manier om je met literatuur, studie, mensen of wat ook bezig te houden: je vol te zuigen, heel langzaam dat onderin je te laten groeien, tot het ergens een stuk van jezelf wordt. Ook dat een groeiproces. Alles een groeiproces. Met daartussendoor steeds weer de ontroeringen en gewaarwordingen, die als een bliksemflits inslaan. Maar toch het belangrijkste: het groeien, het organische groeiproces. En dan: het plotseling dáár zijn van "Leitmotiven".

131 E.T., 330. *Het Werk*, 344; Monday morning, 13 April 1942, 8.30: Rilke. Ik lees nu zijn brieven. Iedere dag opnieuw vond hij een paar goede en lieve en nieuwe woorden voor de natuur om hem heen, voor verschillende mensen.

132 E.T., 330. *Het Werk*, 345; Monday morning, 13 April 1942, 8.30: And, indeed, I have only felt well in the mornings these last few days with Bible-readings, with Rilke and with these ruled pages. [Het was die laatste dagen inderdaad zo, dat ik me nog alleen maar prettig voelde 's morgens bij het lezen van de Bijbel, bij Rilke en op deze lijntjes.]

one's means of expression. I still do not know in what sphere I shall find my instruments. Wait and see and be patient; work on your daily tasks; become more and more yourself, yet be a link in the whole. But no hackneyed imitation, and not a single minute of indiscriminate living. Become an instrument, not only in your spirit but in your body as well. This is, of course, being written under the influence of Rilke, of Rainer Maria, who has been there as large as life in the midst of my life these past few weeks and who is becoming a more and more powerful support for the tender shoots that are about to spring gingerly to life within me. Under Rilke's influence, yet genuinely from within myself.¹³³

Rilke's inspiration and his unorthodox influence on Hillesum's creative process, make it difficult to develop a literary hermeneutic *im Nachhinein*. Hillesum wrote, "the intense association with Rilke [...] weighs so heavily on me that my own words cannot break free from under it."¹³⁴ It is central that we take into account the literary perspectives and historical conditions of both authors, as well as transcendent reality that surpasses them. Both thinkers lived with a *Weltinnenraum* ("a phrase in one of Rilke's poems")¹³⁵ that occupied a *presence* not bound to a time or place, a world with God. Both Rilke and Hillesum gain a consciousness and "awareness-of-You (God),"¹³⁶ that becomes a part of their own divine, human history, of what

133 E.T., 275. *Het Werk*, 285-286; Sunday evening, 8 March 1942, 10.00: Dat het iemand zo vergund is steeds meer te begrijpen. En iedere dag zich weer te verdiepen. Ik ben zo dankbaar. En moet nog geduldiger worden. De gevoelens zijn zwaarder en groter dan de uitdrukkingmogelijkheden. Ik weet nog niet op welk gebied ik m'n instrumenten vinden moet. Wachten en luisteren en geduldig zijn. En de dagelijkse dingen werken. En steeds meer zichzelf worden. En toch de schakel in het geheel. Maar geen versleten imitatie, en geen enkele minuut klakkeloos leven. Tot instrument worden, niet alleen de geest, ook het lichaam. Dit geschreven natuurlijk onder invloed van Rilke, van Rainer Maria, die de laatste weken levensgroot midden in m'n leven staat en die een steeds krachtiger stut wordt voor de tere ranken, die heel schuchter in mijn innerlijk aan het opschieten waren. Onder invloed van Rilke, maar toch ècht uit mezelf.

134 E.T., 275. *Het Werk*, 286; Sunday evening, 8 March 1942, 10.00: De intensieve omgang met Rilke de laatste dagen weegt zo zwaar op me ook, dat m'n eigen woorden daar onder niet los kunnen komen.

135 E.T., 515. *Het Werk*, 545; Tuesday afternoon, 15 September 1942, 3.00: een woord uit een gedicht van Rilke.

136 Cf. Meins G. S. Coetsier, "'You Consciousness' – Towards Political Theory: Etty Hillesum's Experience and Symbolization of the Divine Presence", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty*

I like to call the "flow of presence".¹³⁷ Hillesum was aware of this presence as a "heaven" living within her:

Why can't I live in heaven too? Heaven is there, why wouldn't one be allowed to live in it too? But it is really the other way round: heaven lives in me. Everything lives in me. I am reminded of a phrase in one of Rilke's poems: *Weltinnenraum* [outer space within (or 'interior world')].¹³⁸

For her, this type of experience [*Erleben*] was essential.¹³⁹ She copied yet again some lines by Rilke:

Durch alle Wesen reicht der *eine* Raum: Weltinnenraum.
Die Vögel fliegen still durch uns hindurch.
O, der ich wachsen will, ich seh hinaus, und *in* mir wächst der Baum.¹⁴⁰

Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008 [Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 103-125.

137 For a careful discussion of "the flow of presence" see: Meins G. S. Coetsier, *Etty Hillesum and the Flow of Presence: A Vogeliane Analysis* [Eric Voegelin Institute Series in Political Philosophy, Studies in Religion and Politics] (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008); "God?... Licht in het duister: Twee denkers in barre tijden: De Duitse filosoof Eric Voegelin en de Nederlands-Joodse schrijfster Etty Hillesum", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A. D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in context* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 2] (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2007), 16-35.

138 *My translation*. Cf. E.T., 515. *Het Werk*, 545; Tuesday afternoon, 15 September 1942, 3.00: Waarom mag ik niet ook in de hemel leven? De hemel is er toch, waarom mag men er dan ook niet in leven? Maar eigenlijk is het toch veel eerder zo: de hemel leeft in mij. Alles leeft in mij. Ik moet denken aan een woord uit een gedicht van Rilke: *Weltinnenraum*.

139 E.T., 336. *Het Werk*, 351; Friday morning, 17 April 1942, 9.00: Yesterday I was struck by this sentence in Rilke: "[...] a time must come when I am alone with my experience, belonging to it, reshaping it: for even now, all that is untransformed oppresses and confuses me. Yes: to belong to one's experience. And to transform it. That is my great yearning as well. We must carry our experience within us, place it at the centre of a quiet space within us and hearken to it there." [Gisteren trof me deze zin bij Rilke: [...] muß eine Zeit für mich kommen, mit meinem Erleben allein zu sein, ihm zu gehören, es umzubilden: denn schon drückt mich all das Unverwandelte und verwirrt mich – Ja: seinem Erleben zu gehören. Und es zu verwandeln. Daarheen trekt mijn grote verlangen. En men moet zijn "Erleben" in zich meedragen, het in zich midden in een ruimte van stilte plaatsen en het daar beluisteren.]

140 E.T., 276. *Het Werk*, 286; Sunday evening, 8 March 1942, 10.00. Cf. *The Complete Works*, 444, n. 54: Quotation from Rilke, *Gedichte 1906-1926* (*Sämtliche Werke*, II, p. 92). German. Translation: "Through every being single space extends:/outer space within. Through us the birds/ fly silently. Oh, I who'd grow,/I look outside, and *in* me grows the tree."

And later again, “Through every being *single* space extends: outer space within” [*Durch alle Wesen reicht der eine Raum: Weltinnenraum!*].¹⁴¹ Rilke’s “outer space within” – *Weltinnenraum* – was an aesthetic mirror in which Hillesum saw herself reflected.

These seem to me to be the loveliest words I know, probably because, being so rounded and perfect, they express what I am coming to experience more and more intensely. I shall just read another few poems of Rilke’s; one should really add not one word to them, now that words are beginning to match my feelings a little, little bit.¹⁴²

The word *Weltinnenraum* could be a conclusion of some sort, maybe even the summary of Etty Hillesum’s life.¹⁴³ In this “outer space within” – in this *Raum* – everything happened: the process of loving and writing, searching and finding. Just as Hillesum could not, I also cannot “add one word” to this. In spite of her spiritual confidence, however, she doubted her own abilities as an author; she did not think she would ever be able to write in the simple style of Rilke. She remarked, “I shall never be able to write as simply as Rilke [...] And then I thought miserably, I shall never get further with my poetry than phrases like that, it’s all so trite, and then I thought of Rilke again.”¹⁴⁴ Hillesum’s need for inner contemplation, discipline, and eventually creativity brought her to the following self-reflection:

Am I just writing this under the influence of the Rilke letters? Or do these letters affect me so much that I live in constant longing for them, drink

141 E.T., 280. *Het Werk*, 291; Friday morning, 13 March 1942, 10.30.

142 *Ibid.*: Dit lijken me de mooiste woorden, die ik ken, waarschijnlijk omdat ze in hun afgerondheid en volmaaktheid precies dat weergeven, wat ik steeds sterker aan het beleven ben. Ik lees net nog enige gedichten van Rilke door, men moest daar eigenlijk geen woord meer aan toevoegen, nu de woorden een beetje, een beetje “ebenbürtig” aan de gevoelens zijn.

143 Cf. E.T., 520. *Het Werk*, 550; Thursday morning, 17 September 1942, 8.00: And with that I arrive back at Rilke: “For truly, even the greatness of the gods depends upon their need: no matter what house we keep for them, they are nowhere safe except in our heart.” [Daar kom ik alweer met Rilke aan: Denn wahrlich, auch die Größe der Götter hängt an ihrer Not: daran, daß sie, was man ihnen auch für Gehäuse behüte, nirgends in Sicherheit sind als in unserem Herzen. –]

144 E.T., 457. *Het Werk*, 482; Wednesday morning, 1 July 1942: Ik zal nooit zo kunnen schrijven als Rilke [...] En ik dacht er bij met een armzalig gevoel: verder, dan tot zulke uitingen zal ik het op dichterlijk gebied nooit brengen, het is toch maar zeer pover alles, en ik dacht weer aan Rilke.

them in with deep drafts, because I feel I have reached the same stage he describes in his letters of 1903 and 1904?¹⁴⁵

On 7 July 1942, sensing the impending doom common to all internees at Camp Westerbork, she wrote that she would have liked to read all Rilke's works once more, before it became impossible for her to read at all: "I would so much like to read everything of Rilke's before the time comes when I won't perhaps be able to lay my hands on books for a long time."¹⁴⁶ The fate of the Jews in the Netherlands now loomed as a personal threat to her.

Tonight I dreamed that I had to pack my case. I tossed and turned, fretting about what shoes to take – all of them hurt my feet. And how was I to pack all my underwear and food for three days and blankets into one suitcase or rucksack? And I had to find room somewhere for the Bible. And if possible for Rilke's *Book of Hours* and *Letters to a Young Poet*.¹⁴⁷

Despite everything, she was motivated to finish reading the Rilke letters. "The Rilke letters have come, those covering the years 1907-1914 and 1914-1921; I hope I shall be allowed to finish them."¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, she wished to "be allowed to keep a few of [her] notebooks." Ety Hillesum wanted to keep them "if only for the sake of the quotations" and to see if she had "remained true" [*trouw*] to herself. If the Nazis let her, she also wanted to hold onto the words of Rilke's 'Malte' (*Die*

145 E.T., 328. *Het Werk*, 343; Wednesday evening, 8 April 1942, 9.30: Schrijf ik dit nu alleen onder invloed van de lectuur der Rilke-brieven? Of grijpen deze brieven me zo – zó, dat ik in een voortdurend verlangen naar ze leef en ze als het ware drink met diepe teugen – omdat ik me in eenzelfde stadium voel als hij in deze brieven van 1903 en 1904?

146 E.T., 479. *Het Werk*, 506; Tuesday afternoon, 7 July 1942: Ik zou graag alles van Rilke nog gelezen hebben voordat de tijd komt, dat ik misschien lang geen boek meer in handen zal krijgen.

147 E.T., 480. *Het Werk*, 507; Tuesday afternoon, 7 July 1942: Vannacht heb ik gedroomd, dat ik m'n koffer in orde moest maken. Het was een zenuwachtige nacht, vooral het schoeisel maakte me wanhopig, alle soorten schoenen deden me pijn. En hoe het zou moeten met het ondergoed en met alles en met dat voedsel voor 3 dagen en dekens, alles in één koffer of rugzak? Maar er zal toch nog wel plaats in een hoekje blijven voor de Bijbel? En als het kan voor het 'Stundenbuch' en 'Briefe an einen jungen Dichter' van Rilke?

148 E.T., 494. *Het Werk*, 522; Wednesday evening, 15 July 1942: En de Rilke-brieven zijn me gebracht, die van 1907-1914 en van 1914-1921, ik hoop ze nog te kunnen uitlezen.

Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge),¹⁴⁹ his novel in diary form. She cited the passage:¹⁵⁰

“[...] It was his task to discover existence in this fear and trembling, in this merely apparent squalor which attaches to all existence. Choice and rejection are no longer to hand.”

And a little further on, she writes:

But don't think I am feeling dejected here, on the contrary. I am sometimes surprised to find how readily I exchange all my expectations for the reality, however harsh it may be.¹⁵¹

Above all, Hillesum was determined to read and re-read Rilke's works, and she desired to *be* there – *dazusein* – in every situation with all her heart. She referred to the following “sentence from one of Rilke's letters: ‘Thus everything comes and keeps on coming, and we have only to be there with all our heart.’”¹⁵² Even with 100 people in a room, Etty Hillesum would sit in a corner and read Rilke:

I keep following my own inner voice even in the madhouse in which I work, with a hundred people chattering together in one small room, typewriters clattering, and me sitting in a corner reading Rilke.¹⁵³

Again and again, she scribbled “a few more words from Rilke” down on paper:

149 E.T., 480. *Het Werk*, 507; Tuesday afternoon, 7 July 1942: Misschien mag ik een paar van m'n dagboekschriften bij me houden, al was het alleen maar om de citaten en om af en toe te kijken, of ik mezelf trouw blijf. Dan wil ik ook deze woorden vasthouden uit het dagboek van Malte.

150 Quotation from Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (*Sämtliche Werke*, VI, 775f.). Cf. E.T., 480. *Het Werk*, 507; Tuesday afternoon, 7 July 1942.

151 E.T., 480. *Het Werk*, 507; Tuesday afternoon, 7 July 1942: – [...] Es war seine Aufgabe, in diesem Schrecklichen, scheinbar nur Widerwärtigen das Seiende zu sehen, das unter allem Seienden gilt. Auswahl und Ablehnung gibt es nicht. – En iets verder: – Glaube nur nicht, daß ich hier an Enttäuschungen leide, im Gegenteil. Es wundert mich manchmal, wie bereit ich alles Erwartete aufgabe für das Wirkliche, selbst wenn es arg ist. –

152 E.T., 495. *Het Werk*, 524; Wednesday evening, 15 July 1942: Een zin uit een brief van Rilke: So kommt alles und kommt, und man hat nur mit dem ganzen Herzen dazusein.

153 E.T., 502. *Het Werk*, 532; Saturday morning, 25 July 1942, 9.00: Deze laatste week is wel een heel grote bevestiging van mezelf. In dat dolhuis daar ga ik m'n eigen innerlijke weg. Er confereren 100 mensen door elkaar in een kleine ruimte, schrijfmachines tikken en ik zit ergens in een hoekje en lees Rilke.

I am not afraid of the hardness of these apprenticeship years: my heart yearns to be hammered and polished; if it only be my hardness, belonging to me, and not, as during so many years of my youth, a pointless cruelty from which I could learn nothing. (And perhaps have learned something after all – but with how much loss of strength.)¹⁵⁴

Etty Hillesum gradually became aware of how Rilke was teaching her. "I realize more and more how much of a great teacher Rilke has been for me this past year."¹⁵⁵ Moreover, her diaries end with a reference to her "great teacher" [*grote opvoeder*]:

I always return to Rilke. It is strange to think that someone so frail, who did most of his writing within protective castle walls,¹⁵⁶ would perhaps have been broken by the circumstances in which we now live. Is that not further testimony that life is finely balanced? Evidence that, in peaceful times and under favourable circumstances, sensitive artists may search for the purest and most fitting expression of their deepest insights so that, during more turbulent and debilitating times, others can turn to them for support and a ready response to their bewildered questions? A response they are unable to formulate for themselves, since all their energies are taken up in looking after the bare necessities? Sadly, in difficult times, we tend to shrug off the spiritual heritage of artists from an easier age (yet isn't an artist always difficult in fact?) with a scornful "What use is that sort of thing to us now?"

It is an understandable but shortsighted reaction. And utterly impoverishing.

We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.

ONE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE ONE'S PAUSES!!!¹⁵⁷

154 E.T., 509. *Het Werk*, 538; Tuesday morning, 28 July 1942, 7:30: Nog een paar woorden van Rilke: – ich fürchte die Härte dieser Lehrjahre nicht: mein Herz sehnt sich, gehämmert und geschliffen zu sein: wenn es nur meine Härte ist, die, die zu mir gehört, und nicht, wie während so vieler Jahre meiner Jugend, eine unnütze Grausamkeit, aus der ich nichts lernen konnte. (Und vielleicht doch gelernt habe, – aber mit wieviel Kraftverlust.)

155 E.T., 533. *Het Werk*, 565; Saturday, 26 September 1942, 9:30: Ik merk steeds meer hoe Rilke één van mijn grote opvoeders van het laatste jaar is geweest.

156 On occasion, Rilke stayed at the castles of his friends, e.g. Friedelhausen Castle in Hessen, Duino Castle in Italy, Lautschin Castle in Bohemia and Muzot Castle in Wallis.

157 E.T., 550-551. *Het Werk*, 583; Tuesday morning, 13 October 1942: Altijd weer kom ik met Rilke aandragen. Het is zo wonderlijk, hij was een broze man en schreef veel van z'n werk binnen de muren van gastvrije kastelen en misschien zou hij kapot gegaan zijn in omstandigheden, als

The words and aesthetic mirrors [*ästhetische spiegels*] of Rilke and Hillesum are still relevant. War, terror, and genocide. These are bloody tragedies that inflict deep wounds up to the present day. We are still in urgent need of “a balm,” of “bandages” to protect the “many wounds” of our times and where possible, to heal them.

From this perspective, it remains a thought-provoking challenge to study the numerous notes, diaries, and poems of Rilke and Hillesum. Rarely did two people write so much in such short life spans. How war, but also love, left its mark on the life and writings of these two authors remains a mystery of *Weltinnenraum*. Hillesum would say: “Rilke still holds good, even now!”¹⁵⁸ I would therefore like to conclude with the wonderful lines of Rilke’s poem *David singt vor Saul* [David Sings before Saul]:

King, can you hear my harp which, when I strum,
 moves us through distances its taut strings cast?
 I play; discordant stars go sailing past,

waarin wij nu moeten leven. Maar getuigt het niet van een goede economie, dat in rustige tijden en gunstige omstandigheden sensitieve kunstenaars voor hun diepste inzichten ongestoord de schoonste en passendste vorm kunnen zoeken, waaraan mensen, die in bewegendere en krachtroevendere tijden leven zich kunnen oprichten en waarin ze een gereed onderdak kunnen vinden voor verwarringen en vragen, die zich nog niet tot eigen vorm en oplossing laten brengen omdat de dagelijkse energieën voor de dagelijkse noden opgeëist worden? In moeilijke tijden pleegt men wel eens met een verachtelijk gebaar de geestelijke verworvenheden van kunstenaars uit z.g. gemakkelijkeren tijden (– kunstenaar zijn op zichzelf is toch immers al zo moeilijk?) overboord te gooien, met de toevoeging: wat kunnen we daar nu mee beginnen? Het is misschien te begrijpen, maar het is kortzichtig. En oneindig verarmend. Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn. MAN MUß SEINE PAUSEN WAHRHABEN WOLLEN!!!

158 E.T., 456. *Het Werk*, 481; Wednesday morning, 1 July 1942: Rilke still holds good, even now. I’ll copy those words of his which I read this morning; they still hold good, even now: “Alas, we count the years and create phases now and then and stop and start and hesitate between both. But everything that happens to us is so much of a piece, in which one thing is related to another, has been born by itself, grows up and is trained along its own path, and ultimately we, too, have only *to be there*, but simply, fervently, as the earth is there, at one with the seasons, bright and dark and wholly in space, not seeking to rest in anything but this network of influences and forces in which the stars themselves feel safe.” [Rilke geldt nog steeds, ook nu. Ik schrijf deze woorden van hem over, die ik vanmorgen vroeg las en ze gelden nog steeds, ook nu: – Ach, wir rechnen die Jahre und machen Abschnitte da und dort und hören auf und fangen an und zögern zwischen beidem. Aber wie sehr ist, was uns begegnet, aus einem Stück, in welcher Verwandtschaft steht eines zum anderen, hat sich geboren und wächst heran und wird erzogen zu sich selbst, und wir haben im Grunde nur *dazusein*, aber schlicht, aber inständig, wie die Erde da ist, den Jahreszeiten zustimmend, hell und dunkel und ganz im Raum, nicht verlangend, in anderem aufzuruhen als in dem Netz von Einflüssen und Kräften, in dem die Sterne sich sicher fühlen.]

until in our descent, like rain at last,
in places where we fall, the flowers bloom.¹⁵⁹

About the author

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¹⁵⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *New Poems* [Studies in German Literature Linguistics and Culture], translated by Len Krisak, introduction by George C. Schoolfield (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 23. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Werke, Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden und einem Supplementband*, Vol. 1, 455:

König, hörst du, wie mein Saitenspiel
Fernen wirft, durch die wir uns bewegen:
Sterne treiben uns verwirrt entgegen,
und wir fallen endlich wie ein Regen,
und es blüht, wo dieser Regen fiel.



9 “I Keep Being Drawn towards Jung”

Good and Evil in the Work of Etty Hillesum and
Carl Gustav Jung

Janny van der Molen

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Abstract

Etty Hillesum loved to read and discuss ideas with her friends and loved ones. A writer she found fascinating was the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. Etty Hillesum likely had read Jung before meeting Julius Spier, but Spier's interest in him urged her on. The author of this essay, noting that Jung had strong and original ideas on good and evil, sees a correspondence between Etty Hillesum's views and Jung's. She discusses to what extent Etty Hillesum's thoughts on right and wrong, and good and evil, could have come from her reading of Carl Gustav Jung.

Keywords: Carl Gustav Jung, psychology, evil, good, God, Etty Hillesum, Julius Spier, love

“I keep being drawn towards Jung,” sighs Etty Hillesum in May 1941.¹ Two months earlier, she took paper and pen to try to organize her thoughts while writing. Thoughts that are also nourished by reading books, her greatest passion. Often she quotes sentences, often long passages from books she is reading. We especially encounter the work of Rilke many, many times, but the writings of Carl Gustav Jung also seem to affect her. What fascinates her about the work of this Swiss psychiatrist?

Let us start at the beginning. It is the 8th of March 1941. Etty Hillesum hesitatingly begins to write in her diary. Her incentive to write does not necessarily have to do with the war, which is making life very difficult for her as an Amsterdam Jew. She is motivated to write by the German

1 E.T., 56. *Het Werk*, 59; Friday, 8 May 1941: Ik word alweer naar Jung getrokken.

palm-reading expert and psychologist Julius Spier with whom she is in therapy. Etty Hillesum has decided to go into therapy because she frequently has dark moods. Sometimes she feels she cannot cope with life anymore. Etty Hillesum also struggles with physical problems. She feels this has to do with what she calls her “spiritual constipation,”² which, according to her, is rooted in the family she comes from. Sometimes, Etty Hillesum fears that she has mental illness, like her brothers, and that she cannot overcome her moods.

Julius Spier must help her end this “spiritual constipation.” Before Etty Hillesum knew him, Spier (Frankfurt am Main 1887 – Amsterdam 1942), who soon has an enormous influence on her, was a successful businessman, publisher, and active within artistic circles. Spier is almost 40 years old when he decides to say farewell to business life and become a student of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung in Zurich. Spier has a good understanding of and relationship with Jung. Jung advises Spier to open his own practice in psychochirology, which he does in 1929. In his practice in Berlin, Spier uses the knowledge he received from Jung, both of psychoanalyses and psychochirology. He writes his own vision on psychochirology in a book entitled *The Hands of Children*.³ Jung writes a preface for this book, which shows his respect for Spier. Being a Jew, Spier is forced to close down his successful practice in Berlin in 1939. He continues his work in Amsterdam and it is here that Etty Hillesum gets in contact with him.

Jung: Spier’s Inspiration

Carl Justav Jung (Kesswil 1875 – Küsnacht 1961) grew up amidst theologians. His mother came from a well-known family of theologians. His father was a theologian and philosopher but Jung did not feel at home in the church, although he did call himself Christian and he was very open about the fact that his work was inspired by his relationship with God. As a young man, Jung read a great deal of theology and philosophy but he decided to become a psychiatrist.

At the beginning of his career, he corresponds for many years with the famous psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (Freiburg 1856 – London 1939). He develops a friendship with him, but then ends this friendship after a disagreement as a result of Freud’s belief in the total influence of sexuality on neuroses.

2 E.T., 6. *Het Werk*, 6; Sunday, 9 March 1941: Seelische Verstopfung.

3 German title: *Kinderhände*, Dutch translation: *Worden wie je bent*.

Jung chooses his own path and comes to a new theory, complete with a whole new vocabulary, such as "unconscious", "anima and animus", "individuation" and "archetype". Religion plays an important role in his thinking. At the end of his career, he leaves us with 250 books and articles. However, the opinions on the meaning of his work are diverse. Some people praise his psychological insights, others call him a mystic, in the negative sense of the word.

As stated, Spier was an admirer of Jung's work. Therefore, it is not surprising that ETTY HILLESUM learns a great deal about Jung through Spier. Spier and HILLESUM find they have a strong connection in which sharing ideas and knowledge play an important role. Spier shares his knowledge with ETTY HILLESUM and reads Jung with her. Afterwards, they have long talks about Jung's work.

The most obvious indication that ETTY HILLESUM is interested in Jung's ideas are the many times she mentions his name in her diary or shares a title of one of his books that she is reading. She mentions eight books and articles by name. Often, she mentions Jung casually: she is ready to read or study Jung, or there is a beautiful quote that she must copy. Reading Jung is like "working" or "being on an adventure." In total, she mentions the name 'Jung' 36 times in her writings.

Jung's Popularity

There is a good chance that ETTY HILLESUM had already read Jung's work before she met Spier. ETTY HILLESUM read a great deal and she was very interested in everything that had to do with psychology. This becomes clear in the many titles and theories of different psychologists she mentions, such as Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Oskar Pfister.

Hanneke Starreveld, a friend of ETTY HILLESUM mentioned by her in her diary,⁴ thought that ETTY HILLESUM might have read Jung's work before she met Spier. "In the intellectual, progressive circles that we were a part of, Jung was popular before the war. We all read Jung, but Adler as well. We discussed the works we read together."⁵

4 For example: E.T., 339: And in their [Starrevelds'] room, high above the Stadionkade, with their many beautiful homemade things, I at once noticed Jung and Rilke. *Het Werk*, 354; Wednesday, 22 April 1942: En in hun kamer, daar hoog boven de Stadionkade, met de vele mooie eigen gemaakte dingen, vond ik opeens Jung en Rilke.

5 In an interview with Janny van der Molen, September 2000.

Etty Hillesum writes in her diary that she is reading Jung with others. For example, she reads *Die Bedeutung der Psychologie für die Gegenwart* with her friend Liesl Levie, and *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* with Spier. It is Spier who gives her *Wirklichkeit der Seele* for her birthday.

Hanneke Starreveld remembers how she read *Frau in Europa* together with Etty Hillesum. “When Etty read something that she felt could mean something for someone else too, then she would give it to them. Starreveld thought this was probably the case with *Frau in Europa*.”⁶ She could not recall the contents of their discussion. The copy of the work, with notes of both women, has gone missing. Later on in this contribution, we will learn more about Jung’s publication, *Frau in Europa*.

Even though we know from the diaries that Etty Hillesum read Jung, we do not find many quotations from his work. Starreveld feels this might have to do with the fact that Etty Hillesum was very drawn to the poetic use of the words of Rilke. For Etty Hillesum, the way Jung formulated his ideas was by far not as attractive as that of Rilke. Starreveld: “She has read a lot of Jung’s work, but for her Rilke had to be quoted. That doesn’t mean Jung was not as influential. I think she lived Jung.”⁷

Touched by Jung

Returning to Etty Hillesum and her “therapist” (who was soon to become much more than that), Julius Spier, we come across Jung several times in the methods Spier uses in his therapy. We find, for example, that Spier analyzes dreams, a typical Jungian method.⁸ Etty Hillesum writes several times about her dreams and about the talks she has with Spier about them.⁹

We can find Jungian influences in the life lessons Spier gives to Etty Hillesum. Indeed, it is as if we hear Jung speak when Etty Hillesum quotes Spier:

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 Jung is definitely not the only one who is analyzing dreams at this time. In 1900, Sigmund Freud presented completely new theories on dreams in his work *Die Traumdeutung*. But because Spier had been a student of Jung, it is more likely that he was influenced by Jung’s ideas on dreams.

9 For example E.T., 78: And I’ll have to record my dreams, for they are often important parts of myself. *Het Werk*, 82; Thursday, 7 August 1941: M’n dromen zou ik ook moeten opschrijven, want dat zijn toch dikwijls ook belangrijke stukken van mezelf.

What you expect from others, that is, from the outside, you carry unconsciously in you. Instead of expecting it from the outside, you ought to develop it in yourself, by making it conscious. The soul is not time bound, it is eternal. You must immerse yourself in it, raise it into consciousness, that is, develop yourselves.¹⁰

The concentration on the inner life in order to develop the self and the idea of an eternal soul are typically Jungian. In Hillesum's writings, we also find Jungian concepts such as "persona", "anima and animus", "introvert and extrovert" and a Jungian explanation of the Jungian idea of "libido".

However, these theories on archetypes, anima and animus, and the personal and collective unconscious do not seem to be the concepts that appeal to Etty Hillesum the most. Rather, it is Jung's emphasis on the meaning of religion in daily life and his interest in questions that have to do with good and evil, that interest her. That is not to say that all Etty Hillesum's ideas on good and evil are Jungian, but she surely found inspiration in Jung's words on this issue and was possibly influenced by him. She chooses those elements from his work that appeal to her, mirrors them to her own, and eventually draws her own conclusions.

Move to the Cosmos

Let us take a closer look at the meaning of religion in the life and work of both Carl Gustav Jung and Etty Hillesum. Like Jung, Etty Hillesum pays much attention to her "deepest source": God. The essential place that religion has in her life seems to be fuelled during her therapy with Julius Spier. He encourages his students, among whom Etty Hillesum, to find the religious and the philosophical in themselves. He stresses that with religion, humans find the strength to cope with their fears. On the day Spier dies, Etty Hillesum confirms the important role he played on her religious journey. "You taught me to speak the name of God without embarrassment."¹¹

The belief that people find healing in religion is also a Jungian theme. Jung comes to the conclusion that most of his patients have lost their faith.

10 E.T., 17. *Het Werk*, 18; Friday, 14 March 1941: J. –Das, was man vom andern, also von aussen erwartet, hat man unbewußt in sich. Statt es von aussen zu erwarten, soll man es in sich entwickeln, indem man es in sich bewußt macht. Die Seele ist nicht zeitgebunden, sie ist ewig. Man soll sich in sie vertiefen, sie ins Bewußtsein heben, d.h. sich entwickeln.

11 E.T., 516. *Het Werk*, 545; Tuesday, 15 September 1942: Jij hebt me onbevange de naam van God leren uitspreken.

He is convinced that this loss of faith, and in a broader sense the loss of myth, is one of the causes of neurosis. To bring patients in contact with myth, with religion, should be the start of the healing process.

A letter that Etty Hillesum wrote to her friend Aimé van Santen on 25 January 1942, little less than a year after she had started her therapy with Julius Spier, shows that the connection with God indeed had a healing effect on her:

What I have gone through this year is really quite simple, but I believe in incisive bearing on my further life. The cosmos has moved from my head to my heart, or in my particular case, to my midriff – anyway from my head to another area. And once God had moved inside me to the space in which he still resides, well, I suddenly stopped having headaches and stomach aches!¹²

It is meaningful that a quotation of Jung follows to emphasize these words:

And now I shall again quote someone else's words, this time C.G. Jung's: "[...] So experienced, 'god' too is a theory in the most literal sense, a way of looking at the world, an image which the limited human mind creates in order to express an unfathomable and ineffable experience. The experience alone is real, not to be disputed; but the image can be soiled or broken to pieces [...]."¹³

She wants to share with others that in her experience, faith is healing. She wants to help others find the inner peace she herself found ever since "God settled in her":

12 E.T., 557. *Het Werk*, 591; Letter 4, To Aimé van Santen, Amsterdam, Sunday, 25 January 1942: Het proces, dat ik dit laatste jaar heb doorgemaakt, is eigenlijk zo eenvoudig, maar ik geloof dat het doorslaggevend is voor het hele verdere leven. De Kosmos is uit m'n hoofd verhuisd naar het hart, of voor mijne wijze naar het middenrif, in ieder geval uit m'n hoofd naar een ander regioon. En toen God eenmaal in me verhuisd was en de ruimte betrokken had, waar hij nu nog steeds woont, ja, toen had ik opeens geen hoofdpijn en geen maagpijn meer!

13 E.T., 557. *Het Werk*, 591; Letter 4, To Aimé van Santen, Amsterdam, Sunday 25 January 1942: En nu gebruik ik al weer de woorden van een ander, dit keer van C.G. Jung: "[...] Auch 'Gott' in diesem Sinne ist eine Theorie, eine Anschauung, ein Bild, das der menschliche Geist in seiner Beschränktheit sich erschafft, um ein unausdenkbares, unaussprechbares Erlebnis auszudrücken. Das Erlebnis ist das einzig Wirkliche, das nicht Wegzudisputierende. Bilder aber können beschmutzt und zerrissen werden [...]."¹³ [This quote originates from Jung's work *Die Bedeutung der Psychologie für die Gegenwart* (1934).]

How great are the needs of your creatures on this earth, oh God. I thank you for letting so many people come to me with their inner needs. They sit there, talking quietly and quite unsuspectingly, and suddenly their need erupts in all its nakedness. Then, there they are, bundles of human misery, desperate and unable to face life.

And that's when my task begins. It is not enough simply to proclaim you, God, to commend you to the hearts of others. One must also clear the path toward you in them, God, and to do that one has to be a keen judge of the human soul. A trained psychologist. Ties to father and mother, youthful memories, dreams, guilt feelings, inferiority complexes, and all the rest block the way.¹⁴

Perhaps it is in this quotation that we find an explanation for Hillesum's interest in Jung and the other psychologists that she mentions in her diary.

If I Have Not Charity

"The experience alone is real," we read in Jung's quote that Etty Hillesum mentioned in her letter to Aimé van Santen. To Etty Hillesum, this is absolutely clear. However, there is yet more: it is about the "love you can apply to small, everyday things,"¹⁵ things one does that come from experience. In this application, there is one crucial word: love; or even better, loving: what one does out of love:

[...] let every one [task] spring from a greater central core of devotion and love.¹⁶

14 E.T., 519. *Het Werk*, 549; Thursday, 17 September 1942: Wat is de innerlijke nood van jouw schepselen op deze aarde groot, mijn God. Ik dank je ervoor, dat je zoveel mensen met hun innerlijke noden naar mij toe laat komen. Ze zitten rustig en argeloos met me te praten en opeens breekt het dan naakt naar buiten, hun nood. En opeens zit daar dan een stukje mens dat wanhopig is en niet weet hoe te moeten leven. En nu beginnen de moeilijkheden pas voor mij. Het is niet voldoende om alleen maar jou te prediken mijn God, om jou uit te dragen tot de anderen, om jou op te graven in de harten van anderen. Men moet de weg tot jou in de anderen vrij maken, mijn God en daarvoor moet men een groot kenner van het menselijke gemoed zijn. Een geschoold psycholoog moet men zijn. Verhoudingen tot vader en moeder, jeugdherinneringen, dromen, schuldgevoelens, minderwaardigheidsgevoelens, nou ja en de hele santekraam.

15 E.T., 57. *Het Werk*, 60; Sunday, 8 June 1941: liefde, waar je iets mee kunt doen in de kleine dagelijkse praktijk.

16 E.T., 165. *Het Werk*, 173; Wednesday morning, 3 December 1941: [...] laat iedere kleine handeling komen uit één groot, centraal gevoel van bereidheid en liefde.

In this respect, Etty Hillesum and Jung are of the same opinion. The love people feel for each other is the only answer to the toxic spirit of the age.

Interestingly, both Jung and Hillesum find inspiration and strength in the words of 1 Corinthians 13. In his autobiography *Memories Dreams Reflections*, Carl Gustav Jung writes that he believes Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13 on charity are, in fact, the first condition to all knowledge. He feels the sentence "if I have not charity" is the embodiment of the deity itself. Etty Hillesum cannot have read this book because it was first published in 1962. However, it reveals similarities in their way of thinking when we read these words of Etty Hillesum, written in her letter about Westerbork to "two sisters in The Hague":

It has been brought home forcibly to me here how every atom of hatred added to the world makes it an even more inhospitable place. And I also believe, childishly perhaps but stubbornly, that the earth will become more habitable again only through the love that the Jew Paul described to the citizens of Corinth in the thirteenth chapter of his first letter.¹⁷

In one of Jung's articles read by Etty Hillesum, *Frau in Europa*,¹⁸ published in 1927, Jung pays a lot of attention to love. He feels women play a special role when it comes to love. It is Jung's belief that it is characteristic of women that they do everything for a person out of love. According to Jung, the European soul is torn because of the (First) World War. He is of the opinion that men and women both have their own task to help society recover. Men will have to work on the "external damage" while women can help to heal the "internal damage" through true love: first for themselves and then for others.

Especially, women can make society "healthier" because they know a higher loyalty than only the loyalty towards one's love partner. Jung calls upon women to make men aware of the need to develop their spiritual side. So both men and women have a task to fulfil, Jung writes. He is convinced that women become increasingly aware that only love can lead to perfection. At the same time, men must begin to see that only their spirit can give

¹⁷ E.T., 590. *Het Werk*, 629; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: En ik meen dan ook, misschien kinderlijk, maar hardnekkig, dat deze aarde alleen weer iets bewoonbaarder zou kunnen worden door die liefde, waarover eens de Jood Paulus schreef aan de inwoners van de stad Corinthe, in het dertiende hoofdstuk van zijn eerste brief.

¹⁸ Many women felt the quoted lines show little regard for women. In September 2000, I spoke to Hanneke Starreveld, with whom Etty Hillesum had discussed this article, and asked her if they had become irritated by Jung's view on women. But this was not the case. "We felt Jung's thoughts were new and this was more important to us."

true meaning to life. Love needs the spirit to find perfection, Jung says, and the spirit needs love.

Etty Hillesum is also sure that love is the answer to all the misery that the Second World War is causing and sees a task for herself, as a woman. However, there is a certain contrast in her thinking. She feels her love for people makes her in a way less feminine:

My human feelings are stronger and much more primitive than my feminine feelings. But it will be quite a struggle to distance myself from the woman in me, if that turns out to be my path.¹⁹

She starts to feel that directing all her love to one person is childish and therefore she wants to transform her love to a love for all. Spier encourages her to do this. To make her love a love for all human beings is a difficult and painful process for Etty Hillesum. The question of what will be the consequence of this love for all, for the love between men and women, is something she especially thinks about. Denise de Costa²⁰ is of the opinion that Etty Hillesum finds a balance after Spier has died and Etty Hillesum stays (regularly) in Camp Westerbork. A "general" love for people has become second nature to her.

Also, we find in the work of Etty Hillesum, the spiritualization of which Jung speaks of as an indispensable element to make love perfect. A couple of days after she mentions *Frau in Europa*, we can see how much she struggles with this matter in the following quotation:

I am no tigress, and that sometimes gives me a feeling of inferiority. My primitive physical passion has been diverted in many different ways and weakened by all sorts of intellectualizations, which I am sometimes ashamed of. What is primitive in me is my warmth; I have a sort of primitive love and primitive sympathy for people, for all people. [...] I even find the loving of one man a bit childish sometimes.²¹

19 E.T., 122. *Het Werk*, 131; Monday morning, 6 October 1941: De menselijke gevoelens in mij zijn sterker en veel meer in oer-vorm aanwezig als die van vrouw. Maar het zal een zwaar stuk strijd zijn om afstand te doen van mezelf als vrouw, als dat m'n weg zal blijken te zijn.

20 Ton Jorna & Denise de Costa, *Van aandacht en adem tot ziel en zin: Honderd woorden uit het levensbeschouwend idioom van Etty Hillesum* (Utrecht: Kwadraat, 1999).

21 E.T., 123. *Het Werk*, 130; Monday morning, 6 October 1941: Ik ben niet meer een vrouwtjes-dier en dat geeft me soms een gevoel van minderwaardigheid. Het oer-lichamelijke wordt bij mij op allerlei manieren doorbroken en afgezwakt door een vergeestelijkingsproces. En het is net of ik me voor die vergeestelijking soms geneer. Wat wel oer bij me is, dat zijn de menselijke gevoelens,

The Origin of Evil

So love is the only solution to evil. This is a conviction with enormous depth as we realize how difficult Etty Hillesum's situation is as she starts writing in her diary. As she increasingly realizes the extent, the intensity, and the consequences of the hatred towards the Jews, this conviction grows.

But what is "evil"? Where does it come from? Is it human? Is it divine? In the answers to these questions, we see parallels in the ideas of Etty Hillesum and Carl Gustav Jung. Firstly, they share a belief that evil has its place in all human beings. There is no such thing as good and evil people. Each person has both sides. There is also no such thing as "*the enemy*". It is way too simple to point at the evil of someone else. A person is his own worst enemy, Jung says.

First, we study a fundamental issue that has interested Jung from an early age, namely the question of how good and evil relate to one another. In his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung tells of a breakthrough in his thoughts on this matter. It happened when he was twelve years old. He thought about his ancestors and ended with the first ancestors, Adam and Eve. Because they did not have any ancestors, Jung concluded that they were created by God in a way He would want people to be. Adam and Eve had no idea how they could have been otherwise. Everything God made was perfect, so they were perfect. Yet, they still did an evil thing. This, Jung concluded, could only be possible if God had also created this evil. He *wanted* Adam and Eve to be sinful and He himself created the snake for this purpose.

Jung says, because man is created in the image of God, this must mean that in God good and evil are also present. He calls good and evil "principles." Jung explains that principle (*prius*) means "in former times," so something that was already there in the beginning. To him it is clear: the principles good and evil find their deepest roots in God. Jung even calls good and evil "names of God."

God's Image

Etty Hillesum does not express herself on the issue of an evil side to God. However, like Jung, she questions how God relates to people and how this

er zit een soort oer-liefde en oer-medelijden in me voor de mensen, voor alle mensen. [...] Het is me soms net of ik het eigenlijk een beetje kinderachtig vind, dat liefhebben van één mens.

affects his actions. Unlike Jung, she does not find the need to be consistent and scientific in her writings, and as time passes she feels no need for the use of many or big words:

Sometimes I try my hand at turning out small profundities and uncertain short stories, but I always end up with just one single word: God. And that says everything, and there is no need for anything more.²²

God is everything. That conclusion is significant, but before we can study the issue of the relation between God and good and evil, we must be aware of the time and circumstances in which Etty Hillesum wrote. The tremendous suffering of the Jewish people raises the question of God's omnipotence. Who can believe in the benignity of God? Who can believe in God at all? A quotation from a letter of Etty Hillesum, written in Camp Westerbork, shows the sentiment of many:

An old woman asked me helplessly, "Could you tell me, please could you tell me, why we Jews have to suffer so much?" I couldn't answer. There was a woman who had had to feed her four-month-old child on cabbage soup for days. She said, "I keep calling, 'Oh God, oh God' – but does He really still exist?"²³

With this in mind, it is, in a sense, remarkable how Hillesum's notion of God develops. Concentrating on the question of whether God is also an evil God, we find some reflections in the work of Etty Hillesum on human beings as images of God. She calls these words from Genesis "presiding": "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."²⁴ In the following quotation, she refers to the evil human beings do to each other:

22 E.T., 640. *Het Werk*, 682; Letter 60, To Henny Tideman, Westerbork, Wednesday, 18 August 1943: Ik zou soms wel kleine wijsheden willen etsen en vibrerende verhaaltjes, maar ik kom altijd weer direct terecht bij een en hetzelfde woord: God, en dat omvat alles en dan hoef ik al het andere niet meer te zeggen.

23 E.T., 600. *Het Werk*, 640; Letter 36, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday, 7 June 1943: Een oude vrouw vroeg me zeer hulpeloos: 'Zou U me ook, zóu U me ook kunnen uitleggen, waaróm wij Joden zoveel lijden moeten?' Ik heb het niet helemaal precies kunnen uitleggen. Een vrouw met een kind van 4 maanden, dat ze dagenlang alleen met koolsoep heeft kunnen voeden, zei: 'Ik zeg aldoor: "Ach God, ach God", maar zou ie eigenlijk nog wel bestaan?'

24 Genesis 1, verse 27. Translation: King James Version.

It is sometimes hard to take in and comprehend, oh God, what those created in your likeness do to each other in these disjointed days.²⁵

Also interesting is the following:

And isn't it true that one can pray anywhere, in a wooden barracks just as well as in a stone monastery, or indeed, anywhere on this earth where God, in these troubled times, feels like casting his likeness?²⁶

In this quote, the line that divides good and evil almost seems to disappear in an acceptance that things are the way they are. Jung says good and evil are both present and therefore both need to be considered. The idea that God has an unsympathetic and inscrutable side – “casting” does not sound friendly – does not seem to trouble Etty Hillesum. She resists and finds another place for herself.

However, there comes a time when the words from Genesis seem to make her doubt. After a horrible night in Camp Westerbork, she writes:

I sank to my knees with the words that preside over human life: And God made man after His likeness. That passage²⁷ spent a difficult morning with me.²⁸

Do we know now how Etty Hillesum feels about the evil side of God? Yes and no. As mentioned before, I do not think Etty Hillesum found the need for definitive answers to this question. Her perception of God is too complex and unique to pin down in a couple of lines and to make hasty conclusions, even if we wanted to. I share the opinion of Loed Loosen, who feels that, ultimately, we must be silent on the secret of the other.²⁹

25 E.T., 384. *Het Werk*, 402; Friday morning, 29 May 1942: Het is soms nauwelijks te verwerken en te bevatten, God, wat jouw evenbeelden op deze aarde elkaar alles aandoen in deze losgebroken tijden.

26 E.T., 586. *Het Werk*, 624; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: En is het ook niet zo, dat men overal bidden kan, in een houten barak evengoed als in een stenen klooster en verder op iedere plek van deze aarde, waar God, in een bewogen tijd, nu eenmaal meent z'n evenbeelden neer te moeten smijten?

27 Etty Hillesum refers to the passage “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him” (Genesis 1, verse 27).

28 E.T., 644. *Het Werk*, 686; Letter 64, To Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Tuesday, 24 August 1943: En God schiep de mens naar Zijn Evenbeeld. Dat woord beleefde een moeilijke ochtend met mij.

29 Loed Loosen, S.J., “Etty Hillesum – Geen idool, maar uitnodiging tot bezinning”, in: *Etty Hillesum, '43-'93: Teksten en lezingen gehouden in de Herdenkingsweek november 1993 te Deventer*,

One can say that Hillesum's God has a human side. Therefore, it is only logical that God has an evil side too. However, as important is this conclusion by Etty Hillesum. God is powerless. There are circumstances, she says, in which hatred plays a major role. And "it seems," she says, "God cannot do anything to change that":

But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that you cannot help us, that we must help you to help ourselves. [...] Alas, there does not seem to be much you yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold you responsible.³⁰

God is not almighty. God is not responsible for evil, but human beings themselves. It is up to humans to make a choice between good and evil:

[...] it's not God's fault that things go awry sometimes, the cause lies in ourselves.³¹

The fact that evil comes from human beings themselves, is absolutely clear to Etty Hillesum:

All the appalling things that happen are no mysterious threats from afar, but arise from fellow beings very close to us. That makes these happenings more familiar, then, and not so frightening.³²

And:

Yes, we carry everything within us, God and Heaven and Hell and Earth and Life and Death and all of history.³³

uitgave van de werkgroep Etty Hillesum '43-'93 (Deventer: Boekhandel Praamstra, 1993), 60: "Uiteindelijk [hebben wij] t.a.v. het geheim van de ander persoon te zwijgen."

30 E.T., 488. *Het Werk*, 516; Sunday morning prayer, 12 July 1942: Maar dit éne wordt me steeds duidelijker: dat jij ons niet kunt helpen, maar dat wij jou moeten helpen en door dat laatste helpen wij onszelf. Ja, mijn God, aan de omstandigheden schijn jij niet al te veel te kunnen doen, ze horen nu eenmaal ook bij dit leven. Ik roep je er ook niet voor ter verantwoording.

31 E.T., 608. *Het Werk*, 648; Letter 42, To Han Wegerif and others, Fragment, Westerbork, not dated, after 26 June 1943: aan God zal het niet liggen, dat het zo scheef gaat soms, maar het ligt aan onszelf.

32 E.T., 259. *Het Werk*, 268; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: En dat al het ontzettende en gruwelijke, dat er gebeurt, niet iets geheimzinnig dreigends en vers is buiten ons; maar dat het heel dicht bij ons is, in ons, uit ons mensen voortkomende.

33 E.T., 463. *Het Werk*, 488; Friday, 3 July 1942: Ach, we hebben het toch immers alles in ons, God en hemel en hel en aarde en leven en dood en eeuwen, vele eeuwen.

Carl Gustav Jung and Etty Hillesum share a belief that good and evil are, in themselves, not static. Change from evil to good and vice versa is possible, Jung says, because both sides are dynamic. In evil, there is a seed of good as there is an evil seed in good. Nothing can be so evil that there is no possibility for good anymore, he claims.³⁴

Etty Hillesum uses these words: "I have discovered that by bearing one's heavy burden one can convert it into something good."³⁵

Change the World, Start with Changing Yourself

The question is: what hope do people have in doing good and fighting against evil? There are clear similarities between the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung and Etty Hillesum on this issue. Both believe that each individual can contribute to a better world by facing evil. "Change the world, start with changing yourself." These words are applicable to both, but before one can start doing this, one has to realize that there is an *inner world* outside the *outer world*. Etty Hillesum refers to Jung as she writes about this in her diary:

The inner world is as real as the outer world. One ought to be conscious of that. [...] These two worlds are fed by each other, you must not neglect one at the expense of the other, must not deem one more important than the other.³⁶

We also find in the writings of Rainer Maria Rilke the distinction between the inner and outer world. Rilke's concept *Weltinnenraum* is dear to Etty Hillesum. She quotes several times in her work his sentence "Durch alle Wesen reicht *eine* Raum: Weltinnenraum." Denise de Costa writes that Etty Hillesum's preference for these words shows that she believes this inner world is something people share. This *Weltinnenraum* is tremendously wide

34 Carl Gustav Jung, *Die Beziehungen zwischen dem Ich und dem Unbewussten* (Darmstadt: Otto Reichl, 1928).

35 E.T., 515. *Het Werk*, 545; Tuesday night, 13 September 1942: Ik heb ervaren dat men, door al het zware te dragen, het verkeren kan in het goede.

36 E.T., 60. *Het Werk*, 64; Wednesday morning, 11 June 1941: De binnenwereld is even reëel als de buitenwereld. Men moet dit bewust weten. [...] De beide werelden worden door elkaar gevoed, men mag de ene niet verwaarlozen ten koste van de andere, de ene niet belangrijker vinden dan de andere.

and of great importance, De Costa says, because it is a space no one can take away. "It offers space to everything of value."³⁷

The answer to evil lies in the knowledge of that inner world, another word for "the soul" or "the unconscious." Once one knows this inner world, one can start destroying the nastiness in oneself, even if this seems small and unimportant. Man should always be in touch with one's inner world to become clean and stay that way. The person that manages to focus on his inner world will come to the conclusion that life is beautiful. And once one has had this experience, one will realize that evil, no matter how serious, cannot take over.

Jung also believes that in knowing the inner world, there is an enormous potential for growth. Eventually, a human being can reach self-actualization (individuation) by getting to know one's dark side. Unlike Hillesum, Jung does not endeavour to put an end to all evil. He feels people have to acknowledge evil because evil *wants* to be part of life.

There will always be evil Jung says and this is not a problem as long as there is a balance between good and evil. The person that finds this balance, is "healthy".

As important as this, is the balance between the inner and outer world. Even though the individuation takes place in the inner world, the outer world must nourish this process.

Etty Hillesum recognizes this, but, to her, there is another reason why the contact between the inner and outer world is more than a question of purely her personal growth. She wants to tell others about the process that takes place within her because she hopes she can help them to do the same.

Finally

It is important to stress some major differences in the ideas of Etty Hillesum and Carl Gustav Jung. Firstly, we must not forget the context in which they wrote their work. When reading the vision of Etty Hillesum on good and evil and one's own responsibility and possibilities, we must not forget that she writes those words in a time of great evil. It is almost impossible to understand how she can be critical about her own dark side knowing that her people, and she herself, are about to share a horrendous fate. Jung writes his ideas on good and evil as a representative of science. His work, although it is criticized, is appreciated by a wide audience. His life is not at

37 Jorna & De Costa, *Van aandacht en adem tot ziel en zin*, 81.

stake. He lives in a free world. At the same time, we must not forget where the origin of his vision lies: in a personal crisis that brings him in contact with his own unconscious. He lives his theory.

It is also important to realize that Jung is actually only one of the many thinkers whom she reads. Of Jung's many works, Etty Hillesum, as far as we know, read eight books. Of those eight books and articles, we can trace five.³⁸

From all the books she read, Etty Hillesum mainly chose elements that have to do with religion and mysticism. In other words, in the enormous works of Jung, she is interested in only one element. So, it is fair to conclude Etty Hillesum is inspired by Jung but we must not forget to mention which part of Jung attracts her.

Apart from this, Etty Hillesum adopts ideas of Jung and turns them into something that fits her. In this respect, the way Etty Hillesum reads Jung is not that different from her reading of for example Rilke or Augustine. Let us turn to Etty Hillesum's own words once more:

And that is probably the only right way with literature, with study, with people, or with anything else: to let it all soak in, to let it mature slowly inside you until it has become a part of yourself. That, too, is a growing process.³⁹

Apart from the question of what good and evil meant to both Carl Gustav Jung and Etty Hillesum, we studied good and evil in relation to God. Firstly, there is this interesting quote we find in Etty Hillesum's work twice; a quote that wants to ensure that one should not reduce God to theory: God deserves to live in the soul. He who can find God within, will be able to heal his soul. This is something Etty Hillesum, who is sensitive to science and theory, makes clear. She herself has experienced how much her life has changed since God "moved" from her head to her heart.

38 Books and articles that may have influenced Etty Hillesum: *Frau in Europa* (1927), *Die Bedeutung der Psychologie für die Gegenwart* (1934), *Analytische Psychologie und Weltanschauung* (1931), *Das Grundproblem der gegenwärtigen Psychologie* (1934) and *Das Unbewusste im normalen und kranken Seelenleben* (1926; Jung rewrote this in 1943 and gave it the new title *Über die Psychologie des Unbewussten*). The other three titles are: *Über die Energetik der Seele* (1928), *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* (1912; Jung rewrote this in 1952 and gave it the new title *Symbole der Wandlung*) and *Wirklichkeit der Seele* (1934).

39 E.T., 315. *Het Werk*, 328; Wednesday morning, 1 April 1942: En dit is misschien de enige goede manier om je met literatuur, studie, mensen of wat ook bezig te houden: je vol te zuigen, heel langzaam dat onderin je te laten groeien, tot het ergens een stuk van jezelf wordt. Ook dat een groeiproces.

Jung seems to have no doubt whatsoever when he speaks on the issue of good and evil in God: God has both sides in him. The devil does not exist: he is "the other side" of God. Modern Christianity does not want to accept this, Jung says, and the consequences are enormous. Because when evil is placed outside Christianity, and only a God of love is preached, people become alienated from the evil within themselves.

Etty Hillesum's answer on this is not as clear. She contemplates the words of Genesis 1:27 again and again: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created He them."⁴⁰

When good and evil people are both created as images of God, what does this tell us about God? Instead of giving a theoretical answer to this question, as Jung does, Etty Hillesum searches for answers. Sometimes she wants to believe that God is pure love, while at other times she wonders if God might not have the dominance to act towards evil. Eventually, she concludes that God is not responsible for evil. "Alas, there doesn't seem to be much you yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives."⁴¹

We have "everything and everything" in us and it is up to ourselves to make a choice; a choice between good and evil.

About the author

Janny van der Molen graduated in Theology on a study on the possible influence of Carl Gustav Jung on Etty Hillesum when it comes to the subject of good and evil. Prof. dr. Klaas A.D. Smelik was one of her two mentors. In 2014, they published *Ik zou lang willen leven* [I wish I could live for a long time], an introductory book about Etty Hillesum's life and ideas, meant for younger readers.

40 Genesis 1 verse 27, King James Version.

41 E.T., 488. *Het Werk*, 517; Sunday morning prayer, 12 July 1942.



10 “To Realize That Life Is Truly Simple”

Etty Hillesum and Walther Rathenau

Jurjen Wiersma

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Abstract

Walther Rathenau (1867-1922) was a prominent Jewish politician and German statesman who was able to remain standing in a chaotic and hostile world. Lore Karrenbrock (1895-1928) started to write letters to him in 1918 after reading his works. Subsequently, a relationship began to flower. In this contribution, the author explores their rapport, and concludes that Karrenbrock's love for Rathenau took a self-destructive turn; she wanted to exist solely for him. The author looks at Hillesum's commentary on the Rathenau/Karrenbrock association and places her as the central figure in a triptych. The author sees three human beings brought together in dark times, facing complexities and extremes, and concludes that Etty Hillesum felt a kinship with Rathenau's sentiments when she quoted him saying, “For me, there will never be a happier moment than when I realize that life is truly simple.”

Keywords: Walther Rathenau, Lore Karrenbrock, simplicity, Briefe an eine Liebende, Etty Hillesum

After the murder of Walther Rathenau, a distraught classmate of Dietrich Bonhoeffer spontaneously wondered, “what will become of Germany if they murder their greatest leaders?” Shortly before, in Bonhoeffer's class at the Grunewald gymnasium (Rathenau lived in the Grunewald villa district of Berlin), strange noises had been heard during the third hour of the lessons. In that moment, Minister Rathenau was gunned down, scarcely 300 metres from the school. An animal, a lunatic, a madman took another man's life, only because he did not like him, Dietrich wrote to his twin sister Sabine:

“Berlin is dominated by frenzy and fury. In the *Reichstag* [Parliament], it is dog eat dog.”

Walther Rathenau (1867-1922) was a prominent German. His father, Emil Rathenau, founded the AEG factory in 1883. His son was exceptionally gifted in literature and philosophy; in his professional life, however, he became well known as an industrialist and politician.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, he finalized the Treaty of Rapallo negotiations on 16 April 1922 between the German Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union, which delivered both countries from their undesirable political isolation after the First World War. Extreme nationalists, however, detested this political move.

On the way to his office in Königsallee in Berlin, on 24 July 1922, he was shot by two veterans. They were members of the ‘Organization Consul’, an extreme rightist, nationalist, terrorist organization that wanted to destabilize the young, unsettled republic through means of political assassinations.¹

In the index of *Het Werk*, the complete edition of Ety Hillesum’s writings in Dutch (and German), Walther Rathenau is mentioned seven times. Ety Hillesum quotes a text written by Rathenau five times and twice he is quoted in an annotation to the text. The five quotes are derived from his work *Briefe an eine Liebende* [Letters to a Lover].² The person indicated with the term *Liebende* was called Lore Karrenbrock. Who was this young woman?

Lore Karrenbrock, a Lover

Lore Karrenbrock, born on 29 June 1895, and deceased 14 November 1928, grew up in Essen where her father was active in local politics and in the painters’ union. Lore attended the local high school where she studied economics. She had a weak back and was therefore partially incapable of employment. From April 1917 to August 1918, she had a job in the office of an Essener manufacturer. She began reading the works of Rathenau in the fall, particularly *Zur Mechanik des Geistes oder Vom Reich der Seele*

1 Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologe – Christ – Zeitgenosse* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967²), 57. The classmate pondered “wo es denn mit Deutschland hinkommen solle, wenn man ihm seine besten Führer ermorde.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke IX (DBW)*. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1986), 43-44, 614. “Bei uns in Berlin ist eine wahnsinnige Aufregung und Wut,” stated Dietrich to Sabine.

2 Walther Rathenau, *Briefe an eine Liebende* (Dresden: Carl Reissner Verlag, 1931).

[Mechanics of the Spirit or the Kingdom of the Soul]. She started to write letters to Rathenau. The author kindly replied and began corresponding with her on 27 February 1918.

In his first letter, he thanked Lore for her friendly and heartfelt prose. He enclosed a copy of *Mechanik des Geistes*, a book, "das ich als meine Hauptarbeit betrachte" [that I see as my main work]. Originally, he greeted her as "Verehrte Frau Lore Karrenbrock" [honorable lady Lore Karrenbrock] and "An Fräulein Lore Karrenbrock" [to Miss Lore Karrenbrock]; later their relation became more personal and he wrote "Liebes Fräulein Lore" [Dear Miss Lore].

The young Lore Karrenbrock's love for Walther Rathenau was "mit geradezu selbstzerstörerischer Kraft" [of a rather self-destructive nature]. The recipient of her passion, Walter Rathenau, tried to respond in a kind and careful manner. On occasion, he discouraged her illusions. He told her not to glorify him: "Erhöhen Sie mein Bild nicht!" I am not different from all the millions of other countrymen.³ Surely, this platonic relationship was difficult for Rathenau. Lore Karrenbrock wanted to exist solely for him.

Rathenau tried to maintain "seine freundliche Distanz" [his friendly distance]. Lore, however, could not accept this and threatened to commit suicide.⁴ It did not come to that. Rathenau wrote in robust words what he thought "vom freiwilligen Sterben" [about voluntary suicide]. He explained that he considered such an act to be a metaphysical injustice, a lack of respect for the eternal good and a renunciation of the internal duty to obey common law with its "natürliche und unverschuldete Ende" [natural and innocent ending of life].

He did not hesitate to be frank and noted: "Wer sich tötet, tötet" [He who kills himself, kills]. Do not succumb to this desire, he continued, try to withstand: "durch Milde schläft es ein wie ein Kind" [by gentleness, it is lulled to sleep, like a little child].⁵

He tried his best to raise her up out of her self-torture and to persuade her to step out of a vicious circle. He urged her not to flee or hide in "Ihres Eigenkreises" [her own little world] and reminded her there were helping hands. The most beautiful message that he could envision receiving from

3 Rathenau's letters from 17 March and 14 August 1918.

4 In her last will, Karrenbrock left Rathenau's letters to the Walther Rathenau Foundation in Berlin. The Foundation published the letters out of respect for the sender and receiver. Publisher Carl Reißner in Dresden published them in 1931 under the title of *Briefe an eine Liebende* (*Letters to a Lover*). Dr. Reinhard Schmook, Director of the Walther Rathenau Foundation, sent me an email dated 8 August 2014 in which he informed me of the more personal background of the exchange of these letters, the 'Briefwechsel' between Rathenau and Karrenbrock.

5 Rathenau's letter of 19 May 1919.

her was that she was reaching out to take a helping hand and that she would take creative action: “Ich fühle Sie von Händen umgeben, die auf Sie warten, die empfangen und danken wollen” [I feel that hands will surround you, hands are waiting for you, that want to receive and thank you].⁶ Once again, Rathenau returned to the question at hand and wrote, “I wish I could help your poor heart to grow up a few years.” If only he could help it mature (“altern machen”), then the problem would resolve itself, he seemed to suggest, and Lore could give her heart to those in need of it, actually every child: “und gar jedes Kind, meine ich, bedarf Ihrer.”⁷

Twenty years later, during the Second World War, ETTY HILLESUM was fascinated with the *Briefe an eine Liebende* [Letters to a Lover], fascinated by their relationship as she recognized within it the characteristics of a classic tragedy. When she read the letters from Rathenau on the afternoon of 20 October, 1941 she felt they were noble and pure with a quality “almost too beautiful to read in a fleeting moment.”⁸

Five Rathenau Quotes

As noted above, Hillesum makes use of and sheds light on five Rathenau quotes. In the following, I give a short description of her comments:

Rathenau quote 1

The first quote concerns Karrenbrock’s insinuation of an impending voluntary suicide, which Rathenau sternly rejected. We have already touched upon this subject; however, further elaboration may prove useful. Do not do it, was Rathenau’s verdict. “All violent deeds in this world, like all acts, live on. We are here to shoulder some of the world’s suffering by baring our breasts, not to multiply it by committing violent deeds.” Try to confront it with love, he advised his pen pal: “Sie haben so viel Liebe in sich” [You have so much love in you].⁹

6 Rathenau’s letter of 30 March 1920.

7 Rathenau’s letter of 21 July 1920.

8 E.T., 132. *Het Werk*, 139-140; 20 October 1942: Dat had ik niet mogen doen, die brieven van Rathenau midden op de dag lezen. Dat is een te grote luxe en luxe verslapt de mens. Ik moet nu weer naar mezelf terug. Het is zó edel en zo puur en van zulk een hoog niveau – het is haast te mooi om in een verloren moment te lezen.

9 E.T., 131-132. *Het Werk*, 138-139.

The next day, on Tuesday morning, 21 October 1941, Hillesum delved further into the matter, which touched her deeply: "You may never commit suicide, that is what I have emphatically stated the entire week." Still, she recognized that she wanted to slip away from this world, as if there were nothing to keep her here. She wrote, "Always something different. I so want something firm." She realized at the same time that what she wanted does not exist in this world. "Only in death." Perhaps this realization explains all her longing for death, for the void, for the sheltering vault of that great silence.¹⁰

Rathenau quote 2

In the afternoon of the aforementioned Tuesday, Hillesum studied ten lines from the letter that Rathenau wrote during Pentecost 1920, "ein tiefer heisser Sommertag" [an awfully warm summer day], he wrote to Karrenbrock. He is happy to hear that she has connected with others in her community. One of them is a child. Rathenau called it a promising step, which he briefly describes.¹¹

In the concrete material world, it is the little things that matter, rightly so. One does not walk around with one's head in the clouds. This boundary prevents "dass man sich verliert" [one from losing oneself]. In the spiritual world of contemplation and fantasy, one can walk on thin ice. That is dangerous "denn sie ist ungemessen" [because there are no limits]. Rathenau recommends moderation to his somewhat unstable correspondent, a recommendation Hillesum finds difficult. She knows she has a wild heart; she cares for her fellow man. At the same time, she knows she has great abundance, too great an abundance to give her heart to "one person." Again she emphasizes and repeats: "The only rule of thumb is one's self."¹²

10 E.T., 133. *Het Werk*, 141; Tuesday morning, 21 October 1941: Soms houd ik dat niet bij en wil een vast punt. Maar het bestaat niet. Alleen in de dood. En daarom misschien soms dat verlangen naar de dood, naar het niets, naar de overkoepeling van het grote zwijgen.

11 E.T., 134. *Het Werk*, 141; Tuesday, 21 October 1941: Uit een brief van Rathenau aan 'Liebes Fräulein Lore': 'Daß Sie begonnen haben, Ihr Leben wieder an Menschen der Umgebung, vor allem an ein Kind zu knüpfen, ist ein schöner und verheißungsvoller Schritt. Ich weiß sehr wohl, daß alle Materie zehrt, doch sie erwidert Liebe, und durch ihre Begrenzung hindert sie, daß man sich verliert. Die Welt des Gedankens und der Phantasie ist gefährlicher, denn sie ist ungemessen; sie verlangt, daß man sich ein Objekt als Ambos schaffe, sonst gehen die Schläge in die Luft und Mensch und Hammer wirbeln in den Abgrund.' –

12 E.T., 134. *Het Werk*, 142; Tuesday, 21 October 1941: Mijn hart is heel wild, maar nooit voor één mens. Voor alle mensen. Dit hart is geloof ik ook heel rijk. En vroeger heb ik altijd gedacht, hoe ik dit aan één iemand zou geven. Maar het bestaat niet. En wanneer je op je 27ste jaar tot

After supper, Hillesum comments on this passage. She pleads, even though she knows this is a painful lesson, for a true, inner independence. Ultimately, one cannot rely on others for help and support. She admits that she has a compulsive urge to lose herself in the Other, the so-called One. Nevertheless, “You’re always thrust back upon yourself.” A person has to be stable.

Rathenau quote 3

Rathenau was seriously concerned with Karrenbrocks’ heartache – her pain and sorrow. Maybe she will grow out of it, he suggests in his letter of 21 July 1920. The best thing for her would be to give her heart to those who need her. However, “Vereinigung” [the desire to become united] is just “Täuschung” [an illusion]. One cannot rely on an illusion; this will result in “eine Enttäuschung” [disappointment]. People are like stars. They twinkle, rise and fall, but they cannot change their journey and do not encounter each other.¹³ Rathenau is sceptical. We are – he continues in his letter of 21 July – bound by our desires and wishes, and not by gifts, but we must lavish our wishes and gifts upon others, aware of “die Bedürftigkeit” [the needs] of other people.

Hillesum wondered whether she was not being too complicated in considering the third quote of Rathenau. Could she distance herself from her own life or would this make things wither away? To what extent is her complexity a source of inspiration? “I don’t know,” she decides. Nonetheless, “[f]or me there will never be a happier moment, than to realize that life is truly simple.”¹⁴

Rathenau quote 4

While Hillesum expresses some thoughts about life and suffering on 15 December 1941, she quotes a (German) text fragment from the flamboyant French writer, essayist, and critic André Suarès (1868-1948), a friend of Claudel, Gide, and Valéry. The first sentence affirms: “Der Schmerz ist

dergelijke hevige “waarheden” moet komen, geeft je dat soms een wanhopig en eenzaam en angstig gevoel, maar aan de andere kant ook weer een trots en onafhankelijk en trots gevoel. Ik ben toevertrouwd aan mezelf en zal het met mezelf klaar moeten spelen. De enige maatstaf die je hebt, ben jij zelf.

13 Rathenau probably refers to *Der Stern der Erlösung* by Franz Rosenzweig, who wrote this book at the end of the First World War; it was published in 1921. The title of the second part is ‘Die Bahn oder die allzeiterneuerte Welt’ [The journey or the continuously evolving world].

14 E.T., 136. *Het Werk*, 144; Wednesday morning, 22 October 1941: Gelukkigere momenten zullen er voor mij nooit bestaan, dan te merken dat het leven werkelijk eenvoudig is.

nicht Ort unseres Verlanges, sondern Ort unserer Gewissheit" [We do not desire pain, but it is inevitably there].¹⁵ To be more concrete, Suarèz is of the opinion that one is neither slave, nor master of pain, anguish, or sorrow, but "Erlöser" [redeemer]. Humans should do everything in their power to liberate themselves from them. Hillesum embroiders upon this theme. It is worth noting here what Walther Rathenau said in his *Briefe an eine Liebende* [Letters to a Lover]. The quote that follows, the fourth one, is exactly the same as the first Rathenau quote above.¹⁶

It underscores the thematic coupling of life and suffering. Sometimes, Hillesum is inclined to replace the conjunction "and" with an equal sign: life *is* suffering. You only have to, she suggests, catch a mild cold or have to go to the dentist... that is only a wee bit of suffering,¹⁷ but she realizes that Suarèz and Rathenau are referring to the existential suffering of people who are facing death or are contemplating suicide.

Both spokesmen are clear in their rejection of suicide. Liberate yourself from the suffering and "blicken Sie ihm ins Auge; es ist nichts" [look it in the eye, it is nothing], Hillesum repeats, and adds to the Rathenau quote: "Es ist nichts –" [It is nothing –].

Rathenau quote 5

This quote is also a repetition. Hillesum looked up a few sentences that she had once rephrased. Certain words and texts became spiritual food for her. She wanted to internalize them, as if they were a visible piece of heaven that she could experience. The fifth quote of Rathenau is derived from his letter of 19 May 1919 and can be found in her diary note of Tuesday, 14 July 1942. It is not surprising that she reached for this text once again. In 1942, the Nazis possessed the technological means for the industrial destruction of all Jews in occupied Europe. On 20 January 1942, the Wannsee conference was held in Berlin. Instigated by Reinhard Heydrich, Himmler's second in command, the Nazi leaders decided to execute the "Endlösung der Judenfrage" [the definitive solution for the Jewish problem].¹⁸

15 E.T., 183. *Het Werk*, 192-193; Monday morning, 15 December 1941: Pijn is niet iets waar we naar verlangen, maar iets waar we zeker van zijn; het is er.

16 See above n. 8 and n. 5. From Rathenau's letter of May 19, 1919.

17 E.T., 183-184. *Het Werk*, 193; Monday morning, 15 December 1941: En al bestaat dat lijden soms in alleen maar een beetje verkoudheid op een koude grijze ochtend en in een tandarts, die opgebeld moet worden [...].

18 Cf. Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 173-174.

Etty Hillesum was aware of this decision. After the attack on Heydrich in May 1942, she must have known that Polish Jews were killed during 'Operation Reinhard' and that the first trains with Jews from Slovakia had arrived in Auschwitz. She was very concerned about the escalating violence, which motivated her to return to Rathenau's words for Lore Karrenbrock:

All violence in the world has future consequences, just as does every act. We are in order to take something of the suffering of the world to ourselves in that we offer our chest as a target, but not in order to multiply that suffering by doing violence ourselves. I know that you suffer and I feel your suffering with you. Be good toward this suffering, and it will be good to you. Suffering multiplies itself both through wishes and through contrariness, but by gentleness it is lulled to sleep, like a little child.¹⁹

Rathenau, echoed by Hillesum, points first to the large scale of the violence coupled with suffering. Unless one confronts it, the violence will increase and become out of control. Subsequently, one must direct attention to individual pain and suffering, an act that calls for, in modern terms, the necessary empathy. Those who encounter suffering should try to remain noble and mild. Through gentleness, suffering is lulled to sleep like a little child.

Naïve? Simply realistic. Violence begets violence. This is common knowledge, or common enough. You do not have to be Rathenau, Hillesum, Gandhi, or Martin Luther King Junior to understand this. "I hate nobody," notes Etty Hillesum. "I am not embittered. And once the love of mankind has germinated in you, it will grow without measure."²⁰

19 E.T., 492. *Het Werk*, 521; Tuesday evening, 14 July 1942: Jede Gewalt in der Welt wirkt fort, wie jede Tat. Wir sind dazu da, um vom Leiden der Welt etwas auf uns zu nehmen, indem wir unsere Brust darbieten, nicht es zu vermehren, indem wir Gewalt tun. Ich weiß, daß Sie leiden und fühle Ihr Leiden mit Ihnen. Seien Sie gütig gegen dies Leiden, es wird gegen Sie gütig sein. Durch Wünsche mehrt es sich und durch Unwillen; durch Milde schläft es ein wie ein Kind. Rathenau insists it is up to us to carry the burden of suffering in the world by confronting it gently and kindly.

20 E.T., 492. *Het Werk*, 520; Tuesday evening, 14 July 1942: Ik haat niemand. Ik ben niet verbitterd. En als een keer die algemene mensenliefde zich in je gaat ontplooiën, dan groeit ze uit tot in het onmetelijke.

Evaluation and Conclusion

1° In the fragments discussed above, Rathenau is obviously present, especially in the text concerning maintaining a balance, creating order, and finding refuge in words, philosophy, and literature. Hillesum believes that her only "Aufgabe" [task in life] is to bring order and harmony to chaos, beginning with the unrest in her inner world. This, in turn, will have a positive effect on the belligerent outside world. This view resounds with Rathenau's. This socially successful, prominent Jewish politician (sometimes branded as a "Kaiserjude") remained standing in his unruly, not uncommonly hostile world by occasionally quietly visiting his mother for a chat and a meal or by 'hiding' in reading and writing books.²¹

Etty Hillesum presents her view as follows: "People need no external standard to go by, just themselves. And they can only have themselves as a standard if they are true to themselves, rely on their own strength and have self-confidence."²² One can also find a trace of Rathenau's reflections in this train of thought. I am reminded of a short essay in which he distinguishes between two profiles of mankind, strong and weak human beings. Courage comes, according to him, from strength and fear of weakness. The armour for a strong person is strength and trust, the armour for a weak person is fear and flight.

The weak person wants to avoid danger. He looks fearfully into the future, speculating, hypothesizing, and projecting. Everywhere, there could be someone out to get him. This is why and how a frightened person imagines things that may or may not exist. Such speculations are, according to Rathenau, "Zwecke" [purposes / intentions]. It is crucial that, inevitably, a "Furchtmensch" [fearful person] will become a "Zweckmensch" [purposeful person] when it comes to rational thought. Weakness, fear, and direction, "Zweckrationalität" [instrumental rationality], such is the profile of this type of person.

Nowadays, for example, populism, Muslim terrorism, tsunamis, and other nasty phenomena threaten the survival of humankind and the earth. The "Furcht- / Zweckmensch" [the fearful / purposeful person] anticipates this and focuses on pitfalls and ambushes. He diligently hoards resources

21 "Meine Mutter wartet mit froher Zuversicht [...]," Rathenau writes to Lore Karrenbrock on 13 November 1919 from Grunewald. He is about to visit his mother and have dinner with her. She is faithfully and trustfully looking forward to meet her son.

22 E.T., 130. *Het Werk*, 137; Sunday morning, 12 October 1941: Een mens heeft geen uiterlijke maatstaven, alleen zichzelf. En zichzelf heeft hij pas tot maatstaf, wanneer hij ook werkelijk zich zelf is, leeft uit z'n eigen krachten en zelfvertrouwen heeft.

and piles up bags of sand against alleged dangers.²³ For him, the end justifies the means!

It is evident that ETTY HILLESUM was not a “Furchtmensch” [fearful person], but a “Mutmensch” [courageous person]. She acted out of strength and trust, despite chaotic features in her inner world and complete chaos in the outside world, flight not being part of her nature. She wanted, as did Rathenau, to have nothing to do with suicide, the ultimate flight *in pessima forma*. “I am searching for shelter for myself [...]” That is very important, and one should never look for a shelter outside of oneself.

2° Careful consideration of the manner in which Hillesum relies upon Rathenau, leads me to the conclusion that a triptych is unfolding. The first panel displays life, the second suffering, and the third love. Hillesum looks at the triptych, moves herself into it and experiences in person what is happening on the panels. Let me elaborate:

- *life*: “Dass Sie begonnen haben, Ihr Leben wieder an Menschen der Umgebung, vor allem an ein Kind zu knüpfen” [That you have started to turn your life towards others, especially to a child]. These words of Rathenau to Fräulein Lore were quoted by Hillesum on Tuesday, 21 October 1941. In the evening of this day, she reflects upon the words: “Sometimes I do not want to know anything more, want to have no knowledge, just to *be*, filled with life and a little goodness.”²⁴
- *suffering*: “Wenn wir am schwersten Leiden, so wird uns damit gesagt, dass wir uns nicht genug vergessen” [When we are encountered with extreme suffering, we are told that we don’t forget enough]. Then it is evident that our ego and our passions control us and we start to act like a “Zwehmensch”, a person obsessed with attaining goals and achieving successes. Hillesum refers to this thought by Rathenau on Wednesday, 22 October 1941. Later, on 15 July 1942, she quotes other words of Rathenau to Karrenbrock: “Seien Sie gütig gegen dies Leiden” [Be kind to this suffering]. Otherwise, things will only getting worse.²⁵
- *love*: *Briefe an eine Liebende* [Letters to a Lover] must have resonated with Hillesum because her own love life, like that of Lore Karrenbrock, had its ups and downs. Such was the nature of her relationship with,

23 Walter Rathenau, *Aufsätze*, ‘Die Kinder der Furcht,’ in: Walter Rathenau, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vierter Band (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1918), 13-14.

24 E.T., 135. *Het Werk*, 142; Tuesday evening, 21 October 1941: Ik zou soms niets meer willen weten, geen kennis willen bezitten, maar alleen maar willen zijn, gewoon maar vol met leven zijn en met een beetje goedheid.

25 See above n. 20.

for example, Han Wegerif, 'Father Han'. On the one hand, she loves him tremendously; on the other, according to a note in her diary on Tuesday morning, 21 October 1941, she does not.²⁶ Love can be, love *is* sometimes ambivalent.

3° But love is not her ultimate measure. More than life, suffering, and love, more than these three is simplicity. Here, I repeat a beautiful sentence at the end of the third quote from Rathenau: "For me there will never be a happier moment, than to realize that life is truly simple." Hillesum writes about this following a remark made by her friend, the psychochirologist Julius Spier: "Es ist im Grunde eigentlich so einfach" [It is basically really so simple].

The same day, Wednesday morning, 22 October 1941, Hillesum returns to a consideration of her ultimate measure and writes: "This really will have to be my ultimate objective: to grow very simple in myself but to understand the complexities of others in all their nuances."²⁷ That appears to be her summit, a peak experience. When her internal world is in harmony, she can stand where she wants to in the complex external world – as "Mutmensch" [courageous person], both easily and simply. Indeed both. "Im Grunde" [in essence], Ety Hillesum was attached to both definitions – to *Einfachheit*, simplicity in the ethical sense, and to *Einfalt*, simplicity in the esthetical-philosophical sense. Both simplicities were a substantial criterion for her but *Einfalt* spoke to her the most; that was her ultimate measure.

About the author

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26 E.T., 135. *Het Werk*, 142-143.

27 E.T., 13 [translation revised]. *Het Werk*, 144; Wednesday morning, 22 October 1941: Dát moet toch het einddoel zijn: zelf heel eenvoudig worden van binnen, maar de gecompliceerdheden van anderen tot in alle nuances begrijpen.



Family and Friends

Figure 1 Dedication by Etty and Jaap Hillesum to Klaas Smelik and his second wife Hermine Bender in Dutch

April '35.
Etty Hillesum

Aan Men Tji en Klaaske
ter herinnering aan
keide en woonwage
en leuke banden.

Etty en Jaap

11 Romance Down by The River IJssel

The First Meeting between Etty Hillesum and Klaas Smelik Senior¹

Klaas A.D. Smelik

Klaas Smelik, Gerrit Van Oord, and Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018
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Abstract

One of Etty Hillesum's friends was the author Klaas Smelik Senior (1897-1986), to whom she entrusted her diaries. In this contribution, the author, Smelik's son, seeks to clarify the course of events during the first encounter between Etty Hillesum and Smelik Senior. A dedication written in a book that Etty Hillesum gave to Klaas Smelik Senior and his second wife Mien Smelik-Bender, provides the basis for an analysis. The Hillesum/Smelik meeting was a notable one that would become ever more meaningful as time went on.

Keywords: Klaas Smelik Senior, historical reconstruction, biography, ego-documents, critical reading, Etty Hillesum, Deventer, diaries

The first meeting between Etty Hillesum (1914-1943) and my father Klaas Smelik Senior (1897-1986) proved, ultimately, to be more significant than those two could ever have imagined at the time. Without this accidental meeting, Etty Hillesum's diaries would probably never have been published, and the world would be deprived of the inspiration that Etty Hillesum, through her writings, has offered – and continues to offer – to so many readers.

The course of events that led to this encounter, however, cannot be reconstructed easily. Etty Hillesum does not write about it in the texts she left us, and Klaas Smelik Senior's memories of this event were not consistent.

¹ I want to thank Gerrit Van Oord, who supplied critical comments to the first draft of this article.

He was interviewed on this subject several times. In this contribution, an attempt will be made to gain more clarity on this issue.

Here is, first of all, an overview of the various interviews with Klaas Smelik Senior about Etty Hillesum in the period 1980-1985, which have remained partly unpublished.² In order to get the best overview, each has been assigned a serial letter:

- Interview A: January 1980, conducted by Klaas A.D. Smelik
- Interview B: November 1981, conducted by Ben Kroon and Corine Spoor, published in *De Tijd* (newspaper)³
- Interview C: February 1983, conducted by Frieda Drijver⁴
- Interview D: June 1983, conducted by Jaap Walvis and Almar Tjepkema, incorporated into the documentary *Het Verstoorde Leven* [The Disturbed Life] (NOS, 1984)
- Interview E: January 1985, conducted by Jan Willem Regenhardt in preparation for the complete Dutch edition *Etty* (published in 1986).⁵

In what follows, it will be shown that in these interviews Klaas Smelik Senior does not always say the same things about his first meeting with Etty Hillesum. Sometimes, the differences are trivial. For example, Smelik states in interviews A, B, and C that he caught five pikes in Friesland, but in interview E they have become five carp.⁶ There are, however, also important differences to note. For this reason, I will always indicate which interview I am referring to. Moreover, an appendix has been attached, with excerpts

2 The unpublished interviews are kept at the Etty Hillesum Research Centre in Middelburg.

3 First appeared in *De Tijd, Boeken extra* on 27 November 1981, afterwards reprinted as: Ben Kroon & Corine Spoor, “Ze was iemand die alles gaf en alles nam, dat hoorde bij haar warmte,” in: Jan Geurt Gaarlandt (ed.), *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn: Reacties op de dagboeken en brieven van Etty Hillesum* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1989), 25-40, especially pp. 30-31.

4 When working on Interview C, Frieda Drijver made use of an earlier tape recording of Interview A. She commented on this as follows: “I have also had access to a tape recording of January 1980 of Klaas Smelik Junior talking to his parents about the events surrounding these diary entries.”

5 Based on this interview, Jan Willem Regenhardt describes the meeting between Etty Hillesum and Klaas Smelik Senior in his book *Mischa's spel en de ondergang van de familie Hillesum* [Mischa's game and the downfall of the Hillesum family] (Amsterdam: Balans, 2012), 42-43. It is remarkable that he reduces the number of players to three: Etty, Jaap and Klaas. In Regenhardt's earlier article 'De Weg Naar Westerbork' [The Road to Westerbork], in: Gaarlandt, *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn*, 192-209, he does not mention the meeting.

6 According to experts, it is more likely that Klaas Smelik Senior caught pike in Friesland than carp.

from the interviews, dealing with the meeting between Etty Hillesum and Klaas Smelik Senior, presented in chronological order.

Problematic Points

There are three important, problematic issues:

- The first problem is the date of the meeting. In interview B of 1981, a date in 1932 is given; the complete Dutch edition *Etty* of 1986 mentions 1934,⁷ but interviews A and C, from 1980 and 1983 respectively, date the meeting in 1936.
- The second problematic issue is the question of who was present. Three participants are undisputed: Etty Hillesum, her brother Jaap, and Klaas Smelik Senior. However, who is the fourth person? According to one reading, this is Iet Last; according to another, it is Mien Smelik-Bender (1891-1947), my father's second wife, whom he was married to before marrying my mother Jenny Kiggen (1913-1980). And – to make things even more complicated – there are indications that even more people were present at the meeting.⁸
- The third and final question has to do with how Klaas Smelik Senior and Etty Hillesum managed to find enough privacy to start their romance.

The Merry Brigade

Iet Last, actually Ida Last-ter Haar (1893-1982), married, divorced, and then remarried the leftist writer Jef Last (1898-1972). Together with Klaas Smelik Senior and three other comrades,⁹ Jef Last had created the Revolutionary Writers Collective *Links Richten* [Turn Left].¹⁰ Subsequently, Last had

7 See E.T., 689, referring to page 72 *How Klaas had beaten*.

8 According to interview B, Jef Last was also present at the meeting; this is probably an error made by the interviewers, if the meeting did indeed take place in 1936, as will be discussed below. In the summer of 1936, Jef Last was with André Gide in the Soviet Union. After that, he went to Spain to fight as a volunteer against the fascists. In those circumstances, a fishing trip to Friesland was out of the question. Also in 1932, Jef Last spent most of his time in the Soviet Union and even planned to settle there permanently. Information about Jef Last on www.jeflast.nl.

9 They were: Freek van Leeuwen, Bertus Meijer, and Jac. van Hattum.

10 Commissioned by the revolutionary collective, my father wrote his first play: *Hollands welvaren! Anti-koloniaal tooneelstuk* [Dutch Prosperity! An Anti-Colonial Play] (Amsterdam: Storm, s.d. [1930]).

remained in contact with Smelik. Inspired by examples from the Soviet Union, reported on by her husband, Iet Last founded the children's circus *De Vrolijke Brigade* [The Merry Brigade] established in Amsterdam's Jordaan district in 1924. From this initiative, the children's circus "Elleboog" [Elbow] later emerged, which Iet Last started in 1949 and which still flourishes today.

After having said goodbye to his life as a sailor and having become a journalist on shore, Smelik came up with the idea of crossing the country by caravan in order to make on-site reports for the socialist broadcasting society VARA [abbreviation of *Vereeniging van Arbeiders Radio Amateurs*, Association of Worker Radio Amateurs]. He spent a long time in the Dutch village of Hellevoetsluis in order to report on the work on the Moerdijk Bridge for the VARA. Iet Last saw Smelik's wanderings with his caravan as an opportunity to expand her activities and she travelled with Smelik, together with her youth theatre group, through the Netherlands. An Auburn¹¹ pulled the caravan, in which the children stayed, while Klaas Smelik and Iet Last sat in the car in front. A picture of this small caravan has been preserved. Klaas Smelik Senior sits behind the large steering wheel of his American, not exactly proletarian eight-cylinder car, wearing his leather pilot's cap – his status symbol, despite the fact he had never flown in his life.

In interviews B, C, D, and E, Smelik tells how he drove from Friesland to the south and that his car, with the caravan behind it, had to stop for the ship bridge in Deventer, the middle section of which was ferried away when a boat approached. This is a constant in all the interviews, even though in interview E Smelik speaks of a 'floating bridge' instead of 'ship bridge', according to the local custom in the province North Holland where Smelik was born. The 'ship bridge' was located west of the centre of Deventer, a pontoon bridge crossing the IJssel river, which was finally removed in 1948 and replaced by a ferry service. Smelik had to drive his Auburn and caravan over that bridge if he wanted to proceed from Deventer to Amsterdam. Apparently, the bridge was open at that time – not surprising, as research shows that in 1927 the bridge was open for passing ships, on average, for no less than three hours and 25 minutes during the day!

In interviews A and C, Smelik says that the children of the circus were rather noisy and their rowdiness caught the attention of a young woman and man who wondered who these people¹² were. "They were Ety and her brother Jaap. We invited them to join us in the caravan. I had just caught

11 It concerns an Auburn, built in 1929, type 8-90 (thanks to Greg Dye for the identification).

12 In interview B described as "that crazy group of people."

five pike in Friesland and we then cooked them nicely and ate them.”
[Interview C]

It is not self-evident that Etty and Jaap Hillesum would have been in Deventer at the time, because both were lodging rooms in Amsterdam where they were studying at the University, since 1932 and 1933 respectively. Apparently, they were staying at their parental home when they first met Smelik in Deventer. If the statement in interview B is true and it was summer, the reason is obvious: they were on their summer holidays from Amsterdam University and spending time at home.

But what happened next? This remains unclear. The outcome, however, is not unclear: Etty Hillesum unbuttoned her blouse without any timidity and showed Smelik her heavy breasts. After this, a courtship began that was the beginning of a “love feast,” as Smelik put it, which lasted six months, until Etty ended it – without causing a rift between the two. They remained friends and from Hillesum’s diaries we get the impression that Klaas Smelik Senior did not give up hope of an amorous rapprochement between the two former lovers, “for old times’ sake.”¹³

One way or another, the two were able to separate themselves from the company to be intimate with each other, but how exactly? Smelik was not clear about this in the various interviews held with him. In interview E, he was asked the question “When you drove away with Etty, where did Iet and Etty’s brother stay then?” Smelik gave the following laconic reply: “They stayed behind with the fish.” In interview C, however, he gives another version:¹⁴

At that time, driving was still something special and we decided to go for a ride all together. We ended up at Zutphen. Jaap and my wife went off to get gasoline. The result was that Etty and I were left alone in the caravan.

There are quite a few differences between these two versions: the love-making now took place in the caravan, not in the car. The venue is Zutphen instead of Deventer. Not Iet but Mien is the fourth person of the company. The children of the circus have disappeared.

Moreover, a new element has been added to the story: the mission to get petrol for the car, which meant that Etty Hillesum and Klaas Smelik Senior were left alone. On its own, this statement sounds more plausible than the

13 See E.T., 282-284.

14 See also interview D, in which Zutphen is not mentioned, however.

statement in interview E that Iet Last and Jaap Hillesum were eating fish while Etty and Klaas Smelik Senior made love in the car.

A Dedication as Key

Is there a way out of this confusion? Perhaps. In the extensive library that was my father's legacy to me, I came across a booklet that somehow drew my attention, amidst the thousands of books. It was a publication of the ballad *Maria Lécina: Een lied in honderd verzen met een zangwijs* [*Maria Lécina: A song in a hundred verses with a tune*], the most famous work by the Dutch poet J.W.F. Werumeus Buning (1891-1958). It was the tenth edition, published by Querido in November 1934. To my surprise I saw the following written on the flyleaf in a characteristic handwriting (see Figure 1):

April '35
Etty Hillesum [underlined]

To Mientje and Klaaske
in memory of
heather and caravan
and punctured tires.

from
Etty and Jaap

The text in fact consists of two parts:

- The first part mentions the date of acquisition and the name of the owner.
- The second part is the dedication by Etty and Jaap to Mientje and Klaaske.

We are dealing with a booklet, therefore, that Etty Hillesum had bought or received in April 1935 and that she later gave to Mien Smelik-Bender and Klaas Smelik Senior. The choice is certainly no coincidence. My father had great admiration for Werumeus Buning, who, in the preface to Smelik's book *Ship Ahoy! Burk's wilde jaren* [*Ship Ahoy! Burk's Wild Years*],¹⁵ remarked

¹⁵ Klaas Smelik, *Ship Ahoy! Burk's wilde jaren* (Amsterdam: Querido, s.d. [1936]). On the title page is says, however: *Ship Ahoy!!!* [with three exclamation marks].

on “the little-known reality, humanity and linguistic wealth, which this [book] introduces to you and me.”¹⁶ Moreover, my father once told me that during his time as a sailor he had met this Maria Lécina, a prostitute from Barcelona, to whom Werumeus Buning dedicated his poem.

The text of *Ship Ahoy!* finishes with the closing date: “Blaricum, December 1935.” This gives another indication of the time period in which we have to place the meeting between Etty Hillesum and Klaas Smelik Senior. Moreover, in interview E, there is a passage related to Etty Hillesum that also alludes to *Ship Ahoy!*:

I still remember Amersfoort. At that time, I published in the ‘Zilveren Wiekslagen’ series. I always asked for money from a publisher [...]. So I got a payment, an advance, and I said to Etty: “Are you coming along?” And on a sunny day, we went to Amersfoort. Then it was cosy, then it was romantic with her.

The reference to an advance indicates that *Ship Ahoy!* had not yet been published. The book was probably published in 1936. It appeared in the series ‘Zilveren Wiekslagen’ [Wing Beats of Silver]. ‘Zilveren Wiekslagen’ was a series published by Meulenhoff Publishers in Amsterdam, which also contained Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Stories of God*.¹⁷ Rilke and Smelik both included in one series – for Etty Hillesum, it must have been particularly interesting to become acquainted with my father, given her own ambition to become a writer and given her great devotion to Rilke. Fifty years later, that devotion still made Smelik swear, when the name of the German poet was mentioned during an interview with Jan Willem Regenhardt:

I always stumbled on Rilke and then I thought, Oh, here she comes again with Rilke. Goddamnit, Rilke again! What do I care about that damn Rilke. I did not like Rilke.¹⁸

In any case, the trip to Amersfoort must have taken place during the six months of Etty Hillesum’s and Klaas Smelik Senior’s affair.

16 *Ibidem*, 9.

17 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Vertelsels over Onzen Lieven Heer* [Stories of Our Sweet Lord], translated by Joh. Winkler, introduced by J. Jac. Thomson (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, s.d. [1936]). Original German title: *Geschichten vom lieben Gott* (1904).

18 Cf. Regenhardt, *Mischa’s spel*, 43. There, the quote from the interview is slightly edited.

So, we now have a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ante quem*: the initial meeting has to be dated after April 1935, the month in which Etty Hillesum acquired her copy of ‘Maria Lécina,’ which she later presented to Mientje and Klaaske, and before March 1937, when she moved in with Han Wegerif and started an affair with her landlord. Therefore, the meeting took place either in 1935, the year that Smelik wrote *Ship Ahoy!*, or – more likely – in the summer of 1936, as is stated in interview A.

Dramatis Personae

Now that we have discussed the first problem – the date of the meeting – we turn to the second problem: the *dramatis personae*. In this regard, the dedication in the booklet that Etty Hillesum gave to Mientje and Klaaske, is especially enlightening. The four persons that are mentioned there, are Mientje, Klaaske, Etty, and Jaap. No mention of Iet Last or support for the unlikely scenario that the love-making took place while the ‘Merry Brigade’ was looking on from the sidelines. Apparently, my father confused this visit to Deventer with one of the trips he made with Iet Last and the children of the ‘Merry Brigade’. The discrepancy in interview D, in which Smelik first talks about “Jef Last’s wife” and then about “my wife,” i.e. Mien, also points in this direction. The reference to “my wife” in interviews C and D¹⁹ thus seems correct and this makes the situation particularly spicy – it resembles a scene from a French nineteenth-century comedy...

If Iet Last was not present at the meeting, then the remark that it was the noise of the children that attracted Etty’s and Jaap’s attention cannot be correct. However, just the big eight-cylinder car followed by a caravan would have drawn attention to itself in the provincial town of Deventer.

During the enjoyable meal, consisting of the five Friesian pike, the spark between Klaas Smelik and Etty Hillesum must have ignited. But how could they get rid of Jaap and Mien? According to interviews C and D, Smelik sent them away to get gasoline – and this is also the story I remember from my youth. Interestingly enough, though, in her dedication, Etty Hillesum refers to “punctured tires.” Perhaps this refers to a situation different from

19 Note, however, that Klaas Smelik Senior in interview D first talks about “Jef Last’s wife”, who is in the car, and immediately thereafter talks about his own wife (“my wife”). For the sake of clarity, Jan Willem Regenhardt’s interview demonstrates that Smelik was not in a relationship with Iet Last: “But take care, Iet was so great even if I was somewhere with her for a decade, I would not have touched her. No. I have not had an affair with her. God save me!” Therefore, this cannot have been the cause of Smelik’s confusion.

the need for gasoline. In this scenario, the car got a flat tyre while driving from Deventer to Zutphen, after which Klaas Smelik Senior replaced it with the spare tyre, which can be seen in the picture of the Auburn, to the right of the driver. In my experience, my father always made repairs to his car with a certain bravado, as if he was still at work in the engine room of an ocean liner – his former job. However, in the dedication, it says ‘punctures’ (plural). Could the spare tyre also have been punctured, as happened to me once? Or did the car get two flat tyres at the same time? In that case, Mien and Jaap could have been sent out to seek help at a nearby garage, not for petrol, but for new tyres.

What remains to be explained is the “heather” mentioned in the dedication. The nearby village of Gorssel is known for its fields of heather – would Smelik have parked his car there, on his way from Deventer to Zutphen? ETTY HILLESUM knew this area from her childhood, because the Hillesum children and their friends regularly biked from Deventer to Gorssel to visit the Adelaar family from Deventer, who had a small cottage there, eponymously called ‘Het Adelaarsnest’ [The Eagle’s Nest; *Adelaar* is the Dutch for ‘eagle’].²⁰

Another question that we must ask ourselves for the sake of completeness is: does the dedication in the booklet actually refer to their first meeting? Or, is a subsequent meeting being referred to? This seems unlikely, because in interview E, Klaas Smelik Senior says the following, referring to another occasion during the time he had an affair with ETTY HILLESUM:

I stood with my cars [...] at Muiderberg under the dike. Then a note arrived from ETTY that she wanted to come. I replied: “ETTY, do me a favour, do not come right now, because I do not know if Mien (my second wife) would like that.” She sent me back a card saying that she understood perfectly.

A dedication mentioning Mientje and Klaaske in one breath assumes that Mien was not yet aware of the latest conquest of her husband – who was very enterprising in this respect. However, once Mien knew about the love affair, she had no desire to see ETTY again, as is evident in the above quote. Moreover, Jaap is also mentioned in the dedication; he was not present at subsequent meetings.²¹ But if the dedication refers to the first encounter, it has a double meaning. Mientje’s memory of the meeting was, after all, much less rose-coloured than Klaaske’s or ETTY’s own thoughts...

20 Compare *Etty*, 690.

21 I thank Ria van den Brandt for this argument.

Finally

We conclude that the short dedication in the booklet that Etty Hillesum gave to her lover and his wife offers greater clarity about the meeting in Deventer than the five interviews conducted with Klaas Smelik Senior. It is a good example of how difficult it is to identify precise historical facts by interviewing witnesses. People's memories deform over time, spontaneously or under the influence of others – a common fact of life that has also been scientifically proven.²² A written source can, therefore, provide more certainty. Much of what we think we know about Etty Hillesum, is, however, based precisely on oral testimony.²³ Our conclusion must be that her diaries and letters will remain the primary source of knowledge about her life, even though they are ego-documents, which, as such, require a special approach as an historical source. Other written sources, such as the dedication discussed here, can have an important supporting role, especially for the period that is not described in her diaries. The memories of friends and acquaintances of Etty Hillesum can also be valuable additions, if critically analyzed and checked, and when possible examined alongside the written sources, as has been attempted in this contribution.²⁴ Uncritically quoting statements from these witnesses as some do, should, however, be avoided at all times.

Appendix

From Interview A: January 1980, conducted by Klaas Smelik Junior

Smelik Junior: "How did you get to know her?"

Smelik Senior.: "With the 'Merry Brigade', which was led by Iet Last, Jef Last's wife [...]."

22 Compare, for example Elizabeth Loftus, 'Creating False Memories', *Scientific American* 277 (1997), 70-75.

23 This evident in Regenhardt, *Mischa's spel*.

24 See also the critical remarks in Gerrit Van Oord, "Historie en legende rondom het gezin van Louis en Riva Hillesum: Een beschouwing over Mischa's spel en de ondergang van de familie Hillesum", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Etty Hillesum in Perspectief* (Etty Hillesum Studies 4; Gent: Academia Press, 2012), 139-152. In this contribution, Van Oord criticizes Regenhardt's approach to oral sources as evident in his already mentioned book *Mischa's spel en de ondergang van de familie Hillesum*.

Smelik Senior: “We arrived in Deventer and we had to wait for a moment there for that shipbridge there and then two young people arrived [...] yes, our kids were rather noisy, so we attracted quite some attention and at one point there two young people came to ask what we were supposed to be. Then we just explained and immediately they stayed in the car, where we spent the night. We parked on the other side [...].”

Smelik Junior: “This was before or during the war?”

Smelik Senior: “No, this was before the war, I think it was in 1937.”

Smelik Junior: “So they stayed overnight in the car?”

Smelik Senior: “Well, it became cosy, because I had caught all this pike in Friesland – we cooked and fried them.”

[Later in the interview the date is adjusted to 1936]

Smelik Junior: “Those lectures²⁵ were also from before the war?”

Smelik Senior: “Yes, it was 1936 at least, because my first radio play is from 1935. [...]”

From Interview B: November 1981, conducted by Ben Kroon and Corine Spoor

Smelik got to know Etty when, in 1932, he returned with Jef Last and his family from a summer outing to Friesland:

“I had caught five pike, which were nicely cooked and in Deventer we went looking for a quiet spot to eat them. Two youngsters saw us passing by and were quite interested in that unusual company. They were Etty and Jaap. They went along immediately, and stayed for dinner. Jewish people simply adore freshwater fish. I thought it was nice of course, such a handsome young woman next to me and that night when we were alone for a moment, Etty unbuttoned her blouse without any timidity. So it began. [...]”²⁶

²⁵ Klaas Smelik Senior and Etty Hillesum together attended classes of professor Hugo Sinzheimer (1875-1945) at the Amsterdam University.

²⁶ Kroon & Spoor, “Ze was iemand die alles gaf en alles nam, dat hoorde bij haar warmte”, 30-31.

From Interview C: February 1983, conducted by Frieda Drijver

In the summer of 1936, the Smelik family travelled through the Netherlands in the company of the 'Merry Brigade', the children's circus of Iet Last, the wife of the writer Jef Last. Their car, with the caravan behind it, had wait to the ship bridge at Deventer. The kids were quite noisy and the whole company attracted the attention of two young people who wondered what this was supposed to be.

Klaas Smelik Senior: "They were ETTY and her brother Jaap. We invited them to join us in the caravan. I had just caught five pike in Friesland and we then cooked them nicely and ate them.

At that time, driving was still something special and we decided to go for a ride all together. We ended up at Zutphen. Jaap and my wife went off to get gasoline. The result was that ETTY and I were left alone in the caravan. ETTY herself wrote in her diaries that she was an excellent lover, and I then experienced this first hand. From that moment on, we were lovers."

From Interview D: June 1983, conducted by Jaap Walvis and Almar Tjepkema

"I was on my way from Friesland with Jef Last his wife. Well, when I arrived in Deventer, we stood for that bridge, when it was still a ship bridge. Well, when we waiting for that bridge, then there were two young people and they were ETTY and Jaap. Well, then we went for a drive. Here my wife and here ETTY. And then I ran out of gasoline. I then told my wife, I said: Would you care to get some gasoline? She went to get petrol together with Jaap and I stayed behind, alone with ETTY. Then the matter was fixed. This lasted for half a year, the party, this love feast."

From Interview E: January 1985, conducted by Jan Willem Regenhardt

Klaas Smelik Senior: "We came from Friesland. I had five carp with me. Deventer still a floating bridge and there I was. Two young people joined us: ETTY and her brother Jaap. I invited them to eat the fish we had stewed in the meantime. Now I happen to know that Jews love to eat freshwater fish – so I was lucky, or rather they were lucky. Then I went for a drive with ETTY. In those days, if I was with a woman... well, she was never safe then. So I soon turned her into my girlfriend. Or no, that was not the way it was.

She immediately gave herself to me as my girlfriend. That way we were together for six months [...].”

Jan Willem Regenhardt: “When you went for a drive with Etty, where did Iet and Etty’s brother stay?”

Klaas Smelik Senior: “They stayed behind with the fish. For a moment, Etty and I had caught each other in my car and that meant that we had an affair.”

About the author

Klaas A.D. Smelik (1950) studied Theology, Semitic Languages, Archaeology and Ancient History in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Leiden. He defended his PhD in Amsterdam in 1977. He taught Old Testament and Hebrew in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Brussels, Ancient History in Amsterdam and The Hague, Jewish History at the K.U. Leuven, and Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Ghent University. He is director of the Etty Hillesum Research Centre (EHOC) first in Ghent, now in Middelburg. Smelik edited the Dutch, English, French and Italian unabridged editions of Etty Hillesum’s writings and is editor-in-chief of the *Etty Hillesum Studies*. He has (as writer or editor) published around 40 books and 250 articles on the Hebrew Bible, Ancient Hebrew inscriptions, Ancient History, Jewish Studies, Anti-Semitism, and Etty Hillesum.



12 Etty Hillesum, A Devoted Student of Julius Spier¹

Alexandra H.M. Nagel

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Abstract

When Etty Hillesum had her hands analyzed by the psychochirologist, Julius Spier, she was deeply impressed by what Spier was able to tell her about herself. Soon after, Hillesum began counselling with Spier and enrolled in his course on Psychochirology. Until Hillesum was assigned a position at the Joodsche Raad, she devoted a substantial amount of time to the art of reading hands. This essay highlights a series of events to show that Hillesum tried to follow Spier's footsteps and was well on her way to becoming a hand-reading psychologist herself.

Keywords: Julius Spier, psychochirology, palmistry, Etty Hillesum

It is well known that Etty Hillesum was a patient and student of the hand reader Julius Spier, and that she became his secretary and lover as well. As Spier's patient, Hillesum was having private, therapeutic consultations with him; as his student, she participated in the course psychochirology, the lessons Spier offered in which he taught others how to analyze hands; and as his secretary, she typed out the letters Spier dictated to her, and took notes during group sessions and private sessions of those who had their hands studied. Moreover, Hillesum read the diary notes of individuals who were having a series of sessions with the hand-reading psychotherapist, and talked with him about patients.

Even though these facts are well known, no one has looked in-depth into Hillesum's involvement with psychochirology. By ignoring this element

¹ This essay is based on a paper presented at the Second International Etty Hillesum Conference Ghent, 15 January 2014.

of her life – an activity that must have consumed a substantial amount of her time – a particular angle of Hillesum's personal development has been overlooked. This essay is a first, sketchy attempt to fill this gap. It focuses on ETTY HILLESUM as JULIUS SPIER'S student. It incorporates some novel bits of information, and presents some background concerning Spier and his students.

Julius Spier and the Founding of Psychochirology

Upon the advice of the psychiatrist Carl G. Jung, Julius Spier opened a practice as a professional, psychologically inclined hand reader in Berlin in 1929. Spier came up with a new term for his profession: he considered himself a 'psychochirologist', he practiced 'psychochirology.' Like so many who start a new enterprise, Spier, a middle-aged former employee of a metal trading company, socialized and networked to make the world aware of his work. This means that besides offering private consultations, he held public lectures throughout the country about the method and usefulness of the kind of hand reading that he had developed, and was still refining. Several newspapers and a few magazines paid notice to this new branch on the tree of science. The journalists explained to their audience what psychochirology entailed, and how stunning it was to discover what Spier was able to tell about someone based upon viewing that person's hands. A series of flattering fragments of these publications were incorporated in a brochure that was produced by the agent in charge of Spier's visit to Frankfurt am Main.²

Although Spier penned many letters – now mostly lost – he only wrote three short articles about psychochirology, two of which were published in periodicals focusing on natural medicine;³ the third came out in a popular

2 From the flyer *Julius SPIER: Psycho-Chirologe aus Berlin* [c. 1930; 4 pages], produced by Hermann Koch, exclusive agent of the 'Süddeutschland, Rheinland-Westfalen Konzert-Direktion,' settled in Frankfurt am Main: "Der Saal war ausverkauft. [...] Spier ist es gelungen, die alten Überlieferungen und Erfahrungen mit den Ergebnissen der modernen Psychologie zu verbinden. Die Hand, die sich nicht verstellen kann, die sich immer ja zeigt, wie sie ist, ist durch ihn zu einem wichtigen Mittel der Seelenheilkunde geworden." Translated: "The hall was sold out. [...] Spier has managed to combine the old traditions and experiences with the results of modern psychology. The hand, that cannot alter itself, that itself always shows as it is, has for him become an important means to mental healing." The fragment is taken from the newspaper article: 'Intuitives Schauen', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 23 October [1930].

3 Julius Spier, "Psychochirologie, eine neue Therapie", *Ärztliche Rundschau* 40 (1930) 24: 339-340; *idem*, "Warum ich nicht wahrsage", *Heilkunst der Gegenwart: Homöopathische Rundschau* 4 (1933) 4: 55-56.

magazine.⁴ At least three physicians, open-minded and active in the field of natural healing, wrote positively about Spier's new way of interpreting features of the hand.⁵ (Perhaps Etty Hillesum read some of these publications, for Spier must have kept in Amsterdam a copy of the flyer and a reprint of some of these articles.⁶)

Convinced of the benefits of the insights he had gained, Spier organized courses to teach others his method of hand reading. Once or twice a year, he travelled to Switzerland to meet up with students over there. He even launched a course in Amsterdam – five years prior to his immigration to the Netherlands.

Spier kept his practice in Berlin until he moved to the Netherlands, slightly less than four months after *Kristallnacht* (the night from 9 to 10 November 1938). Once settled in Amsterdam, he quickly set out to do what he had been doing for the past decade: he again offered private consultations, looked for opportunities to give lectures, and sought new pupils. Importantly, he finally had time to write a book. As soon as the manuscript entitled *Kinderhände* was finished, somewhere between the late spring and early summer of 1939, the tedious labour began of getting publishers engaged with the project.⁷ Along the way, Spier was invited to contribute an entry about chirology to a Dutch encyclopaedia, which he happily accepted.⁸

Whenever Spier talked about psychochirology, and analyzed hands, he made an impression: all of the German and Dutch psychochirology students

4 Julius Spier, "Hände sprechen", *Der Querschnitt* 11 (1931) 10: 687-690.

5 August G. Heisler, "Chiroplogie (Julius Spier), eine wertvolle Methode der seelischen Tiefenforschung", *Ärztliche Rundschau* 40 (1930) 24: 340-341; Karl F. Keim, "Die Hände als objektive Lebensurkunde", *Stuttgarter Neues Tagblatt*, October 7, 1930; Heinz Bottenberg, "Die Chiroplogie in der ärztlichen Praxis", *Biologische Heilkunst* 14 (1933) 18: 273-279.

6 Kept in the archive of the Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, are (occasionally incomplete) copies of: Bernhard Diebold, "Blick in die Hand", *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 25 August, 1929; *idem*, "Das Gesicht der Hand: Die Handlesekunst – eine ernste Wissenschaft", *Das Illustrierte Blatt* (17) 42, 1929, 1195-1196 & 1200; Rolf Reißmann, "Fahrplan des Schicksals: Die Hand und ihre Linien", *Der Tag*, 12 November 1929; Keim, "Die Hände als objektive Lebensurkunde"; Heisler, "Chiroplogie (Julius Spier)"; Spier, "Psychologie, eine neue Therapie". Henny Tideman and Ruth Busse-Spier, and perhaps others of the circle around Spier, handed this material in 1985 to the Etty Hillesum research team that worked on the publication of Hillesum's complete works.

7 Published posthumously: Julius Spier (Carl G. Jung, foreword; Herta R. Levi, introduction, editing), *The Hands of Children: An Introduction to Psycho-chirology* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1944), reprinted with an appendix added by Herta Levi in 1955.

8 T.P. Sevensma (ed.), *Het Nieuwe Zoeklicht: Nederlandse Encyclopaedie voor allen, Vol. 3* (Arnhem: Van Loghnum Slaterus' Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1940), 235. See the letter from Julius Spier to Johan van Tricht dated July 27, 1939, and from Johan van Tricht to Julius Spier dated 29 July 1939 (archive Letterkundig Museum, The Hague).

that have been tracked down credited him for his teachings. However, the anti-Semitic politics of Nazi Germany certainly impeded Spier's path to lasting success. After Hitler's rise to power, he was – just like all Jews in Germany – hampered in making himself further known in the world. Due to the suppression of Jews, several of his pupils left the country. It is probably the combination of having to maintain a low profile from 1933 onwards, the departure of promising students, Spier's own departure from Germany, and his relatively early death that severely affected the development of his hand-reading method into a school for aspiring psychochirologists. Still, of Spier's German pupils, Charlotte Wolff, Julia Neumann, Katya Klopfer, Annamarie Mommsen, Kate Marcus, and Ernst Bernhard continued to read hands for many years after parting from their mentor.⁹ They all developed their own methodology, and definitely the first three of these six did make a name for themselves as outstanding hand readers.

According to Henny Tideman, Adri Holm was the sole Dutch psychochirology student to continue to read hands after Spier's passing on 15 September 1942.¹⁰ But as my research has shown, Tideman's assertion appears to be incorrect. Just as some of Spier's German pupils set up their own chirological practice, so too did at least one of his Dutch pupils. Her name was Elisabeth Jansma-Engers, never referred to by Hillesum.¹¹ Operating under the pseudonym Phyllis Jaarsma, Jansma-Engers eventually specialized in reading hands that are portrayed in works of art. She was able to interpret the character of individuals painted on canvas, based upon her analysis of the hands that the artist had portrayed. Jaarsma/Jansma's studies resulted in two small books with ample pictures, published in 1963 and 1970 respectively.¹²

Furthermore, after Liesl Levie and Mimi de Vries (also never referred to by Ety Hillesum) had survived the concentration camps, they picked up hand reading to generate some income.¹³ Spier-club members Gera Bongers and Dicky de Jonge, and perhaps others unknown as well, maintained a

9 More about these persons in my dissertation *Wie was de 'S.' van Ety?*, forthcoming.

10 Klaas A.D. Smelik & Meins G. Coetsier (eds), *Ety Hillesum: The Complete Works 1941-1943. Bilingual, Annotated and Unabridged* (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2014), 6 note 4.

11 Alexandra Nagel, "Wat handen vertellen: Het contact tussen Phyllis Jaarsma en Godfried Bomans", *Goede Papieren* 9 (2015) 2, 36-39.

12 Phyllis Jaarsma, *Handen in schilderkunst en praktijk* (Amsterdam: Contact, 1963); *idem*, *Wat handen vertellen* (Amsterdam: Becht, [1970]).

13 More about the Dutch students will be presented in my dissertation *Wie was de 'S.' van Ety?*, forthcoming.

lifelong interest in chiromy. De Jonge and Bongers practised it occasionally, as a hobby, and out of a habit.

Although Spier considered his work unfinished, he is, even today, acknowledged among contemporary palmists with a keen eye for the history of their profession, for the novel bent he has brought to chiromy – even if some of his ideas in the meantime have become outdated, or clearly do not work for others.¹⁴ Many more than just a handful have considered Spier's work as an unconventional yet decent practice. Besides, his work had a more lasting impact on some of his pupils than nowadays is known among the readers of Ety Hillesum's writings.

Ety Hillesum's Growth from 'Object of Study' to Spier's Assistant

Two years after Spier's immigration to the Netherlands, Ety Hillesum met the psychochiromy as the 'object of study' for a few of his students during a course meeting. This first encounter between Hillesum and Spier is usually marked as the very beginning of Hillesum's remarkable spiritual growth, as laid down in her diaries and letters. The occasion also marks the beginning of Hillesum's development towards becoming Spier's assistant. When reading the diaries from a 'chiromy' perspective, a series of moments in time are illuminated. These occasions illuminate how, on becoming Spier's close assistant, Hillesum's skills developed until she began to work for the Jewish Council in July 1942.

3 February 1941

Hillesum is the object of study

As noted, the starting point of Hillesum's 'psychochiromy career' was 3 February 1941, when she was introduced to Spier and had her hands analyzed by him and a few of his students. The encounter impressed Hillesum deeply. And indeed, when one reads the report of the meeting recorded by Adri Holm (a copy of the 'protocol', as it was called, and Hillesum's handprints have been saved by Dicky de Jonge), it is stunning to see what Spier was able to tell about Hillesum simply by studying her hands.¹⁵

14 *Ibid.*

15 Alexandra Nagel, "Protocolen en vellen boterhampapier: Inventarisatie van een verzameling handanalyses uit de school van Julius Spier", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Ety Hillesum in perspectief* [Ety Hillesum Studies 4] (Gent: Academia Press, 2012), 61-75, 62. The hand-analysis of Ety Hillesum is part of my thesis work *Wie was de 'S.' van Ety?*, forthcoming.

Second half of February, 1941

Hillesum wrestles with Spier

The initial meeting was followed-up on 8 February 1941, when Hillesum attended a public lecture Spier presented in the house of his sister Alice Krijn-Spier and her husband Leo Krijn. Shortly thereafter, Hillesum had her first private session with the psychochirologist, on which occasion she wrestled with him and won.¹⁶

8/9 March 1941

Hillesum begins her diary

The third memorable date is that of the day that Hillesum either wrote a letter to Spier, 8 March 1941, or the day after, 9 March 1941, when she started her diary and copied into it the letter she had written the previous day. This act indicates that Hillesum took the counselling seriously, and had decided to give diary writing a try.

23 March 1941

Hillesum tries to enlist Lenie Wolff as an 'object'

Not even two weeks later, Hillesum tried to entice a friend of her youth, Lenie Wolff, to serve as subject for the psychochirology course.¹⁷ Apparently, Hillesum, by then, had enrolled in the course, and was still so fascinated that she wanted her friends to have their own experiences with Spier. (On 4 July 1942, Hillesum introduced her friend Leonie Snatager and the "philosophical Joop" van Santen to Spier, who then analyzed the hands of both.¹⁸)

August 1941

Hillesum becomes Spier's secretary

The next important event, perhaps the first milestone on her path to getting closely involved in Spier's work, concerns the occasion on which Hillesum agreed to become Spier's secretary. This decision must have been made somewhere in August 1941. In this new role, Hillesum had, among other tasks, to write – and duplicate – the reports of the hand-analyses that Spier's students carried out under his supervision. For that purpose, Hillesum learned stenography; she wanted to be able to quickly jot down all that was observed during the hand reading sessions. In addition, she bought five binders, to store diverse, chirological material, probably in preparation for Spier's next book project (a book that, due to the difficult circumstances, was never written).¹⁹

16 E.T., 6. *Het Werk*, 6; Sunday, 9 March 1941.

17 E.T., 42. *Het Werk*, 45; Sunday, 23 March 1941.

18 E.T., 68. *Het Werk*, 72; Sunday, 4 July 1941. In the footnote the "philosophical Joop" is by mistake identified as Joop Bool. Joseph (Joop) van Santen was an older brother of Hillesum's friend Aimé van Santen.

19 E.T., 109. *Het Werk*, 115-116; Monday morning, 29 September 1941.

6 September 1941

Hillesum introduces Wiep Poelstra to chiromy

On Tuesday, 9 September 1941, Hillesum confessed that she was not looking forward to explaining the principles of chiromy to Wiep Poelstra the following Thursday. Something in her did not want to do it. Yet, when Poelstra, a friend of Han Wegerif, had showed up on the Sunday before, and requested a lesson and Hillesum equally had not felt ready for it, she “nevertheless delivered a fascinating lecture” and “felt extremely pleased” with herself.²⁰ Therefore, the diary entry shows that Hillesum was capable of explaining the basic chiromical principles, but struggled with insecurity.

September-October 1941

Hillesum writes her first protocol

The first protocol that Hillesum prepared, concerned Alfred Kropveld, whose hands were studied on Wednesday afternoon, 24 September 1941. Son of a physician and himself a physician, Kropveld had opened a practice at the Olympiaplein in Amsterdam just six months before. It took Hillesum a month to write the report. Within herself, she battled with the man with the “unholy father-complex,” whom she called a “[p]otential schizoid.”²¹

During those weeks, Spier held a lecture about the *Kopflinie* [‘headline’] at the Valerius clinic in Amsterdam. He connected this particular line in the hand to schizophrenia.²² Hillesum had looked forward to the lecture, probably because the topic was relevant to her relationships with her two brothers, who both had (severe) mental difficulties. Moreover, during the same time span, Spier analyzed Mischa Hillesum’s hands, and Etty also prepared the report of “Mischa’s psychoanalysis.”²³

19-25 January 1942

Aimé van Santen comes to visit

Even though Hillesum at times seriously questioned the path she had embarked upon in order to learn to read hands,²⁴ she persevered and remained intrigued. So when her friend with the raven hair and “narrow, pale Tartar

20 E.T., 100. *Het Werk*, 106; Tuesday morning, 9 September 1941: [...] hield ik toch plotseling een boeiend referaat [...] En die me dan achteraf zo een tevreden gevoel geeft.

21 E.T., 111, 114, 122. *Het Werk*, 115; Thursday evening, 25 September 1941: Die ongelukkige schizofreen in wording met de “phantastische Vater-Imago”; 120; Monday evening, 29 September 1941: En die Kropveld moet echt worden uitgewerkt; 128; Sunday late afternoon: Ik kijk net even de aantekeningen over de schizoïede man in. The protocol that Etty Hillesum prepared of the session with Alfred Kropveld was saved by Dicky de Jonge, see: Alexandra Nagel, “Etty Hillesums ‘beestachtig interessante object’, Alfred Kropveld”, unpublished essay.

22 E.T., 113. *Het Werk*, 120; Monday evening, 29 September 1941.

23 E.T., 138. *Het Werk*, 145; Friday, 24 October 1941.

24 See for instance E.T., 139, 147, 391. *Het Werk*, 147; Tuesday morning, 28 October 1941; 155; Friday, 21 November 1941; 410; Thursday morning, 4 June 1942.

face,” Aimé van Santen, who also studied Slavonic languages, paid her an unexpected visit in January 1942, she immediately took him to Spier to have his hands analyzed.²⁵ By then, Hillesum had experience in writing protocols. After a few days, she had her notes typed out and mailed them to Van Santen.²⁶

3 February 1942

Hillesum celebrates her first ‘spiritual birthday’

The next highlight can be pinpointed to 3 February 1942, when Hillesum celebrated her first ‘spiritual birthday’, that is, the first year of her friendship with Spier. She wrote Spier a ten-page letter – now lost – for the occasion. On the morning itself, the psychochirologist and Adri Holm studied her hands just as they had done the year before.²⁷ To Hillesum’s great delight, specific features in her palms had changed.

17 March 1942

Hetty E. becomes Hillesum’s first ‘client’

On Tuesday, 17 March 1942, it was more or less decided that Hillesum was ready to take someone under her wings while acting in a role as psychotherapist. The person involved was Hetty E., ten years Hillesum’s junior.²⁸ On that particular day, Hetty went to Spier to have her hands analyzed. Hillesum was present as well, and took notes, that she wrote out later.²⁹

25 E.T., 234-235. *Het Werk*, 244-245; Friday morning, 23 January 1942: Maandagmiddag plotseling Aimé. Met [...] ravenzwart langgegroeid haar om een smal, bleek Tartarengesicht.

26 Letter from Ety Hillesum to Aimé van Santen written on Sunday morning, 25 January, 1942 (E.T., 555-557; *Het Werk*, 589-592). Most of the report that Hillesum prepared for Aimé van Santen has been saved, see: Alexandra Nagel, “Aimé van Santen en het protocol met hindernissen”, unpublished essay.

27 Ety Hillesum described the event in a letter to Gera Bongers, written Friday morning, February 6, 1942 (E.T., 557-559. *Het Werk*, 592-594).

28 Hetty E. is perhaps Hetty Elisabeth Erdtsieck (b. 1924). She is the only person traced in the online database of the Amsterdam municipality that matches with ‘Hetty E. born ca. 1924’. In case Hetty is an shortname for Henriëtte, more women match.

29 “Perhaps still time to transcribe Hetty’s notes this morning?” and “I must still type out that talk with Hetty” (E.T., 295, 309. *Het Werk*, 307; Monday evening, 22 March 1942: Misschien vanavond nog Hetty uitwerken?; 322; Saturday morning, 28 March 1942: Nog dat gesprek met Hetty uittikken, razend moeilijk is zoiets). Back home after the hand-reading session, Hillesum typed a letter to Spier, in which she stated: “[...] und ich glaube dies wird mein erster ‘Fall’, wo ich mal selbständig heran gehe, natürlich immer mit Deiner Stütze im Rücken.” This letter by Ety Hillesum to Julius Spier dated 17 March 1942, is published in: Alexandra Nagel & Denise de Costa, “Bij jou voor anker gaan: Vijftien brieven van Ety Hillesum aan Julius Spier”, in: Klaas A.D. Smelik *et alii* (ed.), *Ety Hillesum 1914-2014* [Ety Hillesum Studies 6] (Antwerpen/Apeldoorn: Garant, 2014), 105-117, especially pp. 116-117; E.T. in this volume, pp. 285-301, especially p. 300.

Hillesum also explained that the experience that afternoon had startled her. She had observed how Spier, symbolically speaking, had taken the young, passionate life, still “full of opportunities,” but also “endangered by itself,” into his hands, and slowly unravelled it.³⁰ It is as if she had been looking anew at the way in which Spier worked; as if she had seen it from an outsider’s point of view, and more clearly than ever before had observed how Spier went about telling Hetty things about herself.

Five days later, Hillesum became aware of herself in connection with Hetty. She had noticed how she did not dare to look at people, whereas Spier always could fix the other with his eyes when talking with him or her. Hetty had sought eye contact with Hillesum during a lesson, yet Hillesum “still shrank before it.”³¹ In other words, Hillesum experienced feelings that intrinsically link to becoming a psychotherapist.

4 April 1942

Hillesum feels confident as Spier’s assistant

“We work together, I know every detail of his practice, carry the material he teaches in my head, so much so that during a lecture I can remind him of something with just a gesture,” Hillesum wrote on Saturday morning,

³⁰ *Ibidem.*

³¹ E.T., 297: I often catch myself being quite shy still and uncertain in my attitude, or rather in the way I look at others. When I talk, really talk, almost testify, to someone, speak about serious things, then I do so without the slightest inhibition, but I also catch myself failing to look at the other person, staring into the distance and, as it were, talking more to myself than to the other. I became clearly aware of that suddenly because I really want to tackle the hazardous enterprise of working with Hetty psychologically. And I know how sharply S.’s gaze is always focused on the person he talks to, how he fixes one with that look. And I daren’t yet look at people properly, locking looks with them; I still keep avoiding them. [...] And there is another thing I feel uncertain and diffident about. I noticed, for instance, that at a recent lesson Hetty sought my gaze, sought it very deliberately, and that suddenly, questing and trustful, she wanted to deliver her face and eyes up to me, and I was aware that I was facing a strong emotion and that I still shrank back before it. *Het Werk*, 309; Sunday evening, 22 March 1942: Maar ik betrap me dikwijls op het volgende. Dat ik toch eigenlijk nog heel schuw en onzeker ben in m’n houding, nog exakter, in m’n blik tegenover anderen. Wanneer ik tegen iemand praat, echt praat, bijna getuig, spreek over ernstige levensdingen, dan doe ik dat zonder enige geremdheid, maar ik betrap me er op, dat ik de ander daarbij niet aankijk, dat ik in de een of andere verte tuur en a.h.w. meer voor mezelf praat dan voor de ander. Ik realiseer het me daarom opeens zo duidelijk, omdat ik met Hetty werkelijk het waagstuk wil ondernemen psychologisch met haar te werken. En ik denk eraan, hoe indringend S. z’n blik altijd gericht is op de ander als hij tegen je spreekt, hoe hij je omvat met die blik. En ik durf een ander nog niet goed aan te kijken, durf een ander nog niet regelrecht aan te vatten met m’n blik, ontwijk nog altijd de ander. [...] Ik merkte bv. een van de laatste lessen, hoe Hetty mijn blik zocht, ècht bewust zocht, hoe ze opeens, in een zoekend vertrouwen, haar gezicht en haar ogen aan me wilde uitleveren en ik voelde, hoe dat een sterke emotie voor me was en hoe ik daar nog voor terugschrok.

4 April 1942.³² It is obvious that Hillesum felt confident in her role as Spier's assistant. Perhaps, the excerpts she made of Spier's manuscript *Kinderhände* for course meetings – the summaries probably ended up as the nineteen-page workbook *Methode der Handanalyse nach Julius Spier*, of which several copies have been saved – helped her to become more self-secure about Spier's chirollogical teachings.³³

10 June 1942

Hillesum and Spier discuss Hesje Hijmans

More than once, Hillesum pondered on psychological matters that emerged during the hand-reading sessions. Many such issues she discussed in more depth with Spier. This happened, for instance, after Spier had analyzed the hands of Hillesum's acquaintance Hesje Hijmans. As soon as Spier had formulated his description of Hijmans, Hillesum thought about it, and then related it to a sentence she had read from Rainer Maria Rilke. She cited this sentence to Spier, to which he responded.³⁴ The mini-dialogue as registered in Hillesum's diary, implies that Spier had taken Hillesum's thinking seriously, and that a genuine, equal conversation had unfolded between the teacher Julius Spier and the pupil Etty Hillesum about the case Hes Hijmans.³⁵

June-July 1942

Leonie Snatager sees Hillesum as her superior

Hillesum's involvement with Spier's counselling reached another level with the case of Leonie Snatager. At the end of February 1942, Snatager, who had a degree in economics, had decided to start a therapeutic trajectory with Spier. A setback in the counselling lingered, when anti-Jewish travel restrictions, installed on 5 June 1942, prohibited Snatager from commuting to Amsterdam for the weekly session. Spier and Snatager solved the problem by means of correspondence: instead of spending time on appointments, they would write about the issues that would have been brought up during the therapeutic session. Thereupon, Hillesum, as Spier's secretary, typed

32 E.T., 323. *Het Werk*, 337; Saturday morning, 4 April 1942: We werken samen. Ik ben ingewijd in ieder detail van z'n practijk, de stof, die hij onderricht heb ik in m'n hoofd, zodat ik hem onder de cursus met een enkel gebaar aan iets herinneren kan.

33 E.T., 351: And making further excerpts from his manuscript for Tuesday's lecture [actually, the Tuesday psychochirology course meeting]. *Het Werk*, 368; Sunday morning, 26 April 1942: En zijn Manuscript verder excerperen voor de cursus van Dinsdag. Copies of the workbook once owned by Elisabeth Jansma, Mimi de Vries, and Henny Tideman have been saved.

34 E.T., 401. *Het Werk*, 421; Wednesday morning, 10 June 1942.

35 About Hester Hijmans (1915-2010) see: Alexandra Nagel, "Een drieluik van Hes Hijmans", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik et al. (eds), *Etty Hillesum in Relatie* [Etty Hillesum Studies 5] (Ghent: Academia Press, 2013), 205-217.

most of the letters the psychochirologist dictated and sent to her friend in The Hague, *and* she read all that Snatager wrote to Spier.

As a result, a multifaceted dynamic developed between the three of them. Even though both Snatager and Hillesum had a history of being good friends, Hillesum at times considered herself superior to Snatager, simply because of her friendship with Spier and her secretarial job. On the other hand, Snatager looked up to Spier, and did so to Hillesum as well. Whether Hillesum was justified in considering herself superior to Snatager, and vice versa, whether Snatager had good reason to look up to Hillesum, is another issue. What matters is that Hillesum, apparently for Snatager, had grown into a wise person that she admired and respected, and that Spier had considered Hillesum suited to the task of being closely involved in his sessions with Snatager.³⁶

Conclusion

When screening Hillesum's diaries for the diverse references to psychochirology, and taking into account the hand analysis reports Hillesum prepared (some of which remain in the stack of protocols that Dicky de Jonge safeguarded³⁷), it is obvious that Hillesum devoted many hours learning to understanding the connection between hands and psyches. She might have practiced reading hands to the degree that it became second nature to her to look at hands, just as had happened to Elisabeth Jansma, Mimi de Vries, Dicky de Jonge, and Gera Bongers.³⁸ An anecdote shared by Leonie Snatager supports this idea. Once, during a train ride, Hillesum had observed the

36 For a more elaborate discussion, based upon a series of letters that Leonie Snatager Penney kept of the correspondence with Julius Spier, see: Alexandra Nagel, "Vriendschap en therapie: Verstregelde relaties tussen Julius Spier, Leonie Snatager en Ety Hillesum", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik (ed), *Ety Hillesum en het pad naar zelfverwerkelijking* [Ety Hillesum Studies, 9] (Antwerpen & Apeldoorn: Garant, 2017), 183-209.

37 In addition to the hand analysis reports of Alfred Kropveld and Aimé van Santen (see notes 21 and 26), and those of Hanneke and Pieter Starreveld (incomplete copies are kept in the archive of the Ety Hillesum Center in Deventer), three reports have been identified as having been written by Ety Hillesum, namely for an unmarried woman aged 40 (dated 15 October 1941), a divorced woman aged 43 (3 November 1941), and a married man aged 36 (17 November 1941). She probably also wrote the report for Jetje Tideman (10 November 1941), and for a married man aged 36 (24 November 1941).

38 Personal information from Bibi Dutrie van Haeften-Gorter, Chaja Kruijssen, Dicky van de Heuvel-de Jonge, and Hans Bongers.

hands of a young man seated opposite of her. Suddenly, she had told him: “You collect stamps!”³⁹ The man had looked up. He did indeed!

Although, as said, Hillesum at times sincerely questioned chirology, and struggled to make sense of the myriad of shapes, lines, and marks that one sees when studying hands, she remained a devoted student of Spier until he became ill (and died), which more or less coincided with her decision to start working for the Jewish Council. Up until then, Ety Hillesum’s efforts to become a worthy assistant of Julius Spier played a major role in her personal growth. Hence, it is an angle that deserves further in-depth investigations.

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39 Notes from the interview Jan Willem Regenhardt held with Leonie Snatager Penney, 2 July 1985 (EHOC archive, Middelburg).

13 “With You, I Have My Anchorage”

Fifteen Letters From ETTY Hillesum to Julius Spier

Alexandra Nagel and Denise de Costa

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Abstract

In December 2012, a letter from ETTY Hillesum to Julius Spier was recovered. Until that date, only a fragment of the letter was known from Hillesum having copied it into her diary. With this essay, the authors join the research that was ignited by the discovery of the complete letter. All of Hillesum’s known missives to Spier are examined. In contrast to the diary, written in Hillesum’s native Dutch, the letters are written in German. The authors take a close look at the contents and conclude that ETTY Hillesum put quite a bit of effort into composing these texts and that she phrased her thoughts and feelings on a variety of subjects with an open, honest frame of mind.

Keywords: Julius Spier, correspondence, close reading, authorship attribution, ETTY Hillesum

ETTY Hillesum and Julius Spier communicated in various ways: they met in person, exchanged phone calls, and wrote letters. Hillesum copied several of these letters, or fragments thereof, in her diary notes, the first being a well-known text: it acts as the preface to her first notebook.¹ This and many other letters, including the (fragments of) 71 in the section “Letters from ETTY Hillesum,” have become part of *ETTY: De nagelaten geschriften van ETTY Hillesum, 1941-1943* (1986) [E.T.: *ETTY: The Letters and Diaries of ETTY Hillesum 1941-1943* (2002)]. However, a few texts were not included in the complete edition of Hillesum’s literary legacy. Together with some other documents, they had been stored in a binder and were forgotten by the time

¹ E.T., 3. *Het Werk*, 3; Saturday, 8 March 1941.

the complete edition of Hillesum's writings in Dutch was published in 1986. In December 2012, however, Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, the Dutch publisher of Hillesum's work, opened the binder and discovered the texts anew.²

One of the findings in the tucked away folder was the copy of a letter Hillesum wrote to Spier on 17 March 1942.³ Since the text, on a sheet of thin paper, is typed, it cannot be recognized through Hillesum's characteristic handwriting. Also, it lacks an addressee and signature. Yet, set in the German language, with a date and several sentences identical to sentences in Hillesum's fifth notebook, there is enough evidence to prove that she was the author. For instance, the first sentence of the letter is rehearsed in the diary on the evening of 17 March 1942, at 7.00 p.m:

Immediately after the lecture I pushed the following letter into his hands.
It had suddenly burst out of me, following Hetty's analysis:

17 March, Tuesday night, 6.30 p.m.

[*crossed out:*] "Since I have [not written] to you for ages."⁴

Another sentence of the letter is traced in Hillesum's diary writing of Friday morning, 20 March 1942:

On Tuesday night under a pale moon and the lamppost (those traditional props for being more or less drunk), his face was an empty, weak shell because the spirit seemed to have fled from it. A few hours earlier, I had

2 The documents in this so-called Jan Geurt Gaarlandt binder are stored in the archive of the Jewish Historical Museum (JHM) in Amsterdam. They have been given the file numbers 15174 to 15192. File no. 15175 concerns a letter dated February 27, 1942, from Henny Tideman to members of the Spier-club about a dream she had; file no. 15180 is a sheet with cryptic notes from Etty Hillesum; file no. 15184, dated ca. March 1942, contains thirteen sheets of typoscript of the correspondence between Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas Salomé; no. 15186 is the letter from Etty Hillesum to Netty van de Hof (E.T., 562-564. *Het Werk*, 597-599; Letter 7); no. 15187 is Hillesum's letter to two sisters in The Hague (E.T., 579-591. *Het Werk*, 616-629; Letter 23); no. 15189 is a fragment of a letter to Maria Tuinzing (E.T., 629-630. *Het Werk*, 671; Letter 55); no. 15190 is an incomplete copy of a letter to Han Wegerif and others (E.T., 644-654. *Het Werk*, 686-698; Letter 64), and no. 15191 is a handwritten letter dated September 1943, from an unidentified person addressed to Jopie Vleeschhouwer, and concerns Etty Hillesum.

3 JHM file no. 15183, see appendix.

4 E.T., 290. *Het Werk*, 301; Tuesday evening, 17 March 1942: *Zo meteen naar cursus, en dan stop ik hem de volgende brief in handen, plotseling uit me opgeweld, naar aanleiding van die analyse van Hetty: // 17 März, Dienstagabend. halb 7 // Da ich Dich ja schon seit Ewigkeiten... [The translation "Immediately after the lecture I pushed..." is incorrect. Better would be: Within a minute off to the course meeting, and then I will put the following letter into his hands.]*

written to him about the previous night: "The great longing found safe harbour for a time after all, it lay at anchor in you for a while."⁵

The Tuesday night referred to is of 17 March 1942; the sentence quoted is taken from the fifth paragraph of the discovered letter.

The identification of the document ignited research into all of Hillesum's hitherto known letters to Spier. They number fifteen in total. The list may be incomplete, and certainly the content is incomplete, while several letters are only known because Hillesum referred to them in her diaries. That said, by listing the letters in chronological order, they offer an interesting view of the relationship between Etty Hillesum and Julius Spier. Therefore, in this contribution, brief descriptions of these letters are given, with special attention given to the eleventh, the rediscovered one, that is reproduced in full in the appendix.

Fifteen Letters

I 8 March 1941: "Lieber Herr S.!"

This is the aforementioned letter on the very first page of Etty Hillesum's diary.⁶ Hillesum has recently engaged Julius Spier as her therapist. She emerges from the text as someone deeply impressed by, and in love with Spier. Her openness to the man she has met little more than a month ago, is remarkable: uninhibited, she writes about the erotic feelings the hand-reading therapist arouses in her.

Two weeks later, Hillesum copies the fragment concerning feelings of loneliness, fear and uncertainty into her diary, and makes a comparison between her moods of March 8 and March 21 1941.⁷

The one and a half pages of the first notebook ends with the remark that writing the letter was difficult, and the confession: "I write with the greatest

5 E.T. 291. *Het Werk*, 302; Friday morning, 20 March 1942: Dinsdagavond bij die bleke maan en die lantaarnpaal (de traditionele requisieten bij de grotere of kleinere dronkenschap) was z'n gezicht een lege, slappe huls, omdat de geest er uit weggevoerd scheen. En een paar uren tevoren had ik hem geschreven over de vorige avond: – Die große Sehnsucht hatte doch einen Moment ihren Hafen gefunden, sie ist bei Dir eine Weile vor Anker gegangen – .

6 E.T., 3. *Het Werk*, 3; Saturday, March 8, 1941.

7 E.T., 38-39. *Het Werk*, 41; Friday morning, 21 March 1941: eine Ahnung darüber, daß das Leben so schrecklich schwer ist und daß man alles alleine machen muß und Hilfe von außen gar nicht möglich ist, und Unsicherheit, Angst, alles war da –

reluctance.”⁸ Yet, within eighteen months, ten similarly lined notebooks would be filled.

II and III beginning of August 1941: “[L]ieber Herrr Sjpjièàrrr”

The first entry in the letter section of *Etty* is addressed to Spier. It is dated Tuesday night.⁹ Most likely, it was written on the evening of 5 August 1941, while from an entry in Hillesum’s second notebook, it becomes clear that she receives a letter from Spier on 8 August 1941.¹⁰ Since Spier usually did not take the lead in writing to clients, he must have responded to a letter from Hillesum – the letter she wrote on 5 August 1941. In this letter, Hillesum mainly expresses her feelings related to Spier, and the man-woman relationship in general.

The next fragment, an excerpt from letter no. III (no. 2 in the letter section in *Etty*), is undated. The editors of *Etty* assign it to the beginning of August 1941. Possibly, no. III is an independent letter. Yet, it equally could be a draft for letter no. II (no. 1 in the letter section of *Etty*), or part of Hillesum’s tribute to Julius Spier, which she begins to work on in January 1942 (letter no. VIII). To consider the latter is the fact that Hillesum looks back at the beginning of her contact with the psychochirologist: she cites from her diary notes dated 11 and 13 March 1941, and concludes that she felt a lot better then than now (the now being either early August 1941, or early 1942).

In this letter, Hillesum is very much focused on herself and her personal development, but is more relaxed in her address to her “dear teacher and master,” whom she teasingly calls “dear Herrr Schpi-e-arrr.”¹¹

IV-VI 10, 13, and 15 August 1941: “Hören Sie mal”

While spending the summer holiday at her parents’ house in Deventer, Hillesum pens three letters to Spier, thereby sketching, among other things, the chaotic household of her parents.¹² She drops the term *Sekretärin* for the first time, which implies that, somewhere in the first half of this month, a decision has been taken by Spier and Hillesum that she will become his

8 E.T., 3. *Het Werk*, 3; Saturday, 8 March 1941: hat mich große Mühe gekostet, ich schreibe furchtbar ungerne, fühle mich dabei immer so gehemmt und unsicher.

9 E.T., 553. *Het Werk*, 587; Tuesday evening, 5 August 1941.

10 E.T., 82. *Het Werk*, 86; Saturday afternoon, 9 August 1941: zijn brief van gisteren.

11 E.T., 553. *Het Werk*, 587; Letter 2, To Julius Spier, Amsterdam, early August 1941: lieber Herrr Sjpjièàrrr, mein lieber Herr Lehrer und Meister.

12 These letters are discussed in the essay “Three Times Yes and a Thousand Fold No!” by Ria van den Brandt & Alexandra Nagel, included in this volume, pp. 303-312.

secretary. She calls Spier the "most terrible of all terrible fellows," and dares to write openly about erotic feelings:

Listen, somewhere on your mouth there is an obstinate and wayward curve and I am planting a kiss on that spot right now, but a truly 'undemonic' one. I hope you don't mind.¹³

Referring to the fourth and fifth therapeutic session with Spier, she confesses to having had the comic pleasure during those sessions of wanting to kiss his mouth, but lacking the courage to say something about it.

Months later, recalled in the fourth notebook, Spier and Hillesum read together the letters he wrote to her in August.¹⁴

VII 25-26 August 1941: "Sagen Sie mir mal etwas Gescheites hierzu"

On 25 August 1941, there is a paragraph in the diary in German, in which Hillesum struggles with the impact of physical discomfort on her mental state. She asks Spier to say something clever, or useful (German: *Gescheites*) about it.¹⁵ The next day, four sentences follow in German, that she copied from a letter to her friend and mentor:

If one keeps one's distance from someone, one can get a better and more distinct picture of him than if one draws too close to him. Isn't that rather sad? (Oh, no, perhaps merely problematical.) Be that as it may, I do want, always, to keep a certain distance from you.¹⁶

A few days later, Hillesum entrusts to her diary her unhappiness and acknowledges that it was very good he was not home, otherwise she would have run to him again.¹⁷ To maintain a distance from the hand reader seems an almost impossible task for Hillesum.

13 E.T., 89. *Het Werk*, 94; Friday afternoon, 15 August 1941: Hören Sie mal: an Ihrem Mund ist da irgendwo eine so eigensinnige und trotzige Biegung, und diese Stelle küsse ich im Moment mal, aber wirklich "undämonisch", finden Sie das bitte gut?

14 E.T., 224. *Het Werk*, 234; Sunday evening, 11 January 1942: [W]e lazzen opeens de brieven van hem uit de Zomervacantie en hij zei: Ich bin doch ein ganz verrückter Hund.

15 E.T., 91. *Het Werk*, 97; Monday morning, 25 August 1941.

16 E.T., 92. *Het Werk*, 97-98; Tuesday evening, 26 August 1941: Wenn man Distanz zu einem Menschen hält, kann man ihn besser überblicken und unterscheiden, als wenn man ihm zu nahe kommt. Ist darin eigentlich nicht etwas Trauriges? (Ach nein, vielleicht etwas Problematisches.) Wie dem auch sei, ich möchte doch immer eine gewisse Distanz zu Ihnen bewahren.

17 E.T., 92. *Het Werk*, 98; Thursday night, 4 September 1941.

No more of this letter seems to have been saved. However, from the undated fragment letter no. 3 in the letter section of *Etty*, it can be deduced that it was written on 26 August 1941, and therefore must be part of letter VII as well. In this particular fragment, Hillesum writes: “This morning I fetched my ‘identity card.’”¹⁸ On the identity card of Esther Hillesum in the City Archive of the Municipality Amsterdam is written “26aug41 PB.” This means that the municipal officer handed the PB (Dutch: *persoonsbewijs* [identity card]) to Hillesum on Wednesday, 26 August 1941. She also writes in the letter fragment: “we’ve been through a great deal together *these last six months*, don’t you agree?”¹⁹ Hillesum met Julius Spier on 3 February 1941; by the end of August 1941, they had known one other almost half a year.

Noteworthy in this letter is Hillesum’s question as to whether, at some point, she may have read the diary of Juliana Vasseur as she would like to see what happens with someone being treated by Spier.²⁰ The request shows that Hillesum wants to follow in her teacher’s footsteps. This becomes even more clear in combination with something she noted a few weeks earlier:

Had a good, long talk about him [Spier] with that nice Juliana. Deep down, she bores me stiff, and yet I like her company. Most people interest me less as company than as subjects. That’s why in the long run – say, in ten years or so – I wouldn’t mind joining a psychological practice. But I think a lot of myself, don’t I?²¹

18 E.T., 555. *Het Werk*, 589; Letter 4, To Aimé van Santen, Amsterdam, Sunday morning, 25 January 1942: Heutemorgen habe ich mein “Persoonsbewijs” geholt.

19 *Ibidem*, italics added: Ich finde, daß wir *das letzte halbe Jahr* sehr viel zusammen erlebt haben.

20 E.T., 554. *Het Werk*, 589; Letter 3, To Julius Spier, Amsterdam, early August 1941: Ich möchte mal genau sehen, wie so ein Prozeß während einer Behandlung von Dir bei einem durchschnittsbürger-Mädchen (das ist nich denigierend gemeint) vor sich geht.

21 E.T., 77. *Het Werk*, 82; Thursday evening, 7 August 1941: Een beetje over hem [Spier] geboomd met die aardige Juliana. In m’n hart verveel ik me dood met haar en toch heb ik plezier in haar. De meeste mensen interesseren me om hun zelf, maar niet voor mij persoonlijk. Daarom zou op den duur, over 10 jaar of zo, een psychologische practijk niet gek voor me zijn. Maar wat verbeeld ik me eigenlijk wel? [Instead of the translation “a good, long talk” it is better to say “talked a little”.]

Little is known about Juliana C.W. (Juil) Vasseur. Born May 1914 in Libau, Latvia, she was the second daughter of the Dutchman Paulus Vasseur (1882-1967) and Irene G.V. Trantz (1885-1965), Latvian. The family settled in Zeist in 1921. In November 1941, Juliana Vasseur gained her Masters degree at the University Utrecht in Social Geography. She wore heavy glasses, remained single, was not the sporty type, and later in life worked in a library of the Radboud University Nijmegen. Hillesum met Juliana Vasseur’s parents on December 7, 1941, and immediately characterized them in her own typical style: “Yesterday afternoon at the Vasseurs, that excitable Baltic mother

[– 24 November 1941: "I'm curious about how I'm going to put it to S."

In the diary notes of Monday morning November 24, 1941, Hillesum concludes that (theoretical) psychology is her main interest, not chirology, nor, for that matter, business correspondence. She is curious as to how she is going to express herself about this to 'S.'²² A draft note without a date, kept in Hillesum's third notebook, shows that she made a start:

I am ashamed. I have fear of living. I consider myself to be a bad secretary, and because I am ashamed about this, I become worse. I always think that you should fire me. I want more psychology and less chirology for a while. I like to study one book at a time.²³

Since there is no evidence that Hillesum finished the letter, it is parenthesed and not given a number.]

VIII 3 February 1942: The "annual confession"

Early 1942, Ety Hillesum develops the idea of writing a long letter since it will soon be a year since she met Julius Spier and committed to his therapeutic counselling, which involved talking about personal, psychological issues, and dreamanalysis. The letter would be a tribute to Spier. On the morning of the memorable day, she delivers fifteen calligraphed sheets of notepaper in a "large yellow envelope" to the Courbetstraat 27.²⁴ It took her approximately four weeks to prepare the text. Spier is pleased with it. When he writes her a month later, he refers to it and calls the letter a novel:

and that father who shot his bolt in the first hour setting out all the interesting details of his life (E.T., 170. *Het Werk*, 178; Monday morning, 8 December 1941: Gisterenmiddag bij de Vasseurs, de Baltische, opgewonden moeder en vader die het eerste uur al al z'n kruit verschoot door ons alle interessante feiten uit z'n leven te etaleren.). For many years, Paulus Vasseur was the vice-consul of the Netherlands in Libau. Afterwards, he worked for many years as Deputy Director at the Verenigde Chemische Fabrieken [United Chemical Factory] in Utrecht.

22 E.T. 153. *Het Werk*, 160; Monday morning, 24 November 1941: Benieuwd, hoe ik hierover tegen S. me uitdruk.

23 E.T., 702 note 153. *Het Werk*, 742 note 161: Ich schäme mich. Ich habe Lebensangst. Ich finde mich eine schlechte Sekretärin und weil ich mich darüber schäme, werde ich immer schlechter. Ich finde dann immer, daß Sie mich entlassen müssen. Ich möchte eine Zeit mehr Psychologie und weniger Chirologie. Ich möchte ein bestimmtes Buch studieren.

24 E.T., 558. *Het Werk*, 593; Friday morning, 6 February 1942: met een grote gele enveloppe, waarin m'n "Jahresbeichte" zat, onder bloed en tranen neergekalligrafeerd op 15 blocnotevelletjes. See also: E.T., 217, 218, 224, 236. *Het Werk*, 226, 227, 234, 246; Tuesday morning and afternoon, 7 January 1942, Sunday evening, 11 January 1942, Friday morning, 23 January 1942.

“Listen: your novel keeps going round in my heart; it is so serene and lovely and bears all your features; I can see you with all your expressions before me!”²⁵ Unfortunately, the document itself is lost. What remains, is a line Hillesum cites on Spier’s last birthday:

Why did I suddenly feel almost adrift and estranged this morning, in the middle of his flower garden? I think it must have been that one passage in Tide’s letter: that she would be sending him some jasmine and that he must imagine it came from Hertha. I felt so small in the face of that gesture; I am far from mature enough for it, I wouldn’t be able to do it. In fact, that was the only faltering part in the “manuscript” I handed him on 3 Feb.: “*And I hope to be true to her, your distant and yet so close girlfriend.*” Beside that strong, exultant letter from Tide (which he himself called a bit effusive) I suddenly felt so petty.²⁶

Henny Tideman and Leonie Snatager also read Hillesum’s “annual confession.” Tideman refers to it in her own diary notes; Snatager does so in a letter to Tideman.²⁷

IX ca. 21 February 1942: “[S]o great a love that it almost hurt”

On the last Friday of February 1942, Hillesum deliberates:

Was it only at the beginning of this week that I wrote him, “For a moment yesterday I loved you with so great a love that it almost hurt. It was a love

25 E.T., 276. *Het Werk*, 287: Monday morning, 9 March 1941: Ihr Roman geht mir immerzu im Herz herum: er ist so still und lieb und hat alle Ihre Seiten: ich sehe Sie dann mit allen ihren Ausdrücken vor mir!

26 E.T., 344. *Het Werk*, 360; Saturday, 25 April 1942; italics added: Waarom opeens zo een beetje ontworteld en vervreemd vanochtend, temidden van zijn bloementuin? Ik geloof, dat het kwam, door die ene passage uit Tide’s brief: dat ze jasmijn zou sturen en dat hij er dan bij denken moest, dat die van Hertha kwam. Ik voelde me zo klein naast dat gebaar, voor zo iets ben ik nog lang niet rijp, ik zal het nooit kunnen. Eigenlijk is dat ook de enige aarzelende plek in mijn “Manuskript” van 3 Febr. aan hem: *Und dieser Deiner fernen und doch so nahen Freundin: ich hoffe ihr treu zu sein.* Naast die sterke, juichende brief van Tide (die hij zelf een beetje “überschwenglich” noemde), voelde ik me opeens zo klein.

27 Hillesum handed her ‘annual confession letter’ to Tideman on September 14, 1942 (appendix to Jan Willem Regenhardt’s report of his interview with Henny Neitzel-Tideman, January-February 1985, EHOc archive, Middelburg). From the letter Leonie Snatager wrote to Henny Tideman, 30 September 1942 (EHOc archive, Middelburg): “[J]e hebt misschien gelezen de brief, die Ettie aan Spier schreef, toen ze hem één jaar kende. Daarin beschrijft ze de invloed die hij op haar leven heeft gehad.”

that so far transcended sensuality and possessiveness that I knew not how to put it into words."²⁸

The letter containing this fragment has disappeared. Most likely, Etty Hillesum begins to work on it on Saturday, 21 February 1942, in order to hand it to Spier on either the following Monday or Tuesday. On that Saturday, she writes in her diary, in German:

And my days rest on the broad foundation of a 'silent hour' in the morning – even if it lasts sometimes for no more than five minutes.²⁹

On Sunday, 1 March 1942, there is another fragment in German, most likely from the very same letter as she explains:

Let me quote myself:

"And my sorrows are amongst the most precious constituents of my own being, for they harbour a new creative element."³⁰

During that week, Hillesum's frame of mind has to cope with inner battles. On the one hand, there is an ongoing fight between obsessive sensuality and contemplative "quiet time." On the other hand, there is a fight between a tremendous heavy sadness and the desire to grow towards complete surrender.

X 9 March 1942: The "self-centred love"

Spier reacts to Hillesum's outpourings in letter no. IX. She entrusts to her diary that she warms herself with his words, and hopes to find "time and concentration" to write a long letter in return.³¹ She must have immediately acted upon the idea, as she reports the following day:

28 E.T., 255. *Het Werk*, 265; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: Was dat nog aan het begin v.d. week, dat ik hem schreef: – habe Dich gestern einen Moment liebgehabt mit einer so großen Liebe, daß es mir fast weh tat. Es war eine Liebe, die so weit über alle Grenzen des Sinnlichen und des Besitzenwollens hinausging, daß ich nicht wußte, wie ich das jemals ausdrücken müßte –

29 E.T., 250. *Het Werk*, 260; Saturday morning, 21 February 1942: Und meine Tage, sie ruhen auf dem breiten Fundament einer "stillen Stunde" am Morgen – und wenn es manchmal nur auch 5 Minuten sind.

30 E.T., 262. *Het Werk*, 272; Sunday evening, 1 March 1942: En laat ik mezelf maar citeren: // – Und meine Traurigkeiten, sie gehören mit zu den kostbaren Bestandteilen des eigenen Wesens und bergen schon wieder in sich den neuen schöpferischen Moment.

31 E.T., 276. *Het Werk*, 287; Monday morning, 9 March 1942.

Now that I have been rereading the letter I wrote to him yesterday, it doesn't seem too bad. I had so many problems when I wrote it that I thought it must be terrible, but it will do.³²

Except for two sentences, the content of letter no. X has been lost.³³

The contact with Spier that week is, on various levels, very intense. On Wednesday evening, the "Great Longing" has once again "seized the petty reality of the body."³⁴ The next day, when Spier shares something with Hillesum about an epileptic patient, she considers him "really much closer and dearer" than the previous evening when he was "all over" her.³⁵ On Friday morning, she returns to the letter:

In connection with my letter, we talked about why one has to suffer when one loves. But that is the wrong sort of love, self-centred love, possessive love.³⁶

XI 17 March 1942: "I have a course meeting with a madman"

Next comes the letter found in the Jan Geurt Gaarlandt binder. As explained above, Hillesum shares with her diary that the impulse to write the letter suddenly welled up in her "following Hetty's analysis."³⁷ Three days later, she duplicates a few sentences in her diary:

This became clear to me for the umpteenth time this afternoon: that one can never be conscious enough of the responsibility one has for one's

32 E.T., 278. *Het Werk*, 288; Tuesday morning, 10 March 1942: Nu ik die brief aan hem van gisteren overlees, valt hij me wel mee, ik heb met zoveel onlust gisteren geschreven, dat ik meende, dat het heel erg moest zijn, maar het gaat.

33 On March 12, 1942, Hillesum notes: "On 8 [sic, 9] March I had written to S., "My passion used to be nothing but a desperate clinging to – to what exactly? To something one cannot cling to with the body"" (E.T., 278; *Het Werk*, 289: 8 [sic, 9] Maart schreef ik aan S.: Meine Leidenschaftlichkeit früher war eigentlich nichts anderes als ein verzweifelt sich festklammern an, ja an was eigentlich? An etwas, woran man sich mit dem Körper gar nicht festklammern konnte –).

34 E.T., 280. *Het Werk*, 291; Friday morning, 13 March 1942: Ja, zo heeft dan het "Grote Verlangen" weer eens de kleine werkelijkheid van het lichaam beleefd.

35 *Ibidem*: Maar toen hij me gisterenmiddag met dat door en door bewogen gezicht iets bijzonder boeiends en interessants over een epileptische patiënt vertelde, toen was hij me toch eigenlijk nog nader en dierbaarder, dan toen hij zich over me heen stortte Woensdagavond.

36 E.T., 281. *Het Werk*, 292; Friday morning, 13 March 1942: Er over gepraat, naar aanleiding van mijn brief, waarom men toch lijden moet, wanneer men lief heeft. Dat is dan de verkeerde liefde, de ich-bezogene liefde, de liefde, die bezitten wil.

37 E.T., 290. *Het Werk*, 301; Tuesday evening, 17 March 1942.

questioning fellow men in search for help, that one must hearken more to oneself ever more attentively and conscientiously, that one must grow ever more self-disciplined, and that one ought not to waste a single moment of one's life, because so much, so overwhelmingly much remains to be done for others.³⁸

That particular afternoon, Hillesum visits Spier with one of her Russian language pupils. Nothing is known about the girl other than her name, Hetty E., and that she is ten years younger than Hillesum. Weeks before, Hillesum had considered Hetty "so young [...], and so searching and inquiring and passionate" that she was happy to be able to offer her "some guidance."³⁹ On the day that they visit Spier to get Hetty's hands analyzed, Hillesum expects Hetty to become one of the people that she (Etty) will "define clearly" in herself.⁴⁰

In the letter, Hillesum lets Spier know that she bathed herself in his radiance that afternoon. She also tells him that she experienced the session as a shock. It was the way in which he took the "young, passionate life at its beginning, full of possibilities, but also endangered by itself" in his hands and slowly laid it "quite bare" (see appendix). Hetty found in Spier a harbour where she could anchor for a little while.

Fairly central to letter no. XI is Spier's work. Hillesum is no longer a patient of Spier; she is the advanced student ready to embark on a new phase. The tone is cheerful, and reflects humor, already clearly visible in the first line:

Since I haven't spoken with you for ages, yes, for ages, I have to write you something again.

The diary notes show that, to the contrary, they had quite a bit of contact during that day. The end of the letter is humorous too. Hillesum has to hurry,

38 E.T., 291. *Het Werk*, 302; Friday morning, 20 March 1942: Und dies wurde mir wieder zum sovielten Mal klar heute mittag: daß man sich nie bewußt genug sein kann der Verantwortung, die man seinen fragenden, hilfesusuchenden Mitmenschen gegenüber hat, daß man immer andächtiger und gewissenhafter in sich selbst hineinhören muß, daß man innerlich immer diszipliniertes werden muß und daß man eigentlich keine Minute seines Lebens vergeuden darf, weil so viel, so überwältigend viel zu tun ist für die anderen.

39 E.T., 254. *Het Werk*, 264; Sunday evening, 22 February 1942. About Hetty E., see Alexandra H.M. Nagel, "Etty Hillesum, a devoted student of Julius Spier", in this volume, pp. 273-284.

40 E.T., 289. *Het Werk*, 300; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: En vanmiddag Hetty als object. Ook dit gaat horen bij degenen, die ik in mezelf tot klaarheid zal brengen. [The translation "And this afternoon, we had Hetty as our subject" is incorrect. It ought to be "And this afternoon, Hetty comes as 'object'."]

while she will participate in the course meeting of “a madman, a so-called psychochirologist,” who will be “very angry” when she arrives too late, and to whom she wants to hand a letter beforehand. Hillesum pretends the person to whom she writes is someone other than the one she has to run for in order to be on time, whereas he, of course, is none other than the one she writes to, Julius Spier.

XII 16 April 1942: “[Y]our picture hangs over my desk”

In the letter of mid-April 1942, Ety Hillesum elaborates on her youngest brother.⁴¹ It is obvious that Mischa Hillesum needs professional care. Spier has tried to help. As the closely involved sister, Hillesum informs Spier in detail about the conversation she had with Mischa, and the confidence she has in Spier being on the right track with him. Also, she lets her beloved teacher and friend know that his picture hangs over her desk, and that her brother “kept looking round at it” throughout their talk.⁴²

XIII 23 June 1942: A “desperate love letter”

Two months later, the news regarding correspondence is: “Yesterday I pushed a letter into his hands which, when all is said and done, was a desperate love letter.”⁴³ It follows another, related sliver of news: “And if I had the time, I should cover *another* twenty pages *now* [...]”⁴⁴ The desperate, probably 20-page love letter has not been saved. Two weeks thereafter, Spier lets Hillesum know in a telephone conversation that he has read her *Tagebuchbrief* (“diary letter”) once more, and considers her “*doch ein fabelhaftes Rindvieh*” (in *Ety* translated as “an incredible idiot”).⁴⁵

41 E.T., 560-561. *Het Werk*, 594-596: Letter 6, To Julius Spier, Amsterdam, Thursday, 16 April 1942.

42 E.T., 561. *Het Werk*, 596: Über meinem Schreibtisch hängt ein Bild von Ihnen, dahin hat er während unseres Gespräches sich fortwährend umgeschaut.

43 E.T., 445. *Het Werk*, 469; Wednesday afternoon, 24 June 1942: Gisteren stop ik hem een brief in handen, die, op de keeper beschouwd, toch eigenlijk een wanhopige liefdesbrief was.

44 E.T., 444. *Het Werk*, 469; Wednesday afternoon, 24 June 1942; italics added: En als ik *nu* tijd had, schreef ik *weer* 20 kantjes, ondanks de papierschaarste.

45 E.T., 482. *Het Werk*, 509; Wednesday morning, 8 July 1942. Concerning the term *Rindvieh*, see the contribution by Ria van den Brandt & Alexandra Nagel in this volume, “Three Times Yes and a Thousand Fold No! Julius Spier writes to Ety Hillesum”, 303-312, especially p. 310 note 31. Probably Spier’s note “and I still recall those diary entries [sic, the diary letter] of yours that touched me so much” (E.T., 490; *Het Werk*, 518; Tuesday evening, 14 July 1942: und ich hab noch

XIV 14 July 1942: "I carry you within me like an unborn baby"

Also lost are the original letters that Hillesum and Spier wrote each other on Tuesday, 14 July 1942. Only fragments are preserved because Hillesum intertwined these with her writings in her tenth notebook.

Due to one of the many anti-Jewish measures taken in late June 1942, Spier's telephone was cut off. Hillesum shares with him in a brief letter that her auricle is desolate and empty now that she cannot hear his vibrant, tender voice on the phone in the morning anymore. Furthermore, she lets Spier know that she carries him like an unborn baby within, although rather than in her belly, she carries him in her heart.⁴⁶ The deep affection is reciprocal. The "few faint, untidy pencil scrawls" Hillesum receives in return as Spier's answer, are, in comparison to the "suitcases full of others," what she considers her "first real love letter."⁴⁷

XV second half of July 1942: Thanking God for "a man like you in my life"

The last letter traced was probably written in the second half of July 1942, after Hillesum gets an assignment at the Jewish Council.⁴⁸ Consequently, the situation changes profoundly. Ety Hillesum has fewer opportunities to visit Spier. Besides, she is concerned about his poor health, and urges him to do everything to get better. Very sweet is the sentence in which she lets Spier know she has thanked God again for having a man like him in her life.⁴⁹

Dear Herr Spier

'S.' runs like a thick red thread through Hillesum's diaries. Their conversations about everyday life were a source of inspiration for writing the letters.

Deine mich sehr rührende Tagebuchaufzeichnung im Sinn!) is a reference to Hillesum's 20-page "desperate love letter."

46 E.T., 490. *Het Werk*, 518; Tuesday evening, 14 July 1942. On Tuesday evening Hillesum writes another brief letter to Spier, that she copies the next morning in her diary (E.T., 493. *Het Werk*, 521-522; Wednesday morning, 15 July 1942).

47 E.T., 492. *Het Werk*, 521; Wednesday morning, 15 July 1942: Het klinkt misschien vreemd, maar deze paar bleke slordige potloodkrabbels betekenen voor mij m'n eerste echte liefdesbrief.

48 E.T., 564-565. *Het Werk*, 600-601: Letter 8, To Julius Spier, Amsterdam, probably July 1942. Hillesum was assigned a position by the Jewish Council on July 15, 1942.

49 E.T., 564. *Het Werk*, 600; *ibidem*: daß es einen Menschen wie Dich in meinem Leben gibt.

And, vice versa, the letters became subjects for conversations. In this way, the two were in a constant dialogue.

Surveying the fifteen letters, or sixteen when the draft letter of 24 November 1941 is counted as well, it is remarkable how open Etty Hillesum was about her inner life. It is not that she became freer in each new epistle; no, from the very first day, she experienced no shame or fear about exposing herself emotionally, psychically, or spiritually to Spier. Yet, unlike the writing in her diary, which comes in an effortless, fluid motion, without hesitations or stutters, she seems more thoughtful and critical when it comes to writing these letters. She worked, for instance, sometimes with draft notes, and took ample time to produce the *Jahresbeichte* (annual confession, no. VIII).

The fact that Hillesum in her letters to Spier emphatically pondered the formulations and words used, has more to do with the genre. In a diary, the writer relates to him or herself while in a letter he or she is focused upon another person. In the case of these fifteen (sixteen) missives, the addressee was someone Hillesum highly respected. Spier was her teacher, friend, lover, “employer”, and therapist; she wanted to be honest and set the level high to open up to him. The difference between Etty Hillesum as a diarist and a letter writer will also have been affected by the language. In the notebooks, she wrote in her native tongue, whereas the letters are written in German, a language that she nevertheless mastered remarkably well.⁵⁰

Noteworthy too is the fact that Hillesum was quite often thinking about writing a letter, and afterwards pondered about what she had put on paper to him. Also, there was never a lack of topics to explore. The subjects exchanged range from erotic desires to care for her brother Mischa, from deep gratitude to a scarcity of time and paper. To become free was a theme, as well as trying to love mankind rather than loving one man. But no matter which subject Etty Hillesum brought to the fore, everything was imbued with a deep love for the letters’ recipient: “*Der lieber Herr Spier*”.

50 The thesis of the difference between the diary entries and the letters to Spier that will be partly due to the language in which Hillesum writes, we pose only carefully. Yet, in our opinion it is an interesting hypothesis, that deserves further investigation.

Appendix: Letter from Ety Hillesum to Julius Spier, 17 March 1942

17 März.
Dienstagabend, halb 7.

Da ich Dich ja schon seit Ewigkeiten, ja seit Ewigkeiten nicht mehr gesprochen habe, muß ich Dir mal wieder etwas schreiben. Weißt Du, so wie Du heute mittag warst und tatest und sagtest, da dachte ich plötzlich: Ich sonne mich in Deinen Strahlen, Geliebtes, und bin so dankbar, daß ich das tun darf.

Es war irgendwie ein erschütterndes Erlebnis für mich heutemittag. Wie muß ich das nun erklären? So ein junges, leidenschaftliches, anfangendes Leben, voll von Möglichkeiten, aber auch gefährdet aus sich selbst heraus, Du nahmst es in Deinen Händen und legtest es gleichsam ganz bloß. Für das Mädchen war es ein wichtiger Tag heute, und ich glaube dies wird mein erster "Fall", wo ich mal selbständig heran gehe, natürlich immer mit Deiner Stütze im Rücken.

Und dies wurde mir wieder zu sovielten Mal klar heutemittag: daß man sich nie bewußt genug sein kann der Verantwortung, die man seinen fragenden, hilfeschendenden Mitmenschen gegenüber hat, daß man immer andächtig und gewissenhafter in sich selbst hineinhören muß, daß man innerlich immer disziplinierter werden muß und daß man eigentlich keine Minute seines Lebens vergeuden darf, weil so viel, so überwältigend viel zu tun ist für die anderen. Dies alles wurde heutemittag mal wieder aufs Neue geboren in mir, durch Dein lebendiges Beispiel.

Ich muß es mal wieder aussprechen: ich habe so einen tiefen, tiefen Respekt dafür, wie Du fortwährend Kräfte von Dir gibst, wie Du immer Kraft und Liebe ausstrahlst, wie Du immer für alle da bist, hilfsbereit. Immer wieder bist Du mir ein wirkendes Vorbild und hab immer wieder Dank dafür.

Und über den gestrigen Abend mit Dir, darüber habe ich mich heutemorgen so sonderbar, so beschwingt glücklich gefühlt. Die große Sehnsucht hatte doch einen Moment ihren Hafen gefunden, sie ist bei Dir eine Weile vor Anker gegangen, und jetzt fährt sie wieder weiter, ein trage, feierliches Schiff, nicht, nein nicht auf der Suche nach einer neuen Ankerstätte. Man soll nicht auf der Suche sein, man fährt schon manchmal ganz von selber einen zeitlichen Hafen hinein. Und sag mir noch eines: ist das fahren eigentlich nicht wichtiger als der Hafen?

Um Gotteswillen, jetzt muß ich davon rennen, ich habe nämlich Kurs bei einem ganz verrückten Mann, einen sogenannten Psycho-Chirologen,

der wütend ist, wenn ich zu spät komme; gelegentlich erzähle ich Dir mal ganz interessante Sachen von ihm. Ich muß ihm auch noch einen Brief geben, und darum möchte ich etwas früher da sein...

... Und jetzt hast Du diesen Brief zu Ende gelesen, sei nicht böse, daß ich Dich so ablenke bevor dem Kurs, guck mir bitte mal nett an, ja????? D a g!...

English translation

17 March.

Tuesday evening, 6:30 pm

Since I haven't spoken with you for ages, yes, for ages, I have to write you something again. You know, the way you were this afternoon, and did, and talked, I suddenly thought: I sunbathe myself in your rays, my dear, and I am so grateful that I may do so.

It was kind of a shattering experience for me this afternoon. Now, how can I explain this? Such a young, passionate life at its beginning, full of possibilities, but also endangered by itself – you took it in your hands and laid it slowly quite bare. For the girl, today was an important day and I believe this will be my first “case”, where I will go independently, [but] of course, always with your support in the back.

This became clear to me for the umpteenth time this afternoon: that one can never be conscious enough of the responsibility one has for one's questioning fellow men in search for help, that one must hearken more to oneself ever more attentively and conscientiously, that one must grow ever more self-disciplined, and that one ought not to waste a single moment of one's life, because so much, so overwhelmingly much remains to be done for others. All this was born anew in me this afternoon, through you as living example.

I have to say it again: I have such a deep, deep respect for how you continuously give strength from you, as you always radiate strength and love, how you are always there for all, ready to help. Again and again, you are an effective model for me, and have ever thanks for that.

And about last night with you, I felt so unusual, so exhilarated happy about it this morning. The great longing had found her harbour for a moment, she had been moored at you for a while, and now she travels on again, a slow, solemn ship, not, no not in search for a new anchorage. One should not be on the lookout, one sails often just by itself into a temporal harbor. And tell me one more thing: is sailing actually not more important than the harbor?

For God's sake, now I must run, because I have a course meeting with a madman, a so-called psychochirologist, who will be very angry when I am late; by occasion, I will tell you some interesting things about him. I also have to give him a letter, and therefore I have to be there a little bit earlier...

... And now you have read this letter to the end, do not be angry that I distract you so before the course meeting, please look at me once nicely, yes????? By e!...

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14 “Three Times Yes and a Thousand Fold No!”

Julius Spier Writes to Ety Hillesum

Alexandra Nagel and Ria van den Brandt

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Abstract

During the summer of 1941, Hillesum and Spier maintained an intensive correspondence. One of the letters Spier sent to Hillesum resurfaced in December 2012. By analyzing this letter, the authors give a new glimpse into the unique relationship between the two. Spier the teacher/therapist responds to an issue Hillesum had brought up, while Spier the admirer/lover expresses very personal, private feelings of affection and desire.

Keywords: Julius Spier, therapy, womanhood, mentorship, correspondence, inner turmoil, Ety Hillesum

As elaborated on in the essay by Alexandra Nagel and Denise de Costa in this volume, in December 2012 the publisher Jan Geurt Gaarlandt retrieved a binder with some documents that he had stored away. One of the papers is identified as a letter from Julius Spier to Ety Hillesum.¹ To date, this document is the first letter retrieved that Spier wrote to his most famous pupil.² It is part of the series that the two exchanged in August 1941, when Hillesum stayed with her parents in Deventer, and Spier was visiting friends in the province of Gelderland. Thanks to this letter, a new glimpse of the contact between Hillesum and Spier is brought to light.

¹ Document no. 15176 in the JHM archive. Thanks to Peter Buijs of the JHM, who recognized the handwriting as Julius Spier's.

² Hillesum's fourth note book contained two small visiting cards from Spier on which he wrote something (E.T., 231, 715 note 231. *Het Werk*, 241, 753 note 241, 818; 19 January 1942).

The Most Terrible of All Terrible Men Writes

The rediscovered sheet of paper, dated 12 August 1941, is Julius Spier's reaction to a letter from Etty Hillesum. Hillesum copied most of this particular letter into her diary on Sunday, 10 August 1941.³ Spier's response of 12 August 1941, begins with a citation from Hillesum's letter: "Ja, Ja, Ja, 'der Schwerpunkt der Frau liegt in dem Mann, im Haus, in den Kindern!'"⁴; it is Hillesum's statement that a "woman's centre of gravity lies in her man, in her house, in her children, that is in the substantial, the tangible, as you put it."⁵ The last three words – "*as you put it*" – show that Hillesum reacts to a previous letter from Spier, namely the one that she received 8 August 1941. On that particular day, Hillesum wonders if a woman could displace her centre of gravity "without losing her own power, without doing violence to her real being?"⁶ She shares this thought, and others, with Spier in the letter she posts in Deventer on 10 or 11 August 1941.

On 13 August 1941, Hillesum receives her mentor's reply, whereupon she writes him back immediately. The preamble is promising: "Sie schrecklichster aller schrecklichen Kerle" [You most terrible of all terrible men].⁷ She then varies on a phrase of Spier's: "Do keep writing to me and write a lot."⁸ What Spier wrote, has become clear now that this letter in the Jan Geurt Gaarlandt binder has been transcribed (see Annex).

Preserved without an envelope, signature, or location, but with a date, the letter must have been written and posted in Wageningen, where, at the time, the hand reading expert was the guest of the Bongers family. "Still no letter from S., the villain," Hillesum complains on Friday morning, 8 August 1941.⁹ She wants to be with him, and with Gera Bongers and her many "pious" sisters.¹⁰ Later on the same day, she does receive a note from Spier, followed a few days later by the one dated 12 August 1941.

3 E.T., 83-84. *Het Werk*, 88-90; Sunday morning, 10 August 1941. Alexandra Nagel & Denise de Costa classify this as letter IV, in their contribution to this volume: "With you, I Have My Anchorage: Fifteen Letters From Etty Hillesum to Julius Spier", 285-301, especially pp. 288-289.

4 See the translation of Spier's letter in the appendix.

5 E.T., 84. *Het Werk*, 89; Sunday morning, 10 August 1941.

6 E.T., 90. *Het Werk*, 85; Friday evening, 8 August 1941: zonder zichzelf a.h.w. te verkrachten, zonder haar wezen geweld aan te doen?

7 E.T., 85. *Het Werk*, 90; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: Schreiben Sie nun mal wirklich weiter und schreiben Sie viel. Nagel & de Costa label this as letter no. V.

8 *Ibidem*: Schreiben Sie nun mal wirklich weiter und schreiben Sie viel.

9 E.T., 78; *Het Werk*, 83; Friday morning, 8 August 1941.

10 There were seven daughters Bongers and one son: Loes, Gera, Netty, Jaap, Guusje (young deceased), Riet, Lietje and Hemmy. A sister of father Bongers, aunt Bets for the children, was a

Spier Is Working on Noble Material

In this retrieved letter, Spier mainly responds to two issues Hillesum raises in her extensive letter of 10 August. He addresses, as said, the theme of "the centre of gravity of the woman" before addressing the chaos and disorder in Hillesum's life. With regard to the first, Spier describes briefly and securely his anthropological conceptions (the sexual is secondary to the human condition) but with a warning, a "thousand times no": do not focus (only) upon the "limited development of the woman and sex solely," but upon the human and the divine in you.¹¹ Spier's advice to focus on the human and the eternal fits into his vision of the self-realization of man. It also carries an emancipatory message. He explains to Hillesum that women who exclusively direct their attention to the children, the household, and the husband, will become disillusioned later in life because they have not worked on their development as a human being.

With regard to the second, the chaos in Hillesum's life, Spier shares his happiness that he was able to do something meaningful for her: "And it makes me so happy to have brought some sort of order in it, and to be able to build further on this noble material."¹² In line with this theme, he gives her, as he did in his previous letter,¹³ a reading tip: a few lines from *Briefe über das Johannes-Evangelium* from Friedrich Rittelmeyer (1872-1938).¹⁴

friend of Han Wegerif. Through her, Bernard Meylink, the fiancée of Loes Bongers, was able to rent a room by Han Wegerif. According to Lietje (Alida Woutera Stroobach-Bongers, b. 1926), Gera was the outsider of the family, and had wanted their parents and siblings to meet Spier. The psychochirologist enjoyed the week's visit in Wageningen very much. When Alexandra Nagel visited Lietje Stroobach-Bongers on July 3, 2011, the latter vividly elaborated how Spier had given an evening "concert". He had used the large, thick plush curtains in the living room as decoration on stage: first hidden behind the curtains, he had then stepped in front of it and begun to sing. The youngest two sisters had giggled. "He did this so nice. He was different, but to him it was normal. I was in awe of him," Lietje Stroobach-Bongers remembered well.

11 See the translation of Spier's letter in the Annex of this essay.

12 *Ibidem*.

13 Cf. *Het Werk*, 86; Friday evening, August 8, 1941: Dat stuk van Rittelmeyer dat hij aangeeft in z'n brief, zal ik morgenochtend beginnen over te schrijven. E.T., 81: Tomorrow morning I shall start copying out that quotation from Rittelmeyer he put in his letter.

14 Hillesum copied the reading tip from Spier's previous letter in her diary (E.T. 81. *Het Werk*, 86; Saturday morning, 9 August 1941). It concerns a fragment from Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Briefe über das Johannes-Evangelium* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1938), 92: "Dinge der Außenwelt kann man so erkennen, daß der Erkennende dem Erkannten gegenübersteht und an ihm den Erkenntnisakt vollbringt. Je tiefer es ins Innere geht, um so mehr wird das Erkennen zugleich ein Erkenntwerden. Einen Menschen in seinem tieferen Wesen kann ich eigentlich nur erkenne, wenn ich zugleich mich von ihm aus sehe, und also auch ein neues Wissen über mich gewinne, indem ich ihn erkenne." E.T., 81: R., p. 92. "[...] Things in the outside world are perceived when the

Rittelmeyer's book was at the time very meaningful to Spier; so much so that he gifted a copy to both Henny Tideman and Etty Hillesum. Inspired by Spier, the two women read texts of this German pastor and founder of the Christian Community. Apparently, Julius Spier took his own copy along on the journey to Wageningen, and was aware that Etty Hillesum brought hers to Deventer. So he could select an appropriate passage as an inspiration for her, one suited to Hillesum's development and situation. Spier does not cite the chosen passage, but offers the reference to the third paragraph on page number 114. Hillesum's Rittelmeyer copy is kept in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. It is filled with lines marking particular passages; also passages that Spier marked in his own book, while Hillesum copied those markings in her copy.¹⁵ The fragment Spier recommends in the letter, is highlighted in Hillesum's copy of *Briefe über das Johannes-Evangelium*:

So wird jeder ganz er selbst, wie er gelebt hat als göttlicher Gedanke im göttlichen Urlicht, und doch alle eins in Christus. Aber das Ziel, ein Menschensohn zu sein, in dem ein Gottessohn lebt, hat jeder. Je mehr der Mensch ein Ich wird, das in der Einheit seines Wesens den ganzen Menschen zusammenfaßt, um so mehr hat er die Möglichkeit, in diesem Ich sich ganz „von Gott geboren“ werden zu lassen, sich ganz mit göttlichem Leben erfüllen zu lassen.¹⁶

perceiver confronts the percept and performs the act of inner perception. The deeper one goes inside, the more one's perception is fused with one's percept. I can only know a human being in his deeper essence if I also see myself from his point of view and thus gain a new understanding of myself through my perception of him." Hillesum cited the last two sentences again in the citation book by A.J.C. van Seters, *Levenskunst: Gedachten van week tot week* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, [1942]), week 32.

15 On the front cover of Rittelmeyer's *Briefe* Hillesum wrote: "De onderstrepingen zijn overgenomen uit het exemplaar van Julius Spier. In het zijne stond voorin: Vieles Göttliche ist nicht dazu da, gesagt zu werden, sondern gestrahlt. Es will aufgenommen sein in unser Wesen, um von da aus den Menschen als Kraft, als Sein, als stille Sprache zugeleitet zu werden. En in het exemplaar, dat hij aan Tide gaf, schreef hij voorin: Möge Dir dieses Buch, das mir so unendlich viel gegeben hat in Deinem Kampfe [sic] um die Kristallisation Deines höheren Ichs behilflich sein!" See: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik, 'Wachten jullie op mij?': *Etty Hillesum in beeld* (Amsterdam: Balans, [2003] 2016²), 95. Translation: The underlinings are copied from Julius Spier's copy. In his copy, he had written: Much of the divine does not exist to be said but to be radiated. It wants to be assimilated into our being in order that it can serve us human beings as power, as existence, as quiet speech. And in the copy he gave to Tide, he wrote on the front page: May this book that has given me so very, very much, help you in your struggle to reach your higher self.

16 Rittelmeyer, *Briefe*, 114-115.

Thus each one becomes himself, when he has lived as a divine thought in the divine primordial light, and yet all One in Christ. But the goal, to be a son of man in whom a Son of God lives, everyone has. The more man becomes an I, who in the unity of his being comprehends everyone, the more he has the opportunity to let this I be completely "born by God", to be completely filled with divine life.

Rittelmeyer's words reflect Spier's view of human self-realization, captured in his motto *Werde der du bist!* [Become who you are]. The goal is to become an "I" that in "the unity of his being" becomes increasingly filled with the divine. In the passage cited, the figure of Christ plays an important role: everyone has the desire to be a "son of man" in whom lives a "Son of God." Spier loved reading the New Testament, and developed a strong interest in the figure of Christ.¹⁷ It is through Spier that Hillesum started to read more Biblical texts.¹⁸

Most likely, Hillesum was not surprised by the reference to the Rittelmeyer passage. Although she did not cite the sentences in her diary, she highlighted the sentences through a double line in the margin in her copy of *Briefe über das Johannes-Evangelium*.¹⁹ The spiritual therapeutic message Spier intended to pass on with the reference to this fragment, might have been designed to inspire Hillesum to come into contact with herself, to maintain a peaceful state of mind, to feel connected to the divine, and be able to defend herself to the chaos. Spier was aware that his letters had a big effect on Hillesum's mood and frame of mind: she confessed to him that his letter of 8 August 1941 had worked in an organizing manner when she had to deal with the chaos of her complicated family. It had been very important to her.²⁰

17 Alexandra Nagel, "Julius Spier zocht en vond houvast in de Bijbel – Etty Hillesum volgde hem", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in discours* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 3] (Gent: Academia Press, 2011, 77-91), 78-81, 83-85.

18 Not to be underestimated is the influence of Henny Tideman on Julius Spier, and, partly through Spier, on Etty Hillesum, see: Ria van den Brandt, "Vriendschap op het tweede gezicht: Aantekeningen bij de vriendschap van Etty Hillesum en Henny Tideman", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in Context* (Etty Hillesum Studies, 2), (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2007, 4-15); Nagel, "Julius Spier zocht", 89-91.

19 The way in which Hillesum highlighted passages in Rittelmeyer's *Briefe*, might be worthy of more research. A double line on the side of the page could be the result from Spier (one line), and Hillesum (another line), who then affirmed the passage herself. However, the double line can also stem from Spier. Hillesum often noted an 'E' for Etty, or 'S' for Spier to note the similarities and differences in marking. See also Alexandra Pleshoyano, *Etty Hillesum: L'amour comme une 'seule solution': Une herméneutique théologique au coeur du mal* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 191 ff.

20 E.T., 83, *Het Werk*, 88; Sunday morning, 10 August 1941: Aber ich wollte ja gar nicht schreiben über diesen komplizierten Haushalt hier, aber ich wollte schreiben über Ihren Brief, der in dieses Chaos ordnend hineinbrach und der so ungeheuer wichtig für mich war.

Spier states in the letter of 12 August 1941, to be “so happy” to have brought “some sort of order” to Hillesum’s mental state, and to be allowed to continue to work with her, what he called “noble material.” The words testify to a remarkable commitment, which is highlighted by several other expressions and phrases as well. Spier informs Hillesum that her letter “flatters” and “inspires” him. He is happy with her letter and longs for more, “the longer, the better,” preferably letters in which Hillesum shares her contemplations and reactions in response to his letter to her.²¹ In the writing, Spier comes across as the attentive teacher moving in accordance with Hillesum’s thoughts and moods, but also as someone explicitly posing himself as the superior: he affirms his pupil through a three times “Yes,” but immediately corrects this by means of a “thousand fold No.”²²

In the rediscovered letter, Spier mentions his upcoming whereabouts: he will spend time in Arnhem and Velp. In case Hillesum wants to write him again, she must send her missives to these places. It is unknown what exactly would bring the psychochirologist to these towns. Perhaps a visit to the publisher Johan L. (Jan) van Tricht (1883-1964), as the men maintained a friendly contact, and may have wanted to go through all the options one more time in order to get Spier’s manuscript *Kinderhände* [Hands of Children] published. They had been corresponding about this matter since the summer of 1939. A short stay with the sculptor Frieda Mary (Fri) Heil-Verver (1892-1983), another friend of Spier’s, is also a possibility. The year before, Spier’s visit to Fri Heil was cancelled.²³ The trip to nearby Velp could be related to a (potential) client, or student of Spier’s, the “nurse from Velp,” whose letter Hillesum would read on 16 December 1941.²⁴

Hillesum’s Reaction: An Ocean Does Not Write

When, on 13 August 1941, Hillesum responds to Spier’s latest letter, she is no longer in inner turmoil. The turnaround in her frame of mind is partly due to the therapeutic effect that the content of Spier’s writing had in his letter that arrived in Deventer on Friday, 8 August. Initially, she did not quite understand all that Spier wrote; the content had not fully reached

21 See the translation of Spier’s letter in the Annex of this essay.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Letter from Julius Spier to Johan van Tricht, 9 May 1940 (archive, Letterkundig Museum, The Hague): “Soeben teilt mir Frau Heil mit dass sie wegen der inzwischen eingetretenen Umstände nicht in Arnhem ist.”

24 E.T., 185. *Het Werk*, 194.

her. But once she had "deciphered" her mentor's "hieroglyphics," suddenly everything had begun to fall into place.²⁵ Her reeling mind had switched into a resting state. She was in touch with herself, as she wrote to him on 10 August 1941: "I regained contact with myself, with the deepest and best in me, which I call God, and so also with you."²⁶ Then, when Spier's letter of 12 August 1941 arrives, Hillesum appears to be even more settled. She informs the "most terrible man" that during the last few days she feels herself to be an enormous, wide, mass of water, an ocean. Has Spier ever heard of an ocean writing letters? An ocean does not even know the alphabet; an ocean is just deep and wide, and that is enough.²⁷ Despite all the distractions in Deventer, a special moment has arrived: Hillesum rests so deeply within herself, that she does not feel the need to write to her dear friend Spier.²⁸ Nevertheless, in the last paragraph of the letter that she writes to him on Wednesday, 13 August, she explains how terribly unpleasant it is when there is no immediate answer to a letter. But could Spier please be content with this small response? She thereby stresses that his letters really excite her.²⁹ Hillesum's message, presumably sent to Arnhem, ends with the anticipation that they will see each other on the coming Monday. Spier's secretary will catch the early morning train to Amsterdam and walk into the door at the Courbetstreet at 9 a.m. She looks forward to their reunion ("Ich frrrreue mich!") and ends with goodbye ("Wiederrrrrschauauaun").³⁰

The summer correspondence does not stop here. Soon after, Hillesum's heavenly peace of mind turns into turmoil again. The visit to her parental

25 E.T., 83. *Het Werk*, 88; Sunday morning, 10 August 1941: habe aufs Neue Deine Hieroglyphen entziffert.

26 *Ibidem*: Ich bekam wieder Kontakt mit mir selber, mit dem Tiefsten und Besten was in mir ist und was ich Gott nenne und dadurch auch mit Dir.

27 E.T., 85. *Het Werk*, 90; Wednesday morning, 13 August 1941: Ich will ja überhaupt nicht schreiben heute und morgen wahrscheinlich auch noch nicht. Weißt Du, wie ich mich die letzten Tage fühle? Wie ein Meer, ein weites, tiefes, namenloses Meer und hast Du jemals gehört von einem Meer, das Briefe schrieb? So ein Meer weiß ja gar nicht was Buchstaben sind, es ist nur tief und weit und das genügt.

28 *Ibidem*: Ich habe mich diese Woche trotz der vielen Ablenkungsmanoeuvres von außen her ganz in mich hineingesammelt und gleichsam innerlich konsolidiert und jetzt ist einer der seltenen Momente da, worin ich so tief in mir selber ruhe, daß ich gar nicht das Bedürfnis habe Dir zu schreiben.

29 *Ibidem*: Ich weiß, wie schrecklich unangenehm es ist, wenn man keine regelrechte Antwort auf seine Briefe bekommt, aber ich will jetzt nur sagen, daß Ihre Briefe mich ungeheuer anregen, mit dieser mageren Reaktion müssen Sie heute zufrieden sein, bitte, bitte.

30 E.T., 91. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday morning, 13 August 1941.

home takes its toll.³¹ On Friday, 15 August 1941, she lets Spier know that her “tortured head” longs for his hands; her “skull” has once more become too small for all the conflicting thoughts, and her heart grows heavier by the hour.³² All is amiss again. After managing for a week “to battle through splendidly,” she began to notice that she feels “completely exhausted and incredibly unhappy” as a result of the turmoil in her parent’s house.³³ She considers herself now qualified for the designation “Rindvieh”³⁴ and warns him beforehand: “If things go on like this, I shall turn your Monday into quite some day.”³⁵ She also reveals that she may need a day to tell him all the rest, and can not stay overnight, “or else my parents will look at me askance.”³⁶ The final sentences in Hillesum’s letter of Friday, 15 August 1941, suggest that she will travel the following Monday from Deventer to Amsterdam and back. The summer holiday with her parents will have ended on 21 August 1941, when she returns to Amsterdam, via Arnhem. How Spier reacted to the final chords of her “pleasant holiday reading” is unknown.³⁷ The remainder of Hillesum’s adventures with her parents and the content(s) of any further correspondence are lost. Hence, in order to fill in this gap another binder with forgotten documents needs to surface...

31 E.T., 87. *Het Werk*, 93; Friday afternoon, 15 August 1941: Es passiert hier immer so wahnsinnig viel im Hause, jede Stunde enthält tausend Stimmungen. The passage comes from Hillesum’s next letter to Spier. Alexandra Nagel & Denise de Costa classify this letter as letter VI, in their contribution to this volume: “With you, I Have My Anchorage: Fifteen Letters From Etty Hillesum to Julius Spier”, 285-301, especially pp. 288-289.

32 E.T., 87. *Het Werk*, 92; Friday afternoon, 15 August 1941: Mein gequälter Kopf sehnt sich heute so sehr nach Deinen Händen. Das Schädeldach ist mal wieder zu eng geworden für die vielen gegenstreitigen Gedanken und das Herz wird jede Stunde schwerer. Das sind mal wieder andere Klänge als das vorige Mal.

33 E.T., 87. *Het Werk*, 93; Friday afternoon, 15 August 1941: Eine Woche habe ich mich wirklich glänzend durchgeschlagen, und mit einemmale bemerke ich, daß ich völlig erschöpft bin und bodenlos unglücklich.

34 *Ibidem*: fortwährende schwere Kopfschmerzen und gelähmt von Müdigkeit, Rindvieh was? The term *Rindvieh*, cow or cattle, stems from Spier. Compare E.T., 303. *Het Werk*, 315-316; Friday evening, 27 March 1942: Spier had called Hillesum “Süßes Rindvieh,” meaning “sweet cow” but translated as “little goose,” which made her extremely happy. And E.T., 567. *Het Werk*, 602-603; Friday, 11 September 1942: More than once Spier used the terms “Rindvieh” and “Sau,” translated as “silly ass” and “a rotter”, for Henny Tideman.

35 E.T., 88. *Het Werk*, 93; Friday afternoon, 15 August 1941: wenn das so weiter geht, kann ich Ihnen Montag noch einen gemütlichen Tag besorgen.

36 E.T., 89. *Het Werk*, 94; Friday afternoon, 15 August 1941: Wird für den mündlichen Rest ein Tag genügen. Aber ich kann nicht übernachten, weil die Eltern zu schiefe Gesichter sonst machen.

37 *Ibidem*: Na, da steht es, schöne Ferienlektüre für Sie.

Appendix: Transcription and Translation of the Letter from Julius Spier to Etty Hillesum

Dienstag 12/8 41

Ja, Ja, Ja, „der Schwerpunkt der Frau liegt in dem Mann, im Haus, in den Kindern!“ und tausend Mal Nein! Denn woher kommen die tausende von vertrockneten „enttäuschten“ Frauen in einem Alter, in dem der Mann zu den schöpferischsten Leistungen aufsteigt? Woher sonst, als von der einseitigen beschränkenden Entwicklung des nur Frau und Geschlecht sein! Wenn dann die Kinder gross und weg sind, der Haushalt von selbst läuft, der Mann im Beruf stecken geblieben und entfremdet ist, dann ist das grosse Elend da, weil versäumt worden ist, das Menschliche, das Ewige und das Allverbundene zum klingen zu bringen! Nein, nein[,] nein, erst kommt der Mensch und der Gott in ihm und dann das Geschlecht! Ist Ihnen das nicht eindeutig klar? Ihr Brief streichelt // mich und regt mich zu vielerlei an, aber ich mache es einmal wie Sie: „ich hätte noch so viel zu schreiben „und schreibe morgen oder heute weiter.“ Und dann kommt das Morgen nie, sondern immer etwas Neues! Aber schreiben Sie nun mal wirklich weiter über meinen Brief und Ihre Eindrücke und schreiben Sie mir zu Donnerstag nach Arnhem und zu Samstag nach Velp. Ich freue mich so sehr mit Ihren Briefen und je länger, je lieber! Also von Geduld verlieren, keine Rede. Übrigens: was Sie da von menschlichen und geistigen Werten, die in Ihrer Familie herumgestreut liegen, sagen, einen ähnlichen Eindruck von Ungeordnetheit hatte ich zum ersten Mal aus Ihrer Hand. Und es macht mich so glücklich, da etwas Ordnung hineingebracht zu haben und weiter an diesem edlen Material bauen zu können. Lesen Sie mal hierzu Rittelm. S. 144 114.3 Abs. hauptsächlich vom letzten Satz ab.³⁸

Tuesday 12/8 41

Yes, Yes, Yes, “the focus of the woman lies in the man, in the house, in the children!” and a thousand fold No! For where do the thousands of dried-up “disappointed” women at an age, wherein the man rises to the most creative achievements? Where else than from the one-sided, limiting development

³⁸ In the transcription, we have adjusted the use of capitals according to the German grammar rules, also in places where Spier presumably used a lowercase letter. The original punctuation has been maintained.

of being woman and sex only! When the children are then big and gone, the household runs by itself, the man is stuck in his work and alienated, then the great misery is there, because it has been neglected to bring the human, the eternal and the all-connected to expression. No, no[,] no, first comes the human being and the God in it, and then the sex! Is not that clear to you? Your letter flatters // me and stimulates me to many things, but I will do it this time just like you: "I still have so much to write and will write further tomorrow or [later] today." And then tomorrow never comes, but always something new! But do write to me really, about my letter and your impressions, and write me until Thursday to Arnhem and until Saturday to Velp. I am so happy with your letters and the longer, the better! So there is no chance to lose patience. By the way: what you say about human and spiritual values, that within your family are scattered around, a similar impression of disorder I had the first time from your hand. And it makes me so happy to have brought in some sort of order in it, and to be able to build further on this noble material. Read on occasion Rittelm. p. 144 114 paragraph 3, especially from the last sentence.

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Reception of Hillesum's Diaries and Letters



15 Etty Hillesum in Jewish Contexts

Piet Schrijvers

Klaas Smelik, Gerrit Van Oord, and Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract

In this article, the author analyzes the Jewish character of Etty Hillesum's life and writings. This is done as a corollary to a 2000 demographic questionnaire on the subject of Jewishness of Dutch Jews. According to the author's analysis, Etty Hillesum's writings show a marked development away from assimilation, toward a clear consciousness of her Jewishness, especially after the persecutions of June/July 1942 (*Diaries*, cahier IX). Aspects of Etty Hillesum's Jewish identity include her concentration on her own spiritual life, her obsession with language and text (literature as a second homeland), the conception of her task as a historical writer, and her dialogues with God. Post-war Jewish reaction to Etty Hillesum's diaries was mixed primarily because of her attitude to armed resistance and heroism, and because of her acceptance of the "Massenschicksal."

Keywords: Jewishness, identity, Massenschicksal, innere Emigration, post-war reception, heroism, Etty Hillesum

How Jewish was Etty Hillesum? Why were certain post-war Jewish reactions to Etty Hillesum so negative? I would like to make an attempt to answer these two questions. My first starting point will be a report that appeared in 2001, titled "De Joden in Nederland anno 2000".¹ The first part of this report contains a demographic profile of the current Jewish population in the Netherlands and can, in my opinion, contribute to a better understanding of Etty Hillesum in certain post-war Jewish circles. The second part is the report of a sociological study among various age groups regarding their ties

¹ Hanna van Solinge & Marlene de Vries (eds), *De Joden in Nederland anno 2000: Demografisch profiel en binding aan het Jodendom* [The Jews in The Netherlands in the year 2000: Demographic profile and links to Jewry] (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2001).

with Jewry. I will, in a manner of speaking, ask Etty Hillesum the highly specific and concrete questions that were also submitted to the Jewish respondents to this research and try to reconstruct her answers on the basis of the diaries she left behind. These diaries were not meant to be published and may be regarded as a sincere self-testimony. During Etty Hillesum's lifetime, what was her own Jewish context, her connection with Jewry?

How Jewish was Etty Hillesum?

In the demographic part of the aforementioned report, the study into the matter of being or feeling Jewish of the interviewed persons is divided into a number of highly concrete question complexes, including: First, the practical execution of the Jewish religion and the honouring of Jewish celebrations and traditions. Second, knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish education. Third, being raised in the family and the possible Jewish origin of the first name of the interviewee and of his or her children. Based on the main part of her diaries, it is my opinion that Etty Hillesum would emerge from these research questions as a more or less assimilated Dutch-Jewish woman who called herself Etty, not Esther, and who only seldom felt Jewish and expressed her appreciation for her Jewish identity or origin. In her diaries, one does not find any reference to Jewish religion, celebrations, or customs. She visited the public gymnasium in Deventer (although she did follow Hebrew classes) and showed little appreciation for her parents who, as becomes clear from the historical study by Els Lagrou,² may also be regarded themselves as assimilated in terms of religion and way of life.

Apart from the three above-mentioned question complexes, a following, fourth part of the research focused on the extent to which anti-Semitism and the impact of the Second World War contributed to the feeling of being Jewish. To this cluster of questions, Etty Hillesum would without doubt have answered in an affirmative manner, as in her diaries it is exactly the anti-Jewish measures by the German occupiers that confronted her with her own Jewish identity.³ As these measures grew in number, intensity, and effect, Etty Hillesum's awareness of her own Jewish identity grew as well. In terms

² Els Lagrou, *Etty Hillesum 1914-1943: Een historisch-biografische studie* [Etty Hillesum 1914-1943: A Historical-Biographical Study], (PhD thesis Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1985-1986).

³ Cf. Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Writing as Resistance: Four Women Confronting the Holocaust* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), especially pp. 57 and 70, on "Jewish identity forced by the Nazis."

of this growth and development, it is my opinion that one does not have to draw a clear, genre-like division line between diaries and letters, but rather a chronological line around the months of June-July 1942 (as from notebook IX), the period that saw the start of the massive deportations and when Etty Hillesum was forced to participate far more frequently and intensively in the Jewish community through her involvement with the Jewish Council.⁴ At the same time, she became more distant from her friend and guardian Julius Spier.

A fifth important question cluster of the aforementioned research regarding the development of Etty Hillesum's Jewish identity and self-understanding is the following: the social environment of the interviewee; in this case, Etty Hillesum's circle of friends and acquaintances, and her contacts with fellow students and fellow Jews, in short: her networks. Through her therapist and future friend Julius Spier, Etty Hillesum's circle of friends partially consisted of German Jews who had fled to the Netherlands in the 1930s. Spier himself left Germany at the end of 1939. He did not belong to the political refugees as such (socialists, anti-fascists), who had left Germany in the years 1933-1934 for *Exil*, but he emigrated to the Netherlands because of the increasing anti-Jewish measures.

This group of German refugees, who are officially not considered part of the artistic and/or political movement of *Exil*, seems to have been somewhat forgotten, both in the Dutch historiography and in the Dutch collective memory. It was not until 1990 that a bundle of autobiographical testimonies by these German-Jewish refugees appeared under the conspicuous title *Anne Frank war nicht allein*.⁵ This group of so-called German Jews was, overall, not without financial means, lived (as far as they were living in Amsterdam, like Etty Hillesum was) in the fairly prosperous neighbourhood of Amsterdam-Zuid, and had, just like Etty Hillesum, no knowledge or ties whatsoever with the Jewish proletariat, who comprised 90 per cent of the Jewish population of Amsterdam at that time, and who lived mainly in other parts of the city (Centrum, Oost). These German Jews in Amsterdam were strongly assimilated, and if they were religiously organized, it was within the Liberal Jewish Community.⁶ Moreover, they were in their sometimes slightly cultural-elitist behaviour very German,

4 The functioning of this Council and its two chairmen Asscher and Cohen forms one of the most controversial subjects of Dutch history of the Second World War, cf. Piet Schrijvers, *Rome, Athene, Jeruzalem: Leven en werk van Prof. Dr. David Cohen* [Rom, Athens, Jerusalem: Life and Work of Prof. Dr. David Cohen] (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2000), especially pp. 202-236.

5 Volker Jakob & Annet van der Voort (eds), *Anne Frank war nicht allein: Lebensgeschichte deutscher Juden in den Niederlanden* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988).

6 See the characterisation of this group with Jakob & Van der Voort (34-35 and *passim* in the interviews included).

sometimes more so than non-Jewish Germans. At the start of the Second World War, some of these German Jews, in particular Julius Spier himself, formed part of the social and cultural environment of Etty Hillesum. Her diary starts in March 1941 with a letter written in German to Herr S. and is interspersed with German quotations. More than once, Etty Hillesum took sides in her diaries against the undifferentiated anti-German feelings of her fellow Dutch citizens.⁷

Innere Emigration

As previously stated, this group of refugees were and felt, first and foremost, German and, as far as they were living under the terror of their Nazi countrymen, some of them could only endure, mentally and morally, and avoid an identity problem through what, in German literature history, is called *Innere Emigration*,⁸ i.e. a mental distancing from the current social-political circumstances and abuses by concentrating on *Innerlichkeit*. It is well-known that focusing on one's inner self is a *Leitmotiv* in Etty Hillesum's diaries. For her, her spiritual inner world is just as real as the outside world, if not more so. She expresses the inner experience more than once through metaphors originating from the landscape, *die Seelenlandschaft*.

Because of these similarities alone, her attitude to life, as worded in the diaries leading up to the summer of 1942, seems comparable with the concept of *Innere Emigration*,⁹ a notion that is fiercely discussed in German literature history. This concept has both a biographical content (an actual withdrawal from public life that is dominated and terrorized by the Nazi regime) and a literary-thematic one, applicable to authors who avoid discussing contemporary, "dangerous," social-political subjects or, at least, avoid mentioning them. The literary-thematic concept of *Innere Emigration* has been defined by H. Wiesner in the authoritative German overview as "Zeichen der Flucht in die Subjektivität, in Sentimentalität

7 Cf. the mention of her discussion in this respect with Aleida Schot in *E.T.*, 112-113 [= *Het Werk*, 119, 29 September 1941].

8 Cf. the overview by Herbert Wiesner, "'Innere Emigration', die innerdeutsche Literatur im Widerstand 1933-1945", in: Hermann Kunisch (ed.), *Handbuch der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*, Volume II (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1970), 383-408.

9 See also R. Grimm, "Innere Emigration als Lebensform", in: Reinhold Grimm & Jost Hermand (eds), *Exil und Innere Emigration* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1972), 31-73; Charles W. Hoffmann, "Opposition und Innere Emigration: Zwei Aspekte des 'Andern Deutschlands'", in: Peter Uwe Hohendahl & Egon Schwarz (eds), *Exil und Innere Emigration II* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1973), 119-140.

und apolitischen Weltinnenraum.”¹⁰ In this negative value judgement, one finds a term borrowed from the German poet Rilke, *Weltinnenraum*, which is also a keyword in Etty Hillesum’s diaries. Ralf Schnell¹¹ refers, under the heading *Innerlichkeit und Irrationalismus*, to a cultural-historical study, which appeared in Munich in 1940, by a then well-known Austrian art historian, Ulrich Christoffel. His monograph with the programmatic and apologetic title *Deutsche Innerlichkeit* shows, through content and form, a strong affinity with Etty Hillesum’s contemplations in her diaries.¹²

Firstly, *Innerlichkeit* finds expression in the instinctive approach: “die Tendenz der menschlichen Seele, die Dinge der Umwelt sich durch Beseelung anzugleichen, sie durch Sinnverleihung in das Wertreich einzubeziehen.” A special form of personal incorporation (*Einverleibung*) finds place. This is the attempt to establish the concept of *Innerlichkeit* in a popular, post-war work called *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* (Krämer), quoted by Ralf Schnell,¹³ which was based on Christoffel’s contemplations. With Christoffel, defender and propagandist of *Innerlichkeit*, who represented the true Germany for him and for other emigrants living in their own country, one also finds other aspects of this inner life that are also found with Etty Hillesum. An example is his mention of “die Stille der Natur,” which means the intense contemplation and personal experience of nature. The reader of Etty Hillesum’s diaries may think of her contemplation of, if not identification with, the jasmine standing in her window sill.¹⁴ In his contribution to a special issue of *De Gids* about Etty Hillesum, Sem Dresden aptly remarked: “In her diary it is about [artificial works], distributed here and there, descriptions of a tree, of plants and flowers, in short, of phenomena which are factually independent of the author, but with which she nevertheless lives in a sort of fusion.”¹⁵ Another characteristic of this *Deutsche Innerlichkeit* is the way in which God is found in one’s own inner world. In this respect,¹⁶ Christoffel referred more than once to Meister Eckhardt (“Nur so weit lebt man, als man aus innerlichem Beweignis wirkt”), whose influence on Etty Hillesum is clearly attested.¹⁷

10 Wiesner, “Innere Emigration”, 398.

11 Ralf Schnell, *Literarische Innere Emigration 1933-1945* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1976), 48; cf. Grimm, “Innere Emigration”, 70-73.

12 Ulrich Christoffel, *Deutsche Innerlichkeit* (München: Piper Verlag, 1940).

13 Schnell, *Literarische Innere Emigration*, 48.

14 E.T., 459. *Het Werk*, 485; Thursday, 2 July 1942.

15 Sem Dresden, “Etty Hillesum: Identiteit als opgave en oplossing” [Etty Hillesum: Identity as Task and Solution], *De Gids* 153 (1990), 3: 159-169.

16 Christoffel, *Deutsche Innerlichkeit*, 109.

17 Ria van den Brandt, “Ik heb hem gebracht de schriften van Meister Eckehardt: Het Eckhardtbeeld van Etty Hillesum”, *De Gids* 153 (1990) 3: 182-192.

Just like certain parts of Etty Hillesum's diaries, Christoffel's monograph is built on eclectic reference to authorities from literature and philosophy, and with Etty Hillesum also, under the influence of Spier, from psychology (with Christoffel as art historian also from the visual arts). These authoritative statements or imaginations are cited, paraphrased, and combined in suggestive montages. In this manner, and thanks to the historically undifferentiated evocation, a sort of spiritual, timeless synchronism with the quoted witnesses is evoked. In this way, Etty Hillesum emigrates, by her identification with what she reads, to an inner world until, in the summer of 1942, the reality of the persecution of the Jews and her own summons for deportation can no longer be ignored.

Other Aspects of Etty Hillesum's Jewish Identity

According to my reconstruction, based on notebooks from the period March 1941 until June 1942, Etty Hillesum would have responded rather negatively to a demographic and sociological inquiry regarding her ties with Jewry. Now, the concept of "Jewish identity" has been thoroughly discussed.¹⁸ For instance, it also reared its head in the opening speech of a congress, organized in Amsterdam in November 2001, on the history of the Jews in the Netherlands in the period 1880-1940.¹⁹ In his opening lecture, David Sorkin (University of Wisconsin) pointed at, on the one hand, the impossibility of an "essentialist" definition, a definition of being Jewish, which would be applicable to all times, places, and persons. On the other hand, he did not wish to reject a more variable concept, determined by historical circumstances, of Jewish identity, hence the ambivalent title of his lecture: "The New 'Mosaik'". Encouraged by this congress, I would like to discuss four aspects of Etty Hillesum's life and writings that could make a claim on the qualification: "Jewish."

In his lecture, David Solkin mentioned that in a bundle of biographical sketches of famous Jewish scholars from the twentieth century, described as "meta-rabbis," the well-known literature historian and publicist George

18 The catalogue owned by the Leiden University Library alone offers countless titles in various languages under this headword.

19 The congress *Dutch Jewry in a Cultural Maelstrom, 1880-1940* (18-20 November 2001) was organized by the Committee for the History and Culture of the Jews in the Netherlands under the auspices of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences in Het Trippenhuis in Amsterdam. Cf. Judith Frishman & Hetty Berg (eds), *Dutch Jewry in a Cultural Maelstrom 1880-1940* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008).

Steiner called “the obsession with language” a common, typically Jewish characteristic. Among other things, Steiner referred to the language-analytical philosopher Wittgenstein and the linguist Chomsky. Without doubt, George Steiner, with his evident obsession for language and text, would also have regarded himself a twentieth-century meta-rabbi.²⁰ Steiner’s “Our Homeland: The Text” is comparable with Etty Hillesum’s statement “literature is my second fatherland.”²¹ Can her attitude towards the texts that she reads, quotes, and paraphrases almost every day, also be considered an example of this, in Steiner’s opinion, typically Jewish obsession with language, with writings that are sometimes experienced as normative, legislative, yes, even sacrosanct? As Dresden remarked in his essay mentioned before,²² it does not primarily concern what and how much she has read something, which, by the way, she often fleetingly does; rather, it is the manner of reading and the objective of writings: “slowly but certainly she sucks Rilke up and not only him to whom she always returns, but in fact she does it all the time. She wants to make the book part of herself, reclaim wisdom from it that offer her information to feed her own life” (Dresden). I do not rule out that, apart from this, what could perhaps be called a Jewish (but not exclusively Jewish) way of reading in which one claims the text as one’s own situation of life, also the choice of reading material, ultimately, had a Jewish bias for her. When, in June 1943, she finally left for Camp Westerbork and was forced, because of the limited possibility to take any luggage with her, to make a selection from the books she owned, one of the things she chose was a volume with quotations from the Talmud.²³ When she left for Auschwitz, as the account goes, she surrounded herself with “her little bibles” and by doing so followed the example, as she mentioned herself, of Dostoyevsky.²⁴

20 Cf. his essay “Our Homeland: The Text” from 1985, incorporated in the bundled collection *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) which, most appropriately, opens with a depiction of a French painting titled “Le philosophe lisant.”

21 Cf. Denise de Costa, *Anne Frank en Etty Hillesum: Spiritualiteit, schrijverschap, seksualiteit* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1996). E.T.: *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum: Inscribing spirituality and sexuality*, translated by Mischa F.C. Hoyinck & Robert E. Chesal (New Brunswick, NJ, & London: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

22 Dresden, “Etty”, 163-164.

23 E.T., 599. *Het Werk*, 639; Monday morning, 7 June 1943. Henriëtte Boas’ criticism is very far-fetched and self-contradictory. See her article “Etty Hillesum in niet-joodse en Joodse ogen” [Etty Hillesum in Non-Jewish and Jewish Eyes], in: Lea Dasberg & Jonathan N. Cohen (eds), *NevehYa’akov: Jubilee Volume Presented to Dr. Jaap Meijer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1982), 255-279.

24 E.T., 495. *Het Werk*, 524; Wednesday evening, 15 July 1942.

A second aspect of the Jewish identity, as stated by George Steiner and David Sorkin, is the “obsession with history/historical consciousness.” At first glance, this aspect appears to be foreign to Etty Hillesum, considering a *communis opinio* that Dresden worded as follows: “It can hardly be argued that her interest in Jewry was, in the early years, extremely small, and that she hardly had any knowledge of Jewish religion, of Jewish history, of Zionist and political developments, of Jewish thinking and suffering.”²⁵ Two nuanced remarks seem applicable here. First, her diaries demonstrate that she underwent a development in her historical consciousness and, linked to this, in her Jewish consciousness during the eighteen months (between March 1941 and October 1942) she discusses in the diaries. Being a scholar of Slavism, Etty Hillesum often speaks about Russia, for instance, about the novels of Dostoyevsky. Very much in line with her egocentric, internalized, and ‘literalized’ attitude to life, initially the virulent anti-Semitism in Tsarist Russia is not mentioned although, remarkably, her own mother is of Russian descent and herself a victim of a Russian pogrom. Another characteristic of her initial introspection, in my opinion, is the fact that she does not utter one word about the anti-Semitism of the Russian author Dostoyevsky. Her silence in this respect is even more striking when it is compared with certain autobiographical sketches by Jewish scholars of Slavism²⁶ who, not once but twice, call Dostoyevsky’s anti-Semitism a factor in becoming aware of their Jewish identity in their professional study of Russian literature. Not until the course of the ninth notebook (June-July 1942) does Etty Hillesum come to mention the vast differences between Russians and Westerners regarding their attitude towards the suffering. Only then does she refer, in July 1942, to pogroms and Tsarist terror.²⁷

A second development in Etty Hillesum’s historical consciousness can be found, in my opinion, in her own concept of her duties as a writer. In her diary notes of 13 March 1941 one comes, for the first time, across the much-quoted statement: “I want to be a chronicler of the things that are happening

25 Dresden, “Etty”, 167. This *communis opinio* was particularly influenced by the essay by Dr. Henriëtte Boas mentioned in note 22. A great number of reviews and letters to the editor written by Boas about Etty Hillesum have been collected in the archive of Uitgeverij Balans in Amsterdam (the publisher of Etty Hillesum’s writings), and in the collections of the media library of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.

26 See J. Rabin-Dorsky & Sh. Fisher-Fishkin (eds), *People of the Book: Thirty Scholars Reflect on Their Jewish Identity* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

27 E.T., 453. *Het Werk*, 478; Sunday morning, 28 June 1942.

now.²⁸ Etty Hillesum becomes aware that apart from all her subjective suffering she also possesses an objective curiosity. This fascination has not yet focused itself on her, but it concerns “everything that touches this world and its people and my own motives.”²⁹ Furthermore, at this point in time, Etty Hillesum does not yet consider herself mature enough to be a chronicler: “Everything has to be described by me at a later stage.” Little over a year later, on 10 July 1942, when she too was threatened with deportation and the consequences of the *Massenschicksal*, she notes in her diary that she should tell “about destiny and about a piece of history the like of which didn’t use to be here before. Not in this totalitarian and wholly organized and encompassing form for the whole of Europe. Some people must survive³⁰ to become chroniclers of these times. I’d like to be a little chronicler in the future.”³¹ On 24 August 1943, she writes one of her last long letters about Camp Westerbork and, following a sleepless Tuesday night shortly before her deportation, she observes:

that no words and images are adequate to describe nights like these. But still I must try to convey something of it to you. One always has the feeling here of being the ears and eyes of a piece of Jewish history, but there is also the need sometimes to be a still, small voice. We must keep one another in touch with everything that happens in the various outposts of this world, each one contributing his own little piece of stone of the great mosaic³² that will take shape once the war is over.³³

28 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: Ik wil de Kroniekschrijfster worden van veel dingen uit deze tijd. E.T., 484. *Het Werk*, 511, Friday morning, 10 July 1942: Ik wil graag zo een klein kroniekschrijftertje zijn later.

29 E.T., 86. *Het Werk*, 91; Wednesday afternoon, 13 August 1941: alles wat deze wereld en z’n mensen en m’n eigen zieleroerselen betreft.

30 Does Hillesum’s formulation remind us here of the word of Isaiah (*she’aryashuv* [a remainder will return]), which was quoted more than once during those years? Cf. Schrijvers, *Rome, Athens, Jeruzalem*, 267.

31 E.T., 484. *Het Werk*, 511; Friday, 10 July 1942: En met deze slanke vulpen zou ik nu moeten zwaaien als was het een hamer en de woorden zouden even zovele mokerslagen moeten zijn, om te vertellen over een lot en over een stuk geschiedenis, zoals het er voor dien nog niet was. Niet in deze totalitaire en massaal georganiseerde en geheel Europa omspannende vorm. Er moeten toch een paar mensen overblijven om later de kroniekschrijvers te zijn van deze tijd. Ik wil graag zo een klein kroniekschrijftertje zijn later. –

32 Does Hillesum’s formulation contain a similar wordplay as the title of David Sorkin’s lecture “The New Mosa-ik”?

33 E.T., 644. *Het Werk*, 687; Tuesday, 24 August 1943: Dat woorden en beelden niet toereikend zijn voor nachten als deze, heb ik jullie al vaak genoeg verteld. Toch moet ik proberen iets voor jullie neer te schrijven, men voelt zich steeds oren en ogen van een stuk Joodse geschiedenis,

I had to think about these passages about Etty Hillesum's sense of duty as a chronicler when, on 15 April 1998, I attended in the auditorium of the University of Amsterdam, Connie Kristel's defence of her dissertation titled "Geschiedschrijving als opdracht: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser en Loe de Jong over de jodenvervolging" [Historiography as Task: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser and Loe de Jong on the Persecution of the Jews].³⁴ When an opponent remarked that in the historical work of the three aforementioned Jewish historians there is a primeval task at work for the people of Israel to preserve its own vicissitudes for posterity, the doctoral student replied that the title of the dissertation is conscientiously ambivalent and further refers to the Jewish duty and tradition to pass on its own history to future generations. I mention this incident to demonstrate that Etty Hillesum's 'chroniclership' (compare the biblical term and title 'Chronicles'), could have been Jewish inspired. She has tried to fulfil this task and duty as well as she could through her letters from Camp Westerbork. Immediately after the war (1950), her task was carried on by the Jewish author Abel Herzberg in his "Kroniek der Jodenvervolging 1940-1945" [Chronicle of the Persecution of the Jews 1940-1945].³⁵

In the introduction to a volume of stories by Israeli authors regarding the Holocaust (Shoah),³⁶ it is rightly observed that there is a vast tradition of Jewish writings on the suffering of its own people. Also, the literature on the Shoah, written in Israel after the Second World War, is clearly linked with this long line of writings about disaster (divine wrath, human lamentation, prophecies of doom, auto-da-fes, pogroms). Traditionally, Jewish history is based on four elements: the promise, the dialogue (between God and man), the trial, the exile (with the redemption enclosed in the promise). In my opinion, it is possible to find, also in Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters, traces of a similar Jewish, archetypical thinking and feeling. She is clearly moved when her father compares the bicycle-less period, when the German occupier had confiscated bicycles, with the passage through the desert and comforts himself with the words: "In the wilderness we

men heeft soms ook de behoefte een kleine stem te zijn. We moeten elkaar toch op de hoogte houden van wat er in de verschillende uithoeken van deze wereld gebeurt, ieder moet z'n steentje daartoe bijdragen, zodat na de oorlog het mozaïek over de hele wereld sluitend zal zijn. Cf. E.T., 584. *Het Werk*, 621; December 1942.

34 Conny Kristel, *Geschiedschrijving als opdracht: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser en Loe de Jong over de jodenvervolging* [Historiography as Task: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser and Loe de Jong on the Persecution of the Jews] (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1998).

35 Abel J. Herzberg, *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging 1940-1945* [Chronicle of the Persecution of the Jews 1940-1945] (Amsterdam: Querido, [1950] 1985).

36 Gila Ramras-Rauch & Joseph Michman [Melkman] (eds), *Facing the Holocaust: Selected Israeli Fiction* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

also had to do without bicycles, for forty long years.³⁷ Or when her father compares the barren, lonely landscape around Camp Westerbork with the “archetypical” desert of the early days: “Later we joked about our surroundings. Westerbork really is nothing but desert [...]. Jews in a desert, we know that sort of landscape from before.”³⁸ In July 1942, at the time of the first massive deportations, she rediscovers the “ancient” force of the Old Testament and remarks that the psalms enter the daily life.³⁹ For me, the most archetypical Jewish aspects are the countless dialogues that Etty Hillesum has in her diaries with God. After the publication of her complete collected writings in 1986, a Jewish critic (Dick Houwaart) remarked (with which I fully agree): “Every day, even every hour, Etty Hillesum speaks with God. She wrestles with him like Job did [...]. The dialogue with God is so purely Jewish, so ordinarily Jewish.”⁴⁰

Mixed Post-War, Jewish Reactions to Etty Hillesum

Unlike certain claims in the Dutch press at the time of publication of Etty Hillesum’s collected writings (1986),⁴¹ I do not believe that Etty Hillesum fully understood, nor could she fully predict, what the Nazis intended to do with the Jews. Fact is that she stated twice, both on dramatic dates (the end of June 1942, and at the start of the massive deportations), that it was about the Jewish downfall and destruction.⁴² She too was not entirely capable of comprehending the reality of the total, systematic, and industrial genocide.⁴³ Her diaries continue to breathe sparks of hope, also during her stay in Camp Westerbork. For example, during her final train journey to

37 E.T., 445. *Het Werk*, 469; Thursday afternoon, 25 June 1942: In de woestijn hebben we het indertijd ook veertig jaar zonder fietsen moeten doen.

38 E.T., 616. *Het Werk*, 656; Letter 46, To Johanna and Klaas Smelik and others, Westerbork, Saturday, 3 July 1943: Later lachten we samen wat over het toepasselijke landschap, het is soms net een woestijn [...]. ‘De Joden in de woestijn, we kennen dit landschap van vroeger.’

39 E.T., 473. *Het Werk*, 498-499; Sunday, 5 July 1942.

40 Dick Houwaart in: *Tijd en Taak*, December 1982. See also Arie Kuiper in: *De Tijd*, 7 November 1986. The influence of Martin Buber cannot be fully ruled out. Cf. E.T., 167. *Het Werk*, 176; Friday morning, 5 December 1941, where the reference “Ich und Du” at least enfeebles the critical observations by H. Boas in above-mentioned article (see note 22).

41 As opposed to Arie Kuiper, “Het fenomeen Etty Hillesum” [The Phenomenon EH], in: *De Tijd*, 7 November 1986.

42 E.T., 455-458. *Het Werk*, 479-483; Monday, 29 June – Wednesday, 1 July 1942.

43 Cf. the discussion on “Wat wist men van Auschwitz en Sobibor?” [What Did One Know of Auschwitz and Sobibor?] in: Anna Voolstra & Eefje Blankevoort (eds), *Oorlogsdagboeken over de jodenvervolgving* (Amsterdam/Antwerp: Contact, 2001), 103-115, 118-119.

Auschwitz, she brings along two Russian dictionaries that, as she says, she hopes to use as *Einzelfall*.⁴⁴ Moreover, she always talks about a labour camp, not about an extermination camp.⁴⁵ For this reason, I think, she was able to continue her talk with God till the end, as archetypical feelings of promise, dialogue, trial, exile, and even hope stay present, albeit sometimes with the greatest effort. From Abraham to Job, to the Chasidism of the Baäl Shem Tov, and the rabbis of Berdichev (according to the introduction to the aforementioned book of Israeli stories called *Facing the Holocaust*, and to which I might add: up to and including Etty Hillesum in 1943), Jewish victims felt that they could appeal to God to give them an explanation for their destiny and suffering and that they could even argue with Him. For instance, in her daily talk with God, Etty Hillesum wrote: “I am beginning to feel a little more peaceful, God, thanks to this conversation with You. I shall have many more conversations with You [...] and remain faithful to You.”⁴⁶ In the post-war stories about the Shoah mentioned earlier, the meaning of the biblical, archetypical elements has often been changed, turned around, or rejected. These stories give a much stronger impression that God has turned away His face and that the Shoah is the final abandonment in a world that is bereft of divine providence.⁴⁷ In the many different reactions to the question “Is there a God after Auschwitz?” there supposedly lies, among other things, an explanation of the fact that among Dutch-Jewish people who have lived through and survived the Second World War, and who are represented in the Dutch press by Henriëtte Boas, every Jewish inspiration in the writings of Etty Hillesum has been fiercely cast away. Some survivors will undoubtedly look upon Etty Hillesum as a worshipper of a non-existent or dead god, or of a God who has deserted His people. The fact that, for instance in France and Italy, the reactions to Etty Hillesum’s writings have been, on the whole, highly positive, whereas in the Netherlands they were very mixed (from outspoken and positively infatuated, to ambivalent and fiercely rejecting),⁴⁸ can undoubtedly also be explained by the simple fact

44 E.T., 480. *Het Werk*, 507; Tuesday afternoon, 7 July 1942.

45 E.T., 494. *Het Werk*, 523; Wednesday evening, 15 July 1942.

46 E.T., 489. *Het Werk*, 517; Sunday morning, 12 July 1942: Ik begin alweer wat rustiger te worden mijn God, door dit gesprek met jou. Ik zal in de naaste toekomst nog heel veel gesprekken met je houden[...] en ik zal je trouw blijven.

47 Cf. on behalf of the multitude of theological reactions to the “religious challenge posed by the Holocaust”: Dan Cohn-Sherbok (ed.), *Holocaust Theology: A Reader* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

48 As an example of the fierce Jewish rejection, I refer to a lecture given in November 1993 by Tamarah Benima with the title ‘Moord valt niet te accepteren: Etty Hillesum (als de gelukkige promiscuë jodin Maria)’ [Murder is Unacceptable: Etty Hillesum (as the Happy Promiscuous

that the Shoah resulted in many more victims in the Netherlands and that, in the country as a whole, no absolutely positive reactions to Hillesum's religious optimism could be expected.

Negative reaction and controversy have also been evoked with Etty Hillesum's involvement with the Jewish Council which, in the years 1942-1943, was forced to collaborate in the deportations. She had clearly anticipated and predicted these controversies, as she shows in her diary notes of 28 July 1942: "Nothing can ever atone for the fact, of course, that one section of the Jewish population is helping to transport the majority out of the country. History will pass judgement in due course."⁴⁹ The Dutch historiography regarding the Jewish Council and its two chairmen, A. Asscher and D. Cohen, shows a fluctuation that has returned to its starting point. In 1950, Abel Herzberg reached a definitive, positive judgement on the role of this council because of the social and material support that it had offered to the persecuted. His, in my eyes, balanced and unequivocal analyses were followed, in the 1960s and 1970s, by a condemnation of this council, and particularly its chairmen, as collaborators and criminals (Presser, De Jong). Looking back, one might conclude that both chairmen, Asscher and Cohen, served as perfect scapegoats in order to ease the guilty conscience of numerous Jewish and non-Jewish Dutch people. In a more recent phase of this historical research, to which I include my own book on David Cohen, the most severe allegations, i.e. collaboration, nepotism during the selection of deportees, and implementing restrictions for going underground, have been refuted or softened, so that it is now possible to speak of a partial, relative rehabilitation of the council and its chairmen regarding the criminalization by Presser and De Jong.⁵⁰

In the last two notebooks of Etty Hillesum's diaries one comes across several remarks about resistance, going underground, heroism, and accepting one's fate, remarks which, especially when these were quoted and glorified in a simplified manner and without comment (as from 1981 with the first publication of a selection from the diaries), must have been extremely painful and unacceptable in certain Jewish circles. Their reactions have

Jewess Maria]. The printed text (dated January 1994) is present in the collection Hillesum of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.

49 E.T., 511. *Het Werk*, 541; Tuesday, 28 July 1942: Het is natuurlijk nooit meer goed te maken, dat één gedeelte der Joden meehelpt om de overgrote rest weg te transporteren. De geschiedenis zal hier later haar oordeel nog over moeten vellen.

50 Cf. the contemplation on the functioning of the Jewish Council written by J. Houwink ten Cate, "Geen helden, geen zondebokken" [No Heroes, No Scapegoats], in: *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 137 (16 November 2001), 28-29, and my reaction "Complexe geschiedenis" [Complex History] in: *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 137 (23 November 2001), 36-39.

been worded by Dr. Henriëtte Boas in articles, reviews, and letters to the editor. The fact is that Etty Hillesum considered Jewish suffering in ghettos, during pogroms, and deportations to concentration camps, as a perpetual return of the inevitable disaster that had to be accepted and fitted into one's life. Such an acceptance of *Massenschicksal* was flatly opposed to the actual assertiveness of a generation of (Dutch) Zionists, to which Henriëtte Boas also belonged.⁵¹ They had been raised with the unconditional Zionism which had been unfolded by the Dutch Zionist Fritz Bernstein in 1926 in his standard work *Der Antisemitismus als Gruppenscheinung: Versuch einer Soziologie des Judenhasses*. Bernstein regarded anti-Semitism as an ineradicable enmity against a group of people, for which only Zionism, the foundation of a Jewish state, offered a solution. As an example, the going into hiding of a group of young Dutch Zionists in 1942 and their escape from occupied territory, was and still is glorified by Jewish historiographers as a sign of Jewish "resistance."⁵² In this manner, the term "resistance" (mostly used for actual and armed actions) was stretched out in the same diametrically opposed fashion as some Etty Hillesum's present-day glorifiers speak of her so-called spiritual and inner resistance.⁵³

What Etty Hillesum basically does is accuse her fellow-Jews, who have gone into hiding, of betrayal of the Jewish cause, as can be witnessed by her observation in the final notebook: "It's the same with those Jews who go into hiding. They may say they're doing it because they don't want to work for the G., but it's not nearly as heroic and revolutionary as that. All they're doing is using a high-sounding excuse to dodge a fate they ought to be sharing with the rest."⁵⁴ With this remark, Etty Hillesum will without doubt

51 Cf. Boas' reaction in "Etty Hillesum in niet-Joodse en Joodse ogen", 262: "Nog opmerkelijker, althans voor mij, is de afwezigheid van enige belangstelling voor het Zionisme." [Even more remarkable, for myself at least, is the absence of any interest in Zionism].

52 Cf. Schrijvers, *Rome, Athene, Jeruzalem*, 268 ff. on Jewish resistance.

53 For example, De Costa, *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum*, 23: "There is another way in which Hillesum fought the totalitarian regime that held so many in an iron grip. She liberated herself from it by focusing on another reality. Through meditation, or 'listening within,' as she called it, she was trying to establish an ethical base. She attempted to bring out the good in herself and others and to rid the world of evil. Inspired by Rilke's *Weltinnenraum* [inner universe], she tried to describe her inner reality." This positive appreciation of Etty Hillesum's *Innere Emigration* with a younger, post-war generation is comparable with the current re-evaluation of *Innere Emigration* in Germany; cf. Friedrich Denk, *Die Zensur der Nachgeborenen: Zur regimiekritischen Literatur im Dritten Reich* (Weilheim i.Ob.: Denk-Verlag, 1995), and his overview article "Regimiekritische Literatur im Dritten Reich: Eine Problemskizze", in: Frank-Lothar Kroll (ed.), *Wort und Dichtung als Zufluchtsstätte in schwererer Zeit* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1996), 11-32.

54 E.T., 523. *Het Werk*, 553-554, Sunday evening, 20 September 1942: het is precies hetzelfde als met de Joden die onderduiken: ze zeggen soms, dat ze dat doen omdat ze niet voor de D. willen

have offended some Jewish survivors. Her notion that it indicates a rare form of self-overestimation to consider yourself as too valuable to endure, as a group, “to share the fate of the masses,”⁵⁵ is diametrically opposed to the selection criteria for postponement of deportation (or for emigration to Palestine) based on merits on behalf of the community. This meritocratic selection determined the policy of the Jewish Council, whose management was inspired and dominated by its chairman Cohen, a Zionist from the very beginning.

Discussions about the contents and influence of terms such as “resistance” and “assertiveness” may be comparable with the similarly unsolvable controversy about the notion of “dignity” in compounds like “human” and/or “Jewish dignity.” At the end of her ninth notebook (2 July 1942), Etty Hillesum formulated the following statement: “Suffering is not below human dignity,” which she, in order to avoid misunderstandings, explains as follows: “I mean: it is possible to suffer with dignity and without.”⁵⁶ Etty Hillesum’s acceptance of suffering can be called un-Zionist. On 25 December 1940, the chairman of the Dutch League of Zionists gave an opening speech during (at least for the time being) the last General Assembly of this League. He stated that Zionism is not primarily a question of self-preservation, but a question of dignity.⁵⁷ In the post-war Zionist body of thought, this official priority notion was interpreted and propagated as assertiveness in an actual, physical sense and, in that conventional sense, equated with actions of heroism. This became the norm in the young Jewish state of Israel and it was, retroactively, applied to the history of the Jews during the Second World War. According to the recent demographic study called *De Joden in Nederland anno 2000* (mentioned above), the majority of the Dutch Jews feels a certain solidarity with Israel (despite everything and not without criticism). In the year 2000 it seems difficult, if not impossible, to defend Israel’s vigorous policy of self-preservation and, at the same time, Etty Hillesum’s *amor fati* in those days.

This conventional interpretation of the notions “dignity” and “heroism” was brought up for discussion by Sem Dresden in his Abel Herzberg

werken. Maar zo heroïsch en revolutionair ligt de zaak niet bij hun. Eigenlijk onttrekken ze zich, met een schoonklinkend excuus aan een lot, dat ze gemeenschappelijk met anderen hadden moeten dragen.

55 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 515; Saturday morning, 11 July 1942: “Massenschicksal.”

56 E.T., 459. *Het Werk*, 484; Thursday morning, 2 July 1942: Lijden is niet beneden de menselijke waardigheid. Ik bedoel: men kan wenswaardig lijden en onmenswaardig.

57 Cf. Schrijvers, *Rome, Athene, Jeruzalem*, 264-265.

memorial lecture 1995, which carries the title “Jewish Dignity.”⁵⁸ Dresden describes heroic dignity as a way towards humanity, in which the hero, as an individual fighting his struggle, is searching for and finding an opportunity to refrain from submitting himself to his fate, but to make his fate personal, building it with his own hands, so to speak. Only in this manner is the hero able to realize his individuality and his personal dignity. Dresden opposes the interpretation that “Jewish submission,” something that Etty Hillesum was also accused of during 1942-43 and in post-war reactions from readers, would imply shameful. Firstly, Dresden offers a historical explanation for this reaction which, in my eyes, is also applicable to Etty Hillesum. He maintains that, based on the age-long experience with pogroms, the Jews have far too little considered the possibility of systematic extermination, which was a completely different matter. In his lecture, Dresden said the following (which, in my opinion, applies particularly to the management of the Jewish Council, although the speaker has been cautious enough not to mention this Council explicitly):

[Because of this age-long experience] people were especially focussed on means of defence which had proven their usefulness in the past, for instance a compromise or postponement and negotiations which, after a short while, would only have appeared, in new circumstances, tragically-ridiculous if they had not resulted in such catastrophic effects. In short, what we see here was a perhaps understandable but assuredly disastrous ghetto-mentality.

I think that Dresden, without saying it out loud, offers here a defence of the Jewish Council, whose foundation chairman Cohen, in his post-war memoirs,⁵⁹ had compared with the *Judenräte*, “which since ancient times (I think even since the Middle Ages) had existed in Poland as a compulsory representation of the Jews against the civil government.”

Dresden opines that, apart from the undoubtedly noble and appreciated heroism of the individual who resists injustice and evil embodied by the enemy, there must also be room for “hesitance and thoughtfulness, because there in particular the essential Jewish and human dignity becomes visible.” For him, dignity (including Jewish dignity) is also incorporated in feelings of

58 The text of this lecture (slightly altered) was published in: Sem Dresden, *Het vreemde vermaak dat lezen heet* [The Strange Amusement Which Is Called Reading] (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1997), 225-244.

59 Cf. Schrijvers, *Rome, Athene, Jeruzalem*, 265.

sympathy, in other words an active involvement in the care for others. This latter position can be interpreted as a defence of Etty Hillesum's decision: "Fleeing or hiding is pointless, there is no escape, so let's just do what we can for others."⁶⁰

The value of Etty Hillesum's writings will presumably not be found for every one of us in all the answers that she has given and formulated. In any case, her writings seem to contribute to a complete realization of the complexity of the problems and of the heterogenic solutions and reactions that are possible during and after times of personal and collective disaster.

When it comes to the Jewish contexts of Etty Hillesum, I hope to have shown that Etty Hillesum was more Jewish than some Jewish-Dutch people have wanted to recognize, more than some non-Jewish Dutch people have been able to recognize, and maybe even more Jewish than she herself realized.

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60 E.T., 483. *Het Werk*, 510; Thursday morning, 9 July 1942: Laten we meegaan en proberen voor anderen nog te zijn, wat we kunnen.



16 From Separation to *Communitas*

Etty Hillesum, A Jewish Perspective

Thalia Gur-Klein

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Abstract

Etty Hillesum's diaries delineate a spiritual and ontological passage through the Jewish people's lethal time. This article conceives of Hillesum's behaviour, spirituality, conscience and moral choices as a movement from separation to *communitas*. Employment in the infamous Jewish Council to evade deportation implied separation from her community. Volunteering to serve inmates at Camp Westerbork as a social worker, on the other hand, provided a path to re-connect with her people and Judaism. The first part of this article focuses on Hillesum's self-reflection on her work for the Jewish Council. There is discussion of Talmudic passages dealing with morality and ethics during a time of persecution. The second part invokes the mystical Judaism of Kabbala and Hasidism, conjecturing that by choosing for *communitas* with the camp inmates, Etty Hillesum rose to the role of female *zaddik*, a righteous and godly inspired person, regarded holy in Judaism.

Keywords: Jewish Council, Jewish ethics, Talmudic ethics, Judaism, Kabbala, Hasidism, *communitas*, *zaddik*, Etty Hillesum

Etty Hillesum's diary delineates a spiritual and ontological passage through her people's lethal time. In the following, I will structure her diary as a movement from separation to *communitas*.¹ Employment in the Jewish Council delineates separation from her community; *communitas* represents a path to re-connect to her people and Judaism.

¹ Latin, commonly referring either to an unstructured community in which people are equal, or to the very spirit of community, *Wikipedia* [retrieved 19 April 2016].

I Separation

Etty Hillesum follows her brother Jaap's advice to enter the *Joodse Raad* [Jewish Council], which she experiences as a separation for life or death, imagining clinging to a driftwood in the sea while pushing others away to drown.² Her image refers to the socio-political cleft between the Jewish Council and the Jewish community. *Joodse Raad* board members and employees enjoyed privileges, protection, and exemptions for their families and themselves deprived from other Jews.³ Both concurrently during and in the wake of the Second World War, resentment and judgement of the *Joodse Raad* have been poignant.⁴ Whether as chief board members or as minor employees, it was felt that they had collectively, actively or passively, facilitated the deportations of their communities, galvanizing and withholding ominous information of their impending ordeal and discouraging or preventing Jews from hiding or resisting.⁵ Historically documented, however, Jewish Councils around Europe vacillated in their attitudes, ranging from receding, covert rescue actions to active resistance with peril to their lives; resistance to the Nazi regime meant arbitrary deportation or execution.⁶ Throughout Europe, moreover, the Nazi occupiers had imposed forced recruiting of approximately fifteen million civilians for slave workers for the Third Reich, with little or no resistance.⁷ There was little reason for either the Jewish community or the *Joodse Raad* to assume that the "Working Camps for Jews" might be different.

2 E.T., 511 [revised], 740-741, n. 494.

3 E.T., 488, 511, 571, 573, 598, 608, 610.

4 E.T., 743, n. 511. As regards the chairmen of the Amsterdam *Joodse Raad*, A. Asscher and Prof. D. Cohen, the Jewish Honorary Council of 17 December 1947 condemned mere receding to the order to form *Joodse Raad*, as well as having chaired it, undertaking, publishing and circulating Nazi decrees, co-operating in anti-Jewish measures, and aiding the selection procedure for deportation. Asscher and Cohen were eventually excluded from employment at any Jewish departments, institutions or organizations, for the rest of their lives, and finally were refused burial in a Jewish cemetery.

5 Johannes Houwink Ten Cate, "Genadebrood van de nazi's", *Historische Nieuwsblad* (June 2011), see <http://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/nl/artikel/27796/genadebrood-van-de-nazi-s.html> [retrieved 19 April 2016].

6 Yad Vashem, "Judenrat", see www.yadvashem.org; Aharon Weiss, "The Relations Between the Judenrat and the Jewish Police", in: Yisrael Gutman and Cynthia J. Haft (eds), *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe 1933-1945: Proceedings of the Third Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, April 1977* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 201-217.

7 Panikos Panayi, "Exploitation, Criminality, Resistance: The Everyday Life of Foreign Workers and Prisoners of War in the German Town of Osnabrück, 1939-49", *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005) 3, 483-502.

Either way, the *Joodse Raad* aroused resentment, precipitating incriminating separation from community and fellow Jews, which Hillesum's own words testify:

Nothing can ever justify, of course, the fact that part of the Jewish population is helping to transport its great majority out of the country. History will pass judgement in due course.⁸

In the following, I will discuss Etty Hillesum's employment in the *Joodse Raad* from the perspectives of biblical and Judaic ethics.

Biblical legal texts and narratives and in their wake, post-biblical and rabbinical literature have generated decrees, commandments and laws. Debating the obligations, rights and relations between individual and community, these continuous productions have generated a corpus of exegetic interpretations and ethical guidelines and codes of law and behaviour that loomed large on Jewish perspectives on its history, culture and society. The Shoah has accordingly aroused ethical debates retrospectively drawing on biblical texts and post-biblical exegesis, and Talmudic and rabbinical literature.

The recurrent queries resurface dilemmas between self-preservation and altruistic love; and between sharing a communal destiny and separation for survival of the individual in hazardous times. When and to what extent may a person go to preserve one's life? When is one obligated to save another person's life notwithstanding an impending danger for oneself? In the following, I will appropriate biblical and Jewish ethics to the Jewish Council and Etty Hillesum's experience, choices and responsibility.

Biblical Esther

From the perspectives of its exilic experience, Jewish history relates a chronology of a minority victimized by ruthless systems, a perception that rami-fies to the Nazi regime. The biblical story of Esther offers a parable of such a lethal system. It delineates an empire where a discriminatory symbolic order establishes hierarchical humankind, demarcated by absolute divides between superiority and inferiority. One person only claims inalienable rights to live and be fed, protected, and housed: the king. Concomitantly, safety of others' ontological existence is not derived from lawful rights but

⁸ E.T., 511 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 541; Tuesday, 28 July 1942: Het is natuurlijk nooit meer goed te maken, dat één gedeelte der Joden meehelpt om de overgrote rest weg te transporteren. De geschiedenis zal hier later haar oordeel nog over moeten vellen.

from privileges hinging on proximity to the absolutist power. In a society devoid of human rights, individuals are not protected by law but by privileges granted by the power that be. Participation in such a lethal regime means survival but entails collaboration – refusal precipitates a demise.

As the biblical Esther climbs up in the privileged ladder and shelters in the safety of the king's palace, her people are deprived of basic rights to life, protection and self-defence, and concur under impending genocide. Residing within the palace walls, Esther too survives by proximity to power not by recourse to human rights. Nonetheless, membership in the lethal regime safeguards her life, but severs her *communitas* with her family and community. Esther's dilemma is reflected in Mordechai's words: "Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews" (Esther 4:13). Eventually, Esther appropriates her power position in the absolutist regime to help her condemned group to resist their enemies, notwithstanding the peril to her own life (Esther, Chapters 4 and 8).

The Book of Esther and the Shoah

Simulation between the Persian empire and the Nazi Reich and their respective rulers resurfaces in their claims to absolute privileges and abrogation of human rights that should be the inalienable recourse to all. Elevating one man and one group above the law and depriving others of its protection unlawfully establishes a symbolic order based on a hierarchical humankind, demarcating absolute boundaries between superior and inferior power positions. Such a discriminatory system precipitates deprivation and annihilation of one group by another turning aberration to a norm. Joining such a lethal system is morally condemning, while cooperating may save one's life.

The Shoah presents dilemmas that converge with the biblical story. The biblical Esther relates to the *Joodse Raad* employees. Entering the *Joodse Raad* had been by conjecture, morally dubious since that organization was playing into the hands of the Nazis whose abrogation of human rights led to mass destruction. Not by law but by proximity to unlawful power position, the *Joodse Raad* promised its staff safety, protection and privileges given to the few and deprived from many – reasons proper for moral judgement. Eventually, employment in the *Joodse Raad* precipitated separation from the community – while leaving the *Joodse Raad* meant exposure. Was Etty Hillesum's choice morally justifiable? She herself straddled on dilemmas.⁹

9 E.T., 488, 571, 573, 598, 608, 610.

Exegetic Ethics

Where does exegetic ethics stand on such dilemmas? Biblical theology promulgates that life is a given recourse inherent to human rights. Based on neither political nor societal grounds but on religious concepts, human rights are conceived as inalienable recourse, not because life inherently belongs to oneself or ever to another human being, but because it does not. Divinely given and created after the divine image, it belongs to God (Genesis 1:27; 9:5). By extrapolation, taking another person's life or one's own falls under capital prohibitions; concomitantly, saving another person's life or one's own is equally mandatory. When such imperatives clash, a choice between one's life and that of another becomes a moral dilemma.

Times of extremes like the Shoah impose dilemmas between self-preservation and the moral imperative to save another life, between sparing oneself and empathetic *communitas* with family, fellow human-beings and community. Biblical ethics inheres to such dilemmas in the command to love one's fellow human-being [*ra'acha*] evenly as one loves oneself, recognizing both self-love and empathetic altruism (Leviticus 19:17).

From the biblical story of Esther to Talmudic texts and throughout post-Shoah rabbinical literature, the dilemma between self-love and love of another has been debated. What are the boundaries of self-preservation in lethal times; how far and when is preserving one's life morally justifiable, humanly feasible and reasonable in the face of danger? When is saving another person's life imperative at the costs of one's own safety? When is it morally legitimate to forsake another, opting separation from one's fellow human beings, persecuted group and family in order to save one's own life? In the following, I will expound on ethical Talmudic passages and rabbinical literature that extrapolate on the dilemma between self-love and love of another.

In his article "Your Life or Life of Your Fellow Human Being," Amiram Domovitz discusses Talmudic codifiers who debate this dilemma, juxtaposing two biblical imperatives: "that thy brother [*ra'acha*] may live with thee" and "neither shalt thou stand (idle) against the blood of thy neighbour" (Leviticus 19:16; 25:36 respectively).¹⁰ Codifiers debate the first verse presenting the following Talmudic hypothesis:

R. Johanan interprets, "that thy brother may live with thee" (Leviticus 25:36). If two are travelling on a journey [far from civilization], and one

¹⁰ Amiram Domovitz, "חייך או חיי חברך, חיי מי קודמים?", in: בשדה חמד no. 3; see http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/sde_chem/kodmim1.htm [retrieved 19 April 2016].

has a pitcher of water, if both drink, they will [both] die, but if one only drinks, he can reach civilization. The Son of Patura taught: It is better that both should drink and die, rather than that one should behold his companion's death. Until R. Akiva came and taught: "that thy brother may live with thee," thy life takes precedence (Talmud Bavli, *Baba Metzia* 62a).

Son of Patura promulgates altruistic love. When people concur under communal danger, they ought to share a lethal lot rather than choose to live while forsaking the other behind to die. Rabbi Akiva decrees that one may choose to live notwithstanding leaving the other to perish, validating the imperative of self-preservation. Leaving the dilemma unresolved, the Talmud validates both solutions as optional.

When should one's life take precedence over other people's lives? Where can one draw the boundaries of altruist love when concurring under impending danger? Should a person choose to die together with another notwithstanding an opportunity to save oneself howbeit forsaking the other to perish?

Domovitz brings to the fore various codifiers who debate this hypothesis in juxtaposition with Leviticus 19:16 "neither shalt thou stand (idle) against the blood of thy neighbour [*ra'acha*]." This verse postulates that on seeing another person, friend or stranger, concurring under impending danger, one is obligated to come to his/her aid. However, rescue should be undertaken in proportion to feasible chances of success and risk to one's own life, and/or to both parties. Nonetheless, undertaking extended risks depends on *hasidut* [grace], namely the rescuer's good will.

The Talmud accordingly postulates that "your blood is not redder than that of another" (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 72:1); by extrapolation, neither is the blood of another better than that of oneself. One may neither sacrifice another to save oneself, nor offer oneself to save another on account of uneven power positions, talents or any sliding scale hierarchy.¹¹

As a *Leitmotif*, the Talmudic debates rebound egalitarian principle inherent in creating all human beings after the "divine image" (Genesis 1:27). Ethically promulgating resistance to hierarchy in humankind, one may guard one's own life when coming to rescue another, evaluating another's life neither higher nor lower than one's own, even under lethal circumstances; by conjecture, altruistic love and self-sacrifice both clash

¹¹ Cf. Melech Westreich, "One Life for Another in the Holocaust: A Singularity for Jewish Law?", in: *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 1.2 (2000). See <http://eial.tau.ac.il/index.php/til/article/viewFile/189/165> [retrieved 19 April 2016].

and counterbalance self-preservation, depending on circumstances. And beyond that, one may choose *hasidut*, acting by grace and good will disregarding self-interest.

Witnessing to these debate dilemmas, Shoah survivors were embraced by the community, legitimizing rabbi Akiva's opinion; however, they commonly remained guilt ridden for living on while their dear ones and community had perished behind, as Son of Petura had conjectured. As a corollary, contemporary codifiers have continued debating Talmudic ethics in relations to the Shoah, on which I will extrapolate.¹²

The *Joodse Raad* can simulate the role of potential rescuers and their Jewish community, *ra'acha*, one's fellow human being who together concur under a communal danger. What should have become a shared lot, however, turned a lethal division. *Joodse Raad* board members and staff were assigned by the occupying Nazi regime to organize, regulate and supervise the deportation of the Jewish masses, while willing to accept exemptions for themselves and their relations.

In accordance with Jewish ethics, we can pose the following queries. Like Esther and like the friends in the Talmud case, both *Joodse Raad* and community concurred under a communal danger which had ethically entitled the community to expect a rescue from the *Joodse Raad* – a moral obligation to offer all means possible. However, within the limitations of one's power. The Nazi regime imposed a system of discriminatory humankind; the *Joodse Raad* played their part in sustaining it. Were the members of the *Joodse Raad* in position to offer a rescue – debatable. Such an action involved a risk to the rescuer, conjecturing a diminishing moral obligation. A chance to rescue lives, however, made attempts morally imperative by *hasidut* ('grace'), notwithstanding lethal risks.

Some *Joodse Raad* members had utilized their position to come to the rescue with peril to their lives, evoking the model of the biblical Esther. Others appropriated their position to spare their relations and themselves from deportation lists. So doing, they reinforced a subcategory to the concurrently hierarchical and discriminatory system wrought against Jews, which elevated them above their fellow Jews. They may have been oblivious of the death camps. But as time passed and people vanished, truth must have been conjectured, which made rescuing imperative. The same knowledge, however, also morally permitted them to save their own lives and those of their dear ones. Either way, wielding a hierarchical selection for

12 Cf. Michael L. Morgan, "Jewish Ethics after the Holocaust", *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 12 (1984), 256-277.

life and death is unequivocally unethical. Even if they could not save their community, they could have enhanced their chances to survive; instead, they hindered and sabotaged it by becoming a complying organization in the Nazi killing machine. Could they acted differently?

To elucidate these postulations, I highlight two models of Jewish Councils in the Netherlands for showcases. Serving as a centralizing authority, the *Joodse Raad* in Amsterdam had ushered the instructions throughout the Netherlands to obey the Nazis' calls to register, comply with eviction and avoid going into hiding or escaping; suppressing "rumours" of extermination, they had arranged selective exemptions and privileges for themselves, their relations and staff.¹³

Two hours farther, east of Amsterdam, the *Joodse Raad* of Enschede disobeyed both the Nazi regime and the *Joodse Raad* headquarters of Amsterdam. Based on logic and courage, their decision was undertaken after the first Jewish "workers" had been drafted to "resettlement in the East" and their families were notified of their "natural deaths" all on the same date three weeks later. Consequently, the *Joodse Raad* of Enschede sent letters of warning to their community and furthermore organized hiding addresses for them with the cooperation of the churches and locals. Their action made the percentage of Jewish survivors from Enschede the highest in the Netherlands. Like the biblical Esther, the *Joodse Raad* of Enschede joined a lethal regime but utilized their inside position to save their community notwithstanding risking their own lives.¹⁴

The case shows the Amsterdam *Joodse Raad* committee to have abused the trust of the Jewish masses. Withholding information, discouraging and preventing hiding or escape, they helped to organize their deportation in orderly fashion eventually assisting their impending annihilation. By conjuncture, it is tantamount to weighing their own blood superior to others'.

Retrospectively, the case of the *Joodse Raad* in Enschede corroborates Hannah Arendt's harsh conclusion that had all European Jewish Councils committees refused as one to be selected by the Nazis, let alone cooperating, the annihilation of the Jews might have been more brutal but chaos and a shortfall of organisation might have allowed a greater proportion of survivors.¹⁵

13 Cf. the contribution by Piet Schrijvers in this volume, "Etty Hillesum in Jewish contexts", 315-331, especially pp. 327-329. Original Dutch version: "Etty Hillesum in joodse contexten", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in facetten* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 1] (Budel: Damon, 2003), 37-55, especially pp. 50-53.

14 See www.secondworldwar.nl/enschede/jodenvervolging.php [retrieved 19 April 2016].

15 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (London: Penguin, [1963] 2006), 115-121, 123-125, 284.

Arendt's postulations can be reified by a testimony from the other side of the divide. Adolf Eichmann, the chief manager of the deportation of the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, said the following about Rudolf Kastner, the head of the Hungarian Jewish Council: "He gave me the Jews without having to release one shot, without demonstrations, without having to draft one aid from the Hungarian Police." Rudolf Israel Kastner (1906-1957) eventually had to face his judges and the traumatized survivors of his community in Israel, who positioned him as an infamous paragon of the *Judenrat's* role in the annihilation of their communities. While the judges postulated that it was for history not the court to judge Kastner, they decreed that due to his policy, Jews obediently mounted the trains to their death believing they were being transported to work camps, while he had known the hard truth of their destination; that in order to save a selected group of prominent persons, family, friends, relations and, self-evidently, himself, he had delivered the Jewish masses to their lethal predicament in a smooth operation; that concealing the truth from the Jews, he had curbed alternatives of resistance or escape. The judges concluded that Kastner had sold his soul to Satan.¹⁶

Evoking Talmudic ethics, the above cases redound the dilemmas between sharing a lethal lot with one's fellow human being or saving one's life. While the obligation to offer rescue is mandatory, the boundaries are demarcated by the extent of risk to the rescuer's life, in which case the principle applied is "your life takes precedence" unless one chooses to act by *hasidut*, voluntarily and altruistically despite danger to one's life.

However, assisting in the demise of another howbeit so as to save one's own life is yet another moral planet. The role of the *Joodse Raad* in their communities' destruction evokes further ethical debates. In the following, I will extrapolate on Westreich's reading of a Mishnaic debate:

If a group of (Jewish) people is approached by Gentiles and told: "Hand over one of you so that we can kill him, otherwise we will kill all of you," they should all let themselves be killed rather than hand over a single Jewish life. However, if they specified a particular person, they (the Jews) should hand him over and not give up their lives, as in the case of "Sheva ben Bichri" (2 Samuel 20). (Mishnah Tosefta, *Terumot* 7:23)

Extrapolating on Westreich's article,¹⁷ the Mishnaic passage both relates and differs from the former ethical texts. Like the former, the present

16 Cf. Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (New London, NH: Milah Press, 1961), 72-73, 145, 244-247, 276.

17 Cf. Westreich, "One Life for Another in the Holocaust."

showcase delineates a lethal danger communally shared; the present case specifically relates a lethal threat precipitated by human hand and coming from an outside group. However, facing a confluent lethal danger, it is in one instance ethically acceptable to hand over a group member to save lives, while unacceptable in another.

Eventually, the types of endangered persons dictate different modes of ethical course of actions. A permission to hand a group member over juxtaposes a “specific person to be handed over” with Sheva ben Bichri, a sought culprit. Indicating “a specific person” conjectures a crime and lawful delivery to judgement. By extrapolation, delivering such a person infers a lawful accusation and mandates a legitimate extradition. Conversely, the second demand concerns handing over unspecifically “one of you”, which conjectures a lethal intention to exert arbitrary execution on the part of the outside group, and mutually unlawful delivery of an innocent member by the in-group. Consequently, the community is commanded to refuse to succumb to the demand to hand over even one soul. Deferring the paramount principle of self-preservation, the community is obligated to refuse and be ready to be killed on the principle of providing a sanctuary even for one innocent life.

The first Talmudic case teaches that refusing or refraining from rescue while saving one’s own life, when it is within one’s power to do so, is understandable howbeit amounting to culpability by desertion. The present passage is imbued by socio-political hostility from an outside group towards an innocent member of in-group. It makes it imperative to protect a community member in disregard to a lethal threat to oneself or the entire group; accordingly handing over an innocent person culminates in culpability by collaborating in murder.

The above debates conjecture a demarcation between separating oneself from an endangered group so as to survive and participating in a lethal regime that threatens one’s group, howbeit for fear for one’s life. In Talmudic perspectives, the fact that the *Joodse Raad* members had separated themselves from the community to save themselves and their relations is humanly understandable, though morally degrading. That they had bought their lives by assisting and delivering their communities to their murderers refutes acceptable *mores*.

The showcase puts the arbitrary demand of the hostile outside group on a par with racist persecution. Nazi lethal policy showed mutual indifference to personal specification and legitimate indictment; turning Jewish masses into quotas for incarceration, deportation and destruction exposes the Nazi unlawful policy. Exposing the unlawfulness of racist victimisation, the Nazi

mass murder contradicts lawful extradition and judgement. The delivered Jews relate to an innocent member unlawfully demanded to be handed over by members of the inside group to the outside group to be murdered. In accordance with the Talmudic ethics, inside members should be ready to be killed on the rightful recourse to sanctuary of their endangered fellow Jews.

According to the first Talmudic case, Etty Hillesum was in her right to join the *Joodse Raad* to save herself or her family. Though not morally brave, she was within her rights choosing to evade risking her life for the sake of saving others, even if it were in her power, as shown in her managing to release her father from the deportation list a number of times. She was in the wrong playing a part in a regime determined to annihilate her community. While, the precise scale and character of the catastrophe were left for conjecture, the lethal intention of the Nazi regime was ominously evident, its unlawfulness clear to her:

Tonight I shall be helping to dress all babies and to calm mothers – and that is all I can hope to do. I could almost curse myself for that. For we all know that we are yielding up our sick and defenceless brothers and sisters to hunger, heat, cold, exposure, and destruction, and yet we dress them and escort them to the bare cattle cars – and if they can't walk, we carry them on stretchers. What is going on, what mysteries are these, [...] an overcrowded freight car with men, women, children, and babies all thrown together, bags and baggage, a bucket in the middle their only convenience? Presumably they will be sent on to another transit camp, and then on again from there. We are being hunted to death all through Europe [...].¹⁸

Until 5 July 1943, the day that she became an ordinary camp internee, Etty Hillesum was part of the *Joodse Raad* that had turned its back to the imperative of offering a sanctuary to their community, sending fellow Jews to

18 E.T., 645 & 650. *Het Werk*, 688 & 692-693; Tuesday, 24 August 1943: Maar ik ga vannacht alle babies aankleden en moeders kalmerend toespreken en dat noem ik dan "helpen", ik zou me hier bijna om kunnen vervloeken, we weten toch, dat we onze zieken en weerlozen gaan prijsgeven aan honger, aan hitte en kou en onbeschuttheid en verdelging en we kleden ze zelf aan en geleiden ze naar de kale beestenwagens, als ze niet kunnen lopen, dan maar op brancards. Wat gebeurt er hier toch allemaal, wat zijn dat voor raadselachtigheden...die overvolle goederenwagen, waar mannen, vrouwen, kinderen, zuigelingen ingeperst worden samen met de bagage, met als enige meubilair een ton in het midden? Men zal waarschijnlijk weer in doorgangskampen komen, van waaruit men weer verder geladen zal worden. Wij worden doodgejaagd, dwars door Europa heen [...].

impending death, discouraging and preventing them from options of escape or hiding, while accepting protection for themselves and their families.

Grace and truth have met together; justice and peace have kissed each other (Psalm 85:11).

Counter to strict appropriation, Jewish ethics endorses going beyond the letter of the law, *Lifnim miShurat haDin* (Talmud Bavli, *Baba Metzia* 30b).¹⁹ The term epitomizes a recommendation to consider and the human factor; to intertwine judgement with compassion, reassessing harsh truth in the light of circumstantial evidences. *Lifnim miShurat haDin* elucidates that the Shoah requires looking beyond the strict law, considering that forcing people to face inhumane choices is unlawful, while it has been employed by lethal regimes as power policy to break their subjects' humanity. A lawful society neither arbitrarily incarcerates nor builds work and death camps for people. A legitimate society safeguards people's recourse to safety and life, their own and their relations', and so doing, protects them from having to face inhumane dilemmas as experienced by people during the Shoah.

II Reversing Separation to *Communitas* – Holist Experiences of Love

Various forms of love are elucidated in classical forms of unions: *philè*, humanistic love leading to a union between human beings; *eros*, erotic love leading to an emotional and sexual union and *agape*, spiritual love precipitating a mystical union between the divine and a human being. To this we add *communitas*, societal union by identification with one's community, and bonding with its members, communal lot, spirit, heritage, memory and history.

19 Eugene Korn, "Legal Floors and Moral Ceilings: A Jewish Understanding Of Law and Ethics", *The Edah Journal* 2 (2002), 2. See http://www.edah.org/backend/coldfusion/search/document.cfm?title=Legal%20Floors%20and%20Moral%20Ceilings%3A%20A%20Jewish%20Understanding%20Of%20Law%20and%20Ethics&hyperlink=Korn1.html&type=JournalArticle&category=Ethics%20and%20Chesed&author=Dr.&firstname=Eugene&lastname=Korn&pubsource=The%20Edah%20Journal%202%3A2&authorid=182&pdfattachment=korn2_2.pdf [retrieved 20 April 2016]. I am grateful to prof. dr. Admiel Kosman from the Potsdam University Germany for referring me to the term in relation to the Jewish Council, to the related articles and to the location of Talmudic passages quoted above. I am also indebted in this regard to Rabbi Ute Steyer from the Jewish Theological Seminary USA.

In the Hebrew Bible, forms of love resurface in correlation. Biblical texts employ confluent terms for multifaceted relations of love. Cleaving [*davak*] and love [*ahav*] convey equivalent terms, alternately appropriating erotic union, altruistic devotion and mystical love between God and People (Genesis 2:24; Ruth 1.14; Deuteronomy 11:22 respectively). Enunciated by identical linguistic terms, Hebrew texts conjecture correlations between various forms of love, rather than mutual exclusivity that may precipitate disharmony. Erotic love without devotion to God's Covenant turns a man into rapist and abuser (Genesis 34; 2 Samuel 13); devotion to God without adhering His socio-humanist laws impairs love of humanity, precipitating infanticide at the hand of a father for a vow to God (Judges 11). By conjecture, biblical texts interrelate socio-relational empathy and human love with mystical devotion to God and love of social justice promulgated in His Covenant.

In the following, I will relate Etty Hillesum's re-bonding with her Jewish heritage and community to her voluntary transfer to Camp Westerbork as a *Joodse Raad* social worker. I contend that choosing *communitas* with the Jewish community, its lot and heritage intercrosses with Hillesum's holistic experiences of love, being multiple and mutually complementary to mystical love to God.

Eventually, it takes Etty Hillesum a mere fortnight to be voluntarily transferred from the Amsterdam *Joodse Raad* to Camp Westerbork as a social worker, howbeit within the *Joodse Raad* system authorised to supervise it.²⁰ In the camp, she will support, aid and console family and inmates alike, tying her lot with theirs to the point of deportation to Auschwitz.²¹ Undertaking hard work and dire conditions at Camp Westerbork, her transition reverses separation reaching towards *communitas* with her community. Refusing to put her life first as Rabbi Akiva postulates, she will share her community's lethal lot, while upfront recognizing it as "mass murder."²² By extrapolation, Hillesum follows Son of Patura's interpretation, "that thy brother may live (and die) with thee" (see above). Concurrently attaining societal and empathetic *communitas* with her people and inmates, Hillesum interchanges first person singular "I" for plural "we": "And even if we stay alive, we shall carry the wounds with us throughout our lives."²³

20 E.T., 740-741, n. 494; 744, n. 516: "As of 30 July 1942 Etty, upon her own request, worked at the recently established 'Westerbork' department of the Jewish Council in Camp Westerbork."

21 E.T., 612.

22 E.T., 602.

23 E.T., 456. *Het Werk*, 480; Monday morning, 29 June 1942, 10.00: En als wij blijven leven, dan zijn dat even zo vele wonden, die wij ons hele leven met ons zullen moeten dragen.

Subverting separation, Ety Hillesum's wilful transfer to Camp Westerbork precipitates affable relations with her family, inmates and the Jewish people. Her social *communitas* ramifies to a holistic experience of love on multifaceted strata. Running parallel to her bonds of love with friends, lovers and family, her social *communitas* ensues in empathy with the camp's inmates widening to humanistic love of humankind and culminating in mystical love of God. Societal sharing rebounds Hillesum to her community's comprehensive relations with God, reverberating with communal and personal piety and transcendental presence in humans and in the world.

Employing the genre of diary, Hillesum coalesces personalized experiences with theosophical conceptions, which I will relate to Jewish mysticism. In the biblical spirit, her theosophical conceptions reverberate with love as multiple and interfacing experiences of correlative validity. Rather than mutual exclusivity and conflicting imperatives, she embraces various forms of love as holistic experiences, inclusive, multifaceted and complementary. Such inclusive conceptions elucidate transposition from erotic and familial love to societal empathy for her fellow inmates, illuminated by mystical love to God:

Truly, my life is one long hearkening [*hineinhorchen*] unto myself and unto others, unto God. And if I say that I hearken, it is really God who hearkens inside me. The most essential and the deepest in me hearkening unto the most essential and deepest in the other. God to God.²⁴

The phrase "hearkening [*hineinhorchen*] unto myself and unto others" alludes to permutation of experiences of union – interpersonal, social and mystical.

On the social and relational levels, hearkening to "others" conjectures interpersonal commutates with one's community and fellow human beings. Mutually listening to "myself" and "others" opens a listener's consciousness to societal recognition of another and others, intertwining empathetic, affable and societal listening to mutually turning into a interpersonal experience for both oneself and others.

Hearkening to "others" also refers the mystical other – God. In third person, listening to the divine turns into an outward movement beyond

²⁴ E.T., 519. *Het Werk*, 549; Thursday morning, 17 September 1942: Eigenlijk is mijn leven één voortdurend "hineinhorchen", in mijzelf, in anderen, in God. En als ik zeg: ik "horch hinein", dan is het eigenlijk God in mij, die "hineinhorcht". Het wezenlijkste en diepste in mij dat luistert naar het wezenlijkste en diepste in de ander. God tot God.

oneself. As a corollary, “God hearkening inside” conjectures immanent presence within, being listened to as one’s essence. In second person “You”, God resounds a spiritual partner of inner dialogue with one’s conscience (see below).

Hillesum’s text culminates in “God to God”, a phrase enigmatic and multifaceted. On the interpersonal level, “God to God” conjectures relations between one human being and another, being connected by the divine image they share; being both recipients of the divine, they re-connect through the divine image and likeness after which they have been created (significantly as plural nouns in the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 1:27). Correlating to “hearkening to God inside,” “God to God” infers that mutually conceiving the divine in oneself and each other illuminates the best in each other.

On the theosophical stratum, “God to God” alludes to mystical relations between humanity and the divine. The phrase invokes relations of *imitatio dei*, human aspirations to find spiritual and moral correlations with divine ideals. It correlates Kabbalistic mysticism epitomized as *hishtavut* equation, postulating ascending the human spirit to the mystical and moral level of its divine provenance and creator.²⁵ “God to God” concomitantly conjectures a mystical union between a devotee and God evoking the twelfth-century ecstatic mysticism of Abraham Abolaffia. Epitomized as *devakut* [cleaving], it is a holistic experience of attachment of body and soul unto God – ontological, emotional and yet spiritual, boundless and unmediated; a relationship leading to an ecstatic experience of mystical love and mutual attachment between a devotee and God. Merging *philè*, *eros* and *agape* as models of love, Abolaffia adapts the image of union between the primordial bodies becoming one flesh, being both human and erotic, as a symbol for cleaving unto God in unio-mystical love (Genesis 2:24). Originated in one body and destined to rebound their original unity, the primordial human union is put on a par with a mystical union between the creating divine and created human designed to reunite. Concomitantly, unio-mystical love of God, *devakut*, turns humans into God’s counterparts. These mystical concepts were appropriated by medieval Kabbalah and eighteenth-century Hasidism, influencing Judaism in their wake.²⁶

This mystical heritage that extrapolates on central biblical conceptions: the divine image inhering in human beings and God indwelling among

25 Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988), 14, 67, 127.

26 Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah*, 14, 42, 55, 66-67, 70, 75-77, 81, 83, 85; idem, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988).

His people (Genesis 1:27; Exodus 25:8). These concepts overshadow God as *deus ex machina* who invincibly saves and arbitrarily rules His people. The Kabbalah accordingly conjures that the strength and weakness of divine presence in the world depend on humans choosing “the path of righteousness” (Proverbs 2:20). God’s presence in the world thus rises and falls by interpersonal grace, charity and compassion; and human actions either empower or weaken the divine presence in the world.²⁷

In congruity with these concepts, Hillesum’s “God to God” reverses the patronymic God-human relations, representing the divine as the ward of humans instead of the other way around: “And if we just care enough, God is in safe hands with us despite everything.”²⁸

Accordingly, Etty Hillesum conceives the Shoah atrocities as neither arbitrary nor ordained by divine predestination. She resounds the Kabbalah, promulgating that God is not held accountable for mankind’s default; mankind is responsible for the divine presence in humanity and the world by doing good by each other:

You (God) cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn’t seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.²⁹

As atrocities are not precipitated by invincibly almighty powers outside the human realm, Hillesum neither complies nor professes ethical or religious acceptance of the Shoah as atonement or redemptive expiation by suffering for the sins of the Jewish people or mankind. Humanly inflicted suffering

27 Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1976 [Hebrew]), 301.

28 E.T., 657. *Het Werk*, 701; Thursday, 2 September 1943: En als wij er maar zorg voor dragen, dat ondanks alles, toch God bij ons in veilige handen is.

29 E.T., 488-489. *Het Werk*, 516-517; Sunday morning, 12 July 1942: [...] dat jij ons niet kunt helpen, maar dat wij jou moeten helpen en door dat laatste helpen wij onszelf. En dit is het enige, wat we in deze tijd kunnen redden en ook het enige, waar het op aankomt: een stukje van jou in onszelf, God. En misschien kunnen we ook er aan meewerken jou op te graven in de geteisterde harten van anderen. Ja, mijn God, aan de omstandigheden schijn jij niet al te veel te kunnen doen, ze horen nu eenmaal ook bij dit leven. Ik roep je er ook niet voor ter verantwoording, jij mag daar later ons voor ter verantwoording roepen.

is not only immoral, it is senseless.³⁰ What she wields to is the realization of an impending catastrophe: "And my acceptance is not indifference or helplessness. I feel deep moral indignation at a regime that treats human beings in such a way."³¹

Consequently, while destruction is within human power, so are redemption and restoration. Refusing to blame atrocities on God, Ety Hillesum lays both accountability and salvation in human actions and conscience, inhering in the divine in humans. As people are created to reach for the divinely illuminated humanity in them, in the other and in the world around, Hillesum believes in the transforming power of goodness, love and compassion to combat the destruction, persecution and wars. Reverberating with such Kabbalistic conceptions accounts for Hillesum's apocalyptic hope for the future: "And remember that every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more inhospitable."³² Laying responsibility for both wrong doing and amendment in the world onto human hand, Hillesum reflects Jewish ethics that converges mysticism with humanism. She conceives amendment to come to humanity through God's presence in them, being their charge. While this makes her a mystic, Hillesum believes in precipitating reformation to global conditions by human actions and change of conscience, which makes her a humanist. Her solutions converge with Jewish mysticism that promulgates messianic redemption by humanity's amending deeds of social righteousness, grace and compassion. Intertwining humanism and mysticism implies that life is neither controlled nor predestined by divine hand, while the divine in humankind shifts moral accountability to the world unto humans.

Such conceptions conjecture divine presence relating to humanity as superior Godhead as well as one's best inner self. A high divine image precipitates woe, wonder and worship, while a closely related deity decreases the distance between believer and God. Circumventing incarnation or divinizing humans, Judaism diminishes the distance between God and humanity through mystical depictions of indwelling of divine presence and divine image endowed unto humans.

30 E.T., 384, 386, 456. *Het Werk*, 402, 405, 480; Friday, 29 May 1942, Sunday morning, 30 May 1942, 7.30, Monday morning, 29 June 1942.

31 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 515; Monday morning, 11 July 1942: En mijn aanvaarden is geen resignatie of willoosheid. Er is nog altijd plaats voor de elementaire zedelijke verontwaardiging over een regiem, dat zó met mensen omspringt.

32 E.T., 529. *Het Werk*, 560; Wednesday, 23 September 1942: En laten we ervan doordrongen zijn, dat ieder atompje haat, dat wij aan deze wereld toevoegen, haar onherbergzamer maakt dan ze al is.

Adapting these conceptions, Hillesum interfaces the theosophical problem of distance by relating to God as a higher existence but such that turns into transcendental presence within humans and their surroundings. She refers to God as a spark of higher life, being an external presence to aspire to while conceiving a correlative presence in one's best self; such correlating presence embodies a piece of the divine assimilated within every person and yet everywhere, a divine indwelling to nurture in ourselves and in the world.

In adapting such theosophical ideas, Hillesum appropriates linguistic references to Judaic mysticism, recurrently evoked in phrases like: "piece of You, God, in ourselves and others; sparks of higher life; Your (God's) dwelling in myself and others":

'Life', which man originally receives as a gift, is something he must, at the highest level, most earnestly strive to attain. Between the 'life' we have been given and the 'life' we are to receive, the 'life' we lead now or fail to 'lead' shuttles to and fro. Had we but the aspiration not to allow that spark of higher life, which occasionally flares up within us, to grow dim again, then we should not forever destroy 'germinating life,' and should slowly rise higher and higher [...].³³

And talking to You, God [...] I feel a growing need to speak to You alone. I love people so terribly, because in every human being I love something of You. And I seek You everywhere in them and often do find something of You.³⁴

Intertextually invoking the concept of "divine (in)dwelling," Hillesum draws on mysticism that overarches the ambiguity between God as an unreachable mystery and a transcendental presence around and within humanity – mystically indwelling of the divine in ontological phenomena which collapses its distance.

33 E.T., 61-62. *Het Werk*, 65; Friday morning, 13 June 1941: 'Was dem Menschen zu allererst geschenkt wird, das "Leben", das muß er auf der höchsten Stufe am allerschwersten erringen: das "Leben". Zwischen dem "Leben", das wir empfangen haben, und dem "Leben", das wir empfangen sollen, pendelt unser "Leben", das wir jetzt führen oder auch nicht "führen". Wäre nur erst einmal in uns das Gewissen dafür erwacht, daß wir das bischen höheres Leben, das da und dort einmal in uns aufleuchtet, nicht wieder untergehen lassen, würden wir nicht immerfort "keimendes Leben vernichten", dann würden wir langsam höher und höher kommen.'

34 E.T., 514. *Het Werk*, 543-544; Tuesday morning, 15 September 1942: Praten met jou, mijn God [...] heb ik alleen nog maar behoefte met jou te spreken. Ik heb de mensen zo verschrikkelijk lief, omdat ik in ieder mens een stuk van jou liefheb, mijn God. En ik zoek jou overal in de mensen en ik vind vaak een stuk van jou.

The concepts of spark of higher life and indwelling of the divine revert us to biblical depictions of human divine relations ensued as analogous reflection, assimilation or hosting. Relations of analogous reflection are conceived in the creation of humans after the divine image. Assimilation of the divine resurfaces in the consummation of the divine fruit of knowledge of good and evil by humans. Hosting the presence of God is translated into God's indwelling amid His people in the tabernacle (Gen. 1:27;3:4; Ex. 25:8). The former conjectures ascending the human; the latter conjectures the divine descending downward toward humankind. Serving as mystical exegesis, the 12th century Book of Zohar interlines such concepts postulating that following the path of righteousness and good deeds transcends a person into a *mishkan*, tabernacle, a dwelling place for God and/or *Shekhina* to descend into.³⁵

Hillesum's reference to "a spark of higher life" within "us" rebounds exegetic Kabbalah that extrapolates on the image [*tselem*] of God as an analogous reflection of the divine being one's ideal self; depicted as a particle, divinely given yet owned by and residing within each person. Either a reflection or a divine talent assimilated, the divine image emulates a person's best self and moral conscience to flourish by acts of devotion and good deeds of love, or be quenched by choosing hatred and harm. Depicted as a precious possession, the divine image is each person's ideal model to adopt, guard and nurture. Envisioning the divine presence within humankind as a talent to accomplish goodness, the Kabbalah postulates interdependence between divine presence in the world and humanity.³⁶

Hillesum represents these mystical depictions as both comprehensive and personalised experiences. While inferring their correlations, she retains their demarcation: "living one's life with God and in God and having God dwell within."³⁷ Each preposition denotes a variation of human-divine relations: "living with God" infers analogous reflection in *imitatio dei*; "in God" conjures a mystical union; "having God dwell within" points to receiving the divine. Hillesum's verse thus alludes to correlative conceptions; the indwelling of the divine presence leads to reflective assimilation of the divine image in oneself and to cohabitation of counterparts in a unio-mystical love; as complementary movements, the divine descending toward the human and the human ascending toward the divine, inherent to mystical devices to resolve the distance between human and divine realms.

35 Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 145, 329.

36 *Ibid.*, 304, 306, 309-358, 376, 379.

37 E.T., 439. *Het Werk*, 463; Monday night, 22 June 1942: het is een leven met God en in God en God in mij.

In congruity with Jewish mysticism, Hillesum postulates that while God is the provenance of life, the divine presence homes in humanity, and it is for humans to undertake the responsibility for the divine presence in themselves and in the world. In depicting God as humanity's ward, Hillesum reflects the Kabbalistic concepts that divine powers come to fruition by human conscientious actions, while divine presence endows meaning to human life. Invoking such co-dependency, Hillesum correlates Jewish mysticism that interlines the recurrent concept of spark of light with the divine image inhering in the roots of each soul, correlative to divine presence in humankind and interconnecting all humans; unique to each person, it also embodies the indwelling of the *Shekhina* in the soul and in the world. The concept of sparks invokes the sixteenth-century Luarian Kabbalah that revolves around the idea of divine sparks of light scattered in the world; retrieved and reclaimed by acts of righteousness, empathetic love and compassion will amend the world's imperfection and by accumulating global goodness in the world will enhance the coming of the messianic times.³⁸

Extrapolating on these concepts, Hillesum highlights the correlative connotations between the divine image moulding humans; the (in)dwelling of God among people; the commandment to love God, and God's commandment to love one's fellow human being (Genesis 1:27; Deuteronomy 6:4; Exodus 25:8; Numbers 35:34; Leviticus 19:17 respectively). Inherent to the genre of diary, Hillesum conveys these theosophical ideas into free stream of thoughts. Translating mysticism into personal experiences by such devices, Hillesum correlates her conviction in divine indwelling within herself to discovering its presence in others, conceiving the divine image to be borne and leading to mystical love of God and to loving others by mutually recognizing the divine in the other and in herself.

Etty Hillesum as Zaddik, the Righteous Holy – Feminizing Holiness

Most, if not all religions conceive contact and mystical union with the divine as ascending to holiness. Conceptualizing Judaic holiness, a holy person reaches connection and unionist love with the divine through *devakut*, unbound cleaving unto God in union of mind and body.³⁹

38 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 108, 101, 111.

39 *Ibid.*, 141, 240; Idel, *Kabbalah*, 9-10, 13-14, 16, 36, 56, 59, 62, 64-68, 70-71, 73-75, 80, 85, 87-89, 92, 118, 162, 164, 219, 308, 313, 327.

Hillesum reaches contact with God ensued in her direct dialogue with God; as a corollary, she experiences divine presence mutually inhering in herself, in people and life surrounding her. Simulating a holy person, the provenance of her religiosity resides in a unio-mystical love, unbound *devakut* cleaving of mind and body unto the divine. Engulfing body and soul, her mystical love means breaking open her individual boundaries to let in the divine unreservedly, with the same passion she revealed in her human relations.

The Judaic holy person is a multifaceted figure. Coalescing multifaceted conceptions, the Jewish figure of holy person has ripened in the Hasidic figure of the *zaddik*; a righteous holy,⁴⁰ a charismatic leader who is religiously a mystic and morally and socially righteous.⁴¹ The concept intersects medieval Kabbalah and Hasidism, invoking the Hebrew Scriptures. Extrapolating on former mysticism, Hasidism has popularized, socialized and personalized the theosophical ideas of mystical union with God, adding a social dimension to the traditional role of God's holy man.⁴² While a *zaddik's* holiness can be achieved in mystical union with God and/or *Shekhina* in spiritual isolation and Torah studies, it is also attained by shouldering righteous tasks to do good by acts of charity, love and justice in society. Correlating mystical cleaving unto God, the *zaddik* reaches for unbound societal and emotive commitment to the community and for interpersonally righteous and compassionate actions to bring amendment [*tikkun*] to fruition in society and the world.⁴³ The *zaddik's* mystical charisma culminates in social and emotive *communitas* with community and fellow human beings. Embodying the community before God elucidates the *zaddik's* duty to share its lot.⁴⁴ Transcending the personal Self into an expanded identity, such societal *communitas* culminates in containing and sharing the collective suffering.

Conceiving unio-mystical union as multifaceted love, Hillesum transposes her religiosity into societal and emotive *communitas* with the camp's inmates and the Jewish people. She shows devoted commitment to the camp's inmates as a social worker, serving, supporting and sharing their fate, conceiving herself as one of them notwithstanding her outside connections

40 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 251.

41 *Ibid.*, 213-259. Cf. also Stephen Sharot, "Hasidism and the Routinization of Charisma", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19 (1980): 325-336.

42 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 247.

43 *Ibid.*, 256-257; Mendel Piekarz, "Hasidism as a Socio-Religious Movement on the Evidence of Devekut", in: Ada Rapoport-Albert (ed.), *Hasidism Reappraised* (London, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998), 225-248; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Walking as a Sacred Duty: Theological Transformation of Social Reality in Early Hasidism", *ibid.*, 180-207, especially p. 191.

44 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 246.

and employment in the *Joodse Raad* that might have spared her. Here, she meets imperatives of a *zaddik's* role – sharing and identifying with the communal lot: “I have already died a thousand deaths in a thousand concentration camps. I know it through and through”.⁴⁵

As a *zaddik's* activities are illuminated by mystical union with the divine, the righteous *zaddik* infuses all aspects of earthly life with holiness even the most mundane activities whether social, ritual or corporal – eating, walking or engaging in sexuality become divinely illuminated. In unio-mystical love to God, Hillesum simulates a holy person, experiencing every aspect of her surroundings to be divinely illuminated, even the barracks at night.⁴⁶

However, partaking social and communal responsibilities in the terrestrial, physical and mundane realm, the *zaddik's* involvement in societal and ontological strata interfaces a seemingly humiliation and downgrading. While such humiliation may be conceived as a fall or error in moral, spiritual or social life, it may lead to eventual rising, amendment and accomplishment of holiness. Hasidic mysticism epitomizes such a course as “descent for the purpose of ascent.”⁴⁷ Here Hasidism extrapolates on the idea that God’s presence is hidden while revealed in actions in the ontological creation; concomitantly, the mystical merits of a holy person are actuated in societal actions in the terrestrial realm. The *zaddik's* “descent for the purpose of ascent” means that the righteous ventures to live under imperfect circumstance and facing their concurring evil, transforms them into powers of grace and compassion. Living in an imperfect world embodies the *zaddik's* descent and fall, while the path to ascent correlates undertaking amending deeds of compassion and righteousness.⁴⁸ The socialized path of righteousness correlates acts of amendment that enhance the coming of messianic redemption to the world, which is the task of all people and particularly that of the righteous holy.⁴⁹

On the mystical stratum, Hillesum’s road-map from separation to *communitas* reflects a holy person’s descent culminating in ascent. Entering the Amsterdam *Joodse Raad* alludes to a fall or descent that culminates in a *zaddik's* ascent as she converts her *Joodse Raad* position into grace by social commitment. Her transition to Camp Westerbork ensues transposing

45 E.T., 456. *Het Werk*, 481; Monday morning, 29 June 1942: Ik ben al in duizend concentratiekampen duizend doden gestorven, ik weet het allemáál.

46 E.T., 529.

47 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 246-247, 256-7.

48 *Ibid.*, 256-257; Piekarz, “Hasidism as a Socio- Religious Movement on the Evidence of Devekut”; Wolfson, “Walking as a Sacred Duty”, 191.

49 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 108-110, 246, 272-273.

wrongdoing to the community to working good by the community. By interfacing mystical union with social *communitas*, Hillesum's descent mystically precipitates an ascent that simulates a task of amendment [*tikkun*] that a holy righteous undertakes, not circumventing but facing evil in the world, in society and in oneself turning it into grace.⁵⁰ While initially employment at the *Joodse Raad* arouses in Hillesum doubts, self-contempt and alienation precipitating separation from her community, the *Joodse Raad* eventually leads her to transform its incriminating structure into a framework of empathy, communality and empathetic support of others. In Hasidic perspectives, the *Joodse Raad* represents downgrading and fall, eventually turning a stepping stone to ascent to righteousness by commitment to her community in the camp. It allows Hillesum to meet her *tikkun*, the mystical task to bring the divine image in her to fruition – conceiving divine presence in human identity in herself and others in a godless existence exerted to annihilate them in the camp.

As a corollary, Hillesum's diary moves in congruity with the mystical *Leitmotif* of descent culminating in ascent. Feelings of alienation and separation from her surroundings accompany her employment in the *Joodse Raad*. At this period, she is entangled in self-doubts as regards femininity, intertwined with ambiguous emotions towards her family, especially her mother.⁵¹ Concomitantly, she demonstrates aversion towards maternity, whose fruit, imagined or real, she thinks ought to be mercilessly aborted in the bud.⁵² Conversely, in their hour of need in the camp, Ety Hillesum nurtures maternal affection and respect for her family, her elderly parents and vulnerable brother Mischa, emotions she amplifies into unbound empathy, love and social responsibility for her camp's inmates. Evoking the social dimension of the *zaddik*, Hillesum's path from alienation to empathetic love alludes to the motifs of descending culminating in ascent.⁵³

Hillesum personalizes her mystical love to God; as a corollary, being a woman, she feminizes the traditional role of the *zaddik*, commonly allotted unto men. However, Jewish mysticism is imbued with feminized imagery. The Kabbalah resurfaces *Shekhina* as feminized indwelling of the divine presence in humans and the world. Embodying a divine flow [*shefa*], *Shekhina* represents God's feminized presence in the terrestrial realm.⁵⁴ On the

50 *Ibid.*, 108.

51 E.T., 79. *Het Werk*, 83; Friday morning, 8 August 1941.

52 E.T., 164. *Het Werk*, 173; Wednesday morning, 3 December 1941.

53 Cf. Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1967).

54 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 301, 304, 259-307

personal and societal levels, mystical union with *Shekhina* simulates with discovering “the roots” of the divine image in oneself, designed to fulfil its moral task in society.⁵⁵ Attuned to humankind, *Shekhina*’s flowing presence wells and dwindles in accordance with good or evil deeds executed by humans.⁵⁶ *Shekhina* intertwines both personal and collective amendments, whose accomplishment leads to the messianic redemption. Eventually, *Shekhina* embodies the ingathered good actions in society and the world; achieving its cumulative summit of goodness by human actions will bring the apocalyptic redemption of messianic times.⁵⁷ On the background of such feminized symbolism, the Kabbalah of 16th century Tsefat induced a *tikkun* ceremony, unio-mystical prayers of amendment to invigorate the mystical marriage of *Shekhina* with God. In ecstatic songs and prayers, they wished to enhance the re-unification of the cosmic feminine and masculine elements of the divine. As a corollary, the Tsefat community aspired to reach a mystical union themselves with the divine. Their *tikkun* ceremony purported a mystical union with God through evocation of the *Shekhina*’s dual personification of Rachel and Leah, the eponymous mothers.⁵⁸ Such collective metaphors of transcended maternity and divinized femininity shed a light on Jewish women’s relations to holiness, intertwined with their terrestrial roles as erotic partners, mothers and responsible members of society, conceived in complementary incongruity rather than mutual exclusivity.

Hillesum touches collective metaphors of femininity as she transcends her unbound empathy with the inmates into collective metaphor of maternal care and them into her wards. Interlined with the prophet’s depiction of distressed Israel as a beloved vineyard and God as a loving gardener (Isaiah 27), Hillesum envisions the camp inmates as cherished plants under her care, whom she soothes with apocalyptic visions of a better world to come against the horror of the present. In these connotations, Hillesum also feminizes the role of apocalyptic prophet whose visions precipitate redemptive future:

I walk past people as if they were plants under cultivation, taking note how tall the crop of mankind has grown.⁵⁹

55 *Ibid.*, 259, 265, 267, 304.

56 *Ibid.*, 197-8, 204-6, 299-301.

57 *Ibid.*, 354-356.

58 *Ibid.*, 144-5.

59 E.T., 527. *Het Werk*, 558; Tuesday, 22 September 1942: Ik ga langs de mensen alsof het aanplantingen zijn en zie hoe hoog het gewas der menselijkheid er opgeschoten is.

[...] like some elementary force – the feeling that life is glorious and magnificent, and that one day we shall be building a whole new world. Against every new outrage and every fresh horror, we shall put up one more piece of love and goodness, drawing strength from within ourselves. We may suffer, but we must not succumb.⁶⁰

Etty Hillesum's maternal empathy is not an isolated experience; it reflects feminine *communitas* among the women inmates. Hillesum describes an anonymous woman who had just recently lost her baby. The woman transcends the commandment to "love the other as thyself" to a maternal *communitas* with the mothers in the camp. Lactating whilst still grieving, she is preparing herself to be deported to an undefined destination, conjecturing it could not be an improvement on the present camp where babies perish. Nonetheless, on the eve of her deportation, she gears herself to feed other mothers' babies under way as if they were her own:

She laughs defiantly: "They may drag us through the dirt, but we'll come through all right in the end!" She looks at the crying babies all around and says, "I'll have good work to do on the train, I still have lots of milk."⁶¹

The anonymous bereaved mother transcends her grief to an all-embracing compassion; she employs motherhood as empowerment and defiance, revolting against a regime that conspires to annihilate not merely their victims' lives, but their humanity and hope for continuity as well.

In feminizing *communitas* in time of collective catastrophe, Etty Hillesum's depiction of the bereaved mother evokes the image of Jeremiah's Rachel, whose name denotes a lactating ewe, female sheep, weeping for her massacred and exiled people, her children: "A voice was heard in Rama (on heights), lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were no more" (Jeremiah 31:14). Feminizing *communitas* connects the anonymous bereaved mother at Camp Westerbork to medieval mysticism that had transcended

60 E.T., 616. *Het Werk*, 657; Saturday, 3 July 1943: een elementaire kracht --: dit leven is iets prachtigs en iets groots, we moeten nog een hele nieuwe wereld opbouwen later – en tegen iedere wandaad te meer en gruwelijkheid te meer hebben wij een stukje liefde en goedheid te meer tegenover te stellen, dat we in onszelf veroveren moeten. We mogen wel lijden, maar we mogen er niet onder bezwijken.

61 E.T., 649. *Het Werk*, 691-692; Tuesday, 24 August 1943: Ze lacht uitdagend: 'Al vervuilen en versmeren we, wij komen er doorheen.' Ze kijkt naar de huilende babies om ons heen: 'Ik zal goed werk kunnen doen in de trein, ik heb nog moedermelk.'

the matriarchal Rachel to a collective metaphor and personification of the *Shekhina* mourning and suffering with her people.⁶²

Depictions of compassionate maternity illuminate Hillesum's image of "the thinking heart of the barracks."⁶³ This image intertextually resurfaces in the 12th century *Sefer HaBahir* conceiving *Shekhina* as God's heart centring the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.⁶⁴ Etty Hillesum's self-image as a thinking heart in midst of her languishing community is multifaceted; it evokes collective metaphors of maternal *Shekhina* suffering for the sake of her people; and the theosophical metaphor of *Shekhina*, the feminine presence of divine flow in the world and amidst humanity.⁶⁵ Conceiving women's experience in collective metaphors, Hillesum elevates *communitas* among the female inmates to the mystical level of transcendental femininity and maternity, illuminating Jewish perception of women's relations to holiness.

Conclusion

Bakhtin postulates that authors create within the framework of "Dialogic Imagination" while interfacing with their history, religion, society, and culture.⁶⁶ Etty Hillesum's diary reads as a composition that dialogizes Jewish heritage, culture, history and theology. A relative of a chief rabbi and brought up and taught by a father who had the rabbinical degree of *maggid* and was a pundit of Hebrew and Bible,⁶⁷ Hillesum relates to Judaic concepts by intertextual dialogism whose indigent contexts I ventured to decipher.

Theosophically, Hillesum evokes Judaism that has been praying to a hidden faced God [*hester panim*], while holding to divine presence even under lethal threat to their existence. Corroborating dialogical imagination between Jewish thinkers, Greenberg interrelates to Hillesum's conceptions:

62 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 144-145.

63 E.T., 515. *Het Werk*, 545; Tuesday, 15 September 1942: Het denkende hart van de barak.

64 Cf. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 278.

65 *Ibidem*, 304.

66 Michail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, (Austin TX & London: University of Texas Press, 1996).

67 Cf. the contribution by Klaas A.D. Smelik in this volume, "Ulrich Beck and Etty Hillesum", 445-457. Original Dutch version: "Ulrich Becks visie op Etty Hillesum", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik (ed.), *Etty Hillesum weer thuis in Middelburg* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 7] (Antwerpen & Apeldoorn: Garant, 2015), 159-169.

If God was more hidden after the destruction of the Temple, how much more hidden must God be in the world after the Shoah? [...] After the destruction, God was more hidden but the divine presence could be found in more places [...]. In a voluntary covenant, there is deeper dependence – that of relationship, love, self-expectations based on the model of the other. The full dignity of the human partner can only emerge when that partner takes full responsibility.⁶⁸

The concept of a hidden faced God, *hester panim* alludes to the mystical space between the divine and humanity, placing humanity as intermediary. In this line, Hillesum depicts peoples as guardians of divine presence, defenders of divine dwelling in themselves, others and humanity.

Hester panim points to Judaism that searches the divine revealed neither in engraved moulds, nor pillars of fire and supernatural miracles; life becomes the divine revealed, sacred yet ontological. A hidden faced God conjectures that God would not send angels to do good by humans; people are called to undertake the work of angels by one another, being mutually redemptive and self-redemptive. As life itself embodies the divine revealed, it is humanity's responsibility to guard life both as moral and ontological task. In an age of rising lethal religiosity, it important to say that Hillesum promulgates Judaism that concurs mystical love of God with social *communitas* and adherence of humanistic ethics; one that equally and inalienably allots human rights to all, and firstly the right to life. That this was denied her and her people *en masse*, proves such rights mandatory.

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68 Irving Greenberg, "History, Holocaust and Covenant", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5 (1990) 1: 1-12.



17 The Invincible Hope of Christian de Chergé and Etty Hillesum

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Abstract

Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé of the Tibhirine monastery in Algeria shared a common belief; they were both convinced that God requires our help in this world and that He places his hope in us. The author explores what it means to be present with Him at the margins of human existence, in solidarity with those who are discarded, and to witness the greatness of life wherever it is violated. He concludes that both Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé laid the foundation for a theology of hope in their writings.

Keywords: Christian de Chergé, theology, hope, God, destiny, faith, Etty Hillesum

I became acquainted with Etty Hillesum's writings in 2002. I was struck by her intelligence and wit, by the quality of her writing, and her capacity to look at life and herself right in the eye. I was impressed by her love of life, her commitment, her faith, and her courage. Etty Hillesum becomes alive with all her passion for the reader, and her diaries and letters can truly become a transformative experience for the reader. This is why she is truly a gift to the literary world.

At the time of their tragic deaths, Etty Hillesum was 29 years old and the Trappist monk, brother Christian de Chergé, was 59. The witness of their lives leads us along one of the most demanding roads of human existence: the gift of one's self for others, which originates in an unshakeable certainty that love is possible and that all are worthy of it. This is the essence of the remarkable stories of Christian de Chergé and Etty Hillesum. They are two travelling companions along an uncharted pathway of existence.

Christian de Chergé

Christian de Chergé entered the Trappist monastery of Aiguebelle in France on 20 August 1969. Two years later, he was assigned to the monastery of Our Lady of Atlas in Algeria, and in 1986 he became the monastery's prior. Having lived in Algeria with his parents as a child, it was he who asked to return to Algeria as a monk. Christian de Chergé and six of his Trappist brothers were kidnapped by the AIG (Armed Islamic Group) on 27 March 1996. On 23 May of the same year, the AIG sent out a communiqué saying: "We have slit the throats of the seven monks."

Christian de Chergé spoke of a childhood experience, which had a profound influence on how he regarded Muslims and their way of living their faith. He was five years old when he arrived with his parents in Algeria to live there for three years. One day, he saw a crowd of people going into a mosque and he asked his mother who these people were. She replied that they were Muslims, people who had another religion. "And what are they doing?" he asked. "They are praying to God," answered his mother. Thus he wrote, "I have always known that the God of Islam and the God of Jesus Christ are not two gods." Brother Christian was initiated by his mother from his early childhood to the reality of religious pluralism in a spirit that was not only tolerant, but which also recognized the deep truth carried by others, even when they seem very different from us. Little by little, these Muslims, alongside whom he lived, became for brother Christian "his closest neighbours."

Through his contact with Islam, Christian de Chergé encountered a truly prayerful people. Just like him and his fellow monks who answered the call of God at the sound of the monastery bell, his Muslim neighbours acknowledged the call to prayer at the sound of the Muezzin, calling from the mosque.

These two calls to prayer were even heard, side-by-side, at the very heart of the monastery of Tibhirine, where the monks made a large room available to the Muslim community of the village during the construction of their new mosque. Brother Christian was convinced that it was the same God who called to prayer: the God of whom his mother had spoken. He writes: "Here, the faith of others is a gift from God, it is mysterious of course, and it inspires respect."²

Journeying with these Muslims, brother Christian entered into what he came to call, "the Third World of Hope". He used the expression "Third World" (*Tiers-Monde* in French), in speaking about the relationship between Christians and Muslims, which he compared to a world in development,

¹ Christian de Chergé, *L'invincible espérance* (Paris: Bayard, 2010), 10.

² *Ibid.*, 183.

still struggling to establish a true fraternity. This “Third World of Hope” would become the fundamental orientation to his life as a monk. He was convinced that God’s promise, where He will one day, at the end of time, assemble all His children in unity, had already begun here below.

The object of his hope was the meeting of the “other”, different by his faith but so very close in his humanity. This “Third World of Hope” that he spoke of, leads into the mystery of a communion, which can be lived even now, in spite of our differences, and even because of these differences, where God sometimes reveals himself in new ways, thus mocking our categorizations, our factions, and our dogmatism. For Christian de Chergé, communion is to be woven here and now with all our brothers and sisters in humanity – be they Christian, Muslim, Jew, or unbeliever. The future comes at this price, he believed.

Irrespective of their political allegiance and even the violence in which some Algerians engaged, the life of Christian de Chergé was given for them. He wanted to be the brother of all of them.

Etty Hillesum

In contrast to Christian de Chergé, nothing prepared Etty Hillesum for living such a radical commitment and deeply rooted faith in God. The writings of Etty Hillesum reveal a story on the scale of a tragic epic. She lived in a context of violence, extreme violence. All the same, her concern for her neighbour was not limited to her own Jewish people, even if it was where she was primarily engaged. Etty Hillesum also found her neighbour in her enemy. She had the deep conviction that everyone is inhabited by the same mystery, and that it is together that we must fight to safeguard our human dignity in the face of adversity and evil.

Throughout her journal, Etty Hillesum reflects with great lucidity upon the hatred that so readily took hold of the heart during the war years in Holland. She is certain that war is born in each of our hearts. For Etty Hillesum, the victims as well as the persecutors are entangled in the same trap, and she makes the following reflection:

I felt very strongly that morning that you cannot take your hate out on individuals, no one person is to blame, the system has taken over, an ominous structure capable of crashing down on top of all of us [...].³

3 E.T. 259. *Het Werk*, 270; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: En dát gevoel had ik heel sterk die ochtend: men kan de haat niet op enkele mensen afreageren, niemand heeft schuld, een

Etty Hillesum was conscious of the role of ideologies. She knew they needed to be denounced and uprooted, but this could not be done to the detriment of the neighbour, even if it was the enemy. She wrote:

If we were to save only our bodies and nothing more from the camps all over the world, that would not be enough. What matters is not whether we preserve our lives at any cost, but how we preserve them.⁴

Hatred and violence were not a solution for Etty Hillesum. Life was priceless for her and she believed that one must never shortchange it. She believed that one should have the courage to face and assume everything in life. That is why running away from danger and from persecution was not an option for Etty Hillesum. But why endure such violence at the risk of one's life? On 3 July 1943, she wrote:

The misery here is quite terrible; and yet, [...] one day we shall be building a whole new world. Against every new outrage and every fresh horror, we shall put up one more piece of love and goodness, drawing strength from within ourselves. We may suffer, but we must not succumb.⁵

It is hard to understand Etty Hillesum's viewpoint without taking into account her faith in God. For her, He is not just an abstract notion somewhere up in heaven. She is convinced that He dwells within her. Little by little, she experiences a new Presence in her heart. Even if she once said she believed in God like everyone else; that was in a very undefined and impersonal way. God becomes a Thou, another in her prayer, and this discovery would have a transformative power in her life.

Her experience of God awakens in her new facets of the great mystery of love but she has great difficulty in explaining it. She even feels discomfort in speaking about it, as if it were indecent to experience this in the midst

system functioneert over onze hoofden heen, een dreigend opgetrokken gebouw, dat boven ons in kan storten [...].

4 E.T. 586. *Het Werk*, 624; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague. Amsterdam, end of December 1942: Wanneer wij uit de kampementen, waar ter wereld dan ook, alleen onze lichamen zullen redden en niets meer dan dat, dan zal dat te weinig zijn. Het gaat er toch immers niet om, dat men ten koste van alles dit leven behoudt, maar hoe men het behoudt.

5 E.T. 616. *Het Werk*, 657; Letter 46, To Johanna and Klaas Smelik and others. Westerbork, Saturday, 3 July 1943: [...] de ellende is werkelijk groot en toch [...] we moeten nog een hele nieuwe wereld opbouwen later – en tegen iedere wandaad te meer en gruwelijkheid te meer hebben wij een stukje liefde en goedheid te meer tegenover te stellen, dat we in onszelf veroveren moeten. We mogen wel lijden, maar we mogen er niet onder bezwijken.

of the present wartime circumstances. The experience of this love engulfed the totality of her reality and her existence. It brought her great joy and made her cry out: "How beautiful life is," whatever the circumstances. For Etty Hillesum, joy resided in consenting to life as it was given to her by God, without avoiding the suffering which came along with it. She writes:

I am with the hungry, with the ill-treated and the dying every day, but I am also with the jasmine and with that piece of sky beyond my window; there is room for everything in a single life. For belief in God and for a miserable end.⁶

In the dazzling metamorphosis that this young woman experiences, not only is the human being recognized as a creature of God, but the human person becomes an actual meeting place with God. On 15 September 1942, she writes:

I love people so terribly, because in every human being I love something of You my God. And I seek You everywhere in them and often find something of You.⁷

In her own way, Etty Hillesum was a combatant in the front lines of a worldwide drama where violence seemed to have the last word. She found herself astonished by this love of her neighbour that inhabited her. She wrote to a friend, Maria Tuinzing, on 8 August, 1943, a few weeks before she was deported:

I keep discovering that there is no causal connection between people's behaviour and the love you feel for them. Love for one's fellow man is like an elemental glow that sustains you. The fellow man himself has hardly anything to do with it. Oh Maria, it's a little bit bereft of love here, yet I myself feel so inexpressibly rich; I cannot explain it.⁸

6 E.T., 460. *Het Werk*, 485; Thursday, 2 July 1942: [...] ik ben bij de hongerenden, bij de mishandelden en bij de stervenden, iedere dag, maar ik ben ook bij de jasmijn en bij dat stuk hemel achter mijn venster, er is voor alles plaats in één leven. Voor een geloven aan God en voor een ellendige ondergang.

7 E.T., 514. *Het Werk*, 544; Tuesday morning, 15 September 1942: Ik heb de mensen zo verschrikkelijk lief, omdat ik in ieder mens een stuk van jou liefheb, mijn God. En ik zoek jou overal in de mensen en ik vind vaak een stuk van jou.

8 E.T., 635. *Het Werk*, 676-677; Letter 56, To Maria Tuinzing. Westerbork, Saturday, 7 August 1943 – Sunday, 8 August 1943: Maar dit ervaar ik steeds weer in mezelf: er is geen enkel causaal

Conclusion

On 28 June, 1974, Christian de Chergé, who was studying in Rome at the time, wrote to his family of the necessity for a balance between seeking God and seeking one's neighbour. He underlined the importance of "finding in every human being the reflection of God with the invincible hope that charity is possible simply because God is there."⁹

The invincible hope at work in Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé was totally oriented toward their neighbour and his mystery, and these two witnesses lived this reality with their respective harmonics and their personal history. Etty Hillesum would surely have recognized herself in what brother Christian wrote about himself and his brothers:

To give one's life in advance without conditions for the love of God is what we have done [...] or at least this is what we thought we did. We have not asked why or how. We turned the gift of ourselves over to God, to take and use as he pleased, whatever the destination, day after day, even to the ultimate sacrifice.¹⁰

The point of convergence between Christian de Chergé and Etty Hillesum is to be seen not only in the similarity of their destiny, but in the manner in which their lives were given in the midst of adversity. It was in the name of his faith that Christian de Chergé gave himself to Algeria, where he learned what he called the "task of being human." Whereas Etty Hillesum, with her faith still so young and undefined, chose to be in solidarity with her people, in the midst of the Shoah. It is there that she deepened her convictions that all humans share in a common life and a common love.

Through their writings, Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé witness to their faith in God, and their faith in humanity. Because of this, they deliberately faced the possibility of a violent death. Brother Christian was not a newcomer to faith. The faith that dwelt in him had been there since childhood and had grown over the years, as he assumed it progressively and fully. Etty Hillesum's faith was an open one, at the frontier of Judaism

verband tussen het gedrag van mensen en de liefde, die je voor ze voelt. Die liefde voor de medemens is als een elementaire gloed, waaruit men leeft. Die medemens zelf heeft er nauwelijks iets mee te maken. Ach Maria, het is hier een beetje kaal met de liefde en ikzelf voel me zo onnoemelijk rijk, ik zou het geen mens kunnen uitleggen. –

⁹ Cf. de Chergé, *L'invincible espérance*, 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

and Christianity, a faith that would thrust her into the heart of her people's horrific tragedy and determine her own life's tragic end.

In both, Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé, we can speak of faith at the service of human fraternity, a faith that is lived as an openness to the world, a faith which pierces a hole in the wall of ostracism, exclusion, and the wall of hate for the so-called enemy, the "other," or simply the one who is different than me. By their common destiny, Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé sing of this invincible hope: that love can have the last word and thus we prepare the "new age" when peace will at last be possible. It is interesting to note that Christian de Chergé was familiar with Etty Hillesum's journal, and we find the following quotation of Etty Hillesum in his notes:

True peace will come only when every individual finds peace within himself; when we have all vanquished and transformed our hatred for our fellow human beings of whatever race – even into love one day, although perhaps that is asking too much. It is, however, the only solution.¹¹

This is the utopia they both shared. Brother Christian and Etty Hillesum had the option of escaping the fate that awaited them. Brother Christian could have returned to France with his brothers, as the Father Abbot in France strongly suggested. Etty Hillesum could have found a refuge in the resistance movement by going into clandestinity as proposed by her friends. But both chose to assume fully their destiny in solidarity with mankind, animated by the same conviction, that it is firstly God who hopes in us. In their own and unique way, they both believed that God needs us and that He asks of us to be with Him at the margins of humanity, in the deepest abysses so as to carry there a message of hope. They both believed that we are all called to be witnesses to the greatness of human life, especially where life is mocked and abused. On 23 June 1942, Etty Hillesum wrote:

Through suffering I have learned that we must share our love with the whole of creation. Only thus can we gain admittance to it. But the price is high: much blood and tears. Yet all the suffering is worth it.¹²

¹¹ E.T., 435. *Het Werk*, 458; Saturday night, 20 June 1942: En een vrede kan alleen een echte vrede worden later, wanneer eerst ieder individu in zichzelf vrede sticht en haat tegen medemensen, van wat voor ras of volk ook, uitroeit en overwint en verandert in iets, dat geen haat meer is, misschien op den duur wel liefde, of is dat misschien wat veel geëist? Toch is het de enige oplossing.

¹² E.T., 442. *Het Werk*, 466; Tuesday morning, 23 June 1942: Door lijden leer ik het en leer ik het ook aanvaarden, dat men zijn liefde met de hele schepping moet delen, met de hele kosmos.

For Etty Hillesum, there was no question about shielding herself for fear of death. Instead, she was animated by the urgency to live everything with her own people right to the end. It was the same for Brother Christian. With regards to his eventual assassin, he writes:

If I have given my life to all Algerians, I have also given it to the ‘emir’ [prince, ruler] of the Army of Salvation. He will not take it [my life] from me.¹³

For Christian de Chergé and Etty Hillesum, their profound hope in humanity made them responsible for their neighbour, to the point of risking their lives for him or her. It was the Dominican Friar, Pierre Claverie, the Bishop of Oran, who was also assassinated in Algeria on the 1st of August, 1996, who said in a homily:

To learn to give, to give oneself, in other words, to love – this is how death is fooled, and then death has nothing to take away from us, for love has already given everything.¹⁴

Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé invite us to live beyond the limits, or frontiers, that we have fixed for ourselves, beyond where we think the road is too rough, too crazy, or impossible. At the end of his life, Christian de Chergé prayed for his eventual assassin and committed him to God. As for Etty Hillesum, she advanced with courage towards the train which was to lead her to Auschwitz, having chosen to be with her people right to the end, pursuing her endeavour to bear witness to the ultimate realities.

It was the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus, who said: “If you have no hope you will not find the unhoped-for.” The witness of Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé opens a breach at the very place where we have set limits and where our hopes are usually broken. And thus, the human and spiritual fruitfulness of this brother and sister in humanity continues to spread and grow.

At the end of the war, after a camp was liberated by American troops, a piece of wrapping paper was found on which a Jewish man had written this prayer:

Maar daardoor krijgt men zelf ook toegang tot de kosmos. Maar de prijs voor dat toegangsbiljet is zwaar en hoog en men moet hem lang bijeensparen uit bloed en tranen. Maar hij is met geen enkel lijden en tranen te hoog betaald.

13 Cf. de Chergé, *L'invincible espérance*, 229.

14 Pierre Claverie, *Lettres et messages d'Algérie* (Paris: Karthala, 1996), 141.

Lord, when you come in your glory, do not just remember all the men of good will; remember equally the men of bad will. Don't, however, remember their cruelty, their torture or violence. Remember the fruit that we have borne as a result of what they have done to us. Remember the patience of some and the courage of others, the friendship and the humility, the greatness of soul and the faithfulness that they have awakened in us. Lord, permit that these fruits borne in us may, one day, be their redemption.¹⁵

Because of the invincible hope to which they bore witness, I believe that – had they been aware of this prayer – both Etty Hillesum and Christian de Chergé would readily have recognized it as their own.

About the author

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15 Métropolitaine Antoine, "L'intercession", *La Vie Spirituelle* n° 679 (March-April 1988), 217-227, especially pp. 222-223.



18 Etty Hillesum

Gender, the Modern and the Literature of the Holocaust

Mary Evans

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Abstract

The diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum were written in a century that widely assumed the legacy of the European Enlightenment would manifest itself in rational and liberal policies. Amongst these policies would be the extension of education and social and intellectual emancipation of women. The author explores the way in which Etty Hillesum profited from these changes but also was the victim of Nazi policies against the Jews, and against dissent in general. Hillesum's body of work lays bare the rupture in twentieth century Europe. The author concludes that the promise of human progress with which the Enlightenment had been associated, was shown to be a very broken promise.

Keywords: gender, Enlightenment, Holocaust, knowledge, modernity, religion, Etty Hillesum

In his autobiography *Experience*, Martin Amis speaks of an encounter with his father, Kingsley Amis.¹ In this, Martin told his father of a description in Primo Levi's *If this is a Man* of the different ways in which Jewish men and women, in a transit camp in Italy during the Second World War, spent the night before their deportation. The men sat about, smoked if they could and talked. The women washed clothes and attempted to bring some semblance of order and normality into their meagre possessions and to the possibilities of the next day.

Martin told his father this story because by this point in their lives father and son had rather different views about women and men and the gender

1 Martin Amis, *Experience* (London: Vintage, 2001), 95.

order in general and Martin was attempting to suggest to his father that the human condition contained distinct, and gendered, ways of relating to the world. But when he looked across at his father, he saw that far from preparing to lambast or challenge his son Kingsley Amis was silently crying. "Don't let us ever," he said, "do that again." Amis Senior was no sentimentalist and in his later years took what people came to regard as a somewhat reactionary view of the world. But this brief encounter is perhaps appropriate as a starting point to my discussion here of Etty Hillesum's diary, in which I want to raise some questions about gender, the modern and subjectivity.

Western Notions of the Good Life

As readers of the literature of the Holocaust will know, the first part of Etty Hillesum's diary (the part that ends in January 1942) is concerned largely with her life in Amsterdam, its social relations and the various ways in which she is attempting to do what we describe as "put together a life." By January 1942, however, the situation for Jews throughout Europe had become very much more difficult; in every sense of the word, Etty Hillesum's existence had become "precarious." But it is precisely that condition of the "precarious" that is the focus here: not just as an exceptional situation (although her situation and that of hundreds of thousands of other people was precisely that) but as a situation which had – and has – much in common with the life conditions of too many people in the twenty-first century. This is not for one moment meant to imply that life for a Jew in Amsterdam in 1942 is the same as that of any of us sitting here today. But it is to explore the extent to which the way in which Etty Hillesum lived her life, the themes that she explored and the relationships that she had, has many similarities that reach across time and place. The forced and often extremely hazardous migration created by civil wars in many parts of the Middle East, the emerging and persistent attacks on the autonomy of women and sexual minorities and the growing material inequalities throughout the world all demonstrate that some of the conditions of precarity and vulnerability continue to be replicated.²

Yet, much of Etty Hillesum's adult life was conditioned by optimism about her life and that of others in the global north. One of the important points in

2 The concept of the "precarious" has been developed by Judith Butler in her book *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004). A very similar concept about the fragility of human existence was framed by Bryan Turner in his book *Vulnerability and Human Rights* (Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

Etty Hillesum's diary is the entry for 24 October 1941, where she says that "I am still attached to Western notions of the good life: being healthy, growing wiser and stronger, learning to stand on one's own feet."³ It is the case that through her higher education Etty Hillesum had encountered Russia and Russian literature ("the East" as Etty Hillesum and many of her companions described the Soviet Union both during and after the Second World War) but even so this comment must make us very much aware that what Etty Hillesum was proposing was a binary division (so common in the second half of the twentieth century before we came to speak of the global north and the global south) between what was known as "the East" and "the West." The implication of this was that the various components that Etty Hillesum was naming as indicative of the "good life" were very close to those values of which the Protestant ethic, as Weber reminds us, has always been the most powerful example. "To stand on one's own feet" is a major demand of Protestantism; in a religion without mediating others, being alone before God demands that the individual acquires that ability to take care of oneself. What is also so striking about Etty Hillesum's remark about standing on her own feet was the similarity between her remark and that of the heroine of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. [This novel, published in 1847, was regarded by some critics as extraordinarily subversive, not least because of the autonomy and agency demanded by the heroine.] When Jane is asked by the unkind and deeply uncharitable Reverend Brocklehurst how she must avoid going to hell, she replies that she must stay in good health and not die. The apparent irreverence of that reply, the way it entirely demolishes the assumptions and the power of Brocklehurst, is perhaps one of the reasons why *Jane Eyre* was attacked at the time of its publication but has consistently been regarded as a canonical account of women's independence.

Jane Eyre, of course, is allowed to live to tell her tale, which is not the fate of Etty Hillesum. But Etty Hillesum's list of the components of the "good life" stands as beacon across both the fiction and the non-fiction of Europe in the past 200 years as indicative of the ways in which the ambitions of those women living at something of a disjunction with their times have been formed. At just the same time as Etty Hillesum, in an occupied Amsterdam, was turning to read philosophy in order to shut out the horrors of the outside world, so Simone de Beauvoir, slightly older than Etty Hillesum,

3 E.T., 138. *Het Werk*, 146; Friday, 24 October 1941: Maar dit zit er niet alleen. Het is aangemengd met Westerse dynamiek, dat voel ik af en toe heel sterk. In deze meer nuchtere dagen van werkelijke zelftucht voel ik dat heel sterk: je bent heus gezond, je bent bezig naar je zelf toe te groeien, op een eigen basis te komen.

was reading if not the same then similar texts to those of Hillesum. Both women were well educated – although in different disciplines – and widely read in canonical European fiction; both had complex and at times tense relationships with others, both male and female. To read those sections of Beauvoir's *The Prime of Life*, the second volume of her autobiography which deals with the German occupation of France, is to encounter exactly the same detailed descriptions of the difficulties of everyday life, the delight over small luxuries, the turning to literature and philosophy for some assurance of both other worlds and, most importantly, some sense of the possibility of transcendence.⁴

What we might take from this, is the theme that runs throughout Etty Hillesum's diary about the search for a morality and a moral existence that can both be sustained, and sustain, in times of lived horror. The question can also be related to that other previously identified theme: that of the conditions of the modern that both create horror and at the same time allow forms of challenge. This is not to pursue the arguments of the Frankfurt School – powerful as they are – about the relationship between the Holocaust and the modern; in summary, the thesis that the European Enlightenment was one of the parents of the Holocaust.⁵ Rather it is to explore three particular ways in which Etty Hillesum's life and diary, whilst extraordinary, is not in itself exceptional. This apparent paradox has three aspects: "knowledge" and critique in the modern, and the gender politics, and sources of authority in the modern.

Three Aspects

The first aspect, is that of knowledge and critique, especially self-critique, in the modern. In her diary entry for 5 September 1941, Etty Hillesum writes,

Knowledge is power, and that's probably why I accumulate knowledge, out of a desire to be important. I don't really know. But Lord, give me

4 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life* (London: Penguin, 1965). Original title: *La Force de l'âge* (1960).

5 The Frankfurt School were a group of social scientists who left Germany for the United States after Hitler came to power in 1933. The members of the group who voiced the greatest scepticism about the implicitly progressive implications of the European Enlightenment, were Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. See their *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum Books, 1994); first published in German in 1944: *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.

wisdom, not knowledge. Or rather the knowledge that leads to wisdom and true happiness and not the kind that leads to power.⁶

As is now recognized, post-Enlightenment Europe has long prided itself on its “knowledge” and the distinction that it assumes that it can make between knowledge and various forms of superstition. That assumption was – as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer pointed out – shattered by the events of the Second World War in which the rational and rationality played a terrifying part. Thus what we might assume from this diary entry, is that Ety Hillesum was not as convinced as many of her peers, and many intellectuals of her time, that knowledge *in itself* was as necessarily positive as was sometimes supposed to be the case. Long before Europe had sat down and examined itself, and its account of its history in the light of the events of 1939-45, Ety Hillesum was suggesting that disruption which has continued to haunt the European consciousness: that a technically competent and sophisticated society is not, in itself, morally positive. In the same passage, Ety Hillesum asks that she may be granted access to knowledge, but that form of knowledge which – in her words – leads to wisdom and true happiness rather than to power. What wisdom is, and indeed what happiness is, we might wish to examine but even allowing for this digression we might also consider that what Ety Hillesum’s account of the possible use of knowledge allows is that it does not carry with it the automatic assumption of power over others. The formulation that “knowledge is power” is part of European history and a highly problematic part, not least because it establishes differences between those who are assumed to know (or have knowledge that can be translated into forms of social power or material reward) and those who do not, as well as those equally problematic distinctions between what is worth knowing and what is not. In every aspect of modern social life, from the most banal social comments about who we “know” the world in which we live is replete with references to “knowing” and having been educated into “knowledge.” None of us would wish to be treated by a doctor with no “knowledge” or fly in a plane without a trained pilot; this is not an argument about the importance, and the importance to people’s well-being, of technical competence. But it is a comment about Ety Hillesum’s recognition of the dark possibilities of “knowledge”: its separation from morality and its potential for authority.

6 E.T., 94. *Het Werk*, 100; Friday Morning, 5 September 1941: Kennis is macht, dat weet ik en misschien verzamel ik ook daarom kennis, uit een soort geldingsdrang. Ik weet het eigenlijk niet. Maar Heer, geef me liever wijsheid inplaats van kennis. Of liever gezegd, alleen de kennis, die tot wijsheid voert maakt de mens, mij tenminste, gelukkig en niet de kennis die macht is.

This takes us to the second aspect of Etty Hillesum's diaries relevant here: the question of the way in which Etty Hillesum resolved her own, and our own, great problem of the origins of the moral in a society that validates "knowledge" and yet has minimized the mystical or the holy as a source of morality. Etty Hillesum finds her source of morality in a specific form and practice of social relations: in the ethic of care, a capacity which is generally associated, particularly in its individual forms, with women. This is not to suggest an essentialist explanation of the ability to care: namely that is a singularly female quality. Women do not *naturally* care but biological and social circumstances variously construct and amplify this generally human capacity. Etty Hillesum learns to care because she sees the vulnerability of others; she also recognizes that she does not wish to be seen as that "real Tartar," as she is described by the sculptress Fri Heil.⁷ [At about the same time, in another part of Europe, Beauvoir was appalled when one of her friends described her as a "clock in a refrigerator"⁸]. As much as human beings may wish to assume qualities of competence and coherence, it is striking that few of us – outside specific activities such as sport – like to be seen as all powerful. In her work with the Jewish Council, through her experiences at the Westerbork camp, Etty Hillesum comes to believe that there is no alternative to the conditions of the ruthless application of the darker rational possibilities of the modern except that of care and respect for others. There is simply no place any longer for those forms of knowledge that separate human beings from one another, the camp (and, of course, others like it) are places where there is only one morally possible form of behaviour. We might see this as forced virtue, but we also have to consider that in the way in which the power of the modern state can create the "war of all against all" the only reaction is not that of an ethic of what has been described as "possessive individualism" but an ethic of the recognition of shared humanity.⁹ This argument may be supposed to take the unfortunate form of suggesting that collective degradation produces human virtue but this is not intended here. But Etty Hillesum's entirely unchosen experience is one where she – and perhaps others – come to see the meaning of moral engagement.

The final point to make here concerns the question of the authority of religion in the modern. Etty Hillesum's diaries very vividly challenges the

7 E.T., 94. *Het Werk*, 100; Friday Morning, 5 September 1941: Daarom deed het me zo vreemd aan dat die gedistingeerde beeldhouwster Fri Heil tegen S. zei, dat ze me net een Tartaarse vond en dat ze vond dat er een wild paard ter completering bij me hoorde, waarop ik door een steppe reed.

8 De Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 461.

9 Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

often repeated view that what she calls the “West” has become more secular. Arguably, we have become more attached to aspects of the Protestant ethic and Etty Hillesum’s soul searching in the earlier part of her diary is about trying to discover the meaning of an abstract God in a world which seems to have such clear and precisely secular rules for coming to the knowledge and experience of God. Those rules of behaviour – that furious attempt to regulate the world – have been the subject of films such as *White Ribbon* and at a much earlier date Freud’s analysis of his patient Dr. Schreber.¹⁰ This profoundly unhappy man was drenched in accredited knowledge yet deeply disturbed and unable to resolve that fundamental human problem of his relationship with either his mortal or supernatural father. But what modern conditions of existence and the search for knowledge set up, is a powerful opposition between what we are both told and have to do and the various forms of perfection and resolution set before and which we strive for. The ordinary commonplace experience of the absence of resolution of those goals provides fertile ground for the frustrations that can find their political expression in various forms of totalitarian or fascist politics: the politics that seem to “solve” the problem of the distance of the individual from achieved coherence.

Etty Hillesum was a victim of those politics. We can read her in many various ways that others will articulate. But as well as being a testament to positive human capacities in a very specific context of human loss and suffering, she can also be read as a way to encourage us to think about our own context and the various forms of need that it produces.

About the author

Mary Evans is currently a Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics. She has taught in universities in the UK and the USA for over 40 years and her work has encompassed studies of fiction, biography and autobiography, feminist theory and most recently forms of social and gendered inequality. At present, she is working on a study of contemporary detective fiction.

¹⁰ The film *White Ribbon* was directed by Michael Haneke and released in 2009; for Freud on Dr Schreber, see Sigmund Freud, *The Schreber Case* (London, Penguin, 2003). Freud’s account of the case was originally published in 1911 in German: *Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen zu einem autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*.



19 America in The Shade

Etty Hillesum As Mediator Between the Cold War
Perspectives on the Holocaust

Hans Krabbendam

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Abstract

Etty Hillesum hardly made explicit reference in her writings to the United States of America. Yet, this country functions powerfully in perceptions of her work. The author points out that Hillesum's lack of mention of the US, forces researchers to re-evaluate just how much occupied Europe expected from America during the war. Secondly, American reflections on Hillesum's work put the focus on the psychological dimension, which might obscure the cultural context of her writings. Thirdly, the author concludes that Hillesum's fascination with Russia functioned as a bridge between the diverse approaches to Jewish suffering in the East and West. Because Hillesum escaped the fixed models of Cold War historiography, she was able to play a mediating role that perfectly matched her aspirations as a writer.

Keywords: Russia, Cold War, America, international reception, academic reception, Holocaust studies, historiography, Etty Hillesum

Esther "Etty" Hillesum had no special relationship to the United States. The first thing one notices in Etty Hillesum's letters and diaries is the almost complete absence of references to America. Yet, this country looms large when one reflects upon her work. In these reflections, America functions at three levels. First, it is a remarkable absence in her literary production. Second, it is an academic arena where discussion of Etty Hillesum's work has resulted in widely divergent opinions. And third, especially during the Cold War, the United States formed one side of the competing interpretations of the Holocaust, with Russia forming the other. Etty Hillesum's oeuvre can

fulfil a role in bridging the differences between the two sides and providing a cohesive way to understand how and why they diverged. This essay opens with notes on Hillesum's writings on America, followed by an analysis of the reception of her work in the United States, and concludes with a call to utilize her work to bridge the gap between eastern and western interpretations of the Holocaust. As it turns out, this mediation role perfectly matches Etty Hillesum's aspirations.

America in Hillesum's Literary Production

Etty Hillesum made only a few, indirect, references to America. For example, she dismissed the public show of religious feelings that emerged out of the Oxford Group, an original American effort to secure peace through moral rearmament.¹ Will Durant, on the other hand, appealed to her and received positive mention from her thanks to his holistic approach to philosophy.² She was also inspired by E. Stanley Jones, an American Methodist missionary in India, but erroneously identified as British in the annotated edition. This friend and biographer of Gandhi and champion of racial equality in India and in the United States, where he inspired Martin Luther King Junior, touched Etty Hillesum by his concept of holy wrath against injustice.³ She originally came into contact with Jones' writings through a friend who had translated them into Dutch. These accidental encounters confirm her rational framework, but didn't present a strong enough case to draw her to America.

1 Cf. E.T., 320: But is there indeed anything as intimate as man's relationship to God? Some distaste because of this about that recent Oxford meeting. So exhibitionist. Such public love-making with God. So bacchanalian, and then all those pious petty-bourgeois men and old spinsters on the lookout for a man. No! Never again. Perhaps it's all right just once, for the experience. But they are too well meaning for one to watch the whole thing as one might a stage play. *Het Werk*, 334; Friday, 3 April 1942: Is er ook wel iets zo intiem als 's mensen verhouding tot God? En daarom toch een zekere weerzin – tegen die Oxford-bijeenkomst van laatst. Zo exhibitionistisch. Zo publiek vrijen met God. Zo bacchanaal-achtig en dan die brave kleine burgers en zoekende oudere juffrouwen. Nee! Toch maar niet weer zoiets. Voor de sensatie misschien een keer aardig. Maar daarvoor weer te fatsoenlijk bedoeld om er als een sensationeel schouwspel naar te zitten kijken.

2 Cf. Fulvio Manara, "Philosophy as a way of life in the works of Etty Hillesum", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 379-398, in particular 382-390.

3 E.T., 731. *Het Werk*, 418; Monday, 8 June 1942.

One might expect Etty Hillesum to mention America as an ally in the war effort, but even this reference is missing. On 24 July 1942, she wrote that she wasn't counting on being liberated by Americans, British or, for that matter, by Russians. America simply does not appear on her radar. This remarkable omission needs to be examined because it corrects the common assumption that all oppressed Europeans during the Second World War counted on Anglo-Americans and Canadians to liberate them. This idea is a projection backward from a later time in which America's contribution to the liberation of Europe was viewed as unparalleled.

The absentee image of America can be explained in part by Etty Hillesum's strong identification with her mother's Russian heritage. At the University of Amsterdam, she read the law but also studied Russian language and culture. One would think that the circumstances that forced her mother's family to leave Russia, might have lead Etty to an appreciation of the United States, but this did not happen. Any option of moving on across the Atlantic was apparently not chosen by the family, and she doesn't report the emigration destination of her maternal grandparents. The only recognition of her grandparents' emigration remains Etty Hillesum's use of their unknown destination as an alibi to register as half Arian.⁴

In contrast to an absent America, the references to Russia are abundant in Hillesum's work. She reports reading Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Gogol. Her literary preferences were not only a result of her mother's background, but also of her strong identification with the poet Rilke who adored Russia. She writes that his descriptions made her long for the Russian steppes with nary a word about American prairies.⁵ On 5 September 1941, she expressed a desire to work in Russia as a chirologist. She sympathized with the Muscovites who were suffering Nazi attacks and remarked that their response was typical of the intense way Russians had of facing serious situations.⁶ She aspired to become a transfer point for this culturally Russian

4 E.T., 510. It might still be worth trying with those vanished parents of my Russian mother. *Het Werk*, 540; Tuesday, 28 July 1942: Het zou misschien nog te proberen zijn met die verdwenen ouders van mijn russische moeder.

5 E.T., 60. Perhaps that is why I have always had that strange longing for the wide Russian steppes. *Het Werk*, 64; 11 June 1941, Wednesday morning, 9.30: Misschien heb ik daarom altijd dat merkwaardige verlangen gehad naar de wijde Russische steppen.

6 E.T., 97; Friday morning 5 September 1941: And what do I want? To practise chirolgy in Russia one day – that would be a beautiful synthesis of everything I am doing now. In my mind's eye I was already writing a letter to Frans from a picturesque street in Moscow. A letter filled with nostalgia. My imagination keeps running riot all the time. Poor Moscow how is it faring right now? One day I shall hear it straight from the Russian people. I still have a lot of studying to do, though. *Het Werk*, 103: En wat ik wil? Later in Rusland chirolgie bedrijven. Dat zou een

knowledge. When she prepared for the trip to her death at Auschwitz, she carried only a Bible, Tolstoy and a Russian grammar.⁷

Despite her leftist leanings, Etty Hillesum was no Communist even if she did defend Russia against allegations of suppression. She understood that the Russia of 1917 had barely prevailed against international opposition and internal starvation and that they needed to influence public opinion in their favour if they were to survive and build a new society. But at the same time, she saw and pointed out similarities between Nazism and Soviet-communism, especially in the realm of disrespect for the human dignity of countless common people.⁸ In practice, she had no realistic image of life in the Soviet Union. She pushed thoughts about the future from her mind, as she wrote on 23 May 1942:

One day, yes, later. What do we know about later? My God. How much sunny optimism still lingers in our imaginations. The future? A barracks in Drenthe, crowded with thirty-six families? Hunger, murder or exile? In any case, don't waste your strength on fantasies, on fruitless, self-tormenting fantasies, the strength you need to get you through these times.⁹

At other moments, Etty Hillesum mapped out a role for herself in the Soviet Union, not as chirologist, but as a cultural broker between Russia and the

schone synthese zijn van alles wat ik nou doe. Zonet zat ik al in gedachten Frans een brief te schrijven vanaf een pittoreske straat uit Moskou. Een brief vol Heimweh. Heel gek gaat mijn phantasie toch altijd. Arm Moskou, hoe zou het er nu gaan? Later moet ik het van de mensen zelf in Rusland horen. Dus nog genoeg te studeren.

7 Cf. E.T., 527. *Het Werk*, 712; Letter 78, Jopie Vleeschhouwer to Han Wegerif and others, Westerbork, Monday 6 / Tuesday 7 September 1943.

8 E.T., 21. *Het Werk*, 34; Saturday, 15 March 1941. With communism in Russia, immediately after 1917, the problem, I think, was different. A new world had to be cobbled together from scratch, and there was no time for deeper thought, for taking an objective view. But yes, basically, it was still the same contempt for the masses, who must not be left to their own devices, who must not be allowed to choose between good and evil for themselves. *Het Werk*, 22: In het Communisme, vlak na 1917 in Rusland, lag het probleem geloof ik iets anders. Er moest een nieuwe wereld uit de grond gestampt worden en de aandacht mocht niet afgeleid worden door de diepere dingen, door het relativeren der dingen. Maar ja, im Grunde is het toch dezelfde minachting voor de massa, die men niet aan zichzelf durft over te laten, die zelf niet mag kiezen tussen goed en kwaad.

9 E.T., 370. *Het Werk*, 383; Saturday evening 23 May 1942: Later, ja later. Wat weten wij van later? Mijn God. Welk een zonnig optimisme nog in onze phantasieën. De toekomst? Een barak in Drenthe, met 36 families in één barak? Honger, moord of verbanning? In ieder geval mag je toch geen krachten weggeven aan phantasieën, aan vruchteloze, zelfkwellende phantasieën, krachten, die je nodig hebt om door deze tijd heen te komen?

West.¹⁰ She felt Russia had nestled in her blood and given her a deepened understanding of humanism. She referenced *Die Russische Leistung*, a book by the Russian-German translator and interpreter of Russian literature Karl Nötzel. In this book, he ascribed to the Russian people the ability to explain to the remainder of mankind the boundaries of humanism. Nötzel felt that Russians above all others could instruct humans in how to live in the midst of deprivations, threats or uncertainty, and that they could find ways to prevail under pressure, without breaking the human will to live. Etty Hillesum thoroughly incorporated Nötzel's writings, finding that his views gave her life a perspective that could not be shaken even by the knowledge that the Nazis pursued the systematic annihilation of her people.¹¹

On 28 June 1942 she confided in her diary the following:

One must be able to bear things, bear them to the bitter end and at their full weight. Suddenly I wondered, isn't that the difference between the Russians and us Westerners? The Russian bears his burden to the end, buckles down under the full weight of his emotions and suffers to his very depths. We stop halfway and relieve ourselves with words, reflections, philosophies, theoretical treatises and what have you. We stop in the middle of experiencing our emotions, can bear and endure them no further, and our brains come to our aid, rid us of our burden and build their theories on it. Won't the end be that Western Europe will have spawned a host of philosophies, etc., while Russia has kept her counsel? What we shall then hear from Russia will be cries straight from her soul, and it won't matter whether or not everything will be all that logical and consistent – it will have been experienced to the full, and that is what matters. For Westerners, theories and systems must fit together much more closely, otherwise they feel that their lives lack a solid basis. They do not endure and experience, bear and suffer, to the full; there is a flaw here in their vitality, a flaw in their capacity to bear things. And hence it is far more vitally important to them that their theories should constitute coherent wholes and not be full of contradictions. To the Russian that does not matter. Terribly badly expressed. No doubt I shall be able to put it more clearly in time. We deprive ourselves of the ultimate suffering

10 A similar admiration for the simple vitality of the Russian people can be found in the records of American diplomat and creator of US containment policy George F. Kennan. See Frank Costigliola, "Unceasing Pressure for Penetration: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War", *Journal of American History* 83 (March 1997) 4, 1309-1339.

11 E.T., 419, 434-435. *Het Werk*, 441, 456-457; 15, 20 and 21 June 1942.

and cast it off with words. The Russian bears it to the end, and unless he perishes as a result he grows ever stronger.¹²

It is clear from this passage that Etty Hillesum was speaking of a deep Russian mentality or worldview (*Weltanschauung* in German, *wereldbeeld* in Dutch). She was not glorifying the Russian empire or its national prestige, but getting at a cultural identity that was shaped by Russian history. Russia was not a geographical location in her mind, but an idea, even an ideal. Her notes in the fall of 1942 confirm her June diary entry as she moved from writing about Russia to writing about God. She was convinced that the Russian cultural elite had understood the core of the Christian faith better than the West. In Russia, she wrote, love took priority over faith, and it was that attitude that could pacify conflicts.¹³

The insights in Hillesum's writings can act as a bridge between Russia and the West. Her ideas embrace both the Russian and the Western approaches to the international debate going on in Holocaust Studies. It is my purpose to use Hillesum's writings to connect both perspectives. The most challenging part of this project is including the Russian domain in the absence of a fully realized American domain. With this in mind, and before I leave the impression that I want to replace *American Studies* for *Russian Studies*, I

12 E.T., 453; Sunday Morning 28 June 1942. *Het Werk*, 478: Men moet de dingen kunnen dragen en tot het einde toe dragen en in hun volle gewicht. En ik vroeg me plotseling af: is dat niet het verschil tussen de Russen en ons Westerlingen? De Rus draagt tot aan het einde en zet z'n schouders onder het volledige gewicht der ontroeringen en lijdt tot op de bodem. Wij houden halverwege op met dragen en bevrijden ons met woorden, beschouwingen, filosofieën, theoretische verhandelingen, wat je maar wilt. Midden in het ondergáán der ontroeringen houden we op en kunnen niet verder dragen en lijden en onze hersens komen te hulp, ontnemen ons de lasten en bouwen hun theorieën op. En zou het niet daardoor komen, dat West-Europa zoveel geproduceerd heeft aan filosofieën enz. en in Rusland op dit gebied een groot zwijgen heerst? En wát er dan uit Rusland komt zijn kreten, regelrecht uit de ziel en het doet er niet toe of dat alles erg logisch en sluitend is, het is daar beleefd tot op de bodem en daarom gaat het. Bij de Westerlingen moeten zijn theorieën en systemen veel passender in elkaar sluiten, omdat hun leven anders nergens een gesloten en hechte basis heeft. Ondergaan en beleven en dragen en lijden doen ze niet tot op de bodem, hier zit er een zwakte in hun levenskracht, een zwakte in hun draagkracht. En daarom is het voor hun van veel groter levensbelang, dat hun theorieën sluitende gehelen vormen en niet vol tegenspraak zijn. Bij de Rus doet dat er niet toe. Beestachtig slecht geformuleerd. Het zal nog wel eens duidelijker in me worden. Wij ontnemen ons het laatste lijden en wentelen het van ons af met woorden. De Rus draagt tot het einde en wanneer hij daarbij niet te gronde gaat, wordt het steeds sterker.

13 On Friday 24 July 1942 (E.T., 501. *Het Werk*, 531) she copied a quotation from Schubart, *Europa und die Seele des Ostens*, pp. 71f. Cf. Wil van den Bercken, "Etty Hillesum's Russian vocation and spiritual relationship to Dostoevsky", in: Smelik, Van den Brandt & Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 147-171.

move on to answer the question how Etty Hillesum's ideas were received in the United States.

American Appreciation for Etty Hillesum

In 2003, Anouta de Groot published a survey on the perception of Etty Hillesum in the English-speaking world, particularly in the United States. She found that women's studies, Holocaust studies and religious studies had taken notice of Etty Hillesum's publications. At about the same time, the complete works of Etty Hillesum came out in the United States. De Groot expected that the annotated edition would revitalize and modify thinking about Etty Hillesum. This proved too optimistic.¹⁴

The great majority of American publications about Hillesum (fourteen out of eighteen) address the religious aspects of her life and death.¹⁵ Roman Catholic authors and publishing firms have been especially interested in this topic. Only four studies analyze Etty Hillesum in a Holocaust framework, and they reach opposing conclusions.

David Patterson, for example, denies Hillesum a place in the circle of Holocaust authors. His view is that she does not inform her readers about the circumstances of the Holocaust and does not live up to the expectations for a Jewish writer. He characterizes her as a naive optimist who fails to express her despair as other diarists do. To him, this absence is an argument for disqualification.¹⁶ Taking a very different view, Christian ethicist Timothy Jackson acknowledges Etty Hillesum's importance as a means to understand the broad spectrum of Holocaust experiences. The same acceptance, self-sacrifice, and experience of meaning that triggered Paterson's rejection, convinces Jackson. He reads Hillesum's behaviour and reflection not as an act of defiance, but as an expression of acceptance of her situation and a source of consolation.¹⁷ For these same reasons, the

14 Anouta de Groot, "Aandacht voor identiteit, spiritualiteit en verbondenheid: Centrale thema's in de Amerikaanse literatuur over Etty Hillesum", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in facetten* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 1] (Budel: Damon, 2003), 129-151.

15 Thanks to RSC intern Cheryl Bork for collecting these texts.

16 David Patterson, "Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004) 2: 274-290. He argued this in his book *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), and "Wartime Victim Writing in Western Europe", in Alan Rosen (ed.), *Literature of the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 33-48, in particular 37-40.

17 Timothy P. Jackson, "'Heroism on an Empty Stomach': Weil and Hillesum on Love and Happiness Amid the Holocaust", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40 (2012) 1, 72-98.

American philosopher John K. Roth included Etty Hillesum in his collection of Holocaust literature.¹⁸

After 2002, a wider circle of American scholars discovered Etty Hillesum. Their interest remained focused on her personality and not on the specific Holocaust context of her experience. Even in his review for a Jewish readership, Cliff Edwards does not argue for Etty Hillesum's unique place in the history of the Holocaust, but rather he remarks on her personal development and evolving spirituality.¹⁹ There exists a definite trend to read Hillesum's work in psychological terms. A telling example of this is the research done by social scientist Tony Woolfson. In an essay for the cultural-psychological magazine, *The Jung Journal*, he places the fate of the Hillesum family in the framework of the diaspora, the long history of Jews moving across the world.²⁰ In his view, the Netherlands as a particular location is irrelevant. Another scholar, Susan Gubar, Professor Emerita of English and Women's Studies at Indiana University, regrets the lack of a cultural *Umwelt* in Hillesum's diary, but Gubar's study fails to use the complete edition of the Hillesum papers, which might have nuanced her observation.²¹

The Jewish-American literary scholar Rachel Feldhay Brenner characterizes Etty Hillesum as an artist who entered an internal field of tension when she simultaneously identified herself with the suffering prisoners and wished to give them a literary voice.²² Brenner writes that the forces of close participation and distant observation competed within Etty Hillesum. This is indeed at the core of Etty Hillesum, a person who connected heart and head in her effort to gain self-understanding. Etty Hillesum was able to continue her earlier exercises in self-perception while in the concentration camp, and thus use this inner process as an instrument to sustain her human dignity. Her efforts guided her strong belief in the goodness in people, a belief that survived even in utter darkness.

In 2008, Brenner observed that American commentators writing about Etty Hillesum had missed aspects of her significance completely because they worked with a preconceived and narrow idea of a Holocaust

18 Leon Stein, "An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943", in: John K. Roth (ed.), *Holocaust Literature* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2008), 259-263.

19 Cliff Edwards' review in *Virginia Commonwealth University Menorah Review* (for the enrichment of Jewish Thought) 62 (Winter/Spring 2005), see <http://www.menorahreview.org/article.aspx?id=16> [visited 10 June 2016].

20 Tony Woolfson, "Dear God, There Is So Much To Do", *The Jung Journal* 2 (Spring 2008), 89-122.

21 Susan Gubar, "Falling for Etty Hillesum", *Common Knowledge* 12 (2006) 2, 279-301.

22 Rachel Brenner, "Etty Hillesum: A Portrait of a Holocaust Artist", in: Smelik, Van den Brandt & Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 235-251.

diary. Their preconceived model of such a diary consisted of an explicit record of the cruelties done to Jews written by someone who had a deep awareness of her/his Jewish religious and cultural identity. Etty Hillesum did not fit this notion because she sought to connect to Christian and humanistic values, and persisted in searching for light in the darkness. The absence of a conscious Jewish identity, her inner struggle, and her criticism of the Jewish elite, who she said, stood empty-handed without the protection of the external signs of their status, were arguments for some representatives of Holocaust Studies in America to cast Etty Hillesum aside as irrelevant.

Even the accessibility of a comprehensive annotated text after 2002 did not automatically lead to a shift in interpretation, because Etty Hillesum's diary circles around the process of change within herself and lacks a more narrow definition of a Holocaust diary. The practical application of Etty Hillesum's ideas was theoretically possible, but that was not her primary concern. She operated increasingly in a transnational, cultural, literary context, rather than in locally grounded organizations. This attitude was visible in her interaction with her oppressors. Her resistance was not so much directed against the Nazis, but against hate-generating oppressive systems and people. The Holocaust harboured exceptional circumstances, but was in itself not incomparably different from other ways in which humans have slaughtered, decimated, and destroyed each other.

Social psychologists in the United States adopted Etty Hillesum's writings to show how someone at the bottom of a pit could formulate and experience a meaningful life by generating positive feelings.²³ But because her life did not have a happy end and she was unable to formulate an uncomplicated plan to confirm the victory of good over evil, her message was not facile, and certainly not a recipe for a bestseller.

Researchers continue to use the selection of texts published in *Het verstoorde leven* as the main source for an analysis of Etty Hillesum's life. Only authors who desire to dig deeper in the exegesis of her texts, use the unabridged publication.²⁴ American publications have been less interested in the particulars of Etty Hillesum's life and more in the universal aspects of her thinking. The unabridged 2002 English text edition did not generate additional interest in the Dutch context of Hillesum's mental universe.

23 Joshua A. Hicks & Laura A. King, "Meaning in Life as a Subjective Judgment and a Lived Experience", *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 3 (July 2009) 4: 638-653.

24 See Jane Fenoulhet, "Intimate Emancipation: Mystical Experience in the Work of Carry van Bruggen and Etty Hillesum", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 42 (2006) 3: 213-225.

It is noteworthy that many former Soviet states, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia have published a translation of Etty Hillesum's writings long before the Russian translation appeared in 2016. This new translation can turn out to be significant because the lessons of these diaries and letters are not restricted to the Holocaust-experience. They can also address other examples of state oppression.

East versus West: The Holocaust in the Cold War

This brings me to the third issue: Etty Hillesum as a bridge between divided interpretations of the Holocaust. As a consequence of the Cold War, researchers interested in the Holocaust found themselves in two competing camps, divided by the question whether the Holocaust should be defined in unique or in universal terms. At the end of the Cold War, in 1990, the American academic Michael Berenbaum summarized the debate about the position of the Holocaust in history. His summation has become a classic reference point. He put the narrow interpretation that defined the Jewish experience as the core of the Holocaust against a broader interpretation that took the Jewish experience as but one component of a much larger evil – the Nazi ideology of racial superiority – which led to genocide everywhere in Europe. *Grosso modo*, these two interpretations dominated the American and Soviet reflections on the Holocaust during the Cold War. The United States adopted the narrow interpretation, and the Soviet Union the broader one.²⁵

Berenbaum illustrated these two visions with two specific faces: those of Elie Wiesel and of Simon Wiesenthal. The first was an orthodox Jew, incarcerated in a homogeneous Jewish concentration camp, where all his relatives died. Wiesel told his own experience as a sub-story of the Jewish tragedy. Wiesenthal was a secular Jew who was brought to Mauthausen along with many different people. He survived his imprisonment and wanted to bring as many Nazi torturers to justice as he could, no matter who the victims were. Berenbaum did not imply that personal experience inevitably leads to one or another of these interpretations. What he did do was allude to the fact that specific experiences, including national ones, could bring one to adopt one of the perspectives over the other.

Viktoria Sukovata, the Ukrainian cultural scientist has delved into this question by comparing the responses to the Holocaust in the American and

²⁵ Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

the Soviet cultures, in successive chronological phases. She concludes that both countries responded similarly to the very first revelations of the catastrophe. After the initial moral outcry, investigators from both countries began to collect sources for historical analyses, and artists and authors worked to make material representations of the atrocities in novels and films.²⁶

During the Cold War, however, the interpretations diverged. The contrasting visions functioned to emphasize the contrast between the two super powers in the cultural Cold War. Sukovata has found five differences in the American and Soviet war experience that prepared the groundwork for the subsequent different interpretations of the Holocaust: the length of time in direct confrontation during the war, the number of casualties suffered, the geographical spread of the war, the ensuing moral debates, and the national interests. Sukovata has described these as the specific conditions reinforcing the core of the two ideologies.

Direct American exposure to the character of the Nazi occupation happened late in the war and outside America's home turf. When American troops entered the concentration camps in April 1945, they were overwhelmed by the gruesome fate of the Jews, which overshadowed any imagination of the fate of other groups of victims. America's own level of casualties was relatively low compared to the six million dead Jews and over 40 million dead Soviets. "Only" 400,000 American soldiers and 3,000 civilians were killed in the war.

Accepting the interpretation of the Holocaust as an attack principally on the existence of the Jewish people can be seen as motivated by both compassion and Americans' feelings of guilt for not having rescued European Jewry. The contrast between the deplorable state of the Jews in Europe and the vibrant Jewish community in the United States fed the conviction that a repetition had to be avoided at all costs. The mood of universal responsibility for preventing the next genocide was especially strong in the United States and gave rise to international institutions such as the UN. In effect, in the US, all reflections on, descriptions of, and presentation about the Holocaust served this ideological position. Hence, eyewitness accounts were given superior status as the most reliable source for information on the Holocaust.

The direct experience with the Holocaust in the Soviet Union happened years before the American one, and was much more intense. Immediately following the German attack in the summer of 1941, the Soviet Union

26 "The Holocaust Response in American and Soviet Cultures as a Reflection of the Different War Experiences and Cold War Politics", in Hans Krabbendam & Derek Rubin (eds), *American Responses to the Holocaust: Transatlantic Perspectives* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017).

suffered from the hostilities of the Nazi's. According to Russian statistics the country lost 28 million soldiers and 18 million civilians, among them almost three million Jews.

In 1944, Jewish journalists from Soviet Union published the first eyewitness accounts of the murder of the Jews in the camps, but these stories were quickly censored by the Soviets for suggesting that this was the logical consequence of any totalitarian regime. Despite this suppression, these stories found their way into literature and art, though most authors positioned these atrocities within the frame work of the epic suffering of the entire Soviet people. There was no place for a unique Jewish experience. According to the authorities, an exception giving more weight to Jewish suffering would have undermined the solidarity of the Soviet family. Or any revelation about active collaborators inside and outside the camps would have fanned the tensions between the various nationalities within the Soviet Union. Soviet history as it was being written after the war, recognized only one category: the real patriots. These were the ethnic Russians who had beaten the Nazis. Any effort to down play their endeavour was suspect. Ignoring the active presence of 430,000 Jewish soldiers in the Red Army, the captured Jews were seen as victims who could not lay claim to a grand place in this history. Someone who fell victim through capture, had neglected his/her duty to the fatherland. There was no space between heroes and martyrs.

Apart from these ideological concerns, there were practical reasons not to let the Jewish experience outweigh the experience of other groups. There was the explicit Nazi depopulation policy in Central Europe that enslaved Slavic and Ukrainian peoples. The effect of this racial policy against the Slavs became painfully clear in the incredibly savage treatment of the Russian prisoners of war. An estimated 3.5 million soldiers who were captured by the Germans died because of malnutrition, exhaustion, and executions. The chance of death for a Russian prisoner of war was 57 per cent against four per cent for a captured American soldier. Even the barbaric treatment of resistance fighters from Western Europe was lenient compared to the Eastern Europeans who stood no chance. These facts coloured what response the Soviet Union would take to the annihilation of the Jews.

In short: for the Americans, the Holocaust was a consequence of the Second World War. For Russians, genocide was the story of the war itself. In America, feelings of guilt lead to feelings of sympathy for the Jews. In the Soviet Union, feelings of pride in and honour of the fatherland in the great Patriotic War dominated. As such, Jews became no more, and no less than "regular" victims.

During the intellectual skirmishes of the Cold War, the Soviet leaders interpreted the attention on the Jews in the Holocaust in the United States

as a denial of the collective Russian suffering. They felt it degraded Russian casualties to a second-rate status. In turn, the Americans concluded that the Russian interpretation was nationalistic glorification. As long as the memorial culture served the national interest, the Americans said, an exchange of ideas was impossible. The fragmentation of the Soviet Union broke the overarching myth of national solidarity, and revived the idea that there were unique national histories that critically confronted a Russian viewpoint. These new histories compared the Nazi practices with the Gulag, in which millions of Soviet former prisoners of war were punished even more, as if they had been traitors.

A new generation of Russian historians connected to discussions in the West, and used Western methodologies basing themselves upon newly opened archives. Simultaneously, researchers in the United States acknowledged the enormity of the total number of casualties in the Second World War. The US investigation of the Holocaust originally studied the unique character of the assault on the Jews. Gradually, it began to connect to genocide studies elsewhere on the planet and to come to terms with the comparative element inherent in any study of people's capacity for inhumanity.

Conclusion

These observations encourage us to suggest a number of issues for future Etty Hillesum research. First, it is remarkable how little attention Etty Hillesum paid to the United States. This in and of itself, alerts researchers to re-evaluate the expectations in occupied Europe when considering what citizens hoped for from America. Her work also opens up another issue worthy of reconsideration – not all Jews who were persecuted dreamt of emigration to the United States.

A second field for future scholarship centres on the fact that the recent interest in Hillesum's work in America happens mostly outside the domain of Holocaust Studies. The multidisciplinary conversation about Hillesum concerns her response to the Holocaust, not her experience in the Holocaust. It is possible that her work rightly enters the subdiscipline of Holocaust Studies via other discourses, and that this approach is enriching because it spreads her work in wider circles. For example, the American interest in Hillesum moves in a psychological direction. But this approach could also limit her impact because it loses the cultural context of her writings. The Etty Hillesum Research Centre would do well to investigate whether this American trend is part of something broader, and whether or not it

is positive. The Research Centre could also explore how a Dutch cultural setting shaped Hillesum's mental world (or not), and how these features can enter international fora.

Thirdly, it is important, when assessing Hillesum's works in international debates about the Holocaust, to recognize the opposing perspectives in Eastern Europe and the West. Does the legacy of the Cold War influence interpretations of her work? Etty Hillesum's fascination with Russia can be a bridge between the diverse approaches to Jewish suffering in East and West, because she escapes the fixed models. An examination of the different East/West points of view as a part of the international scholarly pursuit of, and appreciation for Hillesum's work, cannot but generate new insights.

Personal Epilogue

It has been a rewarding endeavour to analyze the oeuvre of Etty Hillesum academically, but her life also evokes a personal response. My own familiarity with Dutch immigrant culture in the United States took me to the last poem of Stanley Wiersma (1930-1986), a Dutch-American poet who – inspired by the news about the prospect of his first grandchild – wrote the following, entitled *From a letter about the anticipated birth of the Wiersma's first grandchild* (1986):²⁷

Our hope reaches out far beyond the birth to how she will become:
 with eyes which not only see, but which look for patterns,
 with ears which not only hear, but which listen,
 with a mouth which not only speaks, but which persuades,
 with a smile which is not only an adornment, but a statement,
 with feet which not only race against others, but run out of sheer delight,
 with hands that not only grab, but also give,
 with a mind that can not only be convinced, but can be moved
 and
 with not only the strength to endure suffering,
 but the imagination to use it.

Etty Hillesum fulfilled these expectations and reaches across cultural boundaries.

²⁷ Stanley Wiersma, *Adjoining Fields: For Stanley Wiersma, a Gathering of Works and Tributes* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1987), 33.

About the author

Hans Krabbendam is the director of the Catholic Documentation Center in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He acquired his Master's in history at Leiden University and specialized in Dutch immigration history at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, USA, where he earned another Master's in 1989. In 1995, he received his Doctoral Degree from Leiden University with a dissertation entitled: *The Model Man: A Life of Edward W. Bok, 1863-1930*. Between 1990 and 2016 he was affiliated with the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg, among others as assistant-director. He published widely on transatlantic themes and edited some 20 volumes on European-American relations. His research interests are immigration history, diplomatic and religious history. He is working on a monograph on American plans for a religious renovation of Europe after World War II.



20 Perceptions of Etty Hillesum in Japan

Yukiko Yokohata

Klaas Smelik, Gerrit Van Oord, and Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract

In Japan, the Roman Catholic perception of Etty Hillesum as a saint-like woman or a mystic, is not so common. The Christian population is quite small in Japan, and the religion is not indigenous. The author examines the contrasting Japanese reception of Etty Hillesum, looking especially at the Buddhist perspective, which focuses more on Hillesum's way of looking at life and the world than on her path of seeking her God. The author determines that the fact that Hillesum's work can be understood as easily in a Buddhist milieu shows that her internal achievement was so profound that it can be appreciated in different contexts in different countries.

Keywords: international reception, Japan, Buddhism, Catholicism, cultural differences, Holocaust Literature, Etty Hillesum

And one day I would love to walk through Japanese landscapes. In fact, I am sure that one day I shall go to the East to get to know them better still. Actually I'm sure I shall visit the East one day, to find a daily way of life there that would be thought discordant here.¹

Two volumes of Etty Hillesum's writings have been published in Japanese translation. Who has read these books, and what they have made of them? To find an answer, I have looked at book reviews in Japanese newspapers and periodicals, and examined references to Etty Hillesum in Japanese

¹ E.T., 394. *Het Werk*, 414; Friday evening, 5 June 1942: En ik zou later eens door Japanse landschappen willen lopen om het nóg beter te weten. Zoals ik überhaupt geloof, dat ik eens in de richting van het Oosten zal trekken, later, om daar dagelijks geleefd te vinden, waarin men meent hier alleen te staan als een dissonant. –

publications and on websites. I have also sought to interview a number of Japanese who have engaged with Etty Hillesum's writings in one way or another. This article presents my findings. My goal is to provide a definitive analysis of Etty Hillesum's reception in Japan.

Etty Hillesum in Japanese Translation

In 1986, Professor Ōkoso Yoshiko² saw her Japanese translation of Etty Hillesum's diary published as *Eros to kami to shūyōjo*,³ and in 1989 Ōkoso's translation of Etty Hillesum's letters came out as *Ikiru koto no imi wo motomete*.⁴ Both of these volumes used as their source text Arnold J. Pomerans's English translations from the original Dutch, respectively, *Etty: A Diary, 1941-43* and *Etty Hillesum: Letters from Westerbork*.⁵ Her editor chose the titles for Ōkoso's work, which, when translated into English, are *Eros, God, and Concentration Camp*, and *Searching for the Meaning of Life*.⁶

Pomerans's source for the *Diary* was the edition by the Dutch Protestant theologian, literary scholar, and writer, Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, *Het verstoorde leven: Dagboek van Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*. Gaarlandt's collection of excerpts from the diaries, supplemented with six letters, showcases Etty Hillesum's spirituality at the expense of other facets of her personality and is now considered partial and unreliable.⁷ Gerrit Van Oord has written that Gaarlandt's work, based on an unrepresentative selection, has, unfortunately, determined much of the initial response to Etty Hillesum's writings, for

2 Dr Ōkoso Yoshiko 大社淑子, professor emerita of Waseda University, Tōkyō, is a specialist in English literature. She is well known for her translation of the works of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Playing in the Dark*, *Jazz*, *Sula*, *Paradise*, *Love* and *A Mercy*.

3 Etty Hillesum, Ōkoso Yoshiko (tr.), *Erosu to kami to shūyōjo* エロスと神と収容所 (Tōkyō: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1986).

4 Etty Hillesum, Ōkoso Yoshiko (tr.), *Ikiru koto no imi wo motomete* 生きることの意味を求めて (Tōkyō: Shōbunsha, 1989).

5 Etty Hillesum, Arnold J. Pomerans (tr.), *Etty: A Diary 1941-43* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983); Etty Hillesum, Arnold J. Pomerans (tr.), *Etty Hillesum: Letters from Westerbork* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

6 Her editor suggested Ōkoso this title to elucidate the essence of the diary for Japanese readers.

7 See, e.g. the remarks regarding this edition in Klaas Smelik, "Gedenken is doen: Van een bundel cahiers tot een wereldwijde publicatie", and Ria van den Brandt, "Etty Hillesum en 'haar katholieke vereerders': Pleidooi voor een meer kritische benadering van een bijzonder document", both in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in facetten* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 1] (Budel: Damon, 2003), 30 and 61.

example, among readers and scholars in Italy.⁸ It seems to have had a similar effect in Japan, though not precisely the same. Gaarlandt's selections gave readers in Japan with a Christian background ample opportunity to project their own religious experiences onto Etty Hillesum, and some see Etty Hillesum's life in the perspective of Christian spirituality. But the selective nature of the source text had a different effect on readers from non-Christian backgrounds – the majority of readers in Japan.

Similarly, for her translated *Letters*, Ōkoso utilized Pomerans's *Etty Hillesum: Letters from Westerbork* also based on a Dutch volume edited by Gaarlandt, namely *Het denkende hart van de barak: De brieven van Etty Hillesum*.⁹

Ōkoso herself wrote the first texts in Japanese that directly reflect upon Hillesum's writings, composing the foreword and afterword to her translations of the *Diary* and the *Letters*. Ōkoso pays little attention to the spiritual dimension of the texts she is translating, and her quotations from Etty Hillesum are not particularly religious. Rather, she notes the historical significance of Etty Hillesum as a witness to her times whose message has lost none of its urgency.¹⁰ She presents Hillesum's writings as "important historical documents" and "testimony to a rare soul who gives us strength and hope." In her foreword to *Eros to kami to shūyōjo*, she writes,

While the heart of a teenager living through troubled times speaks to us in the diary of Anne Frank, the diary of Etty Hillesum shows us how a woman in her twenties was able, with intelligence, empathy and a love of life, to remain herself under the cruellest of circumstances.¹¹

According to Ōkoso, "Etty's diary puts the shocking period 1942-1943 in a different light from that cast by the diary of Anne Frank or by Viktor Frankl's *Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*."¹² She expects Etty Hillesum's diary to cut through to the reader's soul, and hopes that the book will prompt Japanese readers to think about the historical significance of the period it covers.

8 Gerrit Van Oord, "Italiaans enthousiasme: Het dagboek van Etty Hillesum in Italië", in: *Etty Hillesum in facetten*, 113.

9 Etty Hillesum, Jan Geurt Gaarlandt (ed.), *Het denkende hart van de barak: De brieven van Etty Hillesum* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1982).

10 Personal interview with Professor Ōkoso, Tōkyō, 18 July 2004.

11 Hillesum, *Erosu to kami to shūyōjo*, ii.

12 Viktor Frankl, Shimoyama Tokuji (tr.), *Yoru to kiri 夜と霧 [Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager]* (Tōkyō: Misuzushobō, 1985).

In the afterwords to her translations of the *Diary* and the *Letters*, Ōkoso dedicates considerable attention to the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands and to the Jewish Council. In the final paragraphs of the afterword to *Letters*, Ōkoso refers to the Nanking Massacre, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and – with a quotation from Doris Lessing – to the German victims of Nazism, neither Jews nor Gypsies, but those who nevertheless paid with their lives for their resistance to Hitler.¹³

Still, Etty Hillesum is not well known in Japan, and Ōkoso's translations of Hillesum's writings have not been reprinted. Japanese publishing houses only reprint books that prove their sales potential within a year of publication, making the marketing strategy in the first year crucial. Apparently, Ōkoso's books were not sufficiently advertised, or the commercial strategy set for them was insufficient in some respect.

Professor David G. Goodman,¹⁴ in his *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype*,¹⁵ examines this limited interest and reaches a comparable conclusion. In Goodman's view, Etty Hillesum's *Diary* is exemplary of the fact that there is no lack of good translations of Jewish literature with a solid academic basis, but nevertheless the reading public has not been reached. Sales figures back up his view. Over a seven-year period, from 1985 to 1992, only 3,000 copies of the Japanese translation of the *Diary* were sold. Over the same period, sales of Amos Oz's *In the Land of Israel*¹⁶ numbered 2,800 copies. Elie Wiesel's *Le Chant des Morts*¹⁷ sold 4,500 copies in nineteen years (1973 to 1992), almost as many as Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Short Friday*¹⁸ in the 21 years from 1971 to 1992. Only Anne Frank's diary consistently sells in long print runs in Japan.

13 Hillesum, *Ikiru koto no imi wo motomete*, 265. Ōkoso quotes a lengthy excerpt from the Japanese translation of Doris Lessing's essay. Doris Lessing, Kaji Etsuko (tr.), *Afugan no kaze Afugan no kaze* [*The Wind Blows Away Our Words and Other Documents Relating to the Afghan Resistance*] (Tōkyō: Shōbunsha, 1988).

14 Another of his research interests is the impact of the experience of the atomic bomb on Japanese culture. (Source: www.acdis.uiuc.edu/About/Staff/showstaff.oho?id=15)

15 David G. Goodman, *Yudayajin inbōsetsu: Nihon no naka no han-yudaya to shin-yudaya* ユダヤ人陰謀説 日本の中の反ユダヤと親ユダヤ [*Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype*] (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1999), 396. David G. Goodman (1946-2011) was an expert on Japanese literature at the University of Illinois.

16 Amos Oz, *Isuraeru ni ikiru hitobito* イスラエルに生きる人々 [*In The Land of Israel*] (Tōkyō: Shōbunsha, 1985).

17 Elie Wiesel, *Shisha no uta* 死者の歌 [*Le Chant Des Morts*] (Tōkyō: Shōbunsha, 1970).

18 Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Mijikai kinyōbi* 短かい金曜日 [*Short Friday*] (Tōkyō: Shōbunsha, 1971).

Reviews in Japanese Newspapers and Periodicals

When the Japanese translation of the *Diary* came out in 1986, at least four daily newspapers and three periodicals reviewed the book: *Tōkyō shimbun* and *Chūgoku shimbun*, regional newspapers in Tōkyō and Hiroshima respectively; *Yomiuri shimbun*, a popular daily, politically conservative, which is the most read newspaper in Japan; left-liberal *Asahi shimbun*, the most prestigious national newspaper; *Shūkan sankei* and *Shinchō45*, two weeklies that cover both gossip and political developments; and *Shūkan shinchō*, one of the higher quality popular magazines. Collectively, these newspapers and magazines represent a considerable expanse of the media landscape. In 1995, the national daily newspaper *Mainichi shimbun* also devoted attention to Ety Hillesum by awarding a prize to a Japanese student's book report on the translation of the *Letters*. All these articles taken together provide us with the first impression Ety Hillesum's book made in Japan.

The reviewer for *Tōkyō shimbun*,¹⁹ Professor Iwabuchi Tatsuji,²⁰ observes that from March 1941, when the Netherlands had been under German occupation for ten months and the preparations for the extermination of the Jews were in full swing, Ety Hillesum wrote exclusively about her inner world, allowing us to forget about the horrors going on around her. Iwabuchi associates this *innere Exil* with the closed and introverted attitude of Peter Weiss,²¹ who fled to Sweden. But Iwabuchi remarks that,

19 “Yudayajin josei no shuki” ユダヤ人女性の手記 [Manuscript of a Jewish woman], *Tōkyō shimbun* 東京新聞, 10 March 1986.

20 Iwabuchi Tatsuji 岩淵 達治 was professor of Gakushūin University in Tōkyō, a specialist in German literature, also a literary writer and a director of classical and modern German theatre. In October 2005, Iwabuchi gave a lecture at Ōtani University (an institution which will be discussed in more detail below) for the special exhibition “Goethes Faust: Verwandlungen eines “Hexenmeisters” ファウスト伝説と作品フランクフルト・ゲーテ博物館の名品.

21 Peter Ulrich Weiss (1916-1982), who was German dramatist, novelist, and essayist, was the son of a Hungarian-born Jewish textile manufacturer with Czech citizenship. In 1934, he and his family were forced into exile by Nazi persecution and emigrated from Germany to England. He then moved to Czechoslovakia in 1936 and, after a sojourn in Switzerland, to Sweden in 1939, acquiring Swedish citizenship in 1945. Weiss began his artistic career as a painter and graphic artist; he also worked in experimental and documentary cinema, translated several of August Strindberg's plays into German, and adapted Franz Kafka's *The Trial* for the stage. He received numerous literary awards, including the Lessing Prize (1965), the Heinrich Mann Prize (1966), and Büchner Prize (1982). Weiss achieved world renown with *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade* (1964; *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, 1965).

due to the process of self-examination, Etty Hillesum was able to live more intensely during the time remaining to her, “The short account of her time in the transit camp seems entirely different to the interior diary that precedes it. But thanks to that earlier period, in which she turned her gaze inwards in search of love and God, she was able to face her hopeless situation.”

Though there was no by-line on the review in *Chūgoku shimbun*,²² the reviewer similarly writes that: “although the *Diary* can be classified among ‘books about the Nazi period, war, the persecution of the Jews, and Auschwitz,’ these things are less prominent in the book than that classification would lead one to expect, because it is primarily a record of Etty’s interior dialogue.”

In contrast, according to the review in *Yomiuri shimbun*,²³ the strength of Etty Hillesum’s diary lies precisely in the fact that her self-examination was not limited to her inner world. Etty Hillesum reached maturity through her awareness not only of herself, but also of other people and the world around her. Hillesum attempted to make the stress of this period bearable by facing the terror and understanding the fate of the Jews. In this way, Etty Hillesum found her own God, not the God of a church or a theological idea.

The reviewer for *Asahi shimbun*²⁴ describes the sincerity of Etty Hillesum’s self-examination and search for God, and portrays it as “moving, because it contrasts so strongly with the cruelty of the Nazis.”

The columnist for *Shūkan shinchō*,²⁵ just like Ōkoso, compares Etty Hillesum’s diary to Anne Frank’s, again contrasting the young girl Anne, to the adult woman Etty who, “living under the deadly Nazi terror, searched for God and love.” The reviewer remarks, “Forty years after the Second World War and after Auschwitz, the publication of this report of her suffering brings her unique soul back to life.”²⁶

22 “*Nachi shihaika no nikki*” ナチ支配下の日記 [Diary under Nazi occupation], *Chūgoku shimbun* 中国新聞, 9 March 1986.

23 “*Kandō, senritsu, seishin no kiroku*” 感動、戦りつ、精神の記録 [Moving, chilling and spiritual writing], *Yomiuri shimbun* 読売新聞, 10 February 1986.

24 “*Erosu to kami to shūyōjo*” エロスと神と収容所 [Eros, God and Concentration Camp], *Asahi shimbun* 朝日新聞, 24 February 1986.

25 “*Erosu to kami to shūyōjo*” エロスと神と収容所 [Eros, God and Concentration Camp], *Shūkan shinchō* 週刊新潮, 13 March 1986.

26 In Japanese, the expression “report of the soul” (*tamashii no kiroku* 魂の記録) is often used to indicate a moving life story with a message of general human interest.

The writer Hosaka Masayasu,²⁷ reviewing the book for the magazine *Shinchō*⁴⁵,²⁸ writes that Etty Hillesum felt real pity for the Nazis when she saw that they could commit cruelties upon the Jews and feel no remorse. Hosaka saw her pity as “the highest point that she could reach as an intelligent woman.” He too made the comparison to Anne Frank.

In the book report on the *Diary* that won the *Mainichi shimbun* prize, schoolgirl Urano Maki²⁹ wrote that Anne Frank’s diary had made her hate Hitler, war and cruelty, but that in reading Etty Hillesum she was moved by something different. In Hillesum she felt joyfulness and realized that love of humanity as a whole motivated Etty Hillesum, even under the most difficult circumstances in the concentration camp. Urano wondered how Etty Hillesum could retain her humanity and vitality, and did not speculate about Hillesum’s faith and relationship to God.

27 Hosaka Masayasu 保阪正康 is a non-fiction writer and commentator. He is a well-known publicist on Shōwa history. He is the author of works such as:

- *Ano sensō ha nandattanoka – Otona no tameno rekishikyōkasho* あの戦争は何だったのか – 大人のための歴史教科書 [That war, what did it mean? A history book for grown-ups] (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 2005);
- *Tokkō’ to nihonjin*, 「特攻」と日本人 [The Special Attack Units and the Japanese] (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 2005).
- *Shōwa Rikugun no kenkyū* 昭和陸軍の研究 [Research about the Army in Showa period] (Tōkyō: Asahi shimbunsha, 2006).
- *Shōwa tennō jitsuroku – sono omote to ura* 昭和天皇実録–その表と裏 [Veritable Records of Emperor Showa: Its two sides of the front and back] (Tōkyō: Mainichi shimbunsha, 2015).

28 *Mō hitotsu no Anne no nikki* もうひとつの「アンネの日記」 [Another “Diary of Anne”], *Shinchō*⁴⁵ 新潮⁴⁵, (1986) 4.

29 In 1995, Urano Maki 浦野真紀 won the annual book report competition for school students organised by the daily newspaper *Mainichi shimbun*. The book reports that *Mainichi shimbun* short-listed for the award between 1994 and 2004 included several on books about the Shoah, such as:

- Anne Frank, Kaitō Kōzō (tr.), *Anne no nikki – Hikari honokani* アンネの日記–光ほのかに [Diary of Anne Frank: In the feeble light; original title: *Het achterhuis*] (Tōkyō: Bungeishunjū, 1957)
- Selma Meerbaum-Einsinger, Akiyama Hiroshi (tr.), *Zeruma no shishū 1924-1942* ゼルマの詩集 1924-1942 [Poems of Selma; original title: *Ich bin in Sehnsucht eingehüllt*] (Tōkyō: Iwanami-shoten, 1986).
- Frankl, *Yoru to kiri*.
- Linda Atkinson, Satō Ryōichi (tr.), *Anna, Senjō ni kieta seishun 1921-1944* アンナ、戦場に消えた青春 1921-1944 [Hannah, interrupted youth on the battlefield; original title: *In kindling flame: The story of Hannah Senesh 1921-1944*] (Tōkyō: Ōbunsha, 1986).
- Saotome Katsumoto, *Auschwitz to watashi* アウシュヴィッツと私 [Auschwitz and me] (Tōkyō: Sōdobunka, 1980).

In contrast, the reviewer for *Shūkan sankei*,³⁰ film director Chiba Shigeki,³¹ dealt with Hillesum's faith and relationship to God very explicitly. Etty Hillesum, who "had prepared herself to accept the path to the concentration camp," reminds Chiba of the Roman Catholic priest Maximilian Kolbe, who – by voluntarily taking another inmate's place – went to his own death quite consciously. According to Chiba, Hillesum's search for and conversations with God inspired her "human creativity and joy in life." Chiba thinks that without her faith it would have been impossible for Hillesum to forgive, let alone love such cruel enemies. He regards Etty Hillesum's diary as "love letters to God."³² Chiba also describes the diary as "a report of the soul."

Clearly, the reviews present a variety of images. Some state that Etty Hillesum's writing and self-examination in "inner exile" was a flight from the cruel reality of persecution. The majority, however, (*Chūgoku shimbun*, *Asahi shimbun*, *Yomiuri shimbun*, *Shinchō*45, *Mainichi shimbun*, *Shūkan shinchō*), regard her self-examination and conscious observation of others as a sign of maturity, and the means by which she acquired a deep insight into human reality thus enabling her to forgive even the Nazis. One reviewer (*Shūkan sankei*) sees Etty Hillesum's humanity and capacity to forgive from a religious and Christian perspective.

The first two interpretations in *Tōkyō shimbun* and *Yomiuri shimbun*, seem to be incompatible. Iwabuchi's remark in *Tōkyō shimbun* regarding

30 'Nijūdai no seijuku shita josei ga nokoshita shūyōjo seikatsuki, ningen no sōzōryoku to ikiru yorokobi o motometa tamashii no kiroku' 二十代の成熟した女性が残した収容所生活記、人間の創造力と生きる喜びを求めた魂の記録 [Account of life in a concentration camp, left by a mature twenty-something; account of a soul seeking human imagination and joy in life] *Shūkan sankei* 週刊サンケイ, 27 March 1986.

31 Chiba Shigeki 千葉 茂樹 made a large number of documentary films on Roman Catholic themes, such as *Mazā Teresa to sono sekai* マザーテレサとその世界 [Mother Teresa and her world] in 1979, *Ashuvittsu, Ai no kiseki, Korube shinpu no shōgai* アウシュビッツ、愛の奇跡、コルベ神父の生涯 [Auschwitz, the miracle of love: The life of Father Kolbe] 1981, *Mazā Teresa no inori, Seimei sore wa ai – Mazā Teresa rainichi no kiroku* マザーテレサの祈り、生命それは愛 – マザーテレサ来日の記録 [Mother Teresa's prayer] 1981, *Heiwa no junreisha, Yohane Pauro* 平和の巡礼者ヨハネパウロII世 [Pilgrim of peace, John Paul II], 1981. He also wrote the script for the animated film *Zeno, kagirinaki ai ni* ゼノ、限りなき愛に [Zeno, or love unlimited], 1999, about Zeno Wladyslaw Zebrowski (1898-1982), a friar who travelled to Japan with Maximilian Kolbe in 1930.

32 Hillesum used the same phrase to describe Augustine's writings. See E.T., 546: I am going to read Saint Augustine again. He is so austere and so fervent. And so full of simple devotion in his love letters to God. Truly those are the only love letters one ought to write: love letters to God. *Het Werk*, 579; Friday, 9 October 1942: Ik ga weer de Heilige Augustinus lezen. Hij is zo streng en gloedvol. En zo hartstochtelijk en vol regelrechte overgave in z'n minnebrieven aan God. Eigenlijk zijn dat de enige liefdesbrieven, die men zou moeten schrijven: die aan God.

Etty Hillesum's *innere Exil* allows readers "to forget that the book was written in the period of the Nazi persecution of Jews" and it cannot be reconciled with the idea in *Yomiuri shimbun* concerning Hillesum's "awareness of other people and of the outside world as a whole." But these different readings are less relevant to Etty Hillesum's reception in Japan. More important is the fact that the majority of the reviewers – including Iwabuchi – place emphasis on Etty Hillesum's self-examination, and not, like the Roman Catholic Chiba Shigeki (*Shūkan sankei*), on a supposedly divine inspiration.³³

Etty Hillesum and the Buddhist University

One trail of Etty Hillesum's presence in Japan leads to Ōtani University in Kyōto, one of the foremost institutions for Buddhist Studies in Japan.³⁴ This university maintains a tradition of posting a new motto for each month of the year – usually, but not always, a quotation from Buddhist scriptures – written

33 Websites of Japanese bookshops and personal blogs of individual Japanese readers give us an impression of the way in which ordinary readers responded to Etty Hillesum's work. Takahashi Yūji 高橋 悠治 who is a pianist and composer, writes in his monthly journal *Suigyū tsūshin* that one would not know simply from reading this diary that it was written by a Dutch Jew in Amsterdam in the period 1940-42 (www1.u-netsurf.ne.jp/~mie_y/suigyū/tushin/1986_03.html). In the readers' forum of the Teiyūdo bookshop another reader, Oikawa Yukiko 及川ゆき子, writes that she had put aside the *Diary* at her first reading, because Etty Hillesum writes so openly about disappointments in love and sex, but at a second reading she was touched by Etty Hillesum's honest, open and deep feelings (http://homepage2.nifty.com/teiyu/journal/yuki_0207.html). By contrast, Yagawa Sumiko 矢川澄子 (1930-2002), was impressed by Etty Hillesum's unconventional love affairs with different men and considered her as a precursor for young women after the Second World War. Cf. "Tamashii no jizai na ugoki – Eti Hiresumu cho 'Eros to kami to shūyōjo'" [A free movement of the soul: 'An Interrupted Life' by Etty Hillesum] in: *Tegami* [Letters] (Tōkyō: Ōdesuku, September 1986), 9, 40-44. Yagawa was author, poet, and translator of French, German and English and rather known in Japan as ex-wife of Shibusa Tatsuhiko 澁澤龍彦 (1928-1987), who was a translator of French literature, especially a translator of Sade, novelist, and an art critic. [Professor Ōkoso, who translated *Etty: A Diary, 1941-43* and *Etty Hillesum: Letters from Westerbork* into Japanese, kindly gave me this magazine. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to professor Ōkoso.]

34 Ōtani University in Kyōto was founded by the Jōdo Shin, one of the main branches of Japanese Buddhism. The educational ideals and philosophy of Ōtani University are based on the teachings of the founder of the Jōdo Shin sect, the priest Shinran, who lived from 1173 to 1262. The institutional history of Ōtani University goes back to 1665, when the Higashi Honganji (the main temple and administrative heart of the Jōdo Shin sect) established a seminary in Kyōto for the study of Mahayana Buddhism. In 1901, as part of the Meiji reform of the Japanese education system according to Western models, the seminary received a charter as a university in the modern sense of the word.

in calligraphy on a board hung next to the main entrance.³⁵ According to the former rector, Professor Kurube Teruo,³⁶ the monthly mottoes have an edifying purpose closely related to the university's mission: they contribute to *monkunjū*,³⁷ a process by which people, consciously or unconsciously, accumulate wisdom and grace by “inhaling the odour” of texts such as sutras. The notice board hangs by the entrance in view of passers-by on the main road, and is there to provide comfort and support to as many as possible.³⁸ Once the university created a website the mottoes became available online.³⁹ This was where I discovered that in March 1997 a quotation from Etty Hillesum had adorned Ōtani University's main entrance: “Facts, I mean. But facts don't really matter in life, only what you have become through them.”⁴⁰

Enquiries into who was responsible for this choice of motto lead to Ōtani University lecturer, Professor Andō Fumio,⁴¹ a Buddhist priest, an exegete of Buddhist scriptures and a specialist on the Jōdo Shin sect. Professor Andō wrote an explanation to accompany the motto as follows:

All sorts of things happen to us in life. Life is an accumulation of daily concrete events. This is true for all of us, but each one of us is responsible for how we respond to that reality and how we develop as a person. As a young woman, Etty experienced the cruelties of the Nazi era and was murdered in Auschwitz. She blamed nobody for the terrible reality that overcame her, but learned a lot from her situation. “I believe we can extract something positive from life under any circumstances. But we have the right to say that only if we do nothing to escape, even from the

35 It is not known how far back the tradition goes of hanging a monthly motto for Ōtani University on a sign by the gate, but it is certainly very old. Only in 1990, in response to numerous requests, did Ōtani University start to provide a written explanation of each month's motto. These glosses are circulated in a small print run as posters [information from *Kyō no kotoba: Dendō keijiban* きょうのことば - 大谷大学伝道揭示板 [The word of the day: Temple signs with monthly mottoes for Ōtani University] (Kyōto: Ōtani University, 1997), 130], and are also collected as books (without specifying an author's name).

36 訓覇 暉雄

37 聞薫習

38 Professor Kurube's introduction to the first of the two collected volumes of Ōtani University monthly mottoes and explanatory texts (*Kyō no kotoba*, 1997, 2ff).

39 http://www.otani.ac.jp/yomu_page/kotoba/index_bn.html.

40 「人生において事実は本当の意味で重要ではありません。事実を通して人がどういう人間になったかだけが重要なのです。」 Etty Hillesum originally wrote this passage in German: E.T., 569. *Het Werk*, 605; Letter 14, To Osias Kormann, Amsterdam, Monday evening, 28 September 1942: *Tatsachen, meine ich. Aber auf die Tatsachen kommt es doch gar nicht an im Leben, nur was man durch sie geworden ist.*

41 安藤 文雄

worst conditions.⁴² Ety did not flee from this difficult situation, but regarded the facts as the meaning of life itself. She sought what she could do and achieve, even under the most difficult conditions. “I sometimes think that every new situation, good or bad, can enrich us with new insights.”⁴³ I suspect that the meaning of life is not to be found in rosy dreams, but in the lessons we can learn from the facts of our day-to-day life. Often, however, we do not take reality seriously and lose ourselves in fantasies about future happiness. And when reality does not match our expectations, we blame others or look for excuses. Then we live with a feeling of emptiness and anxiety. What is wrong with us? “One discovers that the basic materials of life are the same everywhere, and that one can live one’s life with meaning – or else one can die – on any spot on this earth. The Big Dipper looks down on some distant hamlet just as reliably as it does on a great city at the hub of a nation, or as it does on a coal mine in Silesia; so that all’s right with the world [...].”⁴⁴ The discovery that Ety made in her dreadful circumstances is that the content and the form of our everyday lives may vary according to time and conditions, but that life itself is one and the same and that everyone can live meaningfully. Living to the full is the task of everyone who is born. It is of the utmost importance that we live without turning our back on the reality that is given us. Whatever I think, I live before I think, and I think about the facts of my life. To become who I am in this precious, unique life that nobody but I can live, is the most important task for every human being.⁴⁵

Professor Andō died in 1998, but my contact at Ōtani University, Mr. Inagaki Junzō,⁴⁶ was very gracious, and asked a number of professors who had been personally acquainted with the Buddhist priest, why Andō had quoted from Ety Hillesum for the monthly motto.

The colleagues at Ōtani University recalled that Andō, inspired by a saying of his predecessor Professor Kaneko Taiei⁴⁷ – “We can never live our

42 E.T., 574. Ety Hillesum originally wrote this passage in German. Page numbers and notes added to Andō’s commentary by the present author.

43 *Ibid.*, 586.

44 *Ibid.*, 581.

45 *Kyō no kotoba 2 – Dendō keijiban* きょうのことば 2 – 大谷大学伝道揭示板 [Word of the day part 2: Temple signs with monthly mottoes for Ōtani University] (Kyōto: Ōtani University, 2001), 9.

46 稲垣 淳造, head of the Academic Planning Office at Ōtani University in 2004.

47 金子 大栄 (1881-1976); an important thinker in the Jōdo Shin sect and a professor at Ōtani University.

life again, but we can look at it again"⁴⁸ – had been searching for a “new way of looking.” They also remembered that Andō was familiar with Viktor Frankl’s books *Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen*⁴⁹ and *Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*, and saw a correspondence between Frankl’s concept of “reversing the question”⁵⁰ and the Buddhist concept of *Eshin*.⁵¹ *Eshin*, of central significance for the Jōdo Shin sect, means that when humans know the limits of their own powers, they can perceive *Tariki*,⁵² the strength of the Buddha, which is greater than all of humanity.

Andō’s colleagues speculated that he recognized elements of *Eshin* in Etty Hillesum’s writings. They thought he chose a Hillesum quote as the monthly motto because he saw a connection between Etty Hillesum’s self-examination and the basic philosophy of Ōtani University; both are engaged in a search for the roots of being human.⁵³

Of Ōtani University’s 120 monthly mottoes between January 1990 and December 2000, 113 derive from Buddhist texts, mostly sutras. Because Etty Hillesum’s quotation was the monthly motto in March 1997,⁵⁴ a closer look at the mottoes of February and April 1997 helps flesh out the conceptual context in which Ōtani University placed Etty Hillesum.

48 “Watashitachi ha jinsei o yarinaosu koto ha dekinai ga, jinsei o minaosu koto ha dekiru.” 「私達は人生をやり直すことはできないが、人生を見直すことはできる。」

49 Viktor Frankl, Yamada Mika, Matsuda Kunio (trs.), *Soredemo jinsei ni iesu to iu* それでも人生にイエスと言う [*Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen*] (Tōkyo: Shunjūsha, 1993).

50 In his book *Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen*, Frankl uses his own experiences as a concentration camp prisoner and psychiatrist to analyze how a camp inmate could survive mentally. Frankl turns the question of the meaning of life on its head: What does life want from me? Frankl says that this inversion means life can never lose meaning in any situation. The Ōtani monthly motto for December 2003 was a quotation from Frankl’s book that encapsulates this idea: “It is life itself that asks questions of us.” 「私達は問われている存在なのです」

51 廻心 *Eshin*

52 他力: *Tariki*: the actualization of Amida Buddha’s *Hongan*. In Jōdo Shin Buddhism *Hongan* is the goal of saving humanity, a goal to which all Buddhas work. Each Buddha also has goals specific to them. The specific goal of Amida Buddha is: “I wish for all to become Buddhas. Otherwise I do not wish to be a Buddha myself.” The word *Amida* is derived from Sanskrit and means ‘infinite’. It expresses that life is raised above all limits or differentiation, so all life is one. [Explanation provided by Professor Nakagawa Kōzaburo on the Otani University website http://www.otani.ac.jp/yomu_page/b_yougo/index.html (Seikatsu no naka no Bukkyō yōgo 生活の中の仏教用語 – Buddhist terms in daily life).

53 Personal communication from Mr Inagaki by e-mail.

54 Other non-Buddhist monthly mottoes over this decade came from the work of the poets Akashi Kaijin 明石海人 (June 1995 and May 1996) and Yamamura Bochō 山村暮鳥 (October 1995), the painter Munakata Shikō 棟方志功 (October 1996), the poet Rabindranath Tagore (July 1995), and the writer Antoine de Saint Exupéry (August 1997).

The motto for February 1997 was a passage from the Vimalakīrti sutra:⁵⁵ “Our being is like an illusion that appears from *Tendō* (*Tentō*).”⁵⁶ *Tendō*⁵⁷ is the Japanese translation of the Sanskrit word *viparyāsa*, basically meaning, “something which is put upside down.”⁵⁸ In Buddhist scripture, it often denotes a wrong notion, something that goes against the truth, an illusion. The passage from the Vimalakīrti teaches that we should not cling to our human, physical body, and that looking at the body as the cornerstone in our quest for insight is an illusory idea. We think of the human body as not changing, but it is constantly changing, constantly getting older and weaker. Once we have freed ourselves from “wrong notions” (*Tendō*) concerning physical existence we can look for a different kind of “body.” This is called the “body of truth” or *dharmakāya* – our existence as it presents itself from the perspective of insight and liberation. In the last lines of his commentary building upon this principle, Andō cites Etty Hillesum’s personal discovery that “the basic materials of life are the same everywhere.” He claims it as one of her most important achievements.

In the Vimalakīrti Scripture, Vimalakīrti uses his developing illness as an occasion to teach the truth to all who come to visit him. In this way, he transforms his illness by the force of compassion, into an instrument capable of inducing a correct understanding of the Buddhist teachings. Something as unpleasant, unsatisfactory, and impure as physical discomfort and sickness is thereby made into a beautiful instrument of realization.⁵⁹

The motto for April 1997 was: “What is our ‘self’? That is the most fundamental question of life.”⁶⁰ It is a quotation from the work of Kiyozawa Manshi, founder of the modern Ōtani University and a leading Buddhist philosopher of

55 The Vimalakīrti sutra is one of the sutras most central to Mahayana Buddhism. In India, this sutra’s influence seems to have been limited, but in China it was of great importance in the development of Zen Buddhism, in which it still plays an important role. For the text of the sutra, see http://www.buddhistinformation.com/ida_b_wells_memorial_sutra_library/vimalakirti_nirdesa_sutra.htm.

56 「この身は幻の如し、顛倒より起こる。」

57 顛倒

58 I am indebted to Shaku Jinsen (釈忍鈔), a Belgian Shingon Buddhist monk, for the information concerning Buddhist philosophy. (Shingon Buddhist Centre, Yō e an (葉衣庵); <http://www.yoean.be/en/>)

59 This theme is congruent with the image of Etty Hillesum as somebody who could have gone into hiding, but chose to remain in the camp to help others there. It is not clear whether this aspect influenced the choice or order of the monthly mottoes in question. Ōtani University does not explicitly make such a connection.

60 「自己とは何ぞや。これ人生の根本的問題なり。」

the Meiji period.⁶¹ The accompanying commentary on this quotation includes the statement that, “for Ōtani University this question underlies all studies, whatever the chosen specialization,” and that “study that gives no answer to this most fundamental question, is not in accordance with the goals of our university.”⁶² The uncompromising tone here leaves no doubt of the fundamental importance that Ōtani University attaches to self-examination.

Taking all of this into account – the function of the monthly mottoes, and Andō’s commentary on the text from Etty Hillesum, the information provided by Andō’s colleagues regarding his reasons for his choice, and finally the placing of Etty Hillesum’s text between a passage from the Vimalakirti sutra and the fundamental quotation from the work of Kiyozawa Manshi – we can say that Ōtani University gave prominence to this particular quotation from Etty Hillesum because of the perceived connection between Etty Hillesum’s insight, born of self-examination, and what the Buddhist university regards as its core mission.

Ōtani University’s reading of Etty Hillesum, which so strongly emphasizes the importance of self-examination, helps to locate the majority of the Japanese reviews. Since the reviews similarly placed such a strong emphasis on Etty Hillesum’s self-examination, it is safe to say that they were reflective of a Buddhist cultural perspective.

That many people in Japan have a spiritual outlook coloured by Buddhism is not news. What is new is that this can now be demonstrably linked to the way in which Japanese readers have responded to Etty Hillesum’s writings. This Buddhist perspective is not a dogmatic-religious conviction, but a philosophical sense of meaning, a common thread that nevertheless leaves room for the range of different interpretations of Etty Hillesum’s behaviour and writing. We saw this range in the reviews. The difference between this Buddhist perspective and a Christian interpretation of Etty Hillesum, also to be found in Japan, will become clearer when we compare the two.

61 清沢 満之 (1863-1903). Kiyozawa Manshi, *Kiyozawa Manshi zenshū* 清沢 満之全集 [Collected Works of Kiyozawa Manshi] (Kyōto: Ōtani University, 2002). At the opening of the academic year (which in Japan falls in April), Ōtani University commemorates its founder. In 1997, this was done by choosing a fundamental quotation from his work as the motto for the month of April. In April 1925, the then chancellor Professor Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 delivered a speech in which he remembered Kiyozawa as someone who “strove for a university in which students through studying Buddhism could find themselves and so be able to enrich their lives”. Kiyozawa, in Sasaki’s words, “was convinced that Buddhism was the core of Asian identity. He thought Japan should be proud of Buddhism and show this to the West in words and deeds. He was opposed to the dominant tendency of the Meiji period to imitate Western systems unreflectively and superficially.” (source: http://www.otani.ac.jp/annai/kengaku_rinen/juritsu_s.html)

62 *Kyō no kotoba* 2, 11.

Etty Hillesum and Japanese Roman Catholics

Christians make up less than one per cent of the 126 million inhabitants of Japan. The Catholic Church in Japan has about 450,000 members, or less than 0.5 per cent of the population. Nevertheless, just as wherever Etty Hillesum's writings have been published, in Japan too, there are writers who approach her work from a Christian theological perspective.

A few energetic Roman Catholic publicists have, through articles, books, and lectures given the Christian theological perspective a currency in Japan that goes beyond the limited circle of their coreligionists. As early as 1986, when the Japanese translation of the *Diary* was published, one of the seven reviews was by a Roman Catholic, Chiba Shigeki, in the religiously neutral *Shūkan sankei*. In his enthusiastic review, Chiba describes Etty Hillesum's diary as "love letters to God."⁶³

Shortly after that, in 1987, a Japanese Salesian priest, Father Kaneko Kennosuke,⁶⁴ published his first article on Etty Hillesum.⁶⁵ He would return to her many times in a series of articles and lectures. In 2003, Kaneko's *Kaze itusmo fuku hibi* [The days that the wind always blows] was published, a memoir of his 50 years as a priest in which he wrote that the *Diary* "hit me like a bomb, with an explosion that awoke my soul and still keeps it awake."⁶⁶

In his 1987 article, Kaneko calls Etty Hillesum "wakeful," because she wishes to be "the thinking heart of the barrack." "Etty is one those few witnesses who – in a terrible situation in which God seemed absent and people had lost their humanity – had a conscience that kept her awake."⁶⁷ Kaneko links this to a Christian perspective by quoting from Pascal, "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world, we must not sleep during that

63 Etty Hillesum describes Augustine's writings in the same terms. See above n. 30.

64 金子 賢之助

65 Kaneko, in: *Seiki* 世紀 [Centuries] 39 (1987), no. 441, 35f.

66 Kaneko Kennosuke, *Kaze itusmo fuku hibi* 風いつも吹く日々 [The days that the wind always blows] (Tōkyō: Don Bosco sha, 2003), 247. Important references to Etty Hillesum and her writings can be found in Kaneko's articles in the Roman Catholic magazine *Seiki* 世紀 ('Centuries') 39 (1987), no. 441, 31, and 41 (1989), no. 467, and the Roman Catholic newspaper *Caritas Dayori* カリタス便り [Caritas letters], no. 38 (July 1996), no. 39 (October 1996), no. 40 (January 1997). In his book *Kaze itusmo fuku hibi* Father Kaneko also refers to Etty Hillesum. Furthermore, in a lecture entitled "Iesu no michi wo kakemegutta hitobito" 「イエスの道を駆け巡った人々」 [People who followed in the way of Jesus], delivered in 1998 in the Culture Center of *Asahi Shimbun*, he devoted considerable attention to Etty Hillesum's person and writings. The text of this lecture has not been published. (Personal communication from Father Kaneko by e-mail, 14 November 2005.)

67 Kaneko, *Seiki* 39, 35ff.

time.”⁶⁸ He associates Hillesum’s thought with the letters of St Paul, “In my own body, I make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ” (Colossians 1:24), and “Can anything cut us off from the love of Christ – can hardships or distress, or persecution, or lack of food and clothing, or threats or violence?” (Romans 8:35).⁶⁹ Kaneko also compares Etty Hillesum’s development to Jacob wrestling with God: “As Jacob wrestled with God all through the night and so received the name Israel, ‘one that struggles with God’, so Etty Hillesum, a Jewish woman aged 27, likewise showed herself a true daughter of Israel, who in a godless period bore her terrible fate and was able to wrestle with God.”⁷⁰ Kaneko is particularly interested in Etty Hillesum’s promise “I shall try to help You, God,”⁷¹ and muses, “Christianity emphasizes helping people, but is it possible to help God?” He finds the answer to this rhetorical question in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 25:34-40), in which the idea of “helping people” and the idea of “helping God” coincide. In this context Kaneko cites the final words of Etty Hillesum’s diary, “We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.”⁷²

According to Kaneko, Etty Hillesum brought the Kingdom of God into the camp. She had decided to bear the suffering of others and thus do what God had asked of her. Kaneko believes that though Etty Hillesum was not a Christian, she was “close to the cross and to reconciliation,”⁷³ and was “the guardian angel of the camp.”⁷⁴ The manner in which Etty Hillesum prayed⁷⁵

68 *Ibid.* English translation from Blaise Pascal, Roger Ariew (tr.), *Pensées* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2005), 273.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*

71 E.T., 488. *Het Werk*, 516; Sunday morning, 12 July 1942: Ik zal je helpen God [...]

72 E.T., 550. *Het Werk*, 583; Tuesday, 13 October 1942: Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn. The original Dutch has ‘pleister’ (a plaster or poultice) rather than ‘balm’, but as the Japanese translator Ōkoso was working from the English text, which uses ‘balm’, she used the word ‘kōyu’ [literally: fragrance oil]. In Japan this word is not used in everyday speech. For those with a Christian background, however, *kōyu* has biblical associations. The fragrance specialist Kumai Akiko, herself a Christian, discusses the word in her books *Ai no popuri* [Love potpourri] and *Shakespeare no kaori* [Shakespeare’s aromas]. Referring to Exodus 30:22-25, Exodus 35:4-9, and the Song of Songs, she explains *kōy* as ‘anointing oil’. Father Kaneko would also associate *kōyu* with the Old Testament. The word *kōyu*, therefore, has an exotic and religious ring to it, but does not have the everyday medical connotations of the word *pleister*.

73 Kaneko, *Caritas Dayori* no. 39.

74 *Ibid.*

75 Kaneko, *Seiki* 39, 35f.; Kaneko, *Caritas Dayori* no. 39. Kaneko cites the scenes in which Etty Hillesum prayed on her knees: E.T., 165; I kneel once more on the rough coconut matting, my hands over my eyes. *Het Werk*, 173; Wednesday morning, 3 December 1941: Ik kniel weer op de ruwe cocosmat met de handen voor m’n gezicht [...].

showed that she had developed a mystical consciousness that enabled her to overcome Nazism and human abjection.⁷⁶ Kaneko states that, “In the camp, Etty was able to maintain an uninterrupted inner conversation with God. She was initially much concerned with her ‘eros’, but went on to become the conscience of the camp. By the time she was deported to Auschwitz, she had become a great mystic.”⁷⁷ Thus, her persecution and death, are viewed by these Catholic authors like events in the lives of Roman Catholic saints. In a lecture delivered in 1998, Kaneko mentioned Etty Hillesum in the same breath as modern Roman Catholic saints such as Maximilian Kolbe and Edith Stein.⁷⁸ As we have seen, Chiba Shigeki in his review for *Shūkan sankei*, also evoked the figure of Maximilian Kolbe.⁷⁹ For both Chiba and Kaneko Etty Hillesum’s image comes close to being that of a Christian saint.

But not all in the Japanese Roman Catholic choir sing the praises of Etty Hillesum. The Roman Catholic publicist Takeshita Setsuko, who discovered Etty Hillesum through Father Kaneko’s writings, takes a more critical view.⁸⁰

76 Kaneko, *Seiki* 39, 35f.

77 Kaneko, *Seiki* 39, 35f.; Kaneko, *Caritas Dayori* no. 40. The Japanese Jesuit website *Seseragi* cites the following prayer of Etty Hillesum: E.T., 616: The misery here is quite terrible. [...] Life is glorious and magnificent. [= *Het Werk*, 657; Letter 46, To Johanna and Klaas Smelik and others, Westerbork, Saturday, 3 July 1943: [...] de ellende is werkelijk groot – [...] dit leven is iets prachtigs en iets groots] and E.T., 640: You have made me so rich, oh God, please let me share out Your beauty with open hands. [= *Het Werk*, 682; Letter 60, To Henny Tideman, Westerbork, Wednesday, 18 August 1943: Je hebt me zo rijk gemaakt, mijn God, laat me ook met volle handen uit mogen delen.] According to the author, Jesuit Father Uekuri, Etty Hillesum’s prayer is a good example of a prayer that wells up spontaneously from God’s blessing. Etty Hillesum is regarded as a blessed Christian who, despite the evil environment of the concentration camp, was given the strength to thank and praise God (www.seseragi.gr.jp/spirituality/scenez-5.htm) [there is no access to this column anymore]. Father Uekuri leads the Sadhana Oriental Meditation and Christian Prayer in Japan. (<http://sadhana.jp/sadhana/meiso.html>)

78 Kaneko, “*Iesu no michi wo kakemegutta hitobito.*” According to Father Kaneko, the 1940s were the hinge of the twentieth century. In this period, the most admirable individuals (such as Maximilian Kolbe, Edith Stein and Etty Hillesum) and the most inhuman individuals (such as Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler and Joseph Goebbels) became manifest.

79 In the 1930s, the Roman Catholic priest Maximilian Kolbe lived in Japan, and he is still known there in that regard.

80 Takeshita Setsuko 竹下節子 lives in Paris, where she studied the history of Catholicism and of the esoteric. She publishes on comparative religion and cultural history, and on Roman Catholic women saints. Her reflections upon female saints take a feminist perspective. These writings include:

- *Pari no Maria* バリのマリア [Mary in Paris] (Tōkyō: Chikumashobō, 1994),
- *Seijo den* 聖女伝 [Lives of women saints] (Tōkyō: Chikumashobō, 1995),
- *Barokku no seijo* バロックの聖女 [Women saints of the Baroque] (Tōkyō: Kōsakusha, 1995),
- *Jannudaruku – Chōitan no seijo* ジャンヌダルク–超異端の聖女 [Joan of Arc: the heretical saint] (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1997),

Still, the *Diary* made such an impression upon Takeshita that in her book, *Terorizumu no kanata e: Warera o michibiku mono wa nanika?* [The other side of terrorism: What leads us?] she presents Etty Hillesum as an example of the willingness to forgive.⁸¹ In her analysis of terrorism published shortly after 11 September 2001, Takeshita argues that terrorism can be fought only when forgiveness breaks the cycle of violence. She explains forgiveness by referencing five examples: the Tibetan Ama Adhe Tapontsang, who spent 27 years in Chinese prison camps, the Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, Etty Hillesum, the seven Trappist monks of Tibhirine in Algeria who were murdered by Islamist terrorists, and finally Jesus Christ himself.⁸² The five examples clearly delineate the position that Etty Hillesum holds in this Japanese Roman Catholic author's view of the world.

Ama Adhe Tapontsang is on the first rung of the ladder, because Buddhist forgiveness is informed by the desire to advance one's own karma, and so is motivated by self-interest. Takeshita implies that Simon Wiesenthal's inability to grant a dying SS man forgiveness for the horrors that he had inflicted on others⁸³ was due to the fact that Wiesenthal was not a Christian. The impulse to forgive was there, but it was not brought to fruition. Etty Hillesum was also not a Christian – Takeshita is very clear about this. Yet, she is a rung higher than Wiesenthal, because she does not see “absolute evil” in those who unjustly persecuted her. Through her inner strength and intelligence Hillesum understood that forgiveness was the only way forwards. According

– *Seibo Maria* 聖母マリア [Blessed Mother Mary] (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1998),

– *Seijo no jōken* 聖女の条件 [Conditions of female sanctity] (Tōkyō: Chuōkōronsha, 2004).

81 Takeshita Setsuko, *Terorizumu no kanata e, warera o michibiku mono wa nani ka?* テロリズムの彼方へ - 我らを導くものは何か [The other side of terrorism: What leads us?] (Tōkyō: Bungeishunjū, 2001). The book contains four chapters. Chapter 1, “The impact of contemporary terrorist attacks”, discusses the range of responses to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and the psychological and geopolitical condition of Europe, America and Muslim countries. Chapter 2, “On terrorism”, is an analysis of the underlying reasons for terrorism and violence. Chapter 3, “How much evil can somebody forgive?” analyzes possible solutions, with forgiveness the foremost among them. Chapter 4, “How much responsibility should we bear for the misfortune of others?” is an epilogue.

82 Takeshita, *Terorizumu no kanata e*, 146-207.

83 *Ibid.*, 153-156. Takeshita refers to an anecdote of Wiesenthal's, in which he recounts how in the concentration camp a dying SS trooper asked his forgiveness for having taken part in a massacre of Jews. Wiesenthal, who could not bring himself to give the man forgiveness, says that a rabbi had confirmed to him that he had no right to forgive on behalf of others. A Roman Catholic theology student who was also in the camp, and with whom Wiesenthal discussed the event, had remarked that according to Catholic moral theology only the victims would have been able to grant forgiveness, but that a penitent sinner such as the SS man nevertheless deserved to receive forgiveness.

to Takeshita, Etty Hillesum's attitude is the instrument that can counter evil in today's world. Takeshita then tells the story of the seven Trappist monks from the monastery of Tibhirine, who were murdered by terrorists on 21 May 1996. One of them – aware of the danger he was in as a Christian in Algeria – had drawn up a spiritual testament two years before his death, in which he had written that he forgave in advance and pray for the soul of anyone who should kill him, because the evil in them was no different from the evil in himself.⁸⁴ With this spiritual testament, Dom de Chergé had pre-empted the calls for vengeance that resounded in France after his murder. His deep awareness of the sinfulness of all humans “runs contrary to reason, but is the only secret of life and love,” because it leads to a principled willingness to extend forgiveness a priori, even to those who kill innocent victims.⁸⁵ According to Takeshita, this attitude most closely approximates that of Jesus Christ. Taking the story of the adulterous woman (John 8:2-11), Takeshita ultimately argues that Jesus taught the world that forgiveness brings about a change of mentality in the person granting and in the person receiving it, and that herein lies the only hope to “install a new program based upon experience” in people's hearts.⁸⁶

Takeshita sees Etty Hillesum as clearly falling outside Christianity. It was enough for Takeshita to know that Etty Hillesum had once had an abortion without any outward sign of remorse, to disagree with Father Kaneko's assessment that Etty Hillesum was an honorary Christian.⁸⁷ In Kaneko's view,

84 This was Dom Christian-Marie de Chergé, prior of the Trappist monastery of Notre-Dame de l'Atlas in Tibhirine, Algeria. His spiritual testament was entitled “Quand un A-Dieu s'envisage.” The passage central to Takeshita's argument runs: “[...] My life is not worth more than any other. Nor is it worth less. In any case, it lacks the innocence of childhood. I have lived long enough to know my complicity with the evil which, unfortunately, seems to prevail in the world, and even with the evil which might suddenly strike me. I would like, when the time comes, to have this moment of lucidity which would enable me to ask for God's pardon and that of my brothers in humanity, and at the same time to pardon with all my heart the one who strikes me down. [...] I give thanks to God who seems to have wanted this lost life, completely mine and completely theirs, for heavenly JOY, for everything and despite everything. In this THANK YOU which says everything from now on about my life, I of course want to include you, friends of today and tomorrow, and you, friends here, beside my mother and father, my sisters and my brothers and their families, repaid a hundredfold as promised! And also to you, friend of the final hour, who will not know what you are doing. Yes, I also desire this THANK YOU for you, and this A-DIEU foreseen for you. May we be allowed to meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it pleases God, Father to both of us. AMEN!” The full text can be found on various websites (e.g. at http://www.communautesaintjean.com/EN/Works_4b.htm). [See also in this volume the contribution by Yves Bériault, “The Invincible Hope of Christian de Chergé and Etty Hillesum.”]

85 Takeshita, *Terorizumu no kanata e*, 170.

86 *Ibid.*, 184.

87 Personal interview with Takeshita in Paris, 7 October 2004.

Etty Hillesum's prayer indicated mystical development, but Takeshita regards the passage in which Etty Hillesum writes of "my folded hands and bended knee"⁸⁸ as the strangest part of the diary. She sees it as "paradoxical that in her miserable situation Etty found God and was able to perceive the horizon of a willingness to forgiveness."⁸⁹ The source of Etty Hillesum's willingness to forgive Takeshita situates not in religion, but in an independent spirit, literary ability, and intelligence. According to Takeshita, it was by these means that Etty Hillesum reached a high level of humanity and this is where Takeshita locates the value of Etty Hillesum's diary, not in any sort of religious illumination.

In Takeshita's view, Etty Hillesum dabbled in a fashionably intellectual way with a sort of second-hand Protestantism that Julius Spier had encouraged, and that Hillesum thought "chic."⁹⁰ Takeshita regards Spier as a "boring and useless fellow" whose influence Etty Hillesum was better off shedding after his death.⁹¹ Anybody reading the *Diary* can see that Julius Spier played a very important role in Etty Hillesum's life and that she continued to feel psychologically dependent upon him for a long time.⁹² By negating Spier, Takeshita places the emphasis on Etty Hillesum's female identity. Female independence and strength are recurrent themes in Takeshita's works, for example in her writings on female sanctity.⁹³ In the biblical narrative of the woman taken in adultery, she sees not only an example of the willingness to forgive, but also an allegory of emancipation from the double standard of a male-dominated society.⁹⁴ Elsewhere, Takeshita emphasizes the "feminine"

88 E.T., 547. *Het Werk*, 580; Saturday evening, 10 October 1942: twee gevouwen handen en een gebogen knie.

89 Personal communication from Takeshita by e-mail, 11 October 2004.

90 *Ibidem*. Takeshita gives strict criteria that a Christian should meet: "For Jesus and like Jesus. The words and actions of Christians bearing witness to the Faith always contain a deep love for Jesus" (Takeshita Setsuko, *Kirisuto kyō* キリスト教 [Christianity] (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 2002), 221.

91 Personal interview with Takeshita.

92 Elizabeth Liebert regards Spier as an important factor in Etty Hillesum's development: "I shall first attempt to establish Etty's developmental stage at the beginning and the conclusion of her diaries, and then illustrate the developmental dynamics involved in Etty's remarkable progression during her last years. At this point I shall examine her relationships, in turn, to Julius Spier, to the deteriorating situation for Jews in Holland, and to God." Cf. Elizabeth Liebert, "The Thinking Heart: Developmental Dynamics in Etty Hillesum's *Diaries*", *Pastoral Psychology* 43 (1995), 6: 394.

93 According to Takeshita, women saints do not give "their" love or "their" strength to others, but function as mediators aware that the source of love and strength lies not in them but in God (Takeshita, *Seijo no jōken*, 295).

94 "In the Temple in Jerusalem Jesus ignored the fascist-like logic of those in power by saving from shaming and stoning a woman who according to the morality of the time was guilty" (Takeshita, *Terorizumu no kanata e*, 180-181).

side of the Redeemer himself: “God’s son Jesus himself embodied the ‘feminine principle’, because he chose the side of the weak and the oppressed, sought no engagement with power or politics, and was a pacifist.”⁹⁵

In the American reception, too, emphasis is often placed upon Etty Hillesum’s femininity and emancipation.⁹⁶ Takeshita’s interpretation of Spier as a hindrance to Etty Hillesum’s development and her emphasis on female identity show clear similarities to the views of, for example, Rachel Feldhay Brenner.⁹⁷ According to Brenner, Etty Hillesum regarded herself as liberated from men, allowing her to easily bounce back from the death of her beloved Spier.⁹⁸ Another American author, Yasmine Ergas, states that in their personal development both Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum tried to understand and accept their female identity.⁹⁹

Yet, on at least one important point, Takeshita’s view diverges from that of American authors such as Brenner, Ergas, and others. The American authors almost always consider Etty Hillesum’s female identity alongside her Jewish identity, and often emphasize the role of Christianity in her lived experience.

According to Brenner, Etty Hillesum was a “catastrophe Jew” who discovered her ethnic roots as a result of the anti-Semitic onslaught – a discovery that reinforced her feelings of solidarity with and compassion for other Jews. Brenner is also of the opinion that Christianity was important to Etty Hillesum. Ergas meanwhile, rates Hillesum’s Jewish identity as more significant than her female identity, and like Brenner, sees Etty Hillesum as strongly inspired by Christianity, albeit Christianity as experienced by a Jew.¹⁰⁰ For Takeshita, however, Etty Hillesum’s Jewish identity and her “fashionable intellectual dabbling” with Christianity are less important than her female identity.

Among Japanese Roman Catholics, we find two readings of Etty Hillesum. The priest Kaneko Kennosuke and the film director Chiba Shigeki give Etty Hillesum the characteristics of a near-saint – an image that has currency

95 Takeshita, *Seijo no jōken* 21.

96 “An important part of the reception of Etty Hillesum in the English-speaking world – and particularly in America – is in the context of Gender Studies and Holocaust Studies.” Cf. Anouta de Groot, “Aandacht voor identiteit, spiritualiteit en verbondenheid: Centrale thema’s in de Amerikaanse literatuur over Etty Hillesum”, in: *Etty Hillesum in facetten*, 129-151, especially p. 129.

97 Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Studies at the University of Wisconsin, USA.

98 Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Writing as Resistance: Four Women Confronting the Holocaust: Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Anne Frank, Etty Hillesum* (University Park [PA]: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). De Groot, “Aandacht voor identiteit”, 131.

99 Yasmine Ergas, “Growing up Banished: A Reading of Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum”, cited in: *Etty Hillesum in facetten*, 134.

100 See De Groot, “Aandacht voor identiteit”, 131-135.

in Italy as well.¹⁰¹ In contrast, the perspective of the Roman Catholic author Takeshita Setsuko arises out of her scholarly approach to religion as a phenomenon. As a professional writer on comparative religion and the esoteric, she ascribes small significance to Etty Hillesum's "Christianity," and does not regard her as remarkable either for saintliness or as a victim of the Shoah. What fascinates her are the wisdom and humanity that Etty Hillesum acquires through her own intelligence and power. This perspective corresponds to the mainstream reception of Etty Hillesum in Japan where most writers strongly emphasize her self-examination.

Father Kaneko has written about Etty Hillesum in one book and numerous articles, yet the impact of his work is marginal, being published by Roman Catholic publishers almost exclusively for Roman Catholic readers – an extremely small minority in Japan. Takeshita in contrast presented her image of Etty Hillesum in the context of a treatise on terrorism, one of the most important and newsworthy topics of the day. For that reason alone, it is of interest to many people. Furthermore, Takeshita's work on terrorism comes out of one of Japan's largest publishing houses. For many readers in Japan, Takeshita's book is their first and only encounter with Etty Hillesum. No doubt a number of readers will be inspired by that encounter to seek out the Japanese translation of the *Diary*, but it is out of print and only available from second-hand dealers.¹⁰² This gives Takeshita's book a considerable advantage when it comes to shaping the reception of Etty Hillesum in Japan.

Conclusion

For Japanese readers, Etty Hillesum was neither martyr, nor saint, but a self-reflective woman who was searching for the meaning of (her) life. The titles of the *Diary Eros, God and Concentration Camp*, and of the *Letters Searching for the Meaning of Life* (here in English from the Japanese), express very well

101 See Gerrit Van Oord, "Italiaans enthousiasme: Het dagboek van Etty Hillesum in Italië", in: *Etty Hillesum in facetten*, 111-127, especially p. 113. Father Kaneko confirms that he was aware of the Italian translation of the diary [Etty Hillesum, Chiara Passanti (tr.), *Diario 1941-1943* (Milan: Adelphi, 1985)] and of the secondary literature on it in Italian, especially Graziella Merlatti, *Etty Hillesum: Un cuore pensante* (Milan: Ancora, 1998), and Wanda Tommasi, *Etty Hillesum: L'intelligenza del cuore* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2002) [personal communication, 27 November 2005].

102 One reader mentions on her personal blog that she would like to read Etty Hillesum's diary, because Takeshita's book had piqued her interest in Etty Hillesum (www.eonet.net.jp/~so-tai-ki/hitoiki%20back%20number.htm).

the Japanese understanding of Etty Hillesum. Most Japanese readers are particularly struck by the painful process of Hillesum's self-examination and by the fact that she was able to find meaning in the terrible conditions of a concentration camp. The Buddhist commentary on Etty Hillesum's work produced at Ōtani University, shows how her quest resonated with the Buddhist worldview – an important dimension of the mental universe of the people of Japan.

Does this mean that Gaarlandt's selective anthology – indirectly the source text for the Japanese editions – did not emphasize Etty Hillesum's religious dimension, even though elsewhere in the world his anthology seems to steer interpreters in that direction? The selective nature of the source text seems to have steered Roman Catholics such as Father Kaneko and the filmmaker Chiba into a comparison of Etty Hillesum with Christian saints. But most Japanese readers – including Takeshita and the professors at Ōtani – hold no such opinions about Etty Hillesum, leaving space for an analysis of her personality.

The average Japanese reader, lacking a Christian frame of reference, is little influenced by the selective nature of Gaarlandt's anthology. Most Japanese readers see Hillesum as having achieved an elevated spirituality, but at the same time they regard her as a young, lively woman. These different perspectives only make Etty Hillesum all the more interesting.

Etty Hillesum dreamt of one day walking through Japanese landscapes, and travelling in the East, "to find a daily way of life there that would be thought discordant here."¹⁰³ She was not able to take that journey in person, but in Japan her writings have echoed far across the land.

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103 E.T., 394. *Het Werk*, 414; Friday evening, 5 June 1942: Zoals ik überhaupt geloof, dat ik eens in de richting van het Oosten zal trekken, later, om daar dagelijks geleefd te vinden, waarin men meent hier alleen te staan als een dissonant. –



21 Saint, Cyber Phenomenon, Thinker, or Poet

Etty Hillesum in Portugal

Patricia Couto

Klaas Smelik, Gerrit Van Oord, and Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract

This article deals with the reception of the Portuguese translations of Etty Hillesum's *Diário* (Diary, 2008) and *Cartas* (Letters, 2009). The author reveals how Hillesum's work was appropriated by a Catholic audience in a predominantly Roman Catholic country, and makes the case that the source text of the translations (*Het Verstoorde Leven*, An Interrupted Life, 1981) greatly influenced the way the Portuguese viewed Hillesum. The author explains that the selections included by Jan Geurt Gaarlandt in *Het Verstoorde Leven* stress the spiritual aspects in Hillesum's writing, and compromise the historical, philological and material aspects. Nevertheless, a secondary, less religious current in the reception of Hillesum's work exists in Portugal, motivated by a more philosophic and feminist perspective. The author concludes by pointing to the study of Etty Hillesum's work at universities and in dissertations, as well as to a generation of Portuguese novelists who have been inspired by Etty Hillesum.

Keywords: international reception, Portugal, Roman Catholicism, *Het Verstoorde Leven*, feminism, literary influence, Etty Hillesum

The discussion on the transcription, editing, translation, and reception of Hillesum's work illustrates how unstable texts are and that it is relevant to our understanding of how new meanings are generated. A text is a social product and takes different shapes as it passes from one social milieu to another. Thus, the author is not the only source of validity, and all variant texts carry their own authority. This process does not end with

the author's death, but readers participate in it by creating new versions of the text.¹

This article deals with the reception of Etty Hillesum's work in Portugal. We must bear in mind that only since the 1990s has Dutch literature begun to be translated into Portuguese more regularly, nonetheless there are not many translations of Dutch works which means that the public is not familiar with writers from the Netherlands or Flanders.² Second, during the sixteenth century, Jews were forcibly converted or expelled from the country by the Inquisition.³ Although Portugal is a secular state, it remains predominantly a Roman Catholic country. Finally, Portugal was a neutral country during the Second World War. Lisbon was a gateway to freedom for many Jewish refugees, a city of light when occupied Europe was blacked out. Consequently, the Second World War did not have the impact in Portugal it had in occupied countries.

The translations of Etty Hillesum's *Diário* and *Cartas* (the titles mean respectively "diary" and "letters") were published in Lisbon in 2008 and 2009 by Assírio & Alvim, a prestigious publisher especially known for its publication of Portuguese and translated poetry and other high quality books.⁴ The sober book cover with a picture of Hillesum and the mention on the back, not only in the inside, stating that the text was translated from the Dutch are an indication that the aim was to offer a book of quality. Both translations carry the seal of the Dutch Foundation for Literature which subsidized the publisher. Needless to say that an indirect translation would have been cheaper, faster, and easier.

When we look at a book, we verify that the main text is surrounded by paratext, i.e. other material supplied by the publisher, the translator, printer,

1 G. Thomas Tanselle, "Textual Instability and Editorial Idealism", *Studies in Bibliography* 49 (1996): 1-60. Also available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40372027> [retrieved on 2 December 2016].

2 Patricia Couto, "A Tradução da Literatura Neerlandesa em Portugal", in: Celeste Augusto, Jef van Egmont & Patricia Couto (eds), *De Wereld achter het Woord / Um Mundo para além da Palavra: Liber Amicorum Dr. Luís Crespo Fabião* (Utreque/Lissabon: private edition, 2013), 441-464.

3 Patricia Couto, "Witnesses and Victims of Massacre: The Literary Testimony of Samuel Usque and Etty Hillesum", in: Ria van den Brandt, Klaas A.D. Smelik & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 335-350.

4 Etty Hillesum, *Diário 1941-1943*, introduction by José Tolentino Mendonça, translated by Maria Leonor Raven-Gomes (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2008); Etty Hillesum, *Cartas 1941-1943*, translated by Ana Leonor Duarte & Patricia Couto (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2009). The *Diário* reached three editions (2.000 copies each) and *Cartas* one edition (3.000 copies).

etc. These added elements frame the main text and can change its reception or interpretation by the public. It is important to analyze the paratexts that surround Hillesum's main text. In the case of the *Diário*, they include the front and back cover (and a quote), the paper dust cover (an important selling strategy), a page long quote from the *Diário* on page 7 ("what they are after is our total destruction [...]" 3 July 1942), an introduction, pictures, footnotes, a note on the translation, and an index. Also included was the letter by Jopie Vleeschhouwer, dated 6 and 7 September 1943, informing how Etty Hillesum, her parents, and brother Mischa were put on transport to Poland.

The *Diário* was translated by Maria Leonor Raven-Gomes and reviewed by Fernando Venâncio, who is known as a writer, literary critic, academic, and translator. Raven-Gomes told me that her source text was the 26th edition of *Het Verstoorde Leven* [The Interrupted Life] (2006).⁵ It is important to keep in mind that *Het Verstoorde Leven* (first published in 1981) is an incomplete and unreliable selection of Hillesum's diary.⁶ It is a known fact that the selection made by Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, a specialist in Dutch literature and theology, who later felt obliged to justify his choices, stresses the spiritual aspects in Hillesum's writing, though compromising historical, philological and material aspects.⁷ The problem, however, is not new; it had already occurred with other translations.⁸ Thus, an unabridged and scholarly edition of her texts was essential and the result was the publication in 1986 of *Etty: De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943* [Etty: The Bequeathed Writings of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943].

In the translator's note, Raven-Gomes mentions that she also consulted *Etty: De nagelaten geschriften*, which revealed a great utility for her work but which she labelled as a work for specialists in Hillesum's oeuvre, thus clearly

5 In 1986, the eighteenth edition of *Het Verstoorde Leven* was totally revised and based on the scholarly edition of *Etty: De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*, published in the same year.

6 Ria van den Brandt, "Introduction", in Smelik, Van den Brandt & Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 1. For the editing history of Hillesum's work, see in this volume: Klaas A.D. Smelik, "To Remember Is to Act: From a Bundle of Notebooks to a Worldwide Publication", 33-49.

7 Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, "Context, Dilemmas, and Misunderstandings during the Composition and Publication of *An Interrupted Life: Etty Hillesum's Diary, 1941-1943*", in: Smelik, Van den Brandt & Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 365-375.

8 Philippe Noble, "Het dubbel filter", in: Van den Brandt & Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in Facetten*, 93-109; Gerrit Van Oord, "Italiaans enthousiasme: Het dagboek van Etty Hillesum in Italië", *ibid.*, 111-127; Yukiko Yokohata, "Het beeld van Etty Hillesum in Japan", in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in context* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 2] (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2007), 95-115, and her contribution in this volume, "Perceptions of Etty Hillesum in Japan", 395-417.

differentiating *Het Verstoorde Leven* from the scholarly edition. She also explained to me the two kinds of footnotes: one by Gaarlandt marked with an asterisk and the other mistakenly called “translator’s notes” partially taken from *Etty: De nagelaten geschriften* and others that were, in fact, written by the translator.

Cartas, published a year later, was translated by Ana Leonor Duarte and by me. While we were translating, we became aware that we were working with different source texts. Thus, I contacted the EHOC and we are grateful to Klaas Smelik and the EHOC for their help and permission to consult the fifth and enlarged edition of *Etty: De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum* (2008) that had not yet been published when we were working on it. It became our source text, as we explain in a note on the translation in which we also point out that the letters to Spier and Kormann were originally written in German. Many footnotes were translated. Sometimes they had to be slightly adapted (editor’s note), and we introduced a few of our own (translator’s note), for example, to specify when the text was translated from the German (apart from Spier’s and Kormann’s letters) or to explain certain realities a Portuguese audience would not be familiar with. The fact that I had the privilege to participate in the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University in 2008 was of great importance as I had practically ignored Hillesum’s oeuvre and its publication history. As a result, we asked the Portuguese editor for permission to translate all of Hillesum’s letters as well as the letters to and about her as presented in the complete Dutch edition of 2008.

Both translations were published in a series called “Teofanias”. The word comes from the Greek and was first used in Greek and Near Eastern religions but was later appropriated by the Christian and Jewish traditions, referring to the manifestation of God to human beings. The presence of the prefix “teo” in “Teofanias” and the explanation: “a teologia, múltiplo lugar” [theology, multiple space] associated with José Tolentino de Mendonça steers the reception of the book to a public interested in theology, especially Roman Catholic matters. Other authors published in the same series were Simone Weil, John Henry Newman, Cristina Campo, Søren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Aquinas, G.K. Chesterton, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Rainer Maria Rilke, in general authors that are considered religious, mystical, and/or associated with the Second World War. All are Christian writers except for Simone Weil, who was born into an assimilated Jewish family, but felt strongly attracted to Roman Catholicism.

The series is published in collaboration with the Theology Faculty of the Portuguese Catholic University with organizer, José Tolentino de Mendonça, who also wrote the exceptional introduction for the *Diário*. Tolentino de

Mendonça is rather well known in Portugal; he is a poet, priest, journalist, translator of the Bible, and Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Culture at the Vatican. We may safely conclude that he is an influential person in the Portuguese Roman Catholic Church and in the media. He is also vice-dean of the Catholic University of Lisbon, which explains the collaboration between Assírio & Alvim and the Catholic University. Hence, it is not unusual that Etty Hillesum was included in the syllabus on a course about Art and Survival at the same university.

Tolentino de Mendonça invited renowned persons, all known for their association with religion for the presentation of the books. Esther Mucznik, a Jewish journalist, writer, and historian, and Nélío Pita, a Roman Catholic priest, presented the *Diário* while *Cartas* was presented by Bento Domingues, a friar and journalist, and Isabel Allegro Magalhães, a literature professor and president of the Graal movement in Portugal. The Graal movement is an international organization for Roman Catholic women founded in Holland in 1921. Writing for *Público*, a Portuguese quality newspaper, Bento Domingues has referred to Hillesum in his chronicles on several occasions; the same can be said of Tolentino de Mendonça, who writes for the weekly *Expresso*.

In his introduction to the *Diário*, Tolentino de Mendonça compares Etty Hillesum to Simone Weil and stresses Hillesum's spiritual conversion or *metanoia*, a concept dear to Christianity. He writes about her spiritual awakening partly inspired by her Christian friend Henny Tideman, her free internment in Camp Westerbork, the importance of literature, her birth as a writer, and finally how she became God's elected. Revealing is the word *crucificante* [crucifying], which Tolentino de Mendonça uses to qualify how Hillesum felt when in God's arms.⁹

Mucznik, in turn, talks about the chaotic, sensuous, tumultuous, and intellectually curious girl that within two years transforms into an internally structured woman. She mentions how her relationship with Spier and the keeping of a diary triggered into three directions: transference from a physical to a spiritual level; her love for the whole of humanity instead of being centred on one person or a few persons; and her encounter with a transcendental and, at the same time, immanent personal God not linked to a specific religion or tradition.¹⁰

9 "Mas é preciso entender até que ponto crucificante, [...] Etty viveu este seu 'estar nos braços de Deus'" [But it is necessary to understand how crucifying, [...] Etty experienced this being "in God's arms"]. José Tolentino de Mendonça, *Diário* (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2008), 19.

10 Van Oord observes that the idea of an immanent and transcendent God in Hillesum was first mentioned by Wanda Tommasi. Cf. Gerrit Van Oord, "Italiaans enthousiasme", 111-127.

Nélio Pita is a psychologist. In his opinion, Hillesum does not let herself be dragged along by the extreme circumstances because she invests in her interior universe, *Weltinnenraum*, in the words of her beloved Rilke. Pita identifies Hillesum's self-nuclear with the sacred part she calls God and with whom she identifies herself when she decides to help God. To Pita, Hillesum's choice to go to Camp Westerbork was not inspired by a death wish but by a strong need for living according to her own principles. Two years later, Pita defended his master's dissertation on Etty Hillesum's *Diário*.¹¹

The presentations by Esther Mucznik, Nélio Pita as well as Tolentino de Mendonça's introduction were made available in *Viragem*, a magazine that can be consulted online, published by the Roman Catholic Movement of Professionals. This volume was dedicated to Bonhoeffer and Hillesum.¹²

In connection with the presentation of the *Diário*, the Portuguese newspaper *Público* published two chronicles, entitled "Etty, a rapariga que aprendeu a ajoelhar-se" [Etty, the girl who learned to kneel] by João Bénard da Costa.¹³ Bénard da Costa was a prominent Portuguese intellectual and Roman Catholic, in earlier times impeded by the fascist regime to teach at a public university or school. He tells his readers how a friend had asked him to persuade Tolentino de Mendonça to publish Etty Hillesum's works in the Teofanias series. Nevertheless, Bénard da Costa could not wait and read *Une vie bouleversée* before Tolentino de Mendonça supplied him with the Portuguese copy. He considered the *Diário* the most important book published in Portugal during the year 2008. In his first chronicle, Bénard da Costa gives his readers a short biography of Hillesum and mentions that she died within three months after arriving in Auschwitz as she "had predicted many times." The question remains, whether, in fact, she was aware that the camp in Poland where she ultimately was sent to was an extermination camp, totally different from Camp Westerbork. Hillesum never mentions the name of the camp and we must bear in mind that it was after the war that the name "Auschwitz" became a symbol for the Shoah. The introduction is followed by

11 Nélio Pita, "O Diário de Etty Hillesum 1941-1942: Uma leitura dos mecanismos de defesa" (MA thesis ISPA Instituto Universitário, 2010). Also available at <http://repositorio.ispa.pt/bitstream/10400.12/4667/1/12618.pdf> [retrieved on 2 December 2016]. The corpus for his thesis consisted of *The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum* (1986/2002).

12 José Tolentino de Mendonça, "A rapariga de Amesterdão", *Viragem* 58 (January-April 2008), 12-15; Esther Mucznik, "Esculpindo uma estátua interior", *Viragem* 58 (January-April 2008), 16-17; Nélio Pita, "Entre a vida e a morte: O universo interior de Etty Hillesum", *Viragem* 58 (January-April 2008): 18-21. http://www.metanoia-mcp.org/viragem/viragem_30_59/viragem58.pdf [retrieved on 11 October 2016].

13 João Bénard da Costa, "Etty, a rapariga que aprendeu a ajoelhar-se (I)", *Público* 2 (25 May 2008): 9; *idem*, "Etty, a rapariga que aprendeu a ajoelhar-se (II)", *Público* 2 (1 June 2008): 11.

a selection of 27 short quotes based on *Une vie bouleversée*.¹⁴ Curiously, in the second article, he questions his selection wondering if it is legitimate to offer the readers a kind of anthology when the compiler is not familiar with the complete work. Bénard da Costa observes that her diary is a declaration of her love to God and consequently there has been a certain reserve in admitting that it is also a declaration of her worldly love to Spier. Her reading of Rilke led to her *sacra conversacione* with God. Bénard da Costa considers her a mystical writer like Campo and Weil. Her unwillingness to separate body from soul, beauty from suffering turn her *via dolorosa* pantheist.

Shortly after the publication of the *Diário*, the Secretariado Nacional Pastoral da Cultura [National Pastoral Bureau for Cultural Care] of which Tolentino de Mendonça is the director, paid attention in their on-line publication to Hillesum's book, by publishing his introduction and quoting from the book.¹⁵ From there, information about the *Diário* soon spread to other sites and blogs belonging to Roman Catholic institutions and from there to dozens of personal blogs. The references usually consist of quotations from the book and an occasional short comment. The first impact the book revealed is how a Roman Catholic audience appropriated Hillesum. Beatification and martyrdom are never far away. Isabel Aguiar, a little known poet, reveals how she was inspired by Hillesum in several poems in her anthology *Requiem por Auschwitz* where she writes about "Santa Ety Hillesum."¹⁶

Nevertheless, there was also a secondary, less religious current in the reception of Hillesum's work, inspired by a more philosophic and feminist perspective.

On the publication of the *Diário*, António Guerreiro, a literary critic, writes a review in the weekly magazine *Expresso*.¹⁷ To him, Hillesum is an extraordinary case. She refused to save her own life, an attitude generally interpreted and criticized as submissive. In his opinion, Hillesum resisted the logic of revolt and hate. Nothing could alienate her inner freedom, her *Weltinnenraum*.

In the same period, Alexandra Lucas Coelho, writer and literary critic for *Público*, interviewed Klaas Smelik, the Portuguese philosopher Maria

14 Bénard da Costa had probably written the article before having access to the Portuguese translation.

15 http://www.snpcultura.org/id_etty_hillesum.html [retrieved on 11 October 2016].

16 Isabel Aguiar, *Requiem por Auschwitz* (Évora: Licorne, 2014). See also http://www.poems-fromtheportuguese.org/78_There%E2%80%99s_a_Jasmine_Town_for_you_1_ [retrieved on 11 October 2016].

17 António Guerreiro, "O espaço interior do mundo", *Expresso Actual* (13 June 2008): 42. Also available at http://www.snpcultura.org/vol_o_espaco_interior_mundo.html [retrieved on 21 October 2016].

Filomena Molder, and Admiel Kosman, an Israeli poet.¹⁸ Lucas Coelho chose individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives, all with publications on Hillesum, and not directly associated with Roman Catholicism. In Lucas Coelho's opinion, the *Diário* is one of those few books that reveals the transformation of a life. It is a "book of disquiet," a clear reference to Fernando Pessoa's book with the same title. She refers to the importance of Hillesum's readings and how her faith grows so that she can be able to help God. In her opinion, Hillesum is a learned, free, left-wing, and lucid woman. Moreover, Lucas Coelho is the only person to mention explicitly the abortion Hillesum chose to have.

Smelik, interviewed by Lucas Coelho, refers to the lack of interest in Hillesum's philosophical views among publishers during the fifties and sixties of the last century and the enthusiastic reception of her work in France, Italy and the USA. He was surprised to verify that the reception of her work was weak in Germany and explains that in Israel her pacifist message and pan-spirituality was not valued. He emphasizes that Hillesum does not belong to a church or religion and calls our attention to her modernity and independence.

Kosman confirms Smelik's opinion; he too considers her a woman ahead of her time. In his view, the weak reception of her work in Israel has to do with the radical division between Israel's orthodox religiosity and non-religiosity where a more heterodox centre is missing. He considers Hillesum's book canonical in theology, as a form of pure religion.

Molder opposes the tendency to consider Hillesum from a Christian perspective and explains that, in that period, several people, Walter Benjamin for example, felt attracted to Christianity. In Molder's opinion, Hillesum is neither Christian, nor Buddhist. Her well-structured, powerful, and consistent thinking is profoundly Jewish. The Messianic idea, however, is not present in Hillesum and her religiosity is undogmatic. According to Molder, Hillesum is a lucid thinker and poet. She admits, however, that it is difficult to understand why Hillesum voluntarily decided to stay at Camp Westerbork.

Two years before the *Diário* appeared in Portugal, Molder had already published an article in a specialized magazine on Hillesum's oeuvre (mainly based on the letters) and Hannah Arendt's report on *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.¹⁹ Molder admires Hillesum's inner form of resistance and her power of not judging, in opposition to Arendt whose aim it is to judge.

18 Alexandra Lucas Coelho, "Etty vai ajudar Deus", *Público Ipsilon* (2 May 2008): 10-12.

19 Filomena Molder, "O coração pensante e a faculdade de julgar", *Intervalo* 2 (May 2006): 22-48.

Hillesum is aware that it is impossible to represent life at Camp Westerbork, nevertheless she refuses to keep silent. Both women have in common the search for words that can do justice to the wasting of so many lives.²⁰ More recently, a paper on Hillesum by Molder was published in an anthology of women philosophers.²¹

Sometime earlier, in 2004, Maria Luísa Ribeiro Ferreira, another philosophy professor, wrote a book review of *Une vie bouleversée suivi de Lettres de Westerbork* for the international Roman Catholic magazine *Communio*.²² In her opinion, Hillesum's God does not belong to any tradition or religion but resides in the deepest of herself. She anticipates Hans Jonas's idea about God's vulnerability; how it is necessary to help God rather than He helping us.

In 2009, *Cartas* was published. The book does not have an introduction but more pictures were included.²³ At the same time, the Portuguese translation of Rilke's *Book of Hours* was also presented and in the same week, a translation of Meister Eckhart was published by another editor. Reason enough for António Marujo, a journalist specializing in religious matters, to write an article on the three books. Rilke and Meister Eckhart were among Hillesum's favourite writers and what the three have in common is that they are considered mystics. Though *Cartas* is a completely different book, not a diary, it is an eyewitness account of life in a concentration camp, and what is being emphasized again is Hillesum's mysticism. Only a short paragraph refers to her witness and representation of a reality for which there are no words.²⁴

Guilherme de Oliveira Martins, a Roman Catholic and prominent socialist politician, and president of the National Cultural Centre, welcomes in the *Jornal de Letras*, an important literary journal in Portugal, the publication

20 It is interesting to know that Molder consulted several copies of Hillesum's work for her research. At the time, the Portuguese translations had not been published and hence she used the Italian translation of 2002 (re-edition of 1990) *Lettere*, and the French translation of 1995 (re-edition of 1988) of *Une vie bouleversée*. However, she also consulted the Dutch scholarly edition of 1986, as well as *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943* (1984) and *Letters from Westerbork* (1986).

21 Filomena Molder, 'Etty Hillesum', in: Maria Luísa Ribeiro Ferreira & Fernanda Henriques (eds), *Marginalidade e Alternativa: Vinte e seis filósofos para o século XXI* (Lisboa: Colibri, 2016), 155-172.

22 Maria Luísa Ribeiro Ferreira, 'Une Vie Bouleversée: Lettres de Westerbork de Etty Hillesum, trad. do holandês de Philippe Noble, Paris, Seuil, 1995, 360 pp.', *Communio* 21, 3 (2004): 353-359.

23 There are photos of fragments of her diaries that were translated in the caption. However, the translation does not correspond Raven-Gomes's translation. Other fragments do not appear in the *Diário*.

24 In Marujo's latest book, a biography of the Portuguese Father Joaquim Carreira who saved Jewish refugees during the war, the first chapter begins with an epigraph which is a quotation from Hillesum's diary. António Marujo, *A Lista do Padre Carreira* (Amadora: Editora Vogais, 2016).

of *Cartas* which he awaited anxiously after having read the *Diário*. He laments the recent death of Benard da Costa before its publication. His article also appears online at the website of the National Bureau for Pastoral and Cultural Care, where internet users have access to Hillesum's unabridged letter of 24 August 1943, though without footnotes.²⁵ Earlier Oliveira Martins had written a book review of the *Diário*.²⁶

In a PhD thesis, Hillesum's mysticism is confronted with that of Saint Perpetua, a Christian martyr from the third century.²⁷ Both were young women who kept journals and died victims of persecution. According to its author, J.P. De Roo, Hillesum is a prophetess who wishes to restore paradise as it was before the fall. There is no hate, there are no victims. Hers is a "sublime form of resistance"²⁸ and the author does not consider Hillesum a martyr.

Remarkable is how writer Miguel Gullander associated the mysticism of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) with Hillesum's on the occasion of the publication in Portugal of Lispector's first novel *Perto do coração selvagem* [Near to the Wild Heart, 1943] in 2011.²⁹ Lispector was born in 1920 into a Jewish family from the Ukraine that escaped to Brazil when she was a baby. The traumas that scared Lispector occurred before her birth: her grandfather had been killed by Russian soldiers, her mother gang-raped and the family house destroyed.³⁰

Gullander belongs to the same generation as Pedro Eiras and João Tordo, young promising writers born in the mid 1970's who were inspired by Hillesum. In Eiras's *Bach*, each chapter is about a historical person and associated to a Bach cantata. In the chapter on Etty Hillesum, he writes about Hillesum's reflections on her last train journey. The next chapter

25 Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins, "Etty Hillesum: A minha vida é uma sucessão de milagres interiores", http://www.snpcultura.org/vol_a_minha_vida_e_uma_sucessao_de_milagres_interiores.html [retrieved on 21 October 2016].

26 Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins, "Etty, um comboio para Auschwitz", http://www.snpcultura.org/vol_etty_um_comboio_para_auschwitz.html [retrieved on 21 October 2016].

27 Jean Pierre de Roo, "Imaginer l'Anthropologie: Sens et non-sens dans l'interprétation de l'alien", PhD dissertation FLUL, 2013 or at http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/8139/1/ulsd65044_td_Jean_de_Roo.pdf [retrieved on 30 November 2016].

28 Maria Filomena Molder, "Why Is Etty Hillesum a Great Thinker?" in: Smelik, Van den Brandt & Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 399-418, especially p. 403.

29 Miguel Gullander, "Perto do coração selvagem, Clarice Lispector", *Buala: Blogue de cultura contemporânea africana, Dá Fala* 11 July 2011 = <http://www.buala.org/pt/da-fala/perto-do-coracao-selvagem> [retrieved on 20 October 2016].

30 Benjamin Moser, Lispector's biographer, places her in the tradition of Jewish mystics driven to create their own theology from God's absence. Benjamin Moser, *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 15.

is not dedicated to anyone and consists of blank pages, symbolising the impossibility of representing what Hillesum went through but giving an indication with Bach's cantata *Ich habe genug* (BWW 82).³¹

In his novel called *O paraíso segundo Lars D.*, the second volume of his "trilogy of sadness", João Tordo presents us with Lars's wife who reconstructs her married life after the sudden disappearance of her husband. She befriends a young theology student and reader of Hillesum's diary. Fragments of her diary are quoted on several occasions.³²

The success of the *Diário* is unquestionable. Years later, I continue to find references to her on the internet, in papers, or on the radio. Her writings have been the focus of lectures and of two more Master theses.³³ Her oeuvre also motivated the Portuguese translations of Patrick Woodhouse's *A Life Transformed*, Paul Lebeau's *Etty Hillesum: Un itinéraire spirituel* and Michael Davide Semeraro's *Etty Hillesum: Umanità radicato in Dio*.³⁴

The success of the *Diário* surpassed that of the *Cartas*. This is not amazing when we consider that we are dealing with the translation of *Het verstoorde leven*, a selection of texts that stresses Hillesum's spirituality, and how from the very beginning several Roman Catholic Portuguese institutions presented the book. Hillesum's decision to stand with her people gives her an aura of martyrdom valued by Roman Catholicism. The *Diário* stresses Hillesum's inner development and her relationship with God. It is an intimate document; diaries are supposed to be written primarily for the writer's eyes.

The reason why larger audiences prefer the more intimate *Diário* is because they can easily identify with the author. The quotes I found in blogs are usually taken out of context and they often do not refer to the war. Hillesum writes about her hardships while she is still in Amsterdam. The letters, however, are the result of the process Hillesum describes in her diary. They are explicitly addressed to others and were almost all written at Camp Westerbork. In them, Hillesum struggles how to represent to the

31 Pedro Eiras, *Bach* (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2014).

32 João Tordo, *O paraíso segundo Lars D.* (Amadora: Companhia das Letras, 2015).

33 Sílvia Cunha Neto, "Antelme, Duras e Hillesum: Memórias dos campos em perspectiva" (MA thesis FLUP, 2013) or at <http://hdl.handle.net/10216/75140> [retrieved on 11 October 2016] (Unfortunately only based on *Une vie bouleversée*, edition 1985); Teresa Claudia Correia de Pinho, "O acesso a Deus em Etty Hillesum" (MA thesis Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculdade de Teologia, Lisboa, 2014) or at <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.14/16337> [retrieved on 11 October 2016].

34 Patrick Woodhouse, *Etty Hillesum: Uma vida transformada* (Prior Velho: Paulinas Editora, 2011); Paul Lebeau, *Etty Hillesum: Um itinerário espiritual* (Braga: Ed. Axioma – Publicações da Faculdade de Filosofia, 2014); Michael Davide Semeraro, *Etty Hillesum: Humanidade enraizada em Deus* (Prior Velho: Paulinas Editora, 2016).

outside world a reality for which there are no words but must be revealed because this is her special responsibility.³⁵ The footnotes tie the readers to the context and confront them with cruel facts such as the assassination of the many persons she mentions in her letters. In this book, the reader is confronted with the terrible and cruel sufferings of life in a concentration camp culminating with the inevitable transportation to Poland and as we know now, to their extermination.

About the author

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35 E.T., 510. *Het Werk*, 540; Tuesday, 28 July 1942.

22 Bright Orange and Crimson

How a Dutch Dissertation on Etty Hillesum Was Coloured
by French Philosophy

Denise de Costa

Klaas Smelik, Gerrit Van Oord, and Jurjen Wiersma (eds), *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018
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Abstract

In her contribution, De Costa explains the process involved in creating her dissertation on Etty Hillesum. She elucidates how her thinking about Hillesum was formed and determined by the perspectives of women's studies and postmodernism, and fed by Francophone philosophers like François Lyotard and Hélène Cixous. According to the author, these perspectives allowed her, and in turn allow a broad audience, to relate to the complexity and ambiguity of Etty Hillesum's work.

Keywords: women's studies, postmodernism, écriture feminine, François Lyotard, Hélène Cixous, Auschwitz, authenticity, Etty Hillesum

Western thought in the last decades of the previous century was fuelled by new movements such as postmodernism and women's studies. In this spirit emerged the first PhD dissertation about Etty Hillesum. Her life and work, considered from core topics such as being a woman in a patriarchal culture, the complexity of life and the "art of living," appear rich in paradoxes, and that is what makes her work so intriguing and timeless.

In the middle of the war, Etty Hillesum suddenly remembers that as a teenager she made a trip to Paris. On 24 April 1942, she writes about it in her diary,

[...] on the train to Paris. Excited by the rhythm of the train, by the many impressions – there I sat with a miserable little notepad clutched in my fingers, and again needed to write. And I wrote something like: "Grey,

In the original, Etty Hillesum writes that she understands the tendency to simplification, but she herself advocates the full acceptance of life's contradictions:

But the only true unity is that which embraces all the opposites and irrational elements, or else it is just another form of frenzy, of being tied down, and that violates life.⁴

The English Etty Hillesum reverses this completely: she advises to simplify conflicts, so that life itself is both easier and more bearable. The original acceptance of complexity is thus rewritten in English into a call for simplification!⁵

Another typical example of the desire for disambiguity is the photo on the front cover of a book with comments on the diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum,⁶ where Etty Hillesum is thoughtfully looking into the camera. Her head is resting on her right hand. The cigarette, which she holds on the original photo between her fingers, has been airbrushed away.⁷ Etty Hillesum perhaps developed over time into a near saint,⁸ but she also had her worldly, 'profane' side. Precisely this contradiction, this inner conflict, characterizes her:

You would actually be far better off as an out-and-out whore or a real saint. You'd be at peace with yourself then because you'd know exactly what you were up to. My ambivalence is shocking.⁹

4 E.T., 199. *Het Werk*, 208; Monday afternoon, 22 April 1941: Maar de enige goede éénheid is die, die alle tegendelen, en irrationele momenten in zich besloten houdt, anders is het weer een krampachtigheid en een vastgelegdheid, die het leven geweld aan doet.

5 In the complete edition *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*, this has been corrected.

6 Jan Geurt Gaarlandt (ed.), *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn: Reacties op de dagboeken en brieven van Etty Hillesum* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1989).

7 These days the picture with cigarette is printed quite often, among others on the front cover of the aforementioned English edition of Hillesum's entire work.

8 Denise de Costa, "Ceci n'est pas une cigarette: Een detaillistische lezing van Etty Hillesum", in: *Lover, literatuuroverzicht voor de vrouwenbeweging* 18 (1991) 3, 140-145, especially p. 142.

9 E.T., 49. *Het Werk*, 51; Tuesday, 25 March 1941, half past five: Je kan waarachtig beter een volledige straathoer zijn of een echte heilige. Dan heb je rust en weet je waar je aan toe bent met jezelf. De ambivalentie bij mij is wel heel erg.

Reading through the Lens of Women's Studies and Postmodernism

What is significance of this desire for clarity, this tendency to simplification? I first posed myself this question in the late eighties, early nineties of the last century, when I was working on my thesis on Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum. My answer can be placed in the intellectual climate of the time. Dutch universities were heavily influenced by French philosophers, such as Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard.

At the same time, at Dutch universities emerged the academic counterpart of the women's movement: women's studies. In this context, the French philosophical ideas were influential as well: the philosophy of Irigaray and the *écriture féminine* of Cixous and others were very much in focus.

During my graduation, I was inspired by French philosophy as well as women's studies. My thesis, which was published in 1989 as: "Talking Silences: A Postmodern Reading of Women's Writing",¹⁰ was on the one hand an introduction to the ideas of Lyotard, Kristeva and Irigaray, and on the other hand an investigation into the question why the latest trend in the philosophy of that time, postmodernism, seemed yet again an exclusively male affair. It seemed to me that postmodernism offered interesting options for women's studies, and this is what I wanted to investigate further.

This chance presented itself during my PhD research, under the guidance of my tutors Maaïke Meijer (Professor of Dutch Literature) and Rosi Braidotti (Professor of Philosophy), both employed at the Faculty of Arts, Women's Studies Department of Utrecht University. Inspired by this combination of expertise, it allowed me to establish a relationship in my doctoral research between French philosophy, especially the post-structuralism and postmodernism, on the one hand and Dutch women's literature on the other hand.

As for the Dutch women's literature, my choice was led by the desire that my research would be of international value: therefore, it had to be books that were known internationally and had been translated. Eventually, I chose two authors who were much discussed at the time: Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum. This was due to the fact that, among other things, it was half a century ago that the Second World War had ended.

In the early nineties of the last century, I started my PhD research on the texts of Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum by re-reading their diaries, letters and stories. My reading was thus heavily influenced by the criticism of

¹⁰ Denise de Costa, *Sprekende Stiltes: Een postmoderne lezing van het vrouwelijk schrift*, Irigaray, Kristeva, Lyotard (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1989).

the unity of thinking formulated by French philosophers. I will disregard Anne Frank in this contribution and concentrate on the reception of Etty Hillesum's writings. This took place in the context of French philosophy, particularly in the context of postmodernism as it was introduced within philosophy by Jean-François Lyotard.

Auschwitz as Lynch Pin

Jean-François Lyotard and Etty Hillesum have more in common than one might suspect at first sight. What connects them with each other, is, *inter alia*, the development of their progressive political engagement. And more so, they linked to each other by "Auschwitz" – Lyotard's summary of the Second World War in one single word, capturing the horrors of the Holocaust, fully aware that there are ultimately no words to express the reality of the concentration camps in language. Etty Hillesum lived and wrote during "Auschwitz"; she was actually murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau in the autumn of 1943. Lyotard only became a philosopher after the Second World War, but the philosophy of both Etty Hillesum and Jean-François Lyotard is strongly influenced by "Auschwitz" as an incomprehensible suspicion and as an incomprehensible fact.

Etty Hillesum was a young student in Amsterdam during the thirties of the last century, active in left-wing, socialist groups. At the outbreak of the war, she came to doubt the possibilities to improve the world through this type of political beliefs. She feared that socialism ultimately cannot contribute fundamentally to world peace, because socialism allows hate to enter, albeit through the back door, but still, there is hatred of everything that is not socialist.¹¹ And hatred, according Etty Hillesum, is the problem of her time: not only the hatred of the Nazi's against the Jews; but also the hatred against the Germans. She is convinced that "we must help to increase the store of love in this world. Every bit of hate we add to the surfeit of hate there already is, renders this world more inhospitable and inhabitable."¹² She shifts the battle stage to her inner self: that is where she wants to start wiping out all the seeds of hatred – the only way to combat

11 E.T., 19. *Het Werk*, 20; 15 March 1941, Saturday morning half past nine: [...] omdat het socialisme de haat binnenlaat, weliswaar langs een achterdeur, maar toch, haat tegen alles wat niet socialistisch is.

12 E.T., 471. *Het Werk*, 497; 4 July 1942, 12.45 at night: [...] men de voorraad liefde op aarde moet helpen vergroten. Ieder beetje haat dat men aan het al veel te veel haten toevoegt, maakt de wereld onherbergzamer en onbewoonbaarder.

hatred, demoralization and destruction by self-introspection. One day, she exchanged views about this with her fellow student Jan Bool.¹³

Before the war, Jan Bool was an active member of the anti-fascist resistance movement and during the war he was a member of the student resistance movement. They met early 1942 at the University of Amsterdam. Later, Etty Hillesum writes about their conversation in her diary:

What is it in human beings that makes them want to destroy others? Jan asked bitterly. I said: Human beings, you say, but remember that you're one yourself. And strangely enough he seemed to acquiesce, grumpy, gruff old Jan. The rottenness of others is in us, too, I continued to preach at him. I see no other solution, I really see no other solution than to turn inward and to root out all rottenness there. I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves. And that seems to me the only lesson to be learned from this war. That we must look into ourselves, nowhere else. And Jan, who so unexpectedly agreed with everything I said, was approachable and interested and no longer proffered any his hard-boiled social theories.¹⁴

Jean-François Lyotard was in the sixties of the last century intricately involved in leftist political developments in France, particularly in Paris. The disappointment of May '68 resulted in his loss of trust in Marxist doctrine, which was so influential at the time. He turned his political commitment into a critical study of the fundamental structures of thinking in Western culture. So he too made a turn towards the inner self, not so much in a psychological and spiritual sense as with Etty Hillesum, but more in a political and philosophical sense, a movement from outside to inside. He came to the conclusion that Marxism as one of the great Enlightenment Stories, with its central focus on progress, liberation and emancipation of humanity, should be declared bankrupt.

13 See also Alexandra Nagel, "Met 26 jaar opnieuw beginnen... is niet mogelijk": Een portret van Jan Bool, Etty Hillesums studiegenoot", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, et al. (eds), *Etty Hillesum 1914-2014* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 6] (Antwerpen & Apeldoorn: Garant, 2014), 151-165.

14 E.T., 245. *Het Werk*, 254; 19 February 1942, Thursday, 2.00 p.m.: Wat is dat toch in de mensen om anderen kapot te willen maken? vroeg Jan verbitterd. Ik zeg: De mensen, ja de mensen, maar bedenk, dat je daar zelf ook onder valt. En dat wilde hij onverwachts zo maar toegeven, de bokkige, norse Jan. En ik zie geen andere oplossing dan in je eigen centrum in te keren en daar uit te roeien al die rotheid. Ik geloof er niet meer aan, dat we in de buitenwereld iets verbeteren kunnen, wat we niet eerst in ons zelf moeten verbeteren. En dat lijkt me de enige les van deze oorlog, dat we geleerd hebben, dat we het alléén in onszelf moeten zoeken en nergens anders. En Jan, die het zomaar met me eens was, toegankelijk en vragend en niet met keiharde, sociale theorieën zoals vroeger.

For Lyotard, “Auschwitz” is the perfect illustration of this. Enlightenment ideals are characterized by the quest for emancipation, of which progress is the code word is: mainly through increasing knowledge, humans would increasingly be able to control the world and lead the way. Enlightenment philosophy is supported by a belief in the existence of a global order, with a privileged position of human beings therein. The idea that humans could impose their will on the world and that the world would be better off, is, therefore, what Lyotard calls the modern way of life.

Since “Auschwitz” we know better, Lyotard states: the Enlightenment idea of progress is based more on illusion than reality. Systems of thought that after “Auschwitz” still pretend that mankind can put order into the world and can turn the world to its hand, must be regarded as out-dated. These big legitimizing stories, explanatory systems, ordering principles or *metarécits* have lost their explanatory value. They no longer fit in with current developments. Lyotard replaces the old, modern concepts of linearity and overall understanding with complexity. According to him, it is complexity that constitutes the essential difference between modern and postmodern society. This shift in the social constellation is associated with a change in conceptions of life of people of today, their way of thinking and feeling. While modern *Zeitgeist* is supported by a belief in order, unilarity and progression, in the postmodern way of life this belief is exposed as an illusion. It disposes of the desire to want to control the reality by imposing all sorts of categories and structures on it; it seeks to accept the chaotic reality as it presents itself to us. Such an attitude to life requires a certain courage to endure uncertainty, which is contrary to the human need for clarity and order.

It is important to note that the postmodern is not a mere chronological succession of the modern and it would, therefore, mean a break with the modern. The postmodern does not mean the end of the modern, but it refers to a different relationship with the modern. The postmodern is part of the modern, in the sense that the postmodern represents that which is not immediately visible, that what hides behind the structures:

Modernity is not age, but rather a mode [...] of thinking, of speaking and of sensibility. [...] What is the postmodern? It is certainly part of the modern. [...] The postmodern is not modernism on its last legs, but in the cradle, and it does not come out of it.¹⁵

15 Jean-François Lyotard, *Post-modern Explained for Children: Correspondence, 1982-1985*, translated by Thomas M. Pefanis (London: Turnaround Books, 1998).

In this sense, Etty Hillesum's outlook on life can be characterized as post-modern. After all, a postmodern attitude to life means that one is open to everything, also to the "unbearable darkness of being":¹⁶ one does not close the eyes to the elusive and complex elements, of which life consists largely. And if there is something both the diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum typifies, it is the courage that speaks out to open itself. While in her journals, she mainly works on raising the awareness of her inner self, with its down sides of unresolved trauma, irrational fears, but also with its beautiful, pure edges where the good, the divine can find shelter, the letters are primarily aimed at the outside world. Etty Hillesum is capable of experiencing both heaven and hell on earth, even if it defies comprehension. From Camp Westerbork, she observes and writes with surprise and bewilderment both at the same time:

The sky is full of birds, the purple lupines stand up so regally and peacefully, two little old women have sat down on the box for a chat, the sun is shining on my face – and right before our eyes, mass murder. The whole thing is simply beyond comprehension.¹⁷

Lyotard clarifies the relationship between the modern and the postmodern by linking the modern with values such as project, program, progression, and by associating the postmodern with values such as analysis, and anamnesis. Anamnesis has to do with memory, becoming aware of the invisible, the hidden. In a letter to her friend Hanneke Starreveld, Etty Hillesum testifies to a postmodern attitude to life,

Say Hanneke, will you excuse me? I want to say a few things to you. [...] Right after you left, the following shot out of my fountain pen in my illegible spidery handwriting [...]: Behind this "wanting-to-grow-further" of Hanneke rest such a great drive and ambition. – It's not about wanting to grow further as quickly as possible, but about developing oneself slowly. I do not believe that one's highlight or perfection is ahead. One has already experienced it once before, in the middle of one's life or in one's youth, and one has passed it. And growing further, is that not trying to attain

16 After: Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated by Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber & Faber, 1984).

17 E.T., 602. *Het Werk*, 642; 8 June 1943, Tuesday morning, ten o'clock: De lucht is vol vogels, de paarse lupinen staan daar zo vorstelijk en vredig, op die kist zijn twee oude, keuvelende vrouwtjes gaan zitten, de zon schijnt op m'n gezicht en vlak voor onze ogen geschiedt een massamoord, het is zo onbegrijpelijk alles.

one's own best moments? We look forward, but shouldn't we sometimes look more backwards and inwards?¹⁸

That is exactly what Etty Hillesum does herself, through the therapy sessions of Julius Spier, but especially by the intensive keeping of her diary: remembering, looking back, meditating, focussing on the *Weltinnenraum*,¹⁹ the inner world. This kind of writing is – according to Lyotard – a form of resistance against the established order, because one is not satisfied with all that is and has been accepted. This kind of writing does not belong to the genre of the *metarécit*, the big unambiguous story of one single truth that is declared, of order, cleanliness and progress, but it is the micrology: it is a small story, without pretensions to possessing a monopoly on truth, it is a story of enlightenment and eclipse of sun and shadow, it is a story where the attention goes right to the absent, the memory, the anamnesis.

Such a story is likely to be shut outside the canon, the canon of war literature for example. The literary scholar Sem Dresden, for example, defines war diaries as books in which the outside world must prevail over inner experiences, both in quantity and interest, and then wonders whether Etty Hillesum's diaries can be placed within the genre of war diaries, because he asserts: "Etty mainly focuses on herself and by writing makes a journey of discovery of her inner self, and for pages and pages the war has nothing to do with this."²⁰ By using a limited, conservative definition of a war diary, he locks out Etty Hillesum's diaries. This precludes him from opening up to the alternative and authentic way in which Etty Hillesum relates to the war. And this is what she certainly does. As was stated earlier, she was convinced that the only effective weapon against the war, is to work on your own development. Improve the world, start with yourself, is her life motto during the war years. Her diaries are war diaries in the sense that the writer is deeply involved in what the Nazism means, and in what respect it endangers civilization and culture,

Nazi barbarism evokes the same kind of barbarism in ourselves, one that would involve the same methods if we could do as we wanted right here

18 Denise de Costa, *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum: Inscribing spirituality and sexuality*, translated by Mischa F.C. Hoyinck & Robert E. Chesal (New Brunswick, NJ, & London: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 164-166.

19 This word is from the poem 'Es winkt zu Fühling fast aus allen Dingen' by Rainer Maria Rilke; see R.M. Rilke, *Gedichte 1906-1926* [Sämtliche Werke II] (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1957), 92. English translation in: Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems* [Oxford World's Classics] (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2011), 116.

20 S. Dresden, *Vervolging, vernietiging, literatuur* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1991), 39-40.

and now. We have to reject that barbarism within us, we must not fan the hatred within us, because if we do, the world will not be able to pull itself one inch further out of the mire.²¹

In her first diary, she already writes that the stance against Nazism must be principled and militant, but must go along with fighting against their own bad instincts.²²

By placing the emphasis in his definition of wartime diaries on describing the outside world, Dresden will subsequently include mostly male authors in his canon, because in our culture men, more so than women, are socialized to focus on the outside world, the visible, the public.

As opposed to Lyotard, who searches for the female vision, the female voice in developing an alternative view of humankind and the world. Although he is absolutely opposed to an essentialist view of humankind, thus rejects the idea that there is an essential difference between men and women, Lyotard puts his hope for the development of a less conservative mind-set especially on women, because as a group they always stood outside the male empire and therefore may have been more connected to what at times of the male dominion was always concealed, to what was not seen, to which did not exist.

The Bird and the Thief

It is interesting to connect this vision of sexual difference with what the literary scholar Hélène Cixous writes about women in Western culture. It relates to the ambiguity of the verb *voler* ["to fly" as well as "to steal"] – a way of living that is found among women. She claims that the realm of culture predominantly owned by men; women are being placed outside of it. Only as invaders, as thieves, can they can participate in this culture: "For centuries, we [women DdC] only have access to the property by stealing; by stealing, we have lived on the run."²³

21 E.T., 21. *Het Werk*, 22; 15 March 1941, Saturday morning, half past nine: [...] het nazi-barbarisme roept in ons eenzelfde barbarisme wakker, dat met dezelfde methoden zou werken, wanneer we mochten doen wat we wilden vandaag aan den dag. Dit barbarisme van ons moeten wij innerlijk afwijzen, wij mogen die haat niet aankweken in ons, omdat de wereld dan geen stap verder uit de modder komt.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Hélène Cixous, "De lach van de Medusa", in: *Sarafaan: Literair-cultureel tijdschrift* 1 (1986) 3, 74-91, especially p. 85.

According to Cixous, it is easier for women to trespass the limits, the laws, the order, to break through them, for they are alien to her. After all, traditionally, men are dedicated to organize the culture and society, and to structure it. When a woman like Etty Hillesum, is entering into culture, she has not yet been placed, because actually one has not counted on her. She is, therefore, free to place herself. And why would she not first sample all the cultural delights that are scattered before her? She does not belong anywhere near anywhere and can, therefore, reach anything. Such as taking a book from the bookcase of Julius Spier, that ended up in her house, to browse in it and quote from it, thus being inspired by different philosophies and religions, without having to worry if one is compatible with the other. Cixous writes about the relationship between the bird, the thief and the woman,

The woman takes after the bird and the thief as the thief takes after the woman and the bird: they pass by, pinch away, enjoy disturbing the organization of space, disorienting and displacing the furniture, the things and the values, breaking them to pieces, emptying the structures, muddling one's own.²⁴

This poetic description of the position of women in our culture and her cheerful and militant appeal to women – in the symbolic sense of the word – to rise up and steal, does not mean that Cixous does not criticize the exclusion mechanisms inherent to Western culture. Quite the contrary, because she had suffered too much herself. Her parents were Jewish; her mother fled from Germany to Algeria. Hélène was born in Oran, the largest port in Algeria, then still a French colony.

I had the “luck” to take my first steps between two holocausts, in the womb of escalating racism, and was a three-year-old Jewish child in 1940, part of myself in the concentration camps, a part of myself in the “colonies”.²⁵

Hélène Cixous “emerged between languages”: around her cradle, many languages were spoken: Yiddish, German, French and Arabic. The atmosphere outside the cradle was threatening: imperialism, colonialism, anti-Semitism, racism and sexism were rampant. Cixous describes herself as a *juifemme*:

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Tussen talen ontstaan / La venue à l'écriture* (Amsterdam: Hölderlin, 1991), 35.

You too are a Jew-woman, smaller, shabby, mouse under the mouse people held to tremble for the big bad cat. Intended for the diaspora of your desires for inner deserts. And if you grow up, your desert will also grow. If you crawl out of your cave, you let the world know that between its states is no place for your kind.²⁶

She writes about the happiness of her native Algeria and her year of birth 1937, because it made her militant. This background made her a passionate advocate of differentiation. In 1974, she founded the first French institute for women's studies in Paris, La Centre de recherche d'études féminines. She is soon considered to be the pioneer in research into textual (sexual) difference. Her bi-weekly seminar attracts a large international audience.

In 1985, "Une vie bouleversée" is published, a translation of a selection of diary entries of Etty Hillesum by Philippe Noble. In the next academic year (1985-1986), Cixous regularly discusses Etty Hillesum's work. On 20 October 1985, the first meeting after the Summer break, she announces that in the coming year they will investigate texts by authors who had experienced no security, but instead fear, persecution and imprisonment:

Most of the texts that we will work on this year, are written thanks to homelessness. It is thanks to the homelessness that they are written. I am referring to a text poetically unfinished, but unforgettable: that of Etty Hillesum: 'Une vie bouleversée'.²⁷

Cixous says some people get thrown the chance or fate to land in "the school of loss." At "the school of loss," mourning is being taught. One learns to give a positive turn to loss: how to transform loss into a blessing. According to Cixous, life can be a "school of loss." In her analyses of texts, therefore, she regularly pays attention to the "training/schooling" of the author. About Etty Hillesum, she says that she had discovered the secrets of life precisely because she wrote in the face of death. As a Jewish woman, she was confronted with loss. She attended "the school of loss" and learned to give a positive meaning to the loss. What she has learned, she passes on to her future readers: her diaries and letters can be characterized as a *leçon de deuil*. Cixous is convinced that it is possible, through the experience of loss and grief, to get to awareness of the richness of life. Precisely, when we must say farewell and distance ourselves, one can gain a deeper awareness

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ Cixous seminar, 20-10-1985; see also De Costa, *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum*, 185-186.

of wealth and the pleasures of life. In this context, she calls the diaries and letters of Ety Hillesum a “bible du savoir vivre,”²⁸ a text that is a testimony to the art to enjoy, as becomes apparent in the next quote:

Every pretty blouse I put on is a kind of celebration, And so is every occasion I have to wash with scented soap in a bathroom all to myself for half an hour. It's as if I were revelling in these civilized luxuries for the last time. But even if I have to forego them one day, I shall always know that they exist and that they can make life pleasant, and I shall think of them as a great boon even if I can't share in them any longer. For whether or not I share in them, isn't really the point, is it?²⁹

Ety Hillesum mourns for all the benefits of civilization which still surround her and which she knows she is going to lose. Out of an everyday activity, she makes a ceremony – says Cixous – a ceremony of enjoyment and of a farewell to that enjoyment. She makes a kind of inventory of all losses, but that inventory is also a list of wealth.

The authenticity of Ety Hillesum's way of living and writing, is located here precisely. The special character of her work has to do with the circumstances in which it is written. Her life and work bear witness to the paradox which Cixous articulated as follows: the very people who must face harsh conditions in their lives, are sometimes able to experience the truth of life. We must, therefore, listen to these people, who are homeless, vagrants, and exiles. While those around her sink into hatred and feelings of displeasure, Ety Hillesum continues to fight in herself against the negativity. Her answers to the questions of life were finally of affirmative nature: she took her life into her hands and felt rightly that not hatred but love gives strength in life. It is not about control and dominant power; it is about taking on life in love, gratitude and humility, no matter how heavy it is.

That makes that the diaries and letters of Ety Hillesum have such nourishing power, even more than 70 years after they were written:

28 Cixous seminar, 23-11-1985.

29 E.T., 468. *Het Werk*, 493; Saturday, 4 July 1942, late morning: Ieder schoon hemd dat je aantrekt is nog een soort feest. En iedere keer dat je je nog met geurige zeep wast in een badkamer, die voor dat halve uur helemaal van jou alleen is. Net of ik al bezig ben één voortdurend afscheid te vieren van al deze voortreffelijkheden der beschaving. En als ik daar later niet meer in deel, zal ik tóch weten dat ze bestaan en dat ze het leven veraangenamen kunnen en ik zal ze prijzen als één van de goede hoedanigheden van het leven, ook al vallen ze mij niet ten deel. Want dat het nu toevallig mij ten deel valt, dáárom gaat het toch niet?

These are books that, in all passivity, are militant, and ultimately they give us real recipes for spiritual survival. They are nourishing books: books that feed the hungry.³⁰

Living Letters

Among the nourishing books are also the books of Lyotard, Cixous, and other representatives of contemporary French philosophy. They are nourishing, because when you read Etty Hillesum inspired by poststructuralism and postmodernism, you can keep contact with the complexity and ambiguity in her work.

In relation to the traditional literary analysis methods, Professor Maaïke Meijer spoke of the paradox of interpretation:³¹ the radical pursuit of rationality, consistency and accuracy ignores the power of literature, and there precisely lies the strangeness, the other, of the language.

The innovative ideas of Lyotard and Cixous, in contrast, make it possible to approach Etty Hillesum in such a way that one stays in touch with the authenticity of her texts, in all their strangeness and contradictions. Reading Etty Hillesum in this way means that her texts remain vivid in all their different colours, from grey and black, to bright orange and crimson.

About the author

Denise de Costa (1958) wrote the first PhD dissertation on Etty Hillesum (1996); *E.T.: Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum: Inscribing Spirituality and Sexuality* (Rutgers University Press 1999). She has written several books and articles on Etty Hillesum, spirituality, women's lives and local history.

³⁰ Cixous seminar, 15-10-1988.

³¹ Maaïke Meijer, *De lust tot lezen: Nederlandse dichters en het literaire systeem* (Amsterdam: Sara/Van Gennep, 1988), volume 1: "De paradox van de interpretatie" [The Paradox of Interpretation].

23 Ulrich Beck and ETTY HILLESUM

Klaas A.D. Smelik

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Abstract

The chapter that Ulrich Beck dedicated to ETTY Hillesum in his book *Der Eigene Gott* [A God of One's Own] has played an important role in the international reception of ETTY Hillesum's work. Nevertheless, there are lingering doubts about Beck's rendering of Hillesum's image of God. The author investigates Beck's vision in this article. According to his analysis, Beck was fascinated by ETTY Hillesum and her image of God, and felt a strong affinity for her. He goes on to point out, however, that having an affinity for someone does not create a sufficient basis for analysis, and he criticizes Beck for his examination of Hillesum's texts, which was not done carefully enough to understand what ETTY Hillesum really meant when she wrote about God.

Keywords: Ulrich Beck, *Der Eigene Gott*, academic reception, New Age, Elie Wiesel, God, personal God, ETTY Hillesum

The German sociologist Ulrich Beck, who passed away in January 2015, was well known amongst ETTY Hillesum scholars.¹ For ETTY Hillesum's diaries were the subject of the first chapter of his 2008 book, *Der eigene Gott: Von*

¹ As noted by Theo de Wit in *Volzin* 14 (2015) nr. 5, 44: "In zijn boek over *De eigen God* (2008) noemt de Duitse socioloog Ulrich Beck het voorbeeld van ETTY Hillesum, in 1943 vermoord in Auschwitz. Haar ongedwongen omgang met haar onafhankelijk blijvende persoonlijke God leidt niet tot 'verafgoding van het eigene' zoals bij religies die tot wellnessinstellingen verworden of bij de nieuwe vormen van nationalisme. Integendeel, deze omgang leidde tot een ongeëvenaarde tegenwoordigheid van geest die gepaard gaat met een constante zelfrelativering." [In his book about *A God of One's Own* (2008) the German sociologist Ulrich Beck mentions the example of ETTY Hillesum, who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943. Her unhindered relationship with her independent personal God does not lead to a worship of one's self, as found in religions that turn into wellness-institutions or in new forms of nationalism. On the contrary, this relationship leads to an unequivocal presence of mind, paired with constant self-relativation.]

der Friedensfähigkeit und dem Gewaltpotential der Religionen [A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence].² In that first chapter, Beck makes use of Hillesum's diary notes to develop his religious-sociological notion of "a god of one's own."

Hillesum researcher Maria Gabriella Nocita made a thorough study of Beck's ideas, publishing an article in Italian in 2013³ in which it is apparent that she does not agree with Beck's view on Etty Hillesum. Nocita opposes Beck's analysis that Hillesum has written of a "Dio personale" [a personal God], saying instead that Hillesum wrote of a "Dio persona" [God as a person], as did, for instance, Saint Augustine. According to Nocita, by assuming that Hillesum wrote about a personal God instead of God as a person, Beck has misunderstood Hillesum's diaries.

In this essay, I too refer to Beck's interpretation and ask: Where did Beck hit the mark and where did he miss? I compare his views to conclusions I have drawn from my own research on the varying meanings of the word "God" in Etty Hillesum's writings.⁴

Stereotypical Inaccuracies

From the very beginning of Beck's chapter on Etty Hillesum, it is clear that he has based his findings on the German translation of the anthology *Het Verstoorde Leven* [The Interrupted Life] and not the complete edition of Hillesum's works.⁵ Beck writes, "Her hand-written diary entries start

2 Ulrich Beck, *Der eigene Gott: Von der Friedensfähigkeit und dem Gewaltpotential der Religionen* (Frankfurt am Main & Leipzig: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008). E.T.: Ulrich Beck, *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010). The first chapter is called: "Das Tagebuch des 'eigenen Gottes': Etty Hillesum, eine unsociologische Einleitung" [The Diary of a "God of One's Own": Etty Hillesum: An Unsociological Introduction].

3 Maria Gabriella Nocita, "Etty Hillesum: quale Dio? Un modello del Dio personale di Ulrich Beck?" In: Gerrit Van Oord (ed.), *Etty Hillesum: Studi sulla vita e l'opera* (Sant'Oreste: Apeiron Editori, 2013), 74-93.

4 Cf. Klaas A.D. Smelik, "Etty Hillesum and her God", in: Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (eds), *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 11] (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 75-102. Expanded Italian edition: Klaas A.D. Smelik, *Il concetto di Dio in Etty Hillesum* (Sant'Oreste: Apeiron, 2014).

5 E.T.: Klaas A.D. Smelik (ed.), *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*, translated by Arnold J. Pomerans (Ottawa, ON / Grand Rapids, MI: Novalis Saint Paul University / William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

in March 1941 and end in October 1943.⁶ This is incorrect. Hillesum's extant diary-notebooks ran only until 13 October, 1942. On the cover of *Het Verstoorde Leven*, however, as well as on the various translations of the anthology, we find the date 1941-1943. Fortunately, a German translation of the complete edition of Hillesum's writings is forthcoming. Future Hillesum research in the German speaking part of Europe will have a reliable and complete text for their work, and these kinds of mistakes will not be made again. Unfortunately, this German complete edition will have come too late for Ulrich Beck.

The emphasis Beck puts on the non-Jewish character of Hillesum's system of belief and her image of God⁷ conforms to the general view of Etty Hillesum that has arisen since the publication of *Het Verstoorde Leven* in 1981. It is, nevertheless, no less incorrect.⁸ Beck poses with great certainty, "She did not accept Jewish identity."⁹ At the same time, he underlines the fact that she died as a Jew: "It was as a Jewess that she was deported to a concentration camp and killed."¹⁰ Admittedly, this tension between the non-Jewish identity of fully assimilated Jews and the Nazi's criteria of who was or was not a Jew, is a historical fact. For example, an assimilated Jewish woman who had survived the Shoah by going into hiding, once told me, "Hitler has made me a Jew." The question remains however, whether this contradiction applies to Etty Hillesum. Was it the Nazis who made her a Jew? Beck ponders the

6 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 2. Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 14: "Die handschriftlichen Aufzeichnungen beginnen in März 1941 und endem im Oktober 1943." Beck used the following German translation: *Das denkende Herz der Baracke: Die Tagebücher von Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*, translated by Maria Csollány (Freiburg: F.H. Kerle, 1983). In the bibliography at the end of Beck's book, the year of publishing is incorrectly given as the year 1981.

7 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 3: "Her 'own' God is not the God of the synagogues [...]." Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 15: "Ihr 'eigener' Gott ist nicht der Gott der Synagogen [...]."

8 See also the criticism in Nocita, "Etty Hillesum: quale Dio?", 79: "Sebbene nell'ambito familiare non le venga data alcuna educazione religiosa in senso stretto, tuttavia è fuor dal vero sostenere, come fa Beck, che la Hillesum 'non farà mai propria l'identità ebraica'. Etty Hillesum non dichiarerà mai un'appartenenza sul piano religioso, ma è pienamente cosciente della propria identità ebraica che difenderà fino a scegliere di condividere quello che chiama il 'destino di massa', il destino del suo popolo." [Although at home she did not get a religious education in the strict sense, it is beside the truth to suppose, like Beck does, that Etty Hillesum 'did not accept Jewish identity'. Etty Hillesum will never declare herself as a follower of any kind of religion, nonetheless she is fully aware of her own Jewish identity which she even defends to the length of choosing for what she calls the 'Massenschicksal', the fate of her people.]

9 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 7. Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 20: "[...] sie nimmt die jüdische Identität nicht an."

10 *Ibid.* Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 20: "als Jüdin ins KZ abtransportiert und vernichtet."

issue thusly: “Was Etty Hillesum a non-Jew in her lifetime and a Jew in her death?”¹¹

Leiden University’s classicist, Piet Schrijvers,¹² deserves the credit for having adjusted the existing image of Etty Hillesum as a non-Jewish Jew-ess by pointing out the typical Jewish characteristics in her writings. He concludes with the rather witty remark:

When it comes to the Jewish contexts of Etty Hillesum, I hope to have shown that Etty Hillesum was more Jewish than some Jewish Dutch people have wanted to recognize, more Jewish than some non-Jewish Dutch people have been able to recognize, and maybe even more Jewish than she herself realized.¹³

The presumption that Etty Hillesum lacked a Jewish upbringing during childhood is based not just on the general bias that only orthodox Jews represent the Jewish identity, but also on insufficient knowledge of her family circumstances. Her father, Levie (Louis) Hillesum, was a *maggid*, a certified teacher in Jewish religion as well as a doctor of Classical Languages.¹⁴ In order to obtain the title *maggid*, Levie Hillesum passed an exam with

11 *Ibid.* Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 20: “War Etty Hillesum Nicht-Jüdin im Leben und Jüdin im Tod?”

12 Piet Schrijvers is generally known for his translations of Latin poets, but he also wrote an elaborate study about the historian and Jewish Council chairman David Cohen, titled: *Rome, Athene, Jeruzalem: Leven en werk van Prof. dr. David Cohen* [Rome, Athens, Jerusalem: The Life and Work of Prof. Dr. David Cohen] (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2000). Schrijvers had published earlier an article concerning the similarities between Etty Hillesum and the Roman philosopher and writer Seneca, with the title: “Een filosoof in bezettingstijd: Over Seneca’s brieven en het dagboek van Etty Hillesum” [A Philosopher During Occupation: On Seneca’s Letters and the Diary of Etty Hillesum], reprinted in: Piet Schrijvers, *De mens als toeschouwer: Essays over Romeinse literatuur en Westeuropese tradities* [Man as Spectator: Essays About Roman Literature and West-European Traditions] (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1986), 190-208.

13 Cf. the contribution by Piet Schrijvers in this volume, “Etty Hillesum in Jewish contexts”, 315-331, especially p. 331. Original Dutch version: *idem*, “Etty Hillesum in joodse contexten”, in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in facetten* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 1] (Budel: Damon, 2003), 37-55, especially p. 55: “Wat de joodse contexten van Etty Hillesum betreft: ik hoop aannemelijk te hebben gemaakt dat Etty joodser is geweest dan sommige joodse Nederlanders hebben willen (h)erkennen, dan sommige niet-joodse Nederlanders hebben kunnen (h)erkennen, en misschien wel joodser dan zij zichzelf heeft gerealiseerd.”

14 See Jaap Meijer, “Als maggid vergeten: Doctor Levie Hillesum 1880-1943, de vader van Etty”, [Forgotten as Maggid: Doctor Levie Hillesum 1880-1943, Etty’s Father] in: Klaas A.D. Smelik *et alii* (eds), *Etty Hillesum in Relatie* [Etty Hillesum in Relation] [Etty Hillesum Studies, 5] (Gent: Academia Press, 2013), 135-150, and *idem*, “De Odyssee van een joods docent: Dr. Levie Hillesum 1911-1924” [The Odyssee of a Jewish teacher: Dr. Levie Hillesum 1911-1924], *ibid.*, 151-174.

good results. He had a working knowledge of Hebrew, a language that Etty herself learned at the Deventer grammar school, as shown in her school records. Moreover, Etty Hillesum's writings show that she was acquainted with typical Dutch-Jewish expressions such as *to say Sheymess*. She notes, "I see an old man being carried away on a stretcher to the train, saying Sheymess over himself."¹⁵

Although certain authors posthumously enlist Etty Hillesum in the Roman Catholic church, Beck was careful to note that her own God was clearly not the God of the church.¹⁶ Beck stresses, "Nor, however, did she convert to Christianity."¹⁷ Because Etty Hillesum stands somewhere outside of strict religious categorization, she becomes an ideal place for Beck to start to convey to the reader his own concept of "a god of one's own." He points out her way of communicating with God as if she were talking to herself, and her remarkable style, a style that is attractive to contemporary readers. Beck himself apparently finds Hillesum's style appealing as he quotes her extensively, sometimes pages on end. And more than once he addresses her directly as, "Liebe Etty" [Dear Etty].¹⁸

An Impotent God

According to Beck, an important element of Hillesum's personal God is his helplessness. He is far from being an almighty God; He is in fact *ohnmächtig und heimatlos* [impotent and homeless].¹⁹ Since I do not grasp the homeless aspect Beck ascribes to Etty Hillesum's writings, and because the assumption that Etty Hillesum's God is impotent reflects a common feeling among the majority of readers of Hillesum's writings, I will consider that aspect here. In the first place, it must be noted that the description "impotent" is

15 E.T., 650. *Het Werk*, 693: Ik zie een oude man wegdragen op een baar naar de trein, sjeimes zeggende over zichzelf... 'Sheymess' is derived from the Jewish creed *Shema Jisrael* and indicates a prayer for a dying person. It mainly consists of constantly calling out the Name of God and the highest form of this prayer is when the dying person is still able to pray along with the people around him.

16 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 3: "Her 'own' God is not the God of [...] the churches [...]." Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 15: "Ihr 'eigener' Gott ist nicht der Gott [...] der Kirchen [...]."

17 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 7. Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 20: "Sie ist aber auch nicht zum Christentum konvertiert."

18 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 11, 18. Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 25, 26, 27.

19 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 9. Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 22.

not actually used by Etty Hillesum herself. It is a term used by her contemporary, the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945),²⁰ who wrote,

God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us.²¹

Beck's impression that Etty Hillesum saw God as impotent, is based mainly on her Sunday-morning prayer of 12 July 1942, in which she writes,

[...] But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.²²

It seems as if Etty Hillesum is saying here that God cannot help mankind and cannot change circumstances. This is indeed very different from the concept of "God the almighty Father" found in the Apostolic creed. But does this mean that for Etty Hillesum God is impotent? That He is unable to help the people because He is powerless?

20 An elaborate comparison of the ideas about the powerless God held by Bonhoeffer and Hillesum in: Meins G.S. Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum: An Analysis of her Diaries and Letters* [Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 22] (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 463-549.

21 Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 507. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung* [Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, volume 8] (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1998), 534: "Gott läßt sich aus der Welt heraus drängen ans Kreuz, Gott ist ohnmächtig und schwach in der Welt und gerade und nur so ist er bei uns und hilft uns."

22 E.T., 488-489. *Het Werk*, 516; Sunday, 12 July 1942: [...] Maar dit éne wordt me steeds duidelijker: dat jij ons niet kunt helpen, maar dat wij jou moeten helpen en door dat laatste helpen wij onszelf. En dit is het enige, wat we in deze tijd kunnen redden en ook het enige, waar het op aankomt: een stukje van jou in onszelf, God. En misschien kunnen we ook er aan meewerken jou op te graven in de geteisterde harten van anderen. Ja, mijn God, aan de omstandigheden schijn jij niet al te veel te kunnen doen, ze horen nu eenmaal ook bij dit leven. Ik roep je er ook niet voor ter verantwoording, jij mag daar later ons voor ter verantwoording roepen. En haast met iedere hartslag wordt het me duidelijker: dat jij ons niet kunt helpen, maar dat wij jou moeten helpen en dat we de woning in ons, waar jij huist, tot het laatste toe moeten verdedigen.

A look at her diaries shows that Etty Hillesum uses the word “powerless” [Dutch: *machteloos*] as well as the abstract noun “powerlessness” [Dutch: *machteloosheid*] in relation to herself, but never in relation to God. In those passages where she uses the word “powerlessness,” it is always a negatively charged concept. In the Sunday morning prayer, however, God is not spoken of negatively. Quite the contrary. Etty Hillesum rejects any hint that God has displayed a passive attitude by not interfering with the circumstances of the war. “Neither do I hold you responsible,” she writes. She goes on that there is not much that can be done about the circumstances since they are outside of God’s responsibility. Hillesum is clear that it is not God’s task to defend the house He calls his home; it is the task of mankind.

Here, Etty Hillesum has a different point of view from Elie Wiesel, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, who survived the Shoah and passed away in New York City in 2016. In 1979, Wiesel published a play in France, in which he poses in a disturbing manner, the question of God’s attitude in times of persecution. Titled *Le Procès de Shamgorod tel qu’il se déroula le 25 février 1649*.²³ It is said that Wiesel based the plot on his own experience in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the same extermination camp where Etty Hillesum died in the fall of 1943. Three Jews in the barrack took God to court, because He was oppressing the Jewish people instead of protecting them. The play, however, is set in the seventeenth century in the Ukraine, where Jews at the time faced severe persecutions.

In the play, Berish, the Jewish innkeeper, and his daughter who has been raped, are the sole survivors of a pogrom. Berish agrees, after some deliberation, to a proposal of three travelling actors to perform a Purim-play... on one condition: The theme of the Purim-play must be a process against God with Berish himself playing the role of the prosecutor. Berish proceeds to formulate his accusations against God:

I – Berish, a Jewish innkeeper at Shamgorod – accuse Him of hostility, cruelty and indifference. Either He dislikes his chosen people or He doesn’t care about them – period! But then, why has He chosen us – why not someone else, for a change? Either He knows what’s happening to us, or He doesn’t wish to know! In both cases he is ... he is ... guilty! Yes, guilty.

23 Original edition: Elie Wiesel, *Le Procès de Shamgorod tel qu’il se déroula le 25 février 1649: Pièce en trois actes* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1979). English translation: Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God (as it was held on February 25, 1649, in Shamgorod)*, translated by Marion Wiesel (New York, Random House, 1979).

In turn, the judges ask, “Is there no one who will make a case for the defence?” Finally, a stranger stands up. He defends God so skilfully that everyone present is full of admiration. They ask the stranger to beg God for mercy since the danger for the Jews is not yet over; they are facing a new pogrom. At the crucial moment, when the shouts of the enemies are starting to pierce through the walls, everyone in the room is invited to put on their Purim-masks. When God’s lawyer puts on his mask, he turns out to be Satan! He delivers the last lines of the play, “So, you took me for a saint, a Just? Me? How could you be that blind? How could you be that stupid? If you only knew, if you only knew...” Deafening shouts are heard, the door is kicked in, and the play ends.

Wiesel is trying to make clear that those who defend God when it comes to the catastrophes faced by the Jewish people – even if they speak words that comply with the Jewish tradition – are in fact none other than Satan. Any defence of the catastrophe, any explanation for the persecution is in fact, blasphemy!

Juxtaposing Hillesum’s Sunday-morning prayer to the play by Elie Wiesel is important in order to get at Hillesum’s views, which are, simply put: God is not responsible for the persecution of His people – mankind is responsible.

In another passage from Hillesum’s diary, she is even clearer about the order of things. Man has a responsibility towards God – and not the other way around. “And yet I don’t think life is meaningless. And God is not accountable to us for the senseless harm we cause one another. We are accountable to Him!”²⁴ Because life circumstances entail “the senseless harm we cause one another,” God is not in the centre of the discussion, nor can He be expected to change the circumstances that were created by human beings. In that sense, God bears no responsibility for humans and cannot help them. What goes on in the world, is the business of mankind, and it is their responsibility to address all issues.

The use of the verb “to help” leaves an opening to suggest its opposite – a helpless, powerless God. In my opinion, that is not what Etty Hillesum intended here. God is not responsible for the circumstances; war and persecution are the work of human beings. Thus, one should not passively wait for God’s help. We human beings must help ourselves and in so doing we will help the God who lives within us.

24 E.T., 456. *Het Werk*, 481; Monday morning, 29 June 1942, ten o’clock: En tòch vind ik het leven niet zinneloos God, ik kan er niets aan doen. En God is ons ook geen verantwoording schuldig voor de zinneloosheden, die wijzelf aanrichten, wij zijn verantwoording schuldig.

It is possible that the Dutch saying, “Help yourself, thus you help God” plays a part in her thinking here. In this phrasing, the subject and object switch places in the second part of the sentence. It does not say this is how God will help you. It says this is how you – a human being – helps God.

The notion of an impotent, powerless God also does not fit with other passages where Etty Hillesum proclaims her faith in her God. In fact, she believes He will guide her on the difficult road she had to take:

Last night, cycling through cold, dark Lairessestraat – if only I could repeat everything I babbled out then! Something like this: God, take me by Your hand, I shall follow You dutifully and not resist too much. I shall evade none of the tempests life has in store for me, I shall try to face it all as best I can. But now and then grant me a short respite. I shall never again assume, in my innocence, that any peace that comes my way will be eternal. I shall accept all the inevitable tumult and struggle. I delight in warmth and security, but I shall not rebel if I have to suffer cold, should You so decree. I shall follow wherever Your hand leads me and shall try not to be afraid.²⁵

This passage clearly does not evoke an unmighty God, “ohmächtig und heimatlos,” who will offer no salvation to mankind. Instead, Etty Hillesum has complete faith in the guidance of her God, even if the path she would like is not always the path she must take. This is strikingly evident from the last text she left us, the letter thrown out of the train destined for Auschwitz: “Christine, opening the Bible at random I find this: ‘The Lord is my high tower.’”²⁶

Beck, along with many others, is wrongly projecting Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s concept of the powerless God onto the Sunday-morning prayer of Etty Hillesum. She is actually trying to say that in circumstances of grave

25 E.T., 154. *Het Werk*, 161-162; Tuesday morning, 25 November 1941, half past nine: Gisterenavond op de fiets door de koude donkere Lairessestraat, ik wilde dat ik kon herhalen wat ik toen hardop zat te prevelen: God, neem me aan Uw hand, ik zal braaf meegaan, zonder veel verzet. Ik zal me aan niets onttrekken van alles wat in dit leven op me aanstormt, ik zal het naar beste krachten verwerken. Maar geef me af en toe een kort ogenblik van rust. Ik zal ook niet meer denken in m’n onnozelheid, dat die vrede, als die over me komt, eeuwig is, ik zal ook aanvaarden de onrust en de strijd die er dan weer komen. Ik ben graag in de warmte en in de veiligheid, maar zal ook niet opstandig worden als ik de kou inga, als het dan maar aan Uw hand is. Ik zal overal meegaan aan Uw hand en zal proberen niet bang te zijn.

26 E.T., 658. *Het Werk*, 702; Tuesday, 7 September 1943: – Christien, ik sla de Bijbel op op een willekeurige plaats en vind dit: – de Heere is mijn hoog vertrek.

difficulty people must help themselves, not wait for a *deus ex machina* to intervene.

Distinction of the Personal God in the New Age Movement

Beck is right, however, in pointing out the distinction between the personal God of Etty Hillesum and the notion of God in New Age circles today.²⁷ In the following passage, Beck addresses Hillesum in relation to this:

But here is something that you will not have thought possible, Etty. Your story of a God of your own has become utterly commonplace, banal and trivial. It has been devaluated by endless repetition. No distinction is made any longer between God and idols. We move in a world of multi-faith quotations whose source and meaning we do not know.²⁸

This idea of “quotations whose source and meaning we do not know” directly opposes the way Etty Hillesum herself was inspired by the writings of others. The fact is, as Beck correctly notes, that Hillesum’s approach is completely different from what is offered in the commercialized New-Age movement.²⁹ Of study and literature Hillesum writes:

And that is probably the only right way with literature, with study, with people, or with anything else: to let it all soak in, to let it mature slowly inside you until it has become a part of yourself. That, too, is a growing process. Everything is a growing process.³⁰

27 Vgl. hiervoor Lisette Thooft, “Etty Hillesum als voorloopster van de Nieuwe Spiritualiteit: ‘Beluisteren, wat er opstijgt uit je zelf’ [Etty Hillesum as Predecessor of the New Spirituality: ‘Listen, to what rises from within yourself’]”, in: Ria van den Brandt & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds), *Etty Hillesum in discours* [Etty Hillesum Studies, 3] (Ghent: Academia Press, 2011), 61-68.

28 Beck, *A God of One’s Own*, 13. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 27-28: “Doch was Sie nicht für möglich halten werden, Etty: Ihre Geschichte des eigenen Gottes ist alltäglich geworden, platt, trivial, auf den Hund gekommen in millionenfacher Wiederholung. Zwischen Gott und Götzen wird nicht mehr unterschieden. Man bewegt sich in einer Welt der multireligiösen Zitate, deren Herkunft und Sinn man nicht kennt.”

29 Beck, *A God of One’s Own*, 13. Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 28.

30 E.T., 315. *Het Werk*, 328; Wednesday, 1 April 1942: En dit is misschien de enige goede manier om je met literatuur, studie, mensen of wat ook bezig te houden: je vol te zuigen, heel langzaam dat onderin je te laten groeien, tot het ergens een stuk van jezelf wordt. Ook dat een groeiproces. Alles een groeiproces.

Growing Process

After this positive note on Beck's analysis, let us turn to another point of criticism. Maria Gabriella Nocita rightly points out that Beck does not consider Ety Hillesum's development, her "growing process," as Nocita calls it. She poses that Hillesum's relation with God matured throughout the two-and-a-half years in which she wrote the diaries and letters. Beck, however, chooses to ignore the growth of Hillesum's spirituality. According to Nocita, this explains his lack of clarity when it comes to understanding how Ety Hillesum experienced God:

This doubt is seen in many Hillesum readers, who do not seek the right approach for a genre as specific as a diary. Her relationship with God *matures* during the entire period of two-and-a-half years in which she writes her diaries and letters. This is the reason why the analysis – as opposed to what Beck is doing – should be based on a chronological study, to prevent that the already risky attempt of extrapolating sensitive elements, is weakened even further.³¹

In my own research on the image of God in the diaries and letters of Ety Hillesum, I looked at her writings to find a chronology for the development of the notion of God. The development³² was easy enough to identify, but a chronology of consecutive phases could not be established. It became clear that a new phase of development did not neatly replace the preceding one. On the contrary, the separate images of God, each different in nature, co-exist alongside each other in her writings. It is remarkable that even the atheist world-view never entirely disappeared for Ety Hillesum:

31 Nocita, "Ety Hillesum: quale Dio?", 78: "Questo dubbio permane in molti lettori di Ety Hillesum che non cercano il giusto modo per approcciare una trattazione così particolare come quella diaristica. Il suo rapporto con Dio *matura* lungo tutto l'arco dei due anni e mezzo in cui compone il Diario e le Lettere, per cui, contrariamente a quello che fa Beck, l'analisi andrebbe impostata partendo da uno studio cronologico, per non inficiare il già azzardoso tentativo di estrapolare elementi tanto delicati."

32 In short: starting with the use of God as a literary figure, via a stage in which she believes in an immanent God staying within a human being, Hillesum's development continues to the experience of a transcendent God according to the Biblical model.

Kneeling doesn't really come easily to me, I feel a sort of embarrassment. Why? Probably because of the critical, rational, atheistic bit that is part of me as well.³³

To pick one phase and present it as Hillesum's ultimate notion of God, like Beck does, is indeed wrong, but a real chronology, like the one Nocita refers to, cannot be established either. The matter at hand is a comprehensive process of growth, in which the interdependently opposing visions exist alongside each other without replacing one another. The statements about God in the diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum are therefore comparable to the layers of an onion: one idea is enfolded in another, and the notion of the transcendent God functions as the inner core. Despite this stratification, there is a unity in Hillesum's vision of God, and she did not feel the need to create a grading system for her vision.

When we look at the diversity in Hillesum's image of God, Beck's way of dealing with the concept "God" in the diaries of Hillesum is minimal. He disregards a great deal, the same way as he pays no attention to the influences of Henny Tideman and Julius Spier on the development of Hillesum's faith.³⁴ He exclusively cites passages that fit within the religious-sociological concept of a God of one's own, the topic of his book, and skips the passages in which Etty Hillesum describes God as the Other, the transcendent God. Beck writes,

She discovers solace and dignity (not safety!) in the intimacy of her relationship with her own helpless God in which God Himself becomes the questioner who has no answers.³⁵

I would like to oppose this with the following passage, in which Etty Hillesum brings forth an entirely different image of God. Hers is not a questioning God who does not know what to do, but a providential God who has a clear plan for her.

[...] it is sheer arrogance to think oneself too good to share the fate of the masses. And if God Himself should feel that I still have a great deal to

33 E.T., 103. *Het Werk*, 109; Wednesday, 24 September 1941: Ik kan helemaal niet goed knielen, er is een soort gêne in me. Waarvoor? Waarschijnlijk voor het critische, rationele, atheïstische stuk, dat er ook in me zit.

34 See Nocita, "Etty Hillesum: quale Dio?", 84-85.

35 Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 9. Cf. Beck, *Der eigene Gott*, 23: "Sie findet Trost und Würde (nicht Sicherheit!) in der Intimität des eigenen, hilflosen Gottes, in der Gott selbst zum Fragenden wird, der keine Antwort weiß."

do, well then, I shall do it after I have suffered what all the others have to suffer.³⁶

Conclusion

On the one hand, we can conclude that Beck has a good eye for the importance of Etty Hillesum for the people today who are looking for a god of their own either because they are dissatisfied with their religious background, or because they are looking for a genuine way to shape their faith. He clearly distinguishes between Hillesum's vision of God, based on a profound relation with high-level texts, and the bite-sized *reli-shopping* of the contemporary world. On the other hand, we must conclude that he has taken the easy way out³⁷ ignoring important aspects of Hillesum's notion of God. Unfortunately like too many authors who have written about Etty Hillesum, Beck would rather quote her diaries than carefully analyze her texts.

About the author

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36 E.T., 487. *Het Werk*, 515; Saturday morning, 1 July 1942, eleven o'clock: En het is een zeldzame zelfoverschatting, om zichzelf te waardevol te vinden, om een "Massenschicksal" samen mee te ondergaan. En als God vindt, dat ik nog veel te doen zal hebben, welnu, dan zal ik dat ook wel doen, na alles doorgemaakt te hebben, wat anderen ook door kunnen maken.

37 He states and emphasizes that he will not and cannot write a theology of the God of one's own. Cf. Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 10 / *Der eigene Gott*, 23.



24 Loving-Kindness, Hatred, and Moral Indignation

Etty Hillesum and Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ordo amoris*

Ronald Commers

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Abstract

In this essay, the author elucidates Vladimir Jankélévitch's ideas on forgiveness and the inexcusable, and investigates their reflection in the moral stance taken against Nazism by Etty Hillesum. Jankélévitch argued that the "suspension of pardon" was crucial for reasons of morality itself. The author asks, was this not in contradiction to the opinions Etty Hillesum developed in those outrageous times? He point out that Etty Hillesum also esteemed "morality itself," placing loving-kindness and the absence of hatred at its core. What may initially seem to be a moral quandary on Hillesum's part, given the Nazi destruction of the Jews, is – on closer inspection of the writings of Jankélévitch and Etty Hillesum – not as contradictory as it appears.

Keywords: Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ordo amoris*, morality, forgiveness, evil, love, Etty Hillesum

"After this war, two torrents will be unleashed on the world: a torrent of loving-kindness and a torrent of hatred." And then I knew: I should take the field against hatred.¹

¹ E.T., 526. *Het Werk*, 556-557; Sunday evening, 20 September 1942: 'Na deze oorlog zal er, behalve een stroom van humanisme, ook een stroom van haat over de wereld gaan.' En toen wist ik het weer: ik zal te velde trekken tegen die haat.

Etty Hillesum refers to the words of Julius Spier. On 23 September 1942, she writes: “Klaas, all I really wanted to say is this: we have so much work to do on ourselves that we shouldn’t even be thinking of hating our so-called enemies. We are hurtful enough to one another as it is.”²

In the opinion of the French moral philosopher, Vladimir Jankélévitch, who during the Second World War was member of the Resistance against the Germans and who after the war was an unbending advocate of the “imprescriptibility” of the crimes of the Nazi’s and their collaborators, forgiveness wasn’t at stake in our judgement of the deportations and the killings of Jews. The “suspension of pardon,” as I may call it, was essential to Jankélévitch for reasons of morality itself.

Morality itself? Is this what Etty Hillesum is referring to when she writes in her long letter on 18 December 1942: “And the absence of hatred in no way implies the absence of moral indignation.”³

Would it be possible to have both? At one side: loving-kindness and the absence of hatred, and at the other: moral indignation? Such is the everlasting question with which I am confronted as a moral philosopher across the testimony of Etty Hillesum’s life *and* work. More than only an example in moral behaviour, Hillesum’s unique testimony in the darkest of dark times is a challenge and a call not to ignore, on the contrary to respond to. Reading Etty Hillesum’s diaries and letters means: to oblige oneself to our own inescapable moral responsibility.

1 The Commanding Significance of Jankélévitch’s Moral Philosophical Examination of Pardon

The French moral philosopher, Vladimir Jankélévitch, who was a member of the French Resistance during the Second World War, wrote extensively on the possibility of giving pardon to people who were collaborating with the Nazi regime. He started reflecting on the problems of forgiveness long before this war started. But, obviously, after the war, he couldn’t escape to reconsider his writing on the subject. As a consequence, the author challenged his book, *Le Pardon*, a real highlight in moral philosophy. The

2 E.T., 529. *Het Werk*, 560; Wednesday, 23 September 1942: Klaas, ik wilde je eigenlijk alleen dit zeggen: we hebben nog zoveel met ons zelf te doen, dat we aan haat tegenover onze zogenaamde vijanden nog niet eens toe zouden moeten komen. We zijn elkaar onderling nog vijand genoeg.

3 E.T., 590. *Het Werk*, 629; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: En afwezigheid van haat betekent nog niet afwezigheid van elementair-zedelijke verontwaardiging.

outcome of it was his book, *L'imprescriptible*. In this small essay, he advocated the opinion: there are crimes one cannot forgive on any condition whatsoever. Even when the people who committed those crimes honestly apologize for what they had done, what has been done lies forever beyond forgiving.

Though without this reversal in his argumentation, in reading *Le pardon*, I was puzzled by the sinuousness of Jankélévitch's examination of forgiving in his remarkable book. I asked myself whether it was a consequence of the vacillations of the moral philosopher or provoked – a more understandable reason – by the ambiguousness of the process of forgiving. But perhaps, both are equally plausible. For the ambiguousness – which Jankélévitch highly valued throughout his philosophy – of the process leads a concerned philosopher to conflicting statements.

In my reading, I was convinced that his own legendary moral austerity perplexed Jankélévitch. Moral austerity led him to an unavoidable incoherence. A kind of well-conceived indecision he couldn't circumvent. Any reader would be perplexed by the reversals in his treatment of what forgiving can provoke in human relationships.

Jankélévitch's post-war *volte-face* has a definite dichotomist characteristic. Yes, there are abysses of malice and malevolence and man cannot avoid the unthinkable as such. Yet yes, understanding can lead men to forgiveness. Are the two statements equally genuine? Or are they in contradiction with one another? Do they oblige us to find our way out in comprehending, explaining and curing the evil acts of men, in times of war, depression, poverty, and exploitation? What would be the view about our human race, were it correct that *Homo Sapiens* was the very reason for the extinction of his nephew, *Homo Neanderthalensis*? What if the latter was Abel and the former Cain? How this may be, the terrors of men and the disasters of mankind only a short time after the enigmatic disappearance of a related human species weren't even less dreadful. Millions have died, without explanation, without admission, hardly leaving a few traces of what has been.

When Jankélévitch considers what might contribute to pardoning, he has significant arguments to convince men of the role of forgiveness in the appeasement and in conciliation. I prefer the latter word to "reconciliation," for it captures the genuine innovative, birth-giving character of the future pacifying union among men who before were but enemies to each other.

Yes, understanding enables the offended to pardon, as it equally leads the offender to apology and to the private or public admission of the evils done. Let's focus on this side of Jankélévitch's *volte-face*.

Five reasons can be given in favour of the nexus “understanding-pardon.” Understanding of the evils done establishes an abstract brotherhood among men. It has an edifying character, we shouldn’t ignore.

In understanding, man recognizes and respects a comparative truth in the divergent claim of the other, making this claim answerable.

Forgiveness induced by understanding, lacks the second person for it is related to the anonym universality of the “third.” The understanding addresses *Vous* (in French, *sie* in German, *U* in Dutch, *Ön* in Hungarian) instead of *Tu* (*Du, Jij, Te*). In *You as Sie*, the general others: *They, Ils, sie, Zij, Ök*, are included as well.

Forgiveness from understanding, though remaining a kind of *simili-pardon*, might bring forward a genuine communication between the offended and the offender, as they reciprocally abandon their *philauthie*, their peculiar self-centredness, to pave the way to some intellectual generosity. On a personal level, in forgiving through understanding, I welcome the other – *l'autre* – with his spoken words, transgressing my pitiful monologue of rancor and hate, abandoning the soliloquy of resentment. In the intelligible dialogue of remembering, of admission, and of explanation, I oblige myself to welcome the sincere spoken word of the other in its most favorable meaning (Gusdorf, *La parole*, 1961).

Finally, forgiveness through understanding, gives the human person his dignity. In this “dignification,” the other does not figure exclusively as this specific other – *l'autre* – given my full personal relationship with her. The other figures as the Other – *Autruï* – representing all the others, infinitely multiplied in the “humanness” (*hominité*) of humankind. *Autruï* is the “I” in plural, the “I” of *sobornost*, or the spontaneous “conciliarity” among men, beyond whatever social attachment, institution, and organization. *Sobornost* is an expression, Jankélévitch uses frequently in his moral philosophy. He borrowed the word from Russian thinkers, philosophers as well as novelists.⁴ This “I” is always far away and nearby. As such, it is – in the view of Jankélévitch – the paradox of paradoxes. In “its inescapable invitation to us,” it urges us to diminish the swelling of our *philauthie*, which is another word for our – equally inescapable – self-love.

4 In the light of Etty Hillesum’s study of Russian literature, this is an intriguing fact. Were both authors, Jankélévitch and Hillesum, not deeply influenced by the Christological humanistic spirituality of Russian authors? I am inclined to answer the question in the affirmative. It indicates a track for additional scholarly investigation. Though I cannot go into this further, in what follows I couldn’t avoid some interesting references to Russian literature. See also: Aleksei Khomiakov & Ivan Kireevsky, *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, eds Boris Jakim & Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998).

But still, we should remember that abysses of malice and malevolence block all understanding and comprehensive excuse. No, it isn't true that "intellection," as Jankélévitch calls it, will lead deductively, to forgiving. "Intellection" will lead merely to understanding the *circonstances atténuantes*, the extenuating circumstances. A gulf remains between "intellection" and pardon, which only can be bridged by an irrational jump in the personal sphere of "I and Thou," *Ich und Du*.⁵ Understanding the offence (or injury), ultimately means that the offended accepts that she wasn't offended at all, and that malice merely was an explicable accident. Deceitfully, "intellection" anaesthetizes the offence, the crime, the malevolence, and the inhumanness. Even time – this other anaesthetizing operator – cannot annihilate the crime. Once again, only real pardon – *le vrai pardon* – in its irrational and pathetic character might cure, yet without provoking the disappearance of misdeed and inhumanity.

Jankélévitch's legendary austerity even leads him further. "Imprescriptibility" is the mark of those crimes that are forever beyond all "intellection," whatever the understanding and comprehension of them may offer as a proper explanation. The millions of people exterminated do need our rigour,

[...] our rigour would only express that there doesn't exist a relationship whatsoever between their crimes and time, not even a relationship of rancour.⁶

In the midst of his examination of the dimensions of forgiveness and of its different appearances, Jankélévitch hits on the subject of the expiration of crimes against the humanness of humanity. Nazi crimes are unforgettable and unforgivable. They are outside historical times and beyond intellection. The "quiddity" dissolves in the "quoddity" of the misdeeds. Understanding the "what" and the "how" of the misdeeds, remains forever unrelated to the "that" they were committed.

In this, we might easily agree with Jankélévitch, were it not that in yet another *volte-face* of his examination, he transposes the unbridgeable gulf between "quiddity" and "quoddity" to the domain of those crimes that

5 The influence of the work of Martin Buber is obvious.

6 My translation of: "Les millions d'exterminés, eux, ont besoin de notre rigueur [...] notre "rigueur" voudrait simplement exprimer qu'il n'y a *aucun rapport* entre leurs crimes et le temps, pas même un rapport de rancune [...]" Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le pardon*, in: *idem, Philosophie morale*, edited by F. Schwab (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 1042-1043. Some years ago, my colleague Andrew Kelley has published a very fine English translation of *Le Pardon*, under the title *Forgiveness* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2005).

– properly speaking – aren't crimes against the humanness of humankind. In fact, in considering chronology in relationship with axiology, the author comes across the same abyss. This abyss cannot be bridged.

Were it the effect of time or "intellection" only to improve the offender, spontaneous personal conversion would be useless and sincere repentance and moral crisis would lose their substance. The same can be said about forgiving and reconciling. Time and understanding – so it is stated in the reverse of Jankélévitch's argument – do not have weight in the morals of crime and pardon.

But, paradoxically, only within time, an individual human being might be able to fulfill personally his vocation as a moral being. *A l'instant même*, instantly, *hic et nunc*, *in einem Augenblick* – *ogenblikkelijk*, as it satisfactorily may be said in German and Dutch, that is: "at a glance." As moral beings, men of "doing what must be done," of "that it must be done," of "quoddity," of 'séance tenante' (words and expressions Jankélévitch frequently used), fulfill their personal vocation. They are called for and they don't walk away from it for they decide to carry out what is required. Moral life isn't a process for it is a drama. It is the drama of *das Augenblick*, *kairos*, the moment not to be missed.

However, with a new paradoxical reversal, Jankélévitch states that moral life – and consequently, "being moral" – is supposed to be the salary of men's volitional effort not to miss the instant, not to be afraid of what comes up to and what cannot be avoided. Only ignorance, unawareness, anxiety, *tartufferie*, unties us from this dramatic destiny, in which our humanness is validated and our dignity announced. But obviously, all this happens within historical times, and within historical times, within the inner circle of our personal history. How one may put it, men's personal history turns out to be the very process of their self-conquered sincerity, of their overcoming the *Angst* in confronting the ambiguousness of their existence.⁷

The philosopher is well aware of this "fact" of human life. Repentance means sincerity of regret. It stands for the intensive dedication to be resolute. And only on this condition, regret and admission may have a redemptory character. Not only for me but also for the other in front of me, and for the "General Other" who was and is and will be. Genuine pardon is possible only between man and man, on a personal level. *A l'instant même*, free of charge: leaving the other to decide whether the apologies given are to be accepted or not. It restores men – generally speaking – in their quality as real human beings, opposed to their quality as nature's creatures. Once

7 On the philosophical meaning of *Angst*, Kierkegaard wrote a beautiful essay. Kierkegaard, undoubtedly, influenced the thought of Jankélévitch in an earlier stage of his career.

again, we meet an austerity that Jankélévitch decided not to circumvent. It wasn't his purpose to formulate once and for all an ethic of forgiveness. Such an ethic, over again, will turn out to be a miserable pretext for the crimes and the offenses that cannot be undone. In his own words:

The way from less to more, crossing all comparative degree, should not replace this radical change, this conversion of one contradiction into another, what pardon is supposed to be [...].⁸

And again, at this point of his argument, Jankélévitch invites us to accept that even when oblivion, wearing off, or integration (through justification and explanation), succeed in dissolving crime and rancour to the infinitesimal minimum of minima, it will not pave the way to a new life, a new order, a truthful conciliation, capable to create dignity and self-esteem for all.

Only love, loving-kindness, will succeed in this radical conversion, in this radical birth of human humanity amidst unresponsive and even inhumane men. Nonetheless, at the end, still men are obliged to tackle the unforgivable, which lies beyond – outside and further than – all comprehension, and loving-kindness. Therefore, it has to be remembered time and again.

Let me try to explain this using a famous example from world literature. In Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Katyusha Maslova finally accepts the benevolent "acting behaviour" of Prince Dmitri Ivanovich Nekhlyudov while he himself tries to undo what he provoked, without being able to undo what he has done. All of this is utterly unrelated to time. Her acceptance of Nekhlyudov's benevolence leads her to neither forgiving, nor to understanding. Nevertheless, it brings her peace of the mind and serenity of spirit. The acceptance of the nobleman's benevolence definitely belongs to another realm. It is part of the kingdom of ends, the dominion of resurrection and transfiguration, where past and present are unknotted, opening all at the sudden a two-sided future for both individuals personally.

One knows the significance of Russian literature both for the work of Jankélévitch and Lévinas. Jankélévitch once wrote:

Earlier we have dwelled upon the secure and viable workings of the aesthetic – ethic, I would add – imagination, and with the dead born volatile

8 My translation of: "Le passage du plus ou moins, traversant tous les degrés du comparatif, ne saurait remplacer ce changement du tout au tout, cette conversion de contradictoire à contradictoire que le pardon suppose [...]." Jankélévitch, *Le pardon*, in: *idem, Philosophie morale*, edited by F. Schwab (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 1015.

inconsistent realizations of charity. The first survive their creation in a permanent manner. The second are alike disappearing appearances.

[...]

In moral acting, doing doesn't result in what has been done for all times. It urges us to do again and again, without interruption, what has been done. Can one understand that what is empty of whatever content, likewise being full of love, must be done unconditionally?

[...]

Stated otherwise: the imperative of love doesn't depend on specific circumstances, independent of any casuistry whatsoever, free from all conditionality. The imperative to love is the only unconditional imperative, without limits and without *quatenus* (= in so far as).⁹

When she was sixteen years old, Katyusha Maslova met Dmitri Ivanovich Nekhlyudov, at the time he visited the estate of his wealthy aunt. She experienced love for the adult prince. He fell for the grace, the charming kindness, and the young beautiful body of the maid of his aunt. He made her pregnant. Soon afterwards, he left the estate, only to return to the untouched existence of wealthy noble people. She bore a boy who died in misery. She was chased from the estate because being pregnant as a young unmarried girl she was considered to be an evil woman. She went into prostitution and got mixed up in the killing of a client – a misdeed for which she was not responsible at any means. She was condemned to hard labour and transportation to a Siberian penal establishment.

By chance, the rich prince was a member of the jury which, in the course of her trial, had to decide about her conviction. He recognized his former charming young mistress and regret crept into his mind, disconcerting his undisturbed existence. How could he have driven such an innocent and beautiful young girl into this state of wretchedness? How could he repair, how could he relieve that what cannot be undone?

From that time onwards, Nekhlyudov devotes his life and fate to the restitution of Katyusha's dignity and humanness. Neither time, nor money, not even his freewheeling style of life, will be spared to bring back what cannot be restored. For what has been, isn't anymore. And what is, hasn't been before. Dmitri follows his ex-girlfriend, who on her miserable journey to the Siberian penalty camp continues to refuse his favours and time and again ignores his passionate demands to forgive him. At last, he arrives in

⁹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le sérieux de l'intention* (Vol. 1 of *Traité des vertus*; Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 243 [my own translation].

the region of the penalty camps and endeavours to share the torments and despair of the prisoners.

At the end of his own journey and after that he proposed to marry her, she seems to accept his efforts to clean her reputation and to obtain an appeal for mercy for her. Ultimately, the judicial mistake is recognized and she goes free. In this final moment, she says that he, whom she still loves secretly, has to fulfil his own life, to marry a woman of his rank and raise children with her. She has decided to follow a political prisoner, who imagines himself as her lover.

At last, both Katyusha and Nekhlyudov are redeemed. Not so because the past has been restored, and not because together they will enter a new life as husband and wife. Their future is the future of hope and love of humankind.

Tolstoy depicts this ultimate *à l'instant meme*, this *Augenblick*, as a liberating delight in his novel *Resurrection*:

It was as if abruptly he had found, after a long period of torment and distress, tranquility and freedom of the soul [...].

It is a radical opening in time, a new beginning, a redeemed existence, in which the past hasn't been undone – for the past cannot be undone – and a radical gulf is kept between the past and the future.

I would like to refer to another famous example drawn from Russian literature. Vasily Grossman, in his beautiful novel *Forever Flowing*, has portrayed the same opening of time *in time*. Repeatedly, the principal character of the novel, Ivan Grigoryevich, confronted with the malice and malevolence of his relatives and friends under Stalinist terror, says to himself (and to the reader): let us not judge hastily, let us think it all over, let us consider circumstances and particular cases.

Grossman, sarcastically, confronts the reader with the problem of guilt and responsibility of all those who collaborated with the secret agencies of state terror. They accepted passively or actively to collaborate in the purges and the trials of innocent men and women. Those were people who denounced others to keep themselves free of examination and trial. Grossman, in his short novel, mentions four Judas figures: persons who escaped from 30 years of imprisonment and hard labour in the Stalinist camps, and who aren't forgiven, nor understood, by Ivan Grigorjevitch after his return from prison camp. What has been done – the crimes committed, the denunciations and the vicious revenges – cannot be undone.

At the end of the novel, Ivan Grigoryevich refuses to search for repair or admission. He decides to return to the house of his father and mother, only

to experience that it doesn't exist anymore. There, in the small town at the seaside, nothing is left what reminds him of his youth and of the cheerful summer days he spent there with his family. Nearby the beach, he stands with his head bowed to the earth. Still, he is the same, unchanged, a person who keeps – historical – time at a distance. He is a man who seems beyond existential condition and who is exempted from human worries. In this peculiar quality, Ivan *is* the principle of morals that never dies and which remains unchanged in what forever is flowing.¹⁰

Neither forgiving, nor understanding: only the radical opening in time. A new beginning, which marks the end of the novel, leaving the reader discomforted and in distress, were it not that the writer has portrayed the redemptive love of Ivan for a woman who herself was personally responsible for the crimes of betrayal and denunciation of her fellow men.

In obeying the imperative of love – without compensation, without reward, beyond calculation, outside circumstantial computation, and therefore free from whatever conditionality – Ivan consents to a future that remains empty of the perspective of return. In this, he resembles Dmitri Ivanovich Nekhlyudov and Katyusha Maslova. Put into the words of Jankélévitch:

The imperative to love is the only unconditional imperative, without limits and without *quatenus* [= in so far as].¹¹

2 Does the “Paradox of Morals” Evict an Ethic of Conciliation?

Let me try to return to the paradox of forgiving such as Jankélévitch has pictured it, but not without indecisiveness.

Genuine pardon is only possible between man and man. It happens at a personal level, *à l'instant meme*, free of charge, leaving the other free to decide whether the given apology is to be accepted or not.

This is the austerity that cannot be avoided. For, as I wrote earlier, the moral philosopher Jankélévitch doesn't take it as *his* purpose to formulate

10 See for his theme of the 'flow of presence', Meins G.S. Coetsier, *Etty Hillesum and the Flow of Presence: A Voegelinian Analysis* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

11 My translation. One can find this proposition on many places in Jankélévitch's works. See for example, *Les vertus et l'amour*, second volume of his *Traité des vertus* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), 235.

once and for all an ethic of forgiveness. Such an ethic, in his opinion, would turn into to be a miserable pretext for the crimes and the offenses that cannot be undone.

The way from less to more, crossing all comparative degree, should not replace this radical change, this conversion of one contradiction into another, what pardon is supposed to be [...].¹²

Those who question ethics with an outspoken ideological content – such as I do – to be practiced in politics or in judicial rhetoric, will easily be willing to share this opinion. Nevertheless, they still might ask themselves whether this uncompromising conviction expel the possibility of a search for an ethic of conciliation in times of crimes against humanity and human rights violation. It is a persisting, intriguing and unavoidable problem.

Isn't it obvious that the categories of "crimes against humanity" and "human rights violation" do belong to an ideologically based normative discourse in "global ethics"? But, on the contrary, is not the moral status of this "global ethics" itself a moral quandary? Aren't its concepts and argumentations, in times of globalization, the domain of churchmen, politicians, NGO administrators, corporate managers and all these other late-modern moralists, who don't stop worrying about "codes of conduct" and the guidelines of "social responsibility"? Is it possible, or even conceivable, that codes and guidelines are exempt from "comparative degrees," with which practicing moralists try to manage the personal and the obligatory conversion of apologizing and forgiving? But still there is doubt about this. They introduce the perspective of human dignity, without much refinement so it seems, in their discourses on the subject of "recognition" and "empowerment." One might reproach them that in their moralistic dissertations, they dignify only those who following the presuppositions deserve it. One is inclined to conclude with Jankélévitch that from a genuine moral point of view, they merely are begging the question and that they fail to value the "paradox of morals."

Though I personally agree with Jankélévitch's critique on this kind of ideological moralism, being aware of the dangers of *les entreprises réductionnistes*, nonetheless I believe that a thoughtful normative outlook on the meaning of these forms of "simili-pardon" (to use Jankélévitch's word) might contribute to the conciliation among men. Isn't it for the sake of the "humanness of humanity," which Jankélévitch put at the bottom of all

¹² Cf. note 5.

genuine recognition and sincere establishment of a realm of values that I feel this demanding force?

Jankélévitch has been categorical in his view on morals, emphasizing the core of morality as that what must be done: now, by me, without postponement, evicting calculation and proper understanding.¹³ When it is imperative, he once said, to do instead of to talk about, the important thing is not to be eloquently brilliant and spiritual, but to act on behalf of what is good. Acting – considered from this angle – is undividable and one. Acting – from this point of view – is to do unconditionally in a world of events. It cannot be captured in whatever ideological language, which is the language of calculated time and place, of deliberation and reflection.

Again, in this categorical view, Jankélévitch imagined theoretical ethics as some kind of dogmatic substantialism, in which first “the good” is “theoretized,” to be said afterwards that it is good by all means, so that *post factum* it can be applied according the theoretically conceived model. The French moral philosopher, not without some contempt, turned his back to this dogmatism. The good is not that which shows similarity with an archetype. What is good, relies on the free creation of our *démiurgie éthique*, which can be translated as: our moral creativity on the spot, without delay and without delegation.

Jankélévitch’s emphasis on “the doing” and “acting” dimensions of the good seems convincing. Nonetheless, it will be difficult not to take in consideration the relationship between: (a) reflection, understanding, and comprehension; (b) the practice of acting in particular circumstances which overwhelm us in the events of life.

Considering cases of conciliation, after human dramas have taken place, in times of war, in situations of civil uproar, religious and geopolitical conflict, we need the time to reflect and to delay our judgment. In the words of Vasili Grossman – though they were meant to be ironic and deconstructing – : let us be patient to think things over and let us not judge too hastily. Let us ask ourselves: what is really happening all the time? What went wrong and why people behave as they did?

Indeed, one might agree with Jankélévitch that the delay needed for reflection and for understanding remains a matter of a third or an outside position. But it is my opinion that in our globalizing “worldscape,” we cannot easily break away from these insistent situations which oblige us to take an external viewpoint. Human rights violations, regretfully, are the salt of the earth. Crimes against humanity haven’t diminished after the two world wars.

13 For this, see the final chapter of the first volume of the *Traité des vertus, Le sérieux de l'intention*, and *Le paradoxe de la morale*.

There is a remarkable passage in the first volume of Jankélévitch's *Traité des vertus* which can be used to diminish a bit the austerity of his rightly stated "paradox of morals":

Doing starts by you. The imperative to do is absolute and initial. To say it otherwise: you are obliged to do because you are obliged. The value that has content – if she it is which we must fulfill – cannot be valuable otherwise than by higher reason. But this higher reason, on its turn, depends on other reasons to do and this to the very limit of what is categorical out of itself, justifying itself. The normative sciences tell us what we should do, on condition that we were obliged to do so. They do not tell us that we should do. They rather assume the 'that,' while already they tacitly are moral [...].¹⁴

This remarkable statement concerning the "normative sciences" – and I suppose that here is meant "ethics," both theoretical and practical, in more conventional way – admits that some implicit or tacit moral purpose already is at work. Moreover, Jankélévitch must have been convinced that these "normative sciences" are both possible and conceivable. One can say even more: he admitted that what men are studying and examining in the "normative sciences" has weight for men's judgement. In fact, he agreed that the "normative sciences" allow men to decide upon what should be done, even agreeing that the "what should be done" is dependent on conditions of the "that" something ought to be done. There will always be an ultimate – final moment – *ein Augenblick*, the time left for a glance – in which all knowledge breaks down, and in which we are definitely left alone, further than cognition, far beyond "intellection." Yet, until this final ultimate moment, perhaps we are left with some time to reflect, to think things and circumstances over, to consider, to examine, to wonder, to wonder the way Ivan Grigorjevich did it after his return from Stalinist prison camps in Siberia.

Has not Jankélévitch agreed with this? Hasn't he said in his wonderful *Le paradoxe de la morale* – the final statement of his moral philosophy in 1982 – what follows?

[...] thinking is anterior to moral valuation, but the reverse is also true, the moral valuation is anterior to thinking [...]

14 My translation of a characteristic argument, which we can find back in the ultimate chapter of his *Le paradoxe de la morale*.

The French moral philosopher has never ignored how reasonable understanding is dedicated to moral valuation. Understanding and comprehension are the consequence of moral valuation itself.¹⁵ “Thinking” is a moral act. It is a doing and as a doing it springs from a sudden insight that something ought to be done: the consideration and examination of human misery, of the violations of human dignity, time and again.

An ethic of conciliation and human dignity isn’t without engagement, nor commitment. An ethic, if it were the result of a sincere human effort to examine and to understand with the aim to suggest a curing course of action, is itself the result of a moral act. An ethic of conciliation, if it were sincere, is already morally preoccupied. The ‘normative sciences’, occasionally at the basis of an ethic of conciliation, do not start from the academic question “Why should I be moral?” (Kai Nielsen), but from the engagement “that something must be done, more precisely, that without delay something should be examined.” If we are committed – by free choice and without delay – to the fate of human rights and the humanness of humanity in times of war crime, then we oblige ourselves to the examination of defensible norms and values. Defensible, for they will be norms and values that can be justified on reasonable grounds. Only later, we will have the opportunity to convince ourselves that a normative community is within reach. It will be a community in which men would have conquered for the time being the opportunity to face each other as moral beings, the same way Nekhlyudov and Maslova faced each other at the end of their voyage through life. Nothing will be definite, for the morality of our normativity will never reach beyond the paradox, namely: that I must do it. With the words of the young Jankélévitch, taken from his doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling:

We create our roles ourselves and while we are playing our roles, we collaborate with an invisible creator who discloses himself bit by bit in the course of what becomes [...].¹⁶

Previously, I wrote that the moral meaning of apology – and, consequently, of forgiveness, in as far as it leans upon uttered feelings of remorse and

¹⁵ “Valuation” is the concept that was used by John Dewey in his *Theory of Valuation*, in: Otto Neurath (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1939), Vol. II, No. 4.

¹⁶ See: Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L’Odyssée de la conscience dans la dernière philosophie de Schelling* (Paris: L’Harmattan, [1933] 2004), 7 [my translation].

the affirmation of guilt – is itself a moral quandary. The moral meaning of apologizing is itself a paradox of morals. The *Catch-22*, to some extent, is evidenced in most of the failing endeavours to organize global society along the lines of transitional justice procedures.

Though the ever unsettled combination of pardon, apology, culpability admission and guilt makes it evident that in global ethical thinking we are – and will be until the end of times – in a state of discourse instability. Yet, this makes our investigation of pardon and apology the more eminently an ethical one.

Apology – and *a fortiori* “simili-forgiveness” – “validates” the beliefs in good and bad, both of the offended and of the “third” party. It enhances the institution of social bonds, personal interrelationships, and it consolidates the sharing of values and norms. The inauguration of the dignity of the offended person being an important outcome, the future of all parties is secured while expectations and hope are instigated. If sincerity and truthfulness are at stake, the offended, the offender, and the “third” together will find a way to build an imminent normative community for which they equally engage themselves and to which they mutually feel committed. With this normative community, hope is installed that on a personal level, the one and the other will make “as much love as is possible in as less being as possible,”

[...] to act so as to keep so much love as is possible, in so few being as is possible [...]

This love that loves the humanity of man – and that doesn't love love for reason's sake – (this love) that loves the humankind as if it is someone, and loves in an incomprehensible way the general person, the humankind incarnated in an individual being, the generalized person on the level of humanity, this love is evidently paradoxical.¹⁷

The love in which man loves the humanness of man, unassumingly loving humanity for its own sake, paradoxically transfigures love. In this love, man loves humanity as if it were a concrete person, a *Thou* personally. It is a supra-natural – and outer-, and otherworldly – love, but nonetheless

¹⁷ My translation of: “[...] faire tenir le plus possible d'amour dans le moins possible d'être [...] Cet amour qui aime l'humanité de l'homme – et l'aime d'amour, non par raison –, qui aime le genre humain comme on aime quelqu'un, qui aime incompréhensiblement la personne-en-général, qui aime le genre humain incarné dans la personne et la personne élargie aux dimension de l'humanité, cet amour est évidemment paradoxal.” Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le paradoxe de la morale* (s.l.: Ed. Le Seuil, 1981), 88.

it is a genuine – deeply worldly – love, and as such a paradox. We should remember that for Jankélévitch “paradoxical” does mean: against nature, against the process of “facts, facts, facts,” so superbly ridiculed by Charles Dickens in his *Hard Times*. It also means: against the current, *contre courant*.

Being and love: they suppose each other; but they equally contradict each other. Paul Ricoeur once said,

The human being is obliged to something through the fact that it is human [...] a demand older than whatever philosophical verbalizing there has been [...].¹⁸

A demand of all times, until the end of times, recognized by all human beings wherever they live, unfulfilled until the end of times.

3 Etty Hillesum’s Redemptory Action as an Ultimate Resistance to Evil

Exactly at this point of reflection, the testimony of Etty Hillesum’s life *and* work comes to mind. Not merely because of the extraordinary personality of this bright young freedom-loving woman and not even because of her scholarly and poetical power. These are beyond doubt, such as it is recognized nowadays. But there is more to pay attention to, specifically from the point of view of the ethics of forgiving and loving-kindness. Etty Hillesum’s life *and* work give evidence of the aforementioned “demand older than moral philosophy” has tried to put into words. They give evidence of this “love that loves the humanity of man, not for the sake of reason, but for the sake of the humankind incarnated in every single person.” It confronts man with the mystery of sacrifice as an ultimate form and a final essence of resistance to political terror.

In her letters to Klaas Smelik Senior, Etty Hillesum asked her beloved friend – who insistently advised her to go into hiding for the life-threatening Nazi-persecution – whether sacrifice, considered as well deliberated self-sacrifice sharing the fate of fellow-men, wasn’t the uppermost form of resistance. From her side, this was an open question. Her answer was already given beforehand. And her answer was not given in order to change

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *UNESCO: Les enjeux des droits de l’homme* (Paris: Larousse, 1988), 236. My translation of: “Quelque chose est dû à l’être humain du seul fait qu’il est humain [...] une exigence plus vieille que toute formulation philosophique [...].”

her into a new-born hero, not even to make her case an example to be followed by others. That she told Klaas Smelik Senior because she was convinced that it was this what *she*, Etty Hillesum, ought to do for herself as a lover of humankind, embodied in the many particular and solitary persons she met in Camp Westerbork, on her own long journey towards individual redemption.

In this way, Etty Hillesum has put her readers, until the end of times, before an immeasurable question: to share the destiny of the victimized and maltreated person and to go with him and her through the agonies of hunger, torture, through the pangs of death, is not this proof of men's highest concern for the humanity of man? Is not this a resistance against which the persecutor remains powerless, in such a way that even the persecutor, the torturer and the hangman will experience their inescapable human weakness? As I have tried to explain, through my re-reading of Jankélévitch's moral philosophy on forgiveness and on the act of forgiving, the answers we might give are forever ambiguous, for no conclusive ethic of resistance can be drawn from them.

In a letter that I wrote to a good friend of mine, who asked me about Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters, I asserted that I was willing to draw a parallel between Etty Hillesum's testimony and Antigone's, such as we know it from the work of Sophocles and Jean Anouilh. I admitted that I see Etty – time and again, it seems, we are forced to use her “Christian” name, as if she were our personal friend – as a twentieth-century Antigone. A beautiful, sexually emancipated woman, a talented intellectual, a gifted translator of Russian literature, who, instead of all what could have made her – after the Second World War that she possibly would have survived – a successful lady, decided not to escape persecution. For, as a profoundly religious human being (in a very large meaning of the word “religious”), she felt obliged to obey a moral order that sprang from her own inner self, refusing all external interference.

Wasn't it this what Klaas Smelik Senior – who stood so near – couldn't rightly understand, although it forced him, ever and ever again, to witness about her life and work long after her death? Handing over to his son, Klaas Smelik Junior, the passionate fascination for Etty Hillesum's “example,” which led the latter, as a deeply religious man, to his own intellectual and scholarly efforts in the study of her diaries and letters?

Whatever our own opinions about resistance and about how to act against terror and persecution, we are obliged to pay attention to Etty Hillesum's *paradigm*. I write this with the doubts Klaas Smelik Senior had in those dreadful days, and which I share and as someone who wrote on the case

of Mala Zimetbaum. Mala Zimetbaum was the courageous Jewish woman from Antwerp, who died in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944. She was killed for she decided not to stay any longer in the camp of death. She bravely tried to escape from the *Endlösung* of both herself and her fellow prisoners, in a perilous attempt to make contact with the Polish freedom fighters, urging them to organize a much-needed military intervention. Mala failed, she was recaptured, after which she was executed in front of the assembled prisoners. But is Mala's acting on behalf of her fellow men really different from ETTY's? Or do they join each other in their love for the humanity of mankind, in spite of the differences in acting?

In my own religious outlook on life, ETTY HILLESUM's paradigm is an ever-lasting challenge to our opinions concerning morals, forgiving and resistance to inhumanity.

When love – love of mankind in each single human person – is more than hope (*espérance, Hoffnung*), such as one can read in Paulus, 1 Corinthians 13, to what then will love instigate us? What are love's limits? Or aren't there no limits to love's instigation?

In this, I might recall, once again, what Jankélévitch – who decided to join the French Resistance movement, and this from the very beginning of the war and not in its last year – has so beautifully written in his final testimony on the ambiguousness of morals: “to you all the rights, to me all the obligations.” A statement that candidly he contradicted a few lines further: “all men have rights and so do I.”

He or she, who lives up to the daily experience of this paradox and who will decide, whatever may come, to go through all the pains of this *elevating and depressing* experience, at the end of life's road might be called: *Ein Mensch*. In ETTY HILLESUM, we encounter *Ein Mensch*, for she lived up to:

This love that loves the humanity of man – and that doesn't love love for reason's sake – (this love) that loves the humankind as if it is someone, and loves in an incomprehensible way the general person, the humankind incarnated in an individual being, the generalized person on the level of humanity [...].¹⁹

May she be blessed for it, as long as mankind persists.

¹⁹ See note 18 above.

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25 A Woman's All-Embracing Search of "the Other"

Etty Hillesum as the Basis of a "Pedagogy of Care and Attention"

Anna Aluffi Pentini

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Abstract

Hardy but not hard – a distinction absolutely essential to the education of social professionals, lies at the core of the life and writing of Etty Hillesum and is the heart of any resilience process. In this piece, the author establishes a link between three very different, resilient women: Etty Hillesum, Milena Jesenská and Helen Lewis, who – she says – convey a type of female hope characterized by vitality and tenderness. The dialogues of their lives were not merely historical testimonies of tragic events, but a hymn to life itself issuing from the confinement of the camps. The author looks at what it meant to *pay attention* right to the very end, and highlights the daily stresses of educational work that can easily lead to burn-out unless competences are built up on the basis of a tender, careful attention to things and people.

Keywords: otherness, Milena Jesenská, Helen Lewis, female hope, chronicle, tenderness, caring, vitality, Etty Hillesum

This contribution has its origins in the experience of teaching a university course in social pedagogy at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University Roma Tre. The study programme included as a course assignment, "Diary of Etty Hillesum" in its first Italian edition, and coincided with the Italian publication of the new edition of her diary. I first read her diary when I was eighteen years old and, since then, have often re-read parts of it or given the book to friends, especially female friends. Reading it again

at the age of 50 brought new discoveries from a new vantage point. Above all, it allowed me to recognize her enormous pedagogical significance and her influence on my own way of thinking and acting in social contexts, in both my professional and personal lives.

The commemoration of the 70th anniversary of Hillesum's death, in 2013, and the 100th anniversary of her birth, in 2014, gave me occasion to make the study of the first edition of the diary obligatory and that of the entire edition optional in my course. The hypothesis was that a pedagogical interpretation of her work has great potential especially for students preparing themselves for professions based on personal relationships such as teaching, social work, and social education, professions particularly vulnerable to burn out. In social pedagogy, personal relationships and context are frequently taken for granted. Yet, every professional and every student of this discipline must necessarily consider how to find the right balance between distance and closeness. In practice, this balance is very difficult to achieve, and yet this forms the core characteristic of humane professionalism. This stems from the fact that every encounter between people is always a surprise given their fundamental diversity: other persons evoke positive or negative, weak or strong, manageable or unmanageable emotions. Pretending to manage in a purely professional way the suffering or the joy others communicate and project on us can only lead to failure, at least when professionalism assumes following a uniform protocol for all people, with no reference to personal or contextual variables. When the existential dimension of personal encounters is not addressed, joy and hurt remain only cold variables. But this existential dimension frequently gets marginalized when the education of social professionals aims at neutralizing feelings and thoughts.

Instead, the existential component is the basis for practical action – it directs and gives substance to our attitudes, it questions and transforms them, whether relationships are difficult or positive. This kind of permanent “reflection in action” also means, therefore, “reflection in relation,” and “action in relation” is what our students need to learn. Only on the basis of this reflexivity, can they deal with feelings that inevitably arise in the face of problematic social situations.¹ Etty Hillesum does not provide a ready-made, exact model for how to conduct human encounters; she never presents her thoughts as the final word or ultimate truth. Instead, she comes across as a person who is simultaneously special and normal, socially likable and lively and yet drawn to solitude, silence and introspection. Above all, she

1 Cf. Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Making of an Adult Educator: An Autobiographical Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1989).

presents as a person intent on listening with great attention to herself and to others, exposing both strength and weakness.

Hillesum's life was shaped by a series of relatively minor painful experiences before the dramatic impact of racial persecution and deportation. We know that she had a difficult relationship with her family of origin. On one of the few occasions when she talks of her mother before the beginning of the deportations, she describes her as aggressive. One of her brothers had serious psychological problems and she generally considered her family strange. So, the "blocks of granite" that she carries inside her, do not all have to do with the Shoah. She moves in the direction of a key concept which she then expresses in the historically dark times also as the aim of psychotherapy:

How rash to assert that man shapes his own destiny. All he can do, is determine his inner responses.²

The topic of accepting one's destiny recurs in her diary but never with a tone of resignation, rather with a growing awareness of her own responsibility in the face of events both grand and small. This approach helps her to cultivate curiosity, attention and vitality and to respond humanely. Her ability to react in a sane way to such terrible events represents the phenomenon of resilience, defined as "positive adaptation in a context of significant challenges [...] exposure to potential life-altering experiences."³

In adult education and in social pedagogy, autobiography is considered to have the potential for self-healing. For Gusdorf,⁴ writing is a system that establishes order. Writing is linked to objectification, and the interpretation of writing to linearity on the one hand and to circularity in the hermeneutic sense on the other. When life and writing come together, they enlighten each other and enrich the "I" with new elements.⁵

Demetrio retraces the tradition of autobiographical writing understood as "approaching oneself through another way as a possibility to reconnect with what one has lost or has searched for in vain, learning thereby to support the lack of a substantial self; it is a means of holding up a mirror to oneself and saying, 'this is the real me,' having in mind a script which

2 E.T., 258. *Het Werk*, 268; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: Maar h oe men zich innerlijk stelt t t de gebeurtenissen van het leven, dat bepaalt je lot. Dat is je leven.

3 Ann S. Masten, J.J. Cutuli, Janette E. Herbers & Marie-Gabrielle Reed, "Resilience in Development", in: Shane J. Lopez & C.R. Snyder (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 117-132, especially p. 19.

4 Cf. Georges Gusdorf, *Auto-bio-graphie* (Paris: Jacob, 1991).

5 Cf. Martin Buber, *Reden  ber Erziehung* (M nchen: G tersloher Verlagshaus, 1999).

fills and cures an interior void.”⁶ Cambi⁷ regards it as an instrument of self-education for the person who writes it. Writing is therefore a way of recovering elements of the self and of integrating suspended instances. Therefore, when Hillesum's therapist, friend and lover Spier counsels her to write, this advice corresponds with an old tradition which is present in today's pedagogical and psychoanalytic discourses.

And in a minor text of his prison diaries entitled “Justification of Autobiographies,” Antonio Gramsci⁸ ascribes to this type of writing a value which combines historical testimony with the intention of enabling others to cope with life's challenges. He attributes a formative function to autobiography because it gives public expression to particular biographical moments. It implies a dual level of reflection on facts and on oneself, which in the case of Ety Hillesum is focused on relationships with others and with God. And yet, it can be observed that the style of self-reflection, which first takes shape in the writings of Hillesum's diary and then in her letters, moves slowly from a purely introspective tone to a documentary one. The diary is, in my view, a gift to be used in the formation of educators and of social workers who need to learn how to listen, think and decide in situations in which personal relationships matter and which present complex and even dramatic problems. This instrument of self-reflection can be an integral part of psychological growth.

Hardy but Not Hard

I would like to start my reading of her diary with a phrase which I found most appealing and central to Ety Hillesum: “hardy but not hard.” I find this distinction absolutely essential in the education of social professionals, quite apart from its existential significance. She says for instance,

There is a difference between hardy and hard. It is often forgotten nowadays. [...] I shall never grow hard nor shall have any need to.⁹

6 Cf. Duccio Demetrio, *Raccontarsi: L'autobiografia come cura di sé* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 1996).

7 Cf. Franco Cambi, *L'autobiografia come metodo formativo* (Bari: Laterza, 2005).

8 Cf. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, vol. 14, ed. V. Giarratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975).

9 E.T., 511. *Het Werk*, 541; Tuesday evening, 28 July 1942: Er is een verschil tussen gehard en verhard. Het wordt veel verwisseld tegenwoordig [...] verhard zal ik nooit worden, ik heb er ook geen behoefte aan om het te worden

This leads to further questions: How to avoid the hardening of the heart? What constitutes hardy and what constitutes hard? Or, more importantly, what is it that makes us hardy without hardening us? These are questions which to me seem essential in both a professional and in a personal context where caring and helping relationships are concerned. They can be addressed through the medium of writing and particularly of diary writing which also has a particular professional significance.

The concept "hardy but not hard" has its historical origin in an encounter with pain, with tragedy. However, for us today it opens up a line of hope when we feel discouraged. It leads to the question, who do we become over the course of our lifetime, traversing greater or lesser periods of hurt? What becomes of us when we assist people who experience greater or lesser tragedies, when we accompany those close to us?

Etty Hillesum was not immune to the risk of becoming hard and she knew it. Following the therapeutic advice of Julius Spier, she takes up journal writing as a means of taking care of herself, and out of that stream-like spontaneity develops literary forms of writing which – if she had lived long enough to realize her potential – would have made her a literary figure. On 5 August 1941, she writes,

I feel like a clenched fist and don't know how to relax. I shall force myself to write something every day, if only a few words, otherwise I shall burst.¹⁰

The desire to write is a characteristic trait of Etty Hillesum. Apart from her literary dreams, we know that her diary grew out of her desire to understand herself better and above all to accept herself. Accepting oneself also means having the courage to plumb the deepest ground in oneself. We encounter Etty Hillesum in numerous contexts in her diary, including intensive self-analysis regarding her general "being in the world" under various circumstances. As readers, we are given access to her far ranging life experiences which – although covering a relatively brief time period – span reflections from a light-hearted youth to those of someone in the depths of tragedy.

The discipline of writing about herself enables her over time to write, when necessary, more in the manner of a chronicle, but her style never becomes cold and detached. Therefore, when Etty Hillesum writes, "yet I

¹⁰ E.T., 73. *Het Werk*, 77; Tuesday, 5 August 1941: Ik voel me als een samengebalde vuist en weet niet hoe tot ontspanning te komen. Ik zal me zelf dwingen iedere dag, al zijn het maar een paar woorden, te schrijven, anders word ik te vol.

must start slowly on that great block of uncut granite I carry within me if I am to model my small figures, or else I am bound to get crushed one day,"¹¹ she is describing the hard labour she has undertaken. Not only is the stone hard, but the work itself calls for a type of writing which chisels the person beyond the reach of language, a topic that will occupy her more and more: "I must delve deep into myself and fetch up unformed slabs of granite and chisel them into shape."¹²

What we encounter, is an almost obsessive kind of daily journal writing that traces the entire process of constructing and de-constructing herself, with her thoughts presented as a constant stream of reflections. Reading it, one has the impression that Etty Hillesum lives in front of a mirror which reflects her in her totality, externally as well as internally, and that this mirror is her writing. Sometimes, Etty Hillesum refers to herself in the second person, admonishes her disorderly side, tries to impose rules and criteria on her writing. But those criteria are never fixed, they evolve alongside her writing and through writing become continuously re-evaluated and recalibrated.

In taking care of herself through writing, Etty Hillesum inevitably engages in a dialogue with God. It seems at times that when Etty Hillesum encounters the deepest part of herself in her writing, she addresses God, effectively the only witness to all the little streams of her restless mind in real time. Gusdorf writes of the psychological value of autobiography that it is a kind of second reading of one's existence, a kind of moulding and re-moulding oneself. "It brings to light the internal space."¹³

Therefore, the notion of 'being hardy rather than hard' is closely connected to the concept of resilience: having experienced a difficult situation, one can become weaker and rigid, or strengthened and more alive. When Hillesum's friend Max meets her after a long time and sees her so overwhelmed by problems, he says with anxiety that he worries she might come to grief. Etty Hillesum responds, "I won't come to grief; don't worry."¹⁴

And in a letter to Spier on 8 March 1941, which opens her diary, she says that now and again "I feel like patting myself on the head in a motherly way

11 E.T., 73. *Het Werk*, 78; Tuesday, 5 August 1941: Toch moet je langzamerhand beginnen in het grote blok onbehouwen graniet, dat je in je draagt, de kleine figuren te gaan modelleren, anders zul je op den duur verpletterd worden.

12 E.T., 340. *Het Werk*, 355; Wednesday evening, 22 April 1942: Afdalen in zichzelf en de ongevormde brokken graniet naar buiten tillen en tot vorm brengen.

13 Gusdorf, *Auto-bio-graphie*, 73.

14 E.T., 279. *Het Werk*, 289; Thursday evening, 12 March 1942: [...] ik ga nooit en nergens stuk [...].

and saying, 'Now, now, my girl, everything will be all right.'¹⁵ This kind of 'resilient fragility' reminds me of the orphan Pippi Longstocking who bids herself good night every evening and says to her mother, who is watching in heaven, "don't worry about me, I'm always doing alright." There is a similar strength in Etty Hillesum which stems from her awareness of a childlike fragility. Her weakness can only be understood in relation to her energy, the energy of someone who knows her strengths, and who counts on the accompaniment of an important but invisible presence.

The theme of "coming to grief" recurs frequently in the eighth notebook, and, as well, a constant returning to herself, to her writing, to reflecting in solitude (while still remaining open to the world) that constitute her self-assurance and her ability to reassure her friends. In her diary, quoting a letter she has written home, Etty Hillesum says, "you mustn't worry about me, no matter what situation I end up in."¹⁶ This feeling of being up to the task is linked to her ability to be fully present with others, and the fact that she feels that she acts in the presence of God in all she does: "it makes me feel I shall be able to cope with any situation."¹⁷ Presence refers to her physical presence, to being present with the greatest awareness and attention, with all her being. She is also present in her writing, while writing in order to be present.

Her last thought on the evening of 27 July 1942¹⁸ reflects on what she has learned during the day, namely "wherever you happen to find yourself, be there with your whole heart," and she insists then: "If your heart is elsewhere, you won't give enough to the community in which you happen to be, and that community will be the poorer for it."¹⁹ It is a "we" that speaks, a categorical imperative in the plural: "I" impoverish the "we" if I am not present with all my heart. This is not an "I" that fuses with a "we," but an "I" that is responsible for the "we."

15 E.T., 3. *Het Werk*, 3; Saturday, 8 March 1941: [...] bekomme ich fast Lust mir selber ganz mütterlich über den Kopf zu streicheln und zu sagen: Na, liebe Kleine, das wird alles schon in Ordnung kommen,

16 E.T., 490. *Het Werk*, 519; Tuesday evening, 14 July 1942: [...] om mij moeten jullie je nooit zorgen maken, in wat voor een situatie ik ook kom.

17 E.T., 490. *Het Werk*, 519; Tuesday evening, 14 July 1942: Ik heb nu eenmaal van aanleg een soort onbepakt godsvertrouwen in me, dat me me opgewassen doet voelen tegen iedere situatie. –

18 E.T., 508. *Het Werk*, 538; Monday evening, 27 July 1942: [...] waar men toevallig geplaatst is, moet men met z'n gehele hart ook zijn.

19 E.T., 508. *Het Werk*, 538; Monday evening, 27 July 1942: Wanneer men met z'n hart ergens anders is, brengt men niet genoeg in in de gemeenschap, waar men toevallig is en die gemeenschap verarmt er dan door.

In all her writing, we find an incessant dialogue, at times almost obsessive in its hammering of facts and emotions in an attempt to bond them together to form meaning, to make sense to what is happening. When she reads Rilke on 28 July 1942, she makes herself echo the poet's emotions until she feels them as her own. As often in her diary, she quotes Rilke affirmatively, "I am not afraid of the hardness of these apprenticeship years: my heart yearns to be hammered and polished; if it only be *my* hardness, belonging to me."²⁰ Submitting to discipline is also part of her taking care of herself, and this discipline at times coincides with the written word: discipline gets exercised through writing and writing itself becomes discipline.

However, the hammering of reflexive writing does not fully explain how one can become hardy without becoming hard. It could also be argued that sooner or later writing leads to the rationalization of lived experiences, inducing a distance from one's feelings and thereby running the risk of hardening the person.

It is therefore appropriate to consider what prevents Etty Hillesum from becoming hard, what allows her to move confidently and steadily in the direction of the Ezekiel prophecy (to which she actually never refers): "I shall give you a new heart and shall plant in you a new spirit. I shall remove from you the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."²¹ The heart of flesh is not inserted in our breast by means of a transplant but through the life we traverse. It is a gift which we can receive as a result of being open, of being ready to let ourselves be transformed through life, through God, through our neighbour. The heart tires but why does it become hard? And why does it become hard in this specific case?

The Circle of Tenderness

My hypothesis is that Hillesum's strength lies in the fluid circularity of her passion, tenderness and compassion. These attributes emerge out of a life full of conflict and a complementarity of distance and closeness to others on the horizontal dimension and between God and her writing on the vertical dimension. Both dimensions are external and yet in her, as well.

²⁰ E.T., 509. *Het Werk*, 538; Tuesday afternoon, 28 July 1942: [...] ich fürchte die Härte dieser Lehrjahre nicht: mein Herz sehnt sich, gehämmert und geschliffen zu sein: wenn es nur *meine* Härte ist, die, die zu mir gehört [...].

²¹ Cf. Ezekiel 36:26.

And she lives out this dynamic circularity through closeness to the people she loves, a closeness that is simultaneously all-inclusive and relative. In this cycle of passion, tenderness and compassion, which evolves between the poles of closeness and distance, the soul is stirred, and this movement prevents the daily occurrences of life, including the dramatic and painful events, from making the person hard. The stirring of the soul allows the person to become hardy and still preserve the warmth of human kindness.

When Etty Hillesum says, "in fact a relationship is nothing, or ought to be nothing, other than keeping one's distance,"²² she expresses what is almost an oxymoron. Relationship signifies a bond, implies closeness. But in order for a relationship not to implode it requires distance, giving each other space, "the better to meet again more intensely on a higher plane."²³

In cases of an affective or loving relationship or of personal proximity or care, the tension between closeness and distance is crucial. But the diary goes further and finds that tenderness is actually the attribute which in a certain sense protects distance whereas closeness is linked to passion and compassion. Passion takes space and gives space due to tenderness; compassion takes shape and becomes lighter thanks to tenderness. Gestures of compassion can only be accepted by a recipient when tenderness is implied.

The danger of possessiveness lurks beneath both passion and compassion. And possessiveness leads to the other person being used, being manipulated in relation to love, suffering and generally the body and its pleasure. When one cannot possess the other fully, or can do nothing to save the other, one becomes disillusioned, withdraws, becomes hard. This risk exists for lovers as it exists for social work professionals, for missionaries dedicated to alleviating suffering, just as it does for stable couples. Disillusionment makes one hard, not hardy. Therefore the recognition that one cannot possess the other leads one to see how crucial it is to exist for the mere pleasure of existing, and of being with the other.

Tenderness is the quality which helps us to establish a proper amount of distance, and which, at the same time, shifts the axis from the exclusivity of passion to the inclusivity of compassion. Consequently, compassion, when expressed with tenderness, flows back into passion. Tenderness brings compassion back to passion through the acceptance of being fully alive – alive and responsive to joy and hope, unconstrained by living with pain.

22 E.T., 289. *Het Werk*, 301; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: [...] eigenlijk is een verhouding niets anders, of behoorde niets anders te zijn dan een voortdurend afstand van elkaar doen [...].

23 E.T., 289. *Het Werk*, 301; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: [...] om elkaar op een hogergelegen vlakke weer des te intensiever te ontmoeten.

This is not to say that Etty Hillesum found the perfect equilibrium, once and for all, or that this circularity offers a recipe for being “good” – there are indications that Etty Hillesum struggled with an intensity that can short-circuit into uncertainty when faced with the reality of too much emotion and confusion. But she keeps dynamic in this circle of tenderness, and not just occupied in tasks. And what really proves the existence of these interior movements. She is often aware of being unable to write down her emotions or completely describe them because they are “unspeakable.” We find many exclamations in her diary about the impossibility of expression, of describing something well, of writing it down fully. We observe her dismay over writing which seeks to scrutinize in ever greater depth the progression of an event, or encounters with and between people and how moved she is by them. Tenderness lightens passionate encounters – both amorous passion and also the passion associated with suffering and pain.

Her female jealousy concerning Spier’s fiancée is moderated by her tenderness and her basic conviction that nobody can possess another person. Even her descriptions of the most intimate moments in her relationships with men are framed by this triangle of passion, tenderness and profound compassion in as much as they express giving and receiving support and comfort as a lived shared experience. Etty Hillesum seems to have set herself the goal of living close to those for whom she felt a deep sense of responsibility. This is her quite original criterion of faithfulness, a criterion of truthfulness. It is this same criterion of remaining truthful to herself that makes her choose to remain at Camp Westerbork instead of getting away when there was still a chance for her to do so. She followed the principle of being to the end with those with whom we enter into a relationship at every level. “Listen, listen everywhere, listen to the very essence of things.”²⁴

She always lived an extremely passionate and compassionate life.

Before, when I spoke to people or when I was in company, I used to give of myself so completely that I had to put all the pieces together again later. People went away strengthened by my vitality, but I was left with the bits and pieces and the fatigue.²⁵

24 E.T., 275. *Het Werk*, 286; Sunday evening, 8 March 1942: En dan luisteren, overal luisteren, tot op de grond der dingen luisteren.

25 E.T., 30. *Het Werk*, 32; Wednesday morning, 19 March 1941: Vroeger, als ik met mensen sprak, of in gezelschap was, gaf ik mezelf helemaal weg en later moest ik alle stukjes weer bij elkaar vegen. De mensen gingen weg, gesterkt door mijn vitaliteit en ik bleef met de brokken en de vermoeidheid achter.

Or later in the diary, she remembers having written to Julius Spier, on 8 March 1942, "My passion used to be nothing but a desperate clinging to – to what, exactly? To something one cannot cling to with the body."²⁶ She repeats that she must "grow still more in patience,"²⁷ and relationships need to become part of the process of becoming hardy, to steel one's heart in ever new ways.

In relationships with men, becoming hardy means learning patience in order to achieve autonomy. Experiencing herself as a woman in relationship with a man becomes an obstacle to autonomy, and it also becomes also an obstacle to compassion. Only at her untidy desk does she feel free, because in that moment, with the help of pen and paper, she manages to be objective; the undeniable strain of that three-dimensional circularity of passion, compassion and tenderness, which sometimes threatens to become a vortex, calms. She knows her own preferences: "I shall always prefer an untidy desk of my own, covered with books and papers, to even the most ideal and harmonious marriage bed."²⁸

This undoubtedly highly personal outlook is linked to a vision of a world in which passion has many different facets which need to be prioritized. For Etty Hillesum, what counts is clear: "What is primitive in me is my warmth; I have a sort of primitive love and primitive sympathy for people, for all people. I don't think I am cut out for one man."²⁹ Her life is therefore determined by more general and more social priorities. Her vitality does not get swallowed up in the tension that surrounds her because she lets herself be moved by her encounters with people and with God, or what she calls God. Both for God and for people, Etty Hillesum exhibits a kind of love that is full of enthusiasm and vitality, for which even she cannot offer a rational explanation.

I have two great feelings deep inside: love, an inexplicable love, which perhaps cannot be analyzed because it is so primitive, for creatures and

26 E.T., 278. *Het Werk*, 289; Thursday evening, 12 March 1942: Meine Leidenschaftlichkeit früher war eigentlich nichts anderes als ein verzweifelt sich festklammern an, ja an was eigentlich?

27 E.T., 275. *Het Werk*, 285; Sunday evening, 8 March 1942: En moet nog geduldiger worden.

28 E.T., 383-384. *Het Werk*, 402; Friday evening, 29 May 1942: een slordig bureau vol boeken en papieren, dat van mij alleen is, zal ik altijd weer verkiezen boven het ideaalste en harmonischste huwelijksbed.

29 E.T., 123. *Het Werk*, 130; Monday morning, 6 October 1941: Wat wel oer bij me is, dat zijn de menselijke gevoelens, er zit een soort oer-liefde en oer-medelijden in me voor de mensen, voor alle mensen. Ik geloof niet, dat ik deug voor één man en ook niet meer voor de liefde van één man.

for God or for what I call God; and compassion, a boundless compassion that can sometimes cause tears to spring to my eyes.³⁰

On the other hand, distance from the concrete world is perceived as a risk of losing vitality, while the tangible reality of passion rekindles desire and turns then back to tenderness. Because of this circularity, Etty Hillesum manages to sustain a strong emotional bond with two men. But there is an episode unrelated to any sensual passion which exemplifies well the difference between the hard and the hardy. This concerns the encounter with her former professor Bonger. They meet just opposite Hillesum's home and she notices at once that he has become "as defenseless as a child, almost gentle"³¹ and she tells us that she feels "an irresistible need to put my arms round him and to lead him like a child, and so, with my arm round him, we walked on across the Skating Club."³² Furthermore, she observes: "He seemed a broken man and good through and through. All the passion and fire in him had been doused."³³ The esteemed and revered university professor seems to have come to grief without his former passion. Etty Hillesum will be shocked to learn a few hours later that Bonger has taken his life because of the imminent Nazi tyranny. Not everyone was able to hold on to some form of hope; Bonger could not manage. Etty Hillesum does not lose hope entirely and she resolves to always pass it on to others and to try and inspire them with courage.

Being of help means, essentially, creating a space in which others can also grow. It is the space where acceptance happens, this potential space according to Winnicott³⁴, which is the foundation for ordinary caring and for rehabilitative caring, the core of closeness. "Including in oneself all the gestures and looks and words and problems of others and allowing their lives to unfold in oneself and throwing fresh light on them – that is our

30 E.T., 161. *Het Werk*, 170; Sunday morning, 30 November 1941: [...] het zijn de 2 grote grondgevoelens in me: liefde, een onverklaarbare, misschien niet nader te analyseren, omdat het een oergevoel is, liefde voor de creatuur en tot God, wat ik dan God noem en medelijden, een grenzeloos medelijden, waardoor soms plotseling de tranen uit m'n hoofd kunnen storten.

31 E.T., 52. *Het Werk*, 55; Tuesday evening, 25 March 1941: En hij, de felle Bonger, was zo weerloos als een kind, bijna mild [...].

32 E.T., 52. *Het Werk*, 55; Tuesday evening, 25 March 1941: [...] en ik kreeg plotseling de onweersaanbare behoefte mijn arm om hem heen te slaan en hem te leiden als een kind en zo, met mijn arm om hem heen, liepen we langs de Ijsclub.

33 E.T., 52. *Het Werk*, 55; Tuesday evening, 25 March 1941: Hij leek ergens gebroken en zo door en door goedig. Alle hartstocht en felheid waren uitgeblust.

34 Cf. Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971).

inner task."³⁵ Every person must on the one hand be endowed with the space, the time and the possibility to "pass through ever higher grades of attention, of solitude, of silence. On the other hand one must be enveloped by warmth so as not to be strangled by distress nor get lost in a collective."³⁶ Solitude is the start of the path to the sacred where the sacred is not just related to God but – according to Simone Weil – to "that which is impersonal in a human being"³⁷ and this in the sense of an 'otherness' which reaches beyond the characteristics of a single individual. Solitude is also what the infant experiences for the first time when managing to be alone in the presence of others. And this kind of 'sacred solitude' is what we need to foster in ourselves throughout our lives and to respect in other people even in helping relationships.

For ETTY HILLESUM, solitude reaches effectively ever higher levels of interior silence thanks to her writing. Attention – cultivated through caring – becomes an ever broader form of tenderness and in a certain sense, impersonal: "why shouldn't one feel an immense, tender ecstasy of love for the spring, or for all humanity? And one can befriend the winter, too, or a town, or a country."³⁸ Patience, developed through writing, allows her to transform passion into tenderness for things and for people. But sometimes, even feelings of tenderness overwhelm her.

One must divide one's single great tenderness into a thousand small tendernesses, lest one succumbs to the weight of that one great tenderness. A thousand small acts of tenderness: for a dog in the road, or for an old flower seller – and finding the right word for someone in need.³⁹

35 E.T., 287. *Het Werk*, 298; Monday morning, 16 March 1942: De gebaren en blikken en woorden en problematiek en het leven van anderen in zich opnemen en dat leven van die anderen in zich zelf verder laten leven en tot klaarheid brengen. Hier ligt een innerlijke taak.

36 Cf. Simone Weil, 'La personne et le sacré', in: *idem, Écrits de Londres et dernières lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 20.

37 *Ibidem*, 17.

38 E.T., 287. *Het Werk*, 299; Tuesday morning, 17 March 1942: Waarom zou men niet een grote en tedere liefdesroes kunnen beleven met een lente, en met alle mensen? En men kan ook vriendschap sluiten met een winter, en met een stad of met een land.

39 E.T., 348. *Het Werk*, 365; Sunday evening, 26 April 1942: [...] men moet zijn éne grote verlangen niet opdelen in honderd kleine bevredigingen. En nu wil ik erbij schrijven: zijn éne grote tederheid moet men verdelen in duizend kleine tederheden, omdat men zou kunnen bezwijken anders onder het gewicht van die éne tederheid. Duizend kleine tederheden: voor een hond op straat en voor een oude bloemenkoopman – en het juiste woord vinden, waaraan iemand net behoefte zou kunnen hebben.

Her way of coping with this is to bring passion and tenderness together.

Friday night, when I cycled back from his rooms through the Spring night, I poured the great love and overwhelming tenderness I feel for him into the night, put some of it into the stars and left some behind in the bushes beside the canal.⁴⁰

And through such an experience, it even becomes possible to say farewell, serenely, to people and to the world.

At that point, a relationship no longer needs physical closeness because being truly loved by somebody implies that person's presence. Etty Hillesum experiences this in her love relationships, following the death of Spier, and when she was separated from all the people and places she was attached to.

Life is going to be very hard. We shall be torn apart, all who are dear to one another. I don't think the time is very far off now. We shall have to steel ourselves inwardly more and more [...]. If you have a rich inner life, I would have said, there probably isn't all that much difference between the inside and outside of a camp.⁴¹

Even with all that preparation, the danger of becoming hard was not entirely averted. Her actual experiences at Camp Westerbork demonstrate that there is a difference between a spiritual exercise and being in daily contact with suffering and injustice.

For those who have been granted the nerve-shattering privilege of being allowed to stay in Westerbork "until further notice," there is the great moral danger of becoming blunted and hardened.⁴²

40 E.T., 349. *Het Werk*, 365; Sunday morning, 26 April 1942: Vrijdagavond, toen ik van hem vandaan fietste door de voorjaarsnacht – ik heb toen de grote liefde en de overgrote tederheid, die ik voor hem voel, uitgegoten in die nacht, heb wat neergelegd in de sterren en heb wat achtergelaten in de struiken aan het water.

41 E.T., 279. *Het Werk*, 289; Thursday evening, 12 March 1942: Het leven zal heel hard worden. We zullen weer gescheiden worden, allen, die elkaar dierbaar zijn. Ik geloof dat die tijd niet eens zover meer is. Men moet zich innerlijk steeds meer voorbereiden [...] als je innerlijk leeft, is er misschien niet eens zo veel verschil binnen of buiten de muren van een kamp.

42 E.T., 586. *Het Werk*, 624; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: Voor degenen, die het zenuwslopende voorrecht genieten "bis auf weiteres" in Westerbork te mogen blijven, bestaat een groot moreel gevaar: dat van te zullen afstompen en te verharderen.

It is an understandable human reaction under such harsh conditions to simply disengage and thereby to become hard.

The human suffering that we have seen during the last six months, and still see daily, is more than anyone can be expected to comprehend in half a year. No wonder we hear on all sides every day, in every pitch of voice, "We don't want to think, we don't want to feel, we want to forget as soon as possible." It seems to me that this is a very great danger.⁴³

Even though most of us have not been confronted with such tragedy, in the light of such a passage we see that this woman, who enjoyed passion, who was not afraid of compassion and who fostered such tenderness, really lived as if every breath was eternal, and therefore was able to depart for Auschwitz singing, hardy but by no means hard.

So Etty Hillesum does not become hard, thanks to passion, compassion and tenderness; she maintains hope. Her example helps us to maintain hope in the face of hardship, including the training of professionals whose work is to help relationships. The act of writing and a relationship with God create a dynamic that alternates between leaving and entering oneself, a dance of objectivity and subjectivity, of mirroring, of recognition and discovering oneself again in a profound dimension of one's being. It is a continuous challenge to find a way of being present both in oneself and for others.

Two Other Women

In trying to go one step further in reflecting on the "pedagogical" elements to be found in Etty Hillesum, I also dealt with a specifically female aspect of her vitality and humanity. I re-read, from this perspective, two contemporaries of her, women who show corresponding characteristics and lived in similar situations, thereby having nurtured their "resilient interior."

One of them is Milena Jesenská, recipient of the famous letters by Franz Kafka, who died in Camp Ravensbrück. The other, less well known, is Helen Lewis, imprisoned in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and eventually Stutthof, who survived. She died, aged 93, in 2010 and I had had the privilege of meeting her once personally in Belfast after having read her work.

43 E.T., 587. *Het Werk*, 624; Letter 23, To two sisters in The Hague, Amsterdam, end of December 1942: 'We willen niet denken, we willen niet voelen, we willen zo gauw mogelijk vergeten.' En het lijkt me toe, dat dit een groot gevaar is.

Milena Jesenská was a journalist before suffering at the hands of the Nazis. She translated Kafka's works into Czech. In the 1930s, she was one of the leading critical journalists of the time. Her articles dealt in particular with the situation in Germany.

As with Ety Hillesum, Jesenská's writings display a capacity to extract profound truths from aspects of apparently mundane events (for example, the description of her special relationship with a governess at home or the advice given to a friend who asks whether he should leave his wife to live in a new relationship) and a capacity to investigate minutely both facts and relationships.⁴⁴

Milena Jesenská was born in Prague in 1896 and was killed in Camp Ravensbrück in 1944. She was a journalist and translator and also dreamt of writing literature. For Milena Jesenská, as for Ety Hillesum, writing was a kind of passionate self-expression. The collection of her most famous articles bears the telling title, "All is Life." It expresses her sociability, adaptability, openness towards others and general curiosity about people. Her political commitment and fervor seem quite incompatible with the character traits of Franz Kafka, who found her so attractive for many years. Milena Jesenská discovered that one cannot really know another person unless one is in love with him or her. And loving someone also means taking care, in love as in friendship.

Buber Neumann, a fellow sufferer in the camps, offers a description of Milena Jesenská: She was as Franz Kafka saw her, she was the woman who loves. Love was for her the only really great thing in life. The strength of her feelings gave her the capacity for an extreme spiritual, physical and intellectual dedication. She knew no hesitations or scruples, she did not consider it shameful to feel with such intensity. For her, love was something translucent and natural.⁴⁵ Milena Jesenská writes to her friend Max Brod, from Vienna on 29 July 1920: "My relationship to my husband is too complicated to be told here but I constantly search for an escape for myself, always solutions, always what is good and right."⁴⁶

For her and for Ety Hillesum, emotional relationships are never linear and are always seen in conjunction with social and civil commitment. They mean total involvement even in unconventional forms. Milena Jesenská says for instance about marriage:

44 Cf. Milena Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben: Feuilletons und Reportagen 1919-1939* (Frankfurt a.M.: Neue Kritik, 1984).

45 Cf. Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Milena: Kafkas Freundin* (Frankfurt a. M.; Fischer, 1985).

46 Alena Wagnerova (ed.), *Ich hätte zu antworten Tage und Nächte: Die Briefe von Milena* (Mannheim: Bollmann, 1996), 39-40.

Why do they not promise each other these infinitely difficult small things (appear freshly washed for breakfast [...] to try and understand the interests of the other person) which one can fulfill – and which yet never get fulfilled – instead of promising something so unimportant as happiness.⁴⁷

Here, as with Etty Hillesum, we find that in the pursuit of an authentic life she relativizes principles and conventional norms that often count as absolute. This quest concerns every moment of life which both women consider precious and unique, in their own lives and in the lives of others. "We make tea and think that this was merely an interlude between what has been and what once shall be. In reality it is not like this; it is life itself."⁴⁸

Milena Jesenská was accused of having a disturbed personality, as was Etty Hillesum, in a 2014 article by Rabbi Giuseppe Laras in the Italian journal *Corriere della Sera*; and accused, as well, of having used intoxicating substances. Milena Jesenská was a woman full of contradictions. In her, female tenderness was combined with typically male energy of will. Modesty and fury lived together in her personality. When she had a blank sheet of paper in front of her, she could not help but begin writing. She combined passion with the same civil courage as Etty Hillesum, ready even to sacrifice her own life for the sake of others, as she did at Camp Ravensbrück: listening to the voices of humanity, she falsified documents of "anti-social persons" who otherwise would have been killed instantly.⁴⁹

Milena Jesenská bears witness to the importance of bravery and autonomy in the face of adverse destiny, which derives from strong affective feelings. To achieve that we need to show ourselves as weak and vulnerable to at least one person, and this has to be a person who loves us and who does not make us feel bad. Only from this person can we ask for indulgence.⁵⁰

Tenderness is a key quality I have identified in Etty Hillesum and it also occurs in descriptions of Milena Jesenská. It seems especially important to her to maintain tenderness and vitality as energy of will, in order to achieve things without losing oneself. At the same time, it is important to show commitment to others. In the camps, Milena Jesenská's commitment to the world became concrete in behaviour that was also full of risks.

47 Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, 77. All quotations my own translation from German.

48 *Ibidem*, 110.

49 Buber-Neumann, *Milena*.

50 *Ibid.*

As for Helen Lewis, the fact that she survived the camps makes her less mysterious and probably deprives her of that aura of heroism that characterizes those whose lives were so brutally and prematurely ended. She was born in Trutnov in Czechoslovakia to a culturally mixed background. She grew up in an open-minded family: Jewish, but not orthodox, German but not nationalist, Zionist, but only for a short time. She recalls a happy infancy and youth prior to the arrival of the Nazis. Her text "A time to speak" was written several years after having been liberated from the camps and was translated into Italian with the subtitle "Sopravvivere nel lager a passo di danza" [Surviving the camp dancing]. It is a testimony to terrible events but also as a means of personally reckoning with her own past. Helen Lewis lost her husband, in the concentration camps, as well as friends.

Helen Lewis's lifelong passion for dance eventually saved her life in the concentration camps. She was chosen to be in a dance group and thereby received better food. Dancing even under those circumstances brought back some of her vitality. Like Etty Hillesum, she was also actively resilient and interested in her fellow prisoners and even in the camp warders, and she remained optimistic. In her autobiography she movingly and with optimism describes even her times of illness and suffering in the concentration camp. Her search for the characteristics of the human soul that go beyond a person's role or function is striking. She illustrates this by means of an extraordinary story from the concentration camp. Every evening, an SS soldier had put aside part of his meal to give it to a starving prisoner the next day. He paid strict attention that every day the food went to a different person and every time he threw it into the air so as to say that it did not come from him but from heaven. He did not appreciate being thanked, the gratitude in the prisoner's eyes was enough for him.⁵¹

This story reminds me of an episode Etty Hillesum records in her diary about an irate Gestapo officer. He had shouted at her and this is how she looks back on it:

And that was the real import of this morning: not that a disgruntled young Gestapo boy yelled at me, but that I felt no indignation, rather a real compassion, and would have liked to ask, "Did you have a very unhappy childhood, has your girlfriend let you down?" Yet, he looked harassed and driven, sullen and weak. I should have liked to start treating him there and then, for I know that these young men are merely pitiful as long as they cannot do harm, but that they become mortally dangerous

51 Cf. Helen Lewis, *A time to speak* (Belfast: Blackstaff Limited, 2010).

and must be eradicated when they are turned loose on humanity. Yet only the system that uses such people is criminal, not these fellows.⁵²

Helen Lewis recalls another similar episode of how close proximity even to an enemy, a guard at the camp, can be infused with humanity. In the concentration camp she had discovered, together with other prisoners who spoke German, that a soldier had been a school teacher before the war and missed his family greatly while hating the job he had to do. One day, he showed them a photo of the wedding of his daughter. Helen Lewis relates that it was not the picture of the bride which held her fascinated, but that of the smiling father – in civil clothes.

And in another situation, she expresses even a kind of forgiveness when coming close to a female guard. She tells that it was a strange experience being so near to an enemy without feeling hate or fear or revulsion. Then the guard began timidly to ask questions about her name, origin, reason for being in prison, listening to Helen's story at first with interest, then gradually with growing horror and at the end she began to cry. Helen describes the situation as absurd, bordering on a farce, because she ended up feeling compassion for this little desperate SS woman. And later on, she writes that she often thought of her after her own liberation, wishing that this guard had managed to rid herself of her SS uniform before the Russians arrived at the camps.

There are undoubtedly similarities in the experiences of these three women, elements of female strength which make them resistant and resilient. In Milena Jesenská, we find passion and compassion which manifest in a broken heart upon seeing those forced to depart on the transports. Milena was one of those few persons who could never become indifferent or insensible and her tenderness reminds us of Etty Hillesum. In Helen Lewis, we find the passion for dancing and attention to others' concerns and curiosity about their unexpected and hidden qualities, a

52 E.T., 259 [revised]. *Het Werk*, 269; Friday morning, 27 February 1942: En dát was het historische in deze ochtend: niet, dat ik door een ongelukkige Gestapo-jongen werd aangeschreeuwd. Ik had misschien verontwaardigd of bang moeten zijn, maar het belangrijke van die ochtend lijkt me daarin te liggen, dat ik een oprecht medelijden met die jongen had, dat ik hem het liefst gevraagd had: heb je zo een ongelukkige jeugd gehad of heeft je meisje je bedrogen? Hij zag er gekweld en opgejaagd – overigens ook heel onaangenaam en slap – uit. Ik had het liefst direct met een psychologische behandeling begonnen. Me er zeer sterk van bewust zijnde, dat deze jongens beklagenswaardig zijn, zolang ze geen kwaad kunnen, maar levensgevaarlijk en uitgeroeid moerende worden, als ze op de mensheid loskomen. Maar misdadig is alleen het systeem, dat deze kerels gebruikt.

sort of compassion for even the torturers. An explicit pedagogical objective also emerges. After she survived, she became keenly interested in what constitutes the evil which she believed was potentially in all of us. This potential urgently requires us to know ourselves in order to avoid becoming monsters.

Which characteristics and aspects of family background contributed to their being women open to new experiences, to diversity and to being so keen on solidarity? The three women share characteristics of a cosmopolitan education and an openness towards the world, an interest in meaningful literature, translations and artistic language. The characteristic personal closeness women show in extreme situations, is illustrated, in the case of Ety Hillesum, through her access to spiritual dimensions and the central role of her relationship with God. This arises for her through an internal dialogue, through which she forms herself in such a way that she can open herself towards others and to God. Through nurturing the ability to go into herself and to leave herself she develops the capacity to always be present.

In all three, we find the desire to understand, to bear witness, to present a sober and detailed reflection which is also warm, which is consistently surprised by others but which also finds itself in solidarity with others.

Their lives are so valuable in the context of education because they demonstrate the direct link that exists between cultivating interests, relationships, passions, internal dimensions and acts of solidarity. They show a practical way to remain *seekers of solidarity*, for solutions of closeness and hope – even when hope appears humanly unfounded, even when all seems lost.

Surely, the representation of the Ety Hillesum's dialogue with God shows an ultimate possibility of opening towards a reality which is at once totally her own and absolutely of the other, which invites us to find ways to reflect on a transcendental dimension, either at the level of practiced faith, or on that of the existential search for meaning. It invites us to examine the means by which a kind of luminosity is made possible and perceptible in those who engage in being lastly imperfect.

Helen Lewis conveys a fundamental element of hope and therefore shows us that an absolutely devastating experience need not destroy the capacity to listen, to care and to feel passion, traits which all three women demonstrated before and during their imprisonment. I always ask myself what would have become of Ety Hillesum if she had not died at 29. In a certain way, the book written by Helen Lewis, which is perhaps less abundant, less literary, less philosophical – one could almost say more banal – confirms

for us that even having passed through hell on earth one can remain alive and not be burdened by destructive resentment.

Conclusion

For the reflective professional, writing is a necessary tool for refining the development of "a thinking heart" – something Etty Hillesum was able to accomplish even in the camp where she spent her last years, and without becoming hard and while still retaining her critical lucidity.

The writings of women like Etty Hillesum, Milena Jesenská and Helen Lewis are a valuable resource for social work professionals, in helping them address relationships in demanding circumstances. In particular, they show how important it is to nurture an internal vitality which manifests simply as a passion for being alive, for pursuing cultural and artistic interests and for experiencing emotional relationships. In doing so professionals learn to recognize the delicate balance between closeness and distance, between involvement and autonomy, discipline and spontaneity. These are all important tools for coping with professional challenges as well as personal relationships.

Assuming an objective distance in writing is one important possibility of self-monitoring. This allows for the discovery of a transcendent dimension in oneself and in the relationship with others. The dimension of tenderness kindles passion and compassion and diminishes the desire to possess and to control others. The dynamic complementarity of passion, compassion and tenderness helps to avoid becoming hard and promotes becoming hardy instead, in the language of Etty Hillesum. In addition, with regard to social professions this kind of inner dynamic of involvement helps to prevent burn-out, because it requires the whole person to be involved in the dynamic process and to thereby discover one's distinctness and one's need for continuous growth and learning. Taking care of the world can only be realized through small steps, through patient and daily growth, and not through dramatic gestures which exceed human possibilities. As we become aware of our provisional existence in a shared space, we also marvel at our physical environment and learn to respect it in communion with others. The possibility of being called upon to show the courage necessary to sacrifice oneself for others can arise in everybody's life. Reckoning with this possibility changes the outlook on daily life. We are all called upon to take care of the world to the extent that we can manage, but we have a responsibility to confront ourselves with those dilemmas in order to achieve an increasingly deeper understanding of ever better understanding of human relationships.

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Index of Names and Subjects

- Abolaffia, Abraham 347
abortion, E.H.'s choice for 413
acceptance, space of 490
Adelaar family 267
Adorno, Theodor 375
Advocaat in bezettingstijd (Being a Lawyer during Occupation, Stokvis) 163-164
'aesthetic mirrors' of E.H. and Rilke 185, 191, 201, 224
agency 106-107, 113
 of E.H. during World War II 13, 103, 107-108, 114-141
 of Shoah victims 107, 108, 113, 139
Aguar, Isabel 425
AIG (Armed Islamic Group, Algeria), assassination of monks by 362
Algeria
 Chergé's life in 362
 Cixous' youth in 441-442
Allegro Magalhães, Isabel 423
Als ik Morgen niet op Transport ga... Kamp Westerbork in beleving en herinnering (If I am not Deported Tomorrow... Camp Westerbork in Diaries and Memoires, Moraal) 148-151
altruistic love, ethical dilemma with self-love 337-344
Aluffi Pentini, Anna 20-21, 500
Ama Adhe Tapontsang 412
ambiguousness, of forgiving 461
America *see* United States
Amersfoort camp 175
Amida Buddha 406n52
Amis, Kingsley 372
Amis, Martin 371-372
Amsterdam
 E.H. living in 25
 German Jews in 317-318
anamnesis 438
Andō Fumio 404-406, 407
Andreas, Lou 194
Andries Blitz (publisher) 36-37
Andriessen, Willem 29, 160n11, 161n13, 179
Angst 464n7
Anne Frank war nicht allein (Jakob & Van der Voort eds) 317
annotations to E.H.'s diaries 43-44
anointing oil, in Bible 410n72
anti-Jewish measures in World War II, and E.H.'s Jewish identity 316-317
anti-Semitism
 Russian/of Dostoevsky, E.H.'s silence on 322
 Zionism as answer to 328
Antigone, E.H. as a 20th century version of 475
Der Antisemitismus als Gruppenerscheinung: Versuch einer Soziologie des Judenhasses (Fritz Bernstein) 328
apologizing 472-473
Arendt, Hannah 340-341, 426-427
Arvers, Felix 200n73
aryanisation, of Dutch Jews 164
Asscher, A. 327, 334n4
assertiveness, Zionist appreciation of 329
assimilation of E.H./Hillesum family 316
Assírio & Alvim (publisher) 420
Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge (Rilke) 222
Augustine, E.H. on 57, 402n32
Auschwitz concentration camp
 postmodern views of 437
 as symbol of Shoah 155-156, 424, 435
 Zimetbaum's stay at 476
austerity, of Jankélévitch 463, 465
authorship ambitions of E.H. 27, 51-52, 75, 106, 137
 E.H.'s doubts about 220, 488
 Rilke's influence on 183, 185-187, 192-193, 195, 199-200, 217, 218, 220-221
autobiographical writing, therapeutic nature of 481-482, 484
autonomy
 of E.H. 250, 489
 of Jesenská 495
Bach (Eiras) 428-429
Bakhtin, Michail M. 358
balancing
 of distance and closeness 480, 499
 of inner and outer world/good and evil 241
Barneveld camp/group 29, 99, 174-175
 closure of 175-176
 efforts to get Mischa Hillesum placed in 134, 160n11
 Mischa Hillesum's decline of place in 167-170, 175, 179
 Riva and Louis Hillesum seeking placement in 171-172, 175
Beauvoir, Simone de 373-374, 376
Beck, Ulrich, on E.H. 20, 445-446
 criticism on 446-457
Bénard da Costa, João 424-425
Bendien, Hans 114
Benima, Tamarah 326n48
Benjamin, Walter 426
Berenbaum, Michael 388
Bergen, Lotte 13, 141
Berger, Ronald J. 106-107
Bergman, Susan 81n1
Bériault, Yves 18, 369

- Bernhard, Ernst 276
 Bernstein, Fritz 328
 Bernstein, Jacob 24
 Bert Bakker (publisher) 36
 Bettelheim, Bruno 107
 Betz, Maurice 200, 207, 215
 Bible
 anointing oil in 410n72
 E.H.'s reading of 307
 ethics of 337-341
 love in 345
 biography of E.H. 12, 23-29
 siblings 24-25
 in Westerbork transit camp 28-29
 'bird and thief' motif (Cixous) 441
 'blaming the victim', Shoah victims 107
 Blaskowitz, Johann 34
 Blumenthal, Ilse 210n106, 211
 Boas, Henriëtte, criticism on E.H. by 41, 83, 88,
 94, 104-105, 321n23, 322n25, 326, 328
 body, Buddhist views of 407
 Bonger, Willem Adriaan 490
 Bongers, Gera 27, 276-277, 305n10
 Bongers family 304-305n10
 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 245-246, 450
Book of Hours see *Das Stundenbuch*
 books, in E.H.'s possession 321, 381-382
 Bool, Jan 436
 Boom, Bart van der 105-106, 107, 110
 Braidotti, Rosi 434
 Brandt, Ria van den 17, 312
 Brenner, Rachel Feldhay 106, 127, 386-387, 415
Briefe an eine Liebende (Letters to a Lover,
 Rathenau) 246, 247n4
 E.H.'s fascination with 248, 254-255
Briefe an einen jungen Dichter (Rilke) 210, 213,
 214n117
Briefe über das Johannes-Evangelium (Rit-
 telmeyer) 305-307
 Bro, Max 494
 Bronte, Charlotte 373
 Buber, Martin, influence on E.H. 325n39
 Buddhism
 forgiveness in 412
 reception of E.H.'s work in 19, 395, 403-408,
 417
 Busse-Spier, Ruth 275n6
 Butler, Judith 372n2
 'bystanders' of Shoah 110, 151, 154

 Cambi, Franco 482
 care, ethic of 376
 Carreira, Joaquim 427n24
Cartas (Letters, Hillesum) 420, 422-423,
 427-428, 429-430
 'catastrophe Jews' 415
 Catholic University of Lisbon 423
 chaos/inner conflicts of E.H. 310, 433
 Spier's advice in dealing with 305-309
 charity, Jung on 234
 Chergé, Christian de 362-363, 413
 similarities with E.H.'s thought 18, 361,
 366-369
 Chiba Shigeki 402, 403, 409, 411, 415, 417
 Christ
 feminine side of 414-415
 on forgiveness 413
 Spier's interest in 307
 Christianity
 E.H. taking inspiration from 415
 posthumous incorporation of E.H. into 46,
 82
 reception of E.H.'s work in 397, 402, 409-411,
 426
 see also Roman Catholicism
 Christoffel, Ulrich 319-320
 chronicle writing 145n2
 E.H.'s ambitions in 14, 49, 106, 123, 137-138,
 141, 143, 144-146, 322-324
 by Moraal 153
 Cixous, Hélène 431, 440-444
 Clement, Marja 12-13, 77
 closeness and distance
 balancing of 480, 499
 in E.H.'s life 486-487
 Coetsier, Meins G.S. 14-15, 225
 Cohen, David 327, 329, 330, 334n4, 448n12
 Cold War, Holocaust Studies in 388, 389, 392
 collaboration with lethal regimes 336, 467
 collective fate of the Jews
 E.H.'s acceptance and sharing of 17-18, 345,
 475
 see also *Massenschicksal*
 Commers, Ronald 20, 477
 communion, Chergé on 363
 communism
 E.H. on 382, 435
 Lyotard's dismissal of 436
communitas 344
 E.H.'s choices in World War II as 18, 333,
 345-346, 353-354, 355
 feminizing of 357-358
 and *zaddik* 353
 compassion 487, 499
 of E.H. 488, 490
 complete editions of E.H.'s work 11, 42-45, 285,
 421-422
 in Germany 447
 in United States 385, 387
 complexity, Lyotard on 437
 concentration camps 155-156
 survival of 113
 conciliation
 ethic of 472
 possibilities for 461-462, 469-470
Confessions (Augustine), E.H.'s references to 57
 1 Corinthians, E.H. and Jung inspired by 234

- Costa, Denise de 16, 20, 235, 240-241, 301, 328n53, 434, 444
- Couto, Patricia 19-20, 422, 430
- Couvert family 171
- creativity, moral, of E.H. 188n22
- crimes, beyond 'intellection' 463
- culture
 outsider role of E.H. in 441
 outsider role of women in 440-441
- Dam, Jan van 175, 176
- death
 E.H.'s attitude towards 100
 of Hillesum family members 29, 158-159
 of Spier 105
- Deen, Helga 155
- Demetrio, Duccio 481-482
- demographic study of Jews in the Netherlands 315, 316, 329
- Het Denkende Hart van de Barak* (The Thinking Heart of the Barracks, Etty Hillesum) 41
 translations of 397
- deportations of Jews 144, 154-155
 E.H.'s descriptions of 139-140, 147-148
 exemptions from/deferments of 169, 170, 171-173, 176-177
 Hillesum family 14, 29, 85-88, 94-95, 135-136, 141, 157-158, 159-168, 170-172, 177-180
 organization of 92-94, 105, 112, 144, 147-148, 162-163, 166-167, 170n45, 178-179
 sick people 112
- destiny of the Jewish people *see* collective fate of the Jews
- Deutsche Innerlichkeit* (Christoffel) 319-320
- Deventer
 Hillesum family living in 25
 Smelik Sr.'s arrival in 262-263, 269, 270
- dialogical dimensions in life 21, 479
- dialogism, intertextual, of E.H. 358
- dialogues with God
 of E.H. 325, 326, 353, 484, 498
 in Judaism 324
- dialogues, inner, of E.H. 53-55, 400, 498
- Diário* (Diary, Hillesum) 420, 421, 424, 425, 426, 429
- diary of Anne Frank, comparisons with E.H.'s diary 397, 400, 401
- diary notebooks of E.H. 9, 11
 annotations 43-44
 bilingual Dutch-English edition of 11
 complete editions of 11, 42-45, 285, 385, 387, 421-422, 447
 and Enlightenment values 18, 371, 375
 handed over by E.H. to Tuinzing and Smelik Sr. 98, 109
 as historical source 268
 publication history of 12, 29-30, 33-34, 35-39, 41-42
 as therapy 27, 136, 227-228, 482, 483
 see also reception of E.H.'s diaries; translations of E.H.'s diaries
- Dietrich, Marlene 208n99
- dignity
 Jankélévitch on 469
 Jewish 329-331
 and suffering, E.H. on 329
- discipline, E.H. submitting herself to 486
- distance and closeness
 balancing of 480, 499
 in E.H.'s life 486-487
- Domingues, Bento 423
- Domovitz, Amiram 337, 338
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor
 anti-Semitism of 322
 E.H. on 198-199
- dreams, Spier's analyses of 230
- Dresden, Sem 319, 321, 322, 329-331, 439, 440
- Drijver, Frieda 260n4
- Duarte, Ana Leonor 422
- Durant, Will 380
- Dutch identity of E.H. 46-47
- Dutch literature, translations of 420
- Eastern Europe, translations of E.H.'s work in 388
- Eckhardt, Meister 427
 influence on E.H. 319
- Edwards, Cliff 386
- egocentrism, E.H. accused of 82-83, 104-105
- Eichmann, Adolf 341
- Der Eigene Gott* (A God of One's Own, Beck), chapter on E.H. in 20, 445-458
- Eiras, Pedro 428-429
- Elternliste* (exemption from deportation) 169
- emancipation, of E.H. 415
- enemy
 E.H. on 236, 401
 Lewis on 497
- English language, translations of E.H.'s work in 11, 396, 432-433
- Enlightenment values
 and E.H.'s diaries 18, 371, 375
 knowledge 375
 postmodern disillusion with 436-437
- Enschede, Jewish Council in 340
- Ensel, Remco 110
- enumerations, E.H.'s use of 68-69
- Ergas, Yasmine 415
- Eshin* concept (Buddhism) 406
- Esther (biblical story), as symbolic for Jewish history/Shoah 335-336
- ethics
 biblical/Talmudic 337-343, 344
 of care 376
 of conciliation 472
 of forgiveness 465, 468-469
 global 473
 Jankélévitch on 470, 471, 472

- see also* moral order/morality
The Ethics and Religious Philosophy of Etty Hillesum 12
Etty: A Diary, 1941-43 396
Etty: De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943 (Etty: The Bequeathed Writings of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943) 421-422
Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943 285
Etty Hillesum: Letters from Westerbork 397
 Etty Hillesum Conference (Ghent) 12, 422
 Etty Hillesum Foundation 42
 Etty Hillesum Research Centre (Etty Hillesum Onderzoekscentrum, EHO) 47-48
 books published by 11-12
Etty Hillesum Studies (book series) 9, 11-12
 Evans, Mary 18, 377
 evil
 E.H. on 15, 236, 237-239
 Jung on 236, 241, 243
 Lewis on 498
 exile, Jewish experiences of 335
Experience (Amis) 371
 Ezekiel, prophecy of 486

 family
 of E.H. 23-25; *see also* Hillesum family
 E.H.'s strained relations with 481
 fate of the Jewish people *see Massenschicksal*
 fear/fearful persons, Rathenau on 253-254
 female identity, of E.H. 414-415
 female voice, Lyotard on 440
 feminine imagery, in Jewish mysticism 355-356, 358
 femininity, E.H. on 235, 356-358
 feminism
 perspectives on E.H.'s work from 419
 see also women's studies
 Flothuis, Marius 153
Forever Flowing (Grossman) 467-468
 forgiveness 412-413
 E.H. on 20, 414, 459, 460
 Jankélévitch on 459, 460-469, 472-473
 Lewis on 497
 Fraenkel, Dr. 189-190
 France, women's studies in 442
 Frank, Anne, E.H.'s diary compared to diary of 397, 400, 401
 Frank, Evelyne 46-47
 Frankl, Viktor E. 108, 113, 118, 120, 140, 406
Frau in Europa (Jung) 230, 234
 Frederiks, Karel Johannes 174-175, 176
 French language, translations of E.H.'s work in 424, 425, 442
 Freud, Sigmund 230n8, 377
 Jung's friendship with 228
 friendship circle of E.H. 317
 future, E.H.'s expectations for 111, 112

 Gaarlandt, Jan Geurt 30, 37, 38, 82
 rediscovery of documents related to E.H. by 286, 294, 303
 selection of E.H.'s diary texts by 396-397, 421
 Gans, Evelien 110
 Gemmeke, Albert Konrad 29, 86, 140n172, 150, 163
 E.H. on 140, 148
 Mischa Hillesum on 170
 gender/gendered views 371-372
 Genesis, E.H. on 237, 238, 243
 Gennep, F.O. van 145n2
 genocide
 responsibilities for prevention of 389
 see also Shoah
 genocide studies 391
 German language
 E.H.'s use of 70, 72-74, 285, 298
 translations of E.H.'s work in 447
 Germans
 E.H.'s attitude towards 114-115, 318
 Jewish refugees in Netherlands 151, 317-318
 'Geschiedschrijving als opdracht: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser en Loe de Jong over de jodenvervolgning' (Historiography as Task: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser and Loe de Jong on the Persecution of the Jews, dissertation, Kristel) 324
 Gestapo, E.H.'s description of her encounter with 116-117, 496-497
 Ghent University, Etty Hillesum Conference at 12, 422
 ghetto-mentality 330
 Giebner, Beate 43
 Glassner, Evaristos Edgar 62
 God
 Chergé's relationship with 366
 E.H.'s conception of 18, 20, 350, 351-352, 358-359, 377, 423, 427, 445-446, 449-451, 452, 453-457
 E.H.'s dialogues with 325, 326, 352-353, 484, 498
 E.H.'s relationship 39-40, 206, 207-209, 218-219, 232-233, 236-239, 242, 243, 364-365, 410, 449, 455
 evil side of 236, 238-239
 human helping of 18, 40, 239, 348, 361, 367, 410, 450, 452-453
 humans created in image of 236-238, 243
 Jewish dialogues with 326
 life belonging to 337
 mystical conceptions of 347-348, 350-352, 355-356, 358-359
 personal 445n1, 446, 449, 454, 457
 as powerless 449-451, 452-453
 Rilke's relationship with 218
 and Shoah (God after Auschwitz) 39-40, 237, 326, 451-452

- see also* religiosity; spirituality
A God of One's Own (Der Eigene Gott, Beck),
 chapter on E.H. in 20, 445-458
 God to God phrase, E.H.'s use of 347, 348
 Goldstein, Yvonne 44
 good life, E.H. on 373
 good/goodness
 E.H. and Jung on 227, 231, 236-237, 240, 241,
 242-243
 Jankélévitch on 470
 Kabbalistic conceptions of 351, 356
 see also evil
 Goodman, David G. 398
 Gorssel 267
 Graal movement 423
 Gramsci, Antonio 482
 Greenberg, Irving 358-359
 Grigoryevich, Ivan (fictional character)
 467-468
 Groot, Anouta de 385
 Grossman, Vasily 467-468, 470
 grotesque elements, E.H.'s use of 71-72
 Gubar, Susan 386
 Guerreiro, António 425
 guilty bystander myth of Dutch people during
 World War II 110
 Gullander, Miguel 428
 Gur-Klein, Thalia 17-18, 359
 Gusdorf, Georges 481, 484

 hands, analysis of *see* psychochirology
The Hands of Children (Kinderhände, Spier)
 228, 275, 282, 308
 'hardy but not hard' phrase of E.H. 20-21,
 482-483, 484, 486, 493, 499
 Harster, Wilhelm 173
 Hasidism, *zaddik* concept in 353, 354
 hatred, E.H.'s rejection of 114-116, 140, 234, 349,
 363, 435, 443, 459-460
 Heil-Verver, Frieda Mary (Fri) 307, 376
 Heldring, J.H. 40
 Heraclitus of Ephesus 368
 heroic dignity 330
 Herzberg, Abel 124-125, 150-151, 170n44, 176,
 324, 327
 Hetty E. (psychochirology patient of E.H.)
 280-281, 295
 Heydrich, Reinhard 156, 251-252
 hiding
 E.H.'s refusal to seek 13, 34-35, 81, 84-85, 100,
 105, 122-123, 328-329
 Smelik Sr.'s offer to E.H. 34, 83-84
 Hijmans, Hes 189n24, 282
 Hillesum, Jaap 24, 25, 29
 death of 158-159
 present at first meeting of E.H. and Smelik
 Sr. 262-263, 266-271
 Hillesum, Louis (Levie) 23-24, 112
 letters by 70, 160n11, 171, 179n69
 maggid title of 448-449
 sense of humour of 70, 118
 in Westerbork 134, 324-325
 Hillesum, Mischa 24-25
 Barneveld camp placement declined by
 167-170, 175, 179
 efforts to obtain dispensation from
 deportation for 28-29, 134-135, 165
 E.H. on 170, 296
 Mechanicus on 160-161, 165
 Spier's analysis of hands of 279
 in Westerbork 136
 Hillesum, Riva (Rebecca) 23, 24
 letters by 14, 29, 86, 163-164, 165-166, 170-171
 in Westerbork 134
 Hillesum, Samuel 23
 Hillesum family 23-25
 assimilation of 316
 deportation of 14, 29, 85-88, 94-95, 135-136,
 141, 157-158, 159-168, 170-172, 177-180
 in Deventer 25
 E.H. on 481
 Mechanicus on 157-158, 165
 in Middelburg 23
 in Westerbork 28, 132-135
 Hillesum research 9, 11
 diversity of 21
 future topics for 391-392
 in Netherlands 12, 42-45
 in Portugal 419
 Het Verstoorde Leven used as source for 387,
 396-397, 446-447
 worldwide 45-49
 Hillesum-Loeza, Esther 23
 Hilversum, hiding place offer for E.H. in 34,
 83-84
hineinhorchen, of E.H./E.H. on 72, 74, 120, 346
hineinhören, E.H. on 72, 73
 historical consciousness
 of E.H. 322-323
 Jewish obsession with 322, 324
 historical research
 E.H.'s diaries and letters as source for 268
 on Jewish Council 124-125
 on wartime knowledge of Shoah 105-106,
 107, 110
A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps
 (Wachsmann) 154-155
 holiness aura of E.H. *see* sainthood of E.H.
 Holm, Adri 276, 280
 Holocaust *see* Shoah
 Holocaust literature 324, 372
 E.H.'s work as part of 385-386
 Holocaust Studies
 clash of Eastern and Western approaches in
 384, 388-391, 392
 and E.H.'s diaries 387
 hope
 of E.H. 490

- female 21
 invincibility of 366, 367, 368, 369
 of Lewis 498
 theology of 18, 361, 362-363
- Horkheimer, Max 375
- Hosaka Masayasu 401
- Houwaart, Dick 325
- Hulst, J.W. van 110-111
- human body, Buddhist views of 407
- human rights, theology on 337
- humanism
 of E.H. 349
 Russian views of 383
- humanity, love for 476
 Buddhist concept of saving of 406n52
 of Chergé 366, 368
 of E.H. 235, 252, 345-346, 365, 368, 474-475, 476
 Jankélévitch on 473-474
 Rathenau on 253
- humans
 helping God 18, 40, 239, 348, 361, 367, 410, 450, 452-453
 as images of God 236-238, 243
 indwelling of God in 350-351
- humour
 as coping mechanism 140
 E.H.'s sense of 63, 116-118
 Louis Hillesum's sense of 70, 118
see also irony
- Hungary, Jewish Council in 341
- identities of E.H.
 Dutch 46-47
 female 414-415
 Jewish 11-12, 17, 315-317, 320-329, 331, 358, 387, 415, 426, 447-449
 Russian 384
- If this is a Man* (Primo Levi) 371
- illnesses
 of E.H. 128-129
 of E.H.'s parents 134
- impersonal constructions, E.H.'s use of 67-68
- L'Imprescriptible* (Jankélévitch) 461
- In Dépôt* (Mechanicus) 158
- In Duizend Zoete Armen* (In a Thousand Sweet Arms, Ety Hillesum) 41-42
- Inagaki Junzō 405
- indwelling of God/divine presence 350-351, 355-356
- The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (Bettelheim) 107
- inner conflicts/chaos of E.H. 310, 433
 Spier's advice on dealing with 305-309
- inner development of E.H. 52
 Beck's neglect of 455-457
 as creative process 188n22
 E.H.'s descriptions of 64-67
 Rilke's influence on 217-218
- Spier's influence on 305-309
- inner dialogues, of E.H. 53-55, 400, 498
- inner world
 E.H.'s focus on 231, 240-241, 298, 318, 320, 328n53, 346-347, 386, 399-400, 402-403, 408, 424, 436, 439-440
 Jung on 241
 Lyotard's focus on 436
see also self-examination; *Weltinnenraum*
- inner-felt agency of E.H. 107, 114-123
- Innere Emigration* 318-319, 328n53
 and E.H.'s attitude to life 318
 of German Jews in Netherlands 318
- Innerlichkeit* concept 319
- 'intellection', and forgiveness 462-463
- internalization processes 120
- An Interrupted Life* *see* *Het Verstoorde Leven*
- intertextual dialogism of E.H. 358
- irony, E.H.'s use of 53, 69-70
- Islam, Chergé's views of 362
- Israel
 Dutch Jewish solidarity with 329
 reception of E.H.'s work in 426
- Italian language, translations of E.H.'s work in 416n101, 479
- Iwabuchi Tatsuji 399-400, 402-403
- Jackson, Timothy 385
- Jacob (biblical figure), wrestling with God 410
- Jane Eyre* (Bronte) 373
- Jankélévitch, Vladimir
 and E.H.'s thought 20, 459, 474-476
 on forgiveness 459, 460-469, 472-473
 on love for humanity 473-474
 on morality 464, 466, 469-472, 476
- Jansma-Engers, Elisabeth (Phyllis Jaarsma) 276
- Japan
 E.H.'s references to/love for 19, 395, 417
 reception of E.H.'s work in 19, 395-396, 398-417
- Japanese language, translations of E.H.'s work in 396, 397
- Jesenská, Milena 21, 479, 493, 494-495, 497, 499
- Jewish Council 317n4, 329, 330, 334
 E.H.'s administrative work for 28, 117, 125-127, 143
 E.H.'s criticism of 125, 126, 327, 335
 E.H.'s social work in Westerbork for 17, 28, 100, 105, 129-132, 143, 345, 354
 ethical dilemmas faced by 336, 339-343, 343-344, 355
 exemption from deportation of family members of employees of 169
 historical research on 124-125, 327
- Jewish identity/Jewishness 320
 of E.H. 11-12, 17, 315-317, 320-329, 331, 358, 387, 415, 426, 447-449
 and Nazi prosecution 447
- Jewish mysticism 346, 347-348

- of E.H. 350, 351-352, 354-355, 358, 359
feminine imagery in 355-356, 358
- Jews
'catastrophe' 415
collective fate of
E.H.'s acceptance and sharing of 17-18, 345, 475; *see also* *Massenschicksal*
Dutch 164, 315-316, 329
exilic experience of 335
German, in Netherlands 151, 317-318
passive victim image of 107, 330
see also deportations of Jews
- Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype* (Goodman) 398
- Jōdo Shin sect (Japanese Buddhism) 403n34, 406
- Jones, E. Stanley 380
- Jong, Loe de 124, 167, 178n65
on Jewish Council 327
- Jonge, Dicky de 276-277
- Joodse Raad* *see* Jewish Council
- Judaism
ethics of 337-343, 344
unity of 90-91
see also Jewish mysticism
- Judas figures 467
- Jung, Carl Gustav 228-229
different from E.H. 241-242
E.H.'s quotations of 232, 233
influence on E.H. 15, 227, 229-230, 231-237, 240-241, 242-243
influence on Spier 228, 230-231
on religion 231-232
- The Jung Journal* 386
- Ka-Tsetnik 135633 (Yehiel Feiner, later Yehiel De-Nur) 36
- Kabbalistic mysticism 347, 348, 355-356
E.H.'s affinity with 349, 352
- Kafka, Franz 494
- Kaneko Kennosuke 409-411, 413-414, 415, 416, 417
- Kaneko Taiei 405-406
- Karrenbrock, Lore 15, 245, 246-247
correspondence with Rathenau 15-16, 245, 247-248, 249-252
- Kastner, Rudolf 341
- Käthe (German housekeeper) 115
- Kaze itsumo fuku hibi* (The days that the wind always blows, Keneko Kennosuke) 409
- Kennan, George F. 383n10
- Kierkegaard, Søren 464n7
- Kiggen, Jenny 261
- Kiyozawa Manshi 407-408
- Klatt, Fritz 188
- Klopfer, Katya 276
- knowledge
E.H. on 374-375
and modernity 377
- of Shoah during the war 13, 81, 83, 96-100, 108-112, 180, 252, 325-326, 343, 424
- Kohlhaas, Elisabeth 173, 174, 178
- Kolbe, Maximilian 402, 411
- Koning, David 30, 36, 138
- Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (The Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War, De Jong) 124
- Korczak, Janusz 101
- Kormann, M. Osias 28, 422
- Kosman, Admiel 344n19, 426
- Krabbendam, Hans 19, 393
- Krell, Mania 149
- Krijn, Jacques (*Hoel*) 44
- Kristel, Connie 324
- Kroniek der Jodenvervolgving 1940-1945* (Chronicle of the Persecution of the Jews 1940-1945, Herzberg) 124-125, 324
- Kropveld, Alfred 279
- Kumai Akiko 410n72
- Kurube Teruo 404
- Lagrou, Els 43, 316
- Lang, Wally de 43
- language, Jewish obsession with 320-321
- language use of E.H. 12-13, 51, 52-53
E.H.'s reflections on 74-75
figurative language 55-67
see also writing style of E.H.
- Laras, Giuseppe 495
- Last, Iet 261, 262, 266
- Last, Jef 261-262
- Lécina, Maria 265
- leftist political engagement
of E.H. 25-26, 382, 435
of Lyotard 436
- Leguyt, J. 190
- letters
by Andriessen on behalf of Mischa Hillesum 160n11, 179
by Hillesum, Louis 70, 160n11, 171-172, 179n69
by Hillesum, Riva 14, 29, 86, 163-164, 165-166, 170-171
by Kormann 422
by Mengelberg on behalf of Mischa Hillesum 160-161, 165
by Paul (Apostle) 410
between Rathenau and Karrenbrock 15-16, 245, 247-248, 249-252
to Rauter by/on behalf of Hillesum family 14, 29, 86, 160-161, 165-166
by Rilke 192, 210, 221, 222
by Snatager 292n27
by Spier 17, 27, 291-292, 303-312, 422
by Tideman 292
by Tuinzing 95

- by Vleeschhouwer 87, 88, 159, 162, 167-168, 421
- letters by E.H. 177, 232, 438-439
- to Christine van Nooten 132-133, 171
 - to Milli Ortmann 168-170
 - to Smelik Sr. 474-475
 - to Spier 16-17, 281n29, 285-301, 304
 - translations of 422-423
 - see also Westerbork letters of E.H.
- Levi, Hertha 27
- Levi, Primo 152, 371
- Levie, Liesl 276
- Lewis, Helen 21, 479, 493, 496-499
- Liebert, Elizabeth 414n92
- Liebes-Lied* (poem, Rilke) 184
- life
- belonging to God 337
 - Cherge's attitude towards 368
 - dialogical dimensions of 21, 479
 - E.H.'s attitude towards 16, 21, 253, 254, 318, 363-364, 365, 372-373, 395, 432-433, 438, 442-443
 - Frankl's attitude towards 406n50
 - Jesenská's attitude towards 21, 494-495
 - postmodern attitudes towards 437-438
 - precariousness of 372
 - simplicity of 245, 250, 255, 432
 - suffering inherent to 251, 252
- Lifnim miShurat haDin* (to go beyond the letter of the law, Talmud Bavli) 344
- limits, trespassing by women of 441
- Lippman and Rosenthal Bank 119n65
- Lisbon 420
- Catholic University of 423
- Lispector, Clarice 428
- literary analysis methods 444
- literature
- Dutch, translations in Portuguese 420
 - Holocaust 324, 372
 - Jewish, lack of Japanese interest in 398
 - Portuguese 428-429
 - Russian 381, 462n4, 465-467
- 'little one', E.H. description of herself as 53
- Lodders, Gideon 43
- Loosen, Loed 238
- losses, E.H.'s abilities to give positive turns to 442-443
- love
- altruistic 337-344
 - in Bible 345
 - and forgiveness 473
 - forms of 344-345
 - imperative to 468
 - Jesenská on 494
 - mystical 347
 - of self 337-344, 462
 - see also humanity, love for
 - love of E.H. 489-490
 - for humanity 235, 252, 345-346, 365, 368, 474-475, 476
 - Jung's influence on 233-236
 - and mysticism 346
 - Rathenau's influence on 254-255
 - Rilke's influence on 188, 194
- loving-kindness
- of E.H. 474
 - and forgiveness 465, 468
- Lucas Coelho, Alexandra 425-426
- Lyotard, François 20, 431
- commonalities with E.H. 435, 436
 - postmodernism of 437-438, 440
- Marcus, Kate 276
- Maria Lécina: Een lied in honderd verzen met een zangwijs* (Maria Lécina: A Song in a Hundred Verses with a Tune, Werumeus Buning), E.H. and Jaap Hillesum's dedication in 259, 264-268
- marriage, Jesenská on 494-495
- martyrdom of E.H. 13, 46, 81-82, 101, 104, 109, 428
- Martyrs* (Bergmann ed.) 46
- Marujo, António 427n24
- Maslova, Katyusha (fictional character) 465, 466-467
- Massenschicksal* (collective fate of the Jewish people)
- E.H.'s acceptance/sharing of 13, 37, 81-82, 88, 89-96, 99-100, 101, 103, 122-123, 140-141, 328, 331
 - possibilities for E.H. to escape 83-84
- Matthew, Gospel of 410
- Mechanicus, Philip 131, 159-160n9, 170n46
- on Barneveld camp/group 174, 175, 176
 - on deportation of Jews 178-179
 - diary on Westerbork camp by 14, 86, 157-158, 159-162, 163, 166-167
- Meeuwenoord, Marieke 14, 143, 153-154
- Meijer, Maaiké 434, 444
- Meijman, Duke 43
- memories, reliability of 268
- Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung) 234, 236
- Mengelberg, Willem 29, 160-161, 165, 168
- The Merry Brigade (De Vrolijke Brigade, children's circus) 262, 266, 268, 270
- meta-rabbis 320-321
- metaphors used by E.H. 56, 59-62
- Dutch character of 46-47
- Methode der Handanalyse nach Julius Spier* (Spier) 282
- metonymy, E.H.'s use of 56-57
- Middelburg
- Etty Hillesum Research Centre in 47
 - Hillesum family living in 23
- Minco, Marga 38-39
- modern/modernity
- and E.H.'s work 374-377

- and postmodernism 437, 438
 Molder, Filomena 426-427
 Molen, Janny van der 15, 243
 Mommsen, Annamarië 276
 monosyndeton, E.H.'s use of 69
 Montagnu family 24
 Moraal, Eva 14, 143, 147, 148-153
 moral creativity, of E.H. 188n22
 moral dilemmas imposed by Shoah 336-337, 342
 and E.H.'s choice to work for the Jewish Council 343-344
 moral order/morality
 E.H.'s search for source of 376
 E.H.'s work as example of 460
 Jankélévitch on 464, 466, 469-472, 476
 suspension of pardon for reasons of 459, 460
 in Westerbork camp 151-153
see also ethics
 'More selfishness than holiness' (article, Boas) 41
 Moser, Benjamin 428n30
 motherhood/maternity, E.H. on 357-358
 mourning, by E.H. 443
 Mucznik, Esther 423
 Münsterberger, Werner 205
 mysticism, of E.H. 346-353, 354-355, 358, 359, 411, 425, 427, 428
 Nagel, Alexandra 16-17, 284, 301, 312
 nature, E.H.'s descriptions of/use of images
 from 60, 62-64, 118-120, 140, 319
 Nekhlyudov, Dmitri Ivanovich (Prince, fictional character) 465, 466-467
 Netherlands
 German Jewish refugees in 151, 317-318
 Jews in 164, 315-316, 329
 reception of E.H.'s diaries in 40-42, 327-328
 in World War II 45, 110, 113
 Zionism in 327, 329
 Neumann, Julia 276
 New Age Movement, personal God in 454
 New Testament, Spier's love for 307
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 113
 Noble, Philippe 442
 Nocita, Maria Gabriella 446, 447n8, 455, 456
 Nooten, Christine van
 E.H.'s letters to 132-133, 171
 Louis Hillesum's letters to 171-172, 179n69
 Mischa Hillesum's postcard to 179
 normative communities 472, 473
 Nötzel, Karl 383
NRC-Handelsblad (newspaper) 40-41
O paraíso segundo Lars D. (Tardo) 429
 Oikawa Yukiko 403n33
 Okoso Yoshiko 396, 397-398, 403n33
 Oliveira Martins, Guilherme de 427-428
Ondergang: De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom, 1940-1945 (Decline and Fall: The Persecution and Destruction of Dutch Jewry, Presser) 124
 Oord, Gerrit van 14, 86n12, 180, 396-397, 423n10
 Ortmann, Milli 29
 letters by E.H. to 168-170
 Ōtani University (Kyōto) 417
 and E.H.'s work 403-408
 outer agency of E.H. 107-108, 123-140, 141
 outsider role
 of E.H. 441
 of women 440-441
 Oxford Group, E.H.'s dismissal of 380
Le Paradoxe de la morale (Jankélévitch) 471
 paratexts, in Portuguese translation of E.H.'s work 421
 pardon 412-413
 E.H. on 20, 414, 459, 460
 Jankélévitch on 459, 460-469, 472-473
Le Pardon (Jankélévitch) 461
 parental home of E.H., descriptions of 56
 Paris, E.H. on trip to 431-432
 Pascal, Blaise 409-410
 passion 487, 499
 of E.H. 488-489, 492
 of Jesenská 495
 patience, E.H. on 209-210, 212-214, 216
 Patterson, David 385
 Paul (Apostle), and E.H.'s work 234, 410
 pedagogy, perspectives on E.H.'s work from 20-21, 480-481, 482
 personification, E.H.'s use of 57-58, 59, 61
 Pessoa, Fernando 426
La Peste (Camus) 145n2
 philosophical perspectives on E.H.'s work 20, 425-427, 431, 444
 photos of E.H., cigarette brushed away from 433
 physical existence, Buddhist notions of freeing oneself from 407
 Piechowski, Michael 188n22
 Pita, Nélío 423, 424
 Poelstra, Wiep 279
 poetry
 E.H. on 72
 by Rilke 184-185, 193, 214, 219, 221-222, 224-225
 writing of 185
 Poland, as the collective name for an unknown future 111
 politics, leftist
 of E.H. 25-26, 382, 435
 of Lyotard 436
 polysyndeton, E.H.'s use of 68-69
 Pomerans, Arnold J. 396
 Portugal

- reception of E.H.'s work in 19-20, 419, 423-430
 World War II in 420
- Portuguese language
 Dutch literature translated in 420
 translations of E.H.'s work in 19-20, 419, 420-423, 425, 427-428, 429-430
- possessiveness 487
 E.H.'s rejection of 488
- postcard
 by E.H. thrown out of train 87, 180, 453
 by Mischa Hillesum to Christine van Nooten 179
- postmodernism 436-438, 440
 perspectives on E.H.'s work from 20, 431, 434-435, 438-440, 444
- prayer
 Christian 362
 by E.H. 410-411, 414
 of Jewish woman found in concentration camp 369
 Muslim 362
- precarious concept 372
- Presser, Jacques 124, 152, 160n11, 167, 170n44, 175-176, 177, 327
- The Prime of Life* (de Beauvoir) 374
- Le Procès de Shamgorod tel qu'il se déroula le 25 février 1649* (play, Wiesel) 451-452
- proletariat, Jewish 317
 E.H.'s solidarity with 82, 105
- Protestant values 373
- Psalms 344
- psychochirology
 E.H.'s study of 16, 273-274, 277-284, 290-291, 295
 Spier's practising of 16, 26, 228, 274-277, 281
 therapy of E.H. 27
- psychology
 E.H.'s interest in 229, 291
 perspectives on E.H.'s work from 386, 387, 391-392
- publication history of E.H.'s diaries 12, 29-30, 33-34, 35-39, 41-42
- Público* (newspaper) 424
- Puttkammer, Erich August Paul 171n47
- Puttkammer list 171
- quotations of E.H., Chergé's use of 367
- quotations used by E.H. 61, 227
 Jung 232, 233
 Rathenau 246, 248-252, 254
 Rilke 214, 219, 221-223, 230, 282, 486
 Spier 230-231
 Suárez 250-251
- Rachel (biblical figure) 357-358
- Rathenau, Emil 246
- Rathenau, Walther 245, 246
- correspondence with Karrenbrock 15-16, 245, 247-248, 249-252
 influence on E.H. 253-255
 murder of 245-246
 quotations by E.H. of 246, 248-252, 254
- rationality, Enlightenment focus on 375
- Rauter, Hanns Albin (*Generalkommissar*)
 on Barneveld camp/group 175
 commander of Vught concentration camp 154, 155
 letters by/on behalf of Hillesum family to 14, 29, 86, 160-161, 165-166
- Raven-Gomes, Maria Leonor 421-422
- reading by E.H. 204, 217, 227, 230, 242, 321
 of Bible 307
 of Russian literature 381
- reception of E.H.'s work 17, 38-39, 46, 315, 426, 432, 445
 in Buddhism 19, 395, 403-408, 417
 in Christianity/Roman Catholicism 19, 385, 395, 397, 402, 409-416, 419, 423, 426, 429
 in Israel 426
 in Japan 19, 395-396, 398-417
 in Netherlands 40-42, 327-328
 in Portugal 19-20, 419, 423-430
 in United States 379, 385-388, 391, 415
- redemption 467
- reflection, needed for conciliation 470
- reflexivity, importance of 480
- Regenhardt, Jan Willem 43, 260n5
- regret 464, 466-467
- relationships
 distance and closeness in 487
 of E.H. 492
- religion, Jung on 231-232
- religiosity
 of Chergé 367
 of E.H. 231-232, 364, 366-367, 385, 410-411, 455
 and modernity 376-377
see also God; spirituality
- repentance 464
- Requiem por Auschwitz* (Aguiar) 425
- rescue, obligations of 341-342
- research on E.H. *see* Hillesum research
- resilience 481, 499
 of E.H. 481, 484-485
 of Lewis 496
 of women 479, 493, 497, 498
- resistance 328
 of E.H. through inner focus 45, 328n53, 387, 426-427, 428, 436, 439-440
 sacrifice as 474-475
 writing as form of 439
- Resurrection* (Tolstoy) 465-467
- Reve, Karel van het 41
- Ribeiro Ferreira, Maria Luísa 427
- Ricoeur, Paul 474
- righteousness 354

- Rilke in Frankreich* (Betz) 215
 Rilke, Rainer Maria 185-186n10
 E.H. on 187-188, 189-190, 195, 196-198, 200, 210-211, 381
 E.H.'s use of quotations from 214, 219, 221-223, 230, 282, 486
 influence on E.H. 14-15, 183, 185-187, 188, 191-224, 240-241, 265, 427
 poetry of 184-185, 193, 214, 219, 221-222, 224-225
 Rittelmeyer, Friedrich 305-307
 Rocco, Hedl (Hedwig) 26
 Roman Catholicism
 forgiveness in 412n83, 413
 posthumous incorporation of E.H. into 82
 reception of E.H.'s work in 19, 385, 395, 409-416, 419, 423, 425, 429
 Roo, J.P. de 428
 Rood, Coen 151
 Roth, John K. 386
 Russia
 anti-Semitism in, E.H.'s silence on 322
 E.H.'s fascination with 19, 379, 381-384, 392
 Holocaust Studies in 384, 388-391, 392
 Russian language
 E.H.'s study of 26
 translations of E.H.'s work in 388
 Russian literature
 E.H.'s love for 381, 462n4
 Jankélévitch influenced by 462n4, 465-467
Die Russische Leistung (Nötzel) 383
 sacred solitude 491
 sacrifice
 E.H.'s conduct interpreted as 13
 as resistance, E.H. on 474-475
St. Louis (ship) 144
 'The Saint of the Museumplein' (article, Heldring) 40
 Saint Perpetua 428
 sainthood, attributed to E.H. 13, 40, 46, 101, 104, 411, 417, 433
 Sajet, Ben 44n20
 Sajet, Daan 44, 194n47
 Santen, Aimé van 279-280
 Santen, Joseph (Joop) van 278
 Sasaki Gesshō 408n61
 Schiwy, Günther 206-207n95
 Schlesinger, Kurt 162n19
 Schmidt, Franz 175
 Schmook, Reinhard 247n4
 Schnell, Ralf 319
 'school of loss' (Cixous), E.H.'s attendance of 442-443
 Schreber, Dr. (patient of Freud) 377
 Schrijvers, Piet 11-12, 17, 85n11, 331, 448
 self-criticism of E.H. 52, 54-55, 74-75, 220, 488
 self-examination
 E.H.'s focus on 386, 408, 482, 484
 importance in Buddhism of 407-408
 see also inner world
 self-love
 ethical dilemma with altruistic love 337-344
 Jankélévitch on 462
 self-preservation imperative 338
 self-realization, Spier's views on 307
 separation
 E.H.'s life characterised as 333, 334-335
 to save oneself 342-343
 sexuality of E.H. 71
Shekhina 355-356, 358
 Shibusa Tatsuhiro 403n33
Ship Ahoy! Burk's wilde jaren (Ship Ahoy! Burk's Wild Years, Smelik Sr.) 264-265
 Shoah 156
 agency of victims of 107, 108, 113, 139
 Auschwitz as symbol of 155-156, 424, 435
 'bystanders' of 110, 151, 154
 E.H.'s attitude towards 104, 114-118, 120-122, 348-349
 E.H.'s knowledge of 13, 81, 83, 96-100, 108-112, 180, 252, 325-326, 343, 424
 Esther biblical story as symbolic for 335-336
 ethical dilemmas imposed by 335, 336-344
 feelings of guilt of survivors of 339
 forgiveness for crimes committed in 463-464
 and God/religiosity 39-40, 237, 326, 451-452
 historical research on wartime knowledge of 105-106, 107, 110
 Jews as passive victims of 107, 330
 organization of 92-94
 Smelik Sr.'s knowledge of 35, 98, 109
 see also deportations of Jews; Holocaust literature; Holocaust Studies
 sick people, deportation of 112
 simplicity of life, E.H. on 245, 250, 255, 432
 Slotke, Gertrud 14, 170, 172-174, 175-176, 177, 178
 Smelik, Johanna (Jopie) 29-30, 34n2, 83-84
 Smelik, Klaas A.D. (Jr.) 13, 20, 49, 101, 104, 105, 109, 165, 271, 426, 457, 475
 E.H.'s diaries discovered by 33-34
 and publication of E.H.'s diaries 12, 30, 38
 Smelik, Klaas (Sr.) 33n1, 262
 dedication by E.H. and Jaap Hillesum in book given to 258, 259, 264-268
 E.H.'s letters to 474-475
 first meeting with E.H. 259-260, 262-271
 hiding place offered to E.H. by 34-35, 83-84
 interviews on E.H. with 260-261, 262, 263-264, 265, 266-267, 268-271
 knowledge of Shoah by 35, 98, 109
 love affair with E.H. 16, 263, 265, 267, 270
 and publication of E.H.'s diaries 30, 36-37, 98, 109
 Smelik-Bender, Mien 261, 266, 267

- Snatager, Leonie 84, 278, 282-284, 292n27
- Sobibor concentration camp 155
- sobornost* (spontaneous 'concordance' among men) 462
- social work of E.H. in Westerbork 95, 127, 129-132
- social work professionals, resilience needed by 499
- socialism *see* communism
- societies, lawful/legitimate 344
- solidarity
of E.H. with the Jewish proletariat 82, 105
seekers of 498
- solitude 491
- Sorkin, David 320, 322
- soul, eternal 231
- Soviet Union *see* Russia
- Spier, Julius 26-27, 229, 318
correspondence with E.H. 16-17, 281n29, 285-301, 303-312
death of 105
E.H. psychochirology student of 16, 273-274, 277-284, 290-291, 295
E.H.'s descriptions/quotations of 59, 230-231
E.H.'s love affair with 16-17, 27, 60, 287, 289, 296-297
E.H.'s secretarial work for 273, 278, 282-283, 288-289
E.H.'s therapy with 27, 227-228, 273, 277, 280, 482
influence on E.H. 15, 27, 192, 194, 231, 255, 305-309, 414
Jung's influence on 228, 230-231
psychochirology practised by 16, 26, 228, 274-277, 281
'Spier-club' 276-277
- spiritual testament of Chergé 413n84
- spirituality
of E.H. 39, 402, 417, 421, 423
see also religiosity
- spiritualization, Jung on need for 235
- Starreveld, Hanneke 229, 230, 234n18
- Stein, Edith 82
- Steiner, George 320-321, 322
- Stokvis, Benno 14, 85-86, 163-167, 178
- Stroobach-Bongers, Lietje 305n10
- Das Stundenbuch* (Book of Hours, Rilke)
189-190, 196-197, 201-203, 204-205, 207
translation into Portuguese of 427
- Suarèz, André, quotations by E.H. of 250-251
- suffering
E.H. on 250-251, 252, 254, 329, 348-349, 367, 493
human reactions to 492-493
Russian, in World War II 390-391
- suicide
of Bongers 490
E.H. on/rejection of 65, 249, 253
Rathenau's rejection of 247-248, 251
- Sukovata, Viktoria 388-389
- survivor's guilt 339
- synaesthesia, E.H.'s use of 62
- Takahashi Yūji 403n33
- Takeshita Setsuko 411-416
- 'Talking Silences: A Postmodern Reading of Women's Writing' (PhD thesis, de Costa) 434-435
- Talmud, ethics of 337-343, 344
- Tempelaars, Rob 43
- tenderness 487, 499
of E.H. 488, 491-492
of Jesenská 495
- Tendō* (*Tentō*) concept (Buddhism) 407
- Teofanias book series 422-423, 424
- Terorizumu no kanata e: Warera o michibiku mono wa nanika?* (The other side of terrorism: What leads us?, Takeshita) 412
- terrorism 412
- testimonials, E.H.'s letters from Westerbork as 147
- theology
of hope 18, 361, 362-363
on human rights 337
- theosophy, E.H.'s use/adaptations of concepts of 346, 347, 350, 352
- 'thinking heart of the barracks', E.H.'s self-image of 358
- 'Third World of Hope' concept (Chergé) 362-363
- Tibhirine monastery (Algeria), Islamist terrorist assassination of monks at 362, 413
- Tideman, Henny 275n6, 276, 292, 307n18
- Tijn, Ed van 44-45
- tikkun* ceremony 356
- time, and forgiveness 464, 467, 468
- 'A Time to speak' (Lewis) 496
- Tolentino de Mendonça, José 422-423, 424, 425
- Tolstoy, Leo 465-467
- Tommasi, Wanda 423n10
- Tordo, João 428, 429
- Traité des vertus* (Jankélévitch) 471
- transcriptions of E.H.'s handwriting, errors in 42
- translations of E.H.'s work 11, 45-46
in English 11, 396, 432-433
in French 424, 425, 442
in German 447
inaccuracies in 432-433
in Italian 416n101, 479
in Japanese 396, 397
in Portuguese 19-20, 419, 420-423, 425, 427-428, 429-430
in Russian 388
- transports *see* deportations of Jews
- Treinen naar de hel* (Trains to Hell, Van Hulst) 110-111

- Tricht, Johan L. (Jan) van 308
Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen (Frankl) 406n50
 truthfulness, E.H.'s aim of 488
 Tuinzing, Maria 29, 35-36, 94, 95, 98, 109
 Turner, Bryan 372n2
Twee brieven uit Westerbork van Eetty Hillesum
 (Two letters from Westerbork by Eetty
 Hillesum) 36
- Uekuri, Father 411n77
 understanding
 and forgiveness 462-463
 and morality 472
 United States
 absence in E.H.'s work of 19, 379, 380-381,
 391
 Dutch immigrants in 392
 Holocaust Studies in 384, 388-391, 392
 reception of E.H.'s work in 379, 385-388,
 391, 415
 Urano Maki 401
- Vasseur, Juliana 290
 Vasseur, Paulus 291n21
 Venâncio, Fernando 421
Het Verstoorde Leven (An Interrupted Life, Eetty
 Hillesum) 11, 30
 introduction by Gaarlandt 82
 publication of 38-39
 selection of diary texts in 42, 396-397, 421
 translations of 19, 396, 419, 420-422, 424,
 425, 429, 442
 use as research source 387, 396-397,
 446-447
 victims of Shoah, agency of 107, 108, 113, 139
Une Vie bouleversée 424, 425, 442
 Vimalakirti sutra 407
Viragem (journal) 424
 Vis, Douwe J. 57
 vitality *see* resilience
 Vleeschhouwer, Jopie (Joseph) I. 28, 189
 letters by 87, 88, 94-95, 159, 162, 167-168, 421
 Vliet, H.T.M. van 42-43
 Voolen, Edward van 45
 Vries, Mimi de 276
 Vught concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager Herzogenbusch*) 153-154, 155
- Wachsmann, Nikolaus 154-156
 Walther Rathenau Foundation 247n4
 Wannsee conference (1942) 155-156
 war diaries 110, 439, 440
 weak persons/weakness, Rathenau on 253
 Weber, Max 373
 Wegerif, Han (Hendrik) J. 25
 Weil, Simone 422, 491
 Weiss, Peter 399n21
Weltinnenraum concept 15, 319
- Rilke's and E.H.'s use of 183, 218, 219, 220,
 240-241, 424, 439
 Wendelgest, Grete 29
 Werumeus Buning, J.W.F. 264-265
 Westerbork letters of E.H. 76, 84, 98-99, 120,
 132-135, 138, 144, 146-147, 152-153, 189-190, 234
 on possible deportation of Hillesum family
 168-170
 publication of 30, 36, 138
 translations of 397, 422, 429-430
 Westerbork revue 149, 150-151
 Westerbork transit camp 13, 113, 143, 145
 comparisons with Vught camp 154
 deportation of Hillesum family from 14,
 29, 85-88, 94-95, 135-136, 141, 157-158,
 159-168, 170-172, 177-180
 E.H.'s care for her family at 132-135
 E.H.'s descriptions of 13-14, 92, 93-94, 117,
 118, 119, 120, 129, 139-140, 143-147, 152-153,
 237, 323, 438
 E.H.'s leave periods from 128, 129
 E.H.'s social work in 95, 127, 129-132, 143
 E.H.'s voluntary stay at 28-29, 104, 105,
 127-129, 139, 143, 221, 345-346, 424
 Herzberg on 150-151
 Mechanicus on 14, 157-158, 159-162, 163,
 166-167
 Meeuwenoord on 14, 154
 Moraal on 14, 148-153
 organization of deportations from 92-94,
 105, 112, 144, 147-148, 162-163, 166-167,
 170n45, 178-179
 Western values, E.H. on 373, 383-384
 Westreich, Melech 341
 Wiersma, Jurjen 13-14, 15-16, 156, 255
 Wiersma, Stanley 392
 Wiesel, Elie 388, 451-452
 Wiesenthal, Simon 388, 412
 Wiesner, H. 319-320
*Wij weten niets van hun lot: Gewone Nederland-
 ers en de Holocaust* (We Know Nothing of
 Their Fate: Ordinary Dutchmen and the
 Holocaust, Van der Boom) 105
 Winnicott, Donald Woods 490
 Wit, Theo de 445n1
 Wolff, Charlotte 276
 Wolff, Lenie 278
 Wolff, Leon de 125
- women
 ethic of care associated with 376
 independence/liberation of 373-374
 Jung on 234
 Lyotard on 440
 outsider role of 440-441
 resilient 479, 493, 497, 498
 saints 414n93
 Spier on 305
 women's studies

- perspectives on E.H.'s work from 20, 431, 434, 440-444
see also feminist perspectives
 Woolfson, Tony 386
 world peace concept 188n22
 World War II
 agency of E.H. in 13, 103, 107-108, 114-141
 American participation in 389
 anti-Jewish measures in, and E.H.'s Jewish identity 316-317
 expectations of Anglo-American liberation in 381
 knowledge of Shoah in 105-106, 107, 110
 in Netherlands 45, 110, 113
 in Portugal 420
 rationality shattered by 375
 in Russia 389-390
 see also Shoah
 writing
 autobiographical, therapeutic nature of 481-482, 484
 of poetry 185
 reflective 499
 as resistance 439
 writing style of E.H. 12-13, 27, 51, 188, 190-191, 298, 449, 483-484
 development of 52, 75-77, 137
 enumerations 68-69
 German language use 70, 72-74, 285, 298
 grotesque elements 71-72
 impersonal constructions 67-68
 inner development descriptions 64-67
 inner dialogues 53-55, 400, 498
 irony 53, 69-70
 metaphors 46-47, 56, 59-62
 metonymy 56-57
 nature descriptions/images 60, 62-64, 118-120, 140
 personification 57-58, 59, 61
 self-criticism of E.H. on 52, 74-75, 220
 Yagawa Sumiko 403n33
 Yokohata, Yukiko 19, 417
 'Your Life or Life of Your Fellow Human Being' (Article, Domovitz) 337
 youth
 of Cixous 441-442
 of E.H. 23, 25-26
zaddik (righteous/holy person) 353
 E.H. as 18, 333, 354-358
 Zen Buddhism 407n55
 Zimetbaum, Mala 476
 'De zin van het bestaan: Een psycholoog beleeft het concentratiekamp & een inleiding tot de logotherapie' (The Meaning of Being: A Psychotherapist Survives the Concentration Camp and an Introduction to Logotherapy, Frankl) 108
 Zionism, in Netherlands 328, 329
 Zohar 351
 Zopf, Wilhelm 173-174, 178
 Zweig, Stefan 199

Index of Citations

The Complete Works

310 200
1112 189-190

E.T. (Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943)

3 485
4 59
6 59, 228
10 54, 67
13 255
17 231
18 114, 115
19 114, 435
20 67
21 115, 382n8, 440
21-22 115-116
22 61, 68
30 62, 488
32 61
34 55
36 58
38 63
38-40 60
47 192, 193
49 433
52 69, 490
56 53, 227
57 233
58 69-70
60 240, 381n5
61-62 350
62 70, 120
64 70
66 63
68 64
70 54-55
73 483, 484
77 290
78 230n9
80 71
81 305-306n13, n14
83 309
85 304, 309
86 44, 49, 121, 194, 195, 322-323
86-87 432
87 310
88 195, 310
89 289, 310
90 304
92 289
94 54, 195, 374-375, 376
97 381n6
100 279
103 456

104 60, 64
111 279
112 63
114 74, 279
116 52
117 137
118 66
120 52, 66
122 64, 235, 279
123 235, 489
130 54, 56, 253
131-132 248
132 56, 248
133 249
134 249
135 254
136 250
138 53, 373
142 66
148 72
150-152 72
152 61
153 291
154 72, 453
158 66, 75
161 489-490
165 137, 233, 410n75
166 66
169 137
170 73, 290-291n21
177 195
177-178 195
180 53
182 196, 197
183 251
183-184 251
184 197
185 198
185-186 198-199
190 199, 200, 201
191-192 201-203
192 66, 203
193 203
194 55
196 205
196-197 205
197 206
199 433
202 206
206-207 207
210 53
211 207-208, 207n97
212 52
214 65
222 53

- 223 208-209
 224 53
 226 192n36
 230 65
 234 210
 234-235 280-281
 238 73
 243 209
 244 65-66
 245 436
 246 63, 210
 247 210, 211, 212
 248 74, 213n117
 250 214, 293
 252-253 214n120
 253 215
 254 295
 255 292-293
 258 66, 117, 481
 259 42n16, 116, 215, 239, 363, 496-497
 260 216
 262 293
 264 216
 267 214, 216
 268 54
 269 194
 270 192n36
 270-271 197
 271 210
 273 204
 275 217-218, 488, 489
 276 219, 292
 278 43, 294, 489
 279 484, 492
 280 220, 294
 281 187-188, 294
 284 98
 286 55, 71
 287 491
 288 137
 289 187, 295, 487
 290 286
 291 286-287, 294-295
 295 281n29
 297 281n31
 298 64, 72
 303 187
 306 119
 308 74
 309 281n29
 310 187, 196n55
 311 195n51
 313 191, 192
 314 64, 213n116
 315 217, 242, 454
 317 200
 320 380n1
 321 192
 322 62, 192
 323 281
 324 73, 197n63
 326 204
 328 220-221
 330 217
 337 186
 339 229n4
 340 484
 341 431-432
 344 292
 346 75
 348 73, 491
 349 492
 351 214-215n122, 282n33
 364 76
 365 196
 365-366 196
 370 382
 383-384 489
 384 68-69, 238
 387 185n4
 394 395, 417
 398 187
 400 204n82
 401 196
 403 204
 404-405 209n102
 408 56, 69
 410 57
 412 57
 431 216, 217
 434 114, 118
 435 367
 435-436 121
 439 351
 442 367
 444 296
 445 296, 324-325
 447 194
 453 383-384
 455-456 97
 456 224, 345, 452
 457 220
 459 118, 329
 460 104, 365
 461 92, 96, 97, 112
 462 54, 60
 463 239
 464 52, 62, 100
 468 443
 470 116, 118
 471 435
 474 108, 109
 476 58
 477 122
 478 58, 123
 479 221
 480 221-222
 482 296

- 483 123, 331
 484 91, 178n64, 323
 485 103
 487 122, 349, 456-457
 487-488 89-90
 488 125, 126, 239, 243, 410
 488-489 39-40, 348, 450
 489 326
 490 296n45, 485
 492 252, 297
 494 58, 221
 495 125, 222
 496 125, 126
 499 111
 500 68, 119
 502 126, 222
 502-503 117
 504 126-127
 508 485
 509 223, 486
 510 381n4
 511 124, 327, 335, 482
 512 74
 514 350, 365
 515 128, 218, 240
 516 231
 518 58
 519 233, 346
 520 220
 523 85, 328
 526 459
 527 356
 529 349, 460
 533 223
 537 138
 538 71, 128
 546 61, 75, 402n32
 547 414
 550 52, 410
 550-551 223
 552 67
 553 288
 554 290
 555 290
 557 232
 558 291
 561 296
 564 297
 568 58
 569 404
 576 129
 580 129
 581 129
 583 139
 584 73, 138
 586 238, 364, 492
 587 493
 590 138, 146, 234, 460
 594 84
 599 117
 600 117, 130, 237
 601 119
 602 57, 130, 438
 603 130
 604 134, 168
 607 131
 608 239
 610 135, 168, 169
 612 169
 615 135, 169
 616 325, 357, 364, 411n77
 617 135
 618 59, 136
 621 111, 120
 623 99, 169
 624 132
 625 169
 626 170
 627 170
 628 94
 631 118, 171
 633 134
 635 365
 640 237, 411n77
 641 120
 644 112, 140, 147, 238, 323
 645 93, 343
 646 147
 649 357
 650 112, 343, 449
 653 147-148
 654 92n23, 98-99, 148
 656 177
 657 112, 348
 658 453
 658-659 87
 659 180
 666 87, 95
 667 87
 668 95
 669 95
 702 291
 706 197, 198n66
 712 70
 761 84
 824 76
 886 76
- Het Werk*
- 3 485n15
 4 59n38
 5 59n39
 6 228n2
 7 54n17, 67n70
 13 67n71
 14 68n72
 14-15 61n43
 18 231n10

- 19 62n49, 114n42, 115n46, 206n90
 20 114n44, 435n11
 21 61n44
 22 55n23, 440n21
 22-23 115n48
 23 58n31, 116n49
 24 63n50
 25 60n41
 32 488n25
 33 69n76
 34 382n8
 36 53n9, n11
 38 70n77
 41 70n78, 287n7
 42 70n79
 44 63n52, 64n57
 45 55n21
 49 192n41, n42
 51 71n81, 433n9
 55 490n31-n33
 59 227n1
 60 54n18, 233n15
 64 240n36, 381n5
 65 120n73, 350n33
 66 60n40
 67 64-65n58
 72 63n53
 74 74n94
 75 52n2, 66n62
 77 52n3, 66n63, 483n10
 78 484n11
 79 64n54
 82 230n9, 290n21
 84 54n19, 56n25
 85 56n26, 304n6
 86 305n13
 88 307n20, 309n25, n26
 90 53n10, 304n7, n8, 309n27-n29
 91 44, 49, 121n74, n75, 323n28, n29
 92 66n64, 194n48, 195n49, 305n14, 310n32,
 432n2
 93 310n31, n33-n35
 94 195n50, 289n13, 310n36, n37
 96 72n85
 97-98 289n16
 98 72n86
 98-99 61n46
 99-100 72n87
 100 195n51, n52, 375n6, 376n7
 103 66n65, 75n99, 381-382n6
 106 279n20
 108 66n66
 109 456n33
 110 73n88
 115 279n21
 117 53n12
 120 279n21
 123 137n163, 235-236n21
 125 66n67
 126 55n22
 128 279n21
 130 489n29
 131 235n19
 137 53n13, 253n22
 138 52n4
 139-140 248n9
 140 65n59
 141 249n10, n11
 142 249-250n121, 254n24
 144 53n14, 250n14, 255n27
 145 53n15
 146 373n3
 148 65-66n60
 153 73n89
 157 66n61
 158 63n51
 159 74n95
 160 291n22
 161-162 453n25
 166 66n68
 170 490n30
 173 233n16, 410n75
 174 54n20
 178 137n161, 291n21
 184 71n82
 185 55n24
 186 195-196n53, n54, n55
 191 196n60, 197n63
 192-193 251n15
 193 64n55, 72n84, 251n17
 194 197n64, 198n65
 195 198n66, 199n67, n68
 198 74n96
 199 199n70, 200-201n75, n76
 200 201n77
 200-201 201n78, 203n79
 201 203n80, n81
 202 64n56
 205 205n87, n88, 206n91
 205-206 62n47
 206 206n93
 207 73n90
 208 433n94
 211 206n94
 216 207n96
 220 207n97
 220-221 208n98
 221 73n91
 232 75n100
 233 76n101, 209n100
 234 289n14
 244 210n105
 244-245 281n25
 246 69n74
 254 210n107, 436n14
 256 210n108, n110, n111, 211-213n112-n115
 257 213n117
 257-258 213n117

- 260 214n119, 293n29
 261 56n27, 69n75
 262 214n120, 215n123
 263 57n29
 264 295n39
 264-265 57n30
 265 293n28
 268 239n32, 481n2
 269 42n16, 116n51, 117n54, 497n52
 270 215-216n124, n125, 363-364n3
 272 293n30
 275 216n126
 277 214n118
 278 43, 216n127
 280 194n45
 281 197n61
 282 210n104
 285 489n27
 285-286 218n133
 286 218n134, 488n24
 287 292n25
 288 294n32
 289 294n33, 484n14, 489n26, 492n41
 291 220n142, 294n34, n35
 292 188n19, n20, 294n36
 295 98n35
 298 491n35
 298-299 54n16
 299 60n42, 491n38
 300 52n6, 62n48, 137n162, 295n40
 301 187n17, n18, 286n4, 487n22, n23
 302 287n5, 295n38
 307 281n29
 309 58n36, 281n31
 310 58n33
 316 187n16
 319 58n35, 119n66
 322 281n29
 323 68n73, 187n15, 196n55
 324 195n51
 327 191n33, 192n34, 213n116
 328 217n130, 242n39, 454n30
 331 200n74
 331-332 74n97
 334 380n1
 335 58n32, 192n37, n38
 337 192n40, 282n32
 339 197n63
 340 204n84
 343 221n145
 344 217n131
 345 217n132
 350-351 71n83
 351 219n139
 352 186-187n13
 354 229n4
 355 75n98, 484n12
 356 61n45
 357 432n1
 358 52n5
 359 67n69
 360 292n26
 365 491n39, 492n40
 368 214-215n122, 282n33
 371 58n34
 380 73n92
 382 196n58, n59
 383 382n9
 393 57n28
 402 238n25, 489n28
 404 59n37
 405 185n4
 414 395n1, 417n103
 417 186n12, 187n14
 420 204n82
 423 196n56, 204n83
 424-425 209n102
 454 216n128, 217n129
 456 109n21
 457 114n41
 458 367n11
 459 121n77
 463 351n37
 466 367-368n12
 469 70n80, 296n43, n44, 325n37
 472 194n46, 204n86
 478 384n12
 480 97n32, 345n23
 481 97n33, 452n24
 482 220n144, 224n158
 484 118n64, 329n56
 485 104n2, 365n6
 486-487 97-98n34, 112-113n36
 487 92n22, 96n31, 109n21
 488 239n33
 488-489 100n39
 493 443n29
 496 116n53, 118n61
 497 435n12
 500 108n18, 109n19
 504 122n82
 505 123n84
 506 221n146
 507 221n147, 222n149-n151
 510 123n85, 331n60
 511 91n21, 137n165, 178n64, 323n31
 513 103n1
 514 122n78, n79
 514-515 90-91n19
 515 349n31, 457n36
 516 125n90, 126n98, 239n30, 410n71, 450n22
 516-517 39-40, 348n29
 517 326n46
 518 296-297n45
 519 485n16, n17
 520 252n20
 521 252n19, 297n47
 522 221n148

- 524 125n94, n95, 222n152
 525 126n97
 528 111n29
 529 119n68
 532 117n55, 126n104, 222n153
 534 127n106, n108
 538 127n109, 223n154, 485n18, n19, 486n20
 540 381n4
 541 124n86, 327n49, 335n8, 482n9
 543-544 350n34
 544 128n114, 365n7
 545 76n102, 218n135, 219n138, 231n11, 240n35
 549 233n14, 346n24
 550 220n143
 553-554 85n10, 328-329n54
 556-557 459n1
 558 356n59
 560 349n31, 460n2
 565 223n155
 568 138n168
 570 128n116, n117
 579 402n32
 580 414n88
 583 76n103, 223-224n157, 410n72
 584 138n169
 587 288n11
 589 290n18-n20
 591 232n12, n13
 593 291n24
 596 296n42
 600 297n49
 605 404n40
 612 129n19
 617-618 129n120
 618 129n121
 621 139n171
 624 238n26, 364n4, 492n42, 493n43
 629 138n170, 234n17, 460n3
 633 84n7
 639 117n57
 639-640 117n58
 640 130n123, 237n23
 641 119n69
 642 130n126, 438n17
 643 130n128
 643-644 134n148
 644 168n34
 646 131-132n132
 648 239n31
 650 135n150, n151, 168n35, 169n37
 653 169n38
 656 135n153, 169n39, 325n38
 657 357n60, 364n5, 411n77
 658 135n154
 659 136n157
 662 111n28, 120n72
 664 99n37, 169n40
 665 132n140
 667 169n41
 668 170n43
 668-669 170n42
 669 94n25
 670 94n26
 672-673 171n48
 673 118n62, 171n49
 674 134n143
 676-677 365-366n8
 682 237n22, 411n77
 684 120n71
 686 112n35, 238n28
 687 93n24, 140n174, 147n5, 323-324n33
 688 343n18
 689 147n6
 691-692 357n61
 692-693 343n18
 693 112n31, 449n15
 696 148n7
 697 92n23, 148n7
 697-698 99n36
 700 112n32, 177n61
 701 348n28
 702 87n16, 162n20, 180n70, 453n26
 711 162n18
 742 291n23