



Identity Borderlands: Life-writing and Anne Frank's Diary

Fronteiras de identidades: a escrita do eu em *O diário de Anne Frank*

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Abstract: According to the perspective of life-writing studies, diaries may be conceived as borderland genres, whose boundaries shift between the private and the public selves. It may be stated that diaries function as transforming locations, in which a sort of negotiation is set between the public persona and the private desires of the one who writes. This article aims to analyze such phenomenon, more specifically, in Anne Frank's diary writing, by making use of its three versions (a, b, and c).

Keywords: Life-writing. Diary. Shoah.

Resumo: À luz de estudos da escrita de vida, o gênero do diário pode ser concebido como uma zona fronteira, cujos limites oscilam entre o eu privado e o eu público. Pode-se afirmar que os diários funcionam como locais transformadores, onde opera uma espécie de negociação entre a *persona* pública e os desejos privados de quem o escreve. Este artigo propõe analisar esse fenômeno, de maneira mais específica, na escrita do diário de Anne Frank, utilizando-se de suas três versões (a, b e c).

Palavras-chave: Escrita de vida. Diário. Shoah.

Introduction

In an analysis of contemporary history, US critic Shoshana Felman refers to the split that afflicts the postmodern subject, stating in *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (2002), that history is crystallized around two poles: justice and trauma (FELMAN, 2002, p. 3). On the one hand, laws seldom seem to offer some kind of right or remedy to the traumatized subject. On the other, alternative solutions to air traumatic stories have been made possible, largely by the rise of life-writing studies. Examples of life-writing materials may be found in writings of the earliest tradition, and may include (but are not restricted to) accounts in prose or verse (auto) biographical fiction, (auto) biography, trauma fiction, memoirs, diaries, testimonies, and letters, among other genres.



It may be said that life-writing can grant the traumatized subject the opportunity to rebuild his/her own story and also him/herself, by somehow adding linearity to a story that, given the intensity of its confrontation with the traumatic *Dasein*, had no beginning, middle, and end. So it is not surprising to note that the convergence between life-writing and trauma theory studies can increasingly foster better understanding of contemporary history, with special regard to the issue of claiming for human rights. An example in which the relationship between life-writing and human rights gains closer ties is the reference work *We Shall Bear Witness: Life Narratives and Human Rights* (2014), co-authored by renowned critics Margaretta Jolly and Meg Jensen.

In fact, Jensen believes auto fictional writing is therapeutic to the extent that it allows writers to rewrite themselves: "Writers of post-traumatic autobiographical fiction, I suggest, use this form not only to confront and rewrite the incidents that inscribed their sense of difference but to also, in effect, rewrite themselves" (JENSEN, 2014, p. 7). However, we must remember that the narrating self is presented as split, namely, between the self who narrates and the self being narrated. This feature was previously pointed out and studied by Max Saunders in *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2010). He explains that:

This splitting of selves is well established itself in autobiography theory, and we have seen a special case of it in autobiografiction. It is seen as inherent in the structure of autobiographical narrative, if only because of the different phases of the self involved. Because of the retrospective nature of the form, the 'I' that is narrating is other than the 'I' that is narrated. (SAUNDERS, 2010, p. 512).¹

According to Saunders, the writing of one's self offers many different nuances, often imperceptible to most readers. This happens, partly, because the self is often staged in life-writing narratives. In order to better define the identity process in (auto) biographical fiction writing, Saunders describes it as a kind of performance. He states: "Writers are consciously and deliberately shifting into the shapes of other subjectivities, and thus revealing the performance involved in the achievement of any subjectivity." (SAUNDERS, 2010, p. 528). In a staged-like way, it may be seen, in life narratives, a self that sometimes masks and unmask itself, playing with different roles and faces. A self that is continuously weaving and unweaving itself. (SAUNDERS, 2010, p. 32).

In the same lines of Saunders' theory regarding "narrating I vs. narrated I", Meg Jensen, in her article "The Writer's Diary the Borderland: The Public and Private Selves of Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Louisa May Alcott"



(2012) conceives diary writing, more specifically, as a type of borderland, whose boundaries vary between the private self and the public self. Diaries operate as local processors, where a sort of negotiation takes place between the public persona and the private desires of the one who writes them.

Indeed, life-writing, of which Saunders is one of the main exponents, seems to treat in detail the division and, therefore, the different facets of writing one's self. This happens because life-writing has as foundation the identity dimension of the subject who narrates. Through this kind of writing it is possible to invest the traumatized subject with a new identity and a sense of agency. One might think that life narratives seem to fill a gap in which justice has failed to do justice, as far as human rights are concerned; such narratives may, in fact, provide therapeutic benefit (EAKIN, 2008; HUNT, 2010) to those who carry an "impossible story".

1 Anne Frank's Diaries

Anneliese Marie Frank had just turned thirteen, on June 12, 1942, when her father gave her a notebook, resembling an autograph album. Square-shaped, with a red and white checked cover, it was used as her journal. The first entry was recorded in the same significant date, as soon as the birthday present came into her hands.

Born in Frankfurt (12.06.1929), Anne Frank and her family took refuge in Amsterdam in March 1934, in order to escape Nazi persecution. In the Netherlands, the last residence of the Frank family would be in a secret annex (*het achterhuis* in Dutch). However a native speaker of German, Anne was literate in Dutch, the very language she chose to write her diary in.

The way most journal entries were introduced (*Lieve Kitty / Liefste Kitty*, in Dutch, "Dear Kitty" / "Dearest Kitty" in English), with reference to the imaginary interlocutor who would join her for the many long, tortuous days of her confinement, is as significant as how Anne concluded the entries and said goodbye to her interlocutor (*Je Anne – Yours, Anne*). The linguistic resource of saying goodbye by using a pronoun (*Jer* in Dutch, "Yours", in English), also common in other languages, is a reduced form of the original expressions "I am your humble servant" or simply "I'm yours". Such valedictions, or farewell expressions, denote informal use and often appear in written journals, having been simplified over the centuries. It can be observed that, in terms of syntactic construction, in its simplified form, the speaker chooses to keep the object ("yours") and hide both the subject ("I") and the verb ("I am").



The singularity of such linguistic expression instigates the reader to wonder where the enunciation subject is located: who is this “I”, the enunciation subject, addressed as though “belonging” to another? According to Émile Benveniste’s enunciation theory, all languages make use of personal pronouns, since languages cannot be conceived without the expression of their speakers, i.e., the people who speak the given languages. From this assumption, he elaborates his enunciation theory, according to which discourse will always be marked by *je* (French for I), either projecting or searching for a *tu* (French for you) in order to establish, more than dialogue, identities. He claims:

Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as I. Here we see a principle whose consequences are to spread out in all directions. Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. Because of this, *I* posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to “me”, becomes my echo to whom I say *you* and who says *you* to me. This polarity of persons is the fundamental condition in language, of which the process of communication, in which we share, is only a mere pragmatic consequence. It is a polarity, moreover, very peculiar in itself, as it offers a type of opposition whose equivalent is encountered nowhere else outside of language. (BENVENISTE, 1971, p. 224-225)

In the light of Émile Benveniste’s enunciation theory, it is possible to observe the unfolding of the many I’s and You’s in discourse. In the article “Leitura literária: enunciação e encenação” (2005), authors Ivete Walty and Graça Paulino warn, first and foremost, to the (co) existence of various types of discourses. They claim:

One of these discourses is known as literary. Enunciation, in this case, unfolds itself into a plurality of I’s and You’s, which relate in an assumedly represented enunciation chain. In this sense, we could say that enunciation, in literature, enacts the very game of language. It establishes not only a relationship between real partners as well as



between fictional counterparts, even though it is a lyric poem where there seems to be only one poetic subject. (WALTY; PAULINO, 2005, p. 140, my translation).²

It is noteworthy how the two authors approach both linguistic and literary discourses, highlighting the latter, which strives to be a typically performative, staged language. It is also interesting to observe how literary discourse gains scope to assume the existence of fictional counterparts, coupled with real actors.

In addition, according to the same authors, fictional enunciation, typically found in the literary fictional discursive domain, not only is able to relate to other discursive fields but also to assimilate them (WALTY; PAULINO, 2005, p. 142). It should be noted, here, how the theoretical assumptions presented by Benveniste and Walty & Paulino approach an intersecting point with the concepts of “divided self” (SAUNDERS 2010); “public X private selves” (JENSEN, 2012) and performance (BUTLER, 2010; SAUNDERS, 2010), as exposed previously in this article. Indeed, one might think that Anne Frank has been a reference for other young contemporary young girls who seek to denounce war atrocities in their diaries. To name a few examples: Zlata Filipovic’s diary, written about the Bosnian War, specifically about the conflicts in the city of Sarajevo, when she was only eleven years old; and, more currently, Farah Baker’s war writings, a Palestinian teenager who describes Gaza Strip’s daily war events in her autobiographical posts on Twitter.

Anne Frank’s writings trigger even greater curiosity when close attention is given to the story of not one, but several of the writings that composed the full work known today as *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Life narrative critics view Anneliese’s thirteenth birthday gift as Diary 1, whose writing ranges from June 12 to December 5, 1942. A year passed until she resumed her intimate writing, by making use of a school notebook. The writings of this notebook, known as Diary 2, extend from 22 December 1943 to 17 April 1944. Another book, Diary 3, was written from 17 April 1944 to 1 August 1944, same date as the last entry written by Anne Frank, soon before the capture of the Frank family, by the Nazi authorities and their Dutch collaborators.

These three diaries make up what is called “version a” or first version of Anne Frank’s diary. She rewrote a second version, or “version b”, on loose sheets of copy paper. They included changing and combining entries of multiple dates, abbreviations, and even name changes. Both versions, in turn, have been expanded into “version c”, a final one, entitled *Het Achterhuis* (The Secret Annex). It is known that Anne Frank intended to submit it for publication by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation. The following is a diagram with a scheme of Anne Frank’s diary successive versions:



1942 <i>Het Achterhuis</i>	1943 X	1944 X	version c X
loose sheets	X	X	version b
Diary 1		Diary 2	Diary 3
12/06/1942 – 05/12/1942		22/12/1943 – 29/03/1944	17/04/1944 – 01/08/1944

After the Franks' seizure by the *Grüne Polizei*, Miep Gies, a family friend, found the diaries, as well as the loose sheets written by Anne Frank, left rolling around the floor of the secret annex by Gestapo officers, and kept them in her possession. When Anne's father, Otto Frank, the only surviving member of the family, returned from Auschwitz, Miep handed him his daughter's writings. After reading the different diary versions, Otto produced a typed manuscript that became known as Typescript 1. It was a compilation of existing writings by Anne, in which he pledged to preserve "the essence" of what his daughter wrote. Then Otto handed Typescript 1 to his friend Albert Cauvern, asking him to revise grammatical errors and eliminate possible "Germanisms" in the Dutch text. The version edited by Cauvern is named Typescript 2. Albert was married to Isa Cauvern, who had been previously hired by Otto Frank as his secretary.

In 1947, Dutch publisher Contact agrees to print *Het Achterhuis* from Typescript 2, sent by Otto. However, the publishing director, G. P. de Neve, known as a devout Catholic man, judged certain passages of the text as inappropriate and even unseemly. He was referring more specifically to sections where Anne directly criticized his mother and the passages where she described details of her sexual development, for example, her menstrual cycles, as well as descriptions of scenes enthralled with her friend Jacke, endowed with powerful and rare homoeroticism. Otto Frank agreed to the cuts proposed by De Neve, as a condition for publication.

Thus, the Dutch edition of *Het Achterhuis* (1947) suffered the deletion of the passages De Neve judged as improper, followed by a first French version, *Le Journal d'Anne Frank* (1950). It is curious to note that the German version, *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank* (1950), and the English one, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1952), were not originated from the Dutch version censored by De Neve, but rather directly from Otto's Typescript 2. The German 1950 version was decidedly the most "faithful" to Typescript 2, for the 1952 English version also incorporated some materials from *Het Achterhuis*.

For reading purposes and comparative analysis of the different materials that



make up the diaries of Anne Frank, this article resorts to the critical and revised edition of *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition* (2003), translated from Dutch to English by Arnold J. Pomerans and BM Mooyaart, and organized by The Netherlands Institute for War Documentation. In addition to preface, introductory articles, and several comments, this special edition includes the three existing versions of journals (a, b, including pages that only came to light in 1998), the uncut originals of *Het Achterhuis* (Tales from the Secret Annex) and *Cady's Life*, the English version of an unfinished novel by Anne Frank.

Very significant for the purpose of this article is the passage that can be found in the last entry of the diaries of Anne Frank, dated 1st. August 1944. It elucidates how the author, in the most mature phase of her life and writing, sees herself as split, fragmented. The passage begins with Anne alluding to her reputation of being “a little bundle of contradictions”. Version a reads as follows:

I have already told you (said) before that I have, as it were, a dual personality. One half embodies my exuberant cheerfulness, making fun of everything, vivacity, and above all the way I take everything lightly. This includes not minding flirtation, a kiss, an embrace, a dirty joke. This side is usually lying in wait and pushes away the other, which is much better, deeper and purer. You must realize that no one knows Anne's better side that's why most people find me so insufferable. (BARNOUW *et al.*, 2003, p. 719)

Version b was not written for this specific entry. Version c, in turn, displays minor changes, according to the following excerpt:

I've already told you before that I have, as it were, a dual personality. One half embodies my exuberant cheerfulness, making fun of everything, my high-spiritedness, and above all, the way I take everything lightly. This includes not taking offense at a flirtation, a kiss, an embrace, a dirty joke. This side is usually lying in wait and pushes away the other, which is much better, deeper and purer. You must realize that no one knows Anne's better side and that's why most people find me so insufferable. (BARNOUW *et al.*, 2003, p. 719)

Both passages call the reader's attention to a bipartite Anne: first, Anne can keep cheerful and witty, despite the Nazi persecution, her captivity condition, and the likelihood of death in a concentration camp. The nice young girl who, despite the worst odds, still continues to believe in love. It was perhaps this side



that made her so popular among readers, for the allegedly graceful way in which she survived such cruel and inhuman conditions perpetrated by war. This can be understood as her public face, one that is staged to the outside world. However, a careful reading of her writing points to a second side, more private and, therefore, less tangible, of her personality. It may be noted that the last two sentences of the passage, where Anne describes her best side (“deeper and pure”) and declares that no one knows it, has not undergone any changes between versions a and c.

Three days after Anne wrote this entry, the occupants of the Secret Annex were arrested and sent to concentration camps in Germany and the Netherlands. But her writings remained and the careful reading of the three versions of the diary of Anne Frank can add better understanding of a less obvious, deeply intriguing facet of the young writer’s personality, and of how she landmarked twentieth century women war writing. An even better side of her identity, an “I” that posits another person (the reader), carefully woven between the lines of her writing, which can surface through a reading that aims to exceed the boundaries of her journals.

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Notes

¹ SAUNDERS, Max. *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

² “Um desses discursos é o que se chama literário. A enunciação, nesse caso, desdobra-se em uma pluralidade de *eus* e *tus*, que se relacionam numa cadeia enunciativa assumidamente representada. Nesse sentido, poderíamos afirmar que a enunciação na literatura encena o próprio jogo da linguagem. Estabelece-se não apenas uma relação entre interlocutores reais como também entre interlocutores ficcionais, mesmo que se trate de um poema lírico em que parece haver apenas um sujeito poético.” (WALTY; PAULINO, 2005, p. 140).



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