

## FOREWORD

When the annual rite of prize-giving occurred in the spring of 1956, *The Diary of Anne Frank* took all the honours. First, the Antoinette Perry Award; second, the Critics' Circle Award; third, the Pulitzer Prize, to list them chronologically.

They brought the highest honour of the season to Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett (Mr. and Mrs. Hackett), who wrote the dramatization, and to everyone associated with the lovely stage production in New York. Behind the theatre artists stood the shining image of a little Jewish girl who, at the age of fifteen, died in the Nazi concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen in March, 1945. The prizes and public veneration for the play were a tribute to the spirit of an adolescent girl.

If Anne Frank, author of the original diary, had survived the barbarism of the Nazis, she would have been twenty-seven years of age. She was an alert and high-spirited girl who hoped to be a writer. How jubilant and proud she would have been if she could have been in New York during the prize-giving season! It would have confirmed the ambitions she confided to her diary during the two years when she was fighting boredom, bickering and misery in an attic in Amsterdam. Everything that one says about the play, one says about Anne Frank. For the triumph of the play lies in the delicacy with which it preserves the bloom of her adolescence and the grace of her spirit.

The play dramatizes *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, published in an English translation in America in 1952. Anne was the youngest of a group of eight Jews who for two years and one month hid in a cramped attic over a warehouse to escape the Gestapo. The Gestapo was then engaged in the grisly operation of shipping Jews to concentration camps as meat packers ship livestock to slaughter. In addition to Anne, the eight included her father, mother and sister, another couple and their son, who was three years older than Anne, and a middle-aged dentist, who joined them later when it

was clear that the Gestapo was getting around to him. We are told that thousands of Jews were in hiding in other places. But we have a vivid knowledge of the eight Jews confined in an attic because Anne gaily continued to keep the diary she had begun on her thirteenth birthday, when she was still attending school with no foreknowledge of the ordeal in store for her family.

Thanks to the diary we know the homely details of this almost incredible example of the will to survive and of the selflessness of a few friends on the outside who provided food and protection. For more than two years, eight human beings never went outdoors, kept completely silent for about ten hours every day when strangers were working in the warehouse downstairs, never stood by a window during daylight, never discarded rubbish that might betray them, never drew water or flushed the toilet when there was anyone else in the building, never did anything that might indicate that the attic was anything except an abandoned storehouse.

If eight people of different ages from different families had succeeded in maintaining such a sensational secret for a week, it would have seemed remarkable. But to have kept the secret for two years and a month would seem fantastic if the diary and other records did not exist to prove it.

The diary would not have such a deep hold on the affections of the world if it were merely a record of events and techniques. Fundamentally, it is a portrait of adolescence. The privations and the emotional strains of the secret household are hardly more than background. In the foreground is the figure of an enchanting girl. Her vitality rushes at the reader. Anne's inner life flourishes. She had every reason to look forward to the career of a writer. For her diary is an extraordinary mirror of a human being on the threshold of life—temperamental, impulsive, brash, but also intelligent, thoughtful, affectionate and aspiring.

Things that are irritating and things that are winning are tightly interwoven. Although she is frequently too restless for the comfort of an anxious household, she is also studious and religious, aware of the mysteries of life and eager to penetrate them. "Little bundle of contradictions" she calls herself in the last item in her diary before the frightful day

when the police raided the attic and carried everyone off to concentration camp.

Like an alert adolescent, she has some mature ideas rattling around in her busy head. She has enough skill as a writer to express ideas easily. Her photograph shows a beautiful maiden with an oval face, black hair in a jaunty bob, lively eyes and a sweet mouth. None of the documents or statistics related to the abominations of the Nazis is so accusing as this diary. It reminds us that the Nazis murdered not only lives but life. They murdered a radiant part of the future.

Strange how the spirit of an immature, obscure girl in Amsterdam during the war has crossed the Atlantic and tested the skill and sensitivity of a group of adult theatre people! The professionals found themselves under a heavy obligation to represent her truthfully. Since diaries are diffuse and chaotic, they set playwrights some difficult problems. For plays do need themes and form. Every word in a good play has to be pertinent.

Mr. and Mrs. Hackett wrote eight drafts of *The Diary of Anne Frank* before they felt that they had represented Anne fairly. Although they have quoted lines from the diary, the play is virtually an independent work. The diary is subjective. But Mr. and Mrs. Hackett have had to create a play that takes an objective point of view toward a group of people of whom Anne is only one, and not necessarily the pivotal one. In the organization and management of the household, Anne's father is the decisive character. Mr. and Mrs. Hackett have had to find concrete devices for explaining traits of character that are only described in the diary. They have had to concentrate intangible movement in specific dramatic acts. They have had to put the diary in perspective against the events of history that occurred after the police raided the attic in 1944. Most of all, they have had to provide a beginning, middle and end.

The reader of the diary is hardly aware of what they have done, the craftsmanship and writing are so unobtrusive. The play is neither heroic nor sentimental. Written in a subdued key, without pointing a moral, it chronicles the plain details of a strange adventure, some of it distressing, some of it humorous, but all of it warm, simple and affecting.

Although Mr. and Mrs. Hackett have contributed craftsmanship, they have not lost the glow of Anne's character.

Their key sentence comes from one of Anne's last observations in her diary: "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart." Everything in the play bears on that point—the quarrels, the intrigue and the terror bearing out the truth of the first phrase in the sentence; the loyalty, the forgiveness and the kindness bearing out the truth of the sentence proper. Although Anne was a born writer, it would have been a miracle if, at the age of twenty-seven, she could herself have told this story in the theatre as tenderly and truthfully as Mr. and Mrs. Hackett have in their play.

By the time any play reaches the stage, it has become a group enterprise. What the playwrights put on paper reaches the audience through the minds and gifts of the actors, director, scene designer and producer. Once Kermit Bloomgarden had persuaded Mr. and Mrs. Hackett to write the play, *The Diary of Anne Frank* became virtually a mission. Everyone approached the production with a particular sense of responsibility. Garson Kanin, who had undertaken to direct the performance, went to Amsterdam to meet Anne's father, who came from Switzerland to help. Although Mr. and Mrs. Hackett had completed the script, they went, too. For ten days Mr. Kanin and Mr. and Mrs. Hackett visited the attic, studied the neighbourhood, listened to the street and canal sounds and ransacked Mr. Frank's mind and memory for details and general impressions.

By the time Mr. Kanin called the actors together, he was able to provide them with a point of view and a mood. Since the warehouse is narrow, the actual living quarters of the refugees in the play were on a perpendicular scale. In his stage design, Boris Aronson translated the same environment into the horizontal dimensions of the stage, portraying the cramped, shabby interior, and suggesting also the outdoors of a city tense from the presence of the Nazis.

Combining instinct for the theatre with precise knowledge of the theme, Mr. Kanin was able to cast the play flawlessly. When it opened in the autumn of 1955, the performance was especially notable for two of the actors who were in it. Jo-

seph Schildkraut, who played the part of Anne's father, gave the performance a solid underpinning by his quiet command of the whole situation and his restrained gentleness. In her first Broadway part, Susan Strasberg, seventeen years of age, played Anne with mercurial spontaneity and purity of soul that gave the performance exaltation and beauty. Like the work as a whole, her performance was overflowing with life but never self-conscious. The play deserved this sort of acting.

Through every line of it shines the spirit of Anne Frank. For the most part, it is a smiling spirit. By preserving it so delicately, Mr. and Mrs. Hackett have let a clean, young mind address the conscience of the world.

BROOKS ATKINSON

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK *was first presented by Kermit Bloomgarden at the Cort Theatre, New York City, on October 5, 1955, with the following cast:*

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

MR. FRANK	Joseph Schildkraut
MIEP	Gloria Jones
MRS. VAN DAAN	Dennie Moore
MR. VAN DAAN.	Lou Jacobi
PETER VAN DAAN	David Levin
MRS. FRANK	Gusti Huber
MARGOT FRANK	Eva Rubinstein
ANNE FRANK	Susan Strasberg
MR. KRALER	Clinton Sundberg
MR. DUSSEL	Jack Gilford

*Directed by Garson Kanin*

*Production designed by Boris Aronson*

*Costumes by Helene Pons*

*Lighting by Leland Watson*

The guidance of Mr. Otto H. Frank, Dr. L. de Jong, Miss Lidia Winkle and The Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation, Amsterdam, is gratefully acknowledged.

*The Time:* During the years of World War II and immediately thereafter.

*The Place:* Amsterdam

There are two acts