

Tekst 5

Books

Surviving history

The Hidden Life Of Otto Frank

by Carol Ann Lee

Reviewed by Walter Reich



Otto Frank with his daughters Margot, left, and Anne

- 1 In *The Hidden Life Of Otto Frank*, the first biography of Anne Frank's father, Carol Ann Lee offers us a scoop: the name of the man who, she says, told the Germans where the Frank family was hiding during the Holocaust. But buried behind the scoop is an account of how Otto shaped and in some ways distorted Anne's story and her public image after her diary was found.
- 2 First the scoop. Who betrayed the Frank family? Based on archival research and interviews, Lee has

fingered Anton Ahlers, a thuggish Dutch Nazi and violent anti-semitic, and said that he probably did it for the reward the Germans were giving to those who turned in Jews.

- 3 In the course of writing about Ahlers, Lee also tells us about his relationship with Otto. It turns out, according to Lee, that Ahlers, a chronic blackmailer, victimized Otto repeatedly. One of these occasions was in 1941, after the Germans occupied the Netherlands but before the Franks went into hiding. He showed Otto a letter to Dutch Nazi Party officials in which one of Otto's former employees denounced him for having made unflattering remarks about the German military and asking that "the Jew Frank" be arrested; Otto paid Ahlers off and took the letter.
- 4 Otto paid Ahlers off again, though not with money, in 1945, after returning from Auschwitz. By that time the Dutch were arresting collaborators, and Ahlers was picked up. Otto wrote to the authorities, telling them that Ahlers had helped him by giving him the denunciatory letter but not mentioning that he had paid Ahlers for it.
- 5 Why did Otto do this? Because of another hidden part of his life, Lee suggests. She contends that he was afraid that Ahlers would divulge to the Dutch authorities that he had done business with the Germans before going into hiding.
- 6 Otto's firm produced pectin, used in making jam, and he apparently sold some of it to the Germans. More than

- 80 percent of Dutch firms did business with the Germans, and selling pectin was neither important to the German war effort nor significant business. Still, it was business, and Lee argues that Otto felt vulnerable on that account after the war. The letters Otto sent to the authorities for Ahlers, Lee writes, “would ensure that Ahlers” – who knew of the pectin sales to the Germans – “kept his silence.”
- 7 But the most protracted period of payoffs, Lee suggests, took place in the 1960s, after Otto had become a public figure as a result of Anne’s diary. However, a more important dimension to Otto’s life, and one that had a direct bearing on Anne’s diary, was the way in which he edited it and shaped its career. Lee shows how decisions that Otto made about editing the diary, finding a publisher, arranging for foreign translations, and having it turned into a play and a movie, determined how Anne’s story would be told. Otto’s sense of himself as an assimilated Jew likely affected these decisions, as did his sense of what should be said by and about Anne.
- 8 In editing the diary Otto removed some of Anne’s critical comments about her mother and some of her references to her own sexuality. He also diminished, somewhat, her focus on her Jewishness. But it was in his choice of writers for the stage adaptation that he most significantly distanced Anne from her Jewish roots and leached from her story the dark themes that, in the diary, were plainly a part of it.
- 9 He chose Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, Hollywood screenwriters whose credits included *It’s A Wonderful Life*. Not surprisingly, they crafted a sentimental and upbeat play. And the play’s director, Garson Kanin, wanted Anne’s focus on Jewish suffering to be translated into human suffering in general. Lee notes that, under Kanin’s direction, “almost all references to Jews and Jewish suffering were erased.”
- 10 With regard to maximizing the audience for Anne’s story and making it universally embraceable, at least in those early years after the Holocaust, Otto’s instincts may have been right. The diary has reportedly sold more than 31m copies in 67 languages. The annual number of visitors to the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam is approaching a million.
- 11 But is audience all? Anne had to go into hiding only because she was a Jew. She was betrayed only because she was a Jew. She was sent to her death only because she was a Jew. To soft-pedal her Jewishness is to deny the reality of her fate.
- 12 Moreover, after arrest, Anne’s life wasn’t uplifting or inspiring at all. A witness who saw Anne and her sister, Margot, in Bergen-Belsen described them as “two scrawny threadbare figures” who “looked like little birds”. They contracted typhus and died soon after.
- 13 Otto may have been right that, in his time, the world preferred an uplifting and a universal Anne. Clearly, as we can see in Lee’s biography, he had those preferences himself. One hopes, though, that in the decades since Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz, during which we have witnessed repeated genocides, we can stare such horror in the eyes and recognize its face without the need to universalize the victim or transform the horror into consolation and kitsch.

The Washington Post

Tekst 5 Surviving history

- 3p 9 Geef van elk van de onderstaande beweringen aan of deze wel of niet in overeenstemming is met de inhoud van de alinea's 1-5.
- 1 Otto Frank used his daughter's diary as a means to distract attention from his wartime business dealings.
 - 2 The Frank family was betrayed by someone whose identity has only recently been uncovered.
 - 3 Anton Ahlers' betrayal forced the Frank family to go into hiding.
 - 4 Lee's book criticises Otto Frank for ignoring the threat Ahlers posed to his family.
 - 5 After the war Otto Frank was aware that Anton Ahlers could still harm him.
 - 6 After the war Otto Frank saw to it that Anton Ahlers was arrested for collaboration.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- 1p 10 What becomes clear from paragraphs 7 and 8 about Otto Frank in relation to his daughter's diary?
- A Having become a celebrity, he gave in to the temptation to rewrite and embellish Anne's story.
 - B He did not trust publishers and historians to do his daughter's memory justice.
 - C He presented an image of his daughter that reflected his own notion of Jewishness and of decency.
- 1p 11 What does paragraph 9 make clear about the play based upon Anne's diary?
- A How it came to lack essential characteristics of the diary.
 - B That it had an even bigger impact than the diary itself.
 - C That it romanticised what it was like to be Jewish.
- 1p 12 Which of the following is true of paragraph 10 with regard to Anne Frank's diary?
- A It characterises the diary as a powerful means to promote an anti-war attitude throughout the world.
 - B It concedes that, in the context of the time of publishing, the editing of the diary was justifiable.
 - C It hints that Otto Frank regarded his daughter's diary as a profitable business.
 - D It stresses that the diary owes its huge success to people's feelings of guilt about the Holocaust.
- 1p 13 What is the writer's intention in paragraph 11?
- A To explain why Anne's Jewishness was obscured in the diary.
 - B To object to the fact that Anne's Jewishness was obscured in the diary.
 - C To put Anne's Jewishness into a historical perspective.

- 1p **14** What is the point made in paragraph 13?
- A** Examples of human cruelty should not be exploited for the sake of cheap sentiment.
 - B** In spite of the horrors of the death camps mankind still has not learned its lesson.
 - C** We ought to have learnt by now not to shy away from brutal and unpolished reality.
 - D** We should respect Otto Frank's wish to project an idealised image of his daughter Anne.

“to universalize the victim or transform the horror into consolation and kitsch”
(alinea 13).

- 1p **15** Noteer het nummer van de alinea waarin dit eerder aan de orde is geweest.