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Anne Frank in Translation

Emily Cluff

The Diary of Anne Frank is arguably one of the best-known Holocaust texts in the world. Since its initial publication in Dutch in 1947 under the title *Het Achterhuis*, the text has been translated into over seventy languages, has sold more than twenty million copies, has been adapted into both film and stage productions, and has been taught in hundreds of schools. Surprisingly, despite its significant cultural presence in the United States, only three complete and published translations of Anne Frank's diary exist in the English language. Barbara Mooyaart-Doubleday first brought it into the English language in 1952, and her translation stood alone for forty-three years before a new translation came forward. In 1995, Susan Massotty translated an expanded version of the text, and the critical edition of the text appeared in English in 2003. However, to call the critical edition its own translation is arguable as Mooyaart-Doubleday's translation is primarily used, Massotty's translation fills in where Mooyaart-Doubleday had not translated, and the translator Arnold J. Pomerans translated only the material that appeared in neither Mooyaart-Doubleday's nor Massotty's translation.

These translations each have their own rich histories, praises, and criticisms, and many scholars have debated the editorial choices made in each regarding the translator's choice of "original" text material from which to translate. In recent years, critics have attacked Mooyaart-Doubleday's

translation for not being an accurate portrayal of the diary. However, despite this criticism, few critics have gone beyond the editorial choices to analyze the translations of the text themselves. What they have said focuses more on the potential of the diary's story to appeal to broad audiences in translation rather than on any direct comparison between the source text and the translated text. This paper seeks to rectify this oversight by analyzing the original publication of *Het Achterhuis* and Mooyart-Doubleday's translation of it in her 1952 publication of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. In doing so, I will show that the question of the source text is not the most important issue at hand when analyzing Mooyart-Doubleday's translation because the problems of the translation extend beyond the choice of source text to the translation itself —particularly due to the ways in which the text has been used since its publication. However, despite the problematic nature of the text, I additionally argue that the translation has particular strengths, especially for the time period in which it was published, and that these strengths have been positively vital for the perpetuation and longevity of the text in both national and worldwide spheres.

The success of this argument depends upon a firm understanding of the complex issues regarding the publication and translation of the text; therefore, this paper will begin with a discussion of the cultural and historical issues at play in the translation of Anne's writings in light of Karen Emmerich's ideas regarding the instability of an original. Afterwards, it will engage with the critical conversation regarding the text by conducting a direct text-to-text comparison of key passages in order to analyze both the weaknesses and strengths of Mooyart-Doubleday's translation. Finally, it will engage with André Lefevere's theory of refraction in order to culminate with an argument for the necessity of Mooyart-Doubleday's translation, despite the translation's problematic nature.

In the translation of *Anne Frank*, the question of what constitutes the original is a complicated one because three versions of the so-called original exist in Dutch. However, to set any of the texts as the hierarchical original is both unnecessary and unhelpful. Translation scholar Karen Emmerich makes the following claims about the instability of the original when translating from a source text:

When it comes to translation, we often revert to rhetoric that suggests that the changes supposedly wrought by translation are inflicted upon an otherwise stable source . . . but the "source," the presumed object of

translation, is not a stable ideal, not an inert gas but a volatile compound that experiences continual textual reconfigurations . . . The textual condition is one of variance, not stability. (2)

This instability proves particularly true in the case of Anne Frank's writings, a complicated issue which I will discuss in greater detail below. However, as Emmerich suggests, to take any version as an authoritative "original" is to ignore the variable nature of the text. Both the author and editors of the various versions of Anne Frank's writing created each version of the text with a different purpose in mind and in a variable set of circumstances with which the text naturally reacted. With this in mind, I will lay out the circumstances and purposes surrounding each individual version in order to demonstrate the instability of the original and to lay a foundation for a discussion of Mooyart-Doubleday's translation choices.

The first version of Anne Frank's diary was never intended as a literary work or a novel written for an audience, making the question of its authority as a potential original more difficult. Perhaps the most frequently told story of Anne Frank's diary is that on June 12, 1942, Anne received a diary with a red and white checkered cover for her birthday, and on that day, she began to write. This story is true, and in fact, she wrote enough to fill that initial diary along with two more exercise books; however, those who read the "diary of Anne Frank" and assume that they are reading the writings found in those books are likely incorrect. Historians and critics now refer to these writings, or the actual diary of Anne Frank, as the *a* text.¹ This edition appears in English only in the revised critical edition of the text, a text which compares the *a*, *b*, and *c* texts critically rather than attempting a literary translation. No translator has ever brought the *a* text—arguably the most valuable as a historical document—into the English language as its own published text.

Although the *a* text represents Anne's initial writings, the *b* text presents another viable option for a source text. On March 29, 1944, Anne records in her diary that she heard a newscaster say that "they ought to make a collection of diaries and letters after the war" (*Critical Edition* 600).² Upon hearing this announcement, Anne began to imagine her diary as a larger literary project. By May of that year, Anne "had begun reworking her earlier entries, now

¹ Although certain critics and historians assign various names to the three text, this paper follows the lead of the general scholarship in referring to the texts as *a*, *b*, and *c*.

² All quotations taken from the diary for historical purposes rather than an analysis of translation are taken from the *a* text found in the revised critical edition.

writing on loose sheets of paper. In fact, Anne had already transformed some of her entries into literary pieces” (Shandler 28). This draft of her “diary” was no longer mere journal accounts of her daily life—she had become an editor of her own life story, revising in the interest of a more engaging plot, refining her style for a cohesive feel throughout the entries, and striving to give her work historical and literary merit. As part of this literary project, she also wrote short fiction pieces about her life in the annex. Assembled together, Anne gave her literary work the title *Het Achterhuis*.³ Due to her imprisonment and subsequent death, she never fully completed her literary revisions. Historians refer to this edited edition as the *b* text. While the *a* text was written first, the *b* text is a potential original in its own right as it represents the original form of Anne’s literary project as opposed to a simple journal. Susan Massotty drew primarily from this text in her translation, and hers is the only translation of it found in English, as the revised critical edition relied on her translation of the text.

The first publication of Anne Frank’s writing in both Dutch and English came from the *c* text, and this is the text from which Barbara Mooyaart-Doubleday translated. After Anne’s death, her father, Otto Frank, gathered her writings and eventually sought to publish them. In doing so, he integrated entries from both the original *a* text and the revised *b* text into a single work. Furthermore, he “incorporated some of Anne’s short prose pieces inspired by her life in hiding that were not part of either diary manuscript,” and he famously removed material that he deemed “either extraneous or offensive to the memories of the others who had hidden in the Annex” (Shandler 30). He published the book in 1947 under Anne’s chosen literary title, *Het Achterhuis*, but the English translation, published five years later, was released under the title *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Although English readers for years took this translation of the *c* text as the authoritative diary of Anne Frank, it is a highly edited text—first by Anne, later by Otto, and, for readers who do not read Dutch, finally by a translator.

This understanding of the three potential “original” texts is important because much of the debate regarding translations and publications of Anne Frank’s writings centers around the necessity of choosing the “correct” original. The question is not simple. If historical accuracy is the goal (and schools for years have taught Anne Frank’s diary as a historical text), then

³ The most literal translation of the title is *The House Behind*; however, translators have consistently translated it more loosely as *The Secret Annex*.

the *a* text is likely the most factually accurate as it is the only unrevised text. However, Anne wrote the *b* text with the intent of creating something of historical and literary merit for future generations, thus the history is at times better explained, and it is the most accurate representation of Anne's own wishes in regards to her work. Of the three texts, the *c* text is the most widely published, yet critics have raised the most attacks against this text, arguing everything from the dangers of editing history to what they find the problematic presence of positive themes in a Holocaust text. However, as Emmerich argues, no source text is truly stable, thus debating which text should rightly be taken as a source text is ultimately an exercise in the irresolvable. I acknowledge the problems of the *c* text—problems made more controversial by the fact that it is now regarded as an authoritative version. However, rather than bemoan that fact and seek for an imaginary “true original,” I seek instead to evaluate the text on its own terms.

As a whole, Mooyaart-Doubleday's translation must be evaluated in light of her own goals as a translator, and by this standard, her translation performs well. Mooyaart-Doubleday was not trained as a translator, and she had never translated anything before taking on the Anne Frank project (van der Linde 1). Due to this lack of background and training, she did not have any theoretical praxis for her translation; in fact, she gave no stated *skopos* of her own for her translation project. She was hired based off a writing sample that demonstrated what Otto Frank called “haar levendige, frisse stijl, die volgens hem het beste paste bij Anne” [her lively, fresh style that, according to him, best matched Anne] (van der Linde 1).⁴ He and the publishers hoped that Mooyaart-Doubleday would carry this tone throughout and thereby produce a sellable text that would accurately represent Anne's style. No critics have debated whether or not Mooyaart-Doubleday accomplishes this praxis, perhaps partly because one cannot argue with the fact that she produced a sellable text, nor can one argue with the fact that numerous schools have deemed her tone and story appropriate for school children.

Questions of source text aside, Mooyaart-Doubleday succeeds quite well in her goal of capturing a lively tone, even in difficult situations. At times, Anne Frank playfully comments on the imperfect Dutch of the adults she was hiding with. In doing so, she both intersperses German words in their dialogue and adjusts the spelling of the Dutch to indicate an accent

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all back translations are my own.

or pronunciation mistakes. Critic Simone Schroth notes that these “affected passages can be described as a challenge regardless of the target language” and further adds that many translators “do not attempt to represent the effect at all” (239). In one example of this, Anne changes the spelling of *uitstekend* [outstanding] to “oitschtekent” to indicate the incorrect vowel pronunciation and the insertion of a guttural where none should occur in Dutch (*Achterhuis* 148). Mooyaart-Doubleday imitates this accent by changing ‘outstanding’ to “outschtanding” (*Diary* 188). This translation captures the effect of Anne’s playfulness and a very similar kind of mispronunciation while keeping the meaning clear. Schroth argues that Mooyaart-Doubleday’s translation is problematic because “some word of explanation still seems needed” (239); however, I argue that it is the lack of explanation that captures her tone so well. In this playful passage, Anne is not seeking to produce an explanation of why they speak differently or what that implies—she is making a joke typical of her adolescence. By imitating that joke without explanation, Mooyaart-Doubleday mimics Anne’s youthful, playful tone and maintains the feeling of adolescence. Overall, Mooyaart-Doubleday succeeds within the minimal *skopos* of her translation, and it is important to acknowledge this success outside of any issues with her chosen source text.

Despite Mooyaart-Doubleday’s success in creating a tone that captures the liveliness of the source text, certain elements of her translation still prove problematic as they significantly change the ways in which readers read the text. The arguably most significant problem is the title itself. Emmerich presents “translating and editing as mutually implicated processes” (13). Mooyaart-Doubleday’s work with the title certainly represents a translingual edition more than a strict translation. As previously mentioned, the published title in Dutch is *Het Achterhuis*, meaning the secret annex or the house behind. Mooyaart-Doubleday’s title of *Diary of a Young Girl* is a complete departure from the Dutch title. As Emmerich states, translation and editing go hand-in-hand, and there is nothing inherently good or bad about a decision to dramatically depart from a strict translation. However, in this case, Mooyaart-Doubleday’s choice dramatically affects how readers read and perceive the text. As earlier explained, the *c* text is not merely the diary entries of Anne Frank (or the *a* text); rather, it is a highly edited text that contains both nonfictional diary entries and fictional works. This is far more apparent in the Dutch text, as readers encounter the text under a title that suggests a literary work. When Dutch readers arrive at the entry

in which Anne writes about the conception of her literary project, they read: “Stel je eens voor hoe interessant het zou zijn, als ik een roman van *het Achterhuis* zou uitgeven. Aan de title alleen zouden de mensen denken, dat het een detectiveroman was” [Imagine how interesting it would be, if I were to publish a novel about the secret annex. From the title alone people would think it was a detective novel] (*Achterhuis* 162; emphasis added). For a Dutch reader, this feels like a private joke, as Anne writes what it would be like to publish a book about the secret annex, all while the reader understands that they are reading that very novel, published under that very title. They become acutely aware that they are holding a fulfilment of Anne’s literary dreams rather than any strictly historical document. The English translation states, “Just imagine how interesting it would be if I were to publish a romance of the ‘Secret Annex.’ The title alone would be enough to make people think it was a detective story” (*Diary* 205). While the literal translation here is perfectly adequate, there is no thrill of realization for English readers that Anne’s dreams are in their hands because the titles do not match. Instead, it feels like an unrealized dream because the book in the readers’ hands has been presented as a diary rather than as the literary work she proposed. Additionally, the translation of the Dutch word *roman* [novel], to the word romance further serves to alienate her proposed work from the published work in which her proposition appears. Beyond the missed emotional reaction to that particular entry, however, the title changes the way readers read the text as a whole in a problematic way.

The title change encourages readers to read a literary, and sometimes fictional, text as a nonfiction work. Throughout the *c* text, some of Anne’s fictional tales appear intermingled with the diary entries. At times, these entries are prefaced with a disclaimer that Anne has written a tale; however, at other times, they are written as journal entries. For example, on July 13, 1943, she tells a tale of a heated argument amongst those hiding in the annex. The tale is fictional, but it begins with “Dear Kitty, Yesterday afternoon, with Daddy’s permission” and concludes with “Yours, Anne” just like any other entry (*Diary* 98). She tells several other fictional stories in a similar manner—mixed in indistinguishably with the more accurate entries. In both the Dutch and English editions, there are often no markers to indicate when the fiction begins and ends, which may certainly be criticized in and of itself as a problematic editorial choice. As I have shown, however, readers who encounter the text in Dutch are already aware that they are reading a

work that is edited and not entirely factual. Nothing in the English version hints at this—it suggests quite plainly that these are all diary entries. The simple translingual editorial choice of the title significantly impacts readers' understanding of the text, and Mooyart-Doubleday's choice set a precedent which has been faithfully followed by all other English translators and publishers, as well as many in other languages. This change significantly affects not just Anne's text, but the conception of Anne Frank at large.

As I have shown, many scholars find the *c* text itself problematic, and certain elements of its translation make it even more so; however, despite its problematic nature, the 1952 English translation gained a popularity and longevity in translation that the original Dutch and subsequent European translations did not enjoy. When *Het Achterhuis* was initially published in the Netherlands in 1947, it was relatively successful and was initially printed five times following its publication. Within three years, however, the reissues had come to a halt as interest in the book waned (Vanderwal Taylor 5). In 1950, translators brought the book into both French and German, but in France it was "read by a relatively small audience" while the German translation "had no resonance" amongst readers (Gilman 45). Among the Dutch and other European audiences, the text did not appear destined for success. In fact, if early reception is any indication, one may argue that the text was destined to fade into anonymity. Mooyart-Doubleday's translation into English was vital to the afterlife of Anne Frank's text because it brought the text from lukewarm European audiences to a new, wider, and highly receptive audience, sparking a resurgence of interest in the text.

Mooyart-Doubleday's translation ignited a rapid spread of engagement with Anne Frank's text that spread to a world-wide audience. Laura Quinn argues that "the historical significance of works of art becomes less attributable to their original moment than to their afterlife that continues to represent the quality of translatability as fame" (48). Certainly, in the case of Anne Frank's diary, its original moment contributed little to its historical significance in comparison with the afterlife that Mooyart-Doubleday enabled through her translation. American audiences quickly embraced the translation of the diary. Many of the elements of the translation that led Americans to initially embrace it are now the same elements that scholars criticize. Some of the heaviest criticism leveled against the *c* text lately is well-represented in Victoria Stewart's argument that the *c* text rewriting was published in such a way as to "mask its fragmentariness" giving "a

false sense of spontaneity or completeness" (111). She further criticizes the ways in which Otto Frank's editing and promotion of the book emphasized its "humanitarian and broadly speaking optimistic content" (112). These criticisms attack what translation scholar André Lefevere calls refractions of the text. Although many scholars criticize these refractions, the changes in the text facilitated world-wide engagement with the text and may be what allowed the text to survive.

In spite of the many critics who view refractions as flaws, Lefevere argues that refractions, such as the ones that Mooyart-Doubleday employs, are not inherently bad and can, in fact, be beneficial. He defines a refraction as "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" (203). When Otto Frank gained an audience for Anne's diary, he refracted it to reflect the way he hoped it would influence that audience. As Victoria Stewart's comments demonstrate, scholars criticize these refractions now; however, some of the very things the diary is now criticized for—such as its universal nature and the pleasantness of the war narrative—are what audiences initially praised it for. One early review published in *The New York Times* states, "Anne Frank's diary simply bubbles with amusement, love, discovery . . . it is so wondrously alive, so near, that one feels overwhelmingly the universalities of human nature" (Meyer). While critics later deemed these elements problematic results of Otto Frank's editing of the *c* text, these very elements initially popularized it. Some critics may not appreciate refraction, but Mooyart-Doubleday's translation played an important role in allowing Anne Frank's text to survive and to spread.

Americans popularly embraced Mooyart-Doubleday's translation in its traditional written form, but the translation also enabled increased engagement with the Anne Frank story in other artistic and educational spheres. People's engagement with the text did not end at reading; they quickly dramatized it into a stage production, which later led to more stage productions and a movie. Additionally, it became largely integrated into school curriculum by 1960 through a grassroots movement by educators, which led to it being required reading in schools throughout the United States (Shandon 160). Its presence in the education system proved long-lasting, and a survey done in 1996 showed that "50 percent of American high school students had read *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a classroom assignment" (Prose 253–54). Perhaps most interesting, however, was the

English translation's effect on the Netherlands. The film, play, and overall success of Anne Frank's text both in the United States and on a more global scale stimulated the sale of the book in the Netherlands. While all reprintings had stopped after 1950, with the 1952 release of the English translation, three new editions arrived in Dutch in 1955, three more in 1956, and still nine more in 1957 (van der Stroom 74). Although the text initially appeared to be headed towards obscurity, the English translation facilitated a long afterlife for it in the United States, in its Dutch home, and in the world at large.

Beyond reviving interest in the "original" Dutch text, Mooyart-Doubleday's translation, in many ways, became an original. Emmerich theorizes that "each translator creates her own original" and that "so-called originals are not given but made, and translators are often party to that making" (Emmerich 13). Mooyart-Doubleday made the *c* text original when she took it as her source text, and many scholars take issue with that, but what these scholars often overlook are the ways in which her text became an original in its own right. First, as the diary made its way into many aspects of American life and consciousness, translators also began to bring it from English into what would eventually be sixty-seven additional languages. Of those translations, over fifty of the translators took Mooyart-Doubleday's English translation as their source text (van der Linde). Thus, for most international readers of Anne Frank's writings, Mooyart-Doubleday's translation was the source text. According to Emmerich, this means that other translators made the English text their original. Additionally, in reframing the text through her unique title, Mooyart-Doubleday made an original text of Anne Frank that presented itself as nonfiction—an original which has come to be widely taught and accepted. Finally, simply in the act of translation, Mooyart-Doubleday created an original because, as Emmerich quips, in a translation, "*all* the words are added; *all* the words are different" (3). Thus, the debate surrounding Mooyart-Doubleday's chosen "original" is somewhat ironic because, through her translation, she creates her own original.

The question of an "original" Anne Frank story to translate from is complex and ultimately less important than the question of how the translation meets the needs of its audience. Mooyart-Doubleday did not merely choose a source text as an original—she created an original Anne Frank story. Despite the criticisms leveled against it and its admittedly problematic elements, her translation met the needs of the time. Lefevere theorizes that the degree to which a writer is accepted in a system is "determined by the

need that native system has of him in a certain phase of its evolution" (206). The refractions created by Otto Frank's editing and Barbara Mooyaart-Doubleday's translingual editing came into the American literary sphere at a time in which readers were ready to accept it. The Dutch, French, and German versions may not have met with much success in their spheres, but the refractions in the English language allowed for an original that resonated with America's post-war moment, Americans' desire for universally human stories, and a desire to bring such stories into theatrical, cinematic, and educational spheres. It was what the system needed, and thus it succeeded where other versions had not. Without Mooyaart-Doubleday's translation, and particularly without the refractions, the legacy of Anne Frank may never have even come to a place where it could be looked at critically. It is important to continue to look critically at the text—particularly the ways in which its translation affects how it is taught and perceived—but in doing so, we must acknowledge the value of the translation. Although Mooyaart-Doubleday's translation was not perfect, the afterlife that it enabled allowed for other editors and translators to work with the text and for critics to engage with it. It made Anne Frank a worldwide presence and paved the way for the critical conversation still going on today.

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