

Anne Frank – The Book, the Life, the Afterlife by Francine Prose.

Atlantic Books 2010.

If you read the diary of Anne Frank as a child or young adult, and were intrigued, inspired or moved by it, you will probably retain a soft spot for the Jewish girl who epitomises the suffering of the Jewish people under the rule of the Nazis. But there is much more to Anne Frank than the first edition of her diary, and in Francine Prose's new book that story is told in satisfying and balanced detail.

After the War, Anne having died of typhus in Bergen Belsen two weeks before its liberation, her father Otto returned to Amsterdam and was given the text of the diary, and other pieces of writing by Anne by the family's devoted friend Miep Gies. It was all that was left of his beloved family and it provoked an intense grief in a broken man. But after a while the potential for publication became obvious and Otto Frank succeeded, not with ease as the book relates, in finding a publisher for a version of the diary, carefully edited by him to remove any elements which he felt might have reflected madly on Anne or on the Frank family.

And after the book came the stage play, the movie, and several television adaptations, the former two ripe with incident, ego and mishap. The diary also attracted its share of unstable individuals, both championing it and its writer and taking the opposite view. Indeed one of the most disturbing aspects of Ms Prose's excellent book is the traduction of Anne and the Frank family by anti-Semites and Holocaust deniers, often in the most bitter and venomous ways.

Perhaps the most important thing that has happened to Anne Frank's diary is that it has finally been published in full, in a critical edition, by the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation, revised and re-published in 2003. This exercise was partly initiated to undermine the perverse allegations made against Anne and her diary's authenticity and we must be grateful that it was.

Francine Prose's book is an eloquent tribute to Anne Frank, revealed in all her aspects as a normal teenage girl forced by circumstances beyond her control into an intolerable situation that then led to her death. It leaves an indelible impression on the reader and, apart from much else, inspires you to read the critical edition of the diary and re-engage with one of the Shoah's iconic figures.

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