

**Esther “Etty” Hillesum: An Annotated and Summarized
Bibliography of Works in English through 2010**

Compiled, annotated, and summarized by

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So died Etty Hillesum, she disappeared, nameless among all those people without a name. She had handed out her body. Through her coursed wide rivers and in her stood tall mountains. The earth was in her and the sky.

She was

-Frits Grimmelikhuisen

Today we live in such dark and dangerous times, politically, socially and within religious institutions, that we who have studied Etty Hillesum for years cannot limit ourselves to only studying her; we must bear witness in our daily lives, with our own limitations, to her most profound teachings, in order to carry forward and internalize all the gifts that she has given us.

-Nadia Neri

Dedicated to Etty: mentor, spiritual friend, poet.

May our remembrance of you, and your example of love for God and the world never die.

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Introduction

Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman who started a diary while she lived in Amsterdam in 1941, and who died two years later in the concentration camp Auschwitz, has had a strong influence on contemporary spirituality in Western culture. The remarkable diaries and her preserved letters continue to create a profoundly positive effect on those who read them. Etty Hillesum was an assimilated Jew living in a household of non-Jews when she began the diaries as a sort of therapy, at the behest of her Jungian friend Julius Spier. They both wanted her diary writing to help bring some order out of a chaotic existence. In this Hillesum succeeded, but as the diaries progressed, she moved beyond her self-absorption to a dawning realization that the evil of the Nazis was slowly strangling the world around her. She also began to use the diaries as a form of prayer. Later, Hillesum even took on the task of helping God, who she believed was having a difficult time solving or salving the evil that the Nazis had set loose on Earth. She became solidly aligned with the persecuted Jews around her, and eventually volunteered to go to Westerbork transit camp, a concentration point for Jews on their journeys East to the death camps. She worked in the hospital at Westerbork for several months. While at the camp, her parents and a brother joined her there as fellow inmates. We have no preserved diaries from that time forward, but she did write many letters, and a great number have been preserved. These letters show a more pragmatic Etty Hillesum; she fought to keep her parents off the trains to Auschwitz, and secretly chronicled the facts of the terrible reality going on in transit camp Westerbork. Yet, even in the camp, she was still able to find

meaning and spiritual beauty in the struggle of her fellow Jews to survive and maintain their human dignity, and also in her observations of the flight of birds, the flowers that bloomed profusely outside the camp fences, and in the faces of her friends. Eventually she, her brother, and her parents were put on a train to Auschwitz. The parents were gassed on arrival; she survived about two months in an adjacent work camp, her brother a bit longer.

After the war, an attempt was made by friends to have Hillesum's letters and diaries published, but without success until 1981, when their publication in an abridged edition in her native Holland caused a sensation. The abridged edition was quickly translated into numerous languages, and the diaries from that publication appeared in the United States in 1983. Following the publication in English of the abridged diaries, her letters soon followed in 1986; but it was not until 2002 that the complete edition of all her known writings was made available to American readers.

Beginning with reviews in 1984, a vigorous amount of secondary writing in English has grown up around Etty Hillesum's work . This bibliography will annotate and briefly summarize those works about Etty Hillesum available in English. Much additional commentary is available in a variety of foreign languages, but those secondary sources will not be covered by this bibliography. For those seeking secondary works in other languages, there is now a fine un-annotated bibliography of resources included in the 2010 publication *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, Brill, pp. 447-464.

I have chosen to present the annotated bibliography in chronological order. This chronological approach will allow scholars who so wish, to trace Hillesum's influence on the literary, religious, historical, and therapeutic communities through their developing understanding of Hillesum from her writing's appearance in English, up through 2010. All works or discrete sections of works that focus directly on Hillesum or her writings will be covered with the exception of brief book reviews. Several of the more substantial book reviews are included, however, as they are more like articles and provide thoughtful commentary on her work and life. I do not attempt to identify works with fleeting mentions of Hillesum. Of these there must be hundreds more.

In addition to the heart of this work: annotations of the writings focused directly on Hillesum (Part B), I have also included three additional brief sections as points of reference: 1) Part A: the primary Hillesum sources as they were translated and published in English in the United States, 2) Part C: a short section describing writings about Transit Camp Westerbork, to and from where Hillesum wrote most of her letters, 3) and Part D: a very brief bibliography that leads readers to introductory materials in English on the general destruction of the Jews, especially in the Netherlands. A non-annotated alphabetical bibliography of all the writings in English completes the study as Part E. Each entry in this section is keyed back to the main entries.

Note: Originally named Esther Hillesum, she was known to her friends and to history as Etty. This first name will be used throughout the text rather than Esther. In almost all cases I will write of her as Etty Hillesum or Hillesum rather than simply Etty, as a form of respect.

Part A: Etty Hillesum's Writings in English

1983

- A1.** Hillesum, Etty. *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*. [abridged] 1st American ed. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

1986

- A2.** Hillesum, Etty. *Letters from Westerbork*. [abridged] 1st American ed. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans. New York: Random House, 1986.

1996

- A3.** Hillesum, Etty. *An Interrupted Life: the diaries, 1941-1943 and Letters from Westerbork*. Edited and translated by Arnold J. Pomerans. 1st American edition, Eva Hoffman, forward. New York: Henry Holt, 1996.

2002

- A4.** Hillesum, Etty. *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*. Edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

2009

- A5.** Hillesum, Etty. *Etty Hillesum: Essential Writings*. Selected with an Introduction by Annemarie S. Kidder. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009. A selection of Etty' Hillesum's writings divided into thematic chapters,

rather than chronologically. There are three major divisions: 1) the Self, 2) the World, and 3) Self and World as One. An introduction briefly describes Hillesum's life, her writings, the people in her life, and her mysticism.

Part B: Articles, Books, Book Chapters, Dissertations and Other Writings Primarily About Etty Hillesum (in chronological order of their writing)

1983

B1 Gaarlandt, J.G., Introduction to Hillesum, Etty. *An Interrupted Life : The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*. [abridged], 1st American ed.

Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), vii-xiv. Introduces the U.S. reader to Etty Hillesum and her diaries.

Briefly describes her life, the circumstances of the writing, and the fate, after her murder, of the exercise books which contained the diaries.

1984

B2 Syrkin, Marie. "Do Not Go Gently." *New Republic*, (March 26 1984): 33-36.

Substantial review of *An Interrupted Life*. What makes Etty Hillesum's diary extra forceful, according to Syrkin, is the period in which it was cast. There is a tension in today's reader who must judge whether Hillesum's inner journey, and sense of God's presence, was appropriate at that time of terror. She was unaware of how terrible things were in the East. And they would soon be terrible for her. Yet we read in her a compassion for the suffering Jews, of whom she remained one, even as she read Christian scriptures.

1985

B3 Baum, Gregory. "The Witness of Etty Hillesum." *Ecumenist*.1 (1985): 24-28.

A Jungian approach to Hillesum's work. Argues that Spier, Etty Hillesum's mentor, who was a Jungian, taught her of the God within: "the divine power hidden at the depths (25)." Baum also maintains that Hillesum's spirituality is a social one, reached through an inner journey that opened her to the God within, and through that God, to the God in others. She was probably not a Christian. For her, the "surrender to God...was at the same time resistance to oppression (27)." Her diaries were her testimony to God's presence.

B4 Boas, Jacob. *Boulevard des Miseres: The Story of Transit Camp Westerbork*.

Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985. See esp. chap. 4, "Etty: TRANSPORT." Boas does well at situating Etty Hillesum in her role in Transit Camp Westerbork, where she was an unofficial social worker, and an official hospital worker there until her own transport. After introducing Hillesum's life story and basic philosophy of non-hatred, the chapter focuses on the process of inmate transport at Westerbork, paraphrasing her description of the preparations for such a transport, but also adding much other detail surrounding the process of moving the Jews out of Holland.

B5 Langer, Lawrence. *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*. New York:

Oxford University Press, 1995. See esp. chap. 6: "Understanding Atrocity: Killers and Victims in the Holocaust." 65-73, originally published in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 24, no. 1 (Fall, 1985). According to Langer, Etty Hillesum's diaries are too naïve, and fail to account for the

tremendous evil of the Holocaust occurring simultaneously to their writing. This lack of concern changed with her descriptive letters from Westerbork. For Langer here, chronicling of the events is more important than any accompanying spiritual quest. He wishes she could have lived to describe more.

B6 O'Connor, Elizabeth. "The Thinking Heart: A Feminine Spirituality from the Holocaust." *Sojourners* (October 1985), 40-2. Brief and basic introduction to Etty Hillesum's diary as a paradoxical "journey into freedom (42)" as she transforms her inner self. O'Connor describes Hillesum as a proto-feminist, and a Jew with Christian proclivities.

.1986

B7 Gaarland, Jan G. Introduction to *Letters from Westerbork* by Etty Hillesum. [abridged] 1st American ed. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans, xi-xviii. New York: Random House, 1986. Introduces the letters from Westerbork to the U.S. readers.

1987

B8 Cunningham, Lawrence S. "Letters from 'the Kingdom of Night'; the Legacy of Etty Hillesum." *Commonweal* (May 22, 1987): 316-318. We know Etty Hillesum's fate, and it adds poignancy to her diary. Nevertheless, it is more than just a tragic tale, for Hillesum finds beauty and the mysteries of eroticism and love along the way. From her life, there derives this diary filled with prayer and dialogue with God. Her message is that hate

needs to be eradicated from the world, starting within her own self. Cunningham judges her to be a “luminous witness to those terrible years... but [also] an authentic voice of the spiritual life (318).”

B9 Ergas, Yasmine. "Growing Up Banished: A Reading of Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. M. Randolph Higonnet (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 84-95. Comparison of the diaries of Hillesum and Anne Frank. Both attempt to construct normalcy “in a rapidly bestializing civil society (84).” Ergas is interested in how women develop identities and grow in the context of genocide. In the cases of Hillesum and Frank, their “gender ultimately recedes to second place” compared to their Jewish identity (85). Their horizons and visions for the future shrink. For Etty Hillesum her growing spirituality eclipsed sensuality, assuming “Christian tonalities(91.)” Under Nazism, Hillesum lost her life both as a Jew and as a woman. What survived and transcended persecution were her diaries – “testimonials to the present and instruments of its transcendence (95.)”

1988

B10 Downey, Michael. "A Balm for all Wounds: The Spiritual Legacy of Etty Hillesum." *Spirituality Today* (Spring 1988), 18-35. Excellent general introduction to Hillesum. Describes her life, her relationship with Spier and others, her altruistic views of human nature, and growing awareness of God. Discusses Etty Hillesum’s inner relationship with God, and the integration of her self it brought. Downey does not slight her growing

compassion for the suffering people around her. Presents the themes of kneeling and Hillesum's sense of the vulnerability of the divine.

1989

B11 Scholtens, Sixtus. "Etty Hillesum, Kierkegaard's Poet of Existence," in *Kierkegaard Conferences I: Kierkegaard-Poet of Existence*. Ed. Birgit Bertung, (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1989) 108-119. Posits that an assigned reading of Hillesum by teachers of Kierkegaard greatly enhances the ability of students to understand Kierkegaard's philosophy. Discusses the authenticity of her religious development using a 4-part Kierkegaardian model of: 1) Conversion, 2) Dark Night, 3) Rebirth and Union with God, 4) An ineffable poetic attempt to explain it all. Concludes that at the end, Etty Hillesum was "not far from the Kingdom of God (119)."

B12 Woodcock, John. "The Therapeutic Journals of Joanna Field and Etty Hillesum." *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies* 5, no.1 (1989): 15-25. Argues that the journals of Hillesum and Field were therapeutic for them. Field was a British psychologist who deliberately kept a journal to improve herself. Etty, according to Woodcock, kept her journal to "find a metaphysics that will support life under ostensibly insupportable conditions (21)." Woodcock believes that Hillesum's diaries were a way for her to keep centered, survive in the face of the Holocaust, and experience herself as a historical record-keeper of Jewish suffering.

1990

B13 Comer, Sylvia. "Etty Hillesum : The Girl Who Learned to Pray and the Spiritual Exercises." *Review for Religious* 49 (1990): 865-73. Presents Etty Hillesum's diary as an account of an Ignation-like inner quest that leads to God. Comer attempts to demonstrate that Hillesum's transformation follows the steps of the *Spiritual Exercises*. God's "total gratuitous gift of self is poured out within this woman" as she follows her spiritual journey (873). A heart-felt meditation by this Religious sister.

B14 Halperin, Irving. "Etty Hillesum: A Story of Spiritual Growth," in *Reflections of the Holocaust in Art and Literature*, ed. L. Randolph Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 1-15. A moving and tender introduction to Etty Hillesum. Halperin reads the diaries and letters as a record of Etty Hillesum's spiritual growth and unfolding, as well as her increasing apprehension about the annihilation of the Jews. As the diaries and letters show, her belief that life and love have meaning only increased during these circumstances. Her inner witness turns into outer witness as well, especially after she reaches Westerbork. There she does what she can to comfort people and record their fate. This essay perhaps overlooks Etty Hillesum's darker aspects.

1991

B15 Cassells, Cyrus. "Life Indestructible." *Kenyon Review*, New Series, 13 no. 4 (1991): 32-39. Cassells reacts to Etty Hillesum's writings with a 12-part poem that incorporates her words into his own reflections and actions. Uses Etty Hillesum's life as an example of how people cope with crises.

B16 Downey, Michael. "Penning Patterns of Transformation: Etty Hillesum and Thomas Merton," in *Merton Annual: Studies in Culture, Spirituality and Social Concerns* 4 (1991): 77-95. Looks for similarities between the spiritual transformations of Merton and Hillesum. Both were writers influenced by war, who searched for truth wherever it might be found. Both struggled with emotional polarities. Both found that transformation involves commitment to the discovery of the self, recognition of the needs of others, and solidarity with them (93).

B17 Spaltro, Kathleen. "'A Symbol Perfected in Death': Etty Hillesum as Moral Exemplar." *Advanced Development* 3 (1991): 61-73. "Views Etty Hillesum's diaries through the prism of Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of moral development (61)." Dabrowski posited five levels of development, the fifth extremely rare and ephemeral to the rest of us. Spaltro believes Etty attained this level with "true integration" of her self (70). The horrible events she experienced probably speeded up her moral development, and were *partly* responsible for her reaching this high level, as was Julius Spier's earlier encouragement.

1992

B18 Piechowski, M.M. "Etty Hillesum: The Thinking Heart of the Barracks." *Advanced Development* 4 (1992): 105-18. Describes the inner growth of Hillesum as evidenced by the diaries. As Etty began to accept her self, she worked through issues of hatred, inner chaos, and lack of personal repose in God. Gradually, she resolved these problems. Piechowski

describes the psychology of this developmental process – Etty Hillesum’s overcoming of possessive attachment to Spier and others, her developing simplicity and strength in the face of outward chaos, a loving appreciation of everyday things. Acceptance of her fate is another theme of the diaries. Hillesum’s self becomes “a kneeler in training” as she surrenders unconditionally to God in gratitude (113) . In addition, Hillesum recognizes God’s presence in others, even those who perform the most evil acts, and she refuses to hate them. By this step in her development, she breaks the circle of evil and reaches the highest stage of personal growth. Her diary is a “work of love and will that makes advanced development possible (105).” In two concluding notes, Piechowski acknowledges the developmental theories of Kazimierz Dabrowski as guiding his thoughts throughout this essay.

B19 Weinstein, Bernard. “Etty Hillesum’s An Interrupted Life: Searching for the Human,” in *The Netherlands and Nazi Genocide: papers of the 21st Annual Scholars’ Conference*, ed. G. Jan Colijn and Marcia S. Littell (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 155-66. Etty Hillesum’s sense of the fate of the Jews was slow to develop, as it was for others in Dutch society, which came late to the Nazi’s extermination timetable. As Hillesum’s diary began, she lived an outwardly comfortable, secular, and ecumenical life in Amsterdam. Meeting Spier triggered a battle inside her between eros and agape (158). As the world outside her began to deteriorate, especially for the Jews, she attempted to rid herself of hatred, while at the same time remaining cognizant of terrible events. “An indwelling Spirit...rooted her in reality (159).” Part of this reality for

Hillesum was the knowledge that God was not saving the Jews. God would need a partnership with loving humans (160). This Judaic doctrine of *tikkun* brought Hillesum to realize her public role – as “healer and witness,” which she lived at Westerbork Camp (160). Jacob Boas is quoted in this article describing Etty Hillesum’s new helping attitude, as is also evidenced by her letters from Westerbork (162-3). Weinstein summarizes Etty Hillesum’s poignant letter describing preparations for transport (163-5). We do not know if Etty Hillesum’s spiritual strength survived the few weeks she spent in Auschwitz.

1993

B20 Barry, William A. SJ. *God's Passionate Desire and our Response*. (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1993). See esp. chap.10, “Mysticism in Hell.” 81-89. This essay is mostly quotes from the diaries and letters. In between, Barry writes that Etty Hillesum speaks to God with honesty and candor. She does not respond to suffering with bitterness. Her mysticism was not pious, but rather of the world, and in the end, the diaries share her love of God with the world.

B21 Piechowski, Michael M. "Is Inner Transformation a Creative Process?" *Creativity Research Journal. Special Issue: Creativity in the Moral Domain* 6 no. 1-2 (1993): 89-98. Explores the diaries of Hillesum, a professor named Ashley, and the Peace Pilgrim. These three were all secular individuals who documented their moral development in diaries. Piechowski uses Dabrowski’s theory of moral development as the model

for his study. All three of his subjects documented their growing inner peace and self-actualization, which was not formed in a formal religious setting. From the strength of their inner peace they creatively sought peace in the external world.

1994

B22 Cannato, Judy. "Transformation in Etty Hillesum : From Chaos to Order."

Spiritual Life (Washington) 40 (1994): 88-96. Author Cannato reads the diaries as the story of Etty Hillesum's emergence from a chaotic life to an orderly one. She highlights three experiences that she sees as Hillesum's key transformative episodes. These "coincide with the phases of mysticism described [by Evelyn Underhill] as purgation, illumination, and union (89)." In the first she asks God to let her accept what life will bring her, and to "try to face it all as best I can," while sharing her love with others (89). The second entry is from April 29, 1942, wherein Hillesum declares independence from Spier, whom she later writes has been a mediator between her and God. The final experience of transformation is noted in the entry from July 3d, 1942 when she writes that the fate of the Jews seems sealed, but that "[e]ven if we are consigned to hell, let us go there as gracefully as we can (93)." From this point on Etty Hillesum becomes the mediator for the victims around her, and according to Cannato rises to Underhill's third and highest level of mysticism, "complete absorption in the interests of the Infinite (95)."

B23 Giles, Mary E. "Reflections on Suffering in a Mystical-Feminist Key."

Journal of Spiritual Formation 15 (1994): 137-146. Suffering as part of spiritual development has a long history, beginning with the self-mortifications of Medieval women like Saints Clare and Teresa.

Contemporary feminist seekers of spiritual wisdom look askance at this tradition. Giles uses Etty Hillesum's experiences recorded in her letters and diaries as examples of how her suffering, entered into voluntarily, transformed her self-gratification into compassion. Feminists who follow "an outer agenda" without paying attention to their inner struggles risk missing the nourishment that arises from "night's inner darkness...[that is followed by] the joys of the dawn (146)."

1995

B24 Bowie, Fiona. "Modern Women Mystics : Etty Hillesum and Simone Weil."

New Blackfriars 76 no. 892 (1995): 175-187. Etty Hillesum was a mystic, who developed a mature relationship with God, manifested in her life with others. She was not conventionally religious, but over time learned to be a friend of the indwelling God, and thereby lived fully in each moment. She also turned her friendship with God into a sharing of her love with nature and suffering humanity. God came to her in her need, and their mutual love was mystical. Simone Weil was also a mystic, though more analytical than Hillesum.

B25 King, Peter. *Dark Night Spirituality: Thomas Merton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Etty Hillesum, Contemplation and the New Paradigm*. London: Society for

the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1995. (see esp. 35-45, 57-62).
Etty Hillesum reminds King of Merton and especially of Bonhoeffer. She was able to reconcile her love of beauty with the growing evil in the Nazi system. “[Both] are manifestations of life (40).” Life is beautiful if you believe in God. Humans are a dwelling for God...and “where life is, there too is God (42).” Love of others and yourself (and appreciation of beauty) are therefore ways of finding and loving God. Hillesum was a contemplative with a sense of “connectedness, wholeness, and integration (62).” Her love of the world’s beauty makes her a forerunner of creation spirituality. Etty Hillesum’s theology ultimately “disarms” evil by “denying its power ultimately to define what life is all about (59).”

B26 Liebert, Elizabeth. "The Thinking Heart: Development Dynamics in Etty Hillesum's Diaries." *Pastoral Psychology* 43 (1995): 393-409. Uses Etty Hillesum’s diaries as a case study in how to read a text as a way to understand the developmental dynamics and moral growth of its writer. Her life as described in the diary is a model for creating an integrated self, as she moved through the stages of development theorized by James Fowler, Robert Kegan and others. Spier helped pace Etty Hillesum’s development; after his death, God took his place as pacer, as did historical circumstances. In the end, Etty developed fully in a hostile environment; we should create hospitable environments in our society, as we question how our culture limits personal spiritual growth.

B27 Sievers, Joseph. “Reflections on the Life and Thought of Etty Hillesum.”
SIDIC Periodical: Issue Title: Women and Dialogue 28. no. 3 (1995): 9-16.

Web.

http://www.notredamedesion.org/fr/dialogue_sidicView.php?id=634

Sievers describes Hillesum's life, the roots of her thought and action, her Jewish identity, and her maturing relationship to God. She believed that God needs help, much as one of her favorite writers Rilke believed (and possibly Spier). Sievers also adds some Jewish roots for this belief. We need to continue Hillesum's heritage of co-responsibility as God's partner (para. 23).

1996

B28 Bedient, Calvin. "Etty Hillesum: Outward from the Camps Themselves," in *Martyrs*, ed. Susan Bergman. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 169-181. Describes the strengthening of Etty Hillesum's soul, which she sometimes called God. Speir helped her grow beyond her spiritually limited, but emotionally charged self. Then she began to kneel in prayer, feeling oneness with life and neighbors. Though she had a sense of moral outrage at events and systems around her, she did not let it grow into hatred of individuals. Instead she voluntarily went to Westerbork to ameliorate suffering in that Hell, even as she continued to find beauty in the world. Though she was to be killed, she recognized that her soul would remain free.

B29 Todorov, Tzvetan. *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, translated by Arthur Denner and Abigail Pollak, New York: Henry Holt, 1996. In a respectful critique, Todorov devotes nearly a full

chapter to Hillesum: “Nonviolence and Resignation,” (esp. p. 198-209) besides using her as an example throughout the book when analyzing various moral issues. In Hillesum’s chapter he poses a specific moral dilemma: whether to take up the tools of the “evil” oppressor against the oppressor, and in so doing risk becoming evil yourself, even as you liberate yourself from the oppression; or, as Etty Hillesum did, to root out the evil within your own heart as a first step to stopping the cycles of violence, and at the same time become a balm for the wounds in others. “Hatred remains her chief enemy (200).” Nevertheless, she continues to hate injustice, without the belief in taking up arms against it. Todorov argues that this pacifist position has power at times, though not always, as “hatred is sometimes not only justified but necessary (202).” The Warsaw resistance fighters cannot be equated with the Nazis they hated and fought. Etty accepts the world, and thus the evil in it too. Todorov counters: “evil is not only painful; very often it is also absurd and, for that reason, unacceptable (208).”

1997

B30 Brenner, Rachel. *Writing as Resistance: Four Women Confront the*

Holocaust. Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum.

Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. Writing autobiography in times of oppression is an act of resistance. Resistance is manifested for Etty Hillesum in a refusal to quit loving the world, and in love for the suffering humanity surrounding her. Evil cannot be completely eradicated from the world. It is interwoven into life, so

Brenner argues. Nevertheless, it must be confronted, and Hillesum did so with both her writing and her acts of selfless love. Her writing of diaries and letters takes up the challenge of confronting evil. As she perceived what the Nazis were doing, she identified with her Jewish heritage, but did not practice either Judaism or Christianity by attention to tradition or ritual. She did, however, attempt to help God. "Hillesum ...defines God as the redeeming moral value that needs to be rediscovered and rescued in the reality of total moral collapse (113)." She shapes her diaries and letters as narratives against evil, and against "fatalism and fear (135)." The "ultimate grace is the poetic word (136)." Brenner also explores Etty Hillesum's gender consciousness. Her sense of strengthening womanhood grew during the course of her diaries. She left behind her former sexual dependencies. In the end she believed she contained a spark of the divine within herself, and that belief should offer us hope in our own struggles.

B31 Penzenstadler, Joan. "Attention to Transcendence: The Life of Etty Hillesum," in *Wagering on Transcendence: The Search for Meaning in Literature*, ed. Phyllis Carey. (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1997). 28-49. (Originally published in 2 no. 2 *Magistra: A Journal of Women's Spirituality in History*). Introduction to Etty Hillesum's spirituality. Etty mediated the transcendent with the world. "She shifted from a narcissistic self-consciousness to a reflection on self that was passionately centered in her desire to live an authentic human life (30)." Her religious sensibility developed from within her self. Etty learned that we have to change ourselves first, before we can change the world. From a

fearful beginning, she learned to love life, even during the dire events that overtook the Jews, with whom she continued to feel solidarity (39). Prayer became central for her – a “fasting from anxiety (41).” Through prayer she learned to care for others. She also learned *hineinhorchen*, the German word for “hearken unto,” or “being attentive to what is meant (43).” Penzenstadler summarizes the Etty Hillesum of the letters and diaries as “an incarnation of what it means to listen to the deeper rhythm of life (47).” That same rhythm works within us, beckoning us to also hearken unto it.

1998

B32 De Costa, Denise. *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum: Inscribing Spirituality and Sexuality*. Translated by Mischa F.C. Hoyinck and Robert E. Chesal. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). See esp. chapters 4-6 for a feminist reading of Hillesum. Chapter 4 systematically summarizes the diaries and the letters as an introduction to Etty Hillesum’s writing. In Chapter 5, De Costa uses the literary theories of Helene Cixous to describe Etty Hillesum’s diaries as feminine writing (*écriture féminine*), written without Hillesum using them as a “training ground for [creative] writing (193).” Writing the diaries was rather Etty Hillesum’s way of transcending depression in order to live a more full life, and as a “survival mechanism, a wall erected to conquer the fear of death (195).” Rilke and Hillesum both attempted to avoid writing about the unsightly, instead seeking the beautiful. Eventually, this changed for Hillesum with her move to Westerbork. The letters were more outwardly focused, and

fall into Cixous' category of "poetic" politics (203). They nourish readers and raise political consciousness. In the end Hillesum did all she could with what little time she had, to develop a "feminine libidinal economy (205)." In Chapter 6, De Costa concentrates on Etty as the Girl Who Could Not Kneel, and her developing spirituality. Etty Hillesum's two great spiritual mentors were her friends Henny Tideman and Julius Spier. Tideman taught her to pray, while Spier became her God-like therapist. Hillesum's spirituality also developed from many additional sources, as her reading and reflections led her away from any one religious tradition. She was a mystic, who found God in herself, from the "very moment Etty chose to be herself (226)." She experienced God as her deepest self, and in this she was subverting the power of the masculine, by knowing God directly, especially after the death of Spier. She became more independent in her relationship with God, as God became more dependent on her. In time, Etty Hillesum was able to balance her inner-oriented dialogue and concern for God's well-being, with concern for the events of the outer world- the suffering and death around her (232). De Costa writes of Hillesum's maternity- not the motherhood of a person who has birthed a child, but rather Van der Haegen's concept of "sociomaternal productivity (235)." This means giving birth to things apart from children- in her case, the social work activities she performed in Westerbork, trying to "bring out the divine in her fellow human beings (238)." At the end God accompanied her to Auschwitz.

B33 Makkonen, Anna. "Holocaust Chronicle, Spiritual Autobiography, Portrait of an Artist, Novel in the Making: Reading the Abridged Diary of Etty Hillesum." *Biography (Honolulu)* 22 no. 2 (1999): 237-261. Analyzes the literariness of Hillesum's diary. It is a private diary written for public reading. Etty Hillesum is a skilled diarist, both critically and narratively. Her poetics is developed even in the midst of horror. Through the writing of her diary, she helps develop the patterns that will alleviate her chaotic existence. Her diary also acts as a storehouse for future images, stories, and other literary devices. Rilke was her "theologian of creativity (251)." Over the course of the diaries the struggle to study vs. the urge to make the diaries take on a social role intensifies. Art gives way to social commitment, as Etty Hillesum attempts to be a balm for all wounds.

B34 Patterson, David. *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press. 1999). See esp. pp. 24-28. A bitter commentary. Etty Hillesum's diary is not a Holocaust diary. The meaninglessness of the Holocaust is outside of her understanding. She is too willing to accept the Holocaust as part of life. She is a voyeur, while the *other ...*"as parent or child, friend or sibling, God or community- is of very little significance to Hillesum (27)."

B35 Schiffhorst, Gerald J. "Etty Hillesum and the Language of Silence." *Mars Hill Review*.14 (1999): 43-50. Etty Hillesum cultivated a spirituality of contemplative silence, much like Thomas Merton. In silence God is present; this silence is more stable than words – a sort of "cosmic interior (47)." Schiffhorst quotes Hillesum: we must "become as simple and

wordless as the growing corn or the falling rain. We must just be (48).”

Schiffhorst does not cite his sources or the appropriate page numbers or dates from her diaries or letters for his Hillesum quotes.

2000

B36 DeCosta, Denise. “Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum: Diarists,” in *Anne Frank:*

Reflections on her Life and Legacy, ed. Hymon Aaron Enzer and Sandra Solotaroff-Enzer (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 214-222. Contrary to the opinion of Sem Dresden in *Persecution, Extermination, Literature*, the writings of Etty Hillesum and Anne Frank are important Holocaust testimonies. Dresden believes their works to be insufficiently Jewish, and too inner-focused to be of much use to Holocaust historians. DeCosta contests these assertions. She sees the writings of Frank, and especially Hillesum as “acts of resistance and survival (218).” As their outward situation grew more dire, the writings helped them create inner growth. Hillesum’s writings are a sort of farewell to the good things in life she is losing, even as she accepts the bad. She “accepts the paradoxes and complexities of life itself,” which for her continued to the end of her stay in Westerbork to be a work in progress (221).

B37 Gagne, Laurie Brands. *The Uses of Darkness: Women's Underworld*

Journeys, Ancient and Modern. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000). 143-190. Etty Hillesum’s spiritual journey compared to Psyche- “ a soul in love with a heavenly bridegroom(165).” Spier stirred

up the life force in her, but she initially transferred it to love for him. Then with the help of her diaries, she turned inward instead to find her deeper self. She hungered for the Absolute, but “never lost her equilibrium (160).” She discovered her way in life, by following her heart’s desire: the love of God there. This enabled her to embrace suffering in the deeper life of the spirit. “God is in our hearts, Etty Hillesum would say- but it is we who must give the love expression (179).” And she did, thereby transforming her relationships. She became aware she would soon die. She then became the mediator between others and God. Etty Hillesum’s journey from loving Spier to loving God was “simply the process of coming to know her heart (190).”

B38 Gaillardetz, Richard. "Etty Hillesum: Suffering and Sexuality, Reflections on Passionate Living." *Spirituality* 6 (May-June 2000): 148-52. Etty Hillesum was flawed, but lived passionately, rather than apathetically. This passion included embracing suffering and death as part of life, along with the sensual and her problematic eroticism. Living passionately can lead to compassion, and thereby, bring us closer to the divine.

B39 Neiman, Alven M. "Self Examination, Philosophical Education and Spirituality." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 34 no. 4 (2000): 571-90. Neiman, who was a professor at Notre Dame, writes to an audience of philosophers who train students to self-examine and develop spiritually. Distinguishing between the two antagonistic models of 1) Pierre Hadot’s Socratic “philosophy as a way of life” (PWL) - what Neiman also calls

“spiritual exercise”, rather than the more au courant 2) “philosophy as theory” (PT), Neiman argues for the former in teaching. He then examines the thought of three exemplars: Wittgenstein and his “philosophy as learning to die”, St. Bernard of Clairvaux with his “loving wonder at the centre of life,” and Etty Hillesum’s “interruption and resurrection.” Hillesum proves that even in the most dire circumstances, her intuitive PWL can prove essential to growth. Her inner changes due to PWL led to outward caring for the whole of creation. Academic philosophers and others may not face the Holocaust, as Hillesum did, but face other demons.

2001

B40 Beattie, Tina. "Etty Hillesum: A Thinking Heart in a Darkened World," in *Spirituality and Society in the New Millennium*, ed. Ursula King with Tina Beattie. (Brighton, GB: Sussex Academic Press, 2001). Chap. 18: 247-260. Etty Hillesum attempted to “humanize the world through discourse (248).” She thought that individual transformations were necessary in order to transform society. Communication of her inner development, however, in the time of the Holocaust, was overlaid with the broken-ness of the world. Beattie uses Paul Ricoeur to argue that in such times we need to create new forms of expression in order to share our story in a meaningful manner. Etty Hillesum struggled with this dilemma. She tried to record the world around her, while at the same time crafting a narrative of hope (250-1). She “read” the world to get at the truth. She accepted her Jewishness, yet remained a bit of an outsider to that

community. She used “cameos” or vignettes to get at the human tales surrounding her in a sort of parallel history to that of general events (252). It is through these stories that the human spirit survived, even though they are, like the stories of others from the Holocaust, inadequate to the times. Hillesum developed a “post-religious spirituality” that is an amalgam of post-Enlightenment European culture, Christian and Jewish beliefs, prayer, and modern psychology. Her spirituality includes a dialogue with God that is more than just an inner talk with her self (254-5). This dialogue provides her with meaning. In it, she helps God, who has become fragile, and must be defended “against human destruction (256).” This theological construct comes from Hillesum’s Jewish background, not some Christian theology of the Cross. From her dialogue with God, she finds the meaning that the world of current events no longer provides her. Beattie concludes that Etty Hillesum’s story “is a mosaic of minute and broken shards of humanity lovingly pieced together against a backdrop of impenetrable darkness, with a gaze that is focused on the eternal and the beautiful in every human being (257).”

B41 Brenner, Rachel Feldhay. “Etty Hillesum: Self-Search as a Writer in the Hell of Westerbork,” in *Women in the Holocaust: Responses, Insights and Perspectives*, ed. Marcia Sachs Littell. (Merion Station: Merion Westfield Press International, 2001), 97-103. In this brief book chapter, Brenner places Hillesum’s Westerbork letters in context, defining them as Holocaust testimonies of a victim-diarist. By actively writing, Etty Hillesum was countering the Nazi attempt to dehumanize the Jews. No writing at that time could adequately describe reality through its

narrative. Art and reality were out of balance. Nevertheless, Hillesum attempted to use the force of love to overcome the imbalances. In this effort, she displayed great sensitivity, and was able to transform the experience of Westerbork “into a source of artistic creativity (102).”

B42 Evans, Mary. "Gender and the Literature of the Holocaust: The Diary of Etty Hillesum." *Women* 12 No. 3 (2001): 325-35. Attempts a feminist reading of the diaries. Etty Hillesum shows that “it is not bureaucracy or social order that produces evil, but the ideas that inform it (327).” And these ideas created an “organized system of destruction (328).” Against the evil, Hillesum asserted “the centrality to civilized existence of the everyday and the mundane (329).” But even more so, rationality is necessary to produce “caring within chaos”. Hillesum was an educated woman, part of the enlightenment tradition. But rational operation was also central to the Nazis and their well-developed organization (but theirs was based on irrational ideas). At Westerbork, she went beyond rationality to a concern “for mothers and children and for maintaining – for as long as possible – the ties between them (332).” Nazism marginalized the ethic of care (334).

B43 Hannafey, Francis T. "Ethics as Transformative Love: The Moral World of Etty Hillesum." *Horizons* 28 no.1 (2001): 68-80. Examines Etty Hillesum’s moral development and her vision of the love of God and others as an ethic, similar to that of Augustine. As time goes on, her moral life becomes more outwardly focused. She is critical of hatred, “and experiences enduring goodness in life (76).” Her moral vision

transcends any one religious tradition. Her love of the people around her “displays a radically altruistic love (80).”

B44 Whitehead, Anne. "A Still, Small Voice: Letter-Writing, Testimony and the Project of Address in Etty Hillesum's Letters from Westerbork." *Cultural Values* 5 no. 1 (2001): 79-96. Whitehead uses the theories of Cathy Caruth and Jacques Derrida to explore Etty Hillesum's letters as examples of testimonial address. Hillesum witnessed Westerbork as a dreamer, rather than as its day-to-day chronicler, who was the diarist Philip Mechanicus. Her testimonial act was precarious, depending on the delivery of the mail she sent out, and also on the ability of outsiders to understand her witness. It was a rehearsal for her departure. It was also a manifestation of her drive for life as opposed to the death drive. She creates a kind of mystical witness that separates itself from the more typical mothering seen in Westerbork. The postcard Etty Hillesum tossed from the train to Auschwitz is one final creative act of parting, and an act of living.

2002

B45 Smelik, Klaas A.D. Introduction to *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans, Edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), ix-xvi. Briefly describes the chronology of Etty Hillesum's life, the generation of her writings, and the history of their publication in the Netherlands.

B46 Smelik, Klaas A.D. Notes to Hillesum, Etty. *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans, Edited by Klaas A.D. Smelik, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002). 673-786. Arguably the most important secondary source on the life and writings of Hillesum, and a masterpiece of annotation. To be read in conjunction with this edition of the letters and diaries. It is the indispensable guide to Etty Hillesum's known writings. Smelik explains current events, personalities, locations, and the authors Hillesum mentions or quotes in her writings.

2004

B47 Burrell, David B. "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum." chap. 16 in *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 245-57. Augustine's *Confessions* and Etty Hillesum's *Diaries* and *Letters* demonstrate two similar "seekers and finders (245)." Both are dialogic with God, and show the emergence of a right ordering of their lives over time. Both demonstrate in their writings a "person-in-community (247)." Both offer us paradigmatic stories, that is, ones that we can emulate. Also, each was transformed by what they perceived as a higher power operating in the world, creating life as a gift. Etty Hillesum was a pioneer in incorporating the power of the Christian gospels into her Jewish situation. Can we of today understand the power of the other religious traditions surrounding us? It is an open question.

B48 Grimmelikhuizen, Frits. "We Have Only to be There With all our Heart: The Lessons Rainer Maria Rilke Taught to Etty Hillesum." Paper presented at the *Etty Hillesum, Companion on Life's Journey Conference*, St. Paul MN, March 2004. (Available from the Bibliographer-Jim Newsome). Over one third of Etty Hillesum's diaries are written in German, including many embedded quotes, as are the letters she sent to Kormann and to her friends the Levies. The famous German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who died in 1926, was very important to Hillesum. She called him her second greatest teacher after Spier (28). Rilke's life and work is discussed by Grimmelikhuizen. Rilke felt an intimate relationship with things, and Hillesum shared this sense of the "numinous" adhering to objects. Rilke wrote a thousand letters, and Etty Hillesum may have learned her letter-writing skills partially from him (11-12). Her relationship with Spier and with God mirrored Rilke's with the older Lou Salome. Hillesum was fascinated by Salome and her writings on sexuality, love, gender, and God (14). But Rilke was the central figure, and Etty Hillesum loved his writing. She studied it carefully. For Rilke and her, God was a mirror. Both also were concerned with patience, and "[living] the questions" in the present, on the way to finding the answers in the future (22). "Rilke and Etty Hillesum were really soulmates (27)." Yet in the end she lets him go, not bringing his work with her on the train to Auschwitz. Her love for him transcended the writings.

B49 Maas, Frans. "Etty Hillesum: In me is the earth and in me is heaven." Chap. 4 in *"Spirituality as Insight: Mystical Texts and Theological Reflections*. Leuven, Dudley MA,: Peeters, 2004, 112-145. Etty Hillesum's

suffering did not lessen her mystical strength. Her relationship with God only grew stronger. In the early diaries, she sought balance between her desires and reality through an inner centeredness that helped her detach from obsessions. Her love of Spier was a source of her love for others, especially after his death, when Hillesum took on his priestly function as mediator with God. Hillesum also sought harmony between her inner centeredness and outer realities. This relationship played out in her soul, which was her “point of contact with God (127),” much as it had been for the mystic, Meister Eckhart. Literature also nourished Etty Hillesum, as it helped her discover love, but alone it was not enough. She believed the soul belongs to God, and that it must be rediscovered every day; it is where God meets the God within. Kneeling helped her do this rediscovery. The soul can be an occasional shelter, but Hillesum continually ventured out into the world of external suffering. As Hillesum gradually overcame her inner chaos, she began to bear the chaos of others (135). She rejected hatred as a strategy for opposing oppression. People should combat oppression by listening to their “better nature (137),” while not forgetting the oppression. We are placed in a position of “responsibility for the world and for the suffering other in it (139).” Also, we are to look after God, as Etty Hillesum does, by defending the soul, but also by being active in the needs of others. Sometimes, all we can do is be with others in their suffering, “and protect them from being devastated by misery (144),” while “things come and go in a deeper rhythm and people must be taught to listen to it (145, quoting Hillesum).”

B50 Patterson, David. "Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 no. 2 (2004): 274-90. Creates a definition of Holocaust diaries as being different than other diaries, and then argues that Hillesum's diaries and letters do not fit Patterson's genre (285-7). He also writes that Hillesum was too optimistic, uncritical, voyeuristic, egotistically concerned with her own personal issues, and too self-important to be a useful Holocaust chronicler. He also does not believe she was adequately Jewish, and therefore was not part of the Jewish communal witness.

B51 Shirley, Inda Starr. "Five Holocaust Diaries (Anne Frank, Moishe Flinker, Eva Heyman, Etty Hillesum, Dawid Sierakowiak)." PhD. diss., Union Institute and University, 2004. Chapter 5: "The Diary of Etty Hillesum," 118-48, and Chapter 7: "Conclusion," 183-98. Hillesum's diary reflects an independent, self-reflecting woman. Her god was shaped by her inner self, and she felt stronger as she shaped this god. Healing from previous emotional ailments occurred for Hillesum as she chronicled the Holocaust. This was the second war to affect her. Her diary "began as a secular text but evolved into a spiritual one (134)." It flowed with continuity, unlike many other diaries which were more discontinuous. Her "sense of responsibility was a leitmotif that surfaced repeatedly in her diary (138)." In her conclusion, Shirley perceives Hillesum's diary as tripartite. First it documents her self-healing, from that process emerges her testimonial writing, and finally, she uses her words in the healing of others, all three as part of an ongoing growth-process (193). Her goals

changed as she progressed. Shirley sees diaries as a powerful means of conveying individual experience, and shaping and changing readers.

B52 Thurston, Ann. "Hope in Hell: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum."

Doctrine and Life. 54 no. 3 (2004): 5-20. Etty Hillesum's soul searching in such a dark time may seem odd, but for Hillesum it was the beginning of her soul-making. Her hopefulness helped redress or provide a counterweight to the chaos both within her and without. She faced the darkness and helped God do so too. She was God-centered in her diaries. Then, at Westerbork, she came face to face with evil, and learned what Hell is like. She witnessed for us what she saw and heard there, and after her death in Auschwitz, a part of her continued in her readers: "a little piece of God growing into poetry (19)."

2005

B53 McDonough, William C. "Etty Hillesum's Learning to Live and Preparing to

Die: *Complacentia Boni* as the Beginning of Acquired and Infused Virtue." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25 no. 2 (2005): 179-202. A complex Thomistic and "virtue ethics" approach to Etty Hillesum, difficult to encapsulate. Etty Hillesum begins the diaries with her life a mess. This "early Etty" is the lost soul that critics like David Patterson malign for egocentric narcissism. However, though she is broken like us, as she matures during the time period of the diaries, her life becomes a stellar example of a "flawed saint" who offers us an entry into how to live our lives in spite of imperfections. In spite of her flaws there is growth,

first in preparation for her impending destruction, and then at Westerbork as the test of her ethical perspective and art against the reigning Nazi horror and counter-ethic. As Rachel Brenner wrote (see 1997 entry above), Hillesum had “faith in the redemptive power of love (quoted 182).” But Brenner does not tell us what this love is, or how it works. De Costa’s Hillesum (see 1998 entry above) is filled with love of a god she creates. Others speak of her love as supernaturalistic and self-effacing. Against these polarities, McDonough defines Etty Hillesum’s love as springing out of Aquinas’ concept of complacency or a resting in what is rationally good (*complacentia boni*), but also coupled with concern. It is a virtue that non-Christian Etty Hillesum can teach Christians, as we observe from her diaries and letters how God’s grace infuses her and strengthens her life of virtue.

B54 Pleshoyano, Alexandra. "Etty Hillesum: For God and With God." *Way*. 44 no.1 (2005): 3-20. Etty Hillesum’s life and works are the developmental seeds for a post-Auschwitz theology. Hillesum’s spiritual growth, as presented in the diaries, can be interpreted in a Jungian way as the projection of her self in the development of an internal God-consciousness. But not always. At other times she writes of God working in the world. This God (and Spier) helped her develop an inner freedom as she learned to feel at home in a disrupted world. Spier helped her unravel her tight inner self, to kneel, meditate, and let God enter her life. Etty Hillesum then became God’s steward or servant, and felt an intimate

relationship with God (14-5). She defended God, and the beauty of the world, and took on the task of trying to be responsible for God (16). She tried to live a life of “giving” to others, as her way of loving God. She also wrote of forgiving God, as she “remain[ed] faithful to that best part of herself which she called God, and to that best part of others which she also called God, so that God might remain faithful to God (17).” In the end it was love that sustained Hillesum. Spier helped her speak the name of the God of love, but with Spier’s death she walked with and for God directly. God, through love of her self, beauty, and others, gave her (and us) a reason for living.

B55 ---. "Etty Hillesum: A Theological Hermeneutic in the Midst of Evil."

Literature & Theology 19 no. 3 (2005): 221-37. Etty Hillesum attempted to bridge the seeming divisions between her body, emotions, spirituality, and intellectuality. She used texts such as those of Rilke and Augustine in this process, but adapted them to her own needs, using them like shards from which to piece together her own picture of things – her own sense of truth. She also used Jung, via her mentor Spier. From these guides she came to realize that words were inadequate to express her relationship with God. Yet she tried, using metaphors and symbols. Her metaphor of the God within was not confined to “within” her body, but rather within her wider, Jungian self in the world. She also used Christian authors to help her explore this God-self relation, and interpret God, though she did not become a Christian. Her God was both immanent and transcendent – inward and in the world. The Shoah “soil[ed] most of God’s images, breaking them to pieces. But...Hillesum

kept searching for the mystery behind the broken images (229).” She trusted God, and was willing to bear witness that the Holocaust was not God’s fault. She looked for the existence of God’s image or presence even in humankind’s dark times. The author, Pleshoyano, believes that Etty Hillesum’s life was itself a “vehicle and a voice for God in the midst of evil,” as she lived God’s love through her own love for others (231). Pleshoyano notes that Hillesum holds meaning for readers today, partly because she attempted to be non-judgmental, while presenting us with a model for living. She lived on the margins of Judaism, but maintained solidarity with her Jewish compatriots. While she did not develop a systematic theology, her understanding of God begins to emerge in her writing and language, with its metaphorical and analogical understandings. From studying her diaries and letters, we can come to our own calling to interpret the world and disclose its truths.

B56 Walton, Heather. "Sex in the War: An Aesthetics of Resistance in the Diaries of Etty Hillesum." *Theology & Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity & Sexuality* 12 no. 1 (2005): 51-61. Walton compares Etty Hillesum’s writing to that of Helene Cixous. For Hillesum, sex is a central component of her writing. It transcends the death-culture surrounding her and other Jews. It also connects her to natural beauty and the world of literature, especially Rilke. Walton sees Hillesum as seeking, through her sexuality, “an erotic intimacy with the divine,” found through an “erotic path to God (54).” This path embraces “embodiment” of the spiritual, manifested in the interaction of the body and soul. This process is messy, and Hillesum’s love affairs were

unconventional and at times imperfect. Her spirituality bred from beauty and art and sensuality “confront[s] the ugliness of historical circumstances (58).” The second half of her writings witnesses the constriction of her sensual circumstances. Spier dies. The jasmine flowers that sustain her with their beauty are battered and torn by storms. Yet she holds on to them internally, even as she contemplates the immense sufferings of Westerbork and beyond. As with the French feminist Cixous, Hillesum believed that paradise could be found at any time as an internal state of being. The garden can be kept open during wartime by “writers, mystics, artists and lovers,” who are the “guardians of the sacred (60).” Perhaps this is what Etty Hillesum meant when she wrote that she wanted to be the thinking heart of the barracks.

2006

B57 Fenoulhet, Jane. "Intimate Emancipation: Mystical Experience in the Work of Carry van Bruggen and Etty Hillesum." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 42 no. 3 (2006): 213-25. Dutch novelist Carry Van Bruggen and Etty Hillesum were both mystics who used their mysticism to help with self-development, and to emancipate themselves from patriarchal structures. Etty Hillesum replaced God-the-Father imagery “by the [essentially ungendered] divine within herself; during the process she ... also exchanged an earthly guru [Spier] for self-reliance (215).” Eventually Hillesum decided that mere independence from family and traditional norms was not enough for fulfillment in the face of Nazi persecution of the Jews. However, her mysticism transcended traditional Judaism,

which limits mysticism to males (216). It intensified after Spier's death, and resembles medieval mysticism: "the ineffability of the sensations experienced, deep inner peace after suffering, union with God described in physical terms, an experience of eternity (223)." This is a form of "opposition combined with self-realisation (224)." It is not an escape from harsh reality, but a way to gather strength for resistance [to patriarchy] and Nazi.

B58 Flinders, Carol Lee. "Etty Hillesum: "The Thinking Heart of the Barracks"" in *Enduring Lives: Portraits of Women and Faith in Action*. (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006), 35-96. A deep and thoughtful introduction to Etty Hillesum, which places her in the tradition of women mystics and spiritual leaders. In the introduction to her book, Flinders argues that as women work for positive change in the world, spiritual friends are necessary. For us, Hillesum is among these potential friends. Flinders writes: "In her company – strengthened...by her calm, her lucidity, her immense warmth – we come back and look again at what we must. With her, we begin to ask...: How do hearts turn to stone? And what do we do about it (6)?" The book is a series of studies of women of faith, including a long chapter on Hillesum. Her writings are described as "a passionate footnote to official versions of what was happening and a fierce corrective to them (36)." Etty Hillesum began her writing as therapy, but as the world around her went mad, she herself became more spiritually and psychologically integrated. She became a mystic, but with her own set of beliefs. Her life is described, as are her favorite writers. The problematic Spier became her spiritual mentor/director, and

his methods are mentioned, especially his attempts to integrate the physical and the spiritual. Hillesum followed Spier's therapeutic beliefs in this area, and started to pray as an outgrowth of it. Her prayers were dialogues and a sort of whole body listening. One of Etty Hillesum's key objectives was not to hate, and the historical reasons that would have increased her hatred are described. But she strove to find something of God in every individual, even Nazis. Eventually she realized that universal love was the best antidote to hatred. Another theme of Hillesum's writing was the attempt to integrate the introspective writer Etty, with the outward Etty who became a sort of social worker. Her writing became a "moment-to-moment vigilance" which "develop[ed] from day to day until eventually it became unconscious. (52)." Flinders draws analogies between Etty Hillesum's manner of being and that of the monastic life, and especially with mystics who gradually feel they are "no longer doing all the work themselves" but that God is working in/through them (55). Eventually the Nazis forced Etty Hillesum's attention outward even more, because of the rising tide of Jewish suffering surrounding her. The lethal maelstrom of Westerbork became the center of Etty Hillesum's life. She saw death around her there, and accepted its inevitability as part of life (69). Yet she worked to ameliorate the "unutterable" misery around her, especially at Westerbork, where she felt an immense tenderness for her fellow inmates. Her letters from there show courage, keen observations, and generosity. The final part of the essay comprises Flinders deeper reflections on Etty Hillesum and her spirituality. One insight of Flinders is that Hillesum attempted to

overcome dualities, as did her friend Spier. She even worked to integrate her Russian and Dutch sides, among other personal chasms. Etty Hillesum's kneeling posture was a crossroads of the spiritual and the bodily – of God and the human. She was a “compassionate witness,” a phrase developed by Harvard Medical School Psychologist Kaethe Weingarten (89), and as such made herself completely available to others. Another theme of Flinders is Etty Hillesum's development of a *flow* to her consciousness (90), even as she struggled to prevent the doubling of her psyche, as people often do in an unconscious attempt to cut off memories of trauma (91). Hillesum wanted to remain aware of what was going on around her “yet [remain] resistant to the panic and rage that could at any moment have engulfed her (93).” Flinders closes the chapter with the metaphor that Hillesum “came to life’ and woke up to a deeper awareness of the spiritual during the period of her diaries and letters.

B59 Gubar, Susan. "Falling for Etty Hillesum." *Common Knowledge* 12 no. 2 (2006): 279-301. Etty Hillesum “fell” or kneeled in a creative manner, as she gained more insights into transcendent love. In this, she followed Rilke's falling angels metaphor. Gubar looks at Etty Hillesum's diaries as the awakening of a young woman's sensibilities and inner-health in a time of growing crisis. Rilke was a strong influence on her as she tried to make sense of her simultaneous erotic relationships with Spier and Pa Hans. Over time her need for love of a strong man transforms into more of a God-directed loving connection with everyone. Simultaneously, she also becomes more of a realist as the Nazi-dominated world closes in

around her. Nevertheless, she follows Rilke in her love of natural objects (like the jasmine flowers) that she impressed into her consciousness and wrote of in her diaries (288). At this time, she also redefined God as needing her help like Rilke's lowly God (hence her falling, i.e. kneeling to be nearer this lowly God). Gubar explores Hillesum's wrestling with Spier, who is like "a transcendent agent capable of granting her an identity as vulnerable and thus as consecrated as his (291)." This new identity includes acknowledgement of the god within her and a subsequent love of life. As she learns to kneel and pray, she continues to think of herself as a Jew. When Hillesum reaches Westerbork, her letters turn to testimony of what is happening in the camp: horror and misery and impending mass eradication of the Jews of Holland. Her faith in love waivers in those circumstances. Yet, she accepts her fate, and does not fall into doing evil herself. She "reads" the circumstances like a mystic (296). She uses Rilke's writings to help her through Westerbork, and saves him from his aestheticism by using his work for redemptive purposes (297). Reading was redemptive for Etty Hillesum, much like prayer was, as it helped her "fall out of the self (297)."

Our reading of Hillesum keeps her alive, as we "fall" into her, and yet we feel helpless to save her from her ultimate fate. As we know more of her fate than she does, we cannot simply accept her redemption-tinged texts as redemptive for her (299). We know what will happen to Etty Hillesum and her community, and we cannot or should not translate her writings into a "banal commercial for the triumph of the human spirit (299)." We

do not know what she believed at the very end of her life, a few months later at the final falling, though it may have been to accept her Being.

B60 Keefer, Janice Kulyk. "Etty Hillesum: 1914-1943" in *Midnight Stroll*.

Monoprints and Drawings by Claire Weissman Wilks. (Toronto: Exile Editions, 2006), 27-125. Keefer uses Etty Hillesum's writings as take-off points for her own poems, which carry within them many of Hillesum's words interspersed with Keefer's own. She writes her own sections in the first person, as an additional voice for Hillesum! The voices intermingle. Wilks' drawings and prints enhance the work, as visually interpretive pieces on Etty Hillesum's life and thoughts.

2007

B61 Nitzan, Tal. "I Remember Etty Hillesum." *Bridges: A Jewish Feminist*

Journal. 12 no. 2 (Autumn 2007): 65-6. A short poem using quotes from Etty Hillesum, interspersed with the author's own words. Nitzan feels a growing sense of hope, and wonders if she should remember Etty Hillesum's own journey, as her own takes her to more peaceful places.

B62 Thompson, Margie. "Stones of Norwich, Ashes of Auschwitz: Julian of Norwich and Etty Hillesum Finding Wisdom by Praying Life Experience," in *Not Etched in Stone: Essays on Ritual Memory, Soul, and Society*, ed. Marie A. Conn and Therese McGuire, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 43-60. An attempt to find the similarities and connections between Medieval mystic Julian of Norwich and Etty Hillesum. They emerged from different backgrounds, but both had

similar spiritual journeys, centering on embodied prayer. For both writing was a spiritual practice, though Julian's was closer to formal theology. Over time, the two women developed an intense intimacy with God. They also shared a strong belief in the power of love, and "refused to despair in the face of disillusionment and destruction (49)." Etty Hillesum's love of God transformed from a yearning for inner peace into a service ethic, and eventually toward union with God and with the suffering Jews of Westerbork and elsewhere. Hillesum and Julian suffered with their God, and their God suffered with them. But both "refused to focus on suffering, choosing instead to focus on love. The fruit of their love as peace and power, as astounding faith and joy, is record[ed] in their writings....It was *through* and not *in spite of* her life experiences that each woman found her unique voice, her central task, and her sensitive service as response in love to Love (57)."

2008

B63 Coetsier, Meins G. S. *Etty Hillesum and the Flow of Presence: A Voegelian Analysis*. Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008. A key work which uses the philosophy of Eric Voegelin to create a broader context/framework for Etty Hillesum's writings, as it simultaneously offers her life as an example of Voegelin's theory carried into practice.

Chapter One contains a biography of Hillesum. In it Coetsier highlights Etty Hillesum's personal incorporation of the transcendent into her inner self in a world of personal, familial, and cultural dysfunction. She was

able to stay open to this transcendent aspect of reality as her spirituality grew. Voegelin diagnosed a spiritual crisis in modernity similar to Hillesum's circumstances. Both valued the human person in a world gripped in terror. Coetsier provides character sketches of the notable friends, family, and other influences on Hillesum.

The second chapter analyzes the diaries and letters, which are marked by a strong sense of the flow of life through the chaos of the age. Like Voegelin, Hillesum searched for order amongst the chaos, and was almost obsessed (perhaps because of the spiritual sickness of her family upbringing) with overcoming the surrounding disorder. Coetsier, in this useful chapter, employs his native Dutch to help English language readers better understand many of the key language tropes Hillesum repeated in her writings. Some examples of these words and phrases, among others, are heart and breath, center and source, the Other and God.

Coetsier moves in Chapter 3 to a discussion of Eric Voegelin's philosophy of culture and history. What chiefly distinguishes Voegelin's philosophy is "his robust insistence on human orientation toward, and receptivity to, the divine as the principal source of the inner form, and this is what Voegelin means by "order," of the life of each society and of each human being (101)." Voegelin also saw God as the "flow of presence" in each person, and in history.

Chapter Four is entitled *Hillesum in the Flow of Presence*. In it Coetsier marks Etty Hillesum's writing as a form of resistance to the Nazis, "charged with flowing presence (123)." He uses the term *attunement* to allude to the love of wisdom that both Voegelin and Hillesum use in their defense of the self among the metaxy or in-betweenness of modern life. Both became "mediators of the divine reality of experiences of truth, love, and goodness to other people (129)." Hillesum stood her ground because of love (151). She kneeled as both a physical and spiritual act of orderliness, and this act included the courage to be herself (156-7). The Nazis violated the dignity of the individual, as well as that of the collective Jews. In Westerbork Hillesum restored that dignity through her love of individuals. Unlike the Nazi aberration, she embraced the divine ground of her being in mindfulness and in open existence, which became her flowing presence. Later on, this embrace with the transcendent opened Hillesum to serious reflection on the fact that God lived amidst the Nazi deformation, and to this she witnessed at Westerbork.

In a final conclusion, the book reviews the author's argument. Coetsier also approaches Etty Hillesum's letters as akin to the New Testament Epistles, as more than shallow flattening of events, but rather "transcendent address (197)"- the confluence of timelessness with time.

B64 Coetsier, Meins G. S. "Etty Hillesum and the Light of Faith: A Voegelian Analysis." *Modern Age* 50.3 (Summer 2008): 198-206. Etty Hillesum's struggles in life brought her to belief in, and dialogue with God. As the world around her deteriorated, her own spiritual conduct took on the

values of love and compassion (199). This spiritual practice was an ordering process for her similar to that advocated by the German political philosopher Eric Voegelin in his philosophy of “experience and symbolization”, a pathway we can use now to bring order to our own chaotic times (200). As she began her diaries she was living in a “deformed reality,” which was the personal result of a dysfunctional family and self-doubt, and of the Nazi disordering of society around her (201). She resisted these processes by her own stance of eliminating hatred from her being. Her diaries began to flow into communion with God, as an inner conversation with God, who was immanent within her (202). She attempted to create Heaven in the midst of the hellish deformations around her. Hillesum acted as a balm for the wounds of those around her, and even found beauty amidst the suffering (203). She refused to give up on humanity, while at the same time acting as a mystical philosopher who kept attuned to the presence of the divine (204). Coetsier maintains in conclusion that Hillesum “became the representative of the divine truth that streamed into her at the meditative Center (Centrum) within her (204).” She has relevance for us today.

B65 Coetsier, Meins G. S. ““God, the Creative Ground of Existence,” in Voegelin, Ety Hillesum and Martin Buber: A Response to Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA), Boston, 2008. Coetsier demonstrates that Richard Dawkin’s atheistic and scornful best-seller, *The God Delusion*, is part of the deformity of our postmodern age which has denied or obscured the presence of the “God” symbol. Eric

Voegelin, the German political/cultural philosopher, strongly urged recovery of the transcendent order, and by extension offered a de facto critique of Dawkins' program of "Atheist Pride". Coetsier summarizes Voegelin's meta-theology relevant to this issue. Then he uses Etty Hillesum's writing as a case study to counter Dawkins' oversimplified notion of God with Etty Hillesum's more complex and symbolic theology. Dawkins attacks a more popular conception of God than the way Hillesum delineates the word. She defines the metaphor God as "the creative ground of existence," and helps us go beyond the "intellectually disordered language symbols" of more popular God images and doctrines (3, 13-14, and passim). Etty Hillesum found what she called God within her self while the surrounding war broke God as an outer image into pieces (16). Yet her inner image of God was a source of dialogue and mutual assurance.

B66 Kornblatt, Joyce. "Refuge in the Storm: A Meditation on Etty Hillesum."

Parabola 33.4 (2008): 86-92. Kornblatt is a Jewish woman who practices Buddhism, and Etty Hillesum has been her teacher because of her "singing in the face of catastrophe (88)," and her "Bodhisattva spirit (88)." Hillesum's "living mandala" was a combination of service, bearing witness, writing and contemplation (88). Her service was one of give and take with those she supported. Her journals and letters bear a difficult witness to the Jewish tragedy of the Holocaust, but also preserve a meeting place for "the dead and the not-yet-conceived (89)." Hillesum's writing was a sacred practice – both communal act and private prayer (89). As we contemplate the diaries and letters we may find our own deep

humanity in pondering Etty Hillesum's interrupted life, where the "ground of our meeting is a death camp (92)."

- B67** Stein, Leon. "An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943," in *Holocaust Literature*, ed. John K. Roth (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2008), 259-63. A summary of Etty Hillesum's writing for a reference work summarizing a variety of Holocaust literature. Besides summarizing Etty Hillesum's work, Stein notes Hillesum's courage and her resolve in the face of terror.
- B68** Woolfson, Tony. "Dear God, There is So Much to Do": Review of Hillesum, Etty. *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943.* *Jung Journal* 2 no.2 (2008): 89-101. A Jungian analysis of Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters. The Jews were often on the receiving end of evil projections from others. They were perceived as outsiders and wanderers, such as Etty Hillesum's mother had been, and thus as threats to order. Hillesum hooked up with Julius Spier, a student of Jung's, and she studied Jung's work through him and through reading Jung herself. Spier helped her to individuate and find the "divine voice" within her. She prayed to this God, and as she did her ego's power diminished, and her true Self emerged (93-4). In this process, she resembled Simone Weil, without Weil's severe asceticism. Also, like Victor Klemperer, the German Jewish diarist, she saw herself as a witness to the events surrounding her. She had more of a spiritual voice than he did, however. Woolfson includes copious endnotes to his review, mostly on Judaism and Jung. One fascinating note reveals that the

famous student of Jung, author Marie-Louise von Franz, consulted Spier, and asked him how he did his palm-reading therapy. He responded that he was a medium, and could tell many details about a person as soon as they walked into a room (98). In other notes Woolfson comments on diary writing as an act of resistance, and quotes Klemperer to that effect (99). Had Etty Hillesum's diaries been found by the Nazis, she would no doubt have immediately been either imprisoned or executed, and the diaries certainly destroyed.

B69 Smelik, Klaus A.D., Ria van den Brandt, and Meins G.S. Coetsier, eds.

Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference, Ghent University, November 2008, Leiden: Brill, 2010. Note: Though the proceedings were published in 2010, the Conference was held in 2008. Entries for each item in the proceedings (all in English) will follow this entry alphabetically by the name of the author. Quotes of Hillesum in the text of these papers are in English, while the original Dutch or German quotes appear below in footnotes.

B70 Brenner, Rachel Feldhay. "Etty Hillesum: A Portrait of a Holocaust Artist," in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 235-51. Hillesum was a writer with a message to the world. This message was presented in two stages: the stage of preparation, which took place primarily in the diaries written in Amsterdam, and the second stage that Brenner names the "stage of the test" (235). This second stage encompassed Hillesum's Westerbork writings. As a witness to the Holocaust, Etty Hillesum wanted to chronicle the events as an artist, but also to live in solidarity

and “emotional proximity” to the victims (237). She used the metaphor of her head being a workshop and her heart a fiery furnace. She hoped to reconcile the two: thought and feeling. Lawrence Langer, and especially David Patterson disapproved of her narcissistic egocentricity and lack of a religious Judaic sense. Brenner refutes this claim (238-9). It was Hillesum’s aim to first understand herself, in order to find a standpoint for understanding her fellow victims, and then be able to articulate her vision of the times (240-3). As she developed a sense of her own value, she also saw this value in those around her (243). Her re-affirming vision was directed to the victims: she hoped to help the Jews re-affirm their humanity as an antidote to violence and terror (244). As Hillesum wrote, this humanity was centered on love as “ ‘the only solution’ to the horrific situation of the world” (quoted p. 245). Hillesum wanted to convince her fellow sufferers to preserve the “ultimate human values” as a way to save themselves and humanity (247). This was difficult for her in the absurdly evil circumstances of Westerbork, but she persevered in witnessing honestly as an artist, while she simultaneously shared love and compassion as examples of “redemptive forces” (248). Hillesum was a vital poet at Westerbork.

B71 Brezzi, Francesca. “Etty Hillesum. An “Atypical” Mystic,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum, 173-190*. Etty Hillesum was a mystic who found God in the existential journey of her self-discovery, in a higher path to transcendence, and finally in her relationships with others (174-5). In spite of the terrible times, Hillesum continued to search for meaning in life as we read in her diaries and letters. Until the

end of her writings she continued to discover beauty in every-day things, as she meanwhile sought union with the divine (176-180). Etty Hillesum's mysticism blended what Brezzi notes as depth, equilibrium, and inward calmness and tranquility into a "unified and harmonious vision" that also is of the world (181). She practiced simplicity and detachment from possessive needs, and "[saw] herself as a link between chaos and calm" (183). "Hillesum finds God as a precious otherness within herself," (ibid.) but also, like Martin Buber, "insists that with each *you*, we talk to the Eternal One" (185). Brezzi addresses the question of whether Hillesum's notion of God was immanent or transcendent. She sees both intertwined in Hillesum's work (186-7). She also likens Hillesum to several noted mystics who looked for God via the senses, rather than through abstract thought, (187) and who strove for a beatific vision of God via love (ibid.). Etty Hillesum does this too, and her love is for God, others, and her self, all of whom she works to help in a spirituality of diversity. Her mysticism is "*a different way of thinking of God... grounded in the experience of unity, search, and desire*" (190).

B72 Cauwenberge, Paul Van. "Welcome Speech by the Rector of Ghent University, Professor Paul Van Cauwenberge, at the Opening of the Etty Hillesum Congress on Monday Evening 24 November 2008," in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, xv-xix. One of the central motifs in Etty Hillesum's mature life was "Daring to think" (Dutch: *durven denken*). Thinking in a new way requires an inner freedom which Etty Hillesum developed. We all have a duty to think, even though there are forces in our times that would stop us from doing so. Etty Hillesum's

writing and life challenge us to move forward “developing new thoughts for future generations” (xix).

B73 Coetsier, Meins G.S. “*You-Consciousness*”- Towards Political Theory: Etty Hillesum’s Experience and Symbolization of the Divine Presence,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 103-124. An exploration of how Hillesum’s writings on God can act as a model for political theory. Etty Hillesum wrote of God as *You* or *Thou*. The times in which she wrote were absurd, and this absurdity helped evoke her sense of *You-Consciousness*. She consequently developed a life of dialogue through interaction with this transcendent other; her communication also flowed into an attempt to have a dialogue with the God within everyone she met, including a *You* as an inner source within her own self (108-9). Coetsier demonstrates how the political philosopher Eric Voegelin can help us better grasp Hillesum’s understanding of consciousness (110+). Through this understanding we can regain a sense of the transcendent in our disjointed, totalitarian-prone, and secular times. *You-consciousness* is “the something that is conscious of the divine presence as the reality that can be actively addressed as *You*, a reality that we can call ‘God’” (113-4). This is the meeting place of the Divine and the human (114). This meeting place is a flowing presence, a talking to God, a meeting within the self or another with God (115-6). This *you-consciousness* happens at the intersection of time with the timeless, of intentionality and “luminosity” (117). In Hillesum, *you-consciousness* was a reaching out “towards *the Other*, towards the transcendent,” (119) leading her to interpersonal dialogue. Coetsier

writes that this “life of dialogue...connects the members of the human race” (120).

Coetsier extrapolates from the writings of Etty Hillesum some political lessons for our current culture. First, each of us should not run away from God into a “deformed ideological stance” that seeks to “ascribe divinity to” a political or religious system (121). *You-consciousness* finds a divine plan “in creating us as unique and free and ...social and relational beings, capable of loving and meeting one another” (ibid.). Hillesum’s writings can help us to reinforce this belief (122). Otherwise we are in trouble. Hillesum, through her *You-consciousness*, helps us meet our own *You-consciousness*, and thereby transform our lives. Through our own growth in love and community we can help “reorder...human existence and experience,” (123) with a “light in human hearts that never constrict and eyes that never shut” (124).

B74 Couto, Patricia. “Witnesses and Victims of Massacre: the Literary

Testimony of Samuel Usque and Etty Hillesum,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 335-350. Samuel Usque was a Portuguese Jewish writer around the time of Christopher Columbus who chronicled the persecution of the Jews in Spain and Portugal during that historical period (see pp. 335-42 for a biography of Usque, a chronicle of the Iberian history of persecutions, and a description of Usque’s writings). Etty Hillesum and Usque both wrote to chronicle the times (like the Biblical book of Chronicles), and both attempted to create an authentic work sufficient literarily to the needs of their narrative, and to the

importance of their description of the facts and the transcendent dimension of the Jewish faith in crisis (343). Both were witnesses, and both used Biblical metaphors for what was happening around them (345-6). They both saw current events as part of the recurring pattern of Jewish history (347-8). Eventually, Hillesum saw her task as more than a mere chronicler of events, but rather as God's poet. "Like Usque, Hillesum considers her task...as sacred" (349). It goes beyond simple description of events to "consoling" her fellow sufferers, and showing them that "God is in safe hands with us, despite everything" (q. 350).

B75 De Costa, Denise. "Etty Hillesum: "Ecriture Feminine?"" in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 269-278. An adaptation of de Costa's 5th chapter of *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum*. Using the literary/cultural theories of Helene Cixous, which center on the dual libidinal economies of masculine and feminine ways of living and writing (270-2), De Costa claims Etty Hillesum falls into the second of these writing economies. De Costa demonstrates how. Hillesum wrote in a "flowing mode" which is representative of *écriture féminine* (272) as she also strove towards a simpler style of writing (273). While the diaries reflect an inwardness, Westerbork compelled her to respond to the outer realities (274-5). According to de Costa, the Hillesum texts affect readers in four ways: 1) they were crafted during times of inner and outer crisis, yet advocate "love, gratitude, and humility" (275-6); 2) they reflect a "poetic politics" that is non polemical (276); 3) the writings are "nourishing" to readers (276-7); and 4) Hillesum's work "re-writes" the

reader through her descriptions of her experiences and understanding (277-8).

B76 Gaarlandt, Jan Geurt . “Context, Dilemmas, and Misunderstandings

During the Composition and Publication of *An Interrupted Life: Etty Hillesum’s Diary, 1941-1943*,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 365-375. Gaarlandt, editor of the *An Interrupted Life*, the abridged diary of Etty Hillesum, describes the history of his editorial decisions, the reactions of critics, and more recent developments along these lines. He accepts full responsibility for all of the decisions he made. In general, his omissions of material were made for reasons of manuscript length: too long a work risked poor sales if it was even published. What he chose to eliminate were 1) early passages on Spier, when Etty Hillesum was writing about him constantly and almost obsessively to the detriment of potential readers’ interest; 2) repetitions of the same metaphors or ideas written too closely in time; 3) sections of quotations from other authors in German; 4) entries that described Spier’s therapy sessions with other patients; 5) Hillesum’s dreams and telephone conversations, and the like. Gaarlandt admits that his revisions speed up her life for the reader. Gaarlandt also discusses the criticisms some have made that his editorial choices created the image of Etty Hillesum as a saint or martyr. He explains that this was never his intention. He altered nothing in her texts, but later discovered that others involved in the project as typists did tidy Hillesum up. In a final section of his essay, Gaarlandt describes a meeting he had many years after the war with Hillesum’s friend Christine van Nooten. She showed

him a cache of love letters she had received from Hillesum's father, with whom she was also in love, and which she wanted Gaarlandt to publish. Supposedly, at the time of this love affair, only Etty Hillesum knew of this relationship. Gaarlandt explains that this makes a strong explanation for all of the food parcels van Nooten sent the Hillesum family in Westerbork. It also offers a possible reason for why Etty Hillesum's famous final postcard from the Auschwitz train was sent to her. Apparently a priest later convinced van Nooten to burn the letters, and they were therefore never published.

B77 Grimmelikhuisen, Frits. "The Road of Etty Hillesum to Nothingness," in

Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 429-445.

Grimmelikhuisen, co-founder of the Etty Hillesum Centre in Deventer, the Netherlands, demonstrates the connections between Hillesum's life and works and Eastern philosophy, especially Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths of the Buddha are described, and then incidents or words from Hillesum are related and linked to each of them. The author also notes similarities between Judaism and Buddhism, mentioning in particular *Tikkun olam*- the Jewish call for each person to act "to repair the world" (434) beginning with the self. This was the path Hillesum followed. Her mentor Rilke's teaching on mindfulness is compared to Buddhist thought (437). Etty Hillesum's inner world is also explored using the concept of *Weltinnenraum* (an outer space within). Grimmelikhuisen clearly shows Hillesum's growth in "mindfulness" and paying attention to people, objects, events, and her inner self. She "tried to become an instrument,

not only in spirit, but also in her body. She was present and thus she became a fountain of kindness and love..." (444).

B78 Lebeau, Paul. "The Reception of Etty Hillesum's Writings in French Language," in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 191-213. Etty Hillesum is well thought of as a spiritual figure among French-speaking people, her writings resonating with several intellectual currents in the Francophone world. The pilgrimage of her life parallels the "mysticism of passage" of Teilhard de Chardin (192), and that theology which forms the Catholic Vatican Two's document *Gaudium et Spes* (193). Her experience also parallels Ignatius of Loyola, and reacts against the other strong French tradition of Cartesian Intellectualism. She therefore rejects a life of the mind without experiences. This also parallels the philosopher Merleau Ponty, and the Jewish convert to Catholicism: Edith Stein. In Hillesum's awareness of the beauty in the world, she is expressing her "kat-holicity" that endorses the fundamental goodness of creation. From her writings we learn that Hillesum noticed a bodily function to the "experience of the self, the other and the world" (201). Lebeau summarizes this when he writes: "the body is the memory of the life" (ibid.). Physicality is evident throughout her diaries and letters, especially in her "gesture of genuflection" (205). She was fascinated with nuns and priests and the monastic character of solitude and the interior life; and in Westerbork with the life of Jewish converts to Christianity (see esp. 205-8). Lebeau also focuses on Etty Hillesum's interest in human faces. In conclusion Lebeau is convinced that Hillesum was Judeo-Christian, who saw God in the faces of others, such

as Jesus, and that Christian believers can find commonality with her, as can other seekers.

B79 Manara, Fulvio C. "Philosophy as a Way of Life in the Works of Etty Hillesum," in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 379-398. Was Etty Hillesum a philosopher? Manara attempts to analyze her writings and actions in order to find out. First using a textual approach, and then an "alchemical" one (380), while defining a philosopher as someone interested in philosophy in their lives (381), Manara concludes that Hillesum was such a philosopher. Textually, Hillesum studied many philosophers, especially Augustine, Jung, and Will Durant. She was quite impressed by Durant's work during the time of the diaries. Durant wrote that philosophy is "harmonized knowledge making a harmonious life" (q. 384), and Hillesum seems to have agreed. Manara looks lexicographically at Hillesum's use of the word philosophy or its derivatives, and groups her uses of these terms by her general connotations, some of which were negative, such as when she contrasted philosophizing with real work. Hillesum did not look for a system into which to compress her philosophy, but rather lived it in day to day life (390), though she was also seeking harmony amidst the chaos within her and around her. Hillesum also broke down barriers between philosophy and other fields such as religion, literature, and poetry as she sought harmony. The "alchemical" reading of Hillesum's texts involves examining how they can become transforming and "mirrored" in the reader's life (393). They can lead us to philosophical practices in our living, and thus to inner transformation (394). According to Manara, we

should step back from our critical techniques, and listen to Hillesum from the heart. Several of Hillesum's particular philosophical practices are explored, including writing (395), dialogue (395-6), and cosmic consciousness (396). Using the thought of Pierre Hadot, Manara shows how Hillesum's life paralleled that of ancient philosophers.

B80 Molder, Maria Filomena. "Why is Etty Hillesum a Great Thinker?" in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 399-418. Etty Hillesum went to Westerbork and described it bravely in her letters. She strove there to use her refusal of self-victimization as a form of resistance to the Nazis (403). She decided to help God, while recognizing the whole of God, history, and community within her. She wanted to love life (see 405-7) while fighting her own demons, rather than directly confronting the forces of evil outside her. Unable to yet be a poet, she used the power of observation to come to terms with her self and with Westerbork (409). One of Hillesum's dilemmas seems to have been between a generalizing "power of contemplation" and the uniqueness of each event she describes (410-11). A second conundrum is her "poet's eye" that "cannot face horror" (412). Molder also mentions a third: Etty Hillesum's moral judgment of people living the Westerbork events versus her hope of being the "thinking heart" of the barracks (414-5). In conclusion, Molder postulates that Hillesum is a great thinker because "in her testimony, we are able to seize the foundation, the ethical principles and the critical conditions of genuine thought" (on p. 416-7 Molder fleshes out these "constitutive traits") (417). As opposed to those at Westerbork who did not want to know or think, Hillesum brought attention to events, to

using the proper words “to help understand that disturbing reality” of the Holocaust (418): “to look for words that do justice to the “wrecked lives”” (418).

B81 Neri, Nadia. “Etty Hillesum’s Psychological and Spiritual Path: Towards an Ethics of Responsibility,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 419-427. Etty Hillesum brought the spiritual and psychological paths near to each other over the course of her diaries and letters. She followed Jung in this process, noting the dangers of projection or externalization of our inner feelings of inadequacy onto social groups. Hillesum rejected this process. Her psychological awakening and self-listening again followed Jung, and as she grew in self-acceptance, she opened out to others with an ethic of responsibility (421). Her resolution of psychological problems prepared her for a spiritual path which was not an escape from problems but authentic (422). She learned how to kneel – a Christian gesture, but also a Jewish use of the body in prayer, that keeps her rooted in the world (423). Neri makes the case, citing some theological comments of Levinas, that Hillesum’s sense of responsibility is rooted in her Jewishness. Also, according to Levinas, in order for the Sanhedrin to be “possible in the human world, we need to find, at all times, someone who is responsible for others” (426). Hillesum was responsible, and performed her deeds of responsibility without hesitation.

B82 Nocita, Maria Gabriella. “Feeling Life: Etty Hillesum *Becomes* Word,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 279-95. As Etty

Hillesum felt life more deeply, she communicated this sense of life's meaning more deeply as well. This need to *express* her inner growth was central to Hillesum (281). Rilke taught her that writing would help her get to know her inner world – she quotes his words: “Through every being *single* space extends: outer space within [Ger. Weltinnenraum]” (282). This space is inhabited by “what is most beautiful,” including God (283). From communing within this inner space, Hillesum will come to “*Hearken*” to herself, God, and others (Ger. Hineinhorchen)(284-6). She learns through this hineinhorchen to experience people and their suffering, and to feel with them, even as she finds joy (286). She opens her inner joyful self to the outer world, “[t]o draw the other into one's inner space” (H. quoted 288). At Westerbork, where the Jews were suffering, Etty Hillesum took them and their suffering into her self, and thereby learned “to read our age” (quoted, 290). She thus found meaning, and wrote of it for others in her letters, which are her testimonials, her bearing witness to events and to the feelings of others (292-3). We should follow Hillesum in this growth process.

B83 Pach, Manja. “Let's Talk About Hope! Etty Hillesum's Future-Perspective-“We May Suffer, But We Must Not Succumb,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum* 351-63. Etty Hillesum wrote frequently about the future, and her plans for after the war. She wished to become a writer, travel to Russia as a cultural ambassador between the Russians and Western Europe, and be a chronicler of the Holocaust. She also believed that Jews needed to survive with their spirituality intact in order to set an example for the entire world. Therefore, it cannot be said that

Hillesum gave herself over to a belief in certain annihilation, or had a death wish when she chose to go to Westerbork rather than into hiding. Etty Hillesum wished, rather, to set a personal example. “She was convinced that it was very important to live life in a good way in the present moment, in order to be strong in the future, for others as well as for oneself” (361).

B84 Pevenage, Debbie. ““There Was Little of That Harmonious Rolling Out of God’s Hand”: Struggle and Balance in the Diaries of Etty Hillesum,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 253-68. Pevenage attempts to link Etty Hillesum’s emotional development with her diary and letter writing. In her diaries she viewed this ongoing developmental process as a search for both balance and a struggle with herself. Hillesum did indeed work hard on her inner development simultaneously as her writing style improved. Her words became more precise, clear, and appropriate while she simultaneously worked for simplicity in her life (see esp. 255). Her early diary entries were “grammatically careless” and meandering (257-8). Gradually they improved, though they remained variable. Pevenage claims her research reveals a “close correspondence between...decisive turning points in (Hillesum’s) personal development and her progressing literary skills” (260). Once Hillesum has “settled things” in her life, she is able to write more clearly, as the reader will note in the final exercise books (266). The links between the two processes cannot be shown to be a simple cause and effect, however. Her writing style may have also been helped by practice, though as she freed

herself from inner struggles, she could devote more of her energies to authorship (see 266-7).

B85 Pleshoyano, Alexandra. “Etty Hillesum and Julius Spier: A “Spierity” on the Fringe of Religious Borders, ” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 43-74. Julius Spier (S) was Etty Hillesum’s great mentor, and taught her to open herself to God. Thus, Pleshoyano coined the word “spierity” as the key to their relationship (43). Spier introduced Hillesum to a variety of spiritual texts, discussed the Bible with her, and taught her from his Jungian worldview, which stressed strong connections between spirituality and psychology (46-7). Pleshoyano works through the Hillesum texts chronologically to show the growth in coherence and understanding, and notes how Spier helped the process along the way. Pleshoyano traces Etty Hillesum’s growing comfort with God, kneeling, and her “inner resources” (54). Spier helped teach Hillesum to love others in a deeper way, and she used him as her role model for this. At the same time, following Augustine, Hillesum moved from a life of outward chaos to one where God dwelled “within herself” (60-1). And eventually, she began to separate her self from Spier’s dominance (see esp. 62-4). In essence, at this time, God became her companion, and she wished to bear witness to God (but still to Spier’s important spiritual teachings as they related to God). She went to Camp Westerbork, where her letters demonstrate that love of God, humanity, and individual humans became the central force in her life. God and her faith in God became the keystone to her life, and she wished to share her understanding of this with others (72-3). Spier was her

mentor in this, even after his death. Etty Hillesum remained “*archetypically Jewish* in her way of thinking and feeling” (72).

B86 Purcell, Brendan. “Foundations for a Judgment of the Holocaust: Etty Hillesum’s Standard of Humanity,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 125-146. Purcell uses Etty Hillesum’s “standard of goodness” (125), as defined in her writings, to examine the Holocaust and indict it as objectively evil. Her standard of good encompasses three dimensions: the personal, the societal, and the historical. In all three the Holocaust is judged a moral failure. Purcell links Hillesum to Plato (especially his Dialogue: *the Gorgias*), Voegelin (especially his lectures on the Nazis), Dostoyevsky, and other moral exemplars as he analyzes Nazism’s evil. At the personal level, Nazism was a version of “cognitive closure” as opposed to Hillesum’s cognitive open-ness (127-8). This means Nazism was thoughtless, stupid, believed itself guiltless, was cognitively unreal, and was anti-human at its core (128). It was also adverse to the good, and anti-autonomous. It was morally bankrupt as a result. Nazis, as opposed to Hillesum, were also lacking in “nobility of soul” or “openness... to [their] reality as... person[s]” (133). Hillesum was able to “soar high above the moral horrors unfolding around her in hope, love, and courageous commitment...[and this] marks her out as a rarely paradigmatic person, someone who, like Socrates, has set new standards for what it is to be human” (134). Like Aristotle, Hillesum saw love (Aristotle called it friendship) as the essential heart of any human society (136). She tried to build this type of society at Westerbork through her personal relationships there. Finally, at the historical level, Nazism,

unlike Hillesum, fails when it attacks the transcendent power that is foundational, (God), and the sense of everyone being members of the one human family. It also fails when it attempts to eliminate the Jews and their God. Purcell calls these acts of the Nazis “Humanicide” (139). Hillesum, on the other hand, held out hope for all humanity as a counter-example to the Nazis, even as they self-excommunicated themselves from community with others. According to Purcell, it is “Hillesum, not the all-powerful National Socialist state, who has the spiritual authority to make a judgment of history” (142). Ultimately, the Nazis failed morally, for they did not place their lives under the authority of God and God’s love of humanity. Hillesum did this through her “uninterrupted dialogue with You, my God” (144). It is through “this intrinsic you-relatedness...towards every human you, grounded in Etty Hillesum’s profound orientation to the divine You, that more than anything else, we find the criterion by which we can judge the Holocaust” (ibid.). Hillesum also felt mercy towards her persecutors, and in this also provided a moral antidote to the Nazi’s nihilistic ethos. In conclusion, Purcell notes that the Nazis pronounced their own condemnation on themselves “in perpetuity” (146). His final summary is keen: “The brighter [Hillesum’s] humanity shines, the more terrible is shown to be the willed refusal of those who wreaked the Holocaust to participate in the human family. And the more transparently is the life of Etty Hillesum grounded in the Power that constituted it, the more clearly is pronounced the sentence of spiritual death upon them” (146).

B87 Siertsema, Bettine. "Etty Hillesum (1914-1943) and Abel Herzberg (1893-1989): Two Dutch Chroniclers of the Shoah," in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, (2008), 297-312. Hillesum and Herzberg both wrote about their experiences in Concentration camps: Etty Hillesum in Westerbork, and Abel Herzberg in Bergen-Belsen. Both were Jewish, had Russian roots, shared an interest in spiritual matters, and had broad religious interests and sensibilities. Both studied law and had literary ambitions (297-9). Both kept diaries during their captivity, though Hillesum's did not survive. But Herzberg was 50, a husband and father, Hillesum was 27 and a single woman. Both noted events in the camp, but also dealt in their writings with "human nature, the role of God, the destiny of man, and similar themes" (300). Both also refused to spend *much* of their literary energies on the perpetrators (whose actions they condemned), but rather on their fellows. Siertsema maintains that Hillesum and Herzberg differed in their portrayals of their fellow inmates (304-9). She claims that Hillesum spent more time judging her fellows for their undeveloped state of being, while Herzberg concentrated on their behavior, where he forgives them for their spiritual destruction, caused by circumstances (305). Hillesum, according to Siertsema, tries to "bring people to a real consciousness, and fights, if necessary, their numbness" (307). However, according to at least one witness, not everyone wanted to be conscious of the surrounding horrors (note 26, p. 307). Hillesum judged people's attitudes less charitably than Herzberg (308-9). Spirituality was important to the two writers, and they each had a personal relationship with God. Herzberg, however, was more centered

in his Jewish tradition, while Hillesum drew on eclectic spiritual resources (309-12). While Hillesum centers her spirituality on a deep personal love of God, Herzberg sees God more as a judge and a representative of reason. Yet, Etty Hillesum, in practice, was more judgmental, perhaps because she saw herself as a spiritual teacher, while Abel Herzberg felt himself more as “a part of the greater whole of the Jewish community of all places and all ages” (312).

B88. Smelik, Klaas A.D. “Etty Hillesum and Her God,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 75-102. Etty Hillesum was Jewish, though assimilated. She believed that all worldviews were imperfect, and those worldviews would have included Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, her spirituality was an amalgam from several spiritual traditions. She also read literary figures such as Rilke and Dostoyevsky, and these became guides in her spiritual quest, as well as did religious texts, including the Bible. From this wide reading, she also came to a lifelong conversation with God, most notable in her tenth and eleventh notebooks. What did Hillesum mean by God? In her early notebooks, God was a literary figure that helped her formulate her thoughts. Gradually, however, God came to be real for her: both as her deepest center (an immanent God), but also as a transcendent God, who lives or takes root in each of us, but is not our self. She wrote of God as a personal being who held her in his arms and took her hand – reminiscent of the God of Israel (89-90). Her God was the creator of Heaven and Earth, and God’s creation was good (90-91). Hillesum believed that, in spite of the Nazi evil, all people were created in the

image of God. Smelik also notes that Etty Hillesum's God is not the omnipotent Biblical God, but one who depends on humans taking responsibility for their actions and for their fellows in dark times. Injustice is "the work of human hands" (94), and we are accountable to God for this. This is a biblical idea (96). Also, Hillesum believed that "God is not almighty, but...he can call us to account for our deeds..." (96). From the human side of the God-person equation, people need to rid themselves of hatred of their enemies, for this hatred makes the world a worse place (97-101). We further God's cause in the world by first turning inward to locate the hatred in our self and make it peaceful, and then by sending this peace or love out into the world.

B89 Smelik, Klaas A.D. "A Short Biography of Etty Hillesum (1914-1943)," in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 21-28. Along with Brandt's introduction, Smelik sets the scene for the scholarly papers to follow in the conference proceedings. He presents a concise introduction to Hillesum's life, including her childhood and pre-diary years, as he also describes her parents, her two brothers, and several of the key figures in her later life, such as Spier, and her landlord and lover: Han Wegerif. Smelik notes the addresses of all of her various known dwellings from birth on. He clearly outlines the chronology of her life, and the factors that led her from the Wegerif household to Auschwitz. Then Professor Smelik summarizes the history of the diaries and letters from Etty Hillesum's death until their final unabridged publication.

B90 Van den Bercken, Wil. "Etty Hillesum's Russian Vocation and Spiritual Relationship to Dostoevsky," in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 147-171. After Rilke, Dostoevsky is the most mentioned author in Hillesum's diaries and letters, appearing 35 times (147). Etty Hillesum had a variety of connections with Russian culture: her mother, her Slavonic studies (including language and Russian history), and her tutoring in the language. Her image of Russia was of a less rational and more spiritual land than the west, where people experienced more but thought less, accepting suffering as a part of life (151-2). The West focused on justice, Russia on love (153-4). She hoped to find ways to bridge the two cultures (154-6). At the core of her Russian-based spirituality was Dostoevsky. She mentioned a variety of his works, including his exile experiences from *Notes from the House of the Dead*. But her central focus was on *The Brothers Karamazov* (161-171). She particularly keyed on three themes there, which she contemplated and lived out in her own life: "1. the problem of human suffering in relationship to God; 2. the experience of the creation as Paradise, in spite of the evil in the world; 3. a common feeling of responsibility for the evil coupled with an all-forgiving love towards everyone" (162-3). Van den Bercken delineates the similarities and differences between the beliefs of Hillesum and the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Both authors stress that internal freedom can help turn "human hell into a personal paradise, a Dostoevskian paradox par excellence" (171).

B91 Van den Brandt, Ria. "Etty Hillesum and Her "Catholic Worshippers": A Plea For a More Critical Approach to Etty Hillesum's Writings," in

Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 215-231. Especially in the 1990s, Etty Hillesum became “canonized” in the writings of a variety of Catholic Dutch and Flemish theologians, both for her proto-Christian mysticism and for her woman-centered spirituality (215-219). Many of these writers relied on the selected text editions rather than the full range of Hillesum’s work, as they presented her to the Christian laity of the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. Van den Brandt describes the *Hillesumology* (Note: I coined this phrase for those critics or hagiographers who interpret Hillesum’s theology, spirituality, mysticism, Judaism, or Christianity for others). Van den Brandt describes the theories of several of these theological writers: 1) Frans Maas, who places Hillesum’s writings and practices in the Christian mystical tradition (particularly alongside Meister Eckhart) , without naming her a Christian (220-3); 2) Jos Snijders, who focuses on her love (224); 3) Maria ter Steeg – who finds a mysticism of love as well (225-6); and Grietje Dresen who notes Hillesum’s “spiritual attitude of surrender” in order to make room in her heart “for the activity of love” (ibid.). Dresen saw Etty Hillesum’s image of God as unfinished, and therefore not Jewish or Christian. This open-ended spirituality may explain the popularity of Hillesum among the young, and others not fully versed in religious traditions (227-8). Van den Brandt encourages theologians to read Hillesum carefully and to use the scholarly complete text. She also recommends Denise de Costa’s work emphasizing Hillesum’s dual “outsider” status as woman and Jew (228-9). Van den Brandt urges theologians to be “more sensitive to textual complexities [while] resisting the temptation to read the texts

within a framework of supposed and unverifiable biographical facts” (230). The Hillesum texts are sources of empowerment for readers that nourish and strengthen us in our own quests to locate our own image of God (230-1).

B92 Van den Brandt, Ria. “Introduction,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 1-20. Etty Hillesum’s writings have been translated into 17+ languages, and she is now known throughout the world. Much has been written about Hillesum, her writings, and the experiences she describes, with a variety of these secondary works focusing on particular aspects of her life, or relating her to a host of others. In November, 2008 an international conference was organized focusing on Hillesum’s writing and her spirituality. The published proceedings are one notable result. In a bibliographic essay Brandt briefly but cogently introduces each presenter’s thesis or central idea in the order in which they are placed in the published proceedings. Her introduction can stand on its own as an insightful view of how scholars in 2008 approached Hillesum’s work and life. It weaves together the intellectual connections between the presented papers, which in the end present a thoughtful portrait of Hillesum.

B93 Van Oord, Gerrit. “Two Voices From Westerbork: Etty Hillesum and Philip Mechanicus on the Transport From Camp Westerbork on 24 August 1943,” in Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 313-334. Both Etty Hillesum and Philip Mechanicus observed the loading and departure of the deportation train from Camp Westerbork on 24 August,

1943. Their descriptions of this event are similar in content (and they even share some of the same wording), though Hillesum wrote her narrative as a finished letter, Mechanicus as journalistic notes. Interestingly, Mechanicus used the metaphor of watching a film, while Etty Hillesum employed theatrical metaphors for the scenes they saw that day. Van Oord also presents Mechanicus' biography, and a description of his highly successful journalistic career. Philip and Etty were close friends in Westerbork, sharing interests in Russian, reading, and their observations of human nature. Neither had sympathy for the German Commandant, or for the collaborating Jewish hierarchy of the camp. In conclusion, the chief difference between the two was Mechanicus' interest in strategies for the physical survival of himself and fellow inmates, as compared to Hillesum's main concern: survival of hers and their spirits.

B94 Woodhouse, Patrick. "The Roots of the Chaos and the Process of Change in Etty Hillesum in" Smelik, *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 31-42. Etty Hillesum began her diaries in a state of emotional chaos to the "depths of her lonely soul (33.)" The roots of this chaos were primarily her dysfunctional family – especially her mismatched and ineffective parents who created a madhouse rather than a home. Her early diaries focus heavily on Hillesum's inner chaos. Only at the age of 23, when Etty Hillesum moved into the household of Han Wegerif did she begin to find a more accepting personal environment. But the major catalyst for positive change was Julius Spier, whom she met in 1941, and who became her therapist, friend, and soul-mate. Spier helped her to gain

self-esteem, create form in her writing and relationships, and develop a religious sensibility and relationship with God (39 and passim). Spier was “a kind of midwife to her very being” (40). With his teaching, Hillesum learned to bear her sorrow and accept the pain in her life (41). This transformed her.

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B95 Coetsier, Meins G. S. “A Heaven-Gram for World Politics”: Hillesum, Heschel and Rilke Rescuing God in Exile.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Toronto, September 3-6 2009. As more information is disseminated by mass media, the human soul has been silenced in its attempt to communicate with the divine. Hillesum, Heschel, and Rilke each searched to re-establish that connection. Etty Hillesum strove to help God in an inner dialogue, using love and compassion as her tools. She expressed her gratefulness to God who dwelled in her “great inner Domain” (6). This inner God was a mystery at her Center, a “flow of presence,” in Eric Voegelin’s words (6). She dug this God out of the depths (7). In Heschel’s terms she was recovering a sense of the “divine reality” or “Transcendent attentiveness” (8, 9). Heschel explored God’s concern for the World and “his” search for us, and how that search can inform our politics (10). The German poet Rilke also believed in an intuitive relationship with God that was reciprocal (11-12). Hillesum read Rilke, and seemed to follow his line of thought in her attempt to help God. She found in Rilke her anamchara or soul-mate, while borrowing imagery and symbology from

his poetry (13-14). Like Rilke, Hillesum saw beauty around her in the midst of destruction, while she helped create order against the demonic forces of dissipation and unconsciousness. The three wisdom figures of the essay: Hillesum, Heschel, and Rilke, help “rescue the Transcendent from the demolition of reason” (16).

B96 Gaillardetz, Richard R. “Sexual Vulnerability and a Spirituality of Suffering: Explorations in the Writing of Etty Hillesum.” *Pacifica*. 22 no.1 (February 2009): 75-89. Etty Hillesum’s contemplative and introspective nature is coupled with an awareness of the world around her, including the increasing persecution of her people. She chronicled this suffering as an act of resistance to it. Hillesum believed it was her task to embrace her own suffering along with that of others, while transforming hatred for those who caused this suffering into love (80). One needed to maintain an openness and vulnerability “without losing one’s dignity (81).” Suffering was part of a larger understanding of life, and was at the heart of her spirituality.

God and Prayer also infused Etty Hillesum’s spirituality. Her God was dependent on humanity. “[H]umans were the hands of God at work in the world (83).” Life was a “cooperative partnership between God and humankind,” called tikkun (83). Evil was caused by human failings, and each person’s task was thus to “purge it from one’s own life (83).” Prayer, for Hillesum, was primarily the asking for strength to shoulder burdens this process might bring.

As the diaries progress her sensuality grew stronger and less dependent on individuals such as Spier or Papa Han Wegerif. She attempted to put her human desire into service for God, while remaining vulnerable and open to the love and passion of others. Etty Hillesum's life during this time "embodied 'passionate living' in both of its senses: erotic passion, and the willingness to suffer (86)." This was the nexus of her suffering spirituality, where her erotic nature had the potential to be transformed into love of humankind (87).

Gaillardetz explores Etty Hillesum's *embodied* spirituality using the example of her physical act of kneeling, which is part of her ritual of prayer; it is a posture of vulnerability, and one which Hillesum compares in its tenderness and intimacy to "gestures of love (87)." Spirituality is thereby (and in other ways) "mediated through one's body (88)." Etty Hillesum was not like many mystics who rejected the physicality of the world. Her world of embodied passion led to compassion, "a capacity to suffer in solidarity with others," which is also a "trafficking in the divine (89)."

B97 Hicks, Joshua A., and Laura A. King. "Meaning in Life as a Subjective Judgment and a Lived Experience." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*. 3 no. 4 (July 2009). 638-653. "Meaning in life" is a concept studied by social psychologists, often using questionnaires and experiments. The authors of this study review the results of this research. In addition, Etty Hillesum's life offers a case study in living a meaningful life, beyond the empirical data. Hillesum often asserted that

her life was meaningful and beautiful. She also wrote that this meaningfulness emerged within her inner consciousness (643), and was a central goal of her existence (644). She lived with a positive affect, though it is possible to find meaning in life even when one is not happy. In Etty Hillesum's case, she said "this is constant: my joy (646)." And in her diaries she linked pleasure with meaningfulness, and the two reinforced each other. Her meaningful and beautiful life bolstered her abilities to do positive work, strengthened her faith, and enabled her to share in the life of the Jews (649).

B98 Kidder, Annemarie S. Introduction to *Etty Hillesum: Essential Writings*, 7-24. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Bks., 2009. This book arranges Etty Hillesum's writings into thematic chapters. In the Introduction Kidder briefly reviews Etty Hillesum's life, including the key players in her diary – both friends and authors. Kidder then describes the transmission history of the diaries and letters. This is followed by a short but dense description of the central themes of the diaries (20-1). Finally, we are given Kidder's definition of mysticism as a way of seeing and approaching life "from the position of the transcendent...and the divine (21)." Using this definition, she reviews the practices of Mysticism, and then argues that Etty Hillesum's diaries read as the work and practice of such a mystic. This aspect of her life continues to guide us, and as we follow Hillesum, we allow God to enter us as God entered her.

B99 Pleshoyano, Alexandra Illeana. "Etty Hillesum: Love Calls for Spiritual Discernment." *Religious Studies and Theology*. 28 no. 2 (2009): 241-268.

A complex and useful analysis of the transformations in Etty Hillesum's comprehension and practice of love. Author Pleshayano uses Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* to help name and model three levels or types of love: carnal erotic, spiritual erotic, and agape. Initially Etty Hillesum's love was physical and possessive (carnal erotic), but her mentor Spier helped to expand her love to a more spiritual eros, where she incorporated the soul and her inner self into bodily love. At this point she began to love herself and that part of God "taking root within her (249)." She began to meditate and pray, even while her carnal erotic life continued in parallel with the spiritually erotic one. At this point in time she wished to share her understanding of this growing spiritual love in some future literary masterpiece (256). But about July, 1942 her writings changed, as the condition of the Jews worsened. Her writing, and later her actions, reached out to the world with love (agape), as she attempted to help God help others (258). She wished to eradicate hatred, starting by replacing it within herself with agape love, even of her enemies such as the Nazis. Pleshoyano asks if eros and agape are compatible, which Anders Nygren had earlier denied. Pleshoyano sees the possibility of the two types of love co-existing within someone. She concludes that Etty Hillesum's reciprocating agape love of God and all humans is a useful model for our multi-cultural world. Though the word "agape" has ties with Christianity, it is not limited to one religious tradition, but is "infinite and offered to all (264)." Also, we should not think of Hillesum as a practicing Christian. As Pleshoyano states, "it is mandatory to respect Hillesum's Jewishness (264)." Etty Hillesum's

writings share with us her growing agape as she helps God, and offer us an example to emulate in our own lives.

B100 Woodhouse, Patrick. *Etty Hillesum: A Life Transformed*. London; NY: Continuum, 2009. A general book-length exploration of Etty Hillesum's life and writings, based almost exclusively on a thoughtful reading of her texts. Woodhouse develops his book's chapters in relatively close tandem with the chronology of Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters. Thus we can see how her ideas developed over time, and the contexts in which new themes arose. Following a brief introduction, he includes a chapter on her life, including how the early diaries relate to her improving psychological well being. The study continues with its next chapter on Hillesum's developing relationship with God, and how it transformed her life both inwardly and outwardly. Woodhouse then writes on her developing ethic of refusing to hate in a world already jammed full with hatred. With her tenth exercise book, Hillesum's emphasis changes to a more direct concentration on the persecution of the Jews, the accelerating terror and darkness of Nazi acts, and the parallel testing of her own will and faith. Patrick Woodhouse's penultimate chapter outlines Etty Hillesum's life in and response to Westerbork, while the final chapter reflects on her meaning for us today, especially her insights that enemies are also human beings, and that love is stronger than death. A good introduction and summation of the main themes of Etty Hillesum.

2010

B101 Parachin, Victor M. "Etty Hillesum: Concentration Camp Mystic."

Spiritual Life. 56 no. 1 (Spring 2010): 39-48. A brief meditation on Etty Hillesum's spirituality, and its usefulness for us today. After a cursory survey of Etty Hillesum's life and historical context, Parachin notes Etty Hillesum's strong faith and hope, which she promoted externally, while being a compassionate pilgrim at Westerbork. Though aware of her impending doom, Hillesum was nourished by her spirituality (which was Christian, according to Parachin!), and shared out "agape" love with those around her in the camp. Finally, Parachin offers his readers personal reflections both on what we can learn from Etty Hillesum, and how we can be like her. His 15 points range from the axiom that everything we need is within us, to Parachin's advice to "See God or Christ in every human being."

Part C: Works About Transit Camp Westerbork

In addition to Etty Hillesum's letters, the following provide further information on Westerbork, and all are worth reading.

1964

C1 Mechanicus, Philip. *Year of Fear: A Jewish Prisoner Waits for Auschwitz*.

Translated by I. S. Gibbons. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1964. Etty Hillesum's friend, Mechanicus, a former newspaper reporter and travel writer, kept a diary in Westerbork that somehow survived the war and his death. He knew Hillesum, and they shared several experiences together that are related in his account. In addition, he spent more time than she did writing about the inner workings of the camp, and the maneuvering done by individuals in order to avoid deportation. After Etty Hillesum's deportation, his spirits and his view of human nature deteriorated in the awful months he had left in the transit camp.

1965

C2 Presser, J (Jacob). *Ashes in the Wind: The Destruction of Dutch Jewry*.

Translated by Arnold Pomerans . Translation of *Ondergang (1965)*, Detroit: Wayne State, 1988. The detailed and quite readable standard narrative history of the end of centuries of Jewish civilization in the Netherlands. The process of extermination was essentially well planned, gradually implemented, and absolutely evil. Presser helps preserve the individuality of many of the Jews who faced almost certain death. He is able to recall anecdotes of their humanity and efforts to survive. Chapter

7: "The Transit Camps," (406-478), treats mainly of Westerbork, both its organizational history, and life there. See pp. 456-464 for an account separate from Etty Hillesum's of a transport departure. This chapter of Presser quotes Hillesum on at least four occasions.

1985

C3 Boas, Jacob. *Boulevard des Miseres: The Story of Transit Camp Westerbork*.

Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985. See esp. chap. 4, "Etty: TRANSPORT", 87-110. Boas describes the history of Westerbork, but also writes character sketches of several of the key leaders in Westerbork, including the enigmatic Commandant, Gemmeker. Boas includes fascinating information on the nearly surreal Cabaret shows that the camp's leaders commissioned. Chapter 4 covers transports, and the witness of Etty Hillesum to them.

1990

C4 Verdoner-Sluiizer, Hilde. *Signs of Life: the letters of Hilde Verdoner-Sluiizer:*

from Nazi Transit Camp Westerbork, 1942 to 1944, ed. Yoka Verdoner and Francisca Verdoner Kan, Reston VA: Acropolis Books, 1990. An upper middle class Dutch Jew, Hilde Verdoner-Sluiizer was another woman who managed to get assorted letters smuggled from Westerbork to her family, who were in hiding from the Nazis. She was a lively and extroverted sort, but was soon, like so many others, overwhelmed by the realities of life in the camp. She died quickly after arrival at Auschwitz. The book is a loving and brave memorial by her family.

Part D: Basic Introductions to the Nazis and to anti-Semitism in Europe and the Netherlands

There are numerous studies and descriptions of Nazism and anti-Semitism in English. The items below are good starting points for learning why the National Socialist Party (the Nazis) rose to power, the varied historical origins of their Anti-Semitism, and why their destruction of the Jews of the Netherlands was so effective.

1979

D1 Fein, Helen. *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. A sociologist's award-winning study of the social contexts for the extermination of the European Jews. Contains a chapter on the Netherlands (262-89), and additional chapters on why social bonds between people failed, as did Christianity as a practical opposing force to the Nazis.

1984

D2 Mason, Henry L. "Testing Human Bonds Within Nations: Jews in the Occupied Netherlands." *Political Science Quarterly*, 99 no. 2 (Summer 1984): 315-343. Compellingly well-written exposition of the process by which the Nazis first isolated the Dutch Jews via edicts and laws, then concentrated them in Amsterdam for easy shipment from there to Westerbork, and then usually to their doom at Auschwitz and Sobibor in

Eastern Europe. Dutch Jews and non-Jews alike were kept remarkably uninformed of the fate of the Jews. A few non-Jews hid Jews, but there was surprisingly little resistance to the Nazis and their extermination process, demonstrating that the efficient strategies of the Germans in Holland worked remarkably well. The Dutch bureaucracy and the bureaucratized Dutch society were also implicated in the death process. Mason contrasts this efficiency of process with the almost total inability of the Nazis to exterminate the Jews of Denmark. As Mason implies, in contrast to that of the Danes, Dutch society failed.

2003

D3 Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin: New York, 2003.

In this magisterial account of the rise of Hitler and the Nazis to power, the reader learns how their core doctrine of anti-Semitism was overlaid with a popular agenda for restoring lost German power and prestige, while combating the economic Depression. Anti-Semitism's German roots are also explored, as are the ruthless and efficient methods of the Nazis as they eventually assumed absolute power. Two sequels by Evans describe the Nazis in power, up to their final destruction in 1945.

Part E: Alphabetical Bibliography of Sources in English on Etty

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