



## **Censoring the Holocaust: How Books Shape Our View of a Painful Past**

***Dr. Edna Friedberg***

Dr. Edna Friedberg is a JTS Fellow and Senior Curator at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the host of the Museum's popular Facebook Live series, "Stay Connected." Dr. Friedberg joined the staff of the Museum in 1999 and served as the historian for the multilingual online *Holocaust Encyclopedia* and as Director of its Wexner Learning Center. She also curated a special exhibit on the legacy of the Nuremberg trials and postwar justice. She received her Ph.D. in Modern Jewish Studies from JTS, where she wrote a dissertation on the origins of American Jewish services for the elderly. Dr. Friedberg regularly speaks to audiences across the country, and her essays connecting Holocaust history with social, cultural, and political trends today have appeared in publications including *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Forward*. An alumna of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, she served as president of the Board of Trustees of the Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital and is a member of Adas Israel Congregation.

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**Source Packet, prepared by Dr. Edna Friedberg, December 2022**

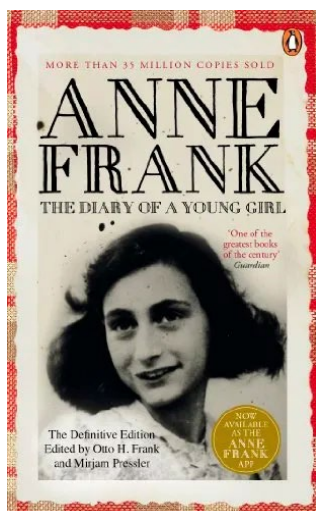
**#1, Book burning in China, 213 BCE**



**#2, Felix Salten, *Bambi*.** Salten (given name Siegmund Salzmann) was an Austrian-Jewish author and journalist who lived in Vienna. In 1922 he published *Bambi, eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Wald - Bambi, A Life in the Woods*. *Bambi* was originally written as an adult novel, though some later translations were oriented to children.



Credit: Ullstein Verlag



**#3,** “It’s really her. It shows her in a truer light, not as a saint, but as a girl like every other girl. She was nothing, actually; people try to make a saint out of her and glorify her. That she was not. She was an ordinary, normal girl with a talent for writing.”

—Anne Frank’s cousin, **Buddy Elias**, speaking in 1996 about the unedited version of Anne that appears in the *Definitive Edition of the Diary*

**#4, Recently recovered diary entry from September 28, 1942**

"I'll use this spoiled page to write down 'dirty' jokes....Do you know why the German Wehrmacht girls are in the Netherlands? As mattresses for the soldiers."

**#5, Otto Frank, 1967 interview for The Eternal Light (coproduction of JTS and NBC)**

“I knew that Anne wrote a diary. But I must say I was very much surprised about the deep thoughts Anne had. It was quite a different Anne than I had known as my daughter. My conclusion is... that most parents don’t know, really, their children.”

**#6, Diary entry, July 15, 1944**

“Anyone who claims that the older folks have a more difficult time in the Annex doesn’t realize that the problems have a far greater impact on us. We’re much too young to deal with these problems, but they keep thrusting themselves on us until, finally, we’re forced to think up a solution, though most of the time our solutions crumble when faced with the facts. It’s difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It’s a wonder I haven’t abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.

It’s utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering

and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them!"

#### **#7, Diary entry, January 5, 1944**

"Yesterday I read an article on blushing by Sis Heyster. It was as if she'd addressed it directly to me. Not that I blush easily, but the rest of the article did apply. What she basically says is that during puberty girls withdraw into themselves and begin thinking about the wondrous changes taking place in their bodies.

I feel that too, which probably accounts for my recent embarrassment over Margot, Mother and Father. On the other hand, Margot is a lot shyer than I am, and yet she's not in the least embarrassed.

I think that what's happening to me is so wonderful, and I don't just mean the changes taking place on the outside of my body, but also those on the inside. I never discuss myself or any of these things with others, which is why I have to talk about them to myself. Whenever I get my period (and that's only been three times), I have the feeling that in spite of all the pain, discomfort and mess, I'm carrying around a sweet secret. So even though it's a nuisance, in a certain way I'm always looking forward to the time when I'll feel that secret inside me once again.

Sis Heyster also writes that girls my age feel very insecure about themselves and are just beginning to discover that they're individuals with their own ideas, thoughts and habits. I'd just turned thirteen when I came here, so I started thinking about myself and realized that I've become an "independent person" sooner than most girls. Sometimes when I lie in bed at night I feel a terrible urge to touch my breasts and listen to the quiet, steady beating of my heart.

Unconsciously, I had these feelings even before I came here. Once when I was spending the night at Jacque's, I could no longer restrain my curiosity about her body, which she'd always hidden from me and which I'd never seen. I asked her whether, as proof of our friendship, we could touch each other's breasts. Jacque refused. I also had a terrible desire to kiss her, which I did. Every time I see a female nude, such as the Venus in my art history book, I go into ecstasy. Sometimes I find them so exquisite I have to struggle to hold back my tears. If only I had a girlfriend!"

**#8, Diary entry, July 21, 1944 (second-to-final piece of writing from Anne)**

“Forgive me, Kitty, they don’t call me a bundle of contradictions for nothing!”

**#9, Excerpts from the novel *Sophie’s Choice*, by William Styron**

“An extermination center can only manufacture corpses; a society of total domination creates a world of the living dead...”

“[T]he repressiveness of a society in general is directly proportionate to its harsh repression of sexual language.”

“Military men are capable of abominable crimes; witness, in our recent time alone, Chile, My Lai, Greece. But it is a "liberal" fallacy that equates the military mind with real evil and makes it the exclusive province of lieutenants or generals; the secondary evil of which the military is frequently capable is aggressive, romantic, melodramatic, thrilling, orgasmic. Real evil, the suffocating evil of Auschwitz—gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring—was perpetrated almost exclusively by civilians.”

“And so you see, dear reader, the death of my friend Sophie forced me to realize that the whole universe is one big concentration camp run by God -- the biggest Nazi of them all! So slavery in Virginia wasn't all that bad. And it was really God's fault anyway. Pretty good tragic insight there. Think I'll crank some Bellamy Brothers and get loaded!”

**#10, Review of “Holocaust,” by Tom Shales, *Washington Post*, April 16, 1978**

“TELEVISION, THE good news machine, departs from its role as national comforter tonight when NBC begins the four-night telecast of "Holocaust," a 9 1/2 hour filmed drama on one of the most discomforting of all possible topics: Nazi persecution and extermination of Jews in the 1930s and '40s. It is hard to imagine television drama more demanding or rewarding.

For years, TV has taken subjects that seemed to defy sugar-coating and turned them into mind snacks - subjects like death, for instance, depicted as everything from cute to noble but never quite ghastly. The people who made "Holocaust"

are shrewd dramatists, and they tell absorbing, interwoven stories about fictitious, believable people that hold one's interest through almost every minute of the 450-minute film, but they have not - to their great credit - minimized or trivialized the reality of horror against which these lives are led."

**#11, Excerpt from official statement by Rep. Tom Coburn (R-OK), February 25, 1997 about NBC's airing of *Schindler's List***

"[The TV broadcast was] an all-time low, with full frontal nudity, violence and profanity being shown in our homes....[T]he fact that it aired on public television on a Sunday evening during a family time should outrage parents and decent-minded individuals everywhere....I cringe when I realize that there were children all across this nation watching this program. They were exposed to the violence of multiple gunshot head wounds, vile language, full frontal nudity and irresponsible sexual activity. It simply should not have been allowed on public television."

**#12, Amendment to Missouri Senate Bill 775, August 2022**

"A person commits the offense of providing explicit sexual material to a student if such person is affiliated with a public or private elementary or secondary school in an official capacity and, knowing of its content and character, such person provides, assigns, supplies, distributes, loans, or coerces acceptance of or the approval of the providing of explicit sexual material to a student or possesses with the purpose of providing, assigning, supplying, distributing, loaning, or coercing acceptance of or the approval of the providing of explicit sexual material to a student."

**#13, How *Night* was Published in America, by Georges Borchardt**

"In 1958, I received from Jérôme Lindon (the owner of Editions de Minuit) a first book by Elie Wiesel, called *La Nuit*, which he had published in France with an introduction by François Mauriac. I am sure I must have realized at the time that it would not be an easy one to get published here, when nobody wanted to hear about concentration camps, and nobody could have predicted that there would someday be such a thing as Holocaust studies. But I was determined to get it published (the submission letter I sent

out referred to it as ‘a book that I feel more strongly about than any other I ever sent you’).

But rejection letters kept coming in. From Simon & Schuster. From Dutton. From Scribner’s. From Braziller. From Ballantine. From Pantheon. From Knopf. None offered much encouragement. Blanche Knopf made it clear the book was not ‘going to be for us... I imagine you will have someone in your office in New York who may want to deal with it abroad in England, or wherever.’ But where was wherever?

Scribner’s found it ‘a horrifying and extremely moving document... However we have certain misgivings about the size of the American market for what remains, despite Mauriac’s brilliant introduction, a document.’ I clearly had not realized that the word ‘document’ which I myself was using in presenting the book, was as noxious in publishing circles then as the word ‘literary’ is today.”

#### **#14, Popular Answered Questions on the books website GoodReads**

**Parent Post:** I am very upset that this book [Night] is on a list as appropriate for 14 year old 8th graders. Because it is, my son is being forced to read it by his school. My family is deeply effected [sic] by this book. My son is in emotional upheaval and very depressed. This book should not be listed as appropriate for this age group. It should be read at the high school level and up- and be listed as so. How could a book like this end up?

**Reply from John:** Wiesel was younger than your son when he experienced Night. Think about that. Of course, part of education, perhaps the most important part, is learning about and confronting history. Hiding from it is not healthy. Wiesel's language is plain and clear, written in a way that allows students, even middle schoolers, to read and understand. I would applaud the school and the teacher for leading students through such an important text. If you are worried about your son reading the book, I think it is appropriate to ask the teacher questions about how they are teaching it and how they are prepared to deal with emotional trauma students might experience reading it. I would not challenge their choice to teach it.

### #15, Elie Wiesel: “An Interview Unlike Any Other”

*A Jew Today*. New York: Random House, 1978, pp. 14–26.

“I knew that the role of the survivor was to testify. Only I did not know how. I lacked experience. I lacked a framework. I mistrusted the tools, the procedures. Should one say it all or hold it all back? Should one shout or whisper? Place the emphasis on those who were gone or on their heirs? How does one describe the indescribable? How does one use restraint in re-creating the fall of mankind and the eclipse of the gods? And then, how can one be sure that the words, once uttered, will not betray, distort the message they bear? So heavy was my anguish that I made a vow: not to speak, not to touch upon the essential for at least ten years. Long enough to see clearly. Long enough to listen to the voices crying inside my own. Long enough to regain possession of my memory. Long enough to unite the language of man with the silence of the dead.”

### #16, Eliezer Wiesel, ... און די וועלט האָט געשוויגן [And the World Remained Silent...]

Buenos Aires: Union Central Israelita Polaca en la Argentina, 1956, p. 245. (Translated)

“Now, ten years after Buchenwald, I see that the world is forgetting. Germany is a sovereign state. The German army has been resurrected. Ilse Koch, the cheerfully sadistic ‘Bitch of Buchenwald,’ has children and is happy. War criminals stroll on the streets of Hamburg and Munich. The past is being erased. Forgotten.”

### #17, comparative excerpts from editions of Elie Wiesel, *Night*

“They only thought about food. Not about revenge. Not about their parents. Only about bread. And even when they had satisfied their hunger—they still did not think about revenge.” Followed by:

און די וועלט האָט געשוויגן, 1956

“Early the next day Jewish boys ran off to Weimar to steal clothing and potatoes. And to rape German girls [*un tsu fargvaldikn daytshe shikses*]. The historical commandment of revenge was not fulfilled.”

**La Nuit, in French:** “Le lendemain, quelques jeunes gens coururent à Weimar ramasser des pommes de terre et des habits—et coucher avec des filles. Mais de vengeance, pas de trace.”

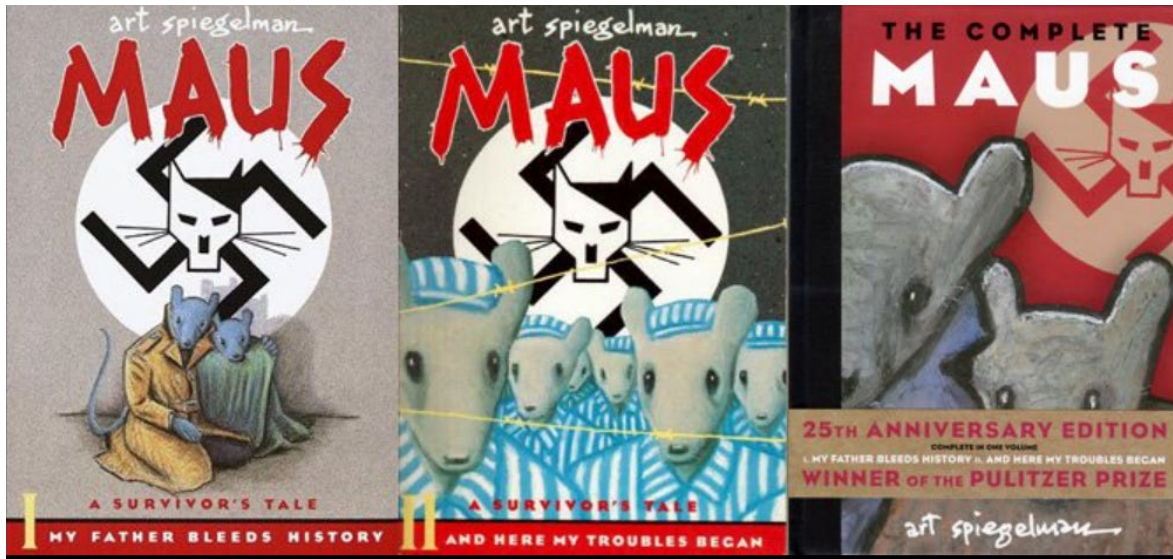


**In English**, as translated by Stella Rodway: “On the following morning, some of the young men went to Weimar to get some potatoes and clothes—and to sleep with girls. But of revenge, not a sign.”

**#18, Naomi Seidman, “Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage.”**

*Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn, 1996). Indiana University Press.

“By stopping when it does, *Night* provides an entirely different account of the experience of the survivor. *Night* and the stories about its composition depict the survivor as a witness and as an expression of silence and death, projecting the recently liberated Eliezer’s death-haunted face into the postwar years when Wiesel would become a familiar figure. By contrast, the Yiddish survivor shatters that image as soon as he sees it, destroying the deathly existence the Nazis willed on him. The Yiddish survivor is filled with rage and the desire to live, to take revenge, to write. Indeed, according to the Yiddish memoir, Eliezer began to write not ten years after the events of the Holocaust but immediately upon liberation, as the first expression of his mental and physical recovery.”



#19



#20



#21

A few tense hours later...



#22

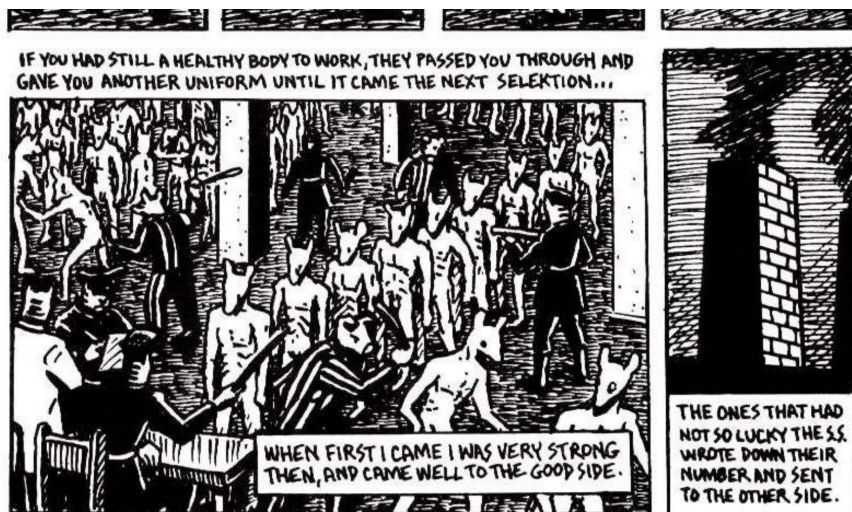




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#26



**#27, McMinn County Tennessee, Board of Education Meeting, January 10, 2022**

Board member: "I am not denying it was horrible, brutal, and cruel. It's like when you're watching tv and a cuss word or nude scene comes on it would be the same movie without it. Well, this would be the same book without it. I may be wrong, but this guy that created the artwork used to do the graphics for Playboy. You can look at his history, and we're letting him do graphics in books for students in elementary school. If I had a child in the eighth grade, this ain't happening. If I had to move him out and homeschool him or put him somewhere else, this is not happening."

School Board Director: "The values of the county are understood. There is some rough, objectionable language in this book and knowing that and hearing from many of you and discussing it, two or three of you came by my office to discuss that. I consulted with our attorney, Mr. Scott Bennett. After consulting with him, we decided the best way to fix or handle the language in this book was to redact it. Considering copyright, we decided to redact it to get rid of the eight curse words and the picture of the woman that was objected to."