

Girl interrupted: Representing Anne Frank through visual and verbal modalities

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▾ ABSTRACT

The Diary of Anne Frank can be considered as a powerful matrix, which has been generating an ad infinitum polysemy and a variety of adaptations, new readings, interpretations, and revisions since it first appeared in Amsterdam in 1947. Its study shares some of the basic concerns of the Holocaust literature such as the impossibility of representing the inexplicable, but also the catalytic challenge of rendering into literature the human experience regarding the trauma and the horror of the Holocaust. This chapter is focused on a specific picturebook created by an acclaimed British duo, the writer Josephine Poole and the illustrator Angela Barrett. *Anne Frank* (2005) is a powerful synergy of verbal and visual narrative aimed at the narration of Anne's short life, from her birth to her apprehension, the discovery of her diary on the floor of the secret annex and its subsequent publication by the only survivor of the Frank family, the father. The book is a realistic and yet imaginative re-creation of Anne's life and, at the same time, a multimodal (verbal and visual) narrative about the legacy of Anne and her diary's everlasting memory. For the analysis two conceptual /theoretical tools are applied: the philosophical concept of the parergon (frame/framing) after Kant and Derrida, and the female development plot which is associated with an established generic tradition in literature from 19th century to the present.

Keywords: Holocaust literature, Anne Frank, picturebook, parergon, female development, *künstlerroman*.

▾ THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK AND HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

The Diary of Anne Frank is an extraordinary text. To be precise, more than text, it is a powerful matrix, which has been generating an ad infinitum polysemy and a variety of adaptations, new readings, interpretations, and revisions. Since it first appeared in Amsterdam in 1947, *The Diary of Anne Frank* has created an astonishing



literary, reading and artistic phenomenon (Barnouw, 2018) with many manifestations. As a reading phenomenon, it is certainly long lasting and intergenerational, but, at the same time, it remains a text that can be read delightfully and with passion by readers of all ages, being at the same time a long-established canonical school text, included in the curricula and school syllabi and taught worldwide.

The conditions of its creation are widely known. The diary was given to Anne as a gift for her 13th birthday and the last entry was written when Anne was fifteen years old. The *Diary* was written while Anne and her family, along with four other people, were in hiding during the German Occupation of the Netherlands in a secret annex above a warehouse in Amsterdam. Anne lived hidden there for 25 months, until the hideout was discovered by the Gestapo –three days after Anne wrote her last entry to the diary– whereupon all occupants were taken to concentration camps. Anne died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen two months before the liberation of the Netherlands, shortly before she would have turned sixteen.

The Diary of Anne Frank is a book that may be characterized equivocal, ambiguous, even controversial, a fact that has sparked debate about its authenticity. A historical document with a testimonial dimension, and at the same time a genuinely literary text, which vibrates, awakens and moves, conveying a timeless humanitarian message across the ages. At the same time, it is inscribed in the collective memory as a depiction of the tragedy of the victims of Nazism. As an expression of a teenager's fears and dreams through diary writing however, the book has a strongly personal quality, as it is imbued with the fluctuations of the author, who is revealed through her writing as a bright, vivacious, passionate and charismatic narrator of her own inner life.

The *Diary* has been studied under the prism of both Psychoanalysis and Psychology (Dalsimer, 1982), and, in this scope, it is considered an important exhibit of Anne's psychological development over the two-year period of the diary, a liminal and ever-changing period for a teenager, who experienced the biological and emotional changes of adolescence, as she resorted to writing while trying to build a meaningful connective tissue against which to exist. After all, Anne Frank herself is not only the par excellence victim of the atrocities of Nazism as a historical figure, but also an iconic heroine of Holocaust Literature, a textual adolescent, who has been established as a symbol of belief in the power of the human spirit, hope and humanity.

As an integral part of Holocaust literature (Langer, 1975), *the Diary of Anne Frank* unpacks a rich variety of cultural meanings and functions at play. It is well established that Holocaust literature is inherently connected with the ineffable, the unspoken, the impossibility of representing the inexplicable, but also with the catalytic difficulty of rendering into literature the human experience regarding this traumatic event (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 2003). It is also associated with the multifaceted concept of trauma and its scientific study, dominated by landmark studies, such as those of Cathy Caruth (1996) and the clinical studies of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992). By means of understanding writing as a confrontation with the traumatic



event, one can achieve healing, atonement and defiance against pain, or the resistance to oblivion.

In a similar vein, the foundational study by Hamida Bosmajian *Sparing the child: Grief and the unspeakable in stories about Nazism and the Holocaust* (1992) is also characteristic. Bosmajian stresses the importance of literature that allows readers to work through traumatic experiences, however she underlines that, in children's literature, there is always a shield of protection, aiming to mitigate a child reader's exposure to atrocity. As she claims characteristically: "those who speak to children or write books for them about the disaster, seek to inform, perhaps to teach, but not to shock them so severely that the young reader is lost and alienated" (1992: 248). Other works on the same subject, such as the classic studies by Kokkola (2003) and Kidd (2005), or newer articles, such as those by Yalova (2016), focus on the problem posed by the degree of concealment or indirect presentation of traumatic events, while preserving historical accuracy, without distorting or falsifying history¹. Personally, I would agree with Kidd (2005: 120) that in contemporary children's literature there is a "shift away from the idea that young readers should be protected from evil and towards the conviction that they should be exposed to it". This finding is perhaps even more valid today, almost twenty years after the initial publication of the study. In other words, there is a clear tendency in contemporary children's literature to present the direct, unmediated experiences of the protagonists of the Holocaust. Possibly because, in general, contemporary children's literature produces more books that deal with challenging and controversial issues in a direct and uncompromised way (Evans, 2015a). A typical example is the picturebook *Smoke* by Antón Fortes and Joanna Concejo (2009), "a harrowing yet poignant picturebook", according to Evans, which describes how a boy survives inside a concentration camp. Although most readers know what will finally happen, the ending is still shocking (Evans, 2015b: xxxiv). This picture book shows that modern children's literature does not avoid references and representations that can be considered traumatic, since today most psychologists and educators converge on the view that the safest way to "injure" a child is really to seclude it in an ivory tower, that is to exclude it from experiencing the traumatic aspects of reality however mediated through an artistic form and at a more comfortable distance. On the contrary, the need for children to be exposed to traumatic or challenging aspects of reality through reading is now recognized. In this context, reading books on the Holocaust becomes a site of trauma, in the same way that literature becomes a field of representation of trauma so that it can be recognized and confronted².

For scholars such as Hirsch (2012) and Kidd (2005), the Holocaust can be considered as forming a paradigm in various epistemological areas, including histo-

1. A convincing overview of the relevant issue is presented by Meni Kanatsouli (2013).

2. Cf. Natov (2019), 57-59 for the power of the imagination as a helpful tool for the reader to come to terms with trauma.



riography and autobiography, literature and art, memory studies (for example, Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer, 1999), psychoanalysis or feminist and post-feminist studies. Marianne Hirsch (2012) has explored recent concerns about memory and trauma through artistic images and a variety of genres from testimonial writing to autobiographical texts, and fictional or visual narratives. All those artistic and cultural discourses are created by the intersection of memory with trauma (see for example, Brison, 1999). Usually, the recollection of traumatic personal histories is inherited by survivors' children and their generation. Trauma acquires a coherent identity when it is transferred and acquires the quality of "postmemory". Intergenerational acts of transfer form a mnemonic palimpsest with successive layers of personal or collective memory in such way that today's Holocaust mnemonic recollections almost unequivocally are guided by second-generation (Ulanowicz, 2013) or third-generation memory (Aarons and Berger, 2017). As we move through the 21st century, Holocaust Literature continues to flourish, and new writers succeed previous post-Holocaust writers. In this way, the very concept of "postmemory" evolves and acquires new, unexpected and sometimes contradictory nuances.

➤ ANNE FRANK BY JOSEPHINE POOLE AND ANGELA BARRETT: RETHINKING AND REVISIONING HER STORY

Anne Frank, as we have established, is more than a historical person, rather she is symbol, a cultural icon. She travels through time and is powerfully sustained through collective imagination. There are of course numerous editions, scholarly articles and annotated editions of the *Diary* itself, as well as a good number of contemporary graphic, visual and intermedial adaptations, visualizations, and retellings of both her life and her *Diary*. Examples include the official *Anne Frank: The Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography* by Jacobson and Colón (2010), but also the latest graphic novel *Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation* (2018), adapted by Ari Folman and illustrated by David Polonsky. The multiplicity of semiotic codes, the synergy of the verbal and the visual, the multimodality and the hybridity (von Lierop-Debrauwer, 2017) all dominate newer and contemporary adaptations of *The Diary*.

I will refer –drawing upon a previous study– (Kalogirou & Economopoulou, 2013) to a specific illustrated adaptation in the form of a picturebook on the life of Anne Frank and the story of her famous diary. *Anne Frank* (2005) written by the British writer Josephine Poole and illustrated by the British artist Angela Barrett is a powerful synergy of verbal and visual narrative aimed at the valid and brilliant narration of Anne's short life, from her birth to her apprehension, the discovery of her diary on the floor of the secret annex and its publication by the only survivor of the Frank family, the father. The acclaimed creative duo Poole and Barrett has created many remarkable picturebooks. This book is a valid and yet imaginative re-creation and reconstruction of Anne's story and, at the same time, a narrative about the future of Anne's



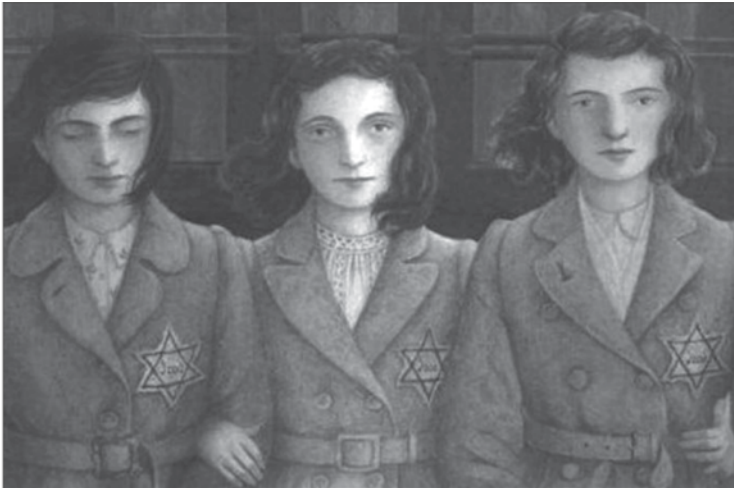
and her diary's everlasting memory. Her end of life constitutes a beginning (the very last word of the text is "beginning") of another everlasting story, of the history of her work and her legacy. Barrett faced the task of representing this horrific period as a challenge. In her own words, "we're used to dreadful things happening - either way back in history or on the other side of the world: I think we comfort ourselves by that distance, but the medieval cruelty of the Holocaust was neither far away nor long ago, so I concentrated on the everyday reality of Anne's family, showed the detail and texture of their daily life, and how it was systematically destroyed"(Carey, 2006)³.

Perhaps her views on the trivialization of dreadful things as everyday reality refer to Hannah Arendt's famous saying on the banality of evil. However, the undoubted realism of illustration is mediated and, to some extent, mitigated by the visual style and the means used by the illustrator. A poetic sense of melancholy pervades many of her illustrations as it makes subtle use of composition, light and color to convey narrative information, to set the scene and to suggest the overall atmosphere and mood of the story. In *Anne Frank* she uses muted and sober colors, mainly the brownish tone of old sepia photographs in order to represent the everyday reality of Anne and the wider cruel reality of the era with the rising omnipotent Nazism, violence, stigmatization and scapegoating of the Jews. At the same time, however, the illustration evokes a mystifying power, creating richly allusive images, full of symbolic details.

There is an impressive verisimilitude with the real persons behind the events and with the real places in which the story took place. Barrett meticulously copies the famous house-museum of Anne Frank in Amsterdam, namely the façade of the building, the interiors of the secret annex as well as Anne's room with her desk and the posters of Hollywood stars stuck on the walls. With a realistic mood, she also depicts the wider social reality and life, the streets and public spaces of Amsterdam, but also the simple everyday life of Anne, who is presented in the overall illustration as an ordinary girl. Realism is certainly dominant at both discursive and visual level. This effet de réel to use the terminology of Roland Barthes is served by the fact of the utilization of the semiotics of photography, as many of the images and most prominently the image in the cover which depicts Anne with her friends in front of a cinema are made to resemble old photographic portraits, wrapped in sepia colors. The reader is often given the impression that they are flipping through an old album through which the past comes to life.

Poole's text, on the other hand, validly describes Anne's life in a narrative style rich in allusions, discreetly poetic, although in general the narrative is

3. It is worth noting that Barrett's fairytale illustrations often are rooted to reality and history. A typical example is the image of the poisoned Snow White from the fairy tale of the same name (2003, again in collaboration with Josephine Poole) which is inspired by a photograph by the American photographer Lee Miller which depicts a young girl, dead on the floor. The girl is the daughter of a Nazi, who had shot himself after poisoning the rest of the family (it is known that Lee Miller captured with her photos the numerous suicides of Nazi officers immediately after the war).



Εικόνα 7. Poole, J. & Barrett, A. *Anne Frank*. London: Red Fox, 2007.

straightforward. The text is also supported by paratextual elements, that is a chronology of the main events of the period from 1918 (the end of the First World War) to 1980 (death of Otto Frank) and information about what happened to Anne's diary after the war. Another element of the paratext is the quotation immediately after the title page of an excerpt from the diary (entry of November 8th, 1943), which paints a bleak picture of the suffocating atmosphere inside the annex and Anne's desire for freedom.

This tension between the polar opposite categories of enclosure vs freedom will permeate the entire book in both text and illustration. But for what reasons could this picturebook be considered an important revisioning of Anne Frank's iconic presence in the collective imagination? With which modalities and based on which strategies of representation the rhetoric of the visual and the verbal produce a multi-layered matrix for the materialization of Anne? Undoubtedly the book succeeds in bringing Anne to life with all the *enargeia*, that is, the ekphrastic energy that speech and image have always had. It is also full of artistic and literary allusions in various works of art but also in generic traditions that form a dense intertextual tissue. But let's start from the beginning. Two conceptual tools can be used to approach and better understand Poole and Barrett's project. One is the ambiguous concept of frame and framing, which has been extensively analyzed in narratology, philosophy and literature most prominently by Derrida (1979) and the deconstructive criticism he exercised in Kant's concept of the *parergon* (frame), a concept that analyzed by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*. Within a more traditional art history context the concept of frame has also been substantially analyzed by Duro (1996) and has been used effectively in the study of fictional narratives with a strong ekphrastic character (Müller, 2004). Also, the notion of framing, crucial as a device for the poetics of metafictional works, has been used in the study of picturebooks (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001: 224-230).



The second conceptual-methodological tool that can be used as a prospective key to the approach of Poole and Barrett's book is its interpretation in the context of the generic tradition of the fiction of female development (Abel, Hirsch, & Langland, 1983) in combination with the genre of *künstlerroman* (Seret, 1992), i.e. the fictional genre of formation and evolution of the artist from his childhood until the moment he composes and shapes his artistic physiognomy, usually achieving at the same time his inner self-realization. In other words, the story of Anne's life is attributed to the narrative as a story of a teenager on her way to adulthood, albeit a suspended adulthood.

↘ SHE'S BEEN FRAMED

The concept of frame and framing constitutes a pervasive semiotic code with statutory function for the textual and visual universe of *Anne Frank*. How many types of frames are there in the book, which is literally punctuated with all sorts of literal and figurative frames?

In philosophy, the concept of frame goes back to Kant's identical *parergon* (a Greek composite word constituted by the presupposition *παρά* + the dative case *τῷ ἔργῳ* = something that is near or close to *ergon*-the work), who uses the term *parergon* to name a series of different objects, which can be considered to be near, close or in addition to the work, being decorative elements or additions to the work, as are the frames of the paintings. The *parerga* (plural) are signifiers that might signal the value of a work, but they do not cease to be artificial or formalistic supplements compared to the pure beauty of the work itself. In Derrida's (1987) subsequent critique of the Kantian *parergon* he questioned this very position. Art, like consciousness, depends on the frame, the picture frame that surrounds the painted canvas to the arch of the proscenium in theatre or the movie frame. The *parergon* delimits what we can see, he argues, subverting the view that aesthetic judgment should be about the innate beauty of the work in itself and not about what surrounds it. The French philosopher also precisely emphasizes the liminal importance of the frame. Being in the meantime, between the inner content and the outer indifferent space, creates an indefinite field. Especially for picture frames however, the latest critique (the edited volume of Duro, 1996 is an important contribution) interrogated the cluster of concepts that activate the *parergon* and which are related to the supposed wholeness and the closure of the artwork, the liminality and the borders of artistic representation, or the call of attention in aesthetic perception. All and all the concept of *parergon* is closely related to the ontology of artistic representation.

The picturebook by Poole and Barrett begins with the birth of Anne. The first double spread activates a complex game between different types of frames. It shows Anne as a baby, safe in her cradle and the text collaborates, describing Anne as "an ordinary little girl". We can easily infer though that Anne is actually "framed" from her beginning of life since her cradle is not safe, as far as its decorative mesh sides



begin to suggest a kind of prison's fence, anticipating the girl's fate. Another type of frame is the open window that separates the inside from the outside, launching an antithetical dipole that will dominate the whole book. It is true that the interplay between inside and outside categories are present in most of the pictures. We should also notice the symbolism of the framed landscape hung on the wall that is opposed to the open window and to the real landscape behind the window's frame. A tension thus develops between the free, open and anarchic nature and the entrenched and artistically organized landscape of the painting. The painted landscape on the wall cleverly alludes to Dutch landscape painting. It is reminiscent of Dutch painter M. Hobbema's sober landscapes, for example his famous *The Avenue at Middelharnis* in the National Gallery of London. Thus, the image as a frame on the wall is embedded in the picture creating an image-within-an image device (closely reminiscent of the *mise en abyme*⁴) that multiplies the polysemy.



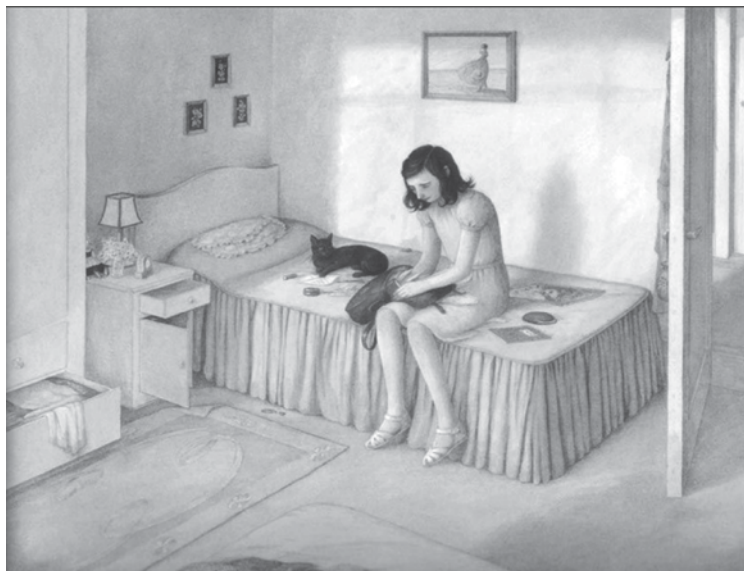
Εικόνα 8. Poole, J. & Barrett, A. *Anne Frank*. London: Red Fox, 2007.

The picture which shows Anne alone on her bed activates again the inside / outside dialectic with the frame device. The text informs us that the Franks they had to disappear, fast. Anne, sad, prepares her things. She is absorbed in her thoughts. Her pose, possibly borrowed from a well-known painting by Edward Hopper (*Hotel Room*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid), a classic pose of solitude and despair, is totally contradictory to the romantic pose of the girl depicted in the painting above

4. For *mise en abyme* in metafictional picturebooks see Nikolajeva and Scott (2001), 224-26. To be precise, *mise en abyme* is created mainly when the embedded picture replicates the broader picture in which it is located. See also Rimmon-Kenan, ²2002, 94.



the bed. The painting inside the frame is probably reminiscent of a painting by J.W. Waterhouse (*The Tempest*) showing another famous teenage girl, Miranda, Shakespeare's heroine, in an open air, windy landscape. One is actually and metaphorically entrapped, the other is literally framed, depicted, however, on open horizons, surrounded by natural elements. The allusive character of the illustration creates a palimpsest code that in this case enhances the polyseme.



Εικόνα 9. Poole, J. & Barrett, A. *Anne Frank*. London: Red Fox, 2007.

However, looking at the whole book we will find that in almost all the pictures there are embedded images in the form of photos or posters that are stuck on the walls of the streets, such as posters of Hitler⁵, or the movie poster on the front of a cinema that promotes W. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer⁶, or the photos and the cutouts of actresses on the wall of Anne's room, and the framed family photos on the kitchen wall with a (partially visible) painting depicting still life with fruits. It is obvious that all these embedded images, some with actual frames, but all clearly framed as they are glued in prominent places on surfaces, serve the *effet de réel* in this case, but also create ironic tensions, especially the poster of the movie *Romeo and Juliet* - signifying perhaps the love that Anne tragically will never meet.

5. Hitler is a haunted presence for the lives of the people of Amsterdam. One of the most emotionally moving images is the huge poster with Hitler's face and the contrast it creates with the two tiny figures of children walking down the street, in front of the large portrait of the Führer.

6. This is the well-known film adaptation of the play in 1936 directed by George Cukor.



Her capture by the Gestapo is rendered with a close-up portrait of Anne looking at the viewer (i.e., at the extra-textual level, outside the frame of the page), with a sad but magnetic gaze. She is framed again, as she is surrounded suffocating from the hands and bodies of the Gestapo. An (outstretched) arm imprisons her, reminiscent of the fence that imprisoned her from the beginning in her crib. Her gaze, however, seems to want to escape.



Εικόνα 10. Poole, J. & Barrett, A. *Anne Frank*. London: Red Fox, 2007.

↘ AN ORDINARY ADOLESCENT, HER DEVELOPMENT SUSPENDED

The narratives of female development are mainly concerned with the spiritual *bildung* of the protagonist female character, a process whose happy ending is often hampered by the patriarchal structures and restrictive commitments of society to women. They are narratives of inner development, formation and self-consciousness⁷, which present significant differences from the traditional male *bildungsroman*. At the plot level, they follow either the narrative pattern of the *apprenticeship*, where the heroine evolves progressively towards a closure which is achieved by forming a coherent self, or the pattern of the *female awakening*, in which the young heroine does not evolve progressively, in a straight linear manner, but experiences disruptions that inhibit her growth, and epiphany moments which change her internally (Abel, Hirsch, & Langland, 1983: 11). The female *künstlerroman* is, according

7. In the studies of the volume Abel, Hirsch, and Langland (1983) fictional works of different periods are critically approached so that both the fictional range of female development and its distinct deviation from the ideals of the traditional male *bildungsroman* be transparent.



to Hirsch (1983: 28), a form of female spiritual *bildung*, which, at least in the nineteenth-century novel, takes the narrative form of the story of the potential artist who for several reasons fails to make it.

The case of Anne in this picturebook, however, is different. Her death violently cuts the thread of her life before she manages to live well. So, it is not that she fails to evolve, to mature biologically and artistically, or to follow her inclination. The circumstances of her life are so overwhelming, so catalytic, that they left her literally no room to expand her relationships with others and to test her strengths in the fields of society, education, public and private spheres.

Illustration, however, has allusions to her writing inclination. First, the black and white sketch of the title page depicts Anne in the classic pose of a writer who sits at her desk holding a writing tool and seeming lost in her thoughts. But, further, we will see that in other images Anne appears near or sitting in an office desk surrounded by the tools of writing. As a small child we see her approaching in a curious manner her father's large office with the typewriter, later, during her confinement, we see her in her small room with the photos of the actors on the walls sitting at her desk and daydreaming. In the last picture of the book, Miep (Miep Gies, the woman who hid Anne and the other Dutch-Jews from the Nazis) hands the diary to Anne's father. Otto Frank is sitting at the big desk, while behind him the big window frame with the decorative sashes (luscious green filled with light outside the window) refers again to prison. The experience of incarceration as a consequence of the relentless persecution of the Jews is obviously indelible. But at the same time, it is understood that the father will safe and continue the work that Anne left behind. The writer's desk even without Anne sitting on it is functional again.



Εικόνα 11. Poole, J. & Barrett, A. *Anne Frank*. London: Red Fox, 2007.



One of the most evocative images is the one depicting Anne and Peter embracing in the attic –the diary at Anne’s feet– looking out of the small window at the pale light and dreaming about the future, sometimes talking, sometimes in silence. Poole’s narration touches slightly poetic modalities, becomes discreetly lyrical, thus attributing the emergence of love between two adolescents with tropes of language reminiscent of the narrative style of a fairy tale: “it was a love as sweet, and as fragile, as the flowers on the chestnut tree outside the window”⁸ - after all, Anne is more like a fairytale heroine “as if she were invisible, in fairy story magic cloak”. The verbal text is punctuated with references to fairy-tale worlds to produce a representational reality that is independent from the real world outside the attic, thus restoring into figurative language what has been irretrievably lost for Anne. The author intensifies the contrast between the bombed-out, dangerous Amsterdam and the silence inside the attic, which is presented here for the first time almost positively as a temporary refuge away from the lurking death. But again, the dialectic of the inside-outside categories has an ambivalent significance. The inside is projected to safe and quiet for a while, a place of erotic awakening and potential fairy-tale, but this does not mean that it ceases to be a suffocating cell that keeps young people away from life. The pose of the two adolescents is emblematic: a boy and a girl look at the sky and the stars and daydream; this image might be correlating to a schema common in narratives of adolescence. Anne Frank’s world is fragile, bittersweet, full of authentic teenage energy. It is the world of a creative bright teenager full of potential trapped in the dark and abominable conditions of the most brutal and utterly horrific event in the modern history of mankind.

➤ CONCLUSION

Anne Frank is a timeless heroine, a universal cultural icon. In the picturebook of Poole and Barrett is represented as an ordinary, real girl and a spirited adolescent, an unfettered and romantic spirit yet enclosed and imprisoned in a narrow attic. What is more she is portrayed as a potential artist, a writer in the making. Had she lived would have possibly created wonderful things and surely, she would have unfolded her creativity, she would have lived her life, if only had the chance of crossing the threshold of adulthood. In Poole’s and Barrett’s creation the symbolic and interpretative character of both the verbal and the visual narratives evoke the contradictory situation of the young girl and the duality of her identity as her body is entrapped in an odd prison-house although her soul and her imagination are flying above the frames of her actual existence. It is true, however, that somehow, she did succeed eventually to set herself free and live, as her work survived herself, confirming the omnipotence of art over barbarism and perishable human life.

8. It is certainly the famous chestnut of Anne, the tree that gave her hope and courage, to which she often refers in the diary.



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