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ETTY HILLESUM



Etty Hillesum was born on 15th January 1914 in Middelburg, the Netherlands. After finishing her secondary education in Deventer, she studied Law and Slavic languages in Amsterdam. She was involved in a left-wing circle of intellectual friends.

In the period 1941-1943 Etty Hillesum wrote twelve diaries and numerous letters. We read that she, rather than to escape into hiding for the German repression, lived with the daunting challenge of the reality of the concentration camps.

On 5th July 1943, she was sent to Camp Westerbork, to the point of no return. Being part of the fate and massacre of the Jewish people, she died on 30th November 1943 in Auschwitz.

The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum (1914-1943), edited by Prof. Dr. Klaas A. D. Smelik, have a special place in the Jewish-Dutch witness of the Shoah. They contain not only a description of Camp Westerbork during Nazi occupation, but also reflect her important, though unfortunate interrupted existential search of an ethical, philosophical and literature nature.

After her death the diaries have received worldwide attention and inspired thousands of readers.

FIRST EDITION

We present to you the first official edition of the EHOC-Newsletter. The aim of this Newsletter is to spread updates and current information on the activities of the Etty Hillesum Research Centre at Ghent University. It promotes and supports research on Etty Hillesum worldwide. We invite you, our readers, if you are active in the field of Hillesum studies, to contact us for possible publication and reviews in our next edition. A word of gratitude to Ghent University and the Etty Hillesum Foundation, for their generous and ongoing support to the EHOC. Finally, in the words of Etty Hillesum herself: "Vooruit dan maar!" ... "Off, you go!"

QUOTATION

"The freight cars had been completely sealed, but a plank had been left out here and there, and people put their hands through the gaps and waved as they were drowning. The sky is full of birds and right before our eyes, mass murder."

Letters and Diaries, 8
June 1943

OPENING OF THE EHOC

On 13th June 2006, the Etty Hillesum Research Centre (EHOC) was officially opened as part of Ghent University with a celebration at Sint-Pietersplein 5. This newly founded Centre coordinates and stimulates research on *the Letters and Diaries* of Etty Hillesum, written during the period of World War Two. In the last twenty years, these valuable manuscripts received global attention and recognition. Researchers of various disciplines and different Universities worldwide, connected to the EHOC, dedicate their studies to careful analysis of Hillesum's writings. During the opening, Prof. Dr. Klaas A. D. Smelik, director of the EHOC, addressed the international group of researchers with words of encouragement and vision. The documentary that was shown, gave a refreshing impression of Hillesum's life and work. Finally, the aim of the EHOC, according to Prof. Smelik, is to create an international network of research. It will link the different fields of study through the EHOC website and academic seminars world wide.

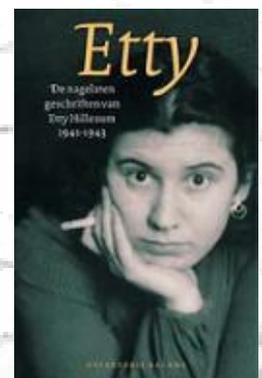
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To provide opportunities for **research and exchange** for scholars world-wide working on Etty Hillesum's writings.
2. To **archive** the international research material on Etty Hillesum and to develop the **bibliography** accordingly.
3. To expand and **deepen our own research** on Etty Hillesum.
4. To **publish** the series 'Etty Hillesum Studies'.
5. To **initiate projects and supervise** the various translations of Etty Hillesum's writings in different languages.
6. To develop a **website**, which will present the different research activities, both local as well as on an international level.
7. To open up the **centre of Etty Hillesum documentation** for scholars and graduates world-wide.
8. To **organise symposiums**, seminars, courses, conferences and debates.
9. To offer professional **academic support and supervision** for those who wish further guidance in their work.
10. To expand our **contacts** with the different organizations interested in Etty Hillesum.

"I want to live to see the future, to become the chronicler of the things that are happening now..."

Everything that happens around me is to be clarified in my mind and later in my writing."

Letters and Diaries, 13 august 1941



EHOC MEMBERS

Michel Tanret

Dep. of Languages and cultures of the Near East and North Africa

Klaas Smelik

Dep. of Languages and cultures of the Near East and North Africa

Katrien De Graaf

Dep. of Languages and cultures of the Near East and North Africa

Philippe Codde

Department of Dutch literature

Bart Keunen

Department of Dutch literature

Anne-Marie Musschoot

Department of Dutch literature

Raymond Detrez

Department of Slavonic and East-European studies

Martin Commers

Department of Philosophy and moral sciences

Bruno De Wever

Department of Modern history

Freddy Decreus

Department of Latin and Greek

Marysa Demoor

Department of English

Jaak De Vos

Department of German

Hendrik Pinxten

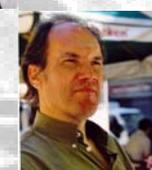
Department of Comparative sciences of culture

Chia Longman

Department of Comparative sciences of culture

Julien Klener

Professor Emeritus Hebrew and Judaism



**ETTY HILLESUM
ONDERZOEKS CENTRUM**

Contactadres:

Sint-Pietersplein 6
B 9000 Gent
EHOC@UGent.be

T 09 264 41 34
T 09 264 35 55



From left to right: Ellen Vandewalle, Maarten Bogaert, Meins Coetsier en Prof. Klaas A. D. Smelik

NEW PUBLICATION

The international group of scholars collaborating with the EHOC is growing. In our next Newsletter we will introduce the affiliated members to you. In the current edition we want to draw your special attention to the recent publication *Denken met Etty Hillesum* by Ria van den Brandt, one of our affiliated members.

On 30th November 2006, Ria van den Brandt presented her book *Denken met Etty Hillesum* at the Etty Hillesum Centre in Deventer, the Netherlands. Ria van den Brandt (1960) is philosopher and researcher at the Heyendaal Institute of the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The EHOC, Ghent has a close link with the Heyendaal Institute.

The book analyses from various perspectives the Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum. The introduction, quotations and commentaries reflect the central themes of her thought. The golden thread in Hillesum's works, according van den Brandt, is the search of an unconventional thinker for a wisdom that would stand its ground in all circumstances of life.

Ria van den Brandt, *Denken met Etty Hillesum*, Uitgeverij Meinema, Zoetermeer, 2006.

Director

Prof. Dr. Klaas A. D. Smelik is director of the EHOC. He studied Theology, Semitic Languages, Ancient Egyptian, Coptic, Archaeology and Ancient History in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Leiden. Amsterdam University awarded him the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1977. Prof. Smelik worked at the Universities of Amsterdam, Utrecht, Brussels and Louvain. At present he teaches Hebrew and Judaism at Ghent University. He published the Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum (1914-1943).

EHOC Researchers

Ellen Vandewalle received her M.A. in Germanic Languages from Louvain University in 2003. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in History from Ghent University, in 2004. She is doing research at the EHOC on the influence of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke on the spiritual and literature development of Etty Hillesum. In Spring 2007 her study on Suarès and Hillesum is to be published: 'De invloed van André Suarès' *Dostojewski* in de dagboeken van Etty Hillesum', in: *Etty Hillesum Studies 2*.

Maarten Bogaert studied Dutch, German and Russian at the Lessius Hogeschool in Antwerp and linguistics in both Leuven as well as Antwerp University. He published articles on translations of Rilke, Tolstoy and Nabokov. He translated literature for 'De Arbeiderspers' and until recently he worked as assistant Russian at the Lessius Hogeschool. Bogaert's research is an analysis of the Russian aspects of Etty Hillesum with a particular focus on the influences of Russian literature and culture on her life and work.

Meins G. S. Coetsier obtained his B.A. in philosophy in 2004 and was awarded Master of Arts in Philosophy, at The Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy in Dublin, Ireland in 2006. Under the supervision of Rev. Dr. Gabriel Slattery, he dedicated himself to two years of fulltime research on *The Flow of Presence. An analysis of the Philosophy of Eric Voegelin. As Illustrated in the life of Etty Hillesum*. Coetsier's research on Etty Hillesum will be further developed and deepened within the area of philosophy and theology.

