

An analysis of anne frank's use of epistolary in the portrayal of her coming-of-a...

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The epistolary movement is a well-known literary wave as it encompasses the use of letters, as a form of storytelling. Epistolary novels are usually written in first person limited narrative voice as they reflect on the personal experiences, opinions, and feelings of one character and create a subjective view of the other characters. During the 18th century, authors perceived the use of the epistolary technique as a way to provide a realistic aspect to their literary compositions (Curran). Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* is among the most enduring and unquestionable biographies written in letters illustrating Jews' martyrdom during the Holocaust. Derived from the Greek words "holos" (whole) and "kaustos" (burned) also referred to as the Shoah, the Holocaust was a historical era marked by the decimation of millions of Jews. Indeed, during World War II, Nazi Germany, aided by its collaborators targeted and exterminated more than half of the Jewish communities in Germany due to racial conflicts. One of the main themes covered in the autobiography is the coming-of-age of the protagonist Anne Frank. With this in mind, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* is considered as a bildungsroman as it deals with the continuous process of self-discovery along with the moral and psychological changes linked with the protagonist's path to maturation. According to literary critic Judith Thurman, the title of Anne's novel "corresponds to what is in fact is an epistolary autobiography of exceptional caliber. It takes the full measure of a complex, evolving character" (Thurman, as cited by Prose). Indeed, the tenacity of the human soul drives the young girl to grow and thrive even in atrocious circumstances. Anne slowly becomes dominated by a struggle to create a stable and permanent sense of self-awareness and self-acceptance. Although

this may be true, in her diary, Anne does not get to experience the acme of her coming-of-age due to her brutal death. The Dutch novelist Harry Mulisch links the growing recognition of Anne's diary to the fact that the young author died during her process of writing it. In that case, he describes Anne's diary as being not only a work of art but also a "work of art made by life itself" due to her abrupt and brutal death (Mulisch, as cited by Prose).

Many literary critics often highlight the importance of maturation in Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Girl*. According to John Berryman, Anne Frank's story can be considered as the "conversion of a child into a person" (Berryman, as cited by Prose). Indeed, he highlights the exceptional aspect of Anne's process of maturation as being uncommon due to her disadvantaged living conditions (Berryman). In like manner, Philip Roth describes Anne Frank's diary as an "accelerated film of a fetus sprouting a face" (Roth, as cited by Prose). He believes that Anne's diary effectively portrays the progressive development of Anne's personality. Consequently, they both put an emphasis on the importance of the theme of coming-of-age in *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Although this may be true, they did not examine the effect of the use of the epistolary literary device in portraying this specific theme of self-maturation which is however essential throughout her diary. As Anne's use of epistolary strongly contributes to the portrayal of her coming-of-age, it is necessary to fully analyze her use of epistolary in order to adequately understand her process of maturation. In that case, how does Anne Frank's use of epistolary form contribute to the portrayal of her coming-of-age?

In this essay, I will first introduce the notion of self-growth and epistolary form, which will allow us to have a better understanding of the relevance of the topic. Then, in order to discern the different approaches used by Anne to unwillingly portray her maturation, I will analyze her use of the epistolary form to portray and link the structure of her novel to her coming of age. This will ultimately create a contrast between Anne's personality at the beginning and at the end of her diary.

In Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Anne's use of the epistolary literary device to express her point of view and narrate the steps of her life builds the naturalistic aspect of the novel. Her use of letters provides a chance to the readers to get closely acquainted with Anne's personal thoughts and beliefs. She is not afraid to discuss controversial topics such as the Jews' situation during WWII. Equally important, Anne's motivation to write in her diary was purely honest and ethical as she was just trying to find a way to escape reality and create a new world for herself. Albeit Anne did make some revisions in order to become a published author, she wrote her letters with a sense of veracity and honesty and did not want to prove a certain point or portray a certain theme. As noted by Philip Roth in *The Ghost Writer*, the diary of Anne ' kept her company and it kept her sane" (Roth, as cited by Prose). In that case, unwittingly Anne is able to provide a historical background to her diary. As a matter of fact, she creates a story based on the consequences of WWII on human psychological and physical attributes. Unintentionally, Anne's provides a vivid representation of life conditions during WWII and documents her coming of age exposed to a life of

imprisonment and fear. The chronological order of her letters throughout the years additionally can be aligned with historical facts. In that case, the use of letters each with a specific date creates a dynamic story which uses historical events as a background. Given these points, the use of the epistolary literary device builds Anne's credibility as a young author which ultimately leads to the creation of the naturalistic aspect of her novel as it creates a sense of sincerity and genuineness. Indeed, as argued by Cynthia Crossen, Anne Frank makes use of an assortment of ideas, dramatic scenes with reflections in her letters as well as a natural tone to create a sense of spontaneity and genuineness thus portraying the naturalistic aspect of her novel.

Anne's personification of her diary contributes to the portrayal of her childishness. Indeed, one of the most significant signs of immaturity is the personification of her diary to become Kitty. Although some people may believe that Kitty remains an imaginary character who consequently cannot be personified, others would rather support the fact that Anne personifies her diary to become Kitty. As a matter of fact, Anne already had real-life friends but she felt the need to make an imaginary friend who would possess every quality she looks for in a person to make her feel less desolate.

According to Anne, " You can be lonely even when you are loved by many people since you are still not anybody's one and only" (Frank 130).

Moreover, Anne was driven by the idea of having a perfect, compassionate friend, consequently, she started to see her diary as a way to escape real life. Anne created the illusion of Kitty and started to treat her like a real

person as she felt like it was easier to talk to Kitty than to her real-life friends: " All I think about when I ' m with friends is having a good time. I can't bring myself to talk about anything but ordinary everyday things[...]that's just how things are, and unfortunately, they're not liable to change. This is why I've started the diary" (13). In that case, Anne's personifies her diary to becomes Kitty as she creates an imaginary personality for it.

By naming her diary, Anne is able to create an abstract person and characterize her diary as a real person. As a matter of fact, involuntarily Anne shapes her diary as being polymorphic:

it takes the shape of the reader and changes according to the different readers.

In like manner, as Anne believed her diary would never reach an audience, she did not refrain from sharing intimate aspects of her life: from the most insignificant detail to the most essential aspects of the young girl's life. Anne sees her diary as a friend rather than as a notebook. In that case, she attributes human characteristics to her diary such as the ability to listen or have feelings. As stated by Anne, " I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a source of great comfort and support" (11). This illustrates Anne's childhood innocence and creativity as she was able to make herself believe that her diary was a real and passionate friend.

Equally important, the protagonist unintentionally shapes her diary as her a real character as Anne builds her self-characterization through Kitty. Indeed, through Kitty, the reader is able to characterize Anne as a young innocent girl according to her thoughts and actions.

Consequently, throughout her diary, Anne uses the personification of her diary to become Kitty in order to show her childishness and immaturity.

Pursuing this further, as the personification of Kitty is a symbol of Anne's childishness, its continual use serves as a representation of Anne's incomplete process of maturation.

Indeed, as Anne started to evolve psychologically and physically, she noticed that she could not hold back from talking to Kitty for the reason that her diary was beyond a shadow of a doubt the only consistent thing in real life. Indeed, in addition to being a source of comfort, Anne's diary became a way to control Anne's deepest feelings: " The prospect of going back to school in October is making me too happy to be logical! Oh dear, didn't I just get through telling you I didn't want to anticipate events? Forgive me, Kitty" (270). Consequently, this phenomenon puts an emphasis on the fact that Anne's process of maturation did not reach its peak.

Throughout her novel, Anne's process of self-maturation can be depicted through the evolution of her writing style. Indeed, at the beginning of her novel, Anne makes use of a simple and straightforward diction. She uses the simplest words to describes her personal thoughts which ultimately creates an atmosphere of directness and candor. According to the poet John

Berryman, Anne Frank's diary evokes a sense of exceptional self-awareness, candor and powers of expression (Berryman, as cited by Prose). Indeed, As Anne is still a young girl, she writes her journal in a simple manner while still conveying her message. The use of common terms conclusively makes her diary easily understood: " It seems like years since Sunday morning. So much has happened it's as if the whole world had suddenly turned upside down" (23).

In contrast, by the end of her chronicle, Anne's writing style underwent a metamorphosis similarly to her metamorphosis as a person. According to Francine Prose, Anne's latest entries were not a guileless outburst of adolescent thoughts and feelings but a " consciously crafted work of literature" (Prose, as cited by Crossen). Anne's writing skills became more developed as she is growing up. With this in mind, Anne's use of a complex diction makes her diary harder to understand. This phenomenon ultimately creates a feeling of intricacy and self-evolvment. Anne uses more imagery and figurative language in order to not only expose her knowledge of literary conventions but also provide a sense of self-improvement. Her use of imagery depicts a deeper analysis and view on herself as well as a feeling of self-awareness. In that case, the change in Anne's writing style serves as a way to portray her maturation and self-growth.

Correspondingly, Anne's process of maturation can be illustrated by the transformation of her narrative voice. Indeed, throughout her novel, Anne Frank makes use of a first-person narrative voice thereupon makes her diary more subjective. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight the evolution of

Anne's narrative voice. Anne's perception and point of view on life has changed. As she makes use of the same narrative voice throughout her novel, her mentality and perception of life have changed thus affecting her narrative voice. Indeed, At the end of the novel, it is noticeable that Anne's narrative voice was highly affected by her mood swings as an adolescent and by feelings of fear, anger or confusion which were almost absent at the beginning of her novel when she was a child. Additionally, these ultimately highly impact the tone of the novel. At first, the tone of her novel is youthful and optimistic: " I had my birthday party on Sunday afternoon. The Rin Tin Tin movie was a big hit with my classmates. I got two brooches, a bookmark and two books" (Frank 10). Nonetheless, by the end of her novel, the tone becomes more complex and introspective: " As I've told you many times, I'm split in two. One side contains my exuberant cheerfulness, my flippancy, my joy and, above all, my ability to appreciate the lighter side of things" (270).

In the final analysis, the evolution of Anne's writing style can be analyzed to portray Anne's process of maturation. Indeed, the metamorphosis of Anne's writing technique through her use of diction, narrative point of view and figurative language effectively shows a sense of self-improvement and growth.

Anne's characterization to describe the people surrounding her as well as herself portrays her process of self-growth. Indeed, Anne's description of other people highly impacts her self-characterization. At the beginning of her novel, Anne provides a surface characterization of others as she does not try to understand why people behave a certain way towards her. She bases her

analysis of human nature on people's actions and appearances. She often jumps to conclusions and drives her action toward someone according to her opinion of that specific person. In that case, she creates a subjective view of the people surrounding her. She, therefore, illustrates her sense of immaturity as she believes that her perception of people corresponds to their real personalities. The most compelling evidence is the characterization of her mother, Edith Frank, at first then of Peter Van Daan. As a matter of fact, Anne shapes her mother as a loathsome character. Anne often accuses her mom of not showing her enough motherly love, affection and care: " I miss - every day and every hour of the day - having a mother who understands me" (129). Instead, she often gets in fights with her mother and does not agree with many of her claims. For this reason, Anne was unfortunately never able to create a close relationship with her mother: " With everything I do and write, I imagine the kind of mom I'd like to be with my children later on[...] I find it difficult to describe what I mean, but the word ' mom' says it all" (129). However, Anne never tried to understand why her mom was behaving a certain way with her. She did not try to understand that her personality was strongly similar to mom's personality, in that case, they often got into fights because they were both outspoken and dynamic. As the reader, it is necessary to understand that Edith Frank was simply hurt by her daughter's rebellion and rebuffs. This phenomenon ultimately leads Anne to create a closer relationship with her father than with her mother: " I finally told Daddy that I love ' him' more than I do Mother, to which he replied that it was just a passing phase, but I don't think so. I simply can't stand Mother, and I have to force myself not to snap at her all the time, and

to stay calm when I'd rather slap her across the face" (48). In that case, Anne provides a bias characterization of her mother and does not understand her mom's motivations or good intentions. Anne's characterization of her mom marks her childhood stage. In that case, unwillingly, Anne is able to shape herself as an immature little girl because she shows that her mentality did not allow her to look further in order to provide a valid characterization of other characters and bases their descriptions on her child opinions.

Similarly, with Peter Van Daan, a year and a half after they have been hiding, Anne starts to notice the young boy and characterizes him according to what she wants to see. Anne creates a surface characterization of Peter as she solely bases her judgments on her idealistic view of teenage love and fantasies. To clarify, Anne believes that Peter is a sweet boy who desperately needs affection: " I think, Kitty, that true love may be developing in the Annex. All those jokes about marrying Peter if we stayed here long enough weren't so silly after all" (189)

In reality, by the end of Anne's diary, it is noticeable that Anne's opinion of Peter has changed, in that case, she acknowledges the fact that her characterization of the young boy was based on an idealistic view of love. Indeed, Anne's opinion of the young boy was highly influenced by her loneliness: " I know very well that he was my conquest and not the other way around. I created an image of him in my mind, pictured him as a quiet, sweet, sensitive boy badly in need of friendship and love[...]When I finally got him to be my friend, it automatically developed into an intimacy that,

when I think about it now, seems outrageous" (268). In that case, she is later on faced with Peter's real personality which is different from Anne's initial opinions.

In contrast to the characterization of her mom, Anne's characterization of Peter marks the beginning of her coming of age. During this time, she stills has a sense of childishness despite the beginning of her process of maturation.

Consequently, the analysis of Anne's use of characterization can be used to depict her childishness and immaturity.

Conversely, by the end of her diary, Anne's gains a better point of view of herself, consequently, her perception of life and people surrounding her has changed. As Anne grows up, she becomes introspective and tries to gain a better understanding of herself before trying to provide a valid characterization of others Her understanding of human psychology was highly influenced by her personal life experiences. Anne's characterization underwent a metamorphosis as she gains a better interpretation of herself. To support this claim, she characterizes herself as a dual character, she believes that there are two different sides in her personality, " the lighthearted Anne" and the " deeper Anne" which both come out according to the person she is faced with (271). Correspondingly she gains a deeper view of life, is able to provide an explanation to reactions of the people surrounding her. Nonetheless, Anne is still troubled by the meaning of existence and her role as a human. She feels a sense of fear and confusion

marked by the inconsistency of her feelings: " I get cross, then sad, and finally end up turning my heart inside out, the bad part on the outside and the good part on the inside" (272). Anne focuses her analysis on herself and tries to understand herself first before creating an image of others. In that case, Anne tries to learn more about herself before judging others. As an example, later on in the novel, after reading the book *What Do You Think of the Modern Young Girl?* Anne reflects on herself and tries to think about her own strengths and weaknesses. She gets to reflect on her relationship with her father as well as her deepest fears such as her feeling of isolation (266). Pursuing this further as Anne reflects on her past actions, she understands that she might have acted foolish or egotistical in some cases. Indeed, as she states, " I've let myself be guided entirely by my feelings. It was egotistical, but I've done what was best for my own peace of mind" (267). Consequently, as she becomes more introspective, Anne ultimately portrays her maturation.

Lastly, Anne's Frank use of revisions in her diary furthermore portrays the theme of coming-of-age. Indeed, later on in the composition of her diary, Anne Frank, wanting to reach an audience by being published, decided to make revisions in order to make her letters more appealing to the public without nonetheless manipulating authentic facts and events. As stated by Francine Prose, author of *Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, the Afterlife*, ' She decided that she wanted the book to be published, and she went back to the beginning and she re-wrote all the entries she wrote as a 13-year-old, except of course now she was a 15-year-old,'. In that case, throughout her novels,

Anne Frank's revisions acts as comments that explain and reveal her final opinions on certain matters. Frequently, it is noticeable that Anne's point of view concerning a specific topic has thoroughly been changed due to her maturation. As an example, Anne's sudden switch of opinion concerning her mother portrays Frank's process of self-growth. Indeed, while reading her previous diary entries, Anne feels sorry for her bad actions towards her mother and tries to better their relationship. Nonetheless, she confesses that she will never be able to love her mother 'with the devotion of a child' (132).

In that case, analyzing Anne's initial and final perception of life and opinions through her revisions provides a flagrant contrast between her mentality as a child and as an adolescent. This time lapse effect ultimately builds Anne's characterization as a young introspective girl. As an example, as stated by Anne in one of her comments: "I wouldn't be able to write that kind of thing anymore. Now that I'm rereading my diary after a year and a half I'm surprised at my childish innocence. Deep down I know I could never be that innocent again [...]it embarrasses me greatly to read the pages dealing with subjects that I remember as being nicer than they actually were" (56). In that case, Anne's use of comments adequately points out to a change in Anne's perception of life which results from her process of maturation.

All things considered, In The Diary of a Young girl, Anne Frank portrays her process of maturation through the use of epistolary. Indeed, through her letters, it is noticeable that in spite of her extraordinary circumstances, the protagonist, Anne, is faced with many conventional problems of adolescence

such as feelings of isolation, rebellion towards her mother, curiosity about adulthood, and shifting attitudes. In that case, Anne's puberty is a conventional portrayal of typical teenage habits. Her diary does not only give a vivid representation of World War II circumstances since it also addresses the timeless theme of puberty which reflects and illustrates typical teenage tendencies. In that case, the topic of coming-of-age is usually perceived as a universal topic; it highlights the importance of self-development but also acts as a link that connects similar-minded teenagers around the world. By representing Anne's change of character with the evolution of her writing style, characterization and revisions, Frank effectively links her dynamic character to her situation as a WWII refugee. Consequently, the use of the epistolary literary technique highly impacts the portrayal of Anne's process of maturation as it gives a vivid representation of her evolution as a person. Pursuing this further, it shapes Anne as a dynamic character thus representing her self-growth. In that case, what other aspects of Anne's diary are highlighted by her use of epistolary?

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