

But it is as if the diary is a living document. Its reception changes with what we know or are willing to confront. Beginning in the 1960s, books, films, museums, and monuments were created to memorialize the Holocaust. People were finally ready to face up to the madness that was Nazism and willing to examine the indifference to violence that had allowed fascism to spread like a virus.

More apropos to our understanding now would be Anne's comment toward the end of her diary: "There's a destructive urge in people, the urge to rage, murder and kill. And until all of humanity, without exception, undergoes a metamorphosis, wars will continue to be waged."⁷

You might wonder: What is the point of questioning who betrayed Anne Frank in a war that happened so long ago? The answer is that almost eight decades since the end of the war, we seem to have grown complacent, thinking, as the Dutch once thought, that it cannot happen here. But contemporary society seems to be increasingly susceptible to ideological divisiveness and the lure of authoritarianism, forgetting the simple truth that incipient fascism metastasizes if allowed to go unchecked.

Anne Frank's world makes this clear. What are the real tools of war? Not only physical violence but rhetorical violence. In attempting to determine how Adolf Hitler had taken control, the US Office of Strategic Services commissioned a report in 1943 that explained his strategy: "Never to admit a fault or wrong; never to accept blame; concentrate on one enemy at a time; blame that enemy for everything that goes wrong; take advantage of every opportunity to raise a political whirlwind."⁸ Soon hyperbole, extremism, defamation, and slander become commonplace and acceptable vehicles of power.

To look at the transformation of a city such as Amsterdam under occupation is to understand that although there were those who supported the Nazis, whether out of opportunism, self-deception, venality, or cowardice, and those who opposed them, the majority simply tried to keep their heads down.

What happens when people cannot trust the institutions that are supposed to protect them? What happens when the fundamental laws that constitute and protect decent behavior crumble? The Netherlands in 1940 was like a petri dish in which one can examine how people brought up in freedom react to catastrophe when it is brought to their door. It is a question still worth asking today.