


# Bernard Kops, Poetry & Peril

Peace Will Come, Anne Frank Insists, You Will See

by Thomas Ország-Land (February 2016)

Bernard Kops, the doyen of Anglo-Jewish letters, has responded to a global  resurgence of violent anti-Semitism by issuing a new collection of verse called [Anne Frank's Fragments from Nowhere](#)

by Bernard Kops

Indigo Dreams Publishing, Devon, 2015

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The book confronts a crisis that may well intensify following the Great Powers' dubious new nuclear power development accord with the theocracy of Baghdad. Its immediate effect will be to fuel the perilous conflagrations already engulfing the Middle East and extending to the European Union and Russia. For the compromise agreement has released an estimated \$150bn in direct and indirect investment in the terrorist states of Iran and its client Syria, and also in numerous terrorist states within states like Hezbollah and Hamas.

The first German feature film based on the teenager's Holocaust testimony, titled *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank* (The Diary of Anne Frank) will be released at the 66th Berlin Film Festival during February. A Hollywood adaptation in 1959 won three Oscars.

Bernard's collection addresses the future by insisting on recording the past. In the poem *For the Record*, he recalls:

*They came for him in Amsterdam, my grandfather David,*

*and with minimum force removed him from his home.*

*He surrendered to the entire German army,  
and that was that.*

*It is of little consequence now;  
so many die alone in foreign lands.*

*But for the record I must say  
they gave him a number, helped him  
aboard an eastbound train.*

*It was a little overcrowded,  
but then they had so many to dispatch...*

The poet grew up in deep poverty in the East End of London “as a committed witness for the lost community of Amsterdam,” he recounts, “including my family and Anne’s. Her fate could so easily have been mine...”

He all but met her. He explains: “My first play, *The Hamlet of Stepney Green*” first performed at the Oxford Playhouse in 1957, “was translated into Dutch by Rosie Pool, an author who joined the Dutch Resistance during the war. She had escaped from the Nazi transit camp at Westbork,” a collection point from which the Jews were being dispatched to mass murder, “and her first task was to smuggle herself back and organize others.

“There she met and tutored Anne. Rosie talked to me endlessly about Anne’s character, personality, dreams and nightmares. All this has fed my imagination, and Anne became my close relative.”

The experience eventually led to Bernard’s play, the *Dreams of Anne Frank*, which opened in the Polka Theatre, London, in 1992. The play (Methuen Drama, England, 1997) has been touring the world ever since. The Hungarian version performed in

1998 at the Mahatma Gandhi School, Pécs, employed a cast of teenage Romany actors, perhaps a quarter million of whose people had been murdered during the Holocaust. The atmosphere was electric.

In Act One, Anne holds up a star on an empty stage as she turns to the audience. (The following text of her song is not included in the new collection.)

*Fate gave me a yellow star.*

*A badge to tell them who I am.*

*I'm Anne from Amsterdam.*

*I'm Anne Frank and I'm a Jew.*

*And I'm the same as you and you.*

*Or you and you and you.*

*But fate gave me a yellow star.*

*Yellow star.*

*The star to put me in my place,*

*To wear it as a badge of shame,*

*But I'm Anne from Amsterdam.*

*I'm proud of who I am.*

*We have to hide away from light*

*Because they come for us at night.*

*And pack us off to God knows where*

*And all we have is where we are.*

*But fate gave me a yellow star.*

*Yellow star.*

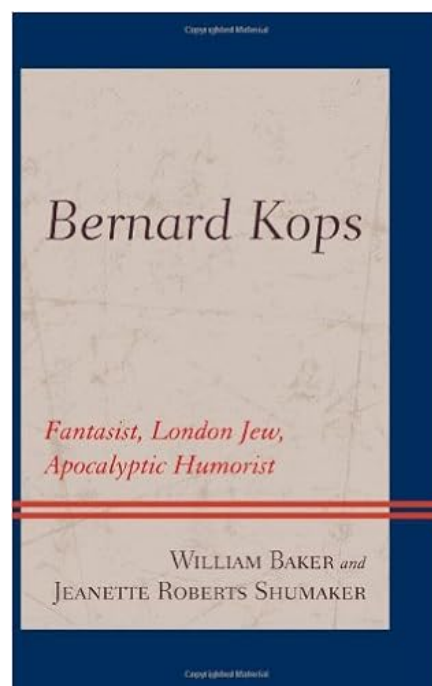
Like Bernard, the real-life Anne had consciously prepared for a writing career, and she spectacularly succeeded. Her diary describing the fears as well as the tensions, loves, dreams and irritations of people hiding away from death in a terrorized city was published posthumously in 1947 as *Het Achterhuis* (The Annex). Subsequent editions were titled *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Diary of a Young Girl*. The book has been sold in more than 30m copies.

A fierce controversy is now raging over an extension of its copyright protection that would normally expire 70 years after the death of its author. Another book of the same period controversially just reissued on entering the public domain is *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) by Adolf Hitler, a screed campaigning for the annihilation of the Jewish people.

Bernard is one of the best known writers of our time. All his writing is steeped in poetry. He is extraordinarily creative, prolific, fearless and compassionate, the author of some nine collections of verse, more than 40 plays for stage and television, 11 novels and two autobiographies.

Many of his books are constantly in print and his plays in production. His range of concerns is enormous, embracing Jewish identity, the many shades of love, family relationships, aging, fear, passion and mental illness. *The Hamlet of Stepney Green*, whose roots reach back to the tradition of Yiddish theatre, is widely recognized as an originator of Britain's revolutionary, new wave, "kitchen-sink" theatre.

A seminal, book-length critical analysis of his growing corpus ([\*Survivors: Hungarian Jewish Poets of the Holocaust\*](#) (Smokestack/England, 2014). His work also appears in the new anthologies [\*Random Red Candles\*](#) grouping the best of *Candelabrum Poetry Magazine, 1970-2010* (Spinnaker), both in England in 2015.



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