Etty. The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941–1943.
Etty Hillesum. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
ISBN: 0-8028-3959-2. Pp. 800.
Review by Carla Sulzbach, McGill University

Throughout the years a number of diaries and personal papers of Holocaust victims have surfaced and on occasion found their way to the wider public. One of these documents, under review here, was written by a young, but mature and independent woman, whose frantic attempts to navigate the ever increasing onslaught of the German occupation of Holland and the subsequent destruction of Dutch Jewry proved to be in vain in the end.

Etty. The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941–1943 is the complete edition of the extant writings of Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman from Holland, who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943 at the age of 29. This volume is the translation of the Dutch original that was first published in the Netherlands in 1986. It has been updated from that edition with additional, newly emerged material. The volume consists of an introduction by the editor describing Etty's biography as well as the journey of the writings; the ten diaries covering the period of March 1941 to October 1942; the letters from, to, and about Etty Hillesum for the period of August 1941 to September 1943; three newly found letters (not in the Dutch original); an appendix with end notes (updated for the English edition) explaining facts and allusions in the text concerning historical events and persons in Etty's life; an index and a bibliography; and 32 pages of photographs. The 46-page physical description of the manuscripts with critical apparatus that was appended to the Dutch edition has been omitted in the present volume.

In July 1942 Etty began working as a secretary in the offices of the Jewish Council in Amsterdam, a position that initially safeguarded her from deportation to the concentration camps. As part of her job she traveled back and forth between Amsterdam and the transit camp of Westerbork in Eastern Holland. It is during this period, as well as her subsequent internment there in 1943 that she conducted the correspondence with her friends that is published here. Two of these letters were made public and distributed through the underground resistance press in limited edition as early as 1943. On September 7, 1943 she was transported to Auschwitz from Westerbork together with her parents and brothers. There they were murdered not later than November of that year. Even from that transport she was able to write a postcard and throw it off the train. It was miraculously found, mailed and reached its intended destination. A photograph of this postcard is included in the book.

Esther (Etty) Hillesum was born in Holland in 1914. Her father hailed from an old and established Dutch Jewish family and her mother came from Russia, having

escaped the pogroms of the early 20th century. Etty had two younger brothers. Although both her parents came from orthodox Jewish backgrounds, Etty's family had become completely assimilated. Possibly as a result of this they had become somewhat alienated from the larger family circle—Etty will recount later (616) that she met a number of relatives in the transit camp of Westerbork, whom she had not seen for many years. Information on her religious background must be gleaned from some of the many books and articles about her that have appeared in the wake of the diaries' publication.

A single, independent, and strong willed woman, Etty lived a life that was quite unconventional for the times as she herself admits (75). Although she had earned a law degree, she never practiced and had instead begun a study of Russian. She was unable to complete the latter because starting in 1941, the Nazi decrees made it impossible for Jews to attend universities (125).

Etty started an intimate relationship with the psycho-chirologist Julius Spier, a German-Jewish refugee who had moved to Amsterdam. He had trained under Carl Jung and set up a practice in Amsterdam where he also taught classes in psychotherapy. Soon a circle of devotees, including Etty, crowded around him. Having become her mentor he advised her to undertake writing a diary, initially for therapeutic reasons. However, it soon became clear that writing and documenting what was happening both within her and around her was a true vocation. She indicates at various places in the diary that she hopes to become a professional writer once the war is over, as well as a chronicler of these surreal times through which she is living (484 and passim). When survival becomes less and less certain, she entrusts her writings to a friend with the express request that were she not to survive, these be published (xv, 752). When Spier dies in September 1942 Etty seems even more convinced that actively seeking an escape from the impending annihilation is futile and that she must share whatever fate awaits her people.

The content of the diaries can be divided into three parts. One deals with Etty's exploration of her inner self. Here she recalls many of the conversations she had with Spier, whom she always indicates simply with "S.". The second part specifically chronicles her journey of spiritual growth and increasing sense of religiosity. These sections are widely interspersed with citations from the German poet Rilke, various Russian authors, the Bible (especially the New Testament) and St. Augustine, the latter two sources clearly at the instigation of Spier (159). Yet her religious experiences are of a non-denominational character and cannot easily be categorized. Part of this is what in all likelihood enables her to philosophically view the extreme violence and hatred taking place around her and to rise beyond the moral depravity of the persecutors by not allowing herself to equivocate their hate. She explicitly expresses her repugnance for the system that created them, but not for the individuals themselves. She never deems them to be beyond redemption. She

loves humanity beyond anything and it is her fervent wish that as soon as she has countered her tendencies of self-absorption, to be of help to those in need, including God Himself whom she never blames for the Jewish suffering. While these two parts are of a highly reflective and personal nature, a third part composedly, yet interspersed with an impressive dose of cynicism at times, reports on the increasingly restrictive measures of the day.

The period covered by the diaries is one in which the life of the Jewish population of Holland was slowly snuffed out, decree by decree. Etty chronicles this process with what at times seems to be an almost chilling detachment, as if it did not personally concern her but only others (358). The letters, on the other hand, show us a correspondent who, while describing in detail the daily life in the transit camp, is rapidly caught up in the vortex of destruction and is swept along by it into the abyss from which there is no escape: Auschwitz.

Etty's name has become yet another one in the still growing silent chain of authors of Holocaust diaries. Even today such diaries are still found in attics and many are, unfortunately, collecting dust on the shelves of archives. Every now and then some are rescued from obscurity and allowed to surface into the light where their authors were not so privileged. Of course, when one thinks of Holocaust diaries, the name Anne Frank springs immediately to mind. And hers is certainly the archetypal example of the genre—it was also the first ever to be published (1947) and there is hardly a work that has been translated in so many languages (save for the Bible).

Excerpts of Etty's writings were first published in Holland in 1982, following which a massive controversy erupted. The debate was conducted mainly between Christian readers who considered Etty a veritable Christian style martyr, placing her in the category of Jewish women such as Edith Stein or Simone Weil (who had either converted to Catholicism or were close to doing so), because, as they understood her, she had selflessly chosen to be deported together with her parents and brothers, rather than resist and seek hiding. Adding to their admiration was Etty's frequent reference to Christian scriptures. On the other side of the debate were Jewish readers, including many survivors, who foremost thought this very attitude a slap in the face to all who indeed resisted by going into hiding. Furthermore, the latter were also puzzled and dismayed by Etty's lack of Jewish identification and by her fascination with Christian texts, as well as her detached way of reporting the increasing restriction on civilian life for the Jewish population—almost as if she herself was not subject to the same decrees.

After reading Etty's work, it becomes clear to this reviewer that neither position does justice to what the author is trying to convey. She, in fact, presents a much more complex personality than those choosing to quibble over her gave her credit for. This collection is an extremely well written account of one person's life and innermost

struggles in a time of extreme cruelty and emotional and physical hardship—a true *document humain*. Her resistance to the horrors that both surrounded and finally engulfed her was, rather, of an intellectual and spiritual nature. Although the right to exist was denied her, in the end, Etty's was to become one of those very few voices left to us from among six million senselessly destroyed Jewish lives.

Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity
Jeremy M. Schott. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.
ISBN: 978-0-8122-4092-4. Pp. 254.
Review by Daniel G. Opperwall, McMaster University

Jeremy M. Schott has made an excellent contribution to the study of Early Christianity, the late Roman Empire, and religion in general. Schott's project is to analyze the birth of the category of 'religion' in the ancient world, and he seeks to do so by first challenging traditional discussions of 'Christian' and 'pagan' identity which accept such categories as fixed and static, and instead proposes that ancient discourse must be framed in terms of the 'politics of ethnic and cultural identity.'(4) Schott examines the works of several key apologetic and philosophical authors of the first three centuries who argue from both the 'pagan' and 'Christian' point of view, focusing on the similarities between their arguments rather than their differences. Schott draws much of the unique flavor of his approach from modern postcolonial theory, though he acknowledges the problems of using this approach to study the ancient world. In the first two chapters, Schott sets up a general outline of the relationship between philosophy, ethnic discourse, and imperial politics in non-Christian Rome and examines the pagan philosopher Porphyry in detail. Schott focuses on the keen interest of Roman philosophers in discovering wisdom in the texts and traditions of provincial (non-Roman) ethnic groups. These ethnological philosophers almost universally valued earlier traditions over later, and consensus over diversity in the texts which they studied. Their central goal was to find that truly ancient truth on which all peoples agreed; such a truth, in their minds, would constitute a foundational, universal philosophy. In this process, Roman philosophers placed provincial cultures in subjugation to their own normative traditions. Much like a governor making his fortune by draining his assigned province, philosophers sought to tear provincial wisdom out of its native context for use in their project of defining universal truth. But by comparing a multitude of traditions from throughout the Empire, ethnological research, Schott argues, paradoxically created psychological and political space in which well-accepted cultural categories became