



# Mapping the Survival Psyche: A Reading of Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*

Christo CD Shaly<sup>1</sup> & Dr. A. Nisha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar (Reg. No: 241131602026), Department of English, Scott Christian College (A), Nagercoil  
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor & Associate Professor, Department of English, Scott Christian College (A), Nagercoil  
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu



## Open Access

Manuscript ID: BIJ-2025-ES-047

Subject: English

Received : 11.12.2025

Accepted : 16.12.2025

Published : 31.12.2025

DOI:10.64938/bjisi.v10si4.25.Dec047

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## Abstract

*The instinct to survive enables human beings to endure even the most unbearable situations. During times of unimaginable troubles, the human spirit is tempted often to give up. But a tiny echo hover down the soul of the human spirit to keep going. In this point of view, Anne Frank resonates strong will power by expressing resilience over hopelessness amidst the chaos. This paper records and examines her emotional expressions as ways to cope through the chaos, by focusing only on the good that she had left despite the chaos. Through the lens of John Leach's Survival Psychology, the study reveals the deeper endurance of the human spirit through Anne's survival strategies. Humor is brought in as a shield against grief, her imagined futures act as a temporary escape from the state of being paralysed with hopelessness and her intimacy with her diary exposes her pain and heals her scars. By linking psychological insights with Anne's literary testimony, this paper offers an insight to the emerging approaches in English studies.*

**Keywords:** survival, psychology, trauma, resilience, endurance

## Introduction

Survival is the innate response of all life in times of adversity. It is the natural gift bestowed upon all creation to thrive and multiply. For centuries, survival has been emphasized in terms of physical endurance considering the strength of the body, the availability of food, or the avoidance of danger. Yet psychology approaches it differently by suggesting that survival is equally an emotional, psychological, and thoughtful process. John Leach, in his notable work *Survival Psychology*, states that when people are forced into life-or-death situations, their survival depends so much on the abstract internal factors regulated by their minds more than the exterior conditions. The notion of survival relies much more on hope and resilience than the rations and shelter.

Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* has been read as a Holocaust testimony literature, as a coming-of-age narrative, and as a universal text of human hope. Yet one dimension that remains underexplored is Anne's use of emotional strategies as a method of resilience and survival. By placing *The Diary of a Young Girl* within the field of Emotional Humanities and analyzing it through the framework of John Leach's *Survival Psychology*, this paper reveals how Anne's survival is being sustained through her humor, hopeful imagination, and her deep active emotional bond with her personified diary. Her diary is more than a piece of writing. It is an active instrument of resilience, one that transforms her fears and despair into relational intimacy and creativity. It also molds her to the person she has become.



Emotional Humanities emphasizes how emotions themselves become active tools of survival and meaning-making by uniquely portraying the lived experiences of emotions in literature. Thus, this paper does not merely analyze Anne Frank's suffering; it explores her strategies for transforming that suffering into endurance. By employing qualitative textual analysis of *The Diary of a Young Girl* and by narrowing down on the focus to the diary entries this study aims to reveal Anne's emotional adaptations for survival. John Leach's theory of Survival Psychology identifies several factors for survival during crisis. Among them hope, adaptability, mental rehearsal (imagining futures), meaning-making, and emotional regulation are found to resonate with Anne's condition in the Annex. While placing Anne's diary in parallel to these ideologies, the study portrays psychological realities present in Anne's resilience.

### 1. Humor as a Shield against Despair

Humor plays a big part not just in the diary of Anne but also in the Annex. Amidst spending their time in constant fear in their secret hiding place, the inhabitants of the Annex had humor now and then to take their minds off the misery around. This is specifically seen in Anne's portrayal of the incidents relating to Mr. Dussel and his patient Mrs. Van Daan. Humor makes one's experience of pain feel much shorter. Though the misery around crawled all the way up to choke their necks, the humor they had was sufficient enough to sustain them and give them hope. Her way of handling the confinement is more like a naturally childish and yet mature doing. The ability to laugh amidst pain showcases the innate nature of the human spirit as a way God designs to rise above suffering. She describes one of her usual mornings through the lines:

"When I get up in the morning, another very disagreeable moment, I leap out of bed, think to myself, "You'll be slipping back under the covers soon," walk to the window, take down the blackout screen, sniff at the crack until I feel a bit of fresh air, and I'm awake. I strip the bed as fast as I can so I won't be tempted to get back in. Do you know what Mother calls this sort of thing? The art of living. Isn't that a funny expression?" (129).

In a place like the Annex even the silence or boredom brings a different sort of anxiety. When everything seems to be falling apart and when Anne feels like she is losing her sense of self, it is humour that helps her cling on to her personality. For someone like Anne, who's always been active, productive and useful, the sudden limitation is not an easy thing. But Anne naturally frames these tensions humorously, and that helps her reframe despair into something bearable. Humor, in this context, functions as more than entertainment; it is a survival mechanism. According to Leach, "Humour is about the finest means a person has for attaining an aloofness to the situation, to become superior to the enforced and threatening environment even if it is only for a few seconds." (Leach 164). Humor is again seen as an act of defiance by flipping the power dynamics. Also Leach observes that the survivors who cultivate humour find ways to lighten their burdens and tend to endure crises better. From the experience of Anne Frank, it is her sense of humor that keeps her kindred spirit alive.

### 2. Imagined Futures as Emotional Lifelines

Anne often writes about her dreams of becoming a writer, of experiencing freedom, and of building a future beyond the war. She writes, "I finally realized that I must do my schoolwork to keep from being ignorant, to get on in life, to become a journalist, because that's what I want!" (243). These imagined futures are not idle fantasies but emotional lifelines that allow her to buffer herself against hopelessness. It is her *ikigai* to wake up each morning and continue to go on. With her imagination of the future as a paintbrush, Anne paints the duller realities that surrounded her into vibrant possibilities. Her initial entries reveal her natural talent of being a writer. Her dream to become a journalist blends in through her emotions and acts as her purpose to endure. Her positive outlook towards the future gives her the ample strength that she requires to make the best of the time she has to cope up with studies while in hiding. They also reveal Anne's inner longing to go back to her usual self where everything would get restored back to normal, as confinement makes her feel like "two Annes" (267). Leach describes this as "mental rehearsal," the ability to envision



alternative futures that keep the mind anchored in possibility, positivity and hope rather than paralysis. "Establishing a definite purpose to one's existence strengthens survival. It is something to aim for." (Leach 152). The view of the chestnut tree from the attic serves as a pathway for her hope to a better future. She also mentions how she goes up to the attic every morning to let the stale air out and get the fresh air of hope in. Anne's optimism turns her obstacles into creative opportunities to educate to grow and survive. Her hopeful sense of focus at a restored future and her consistent references to life after the war illustrate her refusal to let the present annihilate her sense of purpose. Thus, positive imagination paves the way as an emotional strategy to not remain stuck in the present destruction but to move forward to life after the war.

### 3. Relational Intimacy with the Diary "Kitty"

Perhaps the most unique of Anne's strategies is her transformation of her diary into a relational attachment. She sees her diary as more than a book, as her emotional companion during the crisis and thus she identifies herself with it. Her diary entries reveal that Anne's long-term search for that person in whom she could identify herself as a whole is finally found in her diary. From her diary entries one can see the dual nature of Anne, which is Anne's hybrid nature of being 'two Annes' in the Annex. Her creation of the diary as Kitty, her personified friend, helps her see the diary as her twin friend enduring the Holocaust with the same emotions as her. By addressing her entries to Kitty, Anne externalizes her loneliness and creates an intimate bond with an imagined confidante. She feels, "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 great source of comfort and support." (7). This manifests Kitty just like any other family member, but more personally. In doing so, she shifts her diary from a private record into a dialogic space of companionship. Leach emphasizes that survivors who establish meaningful attachments whether with people, objects, or imagined entities are more likely to endure crises. "It is claimed that such attachment is a true coping behaviour. The strong social bond between the victim and his kin provides a powerful

motivational force for reunion and hence survival." (Leach 157). For Anne, Kitty is more than paper and ink; it is a sustaining relationship that helps her preserve her dignity and humanity amid isolation. It is in Kitty that she is able to confide the emotions which she couldn't otherwise with her Dad or Peter. The diary also serves as a reminder that literature not only remembers the dead but it keeps the living alive.

### Conclusion

Anne's humor as survival remains largely overlooked in Holocaust scholarship, where humor is often considered inappropriate or trivial in contexts of genocide. Yet her diary shows humor as a legitimate tool of resilience. Her sense of humor rejuvenates her strength and eases the burden of being confined. Humor shaped Anne's character differently than the inmates of the Annex. Humor during hard times reminds that pain is not the whole story. When others keep constantly lamenting over the brutality of the war, humor helps Anne's perspective to stay grateful with hope for the future. Her practice of imagining futures as a form of mental rehearsal demonstrates her will to survive. The personification of the diary as a person named Kitty, demonstrates how the process of reflective writing in itself creates a human relationship. From the above findings one can understand a human's emotional efforts at work during crisis. Anne's way of handling the situation through her emotional strategies prove that her way of survival is not a passive process of endurance but an active emotional one. Anne's humour helps her adapt, her re-imagined futures give her hope and her relationship with Kitty gives her the strength to go on. By placing *The Diary of a Young Girl* within the boundaries of 'Emotional Humanities' we can see how human emotions help navigate through chaos towards survival. Though often human reason and human emotion don't go hand in hand, when regulated properly it acts as a pathway towards survival. This widens our understanding of survival as it is not restricted by mere physical factors such as food and shelter but rather it is more emotional and willful. This approach connects literature and psychology by highlighting Anne as a survivor beyond survival. Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* reveals survival as an emotional, imaginative,



and relational act which is led by her will. Anne's choice to reflect on her diary during her battle with emotional turmoil helped her be grateful to what she already had; and this in turn produced optimism. By grounding John Leach's framework of Survival Psychology as the based and situating the text within foundations of 'Emotional Humanities', this paper reveals unexplored dimensions in the realm of survival against the fittest. These finding reveal that survival is not the escape from death but the preservation of hope, dignity, and creativity in the face of oppression. Literature emerges here not as a

passive record of trauma but as an active instrument of endurance. Anne's diary demonstrates that writing itself can sustain survival by creating meaning, fostering resilience, and preserving humanity in dehumanizing circumstances by showing how survival is profoundly emotional.

#### **Works Cited**

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