

The Journal of Helene Berr

By Hélène Berr



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Not since *The Diary of Anne Frank* has there been such a book as this: The joyful but ultimately heartbreaking journal of a young Jewish woman in occupied Paris, now being published for the first time, 63 years after her death in a Nazi concentration camp.

On April 7, 1942, Hélène Berr, a 21-year-old Jewish student of English literature at the Sorbonne, took up her pen and started to keep a journal, writing with verve and style about her everyday life in Paris — about her studies, her friends, her growing affection for the "boy with the grey eyes," about the sun in the dewdrops, and about the effect of the growing restrictions imposed by France's Nazi occupiers. Berr brought a keen literary sensibility to her writing, a talent that renders the story it relates all the more rich, all the more heartbreaking.

The first day Berr has to wear the yellow star on her coat, she writes, "I held my head high and looked people so straight in the eye they turned away. But it's hard." More, many more, humiliations were to follow, which she records, now with a view to posterity. She wants the journal to go to her fiancé, who has enrolled with the Free French Forces, as she knows she may not live much longer. She was right. The final entry is dated February 15, 1944, and ends with the chilling words: "Horror! Horror! Berr and her family were arrested three weeks later. She went — as was discovered later — on the death march from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, where she died of typhus in April 1945, within a month of Anne Frank and just days before the liberation of the camp.

The journal did eventually reach her fiancé, and for over fifty years it was kept private. In 2002, it was donated to the Memorial of the Shoah in Paris. Before it was first published in France in January 2008, translation rights had already been sold for twelve languages.





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The Journal of Helene Berr By Hélène Berr Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Iwas abruptly assailed by the feeling that I had to describe reality, writes Berr midway through this urgent firsthand account of the devastation of Paris's Jewish community during WWII. This journal, which begins in 1942 as the record of a young woman's intense and buzzing inner life, becomes over time a record of human suffering: How will the world be cleansed unless it is made to understand the full extent of the evil it is doing? Berr, daughter of a prosperous assimilated Jewish family, was forced to quit her studies at the Sorbonne, joined an underground network to save Jewish children, saw her father arrested and beloved friends deported. But as compelling as external trials are the thoughts and feeling of this brilliant, passionate and brave young woman. As the noose tightens around Paris's Jews, Berr wonders if she still has the right to find momentary pleasure in reading; she questions herself for falling into instinctive, primitive hatred of Germans. Yet in one overpowering moment of rage, she rails against impassive Parisian Christians who crucify Christ every day. Berr died in Bergen-Belsen in 1944, five days before the camp's liberation, but her vibrant voice—full of anguish, compassion, indignation and defiance—springs from these pages—as extraordinary a document of occupied France as Irène Némirovsky's *Suite Française*. Photos. (*Nov.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

"A worthy addition to Holocaust literature, evoking the sweetness of one life lost and reminding us with urgent clarity how inexorably it was swept under those tragic times." --Kirkus Review

Review

"Hélène Berr's journal of her experiences in occupied France is breathtaking. Written with an understated literary style, Berr skillfully and sparely relates the horrors leading up to her seizure by the Gestapo and death in a concentration camp. The young literature student is overflowing with plans and ideas for the future while knowing there is no future for her. Most touching of all, she worries not about what will happen to her, but how others will be affected if she does not keep from them her shock and panic at the unspeakable torture she witnesses. This book is a must for anyone interested in the personal forces of history and who loves a riveting read."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christi Potter:

Nowadays reading books become more than want or need but also work as a life style. This reading addiction give you lot of advantages. Associate programs you got of course the knowledge the actual information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge you get based on what kind of publication you read, if you want attract knowledge just go with knowledge books but if you want feel happy read one along with theme for entertaining for example comic or novel. Typically the The Journal of Helene Berr is kind of book which is giving the reader unstable experience.

Margaret Calderon:

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Leah Pelton:

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Raymond Dixon:

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