

3 hours ago Anne Frank relaunched in the world of comics and graphic novels



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Recently the Basel-based Anne Frank Fonds proudly presented the *Graphic Diary of Anne Frank*. The impression is created as if this is the first ever comic book version of Anne Frank's narrative. Senior researcher at the NIOD Kees Ribbens shows that there were various predecessors.



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Cover of the *Graphic Diary of Anne Frank* (2017)

At a recent press conference in Paris the Basel-based Anne Frank Fonds proudly presented the *Graphic Diary of Anne Frank* [<http://www.annefrank.ch/graphic-diary-en.html>], to be released in more than forty countries worldwide. This new book is created by illustrator and art director David Polonsky and film director and screenwriter Ari Folman – assisted by historians and other experts – and can be described as a colorful comic book adaptation of Anne Frank's world-famous diary that she wrote between June 1942 and August 1944. The aim of this illustrated narrative is to visualize Anne Frank's historical Holocaust document in an appealing way, making the fate of the inhabitants of the Secret Annex in Amsterdam during their period in hiding tangible, in particular to a new audience of young readers.

The *Graphic Diary* had already been announced [<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/298644/anne-frank-s-diary-the-graphic-adaptation/>] several months ago by the renowned British publishing firm Penguin. The headline above their announcement read "The first ever graphic adaptation of one of the world's most loved books". The Dutch publisher, Prometheus, – announcing [[https://issuu.com/uitgeverijprometheus/docs/prometheus\\_fictie\\_zomer\\_2017\\_lowres/24](https://issuu.com/uitgeverijprometheus/docs/prometheus_fictie_zomer_2017_lowres/24)] the Dutch edition in their 2017 fiction (!) catalogue – stated that Anne Frank's diary would now, for the first time, be published as a graphic novel

("70 jaar Het Achterhuis – nu voor het eerst als graphic novel"). The Anne Frank Fonds itself claims, somewhat more precisely, that "For the first time ever, the Graphic Diary of Anne Frank is [now] to be published". And it is indeed correct that there has not been a previous Anne Frank publication which has explicitly been labeled 'Graphic Diary'. But by declaring that "Seventy years after its first publication, the original diary will be complemented by a graphic version [<http://www.annefrank.ch/graphic-diary-en.html>] ," the impression is nevertheless created as if this product of the Polonsky and Folman team is the first ever comic book version of Anne Frank's narrative. And that is certainly not the case.

### The Graphic Diary: an innovation with predecessors

From the 1960s onwards various comic editions based on the life and diary of Anne Frank have been published around the world, in countries as diverse as Mexico, Japan, the Philippines, Italy and the United States. One of the more well-known examples is the [Graphic Biography initiated by the Anne Frank House](http://www.annefrank.org/en/Sitewide/Organisation/Annual-Report-2010/Anne-Frank-Graphic-Biography/) [<http://www.annefrank.org/en/Sitewide/Organisation/Annual-Report-2010/Anne-Frank-Graphic-Biography/>] in Amsterdam and made by two American comic book creators, Ernie Colón and Sid Jacobson. Unlike the new Graphic Diary, it does not solely focus on representing Anne Frank's wartime diary notes, as it also presents her tragic life before and after hiding in the Annex at Prinsengracht 263. Many comics combine these different periods, though the degree in which they attempt and succeed to do justice to the historical context of the Holocaust era differs.

That the publishers of the current Graphic Diary in various languages may not be aware of these cultural predecessors is understandable. In many countries comics have not been considered respectable media until relatively recently. Art Spiegelman's Holocaust-related *Maus* has been vital in paving the way for the now well-respected phenomenon of the graphic novel – the comics genre that stands out for writing and drawing complex, non-superficial sequential narratives (either factual or fictional) for a more mature audience of readers. But its appearance on the global book market did not necessarily increase the public awareness of the large amount of previously published comics representing various aspects of World War II and the Holocaust, including comics dealing with Anne Frank. Therefore many of such comic strips, in all their versatility, still remain under the cultural radar.



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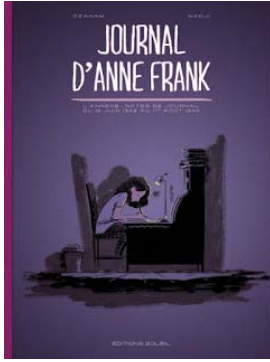
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Cover of the Spanish comic edition (1961)

By now, a few dozen Anne Frank comics – sometimes counting less than ten pages, while others represent her narrative in book length publications – have been identified. An enlightening introduction to the worldwide production of comics, manga and bandes dessinées about Anne Frank can be found in my [article](http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11755/cfc9cfe-d-b1d2-4cfe-bb88-dd8b37bf5759) [<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11755/cfc9cfe-d-b1d2-4cfe-bb88-dd8b37bf5759>] (open access) on Anne Frank's international representation in sequential art. The oldest one discovered so far, is a [Spanish comic from 1961](https://www.tebeosfera.com/numeros/idlilio_1961_bistagne_6.html) [[https://www.tebeosfera.com/numeros/idlilio\\_1961\\_bistagne\\_6.html](https://www.tebeosfera.com/numeros/idlilio_1961_bistagne_6.html)] , strongly inspired by the US made Anne Frank movie that premiered two years before the publication of this small comic.

A very recent one, published in [early 2016 in France](http://www.soleilprod.com/serie/journal-d-anne-frank.html) [<http://www.soleilprod.com/serie/journal-d-anne-frank.html>] , stayed really close to the narrative of Anne Frank's published diary, but did not attract a lot of attention. Not surprisingly, a Jewish radio station in Paris was obviously somewhat confused by the Anne Frank Fonds' announcement of the 'first ever' comic about her. While presenting the details of the new Graphic Diary on their [website](http://radiorcj.info/journal-danne-frank-adapte-bande-dessinee/) [<http://radiorcj.info/journal-danne-frank-adapte-bande-dessinee/>] , they illustrated the news with images from the 2016 comic book made by Antoine Ozanam and Nadji Scelsi...

Ever since the publication of Anne Frank's diary, her historical experiences and impressions have been represented in a



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Cover of the French comic edition (2016)

number of ways. The 1959 Oscar-winning movie was not the first example of this development, as it was based on a previous Broadway play. The attempt to visualize her life and diary has resulted in a steady flow of comic strips, comic books and graphic novels across various countries for over half a century. Given the unmistakable artistic merits of the Graphic Diary, there is no need to use marketing slogans that exaggerate the innovativeness of the newly launched comic book. In order to get a good understanding of Anne Frank's global impact, and of the various parties involved in shaping and co-creating this cultural legacy, we should pay more attention to the *diversity of her expressions* [<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11755/cfc9cfed-b1d2-4cfe-bb88-dd8b37bf5759>] in today's popular culture – whether or not they are institutionally authorized. The Graphic Diary: an innovation with predecessors.

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