

The Shadowy History of Berlin Underground: 1939-45/Der Schattenmann: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1938-1945

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Abstract : This paper asks how to read a particularly vexed and complicated life writing text. For over half a century, the wartime journals of Ruth Andreas Friedrich (1901-1977) circulated as among a handful of more or less authoritative and “authentic” first-hand accounts of German resistance under Hitler. A professional journalist, Andreas Friedrich is remembered today largely through her publications at the war’s end, which appeared in English as Berlin Underground (published by Henry Holt in 1947), just before their publication in Germany as Der Schattenmann “The Shadow Man” (also in 1947). A British edition by the now obscure Latimer House Limited (London) followed in 1948; it is based closely on but is not identical to, the Henry Holt American edition, which in turn differs significantly from its German counterpart. Both Berlin Underground and Der Schattenmann figure Andreas-Friedrich as a key figure in an anti-fascist cell that operated in Berlin under the code name “Uncle Emil,” and provide a riveting account of political terror, opportunism, and dissent under the Nazi regime. Recent scholars have, however, begun to raise fascinating and controversial questions about Andreas-Friedrich’s own writing/reconstruction process in compiling the journals and about her highly selective curatorial role and claims. The apparent absence of any surviving original manuscript for Andreas-Friedrich’s journals amplifies the questions around them. Crucially, so too does the role of the translator of the English editions of Berlin Underground, the enigmatic June Barrows Mussey, a subject that has thus far gone virtually unnoticed and which this paper will focus on. Mussey, a prolific American translator, simultaneously cultivated a career as a professional magician, publishing a number of books on that subject under the alias Henry Hay. While the record indicates that Mussey attempted to compartmentalize his professional life, research into the publishing and translation history of Berlin Underground suggests that the two roles converge in the fact of the translator’s invisibility, by effacing the traces of his own hand and leaving unmarked his own significant textual interventions, Mussey, in effect, edited, abridged, and altered Andreas Friedrich’s journals for the second time. In fact, it could be said that while the fictitious “Uncle Emil” is positioned as “the shadow man” of the German edition, Mussey himself also emerges as precisely that in the English rendering of the journals. The implications of Mussey’s translation of Andreas Friedrich’s journals are one of the most important un-examined gaps in the shadowy publishing history of Berlin Underground, a history full of “tricks” (Mussey’s words) and illusions of transparency. Based largely on archival research of unpublished materials and methods of close reading and comparative analysis, this study will seek to convey some preliminary insights and exploratory work and frame questions toward what is ultimately envisioned as an experimental project in poetic historiography. As this work is still in the early stages, it would be especially welcome to have the opportunity provided by this conference to connect with a community of life writing colleagues who might help think through some of the challenges and possibilities that lie ahead.

Keywords : women’s wartime diaries, translation studies, auto/biographical theory, politics of life writing

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