Almost one hundred trains left Camp Westerbork for Central Europe. The majority of deportations took place between July 1942 and September 1943. Transports also took place before and after this period, but less frequently. The subject of this article is the transport of 24 August 1943. The writer Etty Hillesum and the journalist Philip Mechanicus left extensive notes behind about this transport. Hillesum in her letter and Mechanicus in his diary entry on that date. Etty Hillesum’s letter is one of forty that she sent from the camp. Two of them are devoted entirely to Camp Westerbork and were published clandestinely in the autumn of 1943. The text by Philip Mechanicus is

* Translated by Jack Santcross. It filled me with great joy that Jack Santcross accepted to translate my text. He is the English translator of two important books by Abel J. Herzberg, *Amor Fati* and *Between Two Streams: A Diary from Bergen-Belsen* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997). Jack Santcross was only eight years old when arrested in Amsterdam and deported first to Camp Westerbork in 1943 and in January 1944 to Bergen-Belsen. *Amor Fati* still needs to find an English publisher.


2 Willy Lindwer lists 93 deportation trains. Two transports departed in the fourth quarter of 1943. In the first three months of 1944 trains departed weekly again, after which the departures decreased considerably. According to Lindwer’s list, the last transport left on 13 September 1944. Cf. Willy Lindwer, *Kamp van hoop en wanhoop: Getuigen van Westerbork, 1939–1945* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1990), 256.

part of the diary that he kept during his stay in the camp. An important element of the transport, namely the loading of the deportees, was witnessed by both of them together. In the summer of 1943, the two authors were regularly in each other’s company.

In this contribution, I shall consider the texts by Etty Hillesum and Philip Mechanicus with the following questions in mind:

a) What kind of information did the authors intend to convey with their descriptions of the terrible transport of that night?

b) Exactly how are the two texts constructed? Which topics did the authors consider important to raise?

c) Why did the authors choose to write at all? For we are not concerned here with ‘normal’ correspondence to relatives and friends who had been left behind, but with the question why Mechanicus kept a diary and why Hillesum wrote two ‘reports’ about Camp Westerbork.

1. The Sources

My study is based on a limited number of primary sources: the diary In Dépôt (English title: Waiting for Death: A Diary) and the letters by Philip Mechanicus, and the diary and letters by Etty Hillesum. However, the history of these sources is complicated. Firstly, the texts were published without the authors having been able to influence them in any way. I want to dwell on this for a moment because it is highly doubtful whether these texts would have seen the light of day if the authors had survived the deportations: in any event not in their present form. I find it disturbing to assume without question that the authors wrote their