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Hannah Arendt and the Lives of the Female Intellectual Celebrity: Public Imagery and Storytelling Before and Since 1995

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**Hannah Arendt and the Lives of the Female Intellectual Celebrity:
Public Imagery and Storytelling Before and Since 1995**

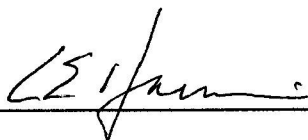
by

Gabrielle Johansson

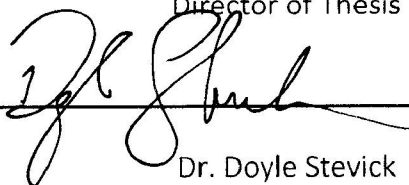
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Thesis Summary

This thesis explores the lives of Hannah Arendt, specifically her public image as a female celebrity intellectual before 1995 and the fractal explosion of variant Arendtian protagonists after 1995, with the publishing of Elżbita Ettinger's *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. Ettinger's book was the first of its kind to explore the correspondence letters between the German-Jewish political theorist and the Nazi philosopher and create from them a narrative of scandal, passion, and paradox. Before 1995, Arendt's public image was secure as a well-respected political philosopher, one that not only contributed to academia, but provided guidance for the postwar world, despite her critics and controversies. After 1995, Arendt's image, her legacy, and who she was understood to have been fragmented as her pre-1995 image was challenged. Arendt and Dinesen's philosophy of storytelling characterizes the way in which Arendt herself and artists have made sense of the unsensible and the paradoxical. While Arendt used the philosophy of storytelling to make sense of reality after the Second World War, artists use the philosophy of storytelling to make sense of how Hannah Arendt, one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, could have had an affair with Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger.

Introduction

The connection of an artist's life with his work has always raised embarrassing problems, and our eagerness to see recorded, displayed, and discussed in public what once were strictly private affairs and nobody's business is probably less legitimate than our curiosity is ready to admit... No one, obviously, could have told the story of her life as she herself might have told it, and the question of why she did not write an autobiography is as fascinating as it is unanswered. (What a pity that her biographer apparently never asked her this obvious question.) ...

It is true that storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it, that it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are... And yet, if we listen to Isak Dinesen's "philosophy" of storytelling and think of her life in light of it, we cannot help becoming aware of how the slightest misunderstanding, the slightest shift of emphasis in the wrong direction, will inevitably ruin everything.

-Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*¹

Hannah Arendt, one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, author of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, and longtime lover, friend, and defender of Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger, wrote this reflection on the celebrated novelist Isak Dinesen in 1968. In her *Men in Dark Times*, a book composed of her personal reflections on role models and friends, Arendt reflects on this female public figure, whose approach to life and approach to the "philosophy of storytelling," were distinct from one another. Here, she considers how such incongruency might affect the novelist's legacy, potentially resulting in ruin. Her reflections on Isak Dinesen are a mirror image of modern reflections of Arendt, which specifically concern the polarization of her public life from her private life. Comparatively, however, the degree of polarization between Arendt's public and private life transcends the "slightest misunderstandings" or "slightest shifts of emphasis" that she describes Dinesen as having. Mirroring her own assumption that these slight variations or instances of hypocrisy would "inevitably ruin everything," modern scholars of Arendt, journalists, and even artists have been debating on her verdict since 1995.

Arendt was herself a very private person. She did not like to share the deeper parts of her soul with the public. She strongly disliked interviews and being in the public light, especially

¹ Arendt, Hannah, *Men in Dark Times*. (1968; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 98, 105.

speaking publicly. That she kept her affair with Nazi Martin Heidegger, which lasted from 1924 to 1929, was reignited in 1949, and lasted until her death in 1975, from the public eye is therefore no surprise. This affair was indeed one of those “embarrassing problems,” that not only damaged her posthumous public image but also the credibility of her works. Her own curiosity about the scandals of Dinesen’s life reflects contemporary interest in Arendt’s personal life, specifically after the publication of Hannah and Martin’s love story in 1995 by Elżbita Ettinger, twenty years after her death. Certainly, the fact that she didn’t write an autobiography is similarly as “fascinating as it is unanswered,” as modern scholars, journalists, and artists try to solve the mysteries she left behind.

The sources used in this thesis reflect Dinesen’s philosophy of storytelling, that Arendt admires, which asserts that good storytelling is a reconciliation of reality and imagination. Meaning making, that is, the use of creative energy and imagination to interpret facts and data, in the form of narrative, is the expression of good storytelling. From newspaper articles, which bring Arendt into the context of contemporary social issues, to plays which use Arendt’s biography as a reference point for discussing humanity, responsibility, and political realities, this thesis engages in a variety of sources which engage in meaning making. Importantly, Arendt’s own works are included as sources which engage in meaning making, perhaps even to the detriment of their credibility.

Intuitively, the process of meaning making often results in a wide variety of interpretations, which one would assume are reflections of different realities. The process of making meaning from Arendt’s life, in particular the paradox of her affair with a Nazi, results in a wide variety of interpretations, from indicting her to mythologizing her. This thesis uses newspaper articles, book reviews, and interviews from 1950 to 1995, as a reference point for comparing sources before and after the publishing of Ettinger’s book, and plays, operas, graphic novels, and poetry to convey contemporary discussions concerning Arendt and her legacy. The sources used in latter portion of this thesis participate in storytelling in order to make meaning of her, her philosophy, and her choices. In this way, they attempt to understand the paradox and to pronounce a verdict on both Arendt and her philosophy.

This thesis is structured in three sections, which relate to the publishing of Elżbieta Ettinger's book *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger* in 1995. The first section discusses Arendt's image as a female intellectual celebrity before 1995. This image is characterized by her role as a guide for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*² (in English, "the process of dealing with the past"), an intellectual and cultural movement in Germany that attempts to make sense of reality, which was made incomprehensible by the atrocities of the Holocaust. Before 1995, she wrote *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and *Human Condition*, which built her philosophy in such a way as to answer directly to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Though she failed in some respects and though many journalists, historians, and political thinkers rejected her, Arendt's role as a public intellectual, who contributed to postwar discussions which attempt to understand the past, rendered her legendary. The second section discusses Ettinger's book itself, how it fundamentally changed the world's understanding of Arendt, and how it precipitated a series of movements which endeavor to rethink Arendt, her philosophy, and her person. The last section of this thesis examines an explosion of literary Arendts which follow chronologically from the publishing of Ettinger's book and stylistically from Ettinger's portrayal of Arendt.

Ultimately, this thesis raises more questions than answers. As with Dinesen's biography, Arendt's life is as fascinating as it is unanswered; it is a mystery, and her biography a collection of moments that do not quite fit together. The question of why she did not burn all evidence of her half-century long relationship with Heidegger has intrigued Arendt scholars and confused journalists. Arendt willingly gave her life's secret to archives. Before Ettinger, these letters were kept, "under lock and key" in archives, until Mary McCarthy, Arendt's best friend and a trustee of

² The term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was coined in the late 1940s in West Germany. It entailed practical and political implementation as well as a very personal collective undertaking to understand the near past. It was an ever-present reality during the postwar years. After the end of the Second World War in 1945, Germany, West and East alike, went through processes of De-Nazification, or *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour). After the atrocities of the Holocaust were revealed to their fullest extent, the world at large engaged in this process of trying to understand what happened and why it happened. The Jewish religion fragmented into various denominations in the wake of the war and the Holocaust. Additionally, the age-old question of theodicy resurfaced in significant ways. Additionally, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* resurfaced in the 1960s with the *Studentenbewegung*, or the West German Student Movement, who protested against remnants of National Socialism in German politics and society. The 68er *Studentenbewegung* was a student led moment. The movement's members, called the "68ers," were the children and grandchildren of those Germans who lived before and during Nazi Germany. This generation was retrospectively called the 68er generation. Their protests, spanning from the early 60s and ending in 1968, sparked a cultural and political revolution. Finally, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* gained a new context in the wake of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as well as the fall of the USSR in 1991.

her archives, provided access to Elżbita Ettinger so she could pursue what was then stipulated as a full-length biography of Arendt.³ Against original agreements, the publishing of Ettinger's abridged biography opened Arendt life's secret to the public. Meanwhile, Heidegger's archives were sealed until Ettinger's book convinced his son, Hermann Heidegger, to release the full collection of letters.⁴ Keeping their letters was even against an agreement they had had to destroy the letters from the beginning of their affair:

According to Heidegger's son, the two had sworn to destroy the other's early correspondence; the three letters from Arendt are copies, and the later ones are carbons. Only in 1966, beginning in the section titled "Autumn," did Heidegger start saving Arendt's letters. Meanwhile, every letter from Heidegger, including notes – "Do you want to come to the wood this evening? But only around 10. For I have exams until 8..." – was kept by Arendt in a bedroom drawer.⁵

Whether for sentimentality, a reverence for truth, or plaguing guilt, Arendt gave these letters to her archives, knowing the likelihood of its release and ensuing controversy. Her public image has suffered from it. As one journalist sarcastically remarks, "if you have a cache of old letters lying about, you'd do well to have some matches nearby just in case."⁶

³ *Letters 1925-1975: Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger*, ed. Ursula Ludz. trans. Andrew Shields. (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc, 2004), ix.

⁴ *Letters 1925-1975: Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger*, ed. Ursula Ludz. trans. Andrew Shields. (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc, 2004), ix-x.

⁵ Brightman, Carol. "The Metaphysical Couple." *The Nation*. May 20, 2004.

⁶ Stokes Jr., David Louis. "Arendt, Heidegger and forgiveness." *Providence Journal*. Dec 9, 1995.

Part I: The German-Jewish Philosopher before 1995

Vergangenheitsbewältigung and “The Great Hannah Arendt”

After the Second World War, the traditional categories of meaning and methods of sensemaking were inadequate. More specifically, in the face of radical evil and its manifestation in the Holocaust, traditional methods of coming to terms with reality were irreversibly debilitated. Rationality, spirituality, and religion were all incapable of explaining the irrationality, senseless murder, and radical evil of the Holocaust. What would immediately emerge as a result from this crisis of maneuvering through reality is the personal and intellectual process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This process was an integral part of Germany’s collective history and of individual Germans’ lives from 1945 onward. It was the process of understanding, coping with, and working through Germany’s Nazi past. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the relevance of its use is not limited to specific times or places. Further, it cannot be understood properly without a context in the present, or, more specifically, actions or changes which respond to the comprehending of the past. At the core of the process is the assertion that



Figure 1: Hannah Arendt at the University of Chicago in 1966.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung is relevant and necessary for the good of the present. Additionally, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as a process of coping with and comprehending the past, in the Arendtian sense, was not limited to Germany but rather is spatially expanded to account for this collective human undertaking.

It is no coincidence that Arendt’s most well-known works were *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, and *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, books that directly served to enhance the understanding of the times and to make sense of what happened in Nazi

Germany. Arendt, pictured above,⁷ was at the forefront of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and a guide for maneuvering through the postwar world. These three books are distinct from each other in many ways and have been used by many for different purposes. *Origins* attempts to explain out of which conditions totalitarianism forms and what its distinct characteristics are. Arendt's *Human Condition* provides a kind of "antidote" to totalitarianism using political philosophy. And lastly, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is an attempt to explain a type of person who emerges in the totalitarian state, someone whose particular kind of thoughtlessness and evil could be counterintuitively "banal."

Arendt, her works, and her thinking were globally recognized and publicly scrutinized. Her role in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is central and how she was received in the press, both positively and negatively, reflects the importance of this role. How regular people, academics, and journalists responded to these works cannot be separated from the context in which they, along with the entire world, were trying to make sense of what happened in Nazi Germany, which included the emotional, personal, political, and sociological aspects of dealing with the past.

The Three Pillars of Hell and Its Antidotes

Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* was from its publication in 1951 a groundbreaking and influential work of political philosophy. In it, Arendt analyzed the rise of both Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia as essentially two sides of the same coin. Before publishing, Arendt first proposed, "The Elements of Shame," and later, "The Three Pillars of Hell," as the title of this project.⁸ All prospective titles refer to her three essays, which explain the conditions from which totalitarian regimes, specifically Nazi Germany, develop. These essays are entitled "Antisemitism," "Imperialism," and "Totalitarianism." The shame of Germany denotes a significant part of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* which would continue to develop throughout the 20th century. Arendt claimed that the rise of totalitarianism follows the denial of the legacy of the Enlightenment, the destruction of rights, and the fall of what she later calls "the public realm" in

⁷ Weisspflug, Maïke. "Hannah Arendt: Only Within the Limits of Nature is Freedom Possible." *Deutsches Historisches Museum*. May 14, 2020.

⁸ Kirsch, Adam. "Rethinking Hannah Arendt." *New York Sun*, June 29, 2004.

her book *Human Condition*. Demarcating three sections of *Origins* are the conditions of totalitarianism, or the three pillars of hell.

With *Origins*, Arendt gained esteem and public renown for her imaginative thinking, originality, and intellectual skill as a contributor to the world's understanding of the postwar world. One reviewer from *The Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that "her courage, serious purpose and very considerable intellectual gifts make [*Origins of Totalitarianism*] an erudite, provocative, and brilliant book."⁹ Many obituaries refer to her as either "one of the foremost political thinkers of the 20th century,"¹⁰ or "a leading philosopher"¹¹ and her *Origins* as a "penetrating analysis,"¹² or the moment in which "reputation as a writer and scholar became firmly established."¹³ Another obituary entitled, "The Triumph of Hannah Arendt," notes

When Hannah Arendt died December 4, many people mourned a friend and a teacher, but some also knew that a shattered culture had lost one of its very last and finest voices. Now there is no one left who can speak about and out of the depth of the experience of German Jewry. She was one of the last survivors of a spiritual republic whose social history was as terrible and brief as it was intellectually radiant and enduring.¹⁴

Her publisher, William Jovanovich, noted that "[s]he was absolutely fearless intellectually... I would say, and this may sound sexist, that she is the outstanding woman thinker of our time, one of the 10 or 12 seminal thinkers of our time."¹⁵ Despite criticisms, her *Origins* "was widely acclaimed, and even some of those who disagreed with the thesis praised the professional quality of the work."¹⁶

Following a rich tradition of German romanticism, akin to Karl Kraus' *Die Letzten Tage Der Menschheit* (*The Last Days of Mankind*), published in the wake of the First World War, Arendt wrote *Origins of Totalitarianism* using rich language and a literary tone while also retaining a sense of historical reasoning and philosophical thought. In the last section of the third part of her book, "Totalitarianism," she discusses the roles that isolation and loneliness have in forming the mass-man, the person – whether civilian or soldier – who forms one unit in the totalitarian society, or a

⁹ M.A. Fitzsimons. "Totalitarian Absurdities: Their Origin." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Mar 25, 1951.

¹⁰ Klaidman, Stephen. "Hannah Arendt, Author, Teacher Dies." *The Washington Post*, Dec 6, 1975.

¹¹ "Hannah Arendt, Dead at 69." *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Dec. 8, 1975.

¹² Klaidman, Stephen. "Hannah Arendt, Author, Teacher Dies." *The Washington Post*, Dec 6, 1975.

¹³ Bird, David. "Hannah Arendt, Political Scientist Dead." *The New York Times*, Dec 6, 1975.

¹⁴ Shklar, Judith. "Hannah Arendt's Triumph." *The New Republic*, Dec 27, 1975.

¹⁵ Bird, David. "Hannah Arendt, Political Scientist Dead." *The New York Times*, Dec 6, 1975.

¹⁶ Bird, David. "Hannah Arendt, Political Scientist Dead." *The New York Times*, Dec 6, 1975.

"small cog in the majestic wheel of slaughter [i.e. war]."¹⁷ She describes isolation as "that impasse into which men are driven when the political sphere of their lives [that is, their political significance in a democratic government]... is destroyed."¹⁸ Loneliness is the "experience of being abandoned by everything and everybody."¹⁹ Arendt asserts that isolation and loneliness are the primary preconditions of totalitarianism because they necessitate vulnerability, mistrust, and desperation to relieve this vulnerability and mistrust, thus causing otherwise normal people to align themselves to totalitarian societies and totalitarian leaders:

What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever-growing masses of our century. The merciless process into which totalitarianism drives and organizes the masses looks like a suicidal escape from reality... it seems as if a way ha[s] been found to set the desert itself into motion, to let loose a sandstorm that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth.

The conditions under which we exist today in the field of politics are indeed threatened by these devastating sandstorms. Their danger is not that they might establish a permanent world... Its danger is that it threatens to ravage the world as we know it – a world which everywhere seems to have come to an end – before a new beginning rising from this end has had time to assert itself.²⁰

Like Arendt's *Origins*, Kraus' drama tells the story of the fall of humanity in the First World War. Kraus wrote his masterpiece as an unperformable play, "which would stretch out over some ten days measured in earthly time..."²¹ Illustrating the unnatural, the unbelievable, and the nonsensical, Kraus' play "was conceived for a theatre on Mars."²² Kraus used a variety of sources, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Gospel of John, and primary sources collected from the German press, to form the dialogue of his play. Summarizing the purpose of his masterpiece in one scene, Kraus wrote with the voice of Horatio:

And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world

¹⁷ Arendt, Hannah. *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (1951; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 329.

¹⁸ Arendt, Hannah. *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (1951; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 474.

¹⁹ Arendt, Hannah. *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (1951; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 476.

²⁰ Arendt, Hannah. *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (1951; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 478.

²¹ Kraus, Karl. "Preface," in *The Last Days of Mankind: A Tragedy in Five Acts*. trans. Patrick Healy. (1918; repr., Amsterdam, Netherlands: November Editions, 2016), 3.

²² Kraus, Karl. "Preface," in *The Last Days of Mankind: A Tragedy in Five Acts*. trans. Patrick Healy. (1918; repr., Amsterdam, Netherlands: November Editions, 2016), 3.

How these things came about. So shall you hear
 Of carnal, bloody, unnatural acts,
 Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
 Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause;
 And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
 Fall'n on th'investors' heads. All this can I
 Truly deliver.

... This is the World War. This is my manifesto. I have considered everything carefully. I have taken on the task to write this tragedy, which is composed of scenes of humanity decomposing...²³

Both Arendt and Kraus thus used approached their respective masterpieces using the same philosophy of storytelling and meaning making, which reconciles imagination with reality. They both approached storytelling by reconciling the atrocities of WWI and WWII and the apocalypse. As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl observed in her essay on "Hannah Arendt's Storytelling":

Hannah Arendt loved to tell stories. She told her cherished stories again and again, with a charming disregard for mere facts (*se non è vero, è bene trovato*) and unfailing regard for the life of the story... Her stories and her sayings were the threads with which she wove her conversations and her works. She knew that she lived in "dark times," times in which a long tradition had unraveled and scattered in a vast mental diaspora to the ends of the memories of men. But she viewed this rupture as a sign that the threads, the thought fragments, were to be gathered, freely and in such a way as to protect freedom, and made into something new, dynamic, and illuminating. She was heiress to an aphoristic technique; the capita mortua of the broken tradition were assembled with this technique, reincarnated, full-bodied and vital.²⁴

Given this quote, one might assume that Young-Bruehl is speaking about novels, short stories, or other works of literature, yet Arendt did not write such works of literature. Instead, she wrote *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *Men in Dark Times*, and various essays and articles, all of which function as works of philosophy, history, or political commentary. A possible exception to this was her biography on the German-Jewess, *Rahel Varnhagen*, that she wrote in Paris in the late 1930s and published in 1957. However, as far as storytelling goes in these works, Arendt tried to weave storytelling with history and philosophy in

²³ Kraus, Karl. *The Last Days of Mankind: A Tragedy in Five Acts*. trans. Patrick Healy. (1918; repr., Amsterdam, Netherlands: November Editions, 2016), 525.

²⁴ Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. "Hannah Arendt's Storytelling," *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977): 183–90.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970279>.

ways that academic standards of rigor could not accept. In *Origins* specifically, Arendt revealed meaning, yet might have “committed the error of defining it,” by creating *Origins* as a historical and philosophical work. Given this, Arendt’s book was open to the scrutiny of critics who did not receive her book as a work aligned to the standards of traditional historical and philosophical rigor.

The difference between *Die Letzten Tage Der Menschheit* and *Origins of Totalitarianism*, however, was the premises on which they were meant to be written and the context into which they were received. While Kraus intended his play to be a work of political commentary by way of literary analogy, Arendt intended *Origins* to be a comprehensive philosophical, historical, and political explanation of the conditions of totalitarianism and how humanity met its death. Arendt endeavored to comprehend and elaborate on the “ill-defined, general agreement that the essential structure of all civilizations is at the breaking point” through philosophical and historical insights.²⁵ The context into which Arendt’s *Origins* was received was therefore academia and the press. While Kraus’ apocalyptic drama was received as a work of literature, subject to the scrutiny of literary criticism, *Origins* was criticized based on historical rigor and philosophical consistency.

That she chose these approaches to her book and ultimately named her book “The Origins of Totalitarianism” rather than “The Three Pillars of Hell,” or “The Elements of Shame,” was perhaps a mistake, given the many criticisms that followed from her publication which concern the inverse relationship between a proper historical methodology and the romanticization of a panoramic apocalyptic world. Arendt intended her book to be a serious academic work. She claimed to use historical analyses, which loosely correspond to certain “origins” of totalitarianism, yet instead used philosophical methodologies, historically scattered examples, and romantic descriptions of a world falling apart. For some, her lack of a traditional perspective renders her interpretation of the origins of totalitarianism as particularly “nightmarish.”²⁶ Though they appreciated her contribution to our understanding of the world and her imaginative thoughts concerning totalitarian systems, a large portion of book reviews and newspaper articles asserted a relationship between Arendt’s lack of correct methodology and a romanticization of a totalitarian world. One writer noted:

²⁵ Arendt, Hannah. “Preface to the First Edition,” *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (1951; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), vii.

²⁶ Carr, E.H. “The Ultimate Denial.” *The New York Times*. Mar 25, 1951.

Rejecting all previous explanations of totalitarianism as dominated by class, national, economic, military, or imperialistic interests, she describes [the spirit of totalitarianism] as an ideological and psychological obsession to destroy the world as it now exists and to reform it into a hard, rigid, virtually delusional system of society.

[Her conclusion concerning totalitarianism is] a crazy system of thought, an absolute evil, a kind of paranoiac dream-world...²⁷

Thus, Arendt's *Origins* could be read as a work of apocalyptic poetry rather than a serious attempt at understanding how totalitarian systems form. Many critics would continue to note how her lack of perspective and historicity compromised the integrity of her arguments.²⁸

After writing *Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951, Arendt wrote its antidote, *The Human Condition* in 1958. While her political philosophy in *Origins* strengthened the understanding of totalitarian structures, in *The Human Condition* it strengthened the understanding of the political and metaphysical realities of the human condition, both under stress and in ideal conditions. Together, these books form a wholistic image. Her instincts concerning the fall of civil society and a rights-based government in *Origins* directed her philosophy of *The Human Condition*. Described as a work of "intense and brooding reflection,"²⁹ *The Human Condition* discussed a wide variety of philosophical issues which concern the conditions in which humans live and the condition of the modern man, post-Enlightenment, post-Marxism, and post-Industrial Revolution.

This antidote to totalitarianism relies on distinctions between the private realm and the public realm and between the *vita contemplativa* – the contemplative life – and the *vita activa* – the active life. Arendt was interested in these distinctions because she believed that they best described how political realities can affect metaphysical realities. For Arendt, the private realm denotes the space in which man concerns himself with physical necessity, such as eating or sleeping, while the public realm denotes the space in which man truly expresses himself as a human being. In this book, Arendt criticizes the traditional way that philosophy has always been done, namely the tradition of philosophy that aligns itself with the legacy of Plato. Plato was unlike

²⁷ Snyder, Louis L. "The Origins of Totalitarianism (Book Review)," *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no. 3 (1951): 257–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4464991>.

²⁸ Baer, Werner. *The American Economic Review* 42, no. 3 (1952): 437–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1810411>. Dunham, Aileen. *The Journal of Modern History* 24, no. 2 (1952): 184–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1872566>. Shields, Currin V. *The Western Political Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1951): 501–2. <https://doi.org/10.2307/442863>.

²⁹ Blanshard, Brand. "Reflections on History: The Human Condition." *The New York Times*, Feb 15, 1959.

Aristotle and Socrates, who lived in the world of human affairs and presented their ideas or questions in the public realm, in that he preferred to sit and think rather than to act in the world. Arendt thus rejects Plato's tradition of the *vita contemplativa* in preference to the *vita activa*, which prefers political action over philosophy. Within her *vita activa* are three activities: labor, work, and action. Action is the most important activity of the *vita activa* because it directly relates to what she calls plurality and natality, necessary components of liberal democracy and the flourishing of humanity. Plurality denotes the condition of human spontaneity, which is inherent in all people as they are individual autonomous beings who can think, act, and be what they will. Natality denotes the birth of new things in the marketplace of ideas, namely the direct result of plurality in the public realm, where individuals can come together to bring newness into the world. This is the philosophical context for Arendt's discussion of the death of Enlightenment values in *Origins*.

Before totalitarian politics consciously attacked and partially destroyed the very structure of European civilization, the explosion of 1914 [after the First World War] and its severe consequences of instability had sufficiently shattered the facade of Europe's political system to lay bare its hidden frame... [within a context of the stateless, refugees, and the Jewish diaspora] The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.³⁰

This "place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective," is what Arendt calls the public realm in *The Human Condition*. Fostering natality and plurality and making it accessible to everyone in the public realm is therefore an antidote for totalitarianism.

***Eichmann in Jerusalem* and Reputation Death**

While *Origins* and *The Human Condition* describe the conditions of totalitarianism, their specific qualities, and their antidotes, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* describes the role of individual people in totalitarian societies. Specifically, Arendt describes the

³⁰ Arendt, Hannah. *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (1951; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 267, 298.



Figure 2: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann behind a glass box in his trial in 1961.

role of one man, Adolf Eichmann who served as a SS-Obersturmbannführer in the Nazi Party.³¹ He was ordered by SS-Obergruppenführer, Reinhard Heydrich, to personally organize, facilitate, and manage the logistics of the Holocaust.³² Her book was originally written in five article installments in *The New Yorker* in 1963 as a report on Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1962, pictured to the left.³³ In

1964, she published a revised and enlarged version of her report on his trial. Similar to *Origins*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* used historical examples to make sense of abstract, complicated, and ultimately philosophical realities, namely of the human person in sinister times.

The subtitle of her article and book – “A Report on the Banality of Evil” – described Eichmann and the context in which he committed his crimes. Taking from the framework of *Origins* and *The Human Condition*, Arendt observed in the trial and asserted in her report that totalitarianism and bureaucratic systems of organization are often conjointly related. In the Nazi German government, therefore, there were many “Eichmanns,” namely bureaucrats, accountants, and administrators, who served as cogs in the death machine of the Holocaust. Arendt's claim that there was a “banality of evil” that emerged from totalitarianism and manifested itself in Eichmann. Despite the sinister nature of “the banality of evil,” Arendt described this man – the

³¹ An SS-Obersturmbannführer would be the equivalent to Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army. Though Eichmann was not a soldier, this title nonetheless illustrates his rank and role as a leader, or manager, for the logistics of the Holocaust. He attended the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, as is described in Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

³² An SS-Obergruppenführer would be the equivalent to Lieutenant General in the US Army. He was the director of the Gestapo from 1934 to his death in 1942. He chaired the Wannsee Conference and, while Eichmann's role in the logistics of the Holocaust cannot be understated, historians consider him to be the chief architect of the Holocaust.

³³ “The Eichmann Trial.” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*.

archetype of this new kind of evil – as more of a “clown” than the psychopathic monster that everyone watching in the courtroom and on television believed him to have been. As is seen in the picture above, Eichmann was placed in a bulletproof glass box as his trial ensued because of this. Using ironic humor and sarcastic tones, Arendt laughed as she wrote her book:

The German text of the taped police examination, conducted from May 29, 1960, to January 17, 1961, each page corrected and approved by Eichmann, constitutes a veritable gold mine for a psychologist – provided he is wise enough to understand that the horrible can not only be ludicrous but outright funny.³⁴

Despite agreeing with the verdict of the trial – that he should be executed for war crimes – the tone of her book, her descriptions of him, and the “banality” by which she describes this evil suggested a reduction of culpability.

Arendt’s book was not limited in scope to her analysis of Eichmann and the “banality of evil,” but included also Jews, both victims and survivors, during and after the Holocaust. Though she did not directly accuse the Jews of their own deaths, she nonetheless had a flippant tone and used a large collection of irrelevant or erroneous historical examples. Despite having said in her book that accusations against Jewish victims – such as those made by the prosecutor of the trial, who had asked “witness after witness, ‘Why did you not protest?’ Why did you board the train?....’” – were “cruel and silly,” she herself accuses Jewish leaders of being instrumental in the deaths of their people.³⁵ Though Arendt’s discussion of the role of Jewish leaders covered fewer than twenty pages, her chapter, “The Wannsee Conference, or Pontius Pilate,” was the source of incredible backlash. In what is perhaps her most controversial sentence, Arendt says,

The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.³⁶

³⁴ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (1963; repr., New York, Penguin Group, 2006), 48.

³⁵ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (1963; repr., New York, Penguin Group, 2006), 11-12.

³⁶ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (1963; repr., New York, Penguin Group, 2006), 125.

She describes this invaluable role of the Jewish leaders as “the darkest chapter of the whole dark story.”³⁷ Though Arendt tries to support these conclusions using the testimony of Pinhas Freudiger, a Jewish Council Leader, and Dr. Louis de Jong, the head of the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation, her conclusions were not only insensitive and offensive to the victims, but also erroneous and lacking in evidence.

Arendt faced heavy criticism in the 1960s concerning not only her book, but herself as a person. These claims concerned the phraseology, tone, and contents of her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, particularly her commentary on the Jews and Eichmann’s “banality.” The public reception of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, particularly when compared to that of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, was a disruption to Arendt’s image as not only a well-respected creative thinker, but a well-liked public intellectual. The contents in her book caused many to wonder about her sense of justice and morality as they seemed to suggest a defense of Eichmann and victim-blaming of the Jews. In ironic mirroring of Arendt’s own title, one critic – Norman Podhoretz – entitled his book review, “Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance.” Podhoretz notes how,

Miss Arendt is all cleverness and no eloquence... in place of the monstrous Nazi, she gives us the “banal” Nazi; in place of the Jew as virtuous martyr, she gives us the Jew as accomplice in evil; and in place of the confrontation between guilt and innocence, she gives us the “collaboration” of criminal and victim.³⁸

One reviewer noted that her book “is characterized by a constant straining for paradox, and what can be more paradoxical than the idea that the victims were the instruments of their destruction? This is certainly one possible interpretation of the facts, but only a perverse mind could have made it.”³⁹ As Amos Elon reflects on *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 2007, he notes how “people were bitterly divided over it. No book within living memory had elicited similar passions.”⁴⁰ Certainly, *Eichmann*

³⁷ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (1963; repr., New York, Penguin Group, 2006), 117.

³⁸ Podhoretz, Norman. “Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance.” *Commentary*. Sep 1963.

³⁹ Bermant, Chaim. “Author and Critic; AND THE CROOKED SHALL BE MADE STRAIGHT: The Eichmann Trial, The Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt’s Narrative.” *The New York Times*. Dec 19, 1965.

⁴⁰ Elon, Amos. “The Excommunication of Hannah Arendt,” *World Policy Journal* 23, no. 4 (2006): 93–102. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40210059>.

in *Jerusalem* changed Hannah Arendt's public image from the celebrated author of *Origins*, whose imaginative thinking was simultaneously innovative and a romantic philosophical musing, to the subject of extreme feelings. Many even resorted to calling her a "self-hating Jew,"⁴¹ who despite her ethnicity, had decided to defend a Nazi and accuse victims of her heritage. One reviewer from the *Jewish Spectator* even titled her article "Self-Hating Jewess Writes Pro-Eichmann Series for the New Yorker."⁴² The last line in Podhoretz's article also reflects these sentiments: "In the name of all that is humane, will the remnant never let up on itself?" Additionally, many who read her report also concluded that she was "soulless" and lacked basic "sympathy."⁴³

Along with critics of *Origins*, many journalists and intellectuals criticized Arendt for her lack of historicity and objectivity. As Podhoretz notes, Arendt's use of evidence was primarily secondary sources, in particular, Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*.⁴⁴ Further, the controversy surrounding her claims exasperated these criticisms and framed them as being not simply the result of a lack of historical training, but rather also an intentional "manipulation of evidence... at all times visibly tendentious."

[S]ince Miss Arendt wishes us to believe that the Nazis could never have killed as many as six million Jews without Jewish help, she tries very hard to convey the impression that what the Jews themselves did in any given country mattered significantly too. And it is here that she becomes most visibly tendentious in her manipulation of the facts. In explaining, for example, why not a single Belgian Jew was ever deported (though thousands of stateless Jews living in Belgium were), she tells us how the Belgian police and the Belgian railway men quietly sabotaged deportation operations, and then adds: "Moreover, among those who had fled were all the more important Jewish leaders . . . so that there was no Jewish Council to register the Jews—one of the vital prerequisites for their seizure." But there *was* a Jewish Council in Belgium. There was also one in France, and Miss Arendt simply neglects to mention it.⁴⁵

⁴¹ See: Maier-Katkin, Daniel, and Nathan Stoltzfuss. "Hannah Arendt on Trial: The 1963 Publication of Her 'Eichmann in Jerusalem' Sparked a Debate That Still Rages over Its Author's Motivations." *American Scholar* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 98–103. <https://search-ebscohost-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=88088541>. See also: Maier-Katkin, Daniel. "How Hannah Arendt Was Labeled an 'Enemy of Israel.'" *Tikkun* 25, no. 6 (2010): 11–14. <https://muse-jhu-edu.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/article/594093/pdf>.

⁴² Maier-Katkin, Daniel. "How Hannah Arendt Was Labeled an 'Enemy of Israel.'" *Tikkun* 25, no. 6 (2010): 11–14. <https://muse-jhu-edu.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/article/594093/pdf>.

⁴³ Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World*. (1982; repr., New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), 337.

⁴⁴ Podhoretz, Norman. "Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance." *Commentary*. Sep 1963.

⁴⁵ Podhoretz, Norman. "Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance." *Commentary*. Sep 1963.

One reviewer, who wrote a book in response to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, described Arendt as being “inconsistent, misinformed, or simply ignorant – and worse... that she [forced] a fact to fit a thesis.”⁴⁶ The thesis of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was a series of unthinkable paradoxes, which according to these critics, were wholly unsupported by historical evidence. In the eyes of journalists, historians, and academics generally, even if it was clear that Arendt considered herself more of a storyteller than a historian or a philosopher as Young-Breuhl suggests above, her own disregard for reality and historical evidence rendered her less of even that.

Some journalists believed that with *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt had reached a certain “dead end,”⁴⁷ which demarcated a type of reputation death. Her interpretation of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* renders a general reduction of culpability while claiming,

that there were no guilty instigators, only a few psychopaths such as Hitler, on the one hand, and victims of the machine on the other, stretching all the way from senior officials such as Eichmann to the simple Jews who died without a fight.⁴⁸

Though Arendt had been helpful when she wrote an explanation of the preconditions and conditions that led to the Holocaust in her *Origins*, Fitzgibbon claims that when it comes to explaining the people behind the Holocaust, Arendt had failed spectacularly.

Arendt’s failures in respect to both *Origins* and *Eichmann*, along with people’s intrigue for her, relate in part to her attempt to understand the incomprehensible. In the case of *Origins*, the question is how can a modern, post-Enlightenment, Christian country could systematically murder more than six million Jews and mobilize its entire population for this goal. In the case of *Eichmann*, the question is how a person, who for all intents and purposes was average and had a normal childhood, could willingly become the head of Holocaust logistics. Though Arendt certainly failed in multiple ways as she tried to maneuver through these questions, she, along with few others, tried to tackle impossible questions that transcend the sphere of academia and pierce the heart of human experience. Arendt’s evaluation of *Eichmann* assumes the need to “take lessons” from

⁴⁶ Bermant, Chaim. “Author and Critic; AND THE CROOKED SHALL BE MADE STRAIGHT: The Eichmann Trial, The Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt’s Narrative.” *The New York Times*. Dec 19, 1965.

⁴⁷ Fitzgibbon, Constantine. “Again, the Issue of German Guilt: Can Nazi Crimes be Blamed on all Germans or only on the Fanatics?” *New York Times*. Aug 18, 1963.

⁴⁸ Fitzgibbon, Constantine. “Again, the Issue of German Guilt: Can Nazi Crimes be Blamed on all Germans or only on the Fanatics?” *New York Times*. Aug 18, 1963.

the past, yet in reality there may be no such lessons or answers that can be extracted from the Holocaust.⁴⁹ Only personal “quarrels with God, with men and with [oneself]” may be extracted from the horrors of the Holocaust.⁵⁰ For some, Arendt’s evaluation of Jewish leadership was not helpful in the slightest but it did serve as a central piece of postwar memory and historical debates. In other words, Arendt could not be used as a helpful reference point, or a guide to questions of theodicy or *why*, in a moral and religious sense, the Holocaust happened.

Interviewing the Female Academic Celebrity

Between 1964 and 1973, Arendt appeared on various interviews, which contributed to the development of Arendt’s public image by not only affirming her image as a female academic celebrity, but also as an individual with a unique life story. These interviews were first glimpses of her personal life, which was previously kept private and would only be revealed more fully in posthumous biographies or works of literature. Hannah Arendt thus became a female academic personality.⁵¹ The most widely discussed of her interviews was with Günther Gaus on his program *Zur Person* on ZDF TV in Germany in 1964. Gaus was one of the most prominent German journalists of his time and invited many famous public figures on his program such as Willy Brandt, Franz Josef Strauß, Edward Teller, and Christa Wolf.

Though this interview did allow a presentation of Arendt as a person rather than simply an intellectual, this interview aired uncoincidentally the same year as the publication of the enlarged version of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* – in 1964. It was therefore in part purposed as a public response to the controversy. In the interview, Gaus asked Arendt whether “the criticism that [her] book [was] lacking in love for the Jewish people [was] painful to [her].” A collected Arendt responded with careful words:

⁴⁹ Hertzberg, Arthur. "A Lifelong Quarrel with God." *New York Times*. May 6, 1990.

⁵⁰ Hertzberg, Arthur. "A Lifelong Quarrel with God." *New York Times*. May 6, 1990.

⁵¹ She appeared on *Zur Person* on ZDF TV in Germany in October 1964, *Das Thema* on SWR TV in Germany two weeks after in 1964, and on *Un certain regard* on ORTF TV in France in 1973. The programs she was invited on were well known and respected and her interviewees, Günther Gaus, Joachim Fest, and Roger Errera were famous talk show hosts and public figures. Gaus was one of the most prominent German journalists of his time and became a German diplomat and politician later in his life. Fest was a German historian, journalist, and editor who wrote various books on Adolf Hitler, Albert Speer, and the rise of Nazi influence in Germany. Errera was similarly a prominent figure, author, and jurist in France.

First of all, I must, in all friendliness, state that you yourself have become a victim of this campaign [namely, the campaign against her, her image, and her work]. Nowhere in my book did I reproach the Jewish people with nonresistance... I called such questions directed to the witnesses in Jerusalem both foolish and cruel...⁵²

At this Gaus interjected, saying, "I have read the book. I know that. But some of the criticisms made of you are based on the *tone* in which many passages are written." At this Arendt responded with,

Well, that is another matter. What can I say? Besides, I don't want to say anything... I was really of the opinion that Eichmann was a buffoon... I know one thing: three minutes before certain death, I probably would still laugh. And that, they say, is the tone of voice. That the tone of voice is predominantly ironic is completely true... When people reproach me with accusing the Jewish people, that is a malignant lie and propaganda and nothing else. The tone of voice, however, is an objection to me personally. And I cannot do anything about that.⁵³

Certainly, this interview was in part purposed as a response to the controversy surrounding *Eichmann*. It gave her the opportunity to address the controversy "face-to-face" on television and through conversation. Interviewing Arendt in this way provided her a more personal and intimate way to express her response to the controversy of her book.

These interviews allowed her public image the flexibility of being more than the author of books and the object of controversy, but also a person who had a childhood, a life story, and a personality. For the first time, in her interview with Günther Gaus in 1964, Arendt's life story gained relevance for people other than herself and those closest to her. In this program, Arendt described her childhood as a Jewish girl and how the first encounter with her own Jewish identity came in the form of anti-Semitic bullying from other children in the streets. Instead of assuming centrality as her identity, religion, or sense of belonging, Arendt understood her "Jewishness" as

⁵² "What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günther Gaus" in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 26.

See also: Philosophy Overdose. "Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günther Gaus)." YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:46:40 to 0:48:30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

⁵³ "What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günther Gaus" in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 26-27.

See also: Philosophy Overdose. "Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günther Gaus)." YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:48:30 to 0:50:30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

a vague description of herself and her family. She shared with Gaus her biography: she was born into a middle-class family in Königsberg, her father died when she was seven years old, and her first love was philosophy and literature. Arendt was a philosophical protégé who, before she was fifteen years old, taught herself Greek and read Immanuel Kant, Karl Jaspers, and Søren Kierkegaard. She told of her education at Marburg with Martin Heidegger, at Freiburg with Edmund Husserl, and finally at Heidelberg with Karl Jaspers.

This interview provides a personal explanation for Arendt's professional interests in politics, political theory, and, specifically, the philosophy of *The Human Condition*. After the burning of the Reichstag in 1933, "indifference was no longer possible,"⁵⁴ and to simply think about what was happening in the world was impossible. In 1933, she lost dear friends and was disillusioned with philosophy and intelligentsia. Both her friends and philosophy had failed to fight against the rise of aggressive anti-Semitism and the decline of a rights-based democracy. 1933



was the moment that the trajectory of Arendt's life shifted, particularly as she rejected philosophy and instead embraced action and, later, political theory. As is pictured above,⁵⁵ Arendt insisted that she was not a philosopher but rather a "political theorist."⁵⁶ She soon began work with Kurt Blumenfeld in his Zionist Organization. Her job was to do research on rising anti-Semitism in Germany. She was arrested for this work by the Gestapo later that year. Arendt explains,

⁵⁴ "What Remains? The Language Remains": A Conversation with Günther Gaus" in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 7.

See also: Philosophy Overdose. "Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günter Gaus)." YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:08:45 to 0:09:40.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

⁵⁵ Philosophy Overdose. "Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günter Gaus)." YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:01:45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

⁵⁶ Philosophy Overdose. "Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günter Gaus)." YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:00:55 to 0:01:20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

I was very lucky. I got out after eight days because I made friends with the official who arrested me. He was a charming fellow! He'd been promoted from the criminal police to a political division. He had no idea what to do... Unfortunately, I had to lie to him. I couldn't let the organization be exposed. I told him tall tales, and he kept saying, "I got you in here. I shall get you out again..." ... I got out, but had to cross the border illegally...⁵⁷

After escaping Germany, Arendt moved to Paris and continued to work for Zionist organizations, where she worked to find homes for Jewish children in Palestine.

Aspects of her interview with Gaus and the intimacy of their conversation as it related to her friends, specifically their falling out in 1933 and their reunion after the war, introduced a contrast between her philosophy and her personal life. This contrast would later become more relevant after 1995 and in the 2000s, as journalists, historians, and artists try to make sense of her affair with Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger. In Arendtian terms, these interviews reveal that there was a distinction between how Arendt personally operated – in her relationships and friendships – and how she operated in the political, or public, sphere. In the interview, her own comments concerning postwar Germany indicate that she might have been too quick to gloss over the fact that her friends were ideologically committed to the Nazi party while her entire book on *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was an indictment of complacent nobodies who followed along without thought. After the war ended and specifically after learning of the horrors of Auschwitz, she mended many of her relationships with old friends and acquaintances from Germany. She explained to Gaus, "these were *only* people who were committed to Nazism for a few months, at the worst for a few years; neither murderers nor informers."⁵⁸ Eichmann himself never specifically murdered anyone either, yet her claims concerning his culpability remain intact. Shockingly inconsistent with her arguments against complacency, against thoughtlessness, and against the characteristics which oppose what it is that she believes contribute to the flourishing of humanity

⁵⁷ "What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günther Gaus" in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 10-11.

See also: Philosophy Overdose. "Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günter Gaus)." YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:14:30 to 0:16:03.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

⁵⁸ "What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günther Gaus" in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 24 (emphasis mine).

See also: Philosophy Overdose. "Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günter Gaus)." YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:42:15 to 0:44:45.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

– namely reflection, reason, and responsibility, as articulated in *The Human Condition* – Arendt not only forgives but also reconciles with her old friends from Germany, which of course, includes Heidegger. Moreover, she describes her German friends as people “who fell into their own trap.”⁵⁹ It is difficult to see how this kind of phraseology does not reduce culpability for people she specifically chose to forgive, namely Heidegger and other unnamed friends. Indicative of either hypocrisy or the blindness of human love, reconciling her philosophy with her personal life is not a simple undertaking.

Arendt’s public image, from her role as a guide for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to the subject of debate and controversy, changes form after her death in 1975 and after the publication of her affair in 1995. The romanticism by which she writes *Origins*, the practical philosophy used to explain the human condition, and the themes of her report on Adolf Eichmann remained after her death and fueled new interpretations of her. While before her death her life and personality were limited to interviews with Günther Gaus and others, after her death and after 1995, her personal life was open for the public to scrutinize. Those things that composed her living image as a female academic celebrity – her comments concerning the Jews and Eichmann, her friends with whom she reunited, her romanticism, and her inconsistencies – were utilized as material for arguments against her.

⁵⁹ “‘What Remains? The Language Remains’: A Conversation with Günther Gaus” in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 24.

See also: Philosophy Overdose. “Hannah Arendt (1964) - What Remains? (Full Interview with Günther Gaus).” YouTube video recording of 1964 interview. 0:43:40 to 0:43:51.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVSRJC4KAiE&t=129s>.

Part II: A Passionate Affair

1995: The Butterfly Effect of an Affair

1995 was the year that Arendt, her image, her influence, and the Arendtian academic world were turned upside down. Though Elisabeth Young-Bruehl first explained in her 1982 biography, *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World*, that Arendt and Heidegger had an affair in her youth, saying, “Arendt’s relationship with Heidegger had, abruptly and frighteningly, ended her youth, her innocence,” the affair was largely undiscussed in both academia and the press until 1995.⁶⁰ Elzbita Ettinger’s book, *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*, published in 1995, used correspondence letters and additional dramatization to reveal that their half-century-long relationship persisted despite Heidegger’s open Nazism and throughout Arendt’s unsparing analysis of Nazism, totalitarianism, and their unthinking sycophants. This book not only sparked controversy, but it fundamentally changed the landscape of Arendtian studies and the lens through which people study Arendt and interpret her writings, in ways that Young-Bruehl’s 500-page biography did not.

Ettinger’s Hannah and Martin

1995 marks the beginning of a new retrospective understanding of Arendt while also marking a rebirth of Arendt in the sphere of public interest. This new Arendt is a literary chameleon, open for interpretation, wholly separated from the Arendt that was known to have lived from 1906-1975 because that Arendt’s image was not tainted by an affair that could discredit her entire life’s work. Notably, the public image of Arendt during her lifetime omitted her relationship with Heidegger. The breaking of this story fills the gaps left by this omission, filling them with confusion, contradictions, and unanswered questions. Ettinger’s book was the first of its kind to expose Arendt and Heidegger’s affair to the world and, by exposing what had been in the dark, bring to light an unrecognizable and incomprehensible Arendt that would later become subject to reinterpretation and reinvention to account for the unresolved tension between

⁶⁰ Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World*. (1982; repr., New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), 51.

Arendt's ideas and Arendt's actions, once so vehemently defended to be essential characteristics of the human condition, that is, thought, reason, and responsibility.

Elżbieta Ettinger and Hannah Arendt had similar lives, experiences, and thoughts concerning life during and after World War II, which can explain her interest in writing her biography. Pictured to the right,⁶¹ Ettinger was a Jewish-Polish woman who escaped from the Warsaw ghetto and worked for



Figure 3: Elżbieta Ettinger

the Polish resistance in World War II, during which time she risked her life to learn English and complete her education in an underground school.⁶² She studied English and Germany philology at Jagellonian and Warsaw Universities and “had a lifelong fascination with history and social justice.”⁶³ As she explains in a project proposal before drafting the book,

I share with Arendt some experiences which permit me to understand her better than many others who do not and who, therefore, can write about her from the “outside” only, not from the “inside” as I can... My life has been changed forever by the Nazis, as was hers; I chose exile (though 30 years later) as did she, and approximately at the same age, the mid-thirties; I am cut off from the Polish culture in which I was born, raised, and educated as she was from the German; I write, as did she, in a foreign tongue, and as did Arendt, live a “life in translation.”⁶⁴

Setting aside Arendt's affair with a Nazi, Ettinger and Arendt had a lot in common. Ettinger had been a Polish resistance fighter, novelist, government diplomat, and avid socialist. Further, much like Arendt, Ettinger used writing to express her political convictions: her novel *The Kindergarten* tells a fictionalized story of her own experiences during the war in Poland. Ettinger had an impressive resumé which reflected active participation in politics and a strong internal

⁶¹ Brent, Frances. “Arendt's Affair.” *Tablet Magazine*, May 30, 2013.

⁶² Long, Tom. “Author, teacher Ettinger dies at 80.” *The Boston Globe*, March 22, 2005.

⁶³ Long, Tom. “Author, teacher Ettinger dies at 80.” *The Boston Globe*, March 22, 2005.

⁶⁴ Brent, Frances. “Arendt's Affair.” *Tablet Magazine*, May 30, 2013.

contemplative life. After the war, she worked for the Polish government in the Ministry of Export and as an interpreter.⁶⁵ After struggling with similar questions of totalitarian control in Soviet controlled Poland, she immigrated to America considering the Soviet Union's false promises of socialism.

According to an old friend, Frances Brent, Ettinger did not originally intend to publish an investigatory report on Arendt that was limited to her affair. Instead, Ettinger had intended to write a full and extensive biography of Arendt, what would have been the second of its kind after Young-Bruehl's in 1982. As Brent notes, "[she] saw an opportunity to explore the complications of moral judgement and personal behavior as it intersected with her own private history and with the larger history of her time." Ettinger's primary motivation was to understand Arendt as a person rather than simply an intellectual, which introduced to the world an Arendt that the world had not yet seen. Though certainly, Young-Bruehl's biography included biographical facts about Arendt, Ettinger wished to understand her in a deeper sense. In doing so, Ettinger revealed a side of Arendt that the world had not yet seen, one where the world-renowned Dr. Arendt, who wrote *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and several other books, displayed "unquestioning generosity, loyalty, and love" to a known Nazi by paying tribute to him for his 80th birthday party, exonerating his anti-Semitism and membership in the Nazi Party from 1933-1945, distorting it as "ten short hectic months," which was likely an uncritical repetition of what Heidegger told her in 1950, during their first reunion after the war had ended.⁶⁶ Ettinger's description of Arendt personalized her as an intelligent, confident, and independent woman, yet also as a romantic, naïve, and vulnerable girl. This personalization of Arendt displays her weaknesses as well as her strengths. Ettinger juxtaposed these with the impersonal description of her bad arguments as well as her good arguments that are scattered throughout newspapers or book reviews from 1951 onward. Unfortunately, as Ettinger's health declined throughout the 90s, the scope of her research and the size of her book on Arendt diminished into the 132-page final product *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*.

⁶⁵ Brent, Frances. "Arendt's Affair." *Tablet Magazine*, May 30, 2013.

⁶⁶ Arendt, Hannah. "Martin Heidegger at 80." *The New York Review of Books*, Oct 21, 1971.



Figure 4: Hannah Arendt circa 1924.



Figure 5: Martin Heidegger circa 1924.

In its 132 short pages, Ettinger tells the scandalous story of their affair, their falling out, and their reunion, characterized by a girlish crush, a naïve trust, and an unwavering loyalty despite sufficient knowledge to indicate the foolishness of it all. Hannah, who was only eighteen at the time, met the great Dr. Martin Heidegger, known as the “magician of Messkirch,” where he was originally from, in 1924.⁶⁷ Pictured above, Hannah⁶⁸ was a young and innocent girl who attended the University of Marburg without the intention of falling for her professor,⁶⁹ who is also pictured above. Martin was 35, married, and had two sons. The professor was a protégé of philosophy and was predicted to be one of the greatest philosophers of the century. Likely because of his magnitude and his “magic” as a lecturer, Hannah quickly fell in love with her professor. Ettinger speculates that Martin, because of her “exotic looks,” her girlish essence, and her submissiveness, similarly fell for his young student.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Wolin, Richard. “Hannah and the Magician: An Affair to Remember,” *New Republic*, Oct 9, 1995, 29.

⁶⁸ Simkin, John. “Hannah Arendt.” *Spartacus Educational* (blog).

⁶⁹ From the Archive Messkirch. See: “A Funny Thing Happened to Philosophy (on its way to the deepest depths),” July 25, 2017.

⁷⁰ Ettinger, Elżbieta. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 15;

If this was intended as a novel and not as a serious attempt at a partial biography, Martin would be the abusive and manipulative boyfriend, and Hannah, his innocent young lover, who was too naïve, girlish, and insecure herself to recognize his toxicity. Ettinger describes Martin as having "a forceful, self-centered nature and a capacity for ruthlessness and cunning... an insecure man in constant need of worship and adulation... that he was capable of possessing a proud woman already known for her fierce independence was deeply gratifying."⁷¹ Additionally, as his young lover, Arendt was keen to find acceptance from him. Ettinger notes, "intuition and experience told her that modesty and mute idolization pleased and excited him... Yet above all else it may have been her own inhibition and insecurity, aggravated by Heidegger's behavior, his likes and dislikes, that *trapped* her."⁷² Heidegger thus took advantage of her insecurity, her innocence, and her naivety for personal and sexual gain. After Heidegger abandoned Arendt in 1929 and sent her to another university, "Not even the security of Blücher's love [her second husband from 1940 – 1970] entirely restored Arendt's self-confidence... Heidegger reenforced the 'slavish' streak in her. An independent and unconventional woman, Arendt still saw men, in personal life, in their traditional role."⁷³ Further, Ettinger notes that "to live meant for her to love him: 'I would have lost my right to live had I lost my love for you... 'I love you, as I have the very first day – you know this, and I have always known this... and with God's will / I will love you more after death.'"⁷⁴ Ettinger's Hannah was nothing like "The Great Hannah Arendt," whose strong public image afforded her respect, admiration, and even the title of "hero." She was instead a tragic figure. She was a young girl, trapped in a toxic relationship, trapped in her own need for Heidegger, and perpetually heartbroken after he left her in 1929.

With Heidegger, Arendt was not only personally vulnerable and unguarded to him as lovers are to one another, she was intellectually vulnerable to him, and she sacrificed truth for the sake of love. He was in this sense, the prime "exception" in Hannah's life, both her private life and her

Letters 1925-1975: Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, ed. Ursula Ludz. trans. Andrew Shields. (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc, 2004), 4.

⁷¹ Ettinger, Elżbieta. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 17.

⁷² Ettinger, Elżbieta. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 19 (emphasis mine).

⁷³ Ettinger, Elżbieta. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 42-43.

⁷⁴ Ettinger, Elżbieta. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 30.

public life, in which her image as a public intellectual and a guide for maneuvering through the trauma of postwar Europe solidified her as anything but the Hannah in Ettinger's book. The most significant example of this is how Martin was able to convince Hannah in 1929 and in 1950 that every accusation of his anti-Semitism and involvement in both the Nazi party and the Nazi ideology, was simply slander. Ettinger notes how easily Hannah believed him and how simple it was for her to disregard the use of evidence, facts, and reason. Unlike many of Heidegger's students, who abandoned all support for him after he adamantly refused to denounce Nazism and the Nazi Party, Arendt never seemed to even suggest he ought to, blindly trusting him and remaining unquestionably loyal to him.⁷⁵ The reasons for this are undoubtedly due to her love for him, even though she was familiar with Martin's pathological dishonesty and how Martin made her feel "belittled, manipulated, and cheated."⁷⁶ There was every reason to believe in the impossibility of a woman like Hannah being so devoted to a man like Martin. This may be precisely why the revelations of Ettinger were so scandalous and created a chain reaction of various interpretations of the unbelievable relationship.

Initial Responses and Reputation Death: Rethinking Hannah Arendt

Hannah Arendt's reputation death took forms in many ways after the exposure of her affair with Martin Heidegger and subsequent reunion and defense of him in Ettinger's book, but perhaps the most important aspect of her reputation death was the movement of rethinking the philosopher's works. Given that most of her reputation was built from her ability to think and act in the world, the revelations of her hypocrisy wreaked havoc on her professional image and brought to question everything that she believed in and thought.

Many considered Ettinger's book as a "smoking gun," and the beginning of yet another rigorous debate on Arendt's moral and intellectual integrity. Questions concerning Arendt's reputation were certainly not limited to how her philosophical thought and actions contradict, but rather also how a *person* who seems to believe in such principles as her philosophical works purport can have the capacity to have an affair with a Nazi, especially after discovering to a

⁷⁵ Ettinger, Elżbieta. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 8.

⁷⁶ Ettinger, Elżbieta. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 28, 22.

sufficient extent the horrors of the Holocaust. After 1995, previous criticisms of Arendt's remarks concerning the Jews in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* resurfaced, specifically within the context of her apathy towards Jews and her love for Heidegger. As Richard Wolin notes in his article "Hannah and the Magician: An affair to remember," "Hannah Arendt did not only have a Jewish problem. She also had a Heidegger problem. And they were, in many respects, intertwined with each other." Referencing the double paradox of her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, specifically as explicated by her most emphatic critics, the revelation of her affair with Heidegger may serve to address the inconsistencies, irresponsible research, and flippant remarks of her book. Along with Wolin, many wondered what the role was that Heidegger played in her thoughts as she wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: did she defend Eichmann to defend Heidegger? One critic notes how, after Ettinger's book, the world "[cringes] in puzzlement when we learn that Arendt remained devoted to an anti-Semitic creep..."⁷⁷ Notably, Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Holocaust survivor, and famed author responded to Ettinger's book saying, "The book shows that Arendt was so arrogant that she thought she alone could decide who should be forgiven and who should not... I'm not so sure her moral stature will remain intact."⁷⁸ Additionally, Ismar Schorsch, who was chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America from 1986 to 2006, fiercely responded that "Arendt's reputation will not recover... Her defense of Heidegger, when she knew better, is hard to forgive."⁷⁹

While most responses to Ettinger's book pertained to Arendt herself, either astonishment at their correspondence or indictment of Arendt's hypocrisy, some criticized Ettinger for her portrayal of Arendt. Critics of Ettinger claim that she portrayed Arendt as a kind of victim to Heidegger's manipulation, ruthlessness, and cunning, and thus reduced Arendt's level of culpability in their relationship. In her book, through Arendt was only 18 when she first met Heidegger, who was 35, married, and a father at the time, she is characterized as a naïve girl who had a girlish crush, that quickly turned into an affair, which left an indelible mark on her, as all first loves are known to do. The girlish crush that Ettinger portrays never left Hannah in Ettinger's description, even after her successes. Meanwhile, Ettinger described Heidegger as a man who

⁷⁷ Stokes Jr., David Louis. "Arendt, Heidegger and forgiveness." *Providence Journal*, Dec 9, 1995.

⁷⁸ Honan, William. "Book on philosopher's life stirs scholarly debate over Legacy. *The New York Times*, Nov 5, 1995.

⁷⁹ Honan, William. "Book on philosopher's life stirs scholarly debate over Legacy. *The New York Times*, Nov 5, 1995.

simultaneously took advantage of a young girl and claimed to reveal to her her true self, who she was, and what her purpose was. Heidegger not only took advantage of her as a young girl but as a human being. He dominated her, defined her, dictated the rules of the relationship, and forced her to be submissive and passive. This portrayal of Hannah and Martin and their dynamic created a stir of criticism. Not only were Arendtian scholars shocked to read about the details of the affair itself, as they disrupted and confused their ideas of Arendt as an upright philosopher, but also it confused their understanding of Arendt as a fiercely independent, resolute, and strong woman.

The general initial response to Ettinger's groundbreaking book from journalists was shock. The revelation of Arendt's complicated, contradictory, and controversial affair, especially given her political and philosophical works on Nazism, totalitarianism, and their unthinking sycophants, created more questions than answers. The astonishment that follows such inconsistencies between Arendt's words and her personal life produced ironic humor. As one critic notes, notes,

A Jew loving a Nazi is not my idea of a comedic premise and yet a little piece of me giggles. The affair is so vitally human, so quintessentially us, that once the shock fades a little smile of recognition comes onto the face. Of course, we cannot all be geniuses, but given half a chance we all can be fools.⁸⁰

The banality of a toxic relationship with a Nazi is certainly as laughable as it is tragic, as it seems to end to Arendt's public image as a serious intellectual or even discredit her life's works. Earlier in the same article, Cohen expresses this transition which seems more like a reputation death: "As a 20th century philosopher, as a fiercely independent woman, she had few equals. She is grist for seminars and doctoral theses – and now, for just plain gossip." The great Hannah Arendt, the philosopher for the times, and the guide so often used to maneuver through the difficulties of the postwar world, was suddenly reduced to scandal and trivial gossip.

⁸⁰ Cohen, Richard. "Crazy Love - There's No Explaining It." *Press of Atlantic City*, Oct 11, 1995.

Part III: Hannah, the Protagonists

Reinventing Hannah Arendt post-1995

After 1995 Hannah Arendt became a potential protagonist, whose life was open to interpretation, recreation, and reinvention, much unlike the public image she had as a thinker and a guide for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Ettinger's book itself was a recreation of Arendt, an attempt to understand her as a person, and an alternate image of her as a person, opposed to the public persona she had while she was alive. The creation of Hannah Arendt as a protagonist were similarly attempts to make sense of the paradox of a love affair between a Jew and a Nazi, Arendt and Heidegger, and Hannah and Martin. Immediately after Ettinger's groundbreaking book, Arendt's role for society as a thinker shifted to a potential protagonist, whose mysterious biography served as raw material for novels, plays, and films. Specifically, the scandal, banality, and ubiquity of her affair offered to artists and critiques alike, perfect material for the recreation and reinterpretation of Arendt. Though Ettinger had intended on writing an extensive, full-length biography of Arendt, her *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger* was a fractal image of Arendt's life, a microscope into the most scandalous part of her life, which lends to artists an unfinished story, one that they can create with literary liberty.

Reflecting the paradoxical elements of the affair and of these stories, these Arendtian protagonists often fall outside of the categories of protagonist and antagonist. Artists utilized Arendt and Dinesen's philosophy of storytelling to make sense of the nonsensical. As noted in the beginning of this thesis, Arendt had a deep appreciation of storytelling and often engaged in storytelling to make sense of the postwar world, which was for her and for everyone, nonsensical and unbelievable. Though, Arendt herself might have cringed at the idea of her private life, particularly the most "embarrassing problem" of her life – her love for Nazi Heidegger – being published and refurbished into plays, films, and graphic novels, the kind of storytelling that these artists in the 21st century engage in reflect the same type of storytelling that she admired and engaged in. At its core, this type of storytelling involves meaning making as the reconciliation of imagination and reality, and, in these cases, to reconcile the paradoxical with literary creativity. Specifically, "...storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it, that it

brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are..."⁸¹ This engagement of Arendtian storytelling to evaluate Arendt creates a dynamic of Arendt against herself, specifically, Arendt's public life against her private life. This dynamic forces these Arendtian protagonists outside of the strict category of protagonist and creates quasi-protagonistic, quasi-antagonistic anti-heroes.

The recreations of Arendt, which will be explored within the context of various themes, take their form in a wide range of mediums, from plays and operas to films and graphic novels. The first work which engages literature to explore the confusion rendered from Ettinger's novel is a play entitled *Hannah and Martin*, written by Kate Foder in 2004. While her play functions as a memory play and has multiple dimensions that follow Arendt through different times in her life, the main plot follows a middle-aged Arendt after her reconciliation with Martin and during her efforts to rebuild his academic career which had been shattered in the wake of 1945. The second source is a play and opera entitled *Die Banalität der Liebe (The Banality of Love)*. The play was written by Savyon Liebrecht in 2007 and the opera was composed in 2018 by Ella Milch-Sheriff. This opera, provided to me by the composer, Ella Milch-Sheriff, follows an elderly Arendt as she traverses through her memories. Like Foder's play, Milch-Sheriff's opera functions as a memory play, with many dimensions of time yet one primary narrative in 2002 with a 96-year-old Arendt. In 2012, Margarethe von Trotta filmed a historical drama of Hannah Arendt that explores a Hannah Arendt who is plagued with trauma and confusion in postwar New York. This film by von Trotta endeavors to take a personal look at the philosopher as she attends Eichmann's trial, writes her infamous *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and loses social favor in the public and close friends in her private life. Finally, in 2018, cartoonist Ken Krimstein from *The New Yorker* created a graphic novel called *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. This graphic novel recreates Arendt's biography as a story of a spectacular woman whose life was a series of escapes, first from Berlin, then from France, then, finally, from the clutches of Martin Heidegger.

These Arendtian protagonists serve various purposes and themes. These purposes serve to make her accessible and lead discussions about her ordinariness or banality, love as a disruption of ethical commitments, and to pronounce a verdict concerning her, namely whether she was a

⁸¹ Arendt, Hannah, *Men in Dark Times*. (1968; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 105.

hero or a villain. These themes are indicative of new ways of interpreting Arendt and new ways of understanding human nature, love, and even her own philosophy. Arendt as protagonist rendered her more a human than a historical figure, more relatable than legendary, and more banal than extraordinary. Arendt, the protagonist often becomes a subject in a conversation about love, not as a virtue, but as a disruption of ethical commitments and a cause of failure to remain constant in one's convictions. In these works, Arendt as a protagonist is put in a position of centrality, from which the audience can determine her successes, failures, virtues, and vices. From placing her on the pedestal of human morality in chaos to placing her into the same glass box that Adolf Eichmann was in his trial in 1960, each rendition of Hannah Arendt as protagonist makes a claim on her, either as a hero or a villain.

Hannah's Literary Predecessors

The proliferation of Arendtian protagonists after 1995 did not, however, arise as the first of their kind. Specifically, there are two of Hannah's literary predecessors that must be mentioned as the literary predecessors of the many protagonists discussed in this section: Uwe Johnson's Countess Seydlitz and Richard Cohen's Erika Hertz. These protagonists provide a contrast between before 1995 and after, as they reflect an entirely different side of Arendt, namely Arendt's image as public intellectual whose personal life had not yet been exposed.

The purpose of Countess Seydlitz, and by extension of Hannah Arendt, in Uwe Johnson's novel was to serve as a guide for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which reflects the role she played in academia and the world at large as she wrote her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Using literature to abstract and better articulate meaning after the war, Uwe Johnson wrote *Anniversaries* as a novel structured by life of the protagonist, Gesine Cressphal, which corresponds to the history of Nazi and postwar Germany. *Anniversaries* was published between 1970 and 1983 in four volume installments, comprising nearly 1,700 pages. In the novel, Countess Seydlitz is the intellectual mentor and personal educator of Gesine. Gesine, like postwar Germany, is haunted by the horrors of the Holocaust and entirely guilt-ridden because she cannot find a way to separate collective German guilt from her own biography: "I am the child of a father who knew of the systematic killing of the Jews... I belong to a national group

that has slaughtered another group in numbers that are too high.”⁸² Arendt, both in real life politics and in Johnson’s novel, served to bridge the gap between the public life and the private life, thus allowing the philosophy of her *Human Condition* to manifest as public issues are made accessible for more individuals.⁸³ Specifically in Johnson’s novel *Anniversaries*, Arendt “exemplifies... how a public intellectual or, in her specific case, a public philosopher can reach beyond an academic audience to challenge society’s conventional certitudes about matters as diverse as politics, history, and social justice.”⁸⁴ Through Johnson’s novel, therefore, Arendt and her philosophy were made accessible by way of analogy, albeit for an audience of academics and intellectually curious individuals who would read Johnson’s 1,700 page masterpiece.

More explicitly, Erika Hertz reflects Hannah Arendt’s public image, her role for society, and her philosophy. Richard Cohen took literary liberties to create *An Admirable Woman* as a fictional autobiography of Hannah Arendt. Published in 1983, one year after Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s extensive biography, it is structured by her life in two parts entitled “Europe” and “America.” Cohen’s protagonist endeavors “to set straight from where I come and what my life has been,” saying further that she is “indifferent whether this account is credited with being whole truth or merely partisan rendition.”⁸⁵ *An Admirable Woman* frames Arendt’s life by specific foci: her intellectual fame, the development of her legendary public image in America, her family and childhood, the struggles of her marriage, and her Jewish faith. The tone of Cohen’s book is indicative of a keen appreciation of Arendt and a clear interpretation of her as a hero. One review wrote how the book shows “how American civilization is divined by a newcomer of genius.”⁸⁶

Despite a clear intention to create linkages between his protagonist and Hannah Arendt, Erika’s life contradicts Hannah’s in important ways, which are indicative of reinterpretation and reimagining Arendt as not simply a legendary public intellectual but as a hero. Erika’s Jewish upbringing, strong Jewish identity, and religious faith, reinterpret Arendt as a female Jewish hero,

⁸² Johnson, Uwe. *Anniversaries: From a Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl*. trans. Damion Searls. (1970, 1971, 1973, 1983; repr., New York: New York Review Books, 2018), 208.

⁸³ Boos, Sonja. “Hannah Arendt,” in *Speaking the Unspeakable in Postwar Germany: Toward a Public Discourse on the Holocaust*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁸⁴ Boos, Sonja. “Hannah Arendt,” in *Speaking the Unspeakable in Postwar Germany: Toward a Public Discourse on the Holocaust*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 87.

⁸⁵ Cohen, Arthur. *An Admirable Woman*. (Boston Massachusetts: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1983), 4.

⁸⁶ Cohen, Arthur. *An Admirable Woman*. (Boston Massachusetts: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1983), back cover.

despite the historical Arendt's secular beliefs and despite the many accusations of her being a "self-hating Jew" after the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Unlike Arendt, Erika always possessed interest and expertise in politics and current affairs so much so that her father sought after her interpretation of events. Further, Erika was trained as a historian not as a philosopher, a fact which reflects Cohen's appreciation of *Origins*, despite academics' general dismissal of Arendt's lack of historicity. One review noted how *An Admirable Woman* "is, in short, a novel about a purposeful life – wherein the power of a singular mind grows into wisdom and wisdom into heroism."⁸⁷

Whether the predecessors of Arendtian protagonists were fictionalized as mentors of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or heroines of genius, these protagonists demarcate a decisive contrast between Arendt's public image before 1995 and after. From a 1,700-page masterpiece to graphic novels, films, and plays, Arendt and her philosophy became more accessible. While both Johnson and Cohen mythologize Arendt in their respective novels, the plays, films, and works of literature to come post-1995 serve to humanize the philosopher as they highlight her failures, struggles, and banality. Though heroic imagery is occasionally utilized to emphasize Arendt's contributions to political philosophy or history, protagonists after 1995 are either riddled with uncertain open-endedness or are themselves a testament of guilt.

Experience and Memory

Paying homage to Arendt, who strongly believed, "all thinking comes from experience," each of these sources takes advantage of Arendt's memory to make sense of her and her philosophy. Foder's *Hannah and Martin* is structured as a memory play that takes the form of an autobiographical defense of her decision to help Heidegger. It is structured by two dimensions to reflect the process of actively thinking; the first is in the current time, which is set in 1950, and the second comprises Arendt's thoughts and flashbacks. In both dimensions, Hannah's real life and her memories, she is in a state of anxiety, insecurity, and vulnerability, which are themes explored in various ways in various situations throughout the play. Similarly, Ella Milch-Sheriff's opera, *Die Banalität der Liebe*, is structured as a memory opera. The present and the past are intermingled

⁸⁷ Cohen, Arthur. *An Admirable Woman*. (Boston Massachusetts: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1983), back cover.

while a 96-year-old Arendt from 1975, the year of her death, relives her experiences as an 18-year-old student at Marburg University in 1924. Arendt's memories are visual represented as dozens of Arendtian figures who all wear the same gray suit, smoke the same cigarettes, and distractedly look beyond with the same contemplative expression. These Arendtian figures are omnipresent in the opera as shown in the image below. The opera begins with dramatic percussion and a rotating Upper West Side apartment, outside of which several Arendts sit, inside of which more Arendts form a cluster standing, and around which 18-year-old Hannah rides her bicycle. These Arendts are 96-year-old Hannah Arendt's memories, which support, criticize, or simply watch both 18-year-old Hannah and 96-year-old Arendt.

The structures of both *Hannah and Martin* and *Die Banalität der Liebe* are non-linear and therefore focus less on specific events but rather their significance in either shaping the person of Hannah Arendt or informing the audience as they ostensibly contemplate the verdict. While Foder uses flashbacks, frame narratives, and memories, Ella Milch-Sheriff used the act of remembering and Arendt's memories themselves to make sense of Hannah. As pictured below, these Arendtian memories are depicted as Arendtian figures.⁸⁸ Unlike Foder's play, in Milch-Sheriff's opera the audience both joins Arendt in her thinking and remembering and joins her own memories as they



Figure 6: Ella Milch-Sheriff's Arendtian memories.

⁸⁸ *Die Banalität Der Liebe*, composed by Ella Milch-Sheriff, Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany, 2018.

pronounce, along with all other characters, a verdict on the philosopher. Both *Hannah and Martin* and *Die Banalität der Liebe* are reflective and pseudo-autobiographical and in their own way offer dialogue directly from Hannah Arendt to offer explanations for the implausibility of their continued relationship.

Conversely, Margarethe von Trotta's film *Hannah Arendt* and Ken Krimstein's graphic novel *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt* utilize linear narratives, memory, and her own thought processes to make sense of her. While *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt* presents itself as an autobiography, *Hannah Arendt* uses flashbacks, which always relate to Heidegger and their relationship. Krimstein's graphic novel is mostly written in first person, from the perspective of Arendt herself. The introduction, entitled "The Sorrows of Young Hannah," tells the story of her childhood and the beginning of her affair with Heidegger. Part one of the book is "Hannah's First Escape," which describes her escape from the Gestapo and from Germany from 1906 to 1933. Part two tells the story of "Hannah's Second Escape" from Paris to America from 1933 to 1949. Part three tells the story of "Hannah's Third Escape" from the personal and philosophical clutches of Martin Heidegger. The timeline of Hannah's third escape is not strictly chronological because this section does not portray her escape from Heidegger in any literal sense. Meanwhile, von Trotta's film *Hannah Arendt* is filmed sequentially and uses dramatization, music, and close ups to highlight Arendt's thoughts or feelings as Eichmann's trial progresses, she writes her report for *The New Yorker*, and receives heavy backlash for her positions. Both works, the graphic novel and the film, offer a perspective on Arendt and answers concerning her personal qualities, her virtues, and her vices.

Accessible Philosophy

Arendt in the form of a protagonist, both before and after 1995, renders her biography and her philosophy more accessible to a wider audience. This is evident most clearly by the wide range of source types which recreate her, specifically films, graphic novels, and plays. In other words, Arendt's biography, which had been previously only relevant for Arendtian scholars, historians, and philosophers, became relevant for a wider audience.

Accessibility to both Hannah Arendt's life and her philosophy is made possible most clearly through the medium in which filmmakers, playwrights, and cartoonists create their protagonists. To make a historical drama about Hannah Arendt, as Margarethe von Trotta did in 2012, would therefore be one of the best ways to present the story of her life and share her philosophy to a wide scope of audiences. A graphic novel, due to its ease of reading, enjoyability, and casual form would similarly render Arendt's life more accessible to an even wider audience. As a cartoonist, Krimstein's career has been directed towards bringing current events, political unrest, polarity, and various difficult topics into the sphere of whimsical art. This is precisely what Krimstein did in his graphic novel as he simplified Arendt, her ideas, and her philosophy, brought Hannah, her biography, and her letters to life, and used creative liberty to create a fictional Arendt that is specially curated to respond to issues in the 21st century. When asked of his motivation to take on this project, Krimstein responded saying,

We also now live in an age of podcasts, and I listen and am learning a lot, and Hannah started coming up on my radar. A publisher was interested in my work, and basically said, you can do whatever you want; show us some ideas. One of them was to take a complex essay or something like chess and make it accessible through pictures and words. Philosophy was like that; it was a puzzle.⁸⁹

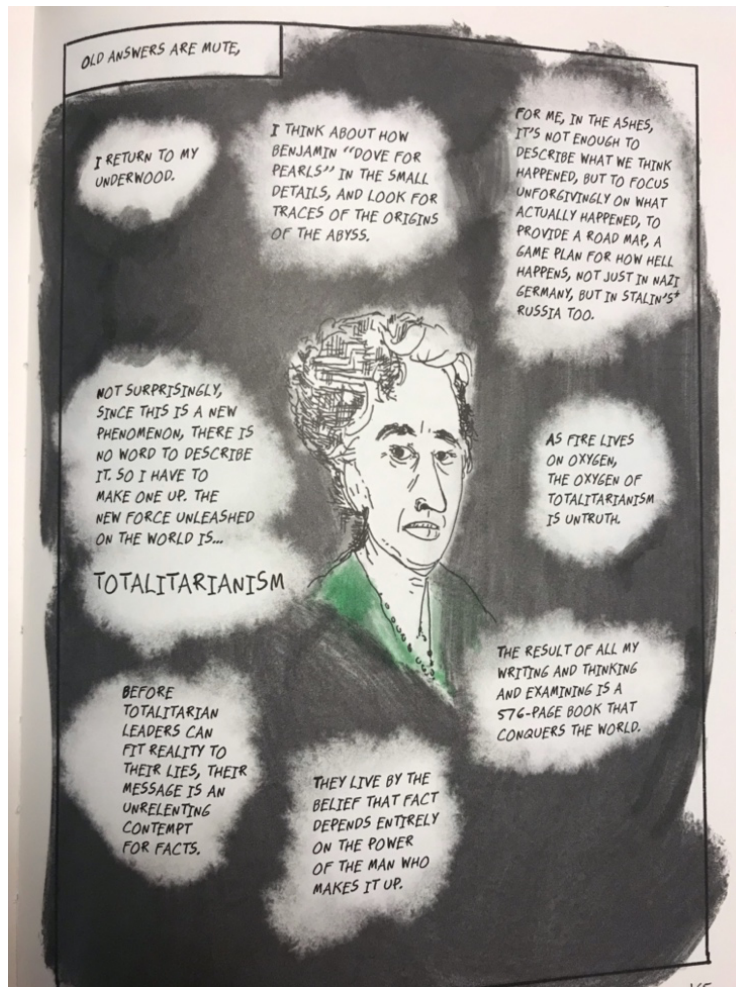
Treating Arendt like a puzzle by picking her apart and placing her together to make cohesion and understanding of her confusing and contradictory life possible was one of the most important ways that Krimstein made Arendt accessible to the public.

Margarethe von Trotta's 2012 film *Hannah Arendt* afforded access into Hannah Arendt's life and portrayed the political philosopher true to her memory. Richard J. Bernstein, who had been a friend of Arendt, her husband, and many of the characters in the film, and who had often visited her apartment in the Upper West Side of New York, notes, "There are things that are revealed in this movie that only Arendt scholars would know and might not even have caught..."⁹⁰ Bernstein's memory and experience with the philosopher attest to Von Trotta's remarkable faithfulness to detail. For Bernstein, the dynamic of Hannah and Heinrich's marriage and

⁸⁹ Gronvall, Andrea. "The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt tells the story of the philosopher's life and thoughts in pictures." *Chicago Reader*. Nov 16, 2018.

⁹⁰ The New School. "Richard Bernstein on the Film 'Hannah Arendt' | The New School." Sep 27, 2013. YouTube video. 2:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbFOD0oLnps&t=419s>.

specifically their nicknames – Hannah calls Heinrich “Stups” – Hannah’s mannerisms, her cynicism, her humor, and her fierce stubbornness was faithful to her memory. This film is one of the more popular adaptations of Hannah Arendt’s life. *Hannah Arendt* won a plethora of film awards, especially regarding Barbara Sukowa’s portrayal of Hannah Arendt. “Hannah was really like that,” Bernstein says. Additionally, he estimated that 75% of the dialogue of the film was authentic, coming either from letters or lectures.⁹¹ That such faithfulness to detail, from biographies, to letters, to personal memories, should take form as an award-winning film attests to a posthumous image of Hannah Arendt, whose private life is open for discussion and whose public image can once again be open for scrutiny for an audience beyond academia.



The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt introduces a Hannah Arendt who is palatable yet philosophically dense, literary yet historical, historical yet specifically useful for the modern age. The palatability of Arendt’s philosophy in Krimstein’s graphic novel is made possible through the medium in which he writes, namely, whimsical cartoons, short textboxes, and diagrams. Seen in the cartoon inserted to the left⁹² is a summary of *Origins of Totalitarianism* limited to one page and eight text bubbles. Krimstein puts Arendt’s 576-page book into simplified and casual text, describing

⁹¹ The New School. “Richard Bernstein on the Film ‘Hannah Arendt’ | The New School.” Sep 27, 2013. YouTube video. 5:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbFOD0oLnps&t=419s>.

⁹² Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 165.

it as “a game plan for how hell happens,” and her cartoon explains the essence of totalitarian propaganda using a single simile: “As fire lives on oxygen, the oxygen of totalitarianism is untruth.”⁹³ Relating Arendt to public affairs is an important aspect of the accessibility of her and her philosophy. The usefulness of Arendt’s philosophy for modern times provides a context in which practically anyone can understand Arendt.

The Humanity of Hannah Arendt

In clear contrast to Arendt’s literary predecessors, Erika Hertz and the Countess Seydlitz, the Arendtian protagonists of the 20th century exemplified ordinariness and relatability. In a positive sense, these Arendtian protagonists suggest that Arendt, as a type of hero, who did contribute to much of our understanding of the human condition, political philosophy, and totalitarianism, is possible to become. Conversely, these Arendtian protagonists also might suggest that Arendt was in fact no one special, whose flaws and ordinariness betrayed her extraordinary writings. These protagonists introduced a normal, human Arendt by having shared human experiences, flaws, and even trauma.

Krimstein’s *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt* was made in part for the purpose of making “The Great Hannah Arendt” more human. Krimstein’s introduction is clear in this regard as he prefaces, “What follows is a story of a life of a person called Hannah Arendt. Born into a lost world in a lost country in another era, a refugee philosopher thinker whose name may sound familiar.”⁹⁴ Hannah, though she is in Krimstein’s words “arguably the greatest philosopher of the

⁹³ Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 165.

⁹⁴ Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 1.

twentieth century," is first and foremost "human."⁹⁵ In telling the story of her life, Krimstein begins with the story of a little girl who had suffered discrimination as a Jew, whose first loss was her father at age seven, who went through the awkwardness of puberty, and whose insecurities and anxieties seemed to dominate her.

Krimstein's emphasis on Arendt's humanity is nonetheless coupled with highlights on her uniqueness. Krimstein highlights the ways that Arendt was human, he also found ways to highlight her uniqueness. Yet despite having these all-too-human personal descriptions, Arendt was different. By the age of 14, young Hannah had already read all of Immanuel Kant's books, from the three Critiques to more obscure works, and was teaching herself ancient Greek. Though this highlights her uniqueness, she is nonetheless a little girl, who has an imaginative and creative mind and puts on mini-plays and dresses up in bed sheets for togas (as seen in Krimstein's



⁹⁵ Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 1.

cartoon at the top right⁹⁶). On the one hand, Krimstein's introduction could have been written about any young child or teenage girl, who goes through puberty, feels awkward, and feels insecure about their body. On the other hand, Arendt was very unlike her peers. The cartoon inserted above⁹⁷ highlights Krimstein's dual description of Arendt that affirms her humanness yet highlights how she did not quite fit in. In Krimstein's graphic novel, Hannah goes through puberty and has insecurity about her body image. Yet in other ways, Hannah is confident, resolute, and a leader: she organized a strike against her teachers who "are too dumb," and could not teach her. Despite this confidence, the pointing fingers, which each yell, "Raus!" ("Out!"), illustrate, young Hannah is ostracized by her friends and punished by her teachers.

Von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt* portrayed a side of Hannah Arendt that was plagued with trauma in postwar New York. This portrayal is much more intimate than Arendt herself would have ever allowed. One film review from *The Candidate Journal*, a peer-reviewed online publication from NYU, notes how the film subverts Arendt's preference for privacy by drawing "out the deep personal pains and friendships that [she] herself refused to discuss..."⁹⁸ Von Trotta portrayed Hannah's feelings as the Eichmann trial brought up trauma from her past, specifically Hannah's experiences in the Gurs internment camp in southwestern France. She was separated from her husband, Heinrich, and sent to the Gurs internment camp in 1940, shortly after France fell to Nazi Germany. After Hannah agreed with *The New Yorker* to report on the *Eichmann* trial, the following conversation ensued between Hannah's husband, Heinrich and herself:

Heinrich: Do you really have to do this? You know how shocked we were when we heard the awful news from Europe. How destroyed you were?

Hannah: I'd never forgive myself if I didn't take this opportunity... You told everyone how smart and brave I was to escape from Gurs...

Heinrich: And so you were, my love.

Hannah: Many women stayed for fear their husbands wouldn't find them if they would leave.

Heinrich: I'd have found you anywhere.

Hannah: Maybe not... [the more we waited] more and more women let themselves go, stopped combing their hair... Stopped washing themselves... Just lay there on their straw

⁹⁶ Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 17.

⁹⁷ Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 18.

⁹⁸ Datema, Jessica. "Film Review – Hannah Arendt." *The Candidate Journal*.

sacks. I tried to encourage them [to escape]. Sometimes I was strict, sometimes friendly. But then one evening, it had rained all day and the straw sacks were falling apart. I suddenly lost my courage. I was so tired. So tired... that I wanted to leave the world that I so loved... And in that moment, I saw you in front of me. How you'd look for me, and not find me.⁹⁹

The intimacy of this moment shows a Hannah Arendt completely unlike the Countess Seydlitz or Erika Hertz, who show no vulnerability. Further, Von Trotta's Hannah Arendt is completely unlike the Hannah Arendt known to the public in her lifetime, who some members of the press accused of being heartless in the wake of her full report of the Eichmann trial. Shown in the picture inserted below, Von Trotta's Hannah Arendt is vulnerable, broken, and human.¹⁰⁰



Portraying Hannah Arendt's flaws directly subverts Hannah Arendt's legendary image that literary predecessors exemplify. In her play *Hannah and Martin*, Foder intentionally chooses not to mythologize Arendt, but rather to display her in unflattering ways which reveal flaws and failure. Foder creates an Arendt, who doubts herself, struggles through her memories, and is woefully flawed. Likely because Foder found inspiration for the play after reading Ettinger's book, Foder's fictional portrayal of Hannah reflects some of the same qualities as Ettinger's Hannah. Namely, Foder's play highlights the spell that Heidegger had on Arendt, Arendt's girlish naivety, and

⁹⁹ *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe Von Trotta (Zeitgeist Films, 2012), 10:00, <https://www.kanopy.com/en/sc/video/4694934>.

¹⁰⁰ Image screenshot from: *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe Von Trotta (Zeitgeist Films, 2012), 19:30, <https://www.kanopy.com/en/sc/video/4694934>.

Martin's manipulative, controlling, and pathological tendencies. The first time she met Heidegger was in her professor's office hours, where she received his feedback from a paper, she had submitted about St. Augustine's essay on love. In this meeting, Hannah was visibly insecure, vulnerable, and awkward. Hannah was transparent about her dependency on his approval of her. Before he gave her his positive feedback on her paper, she prefaced their meeting with "I'm a bit embarrassed [about my paper] ... I hope I haven't disappointed you..."¹⁰¹ Foder's construction of this scene illustrates Arendt's vulnerability and Heidegger's systematic manipulation. In this scene, he offered to teach her how to think, along with money and a job, all while establishing her insecurities: that she was lonely, poor, and had much to learn.¹⁰² Heidegger taking advantage of his young student immediately framed him as the abusive boyfriend and Hannah, despite decades of philosophical work, accolades, and professionalism, as his dependable victim.

In Foder's play, Arendt's dependency on Heidegger renders not only herself but also her philosophy as particularly distinct from her mythic image. Love made it more difficult to differentiate between herself and her abilities and her connection with Heidegger. Foder pays special attention to Hannah and Martin's mutual dependency, which was a topic that Ettinger discussed extensively. Hannah's dependency on Martin was intense and Foder even suggests that without Martin, Hannah Arendt as one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century would not exist. Heidegger's most important contribution to Arendt was a language for thinking, that she used and would continue to use throughout her academic career. In a scene with her mentor Karl Jaspers and his wife, they discuss Martin, his treatment of Jews at the University and his affiliation with the Nazi party. Jaspers suggests a complete rejection of Martin because of his hypocrisy, saying, "He has shown with his life that his thinking is flawed – therefore, poof! His work is gone!"¹⁰³ However, Hannah cannot bring herself to Jasper's conclusion because of the magnitude of his role in her life:

He taught me how to think... Not the content, but the language. Suppose you'd only been taught to speak Chinese as a child. You could say an infinite number of things by

¹⁰¹ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 107.

¹⁰² Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 109-111.

¹⁰³ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 133.

rearranging the words, but you'd still be saying them in Chinese. I feel as though everything I've got to say is somehow in reference to Martin, even if it's very different from what he says. I spend my life agreeing with him, or refuting him, or beginning where he began but going somewhere different. I speak Chinese.¹⁰⁴

In Foder's play, despite Arendt's extensive defense of individualism and plurality in her *Human Condition*, Hannah struggles to separate herself and her thinking from Heidegger and her love for him as if she was necessarily bound to him and unable to escape from the influence that he had on her. Even Arendt's love for cigarettes, which characterized so much of her public image, is traced back to Martin. He introduced her to her first cigarette saying, "You'll find that cigarettes are important for those who embrace anxiety..."¹⁰⁵ Though she would later explain this in her *Human Condition* as living authentically as a human through the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, "anxiety" is meant here as Martin's version of "the fear that goes with throwing oneself into the void..." which is necessary for living authentically as humans who have questions about structures of reality, the cosmos, and the meaning of life.¹⁰⁶ Though of course Heidegger depended on Arendt for his romantic needs during their affair and again for her help in rebuilding his academic career after the war, Foder pays special attention to the ways that her Hannah depended on Martin for her identity and her way of thinking.

Love and Lower Passions

Considering the legendary status of the Countess Seydlitz, Erika Hertz, and that Hannah Arendt had in her own lifetime, the most human aspects of these literary works are also the most scandalous. As is quoted above, in the words of one critic,

The affair is so vitally human, so quintessentially us, that once the shock fades a little smile of recognition comes onto the face. Of course, we cannot all be geniuses, but given half a chance we all can be fools.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 133.

¹⁰⁵ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 116.

¹⁰⁶ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 115.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, Richard. "Crazy Love - There's No Explaining It." *Press of Atlantic City*, Oct 11, 1995.

Hannah and Martin, *Die Banalität der Liebe*, and *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt* portray Hannah Arendt's love affair with irony. In these works, which are in themselves critics of Arendt, Arendt's fatal flaw was to put her relationships and sentimentality over her mind. Her love, particularly her love for Martin Heidegger, perpetuated a tendency to forget her values and ethical responsibilities, thus discrediting her.

Foder illustrates how love blinded Arendt by way of analogy, namely through the analogy of Richard Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.¹⁰⁸ The scene begins with a letter between Hannah and Martin in which Martin professes his love for Hannah despite his duty to his family. Martin reads, "I will teach you, as you desire. And you will rescue me [from the monotonous familial duties]." ¹⁰⁹ At this, music plays. After Arendt fails to recognize what exactly was playing, Martin replies:

Martin: It's *Tristan and Isolde*. You get the whole story compressed into this prelude. The music tells you exactly how it will unfold before the curtain's even gone up. He'll wrong her. He'll – well, you tell me how he'll wrong her.

Hannah: He'll murder the man she loves.

Martin: And then?

Hannah: She'll want vengeance.

Martin: She'll arrange to have him killed. But when the time comes, she'll find that she's fallen in love with him.

Hannah: And she won't be able to bring herself to harm him.¹¹⁰

This scene uses the analogy of Tristan's betrayal of Isolde to illustrate the imminent betrayal of Martin and her subsequent defense of him. While it is not clear what is meant by "the man she loves," a possible meaning could be her own people – the Jews. By being a Nazi, Heidegger took part in the murder of six million of her own people. Another possibility is that the "man she loves," refers to what Arendt calls, *Amor Mundi*, or the love of the world, one of Arendt's most difficult philosophical notions. Essentially, *Amor Mundi* refers to a type of political love for the world. As Samantha Rose Hill, a biographer of Arendt, notes,

¹⁰⁸ The story of *Tristan and Isolde* originates from a chivalric romance story from the High Middle Ages. Though it has many versions, the version written by Gottfried von Strassburg, entitled *Tristan and Iseult*, is the most well-known and widely read. The version used in *Hannah and Martin* was composed by Richard Wagner from 1857 to 1859.

See: "Synopsis: *Tristan and Isolde*." *The Metropolitan Opera*.

¹⁰⁹ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 113.

¹¹⁰ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 113.

There is... a challenge to think about what it means to be committed to the world, to care for the world despite its horrors. There is a provocation to embrace one another in our difference and to meet one another as fellow human beings. There is also a radical critique to be found of more common forms of love, which are destructive of difference and plurality...

For Arendt, *Amor Mundi* is bound up with her axiom at the beginning of *The Human Condition* that we must stop and think what we are doing... There is a form of self-reflective critical thinking contained within these ideas, since in order to see the world as it is we must stand on the sidelines, find perspective, and a place of solitude for thinking. In other words, there has to be a turning in before we can turn out. Loving the world requires reckoning with the world, which means we must find some critical distance from what is happening around us. When we witness injustices, sometimes there is an impulse to act, but Arendt cautions us to slow down and think what we are doing—to be thinkers not just joiners.¹¹¹

On a philosophical level, Heidegger murdered the spirit of *Amor Mundi*, by denying reason and humanity, by joining the Nazi Party, and by not thinking what he was doing. Ultimately, this account of Heidegger only aligns itself to this explanation if it assumes same premises that Arendt herself did. These premises form the account that Arendt, both in Foder's play and in real life, that Arendt believed. Arendt believed and publicly stated in 1971 for Heidegger's 80th birthday, that Heidegger was too busy with his philosophy to realize the physical realities of his allegiance to Nazism.¹¹² Rather than being "a potential murderer" himself, though she resorted to calling him that in an article for the *Partisan Review* in 1946, Heidegger was simply a philosopher out of his depth in the world of politics. Regardless of what "the man she loves" means precisely, the fact remains that "when the time [came, Arendt found] out she'[d] fallen in love with him... And she won't be able to bring herself to harm him." As one review of the play notes, the main message of Foder's play was to show how "even the acutest mind turns mushy when feelings are involved."¹¹³ Like Isolde, Hannah, though determined to understand totalitarianism, to protect humanity with her philosophy, and to live her life in accordance with *Amor Mundi*, found that her love dealt a fatal blow to her ethical integrity.

¹¹¹ Hill, Samantha Rose. "What Does It Mean to Love the World? Hannah Arendt and *Amor Mundi*." *Open Democracy*. March 2017.

¹¹² Arendt, Hannah. "Martin Heidegger at 80." *The New York Review of Books*, Oct 21, 1971.

¹¹³ Feingold, Michael. "Kate Fodor's Hannah: Merely Dr. Heidegger's experiment?" *Village Voice*. March 30, 2004.

Similarly, in *Die Banalität der Liebe*, Milch-Sheriff highlights how love paralyzed her ability to retain her ethical integrity. Milch-Sheriff illustrated this love as blindness and thoughtlessness. The first scene of Act II illustrates this most clearly.

*On a large desk lie the contents of several drawers: letters, loose sheets, photos, among them Heinrich Blücher, Arendt's husband [from 1940-1970, the year of his death], the young Hannah, her mother, Rafael [Arendt's childhood best-friend, fellow student, and also a Jew, who loved her more than a friend] and Martin Heidegger... Arendt enters the stage... Michael enters [a journalist, later revealed to be Rafael's son] ...*¹¹⁴

They conversed of Eichmann and Heidegger. Michael pointed out to Arendt that “both were Nazis,” to which Arendt replied,

One was a mediocre, simple man, incapable of thought. The other was a genius. Genius, do you understand?

Michael: One was a servant and so was the other.

Arendt: The Nazis exploited him.

Michael: He was a member of the Nazi Party.

Choir: Martin Heidegger is one of the greatest philosophers of all times. He has shown a way to understand the world differently. He spoke of art, language, psychology –

Arendt: This man is greater than his deeds. For a certain time, a limited time, he was wrong. Even great people can make mistakes.¹¹⁵

This act is not simply fictional, but rather a direct critique of Hannah Arendt as she exhibits her own mediocrity, simplicity, and incapacity for thought in the face of love. As she tries to make distinctions between Eichmann's mediocrity, simplicity, and incapacity for thought and Heidegger's genius, Michael – the journalist, points out their common slavishness to the Nazi Party and to Hitler. Yet there are commonalities between all three of them: while Eichmann and Heidegger were slaves to their devotion to Hitler, Hannah is a slave to her passions.

Hannah Arendt: Hero or Villain?

As each of these works uses the philosophy of storytelling to reconcile what is known about the paradoxical affair, imagination, and Arendt's own philosophy, each pronounces a verdict on Arendt. Each of these works also create a fictional confrontation between Hannah and Martin, as individuals and as lovers, or Arendt and Heidegger, as philosophers. These confrontations serve to

¹¹⁴ *Die Banalität Der Liebe*, composed by Ella Milch-Sheriff, Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany, 2018.

¹¹⁵ *Die Banalität Der Liebe*, composed by Ella Milch-Sheriff, Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany, 2018.

either defend Hannah or display her weaknesses in the face of love. Ken Krimstein similarly creates Arendt as a hero for modern times, who, like the modern superhero archetype, is orphaned by the loss of her father and has an incredibly difficult life. Margarethe von Trotta creates Arendt as simultaneously a hero and a guilty party, thus leaving the pronouncement of the verdict to the audience. Kate Foder's Hannah is a failure and in the words of her assistant Alice, either "a criminal or a fool."¹¹⁶ Foder uses Baldur von Schirach as a version of Adolf Eichmann and an alternative archetype of the banality of evil. Finally, Ella Milch-Sheriff's opera is a "merciless" indictment of Arendt as sharing fundamental qualities of banality and guilt with Eichmann. Despite this, Milch-Sheriff's Arendt is "a tragic figure," whose story shows the ruin of a person and the downfall of a great philosopher.

Krimstein makes Arendt to be a hero, who fits into the archetype of modern superhero, by her integrity to truth in the face of loss, trauma, and betrayal. The structure of Krimstein's graphic novel, namely how it is structured by her escapes, attests to Hannah Arendt's heroism and virtue as an ambassador of truth, yet also to how difficult her life was. Her determination in the search for truth despite living through moments where both her literal life and her interior thoughtful life was threatened suggests integrity, strength, and determination to live in accordance with certain values. Krimstein engages in the philosophy of storytelling to offer a reconciliation between Arendt's personal life and her philosophy. Krimstein's answer to the question of Hannah and Martin not only defends Arendt but offers an alternative literary moment of closure between the two. While Arendt refuses to disown Heidegger in the public realm and promises to "publicly forgive [him]"¹¹⁷ (as she does in her 1971 article, "Heidegger at 80"), Hannah banishes him from her personal life in the private realm. As pictured on the next page, Krimstein created a confrontation between Hannah and Martin in which Arendt disowns Heidegger in the private realm, thus ending their affair, friendship, and relationship.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 146.

¹¹⁷ Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 203.

¹¹⁸ Krimstein, Ken. *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 200-205.



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While Krimstein's Hannah is a superhero of truth for modern times, with a defense of her protection of Heidegger and a reconciliation between paradoxes, Von Trotta's Hannah Arendt is similarly paradoxical yet leaves the verdict in the hands of the audience. Von Trotta's Hannah was simultaneously a martyr for truth and an arrogant academic and potentially guilty partner of Heidegger. In the film, while her motivations to report for *The New Yorker* were deeply personal, she also had a deep sense of duty to truth. While her initial motivations were ostensibly to understand saying, "I'd never forgive myself if I didn't take this opportunity,"¹¹⁹ as the film progresses and her image is destroyed after the publishing of her report, Arendt retains her allegiance to her words. One perspective, that is, the perspective of the press and of Arendt's friends who left her in the wake of her report, is that she retained her allegiance to her words because of pride. This perspective asserts that Arendt was the source of her own morality and an arbiter of her own truth. Additionally, even though the press in Von Trotta's film repeatedly ask for an audience with Arendt, she consistently refuses, saying arrogantly, "I refuse to explain myself to these dimwits."¹²⁰ Another perspective, which is Arendt's perspective on herself, is that she was a martyr for the truth and that she willingly sacrificed her image and her friends for the sake of the truth. A flashback of Heidegger, whom Arendt's best friend, Mary McCarthy, described as her "secret king of thinking,"¹²¹ lays the groundwork for such sacrifice. While Arendt is surrounded by piles of files and documents, she somberly looks out into the distance and the film shows a flashback of her first meeting with Heidegger in 1924. In his office, Heidegger says, "Fraulein Arendt, you say you want me to teach you how to think. [*young Hannah nods eagerly*] Thinking is a lonely business... [*young Hannah smiles with a look of determination*]."¹²² The eagerness and determination by which Hannah agrees to learn how to think suggests that the business of thinking is her calling. Despite everything that would happen after 1924, this business of thinking would remain her calling. Given that this flashback occurs while Arendt works on her report of the

¹¹⁹ *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe Von Trotta (Zeitgeist Films, 2012), 0:10:00, <https://www.kanopy.com/en/sc/video/4694934>.

¹²⁰ *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe Von Trotta (Zeitgeist Films, 2012), 1:19:00, <https://www.kanopy.com/en/sc/video/4694934>.

¹²¹ *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe Von Trotta (Zeitgeist Films, 2012), 1:20:00, <https://www.kanopy.com/en/sc/video/4694934>.

¹²² *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe Von Trotta (Zeitgeist Films, 2012), 0:48:00, <https://www.kanopy.com/en/sc/video/4694934>.

Eichmann trial suggests that this report is an opportunity to accept this calling and bear the consequences of thinking and embrace loneliness.

Von Trotta's creation of a conversation between Arendt and Heidegger, which occurred in 1949 in the film, is, compared to other sources, particularly weak and does not serve as an illustration of Arendt's heroism, but rather a potential reason for her to not explain herself to the public, ostensibly because of a lack of confidence in her own position. Despite her heroism in standing up for truth, Arendt is lenient on Heidegger as is evident by the following scene where Hannah and Martin walk in the woods,

Heidegger: Your last letter grieved me. How can you believe all that slander?

Arendt: [*turning to him*] After I read your first rector's speech, I was sick to my stomach. I couldn't believe it. That the man who taught me how to think was behaving like a fool.

Heidegger: I know they were bitter years for you, full of misery, hardship, and helplessness. But they weren't easy for me either.

Arendt: [*grabbing him by the shoulders*] Martin, I came here because I want to understand.

Heidegger: Hannah... I'm like the lad who dreams and knows not what he does. I have no talent nor experience with politics but now I have learned and in the future, I want to learn even more.

Arendt: [*shaking her head*] But why not bring this to an end and explain yourself in public? [*Heidegger has no answer. Arendt looks into his eyes imploringly, wanting to understand.*]¹²³

The meaning of such silence and Arendt's imploring look could simply be that Heidegger had no actual defense for his Nazism, and he could not lie to the press as he could lie to Arendt. Yet on the other hand, this silence could serve as a reflection of her own silence concerning the claims of her report and the severe backlash she received from the press. In other words, this silence could denote doubt, both Arendt's doubt in herself and the viewers doubt in Arendt's claims. The verdict on Von Trotta's Arendt is therefore open to the interpretation of the viewer. While she sacrificed everything for something that she believed in and was in this sense a martyr of truth as she saw it, she was also arrogant and hypocritical, especially in regard to her relationship with Heidegger.

From the first scene of the play to the last, Kate Foder uses Arendt to thematize responsibility, guilt, and forgiveness. In the first scene of the play, which begins in Germany in 1950, Arendt lights a cigarette and wonders about the transference of guilt via handshaking, from

¹²³ *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe Von Trotta (Zeitgeist Films, 2012), 1:16:00. <https://www.kanopy.com/en/sc/video/4694934>.

Hitler to Himmler, to the minister of education, to Martin Heidegger, and finally to herself. Foder opens the play with Hannah's recognition of possible guilt: "All the way down to Hannah it goes – does it then? I wonder. And this: This is a question as well. If the hand you take is one stretched out for help, what then? A sin to take it? Or a sin to refuse?" This complex serves as the underlying motif of the whole play, with Arendt vacillating between blindly defending him, insisting his involvement in the Nazi part was "a spell of political insanity," and occasionally confronting him.

Foder's play, as an exploration of this question, suggests an indictment of Arendt. Foder uses an alternative of Adolf Eichmann, Baldur von Schirach, to represent the archetype of the banality of evil. Particularly in relation to her defense of Martin and her immediate recognition of Baldur von Schirach's guilt, Arendt in the words of Alice was either "a criminal or a fool" for her defense of Heidegger.¹²⁴ The inconsistency of her convictions about Schirach's guilt and her defense of Martin may be used to reject Arendt considering her hypocrisy and using Jasper's reasoning for rejecting Heidegger's philosophy, namely, that actions speak louder than words. Her indictment is not simply further complicated by the trial of Baldur von Schirach but is characterized by the contrast of her conclusions about them. Schirach's proceedings swim in Arendt's mind throughout the play and his voice intermittently taunts her thoughts, especially when speaking about Heidegger and his culpability. Schirach is a mirrored reflection of Martin Heidegger. They were both educators of German youth, yet while Heidegger was simply the rector of Freiburg University, Schirach was the head of the Hitler Youth Organization. Both men militarized thinking by making their students, "soldiers of ideas."¹²⁵ Both men dismissed Jews as "besides the point," and ultimately superfluous.¹²⁶ While Arendt, without hesitation, judged Schirach as guilty and deserving of a full sentence, she excused Heidegger on grounds of "political insanity" which, as Alice pointed out, could have been applied to Schirach as well. Additionally, Schirach cannot be separated from Adolf Eichmann, in particular as their descriptions relate to the banality of evil. While in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt describes Adolf Eichmann as a type of "clown,"

¹²⁴ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 146.

¹²⁵ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 104, 128-29.

¹²⁶ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 105, 139.

Foder's Hannah describes Schirach as "amusing," saying he is "a big pudgy, I'm afraid. But a handsome face. Skin like an advertisement for ladies' soap. He's quite funny at times... He's no genius, but a lover of music and art ..." ¹²⁷ Hannah's casual description of a man who systematically destroyed "nine million German children's sense of right and wrong," conveys her understanding of him as banal similarly to how she considered Eichmann banal. Both men worked for the Nazi party, followed orders, and blamed their bureaucratic superiors for their moral failures. In light of Arendt's condemnation of Schirach, who represents both Eichmann and Heidegger, her defense of Heidegger constitutes severe moral failures in Arendt.

Though Foder's play functions as an indictment in these ways, it paradoxically also serves to defend Hannah, albeit with subtlety and an incomplete vindication. Like Krimstein, Foder's play curates a fictional confrontation between Arendt and Heidegger, one where Arendt condemns Heidegger, something she did, both in real life and in the play, after hearing about Heidegger's participation in the Nazi party yet rescinded later by publicly defending him and helping him rebuild his academic career. By creating a dialogue between Hannah and Martin, which fictionalizes Hannah's defense of philosophical ideals of the dignity of human persons, Foder's play juxtaposes Arendt with Heidegger. In this conversation, Heidegger dismissed Arendt as melodramatic. Hannah confronts Heidegger, saying,

Hannah: When you [pronounce your allegiance to the philosophy of Hitler] you say that the rest of us are worth nothing! We only interfere and pollute! Why not gas us and be done with it?

Martin: You are letting your good, careful mind succumb to melodrama... ¹²⁸

By such dismissal of Nazi gas chambers as mere "melodrama," the real villain is revealed to be Heidegger. Considering her defense of Heidegger, however, Hannah is no hero. In this play, Foder ultimately chose to leave Alice's question, of why Arendt would want to defend Heidegger unanswered. On the one hand, Foder's portrayal of Arendt purports girlishness, naivety, or thoughtlessness because of blind love, yet on the other hand, Foder's portrayal accuses Arendt and may even suggest taking Karl Jaspers' position of rejecting the thinker's thoughts because of

¹²⁷ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 103-4.

¹²⁸ Foder Kate. "Hannah and Martin," in *The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize: Six Important New Plays by Women from the 25th Anniversary Year*. ed. Emilie S. Kilgore, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 2004), 140.

his actions. Foder's play wrapped Arendt in controversy, confusion, and doubt. Yet, similar to Ettinger, Foder's play remains open for interpretation and retains some fragments of Arendt's shroud of mystery.

Ella Milch-Sheriff's opera contains similar paradoxes, particularly as it concerns her status as a hero or a villain. As is clear from the title of the play, however – *The Banality of Love* – Milch-Sheriff makes equivalencies between Hannah Arendt and Adolf Eichmann. While Eichmann was the archetype for Arendt's "banality of evil," Arendt is the archetype for the "banality of love." However, despite this, Arendt was a "tragic figure," who was victimized by Heidegger and manipulated by him. Thus, Milch-Sheriff's opera has multiple villains and multiple indictments. As she notes in her own description of the opera,

the opera presents several indictments – one entwined with another. First an indictment against Heidegger, who collaborated with the Nazis... Second, an indictment against the Nazi Germans and their collaborators... Third, an indictment against the church... Fourth, an indictment against many Jews who remained admirers of the German culture and of their own murderers. Last and foremost, an indictment against Hannah Arendt. Despite everything she saw and witnessed and knew, she could not cut off her ties with Heidegger and even helped him publish his doctrines in America after the war.¹²⁹

That Milch-Sheriff's villains intertwined with one another and their crimes were layered on top of one another suggests the possibility of multiple interpretations.

However, Savyon Liebrecht, the author of the play on which Milch-Sheriff's opera is based, explains in an interview that her attitude towards Arendt is essentially incriminating. She quotes the historian Barbara Tuchman who asserted that Arendt "defended Eichmann to defend Heidegger." Here, Richard Wolin's quote from 1995, which says that "Arendt defended Eichmann to defend Heidegger," addresses the question of Arendt's hypocrisy, specifically, the paradox of her report, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and her affair with Heidegger. Central to *Die Banalität der Liebe* is the irony of their relationship. The opera explicitly incriminates Arendt: "The director of the opera, Itay Tiran, decided to put Arendt in a glass booth - from which she sings an aria about the banality of evil."¹³⁰ Here Arendt clearly symbolizes Eichmann himself, the archetype of her banality

¹²⁹ Source personally acquired from Ella Milch-Sheriff.

¹³⁰ Hitron, Haggai. "Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger and the Banality of Love Between a Jew and a Nazi." *Haaretz*, February 2018.

of evil, who sat behind bulletproof glass during his trial in 1961. In this sense, Arendt is an archetype for the banality of love; she is, in other words, the subject of the criticism of her own way of thinking. This scene illustrates this dynamic by including Arendtian figures – which represent her memories – into the scene as they sing, “Ich klage an [I accuse].” As is seen in the photo inserted below, as Arendt’s critics gather around her glass box singing their accusations, Arendtian figures gather in support of indictment. The following scene, which uses the ideas of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, ensues,

Michael: You have protected Eichmann, because of your relationship with Martin Heidegger!

Arendt: What is the connection between Heidegger and Eichmann?

Michael: Heidegger was also a party member.

Arendt: Our theme here is Adolf Eichmann!

Hausner [the judge] takes a seat in the courtroom of the Eichmann trial [though no Eichmann in present – only Arendt]...

Hausner: ... I do not stand alone. Standing with me at this hour are six million prosecutors.

Arendt (to Hausner): Judge him according to his deeds as an individual.

Choir: You have protected Eichmann because of Heidegger!

... [Arendt is placed into the glass box] ...

Hausner + Choir: *[closing in on Arendt]*: Six million prosecutors. They cannot stand up on their feet. They cannot point and accusing finger at the glass cell. They cannot shout at the man sitting there – I accuse! I accuse! I accuse! ...

Arendt: The sad truth is that most maladies are executed by people who have never consciously decided to be good or evil. Their normality is scary. Normality. Normality. Normality.

... She starts to run back and forth, as if she lost her mind.

Arendt: Banality of Evil.¹³¹

¹³¹ *Die Banalität Der Liebe*, composed by Ella Milch-Sheriff, Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany, 2018.



The paradoxical nature of this scene reflects the paradox of Arendt as a person and as a thinker. That Arendt, author of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, guide of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and legendary public intellectual, had an affair with Heidegger and that she publicly defended him from 1949 to 1971 is assuredly a paradox of extreme proportions. Ella Milch-Sheriff, Ken Krimstein, Kate Foder, and Margarethe von Trotta have all in their own ways pronounced evidence to the court and suggestion of a verdict for the jury to decide upon.

Conclusion

Certainly, the question that Arendt poses as to why Isak Dinesen did not write an autobiography might not be as interesting as the question of why Arendt herself did not write an autobiography. The answer to why she never wrote an autobiography is truly as “fascinating as it is unanswered.” Characterized by paradox and a lack of self-reflection, Arendt’s autobiography could have been useful to answer the paradoxes of her life, namely, to reconcile her affair with Heidegger and her sense of philosophical and personal coherence. Had she written an autobiography, however, there would be less if any plays, operas, or graphic novels which engage in their philosophy of storytelling. Had she written a defense of her affair or expressed regret, reconciliation between reality and imagination would be more difficult because there would be less room for imagination. The extent to which these paradoxes subvert the integrity of Arendt’s philosophy is ultimately open for interpretation. Whether the affair was just an “embarrassing problem,” or if it indeed “ruin[ed] everything,” is an open-ended question.

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