

**OPENS AT FILM FORUM IN NEW YORK ON MAY 29, 2013
AND AT LAEMMLE THEATRES IN LOS ANGELES JUNE 7TH
NATIONAL RELEASE TO FOLLOW**



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Hannah Arendt

A film by Margarethe von Trotta

The sublime Barbara Sukowa reteams with director Margarethe von Trotta (*Vision*, *Rosa Luxemburg*) for her brilliant new biopic of influential German-Jewish philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt. Arendt's reporting on the 1961 trial of ex-Nazi Adolf Eichmann in *The New Yorker*—controversial both for her portrayal of Eichmann *and* the Jewish councils—introduced her now-famous concept of the “Banality of Evil.” Using footage from the actual Eichmann trial and weaving a narrative that spans three countries, von Trotta beautifully turns the often invisible passion for thought into immersive, dramatic cinema. An Official Selection at the Toronto International and New York Jewish Film Festivals, *Hannah Arendt* also co-stars Klaus Pohl as philosopher Martin Heidegger, Nicolas Woodeson as *New Yorker* editor William Shawn, and two-time Oscar Nominee Janet McTeer (*Albert Nobbs*) as novelist Mary McCarthy.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The light that comes from a person's works enters directly into the world and remains after the person dies. Whether it is large or small, transitory or enduring, depends upon the world and its ways. Posterity will judge.

The light that comes from a person's life—spoken words, gestures, friendships—survives only in memories. If it is to enter into the world, it must find a new form. A story must be made from many memories and stories.

—Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, author of the biography *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*

The light that Hannah Arendt's work brought into the world still shines. And because her work is invoked by an ever-increasing number of people, it becomes brighter every day. In a time when most felt obligated to adhere to a specific ideology, Arendt was a shining example of someone who remained true to her unique perspective on the world.

In 1983 I wanted to make a film about Rosa Luxemburg, because I was convinced that she was the most important woman and thinker of the last century. I was eager to comprehend the woman behind this fighter and revolutionary. But now, as we begin the 21st century, Arendt is an even more important figure. Her foresight and wisdom are only just beginning to be fully understood and addressed. When she first formulated the concept of the "banality of evil"—a term she coined in her report on the Eichmann trial—she was sharply criticized and attacked as if she were an enemy of the Jewish people. Today, this concept has become an essential component of any discussion that seeks to judge the crimes of the Nazis.

And once again, I was interested in finding the woman behind this great and independent thinker. She was born in Germany and died in New York. What brought her there?

As a Jew, she certainly hadn't left Germany voluntarily and for this reason, her story raises a question I have asked in many of my other films: how does a person behave in the face of historical and social events that he or she cannot influence or change? Like many other Jews, Arendt could have been a victim of National Socialism. But she was quick to recognize the danger and fled from Germany to Paris. When France was invaded, she left from Marseilles and made her way through Spain and Portugal, and finally to New York. As she fled, she thought bitterly of the many friends who had chosen to remain behind and support the Nazis. She was deeply disappointed to see how quickly they adapted to the "new era," and described this phenomenon in an interview as: "Zu Hitler fiel ihnen was ein." This means that in order to justify their decision, "they made up ideas about Hitler."

Exile was her "second awakening." The first transformation in her life came when she studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger. At that time, she was certain that her life's vocation would be in the pursuit of pure thought. But after her forced exile, she had no choice but to engage with the events of the real world. By 1960, when she finally felt settled in America, she was ready to take on one of the most tragic chapters of the 20th century. She would look directly into the face of the man whose name evoked the murder of millions of Jews: Adolf Eichmann.

Our film concentrates on the four turbulent years when the lives of Arendt and Eichmann crossed. This focus offered the opportunity to tell a story that would lead to a profound understanding of both the historical and highly emotional impact of this explosive confrontation. When the uncompromising and unconventional thinker faced the submissive and dutiful bureaucrat, both Arendt and the discourse on the Holocaust changed forever. In Eichmann, she saw a man whose fatal mixture of obedience and an inability to think for himself ("Gedankenlosigkeit") was what enabled him to transport millions of people to the gas chambers.

Portraying Arendt almost exclusively during the period which begins with Eichmann's capture and ends shortly after the publication of her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, made it possible to not only investigate her groundbreaking work, but also to reveal her character and personality. We get to know her as a woman, as a lover—and most important to her character—as a friend. There are only few flashbacks that take us back to the 1920s and then the 1950s—showing the youthful Hannah's passionate love affair with Martin Heidegger, as well as their reunion years after the war ended. She never managed to let go of her connection to Heidegger, despite the fact that he joined the National Socialist Party in 1933. These flashbacks are important to understanding Arendt's past, but the film is primarily concerned with her life and relationships in New York: with her husband Heinrich Blücher (who

she had met in exile in Paris); with her German and American friends, especially the author Mary McCarthy; and with her oldest friend, the Jewish-German philosopher Hans Jonas.

This is a film that shows Arendt as a person caught between her thoughts and her emotions—one who often has to disentangle her intellect from her feelings. We see her as a passionate thinker and professor; as a woman capable of lifelong friendship—she was hailed as a woman who was a “genius at friendship”—but also as a fighter who courageously defended her ideas and never shied away from any confrontation. But her goal was always to understand. Her signature declaration, “I want to understand,” is the phrase that best describes her.

And it is precisely in her quest to understand people and the world that made me feel overwhelmingly drawn to her. Like Arendt, I never want to judge, but only to understand. In this film, for example, I want to understand what Arendt thought about totalitarianism and the moral collapse in the last century; about self-determination and freedom of choice; and finally, what she managed to illuminate about evil and about love. And I hope that the audience will come to comprehend, just as I did, why it is important to remember this great thinker.

The key to understanding her life is in Arendt’s wish to sustain what she called *amor mundi*, or the “love of the world.” Although her forced exile caused her to experience both vulnerability and dire alienation, she continued to believe in the power of the individual to withstand the cruel force of history. Her refusal to be overwhelmed by despair and helplessness makes her, in my eyes, an extraordinary woman whose “light still shines today”. A woman who can love and be loved. And a woman who can, as she put it, “think without banisters.” That is to be an independent thinker.

In order to offer an authentic vision of Arendt as a human being, we ultimately had to move beyond the mountain of written and archival audiovisual sources. Therefore, after a long period of traditional research, we conducted extensive interviews with contemporaries who had been a part of Hannah Arendt’s life and work for many years.

—Margarethe von Trotta

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARGARETHE VON TROTTA

Your films almost always offer an intense confrontation with significant historical figures: Rosa Luxemburg, Hildegard von Bingen, the Ensslin sisters.... What excited you about Hannah Arendt?

The question of how to make a film about a woman who thinks. How to watch a woman whose main action is thinking. Of course I was also afraid I wouldn't do her justice. This made the cinematic portrayal far more difficult than, for example, with Rosa Luxemburg. Both women were highly intelligent and unique individuals, both were gifted in their capacity for love and friendship, and both were provocative thinkers and speakers. Hannah Arendt's life was not as dramatic as that of Rosa Luxemburg—but it was important and moving.

To find out more about her, I not only read her books and letters but also tried to find people who had known her. Through these many conversations, I gradually discovered what I wanted to say about her, and which time in her life would best serve my intentions. Sometimes I was actually quite afraid of her. She would suddenly appear so abrasive and arrogant. Only after the famous conversation with Günter Gaus did I finally become convinced that Arendt was truly a charming, witty and pleasant person. After watching them together, I understood what Gaus meant when he said later in an interview that she was the kind of woman for whom you instantly fell.

Your exploration continued while working on the script with American screenwriter Pam Katz in 2003. By 2006, you decided to focus the film (then under the working title *The Controversy*) on the four years around the 1961 Adolf Eichmann trial.

We wanted to tell Hannah Arendt's story without reducing the importance of her life and work, but also without resorting to the all too sprawling structure of a typical biopic. After *Rosenstrasse* and *The Other Woman*, *Hannah Arendt* is my third collaboration with Pam Katz. We were therefore able to write the script in a sort of "ping-pong" technique, continuously discussing the work via email, telephone, and in person in New York, Paris and Germany. Our first question was: what should we choose to show of Arendt's life? Her love affair with Martin Heidegger (which many probably expected)? Her escape from Germany? Her years in Paris or her years in New York? After wrestling with all of these possibilities, it finally became clear that focusing on the four years where she reported on and wrote about Eichmann was the best way to portray both the woman and her work. The confrontation between Arendt and Eichmann allowed us to not only illuminate the radical contrast between these two protagonists, but also to gain a deeper understanding of the dark times of 20th-century Europe. Arendt famously declared that "No one has the right to obey." With her staunch refusal to obey anything other than her own knowledge and beliefs, she could not be more different than Eichmann. His duty, as he himself insisted, was to be faithful to his oath to obey the orders of his superiors. In this blind allegiance, Eichmann surrendered one of the main characteristics that distinguishes human beings from all other species: the ability to think for himself. The film shows Arendt as a political theorist and independent thinker set against her precise opposite: the submissive bureaucrat who does not think at all, and instead chooses to be an enthusiastic subordinate.

You were able to incisively capture Eichmann's "not-thinking" character through the black-and-white archival footage from the trial.

You can only show the true "banality of evil" by observing the real Eichmann. An actor can only distort the image, he could never sharpen it. As a viewer, one might admire the actor's brilliance but they would inevitably fail to comprehend Eichmann's mediocrity. He was a man who was unable to formulate a single grammatically correct sentence. One could tell from the way he spoke that he was unable to think in any significant way about what he was doing. There is only one scene with Barbara Sukowa that takes place in the actual courtroom; and there, because it had to be an actor, you only see Eichmann's back. We filmed all the other courtroom scenes in the pressroom, where the trial was actually shown on several monitors. This was a way of being able to use the real Eichmann, via the archival footage, in all the important moments. But we had also come to believe that since Hannah Arendt was a heavy smoker, she would have spent more time in the pressroom than in the courtroom. That way, she could follow the trial and smoke at the same time. Many of the other journalists also watched the trial on the TV screens and filed reports at the same time. By the way, long after writing this sequence, we were finally able to speak with Arendt's niece, Edna Brocke, who was with her in Jerusalem at the time. She confirmed that her aunt had indeed spent most of her time in the pressroom because she was allowed to smoke there!

***Hannah Arendt* would not be a von Trotta film if we failed to also see Hannah Arendt as a woman, lover and friend. And if we didn't get to better understand the complexity of this great thinker.**

The film is also about her life in New York, her friends, her love for Martin Heidegger—even if we were convinced that Heinrich Blücher is was a far more important figure in her life. She called Heinrich her “four walls,” meaning her “one true home.” Heidegger was Hannah Arendt’s first love, and she remained connected to him despite his affiliation with the Nazis. At the very beginning of my research, Lotte Köhler, Arendt’s only remaining living friend, gave me the book of published correspondence between Heidegger and Arendt. But she made sure to let me know that Arendt had kept all his letters in her bedside drawer. In a flashback, we show Arendt meeting him during a visit to Germany. This meeting actually took place, although just several weeks before their encounter, she had written a letter to her friend and mentor, Karl Jaspers, in which she called Heidegger a murderer. Arendt’s niece said that her aunt explained her ongoing relationship with Heidegger by insisting that “some things are stronger than a human being.”

For the role of Hannah Arendt you again chose to cast Barbara Sukowa. Why?

I saw Barbara Sukowa in the role of Hannah Arendt right from the very beginning, and fortunately managed to overcome any initial resistance to casting her. I would not have made this film without Barbara. I needed an actress that I could watch while she was thinking. Barbara was the only one who could be relied upon to meet this difficult challenge.

How well Barbara Sukowa succeeds is evident—among many scenes—in the eight-minute speech at the end of the film. Not many directors would have taken the risk of trying to hold the attention of the audience for so long. Why did you make this decision?

Many felt that a film about Hannah Arendt should actually start with a speech. But we begin with a conversation between girlfriends talking about their husbands. We wanted the final speech to be the moment where the audience finally understands the conclusions her thinking has brought to light. Only after one has watched her as she gleaned her insights about Eichmann’s character, and seen how she was so brutally and often unfairly attacked for them, are you then willing to listen to her for so long. By then, one has fallen in love with her, as well as her way of thinking. And Barbara’s performance is both so intelligent, and so emotional, it takes your breath away. We have moved gradually towards this moment, slowly giving the audience the opportunity to understand the building blocks of Arendt’s complex thoughts and to comprehend what she meant by the banality of evil. The speech is both the intellectual and the emotional climax of the entire film.

The crew is full of powerful women: co-writer Pam Katz, producer Bettina Brokemper, cinematographer Caroline Champetier, editor Bettina Böhler. Coincidence or conscious decision?

I didn’t plan it that way—it just happened. But then again perhaps it wasn’t a coincidence. But Hannah Arendt was the opposite of a feminist and *Hannah Arendt* is also not a typical “woman’s film.” It is a film made by highly dedicated and professional people committed to telling a story that does justice to her life.

According to Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt’s teacher and friend, “the venture into the public realm is only possible when there is trust in people.” Each one of your films is such a venture. How does this apply to *Hannah Arendt*?

In the spirit of Hannah Arendt, trusting the audience to move through ignorance and amazement to the desire to understand, and ultimately to arrive at such an understanding.

HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHIES

HANNAH ARENDT was born on October 14, 1906, in Hanover, Germany. Arendt grew up with social democratic, assimilated Jewish parents. She studied philosophy and theology in Marburg and Heidelberg, where her professors included Karl Jaspers, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger, with whom she had a love affair. Her first marriage, from 1929–1937, was to philosopher Günther Anders. In 1933, after being briefly imprisoned by the Gestapo, she fled via Carlsbad and Geneva to Paris. She worked for the Youth Aliyah, a Jewish organization that helped Jewish children immigrate to Palestine. In Paris, in 1937, she met Heinrich Blücher, a former Communist and self-educated man from a working class background whom she married 1940. After an internment and escape from the infamous detention camp in Gurs, she immigrated to the United States with her husband and mother in 1941.

For many years, she carved out a living by writing articles and working in publishing, until she eventually found a job as executive secretary of the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction organization. In 1951 she obtained American citizenship and in the same year her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—a comprehensive study of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes—was published. This became an instant intellectual classic and launched her career in America. After guest professorships at Princeton and Harvard, she received professorships at the University of Chicago and the New School for Social Research in New York.

In 1958, she published her book *The Human Condition*. In 1961, she went to Jerusalem to report on the Adolf Eichmann trial for *The New Yorker*, and her articles were published in the magazine throughout 1963 in five parts. They triggered intense media coverage. She received fierce opposition and devastating criticism, both for her portrayal of the Jewish councils and her portrait of Eichmann. But her subsequent book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, has achieved a highly respected, if controversial, place in most serious discussions of the Holocaust. It is now regarded as one of her most important books. She died in New York on December 4, 1975.

HEINRICH BLÜCHER was born in 1899 in Berlin. The son of a factory worker who died before he was born, was raised by his laundress mother. He was drafted into World War I before finishing school, and returned to join the rebellious soldier's council—one of the many Worker's Councils who rioted in the streets when the war finally came to an end. Blücher joined Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacus League and soon afterwards, he became a member of the German Communist Party. He had a hunger for learning—but not for schooling. He also avoided gainful employment in order to read as much as possible—consuming Shakespeare, Marx, Engels and Trotsky.

Although he was a Gentile, in his adventurous quest to educate himself, he joined the “Blue White,” a Zionist youth group. He also worked on various cabaret and film projects before fleeing the Nazi regime in 1933 to Prague, and later to France. It was in Paris that he met and fell quickly in love with Hannah Arendt. After one youthful marriage, and a second to secure citizenship for a girlfriend, Arendt became his third wife. Together they escaped via Spain and Portugal to the U.S., and settled in New York. Blücher lectured at the New School for Social Research, and starting in 1952—despite his lack of even a high school diploma—he taught at Bard College as a Professor of philosophy. Heinrich Blücher died in 1970. In one of his last lectures he anonymously invokes his relationship with Arendt: “What counts now is the mutual insight of two personalities who recognize and respect each other as such; who in effect can say to each other, ‘I guarantee you the development of your personality and you guarantee me the development of mine.’ This is the basis of all real community thinking.” After thirty-four years together, Arendt found it nearly impossible to imagine life without her husband.

KURT BLUMENFELD was born in 1884 in East Prussia. In 1904 he began studying law in Berlin, Freiburg and Königsberg. In 1909 he began his professional career as party secretary of the Zionist Federation of Germany, later becoming its president. As Secretary General of the World Zionist Federation from 1911–1914 he first visited Palestine, where he then emigrated in 1933. Already in 1926, he was the most influential proponent of Zionism in Germany. Hannah Arendt was taken to one of his lectures by her friend Hans Jonas, and although she didn't convert to Zionism, she formed a lifelong attachment to Blumenfeld. They fiercely debated Zionism, politics, the diaspora, the Holocaust, assimilation, the return to Palestine and the general problem of Jewish identity. Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial and her theories about the "banality of evil" resulted in a painful rejection from her father figure and close friend. When she learned that Blumenfeld was dying, she visited him again in Israel, but the two of them could not bridge their differences. It was one of the great sorrows of Arendt's life that there was not enough time to achieve a reconciliation with Kurt Blumenfeld before he died in Jerusalem on May 21, 1963.

ADOLF EICHMANN was born in 1906 in Solingen, Germany. His father was an accountant. Eichmann was a high-school dropout who began, but never completed, his training as a mechanic. In 1927, Eichmann joined the *Deutsch-Österreichische Frontkämpferversammlung* (German-Austrian Front Fighters Association). Five years later he joined the Austrian Nazi Party and the SS. In 1935, he was transferred to a newly-formed "Jews Section," then became Administrator for Jewish Affairs. Ambitious and eager to succeed, he later became head of the Unit IV D 4/4 and IV B4, which was responsible for the overall organization of the deportation of Jews from Germany and the occupied European countries. He oversaw all the logistics, from the compilation of the transports, to the utilization of the railway trains. After the end of World War II, Eichmann fled from an American internment camp. Under a false name and with the support of Catholic monks—as well as a passport from the Vatican—he managed to escape to Argentina. After being tipped off by German Jews who lived nearby, Israeli Mossad agents kidnapped him in 1960. His trial in Jerusalem drew worldwide attention. Over 600 journalists were present when Eichmann declared himself "not guilty as charged." He was, however, found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. After his legal appeal was rejected, Adolf Eichmann was hanged in Israel on May 31, 1962. To avoid burying his remains on Israeli soil, he was cremated and his ashes were scattered in the Mediterranean.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER was born in 1889 in Messkirch. Before he even turned thirty, he was one of the most prominent philosophers in Germany. His 1927 work, *Being and Time*, remains his most important book and profoundly influenced 20th century philosophical thought—particularly deconstruction, existentialism and hermeneutics. From 1923–1927 he was professor at the University of Marburg, where Hannah Arendt was one of his students. A passionate love affair began between them. The relationship between the married father of two and his nineteen-year-old student was naturally quite problematic. Heidegger adored his brilliant student, but did not want to jeopardize his job or marriage. After Arendt left school their affair finally ended, shortly before her first marriage. And although they had been out of touch for several years, she was shocked and disappointed when Heidegger, her esteemed professor and first love, made the stunning decision to join the Nazi Party in 1933. Despite that turn of events she renewed their friendship in 1950, and with several lengthy interruptions, the relationship remained important to both of them throughout their lives. After the war Heidegger was widely shunned, and it was largely due to Arendt's efforts that he was finally able to lecture and publish again. She did not forgive his behavior, but always believed that his work must be awarded a prominent place in the canon of Western thought.

HANS JONAS was born on May 10, 1903, in Mönchengladbach. His father was a textile manufacturer; his mother was the daughter of the Chief Rabbi of Krefeld. Against the wishes of his father, Jonas became involved in Zionist circles. He also began studying philosophy and art history in Freiburg and Marburg, under Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. Jonas met Hannah Arendt when both were young students, and except for one bitter but temporary interruption, they remained friends their entire lives. In August 1933 he immigrated to London; then went to Jerusalem 1935, where in 1944 he joined the Jewish Brigade of the British Army and fought against the Germans. In 1949 he moved to Canada, and then in 1955 finally settled in New Rochelle, New York, where he had a joyous reunion with Arendt and joined her circle of friends. He took guest professorships at various prestigious universities in the U.S., mainly lecturing on the history of philosophy and the humanities. Their friendship was heavily strained by a conflict arising from the release of Arendt's articles and book on Adolf Eichmann. They didn't speak for two years, but Jonas' wife Lore finally helped the two old friends mend their rift.

MARY McCARTHY was born in Seattle on June 21, 1912, and subsequently orphaned at age six when both of her parents perished in a flu epidemic. A published author by age thirty, she quickly became a renowned writer and feminist. Her most famous book is the 1963 novel *The Group*, which follows the lives of eight women following their graduation from Vassar College in 1933. The book was an enormous commercial success (it remained on the *New York Times*' Best Seller list for two years), but controversial for its frank depiction of female sexuality and savaged by many male critics. McCarthy commiserated with Hannah Arendt during this time, as she was being simultaneously attacked for her articles on Adolf Eichmann. McCarthy wrote an impassioned and articulate essay defending Hannah Arendt's work—and supported her faithfully during the long months of anger and hostility that filled every corner of Arendt's private and public life. Her friendship with Arendt was committed and passionate—the European and the American together embodied all that was most admirable in powerful intellectual women. The published volume of their letters, *Between Friends: The Correspondence 1949–1975*, achieved worldwide acclaim. With her outspoken and spirited boldness of expression, McCarthy took part in many literary and political disputes. When Arendt passed away in 1975, it was McCarthy who was entrusted with the responsibility of completing her friend's unfinished book *The Life of the Mind*. Mary McCarthy died in New York in 1989.

THE CAST

BARBARA SUKOWA (Hannah Arendt)

Through her years of collaboration with Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Margarethe von Trotta, Barbara Sukowa has come to embody the essence of German film history. Born in Bremen, she started her career at the famous Max Reinhardt School in Vienna and then performed extensively in German theatre. In the U.S., Sukowa is well known for her performances in some of the most iconic films of the New German Cinema. Her breakthrough role was “Mieze” in Fassbinder’s monumental *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980), which earned her the German Best Young Actress Award. Working again with Fassbinder, Sukowa received the German Film Award (Gold) for her performance as the title character in his 1981 film *Lola*. In addition to *Hannah Arendt*, Sukowa has collaborated with von Trotta on several other films, most notably *Vision – From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen*; *Marianne and Juliane*, for which she won Best Actress at the 1981 Venice Film Festival; and *Rosa Luxemburg*, for which she received the Best Actress honors at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival. She has twice received the Bavarian Film Award, most recently for *Vision*. In 2008, she won Best Actress for *The Invention of the Curried Sausage* at the Montréal Film Festival. Sukowa’s other films include work by internationally acclaimed auteurs such as Michael Cimino, Lars Von Trier, David Cronenberg, Volker Schlöndorff, Agnieszka Holland and Tim Robbins; as well as projects directed by Serge Gainsbourg, actor John Turturro, and artists Cindy Sherman and Robert Longo.

In the early 1990s Sukowa moved to New York and pursued her career as a singer, working with some of the world’s outstanding orchestras and conductors including the Berlin Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Schoenberg Ensemble conducted by Claudio Abbado, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Reinbert de Leeuw, Concertgebouw, and Carnegie Hall. In addition to classical music Barbara Sukowa performs concerts with her rock band the X-Patsys.

AXEL MILBERG (Heinrich Blücher)

A graduate of the prestigious Otto Falckenberg Schule in Munich, Axel Milberg was an ensemble member of the Munich Kammerspiele from 1981–1998 and worked with directors such as Peter Zadek and Dieter Dorn. Milberg gained popularity with German cinema and TV audiences through the movie *After Five in the Forest Primeval*, directed by Hans-Christian Schmid. For his audio book reading of Henning Mankell’s *The Chinese*, he received the CORINE International Book Award. He has received several awards for his theater and television work, notably the Grimme prize, the Bavarian Film Prize, and the North German Film Award.

JANET MCTEER (Mary McCarthy)

A two-time Academy Award nominee, Janet McTeer studied at London’s Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and made her film debut in *Half Moon Street* opposite Sigourney Weaver and Michael Caine. For her performance in the 1996 West End revival of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (which subsequently moved to Broadway), she received a Tony Award, a Drama Desk Award, the Laurence Olivier Theatre Award and the London Critics Circle Theatre Award. In 2000, she received a Best Actress Oscar nomination for *Tumbleweeds*, a role that also earned her a Golden Globe for Best Actress and the Gotham Award for Best Newcomer. In 2009 she received an Emmy nomination for her portrayal of Clementine Churchill in the TV movie *Into the Storm*. Other films include *Carrington* (1995), Terry Gilliam’s *Tideland* (2005) and *The Woman in Black* (2011). In 2012, Janet McTeer received her second Oscar nomination, this time for Best Supporting Actress for her role in *Albert Nobbs*, opposite Glenn Close.

MARGARETHE VON TROTTA

(Director & Co-writer)

Born in Berlin, Margarethe von Trotta is one of the leaders of the New German Cinema movement, as well as one of the world's most important feminist filmmakers. From the early 1960s, after returning to Germany from Paris (where she encountered the Nouvelle Vague and the films of Ingmar Bergman), von Trotta then pursued acting, working closely with both Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Volker Schlöndorff, who later became her husband in 1971. Her first film, *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, which she co-directed with Schlöndorff in 1975, tells the story of a young woman who has a casual affair with a man she later discovers to be a terrorist.

Following her first independent directorial effort, *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages* (1978), von Trotta has gone on to make important and controversial films—often collaborating with *Hannah Arendt* star Barbara Sukowa—such as *Sisters, or the Balance of Happiness* (1979); *Marianne and Juliane* (winner of the Golden Lion at the 1981 Venice Film Festival); *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986); *Rosenstrasse* (2003); and *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen* (2010).

Despite being a leading feminist director, she rejects the description of her films as the product of “woman’s filmmaking,” arguing against the confines of the label. She believes that she should instead be seen as a filmmaker who is a woman, as well as a director who examines the interior of the feminine and personal as well as the exterior of the political. Margarethe von Trotta is also a Professor of Film at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2012	HANNAH ARENDT
2010	VISION – FROM THE LIFE OF HILDEGARD VON BINGEN
2006	I AM THE OTHER WOMAN
2003	ROSENSTRASSE
1995	THE PROMISE
1993	THE LONG SILENCE
1990	THE AFRICAN WOMAN
1988	LOVE AND FEAR
1987	FELIX
1986	ROSA LUXEMBURG
1983	SHEER MADNESS
1981	MARIANNE AND JULIANNE
1979	SISTERS, OR THE BALANCE OF HAPPINESS
1977	THE SECOND AWAKENING OF CHRISTA KLAGES
1971	THE LOST HONOR OF KATHARINA BLUM (Co-directed with Volker Schlöndorff)

“Saying Good-by to Hannah” By Mary McCarthy

Reprinted from *The New York Review of Books*, with the permission of the *Mary McCarthy Literary Trust*.

January 22, 1976

Her last book was to be called *The Life of the Mind* and was intended to be a pendant to *The Human Condition* (first called *The Vita Activa*), where she had scrutinized the triad of labor, work, and action: man as *animal laborans*, *homo faber*, and doer of public deeds. She saw the mind's life, or *vita contemplativa*, as divided into three parts also: thinking, willing, and judging. The first section, on thinking, was finished some time ago. The second, on willing, she finished just before she died, with what must have been relief, for she had found the will the most elusive of the three faculties to grapple with. The third, on judging, she had already sketched out and partly written; though the literature on the subject was sparse (mainly Kant), she did not expect it to give her much difficulty.

I say “her last book,” and that is how she thought of it, as a final task or crowning achievement, if she could only bring it off—not only filling in the other side of the tablet of human capacities but a labor of love in itself for the highest and least visible of them: the activity of the mind. If she had lived to see the book (two volumes, actually) through the press, no doubt she would have gone on writing, since her nature was expressive as well as thoughtful, but she would have felt that her true work was done.

She would have executed a service or mission she had been put into the world to perform. In this sense, Hannah, I believe, was religious. She had heard a voice such a spoke to the prophets, the call that came to the child Samuel, girded with a linen ephod in the house of Eli, the high priest. One can look on this more secularly and think that she felt herself indentured, bound as though under contract by her particular endowments, given her by Nature, developed in her by her teachers—Jaspers and Heidegger—and tragically enriched by History. It was not a matter of self-fulfillment (the idea would have been laughable or else detestable to Hannah) but of an injunction laid on all of us, not just the talented, to follow the trajectory chance and fate have launched us on, like a poet keeping faith with his muse. Hannah was not a believer in slavish notions of one's “duty” (which may be why she had so much trouble with the section on the will) but she was responsive to a sense of calling, vocation, including that of the citizen to serve the common life. She was also a very private person, and I think (though we never spoke of it) that *The Life of the Mind* was a task she dedicated to the memory of Heinrich, a kind of completion and rounding out of *their* common life.

Heinrich Bluecher, her husband and friend, was the last of her teachers. Though he was only ten years older than she, in their intellectual relationship there was something fatherly, indulgent, on his side, and pupil-like, eager, approval-seeking, on hers; as she spoke, he would look on her fondly, nodding to himself, as though luck had sent him an unimaginably bright girl student and tremendous “achiever,” which he himself, a philosopher in every sense, was content, with his pipes and cigars, not to be. He was proud of her and knew she would go far, to peaks and ranges he could discern in the distance, and calmly sat back, waiting for her to find them.

For her, Heinrich was like a pair of corrective lenses; she did not wholly trust her vision until it had been confirmed by his. While they thought alike on most questions, he was more a “pure” philosophic spirit, and she was more concerned with the *vita activa* of politics and fabrication—the fashioning of durable objects in the form of books and articles; neither was much interested in the biological sphere of the *animal laborans*—household drudgery, consumption of goods; though both were fond of young people, they never had any children. When he died, late in 1970, quite suddenly, though not as suddenly as she, she was alone. Surrounded by friends, she rode like a solitary passenger on her train of thought. So *The Life of the Mind*, begun in those bleak years, was conceived and pondered for (and she must have hoped *with*) Heinrich Bluecher, not exactly a monument but something like a triptych or folding panel with the mysterious will at the center. Anyway, that is what I guess, and she is not here to ask. I spoke of a crowning achievement, but Hannah was not in the least ambitious (absurd to connect her with a “career”); if there was some striving for a crown, it was in the sense of a summit toward which she had labored in order to be able to look around, like an explorer, finishing the last stages of an ascent alone. What would be spread out before her were the dark times she had borne witness to, as a Jewess and a displaced person, the long-drawn-out miscarriage of a socialist revolution, the present perils of the American Republic, in which she had found a new political home in which to hang, with increasing despondency, the ideas of freedom she had carried with her, but also the vast surveyor's map of concepts and insights, some inherited from a long philosophical tradition and some her own discoveries, which, regarded from a high point, could at least show us where we were.

In the realm of ideas, Hannah was a conservationist; she did not believe in throwing anything away that had once been thought. A use might be found for it; in her own way, she was an enthusiastic recycler. To put it differently, thought, for her, was a kind of husbandry, a humanizing of the wilderness of experience—building houses, running paths and roads through, damming streams, planting windbreaks. The task that had fallen to her, as an exceptionally gifted intellect and a representative of the generations she had lived among, was to apply thought systematically to each and every characteristic experience of her time—*anomie*, terror, advanced warfare, concentration camps, Auschwitz, inflation, revolution, school integration, the Pentagon Papers, space, Watergate, Pope John, violence, civil disobedience—and, having finally achieved this, to direct thought inward, upon itself, and its own characteristic processes.

The word “systematically” may be misleading. Despite her German habits, Hannah was not a system-builder. Rather, she sought to describe systems that were already *there*, inherent in the body of man’s interaction with the world and with himself as subject. The distinctions made by language, from very ancient times, indeed from the birth of speech, between *this* and *that* (e.g., work and labor, public and private, force, power, and violence), reveal man as categorizer, a “born” philosopher, if you will, with the faculty of separating, of finely discriminating, more natural to his species than that of constructing wholes. If I understood her, Hannah was always more for the Many than for the One (which may help explain her horrified recognition of totalitarianism as a new phenomenon in the world). She did not want to find a master key or universal solvent, and if she had a religion, it was certainly not monotheistical. The proliferation of distinctions in her work, branching out in every direction like tender shoots, no doubt owes something to her affection for the scholastics but it also testifies to a sort of typical awe-struck modesty before the world’s abundance and intense particularity.

But I do not want to discuss Hannah’s ideas here but to try to bring her back as a person, a physical being, showing herself radiantly in what she called the world of appearance, a stage from which she has now withdrawn. She was a beautiful woman, alluring, seductive, feminine, which is why I said “Jewess”—the old-fashioned term, evoking the daughters of Sion, suits her, like a fringed Spanish shawl. Above all, her eyes, so brilliant and sparkling, stary when she was happy or excited, but also deep, dark, remote, pools of inwardness. There was something unfathomable in Hannah that seemed to lie in the reflective depths of those eyes.

She had small, fine hands, charming ankles, elegant feet. She liked shoes; in all the years I knew her, I think she only once had a corn. Her legs, feet, and ankles expressed quickness, decision. You had only to see her on a lecture stage to be struck by those feet, calves, and ankles that seemed to keep pace with her thought. As she talked, she moved about, sometimes with her hands plunged in her pockets like somebody all alone on a walk, meditating. When the fire laws permitted, she would smoke, pacing the stage with a cigarette in a short holder, inhaling from time to time, reflectively, her head back, as if arrested by a new, unexpected idea. Watching her talk to an audience was like seeing the motions of the mind made visible in action and gesture. Peripatetic, she would come abruptly to a halt at the lectern, frown, consult the ceiling, bite her lip, pensively cup her chin. If she was reading a speech, there were always interjections, asides, like the footnotes that peppered her texts with qualifications and appendices. There was more than a touch of the great actress in Hannah. The first time I heard her speak in public—nearly thirty years ago, during a debate—I was reminded of what Bernhardt must have been or Proust’s Berma, a magnificent stage diva, which implies a goddess. Perhaps a chthonic goddess, or a fiery one, rather than the airy kind. Unlike other good speakers, she was not at all an orator. She appeared, rather, as a mime, a thespian, enacting a drama of mind, that dialogue of me-and-myself she so often summons up in her writings. Watching her framed in the proscenium arch, we were not far from the sacred origins of the theater. What she projected was the human figure as actor and sufferer in the agon of consciousness and reflection, where there are always two, the one who says and the one who replies or questions.

Yet nobody could have been farther from an exhibitionist. Calculation of the impression she was making never entered her head. Whenever she spoke in public, she had terrible stage fright, and afterward she would ask only “Was it all right?” (This cannot have been true of the classroom, where she felt herself at ease and among friends.) And naturally she did not play roles in private or public, even less than the normal amount required in social relations. She was incapable of feigning. Though she prided herself as a European on being able to tell a lie, where we awkward Americans blurted out the truth, in fact there was a little hubris there. Hannah’s small points of vanity never had any relation to her real accomplishments. For example, she thought she knew a good deal about cooking and didn’t. It was the same with her supposed ability to lie. Throughout our friendship, I don’t think I ever heard her tell even one of those white lies, such as pleading illness or a previous engagement, to get herself out of a social quandary. If you wrote something she found bad, her policy was not to allude to it—an unvarying course of action that told you louder than words what she thought.

What was theatrical in Hannah was a kind of spontaneous power of being seized by an idea, an emotion, a presentiment, whose vehicle her body then became, like the actor's. And this power of being seized and worked upon, often with a start, widened eyes, "Ach!" (before a picture, a work of architecture, some deed of infamy), set her apart from the rest of us like a high electrical charge. And there was the vibrant, springy, dark, short hair, never fully gray, that sometimes from sheer force of energy appeared to stand bolt upright on her head.

I suppose all this must have been part of an unusual physical endowment, whose manifestation in her features and facial gestures was the beauty I spoke of. Hannah is the only person I have ever watched *think*. She lay motionless on a sofa or a day bed, arms folded behind her head, eyes shut but occasionally opening to stare upward. This lasted—I don't know—from ten minutes to half an hour. Everyone tiptoed past if we had to come into the room in which she lay oblivious.

She was an impatient, generous woman, and those qualities went hand in hand. Just as, in a speech or an essay, she would put everything in but the kitchen stove, as if she could not keep in reserve a single item of what she knew or had happened that instant to occur to her, so she would press on a visitor assorted nuts, chocolates, candied ginger, tea, coffee, Campari, whiskey, cigarettes, cake, crackers, fruit, cheese, almost all at once, regardless of conventional sequence or, often, of the time of day. It was as if the profusion of edibles, set out, many of them, in little ceremonial-like dishes and containers, were impatient propitiatory offerings to all the queer gods of taste. Someone said that this was the eternal Jewish mother, but it was not that: there was no notion that any of this fodder was good for you; in fact most of it was distinctly bad for you, which she must have known somehow, for she did not insist.

She had a respect for privacy, separateness, one's own and hers. I often stayed with her—and Heinrich and her—on Riverside Drive and before that on Morningside Drive, so that I came to know Hannah's habits well, what she liked for breakfast, for instance. A boiled egg, some mornings, a little ham or cold cuts, toast spread with anchovy paste, coffee, of course, half a grapefruit or fresh orange juice, but perhaps that last was only when I, the American, was there. The summer after Heinrich's death she came to stay with us in Maine, where we gave her a separate apartment, over the garage, and I put some thought into buying supplies for her kitchen—she liked to breakfast alone. The things, I thought, that she would have at home, down to instant coffee (which I don't normally stock) for when she could not be bothered with the filters. I was rather pleased to have been able to find anchovy paste in the village store. On the afternoon of her arrival, as I showed her where everything was in the larder, she frowned over the little tube of anchovy paste, as though it were an inexplicable foreign object. "What is that?" I told her. "Oh." She put it down and looked thoughtful and as though displeased, somehow. No more was said. But I knew I had done something wrong in my efforts to please. She did not wish to be *known*, in that curiously finite and, as it were, reductive way. And I had done it to show her I knew her—a sign of love, though not always—thereby proving that in the last analysis I did not know her at all.

Her eyes were closed in her coffin, and her hair was waved back from her forehead, whereas *she* pulled it forward, sometimes tugging at a lock as she spoke, partly to hide a scar she had got in an automobile accident—but even before that she had never really bared her brow. In her coffin, with the lids veiling the fathomless eyes, that noble forehead topped by a sort of pompadour, she was not Hannah any more but a composed death mask of an eighteenth-century philosopher. I was not moved to touch that grand stranger in the funeral parlor, and only in the soft yet roughened furrows of her neck, in which the public head rested, could I find a place to tell her good-by.

Hannah Arendt

A film by Margarethe von Trotta

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Heinrich Blücher **AXEL MILBERG**

Mary McCarthy **JANET MCTEER**

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Hans Jonas **ULRICH NOETHEN**

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a Heimatfilm Production in Coproduction with Amor Fou, Mact, Metro and ARD Degto, BR, WDR
Supported by: Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, FFA, FFF Bayern, DFFF, Film Fund Luxembourg - CIAV,
Film Fund Luxemburg - AFS, CNC Israel Film Fund, Jerusalem Film and Television Fund, Eurimages

**Germany • 2012 • 113 mins • Color • DCP, Blu-ray and HD-Cam
In English and German with English subtitles
Aspect ratio: 2.40:1 • Sound: Dolby SRD • Not Rated**



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