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HANNAH ARENDT

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Foreword

Hannah Arendt is from the century of world wars: she experienced dictatorship and terrorism, escape, forced migration, imprisonment and nuclear threat, and far too much ideology for just one lifetime. She was homeless and stateless for almost two decades, and lived through this century's most defining experience: "We lost our home, and with it the familiarity of everyday life. We lost our profession, and with it the faith of being somehow of use in this world."[i]

Paradoxically, this experience helped her make an entirely fresh start in an unfamiliar country and new language. In 1946, without any prospect of stability in her life, she declared in passing to her teacher Karl Jaspers that a "dignified existence on the edge of society" was only possible if one "takes the risk, with varying degrees of humour, of either being stoned by it or condemned to starvation".[ii]

Hannah Arendt didn't starve, but she came close to the stoning on more than one occasion; rather than avoiding trouble, she favoured opposition and resistance. Her book on Adolf Eichmann was a prime example of this. Unable to see him as a mass murderer, she instead depicted him as a "clown" and reported on his 1961 trial in Jerusalem seemingly without compassion, which brought her the accusation of not loving her own people. She had only just become a citizen of the United States, and put herself and her husband Heinrich Blücher in great danger. In the paranoid climate of the McCarthy era, Blücher, a former communist and social activist, was threatened with deportation. Instead of keeping her head down and drawing as little attention as possible, Arendt attacked the public slanderers as the true enemies of democracy.

The 20th-century denied her the opportunity of having an academic career. Without a doubt, we lost a philosopher in Hannah Arendt. She could have been the pride of any German university; that is, if the German universities hadn't closed their doors on her in 1933, and if she hadn't been chased away.

No one could have foreseen that she would become the lover of a prominent philosopher, much less that she would be torn from her literary existence with Goethe and Plato and Rilke. Inspired by the Friedrich Schiller poem, she melancholically referred to herself as the "The Girl from Afar". And she was, but she didn't remain so; instead, she became a shrewd observer of her time, entirely dedicated to contemporary events.

As an intellectual, as a writer, as an ever-current contemporary, she was self-created. Her confidence led her to start early in gathering together everything that she scribbled, wrote or typed. Her handwriting, as she was the first to admit, was catastrophic, so whenever possible she had a typewriter with her; and later on, she also dictated. A diligent reporter, she took the typewriter with her everywhere, to Switzerland when visiting Karl Jaspers, to Luxembourg to see her friend Anne Weil, to Jerusalem for the Adolf Eichmann trial. Hannah Arendt's collected letters form an almost inexhaustible reservoir of thoughts, opinions, observations, and drafts for essays, lectures and books.

When she commuted between New York, Chicago and San Francisco, when she travelled between America and Europe, she told her husband and friends about her many encounters, about the hardships of being on the road, and also about her astonishment at how swiftly Germany was emerging from the ruins of Nazism. And also, at the peak of the Vietnam war, about her fears for the survival of the American republic she so revered.

She found her true calling far from the German lectern. In America, she became a media intellectual long before anyone even talked about "the media", and before a critical public had formed. She once said that while men focus on having an impact, her aim was to understand. But it went further than that. In the early 1960s, the Holocaust wasn't a topic of discussion even among survivors in the USA. Hannah Arendt brought it into the public eye by taking it beyond academic debate; she had herself dispatched to Jerusalem as a trial observer by *The New Yorker*. She had no qualms about exerting pressure on *Der Spiegel* until someone agreeable to her finally reviewed her Eichmann book. And though she had little desire to appear on American television, not wanting to be recognized on the street, in 1964 she stepped in front of the camera with Rolf Hochhuth to promote his "The Deputy", the play in which he denounced Pope Pius XII for not having spoken out against the discrimination, marginalisation and murder of the Jews.

At a 1972 symposium held in Toronto in Arendt's honour, she placed emphasis on the comment "that everything I have done, and everything I have written, is temporary".[iii] How many of the listeners will have noticed the allusion to Bertolt Brecht? Regardless of where she was – whether in the internment camp in France in 1940, in the court room in Jerusalem, or at home in her apartment in New York where she held court as a *salonière* – she always had quotes like these "somewhere in the back of her mind"[iv]. She carried German literature with her everywhere, including the ballad "Of Poor B.B.", which she quoted in her essay on Walter

Benjamin: "We know we are temporary / And that after us will come: nothing worth mentioning."[v]

Her books – from her biography of Rahel Varnhagen to the essay "On Violence", from "The Human Condition" to "The Life of the Mind", from "The Origins of Totalitarianism" to the book about the revolution – don't form a cohesive body of work, but rather are fragments of a life's work, one whose completion would never have occurred to her. Because she wrote about everything and was able to fearlessly contradict herself, she was increasingly used as a purveyor of calendar mottos, becoming "Holy Hannah", the keynote speaker and columnist.

In a radio interview in September 1964, Arendt uttered a sentence which would become legendary: "According to Kant, no-one has the right to obey"[vi]. An abridged version of this became the banner of a determined anti-authoritarian confidence; a slogan as suited to coffee cups and tote bags as Janis Joplin's song lyric "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose", or Willy Brandt's promise to "Dare more Democracy". In the spring of 2020, the quote appeared on a homemade placard in Berlin's Rosa Luxembourg Platz, and was used for demonstrations against the quarantine regulations imposed at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Bolzano, meanwhile, it had long since attained the ranks of a religious cleansing formula. There, since 2017, the quote appears tri-lingually in neon lettering to caption a perfectly-preserved Mussolini frieze. It shows the Duce astride his steed, right arm raised, and beneath it is the Italian fascist's motto: "Credere, obbedire, combattere" ("Believe, obey, fight").

According to Hannah Arendt, no-one had to obey. She left no directives; and her work contains no stipulations, only suggestions. Her way of thinking, which she referred to as "thinking without guardrails", didn't restrict others either.

The friends she gathered around her in her apartment on New York's Riverside Drive loved her for this; and with equal passion she was hated for it too, by her enemies, of whom there were more than a few. She brought Rahel Varnhagen's salon from romantic 19th century Berlin to the Hudson, where such intellectual conviviality was a new discovery. With her temperament, her argumentative disposition, her worldview, Arendt was immortalised in literature even during her lifetime, appearing in novels by Susan Sontag, Robert Neumann and Uwe Johnson. To the literary critic Alfred Kazin, Hannah Arendt was a "chosen one": even in 1987, many years after her death, he would glow with enthusiasm when talking about her, the woman whose first great manuscript he had "Anglicized".

From Rilke to Brecht, from Heidegger's strict philosophical unconcealment to the glaringly bright lights of the public eye: that is the strain and span of this life. For anyone else it would have been too much, but not for Hannah Arendt, who said: "I simply did what I wanted to do."[vii]

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The legacy of this time – the radical Twenties

In 1956, Bertolt Brecht dies, and Hannah Arendt lets out a small sigh: "[Y]es, the Twenties have died on this very day."[viii] Beyond costume parties in the safe academic milieu, she will have experienced little of the legendary 1920s, because she was busy falling unhappily in love and getting unhappily married. Martin Heidegger and Rainer Maria Rilke were her safeguard from the street riots between Communists and National Socialists; and from the political mayhem of new elections, emergency regulations and presidential cabinets amidst which the Weimar Republic foundered.

The closest she got to the Weimar reality was a mere coincidence: in a December 1930 edition of the "Frankfurter Zeitung" which published her front-page essay to commemorate the 1500th anniversary of the theologian Augustine's death, a "private telegram" on the back page announced that a drawing from George Grosz's "Ecce Homo" series, depicting Christ wearing a gas mask, had prompted a further lawsuit against Grosz and his publisher Wieland Herzfelde.[ix] In his drastic pictures, Grosz portrayed precisely the Weimar reality which was kept away from Marburg's "Magic Mountain". But the two worlds clearly weren't that far apart after all: in the spring of 1928, when Hannah Arendt was already working on her doctoral thesis about the "concept of love in Augustine", Brecht was also studying Augustine, allegedly "due to a lack of trashy romance novels".[x] He then set to work on the "Threepenny Opera", which premiered at the Berliner Ensemble theatre on the 31st of August 1928. It was the counter world to the intellectual realm that Hannah Arendt had found in the philosophy seminar. For this reason, unlike Elias Canetti, Lisa Fittko, Benno von Wiese and approximately two thousand others who would later claim to have witnessed this theatrical sensation, she was unable to be at the inaugural performance because she was busy finishing her own Augustine work.

Brecht wasn't yet her world. She wouldn't have known that Brecht's first play "Drums in the Night", written in 1919, was initially called "Spartacus" and that it was about the eponymous uprising; the workers' revolution at the end of WWI which was immediately quashed. Nor was she aware of the Berlin uproar which arose the night preceding the 1929 stock market crash. She didn't experience the street riots and was therefore "unable to comprehend the rampaging vandalism of these events and the enjoyment found in them", as Helen Wolff, her later editor and friend, half-apologetically claimed.[xi]

But "The Threepenny Opera" was hard to escape. Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's compositions for the amoral "Mack the Knife" and "Pirate Jenny" became popular tunes in apocalyptic Berlin. Writing after the war, Günther Stern, by then firmly established as Günther Anders, described them as "the only songs that could successfully compete with the hits, and at the same time not be misunderstood as hits".[xii] For Elias Canetti, the Brecht quotation "First comes the eating, then the morality" was an "all-purpose phrase" in which "time found its common denominator".[xiii] In her book "The Origins of Totalitarianism", Arendt would go on to write about the resounding inefficacy of both the avant-garde and social criticism in the example of Brecht's "Threepenny Opera": "The avant-garde didn't realise that this society could no longer be shocked, and that their amorality was charging an open door. All attempts of this kind were so overwhelmingly successful in post-war Germany that the "revolutionary minority" should have noticed they were clearly representing the spirit of the majority."[xiv]

In 1928, Hannah Arendt certainly didn't belong to this revolutionary avant-garde. If anyone was apolitical, it was her. The explosive power in Pirate Jenny's song escaped her. For Ernst Bloch, it was a "verse of genuine dynamite". When Polly sings in the "Threepenny Opera" about the ship that will come in with eight sails and fifty cannons, she is singing about her rage: "And at noon all will be quiet in the harbour/When they ask me who must die/You'll hear me say: Everyone!/And when the heads fall, I'll say: Whoops!"[xv] Bloch's only regret is that Pirate Jenny's saviour doesn't actually come and blast the town with his fifty cannons, "which would have been the revolutionary logic of the play".[xvi] The "dynamite" verse describes nothing other than the work of the guillotine, which horrified Hegel, a former Jacobin, for being the "coldest, tritest death, without any more meaning than slicing through a head of cabbage or a gulp of water."[xvii]

In his enthusiasm, Bloch, who would later defend the Moscow trials in which Stalin denounces his internal party opponents as traitors and has them condemned and executed,

echoes the rush of amorality into which not only the Berliners were falling. In January 1929, the "Threepenny Opera" was performed on nineteen German stages, and also in Prague, Vienna and Budapest. In 1928 and 1929 alone, there were apparently four thousand two hundred performances.[xviii]

For Hannah Arendt, there wasn't yet any revolutionary romanticism, no fifty cannons. In the controversy surrounding her Eichmann reportage, Gershom Scholem will falsely claim that she comes from Weimar left-wing circles. Arendt will point out that she didn't even know them back then. The religious historian had experienced Berlin brutalism just as little as her, having emigrated to Palestine in 1925. Feeling the need to correct Scholem, she writes to him: through her first husband, Günther Stern, she admittedly "knew a number of the so-called "left-wing intellectuals" […] for example Brecht, Hanns Eisler, Korsch. But that doesn't mean I was one of them, and certainly not that I "come from them"".[xix] She does, however, later regret the fact that back when the Republic was at stake, she was interested in neither history nor politics.

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Just yesterday they were communists

Amidst this end-of-year melancholy, Arendt's friend Mary McCarthy gets in touch. She wants a united attack on the "new intellectual right-wing", this "strange mix of leftist, anarchist, nihilistic, opportunistic elements who all pass themselves off as conservative, a real ship of fools".[xx] Everything centres on Whittaker Chambers, she says, whose book shouldn't be reviewed as "simply one among many". She feels that the new right-wing want to push it through as a "normal" publication, and this intent must "be nipped in the bud", providing "it isn't already too late", as she gloomily prophesies.[xxi]

As was frequently the case in their lives, the always-combative Mary McCarthy, with her wealth of experience among New York's intellectual biotope, acts as an agitator to Hannah Arendt, who is more cautious. McCarthy enjoys escalating the debates which impassion her, and the attention doesn't bother her; on the contrary, she seeks it out. Arendt follows in the younger woman's footsteps as though she were her older sister. In 1950, a few months before North Korea's invasion of the South, Mary McCarthy had spoken out against the Stalinists in the

Waldorf Astoria hotel with the people from the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Now, two years on, the former communists use the list of names from the event in order to forcibly recruit alleged *fellow travellers*, the "crypto communists". In late March 1952, a further Congress meeting takes place at the same location. Hannah Arendt is already on her way to Europe, so Mary McCarthy speaks in her place (which she will do again during the controversy surrounding "Eichmann in Jerusalem").

McCarthy had conferred for days on end with her husband and their mutual friend Rose Feitelson about what to wear for the occasion. And she manages to look both "fragile" and "authoritative",[xxii] as Feitelson reports back to Europe, where Hannah Arendt has been anxiously awaiting the news. The Waldorf Astoria became a place of encounter between Joseph McCarthy's supporters and opponents, and reformed Stalinists and Trotskyists who argued over how to fight Communism. Mary McCarthy's adversary was the journalist Max Eastman. He had once been the young radical in Greenwich Village, and had beaten his drum for women's suffrage and socialism before a trip to the Soviet Union disillusioned him. He translated a few more books by Stalin's rival Leo Trotsky before entirely renouncing the subject. Now Eastman was actively involved in hunting down genuine and supposed communists among his intellectual friends.

In this particular case, the entire family is involved in the debate over whether America is being infiltrated, and to what extent this infiltration may already have advanced. In 1956, Mary McCarthy's brother Kevin plays the male lead in "Invasion of the Body Snatchers", the B-movie which will become a classic of drive-in cinema. In threatening monochrome, the film depicts a nightmare scenario in which anonymous forces transform the inhabitants of an American small town into emotionless automata. It ends with Kevin McCarthy screaming "You're next!" at motorists on the freeway. The plot, with pods that appear out of nowhere and transform into replacement humans, was absurd enough to make the message interpretable on all sides: Was the danger posed by the communists sowing their devilish seed, or by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who threatened freedom through his totalitarianism of the mind? The director Don Siegel said in his memoir that at the end of the film, when the lights went on, audience members looked around and wondered whether the people sitting next to them were pods too, already waiting to replace them.[xxiii]

Hannah Arendt finally reads "Witness" (or flicks through it), but instead of reviewing the book, she reviews the mindset of which she considers it symptomatic. From Mary's stories and

her own experiences in Europe, she knows that Congress enthusiasts are "people with a more or less pronounced communist past […] who have an easy time with fear".[xxiv] She herself has no fear whatsoever in this situation, at least not for herself. She still feels like a pariah, but she doesn't have to fear execution by stoning. And though her living circumstances are far from secure, by this point Heinrich Blücher is able to provide a certain level of financial security for their household. But she is afraid for the country that has just accepted them both as citizens. The letter in which she informs Jaspers about life under the diarchy of Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy, the longest letter she writes to him, is saturated with the deepest political melancholy: "It seems no longer possible, as it was just a few years ago, to unreservedly stand up for America, as we both [she and Blücher] have done."[xxv]

"Witness" offers her the opportunity to create in her political philosophy another type beyond the *parvenu* and the *pariah*; that of the ex-communist continuing his life with an unchanged totalitarian worldview. Chambers refers to Alger Hiss, who he sent to prison, as the "closest friend I ever had", but claims he has to snitch on him because "amid the situation in which this nation currently finds itself, I can't do anything else". He ends his confession in the tradition of Martin Luther: "God help me".[xxvi]

For Chambers, the battle against communism is a battle between good and evil. His moment of epiphany was prompted by a book about the Soviet prison camps, an eye-opening read for him because as a communist he shares responsibility for these camps. "It's evil, absolute evil. And I'm part of this evil",[xxvii] he repents. This religious pathos isn't terribly different to Hannah Arendt's entry in her "Thought Diary": "Radical evil is that which should never have been allowed to happen; in other words, something with which a person cannot reconcile himself […] for which a person cannot take responsibility, because its consequences are immeasurable, and because with these consequences there can be no adequate punishment."[xxviii]

Chambers, however, absolutely wants to assume responsibility; he takes on the sins of the world, if only to then point the finger at others and demand the same of them. For him, the only salvation lies in betrayal, in denunciation, something from which Hannah Arendt's secular foundation ultimately protects her. More than twenty years before, in an essay on Augustine and Protestantism, she had postulated the unavoidable secularisation of religious experience: "With the general shift towards secularisation, the religious return before God loses its known authority, and instead becomes a return to one's own life."[xxix]

Chambers doesn't want a life of his own, but he does want to return to the pre-secular state. After he was able to break free from communism and his homosexual experiences (about which the House Un-American Activities Committee was unaware), to be on the safe side he promptly got baptised twice, became an Episcopalian, then a Quaker, then a preacher, and declared that everything must be sacrificed and that "in today's world, denunciation is a moral obligation".[xxx]

The religious rambling obfuscates the real danger: not the temptation of communism, but the temptation to fight it with communist – or in other words, totalitarian – methods. In Hannah Arendt's view, Chamber's recommendations equate to the methods of a police state, and are incompatible with democracy. "Only in a police state where inhabitants are divided into two constantly-shifting groups, where one has the privilege of denouncing others, and the other fear being denounced, has "denunciation" become an obligation."[xxxi] As always, this too indicates the efforts of the best in the class to yet again be the best in the class. Arendt has to explain to the apolitical Gershom Scholem that "the McCarthy thing is a genuinely serious matter, and the differences deeply rooted",[xxxii] but she also takes great delight in these differences.

In her attack on Whittaker Chambers, an apologia emerges for her husband, the former communist. She is playing an incredibly dangerous game; she wants to save him, but is simultaneously putting him (and herself too) in great danger. After all, the news about Chaplin, who thirty-five years after he filmed the short "The Immigrant" was himself kicked out of the country like an illegal immigrant, was all over the papers.

In her analysis, she differentiates between ex-communists and former communists. Both swore by the communism which found its justification in the resistance to fascism. Former communists, she claims, those whom she alone accepts, have gone into hiding in both public and private life. "They were and are not of the opinion that they are destined and chosen to lead the fight against communism".[xxxiii] It's obvious who she means: "You can recognise the politically experienced among the former communists by the fact that they left the Party relatively early; they sensed when the moment had come in which a revolutionary party had turned into a totalitarian movement".[xxxiv]

But history is about to be rewritten. The ex-communists, according to Arendt's explanation of the American situation to her friend Blumenfeld in Israel, played a particularly fateful role, wanting to prove "that US politics have been shaped since 1932 by a communist band of conspirators within the government".[xxxv] The ex-communists, "though small in number,

have made from their past a springboard into normal public life, where they could play an even bigger role if they succeed in recruiting all former communists".[xxxvi]

This is, admittedly, followed by a rather surprising sentence, but one that isn't so surprising if you know that just a few months previously, Hannah Arendt was sitting in the seminar of the newly-rehabilitated Martin Heidegger, only to have to tear herself away from him once again. In the aforementioned sentence, she calls for reconciliation and solidarity with those who "have ever been caught up in the maelstrom of a totalitarian movement". Sometimes, she affirms, this can include "the best of us". And of course, to her, Heidegger is one of the best, and here she is the one who can save someone: "We have to form friendships wherever we can, and this applies to former Nazis or fascists just as much as it does to former communists."[xxxvii] In this way, ever the star pupil, she casually exonerated Blücher together with Heidegger.

She herself, of course, is in the clear; she was never so strongly politically engaged that she was at risk of getting carried away. And yet to the end of her days, she reprimanded herself for having been apolitical before 1933, for not having resisted the rise of Nazism. While Günther Anders was heading off to see Brecht, she was preoccupied with the concept of love in Augustine and then with the Romanticist Rahel Varnhagen. She doesn't want that to happen again. There's a danger, she writes, that the ex-communists "will heighten the totalitarian danger in which every free society now finds itself".[xxxviii]

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The salon on the Hudson

Hannah Arendt's first publication with Piper Verlag isn't her biography of Rahel Varnhagen, but an essay, released as a pamphlet, on the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. She would have liked to dedicate "Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on The Hungarian Revolution" to the memory of Rosa Luxemburg, and thereby also to Heinrich Blücher's youth, but the new chief executive objects, and the publisher tries to explain the book to its own author. Is it not, after all, a "passionate plea to correctly recognize the nature and danger of totalitarian imperialism, specifically: of the communist regime of violence"? Among readers "without further knowledge", the editor squirms, trying to adopt the right tone, Rosa Luxemburg will "be counted

among the pioneers of the very same communism in Germany". This could give rise to "a sense of unease" in an uninformed reader who is expecting an anti-communist book.[xxxix]

She relents. "Poor Rosa! Dead for nearly 40 years and she's still falling between two stools. I understand your reasons, of course,"[xl] she writes to Klaus Piper, from whom she can expect no more understanding for the revolution than from Rössner – and perhaps it is only her own revolutionary romanticism.

When the Rahel Varnhagen book is published in June 1959, the question of the title brings even more difficulties. Piper Verlag wants the subtitle to be "A Life Story", while Arendt would like a clear indication that it's a Jewish life story; the story of a Jewess. "Yes, the subtitle", she writes to her publisher, probably very aware of the thoughts the editor might be having regarding its marketability. "Of course yours sounds better, but the word "Jew" simply has to be in there somewhere. Otherwise it will be misleading to the reader. And I don't believe it would significantly reduce the readership, either. After all, interest in the Jewish question is currently very buoyant among the better people in Germany." She plays through different iterations: "*A Life Story from German Judaism*, or *A Life Story from the Beginnings of German Judaism*", and then comes up with the ideal solution: "I do of course have a far more beautiful subtitle, but unfortunately it isn't viable. Namely: *Rahel Varnhagen. The Melody of an Injured Heart, Interpreted by Hannah Arendt.* Because that's precisely what I've done."[xli]

Must the word "Jew" really appear? The sentence is underlined in Rössner's managerial blue ink and commented in the margin with a recommendation directed at the publisher: "No!?"[xlii]

But that isn't yet the last word; the publisher's wife has that. Elisabeth Piper wins the subtitle debate with the suggestion "The Life Story of a German Jewess from the Romantic Era". Her husband goes into raptures over this, particularly due to the added romanticism, because it ensures that the reader "is consistently and fully aware of the absolute, the passionate intensity, and the open-to-the-feminine as a romantic awareness of life".[xliii] The fact that, of all things, the SS ideal of the "absolute" should occur to him is surely just a coincidence. And yet former SS man Rössner still doesn't admit defeat; he once again shortens the subtitle in the strict avoidance of anything Jewish, and two months later sends Arendt a jacket design with a vague "A Life History".

Unlike with her fondness for the revolutionary, Hannah Arendt will ultimately prevail here. Rahel Varnhagen was a Jew when the Zionist Hannah Arendt began to research her, and

thirty years later she is still a Jew, while Arendt has long since bid farewell to Zionism, and that's how she wants to introduce her Rahel. When Hans-Harder Biermann-Ratjen, the leader of the Hamburg Office for Culture, asks her what topic she will discuss at the 1959 Lessing Prize Ceremony, she responds: "Well, the idea of talking about Jews […] seems to immediately suggest itself."[xliv]

By all accounts, Rössner adored his author and took exemplary care of her. He didn't seem aggrieved when he edited Arendt's book about one of his former SS comrades. (He didn't have to do it, and could have delegated her "Eichmann" to one of the editors.) After her death, he did admittedly suggest letting the title go out of print on account of its temporary slump in sales.[xlv] His own time in the SS was behind him, and he had returned to civilian life. He was spared in post-war society; he was, after all, far from the only one to have been in the SS.

"It just never occurred to me to ask about his past," said the author Marcel Reich-Ranicki, an occasional Piper author. "It wasn't the done thing back then."[xlvi] Hannah Arendt didn't ask either; but she did often wonder. Due to the interventions in the "Eichmann" manuscript, she complained to Jaspers about Klaus Piper, who suddenly only wanted to bring the book out as a paperback. "Beforehand, he sent me a memorandum from a lawyer regarding potential lawsuits. The fact that he requested it is completely fine. But you should have seen this memo: Page after page of concerns that convicted Nazi criminals (from the Eichmann commando) in German prisons could feel their "honour" had been slighted. Totally bizarre and unmistakably a document written by Nazi sympathizers – but no one there noticed that!" By "there", did she mean in the publishing house? "I almost suspect that he [Piper] has such people in his own publishing company, of course without realizing[xlvii]."

According to his own statement on the matter, Klaus Piper knew that his publishing director had been a member of the Nazi Party, but he was unaware of his former role in the Reich Security Head Office. The editor Hansjörg Graf, however, who had been with Piper since 1956, was convinced that his boss must have known.[xlviii] Rössner's family was also sure that Piper had been informed about the matter.[xlix] The author Gerhard Zwerenz, who Piper wanted to sign onto his list, recounted that in 1959 Rössner "praised Heidegger to the skies, describing himself as Hannah Arendt's indispensable editor and even her friend". This appeared in his book "Slave Language and Revolts", co-written with his wife Ingrid, and he later wanted it amended: "It may

certainly be assumed that Hannah Arendt had an inkling of Rössner's SS career, which was known within the publishing house and among those associated with it."[l]

The editor Reinhard Baumgart regarded his employer Rössner as a person who knew how to counterbalance the publisher's whims – "quiet, conciliatory, reserved, a fair-minded superior". In a mildly historicizing retrospective, once the SS background had become public knowledge a quarter of a century after Arendt's death, Baumgart claimed that "one could have taken him for an educated, former general staff officer, the employee of a conquered army, a gentleman among warhorses."[li]

There's no doubt that this man was defeated, and by his past in particular, but no one around him made this into an accusation. As a student in Freiburg in 1943, Walter Jens, also a Piper author, bought the book "The George Kreis and Literary Criticism", Rössner's PhD thesis from 1938, in which the author calls upon people to "keep a very close eye on the Judaizing of the Kreis"[lii]. Jens questioned his editor Rössner on this book, and asked whether he was the "George Kreis Rössner". He didn't deny it. It was never discussed again. "In any case, he didn't dispute it, he just consoled his author [Jens]".[liii]

Internally, they knew how to communicate, almost like in a secret society. At the same time, it was possible to advance an examination of the past with old forces like Rössner. In a 1962 essay, Jens referred to the nationalist view of literature which the Germanist Hans Schwerte was still cultivating in the 1950s when he promoted the "conscious championing of the core values of nationhood and Germanness".[liv] From his former SS order, SS-Obersturmbannführer Rössner knew the SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Ernst Schneider, who had written his PhD thesis on Rilke and been promoted to leadership of the "Ancestral Heritage" organisation, which the SS leader Heinrich Himmler was running as a cultural-political hobbyhorse; not excluding experiments on humans. After their time in the SS, they were reunited at Stalling Verlag: Rössner had three years of imprisonment behind him and was editing the work "Thinkers and Interpreters in modern-day Europe". Schneider, who had re-named himself Schwerte and thereby escaped prosecution, contributed an essay on Gottfried Benn, who in his autobiography "Double Life" had by no means called himself to account. In 1958, Schneider qualified as a professor in Erlangen, as Schwerte, with a piece of work published as "Faust and the Faustian". The two souls living in Schwerte enabled him to create this exemplary work in ideological criticism. Joachim Fest, who came from an anti-Nazi family, also refers at the end of his 1963 portrait gallery "The Face of the Third Reich" to the "exceptional work of Hans Schwerte".[lv]

This can be found in a book which was published by Piper and accounted for by Schneider-Schwerte's old SS comrade Rössner.

[p. 244 – 249]

A mere performance

Hannah Arendt would surely have got a kick out of the information passed to the CIA by Reinhard Gehlen, the President of the German Federal Intelligence Service (the BND); namely that Eichmann's defence lawyer Robert Servatius was a "close associate" of the BND.[lvi] The trial didn't just take place in a theatre, the setting was also equivalent to a performance, and Hannah Arendt knew very well that a superior state-political interest was directing the proceedings. She just didn't realise *how* carefully the trial had been staged. In "Eichmann in Jerusalem" she quotes extensively from Ben-Gurion's declarations. Because the generation of Israelis who grew up after the great catastrophe might lose their connection to the Jewish people and their history, she wrote, it was necessary "that our young people remember what has happened to the Jews. We want them to know the tragic facts of our history."[lvii] For Arendt, Ben-Gurion's intended "life lesson" bore no resemblance to a constitutional trial, and she made her readers aware of that. But she of all people, a person who had always striven to remain independent, taking the stage only in universities and avoiding the Amerika Häuser, who believed she was uncovering a set-up in "Eichmann in Jerusalem", became the victim of someone entirely different.

Arendt is in agreement with her husband that Servatius, with all his brawn, is an unpleasant figure. A glimmer of light is offered by his assistant Dieter Wechtenbruch. This "student of Carl Schmitt […] was readily available to reporters outside the court room",[lviii] she states further on in the book, of course not asking herself why he was so readily available. Wechtenbruch, who unlike Servatius spoke English and French, had signed a contract in Cologne on the 17. January 1961 for his participation in the Eichmann trial, which allowed for a monthly fee of one thousand Marks and states: "Lawyer Wechtenbruch undertakes not to reveal to the press, editors or any other persons interested in publication any information regarding trial material or proceedings, or regarding statements and communications from the mandate, nor will he undertake to make any publications himself." Utilizing this agreement, Wechtenbruch refuses his whole life long to answer questions on the trial.[lix]

"Today I saw Servatius's young assistant for hours on end, Wechtenbruch or something like that," she reports back to New York during the trial. "He's flying to Germany tomorrow to secure witnesses, and above all to attempt to convince the Germans to file an application for extradition. He was really interesting, most notably because he's far more likeable than the men here representing the Federal Republic, who suffer from the most severe "Israelitis", as people here want to define the newly-emerged philosemitism."[lx]

Hannah Arendt was evidently charmed by the young man, who was just thirty years of age. Wechtenbruch also pleases her by allegedly being "impassioned with a burning hate for Adenauer". While Servatius wanted to avoid the revelation of further names – names of industrialists who, like the IG Farben company, were involved in Auschwitz (and who, according to rumours, paid the defence lawyer for this) – Arendt reported that Wechtenbruch wanted to "denounce Germany for not demanding extradition again".[lxi] That, at least, is unlikely. Eichmann's extradition to Germany could have resulted in legal proceedings in which it may have come to light that he hadn't acted alone, and this was to be avoided at all costs. In Israel, Eichmann was at a safe distance and protected from overly-strong legal interest in a German administration which had collaborated with the genocide of the Jews.

Arendt wasn't the only one to fall for Wechtenbruch's charms, or to at least believe his explanations. After the opening speech by the public prosecutor Hausner, who wanted to speak as an accuser for the six million who no longer could, the German lawyer was apparently severely shaken. Describing Wechtenbruch's reaction, Haim Gouri stated: "I will never again be able to believe Germans from this generation. I now know the truth."[lxii]

The truth is that Wechtenbruch, the man who made himself available outside the court room to reporters like Hannah Arendt, was a confidant of the BND, who were running him as V-7461. As Arendt derisively noted, Servatius compared "his client's personality to that of an average postman",[lxiii] while it escaped her, *had* to escape her, that Wechtenbruch, or rather V-7461, was himself acting as a postman between Eichmann and the BND. In the person of Wechtenbruch, as noted in one of the memos, "the BND was present in all these relationships and able to report back in minute detail to the Federal Chancellery".[lxiv]

The question as to whether he was a student of Schmitt's was one Wechtenbruch could easily answer – he wasn't, but he willingly spoke with "Frau Arendt" about the "special Israeli laws" which had been agreed for the Eichmann trial. He made reference to Schmitt's constitutional theory, "in order to state that a law doesn't earn its name if appears not as a

general norm but as a device dressed up in law's clothing".[lxv] As a confidential informant, however, Wechtenbruch revealed himself in a wondrous way to be a student of Schmitt the Hannah Arendt reader. Schmitt had dedicated his 1954 book "Dialogue on Power and the Access to the Holder of Power" to the historian Reinhart Koselleck with a quote from "The Burden of Our Time", the British first edition of her totalitarianism book: "Real power begins where secrecy begins. (Hannah Arendt)".[lxvi] She herself found an even better formulation for this in the 1955 German edition: "Power always begins where the public ends."[lxvii]

The audience in Jerusalem wasn't just allowed, it was desired. The secret operation "Gleisdreieck", organised by the BND in conjunction with the Chancellery, was however possible, and to historian Klaus-Dietmar Henke one of the BND's "greatest achievements" in the Adenauer era.[lxviii] To this day, it still hasn't been fully revealed. In order to prevent the accused from speaking during his trial about further men involved in the Holocaust – who by then may have secured new key positions in the Federal Republic – his defence was rigorously monitored. Servatius allowed Gehlen to see every single note that Eichmann wrote in his cell, or which was typed by the secretary in preparation for the trial. In this way, Gehlen could warn his superior, the Federal Chancellery State Secretary Hans Globke, if there were any danger that his past as Eichmann's intellectual foreman could come to light. The accused supposedly received a constitutional trial, and yet was simultaneously deprived of his legal rights.

The situation was serious, danger was imminent, and no stone could be left unturned if the operation was to be a success. For that purpose, it had to be established in advance whether "the system of questioning is indicative of the Israeli authorities' intent to broaden responsibility for the criminal acts of National Socialism to other individuals who may be politically active in the Federal Republic."[lxix]

Hannah Arendt suspected nothing of the young man's secret; a secret which the old man also wanted to conceal. Nor was anyone to find out about the second agreement Wechtenbruch made with the BND. In this, his employer protected him even posthumously. Until the end, he felt bound to the non-disclosure agreement, and therefore also remained silent on the fact that he and Servatius had flagrantly defied the rules of professional conduct and betrayed their client.

The West German raison d'être required that the past stay in the past, even if it had become all too present in the person of Eichmann. The rival GDR, with its "Brown Books" and "Blood Judge" campaigns, was a painful reminder that in the Federal Republic a judicial reappraisal of National Socialist crimes had been mostly neglected, and that the perpetrators

were simply allowed to continue in prominent roles. Hans Globke was particularly active in the political events of the Republic, a co-author of an instrumental commentary on the Nuremberg race laws. In 1941, as one of Hitler's diligent civil servants, he had received a "Civil Service Faithful Service Medal". Globke was denounced by East Berlin as "Bonn's Eichmann", and parallel to the trial in Jerusalem, a show trial was staged in the GDR against the absent state secretary.

The German foreign intelligence service used Wechtenbruch because he was able to travel back and forth between Jerusalem and Munich during the long weeks of the trial and also pass on the records which Eichmann prepared in his cell. With the sale of these notes to interested newspapers in Great Britain, France and Italy, the Hitler supporter and news dealer François Genoud wanted to finance Eichmann's defence; Servatius was also involved in the deal.[lxx] So was the BND, who checked the notes before publication. By doing so, they made sure that nothing compromising to the Federal Government would become public knowledge around the world. Wechtenbruch was an important cog in the "Operation Defence against the Past"[lxxi] concocted by Hans Globke and Reinhard Gehlen.

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[i] Hannah Arendt, Wir Flüchtlinge, in: dies., Zur Zeit. Politische Essays, ed. by and with an afterword by Marie Luise Knott, translated from U.S. English by Eike Geisel, Munich 1989 [1986], p. 7.
[ii] Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, 29. January 1946 (Correspondence with Jaspers, p. 65).
[iii] Discussion with friends and colleagues in Toronto (November 1972), in: Hannah Arendt, Ich will verstehen. Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk, ed. by Ursula Ludz, Munich/Zürich 1996, p. 71–113, here p. 112.
[iv] Television interview with Günter Gaus (October 1964), in: ibid., p. 44–70, here p. 58.
[v] Ibid., p. 108f.
[vi] Cited from: «Wenn ich verzweifelt bin, was geht's mich an?» Conversation with Günther Anders, in: Mathias Greffrath (Ed.), Die Zerstörung der Zukunft. Gespräche mit emigrierten Sozialwissenschaftlern, Frankfurt am Main/New York 1989, p. 22.
[vii] Jens Hacke, Existenzkrise der Demokratie. Zur politischen Theorie des Liberalismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit, Berlin 2018, p. 105.
[viii] Hannah Arendt to Kurt Blumenfeld, 31. August 1956 (Correspondence with Blumenfeld, p. 164).
[ix] Dr. Hannah Arendt, Augustin und der Protestantismus, in: Frankfurter Zeitung, 4. December 1930, p. 1, and: Der dritte Prozeß gegen George Grosz, in: ibid., p. 2.
[x] C.f. Werner Hecht, Brecht Chronik, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 247.
[xi] Helen Wolff to Günter Grass, 2. October 1968, in: Günter Grass/Helen Wolff, Briefe 1959–1994, ed. by Daniela Hermes, Göttingen 2003, p. 130.
[xii] Günther Anders, Bert Brecht. Gespräche und Erinnerungen, Zürich 1962, p. 46.
[xiii] Elias Canetti, Die Fackel im Ohr. Lebensgeschichte 1921–1931, Munich 1980, p. 342.
[xiv] Hannah Arendt, Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1955, p. 774f.
[xv] Bertolt Brecht, Die Dreigroschenoper, in: the same work. Large annotated Berlin and Frankfurt editions, Volume 2: Plays 2, edited by Jürgen Schebera, Berlin/Weimar/Frankfurt am Main 1988, p. 229–322, here p. 249.

[xvi] Cf. Ernst Bloch, Song of "Pirate Jenny" in the Threepenny Opera, in: Musikblätter des Anbruch 11 (1929), in: Bertolt Brechts Dreigroschenbuch. Texte Materialien Dokumente, ed. by Siegfried Unseld, Frankfurt am Main 1960, p. 195–197, here p. 197.
[xvii] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, System der Wissenschaft, Part One: Die Phänomenologie des Geistes, Bamberg und Würzburg 1807, p. 541.
[xviii] Cf. Stephen Parker, Bertolt Brecht. Eine Biographie, translated from the English by Ulrich Fries and Irmgard Müller, Berlin 2018, p. 381.
[xix] Hannah Arendt to Gershom Scholem, 14. September 1963 (Correspondence Scholem, p. 458).
[xx] Mary McCarthy to Hannah Arendt, 2. December 1952 (Correspondence McCarthy, p. 11). She writes it almost correctly in German, as «Narrenschiffe».
[xxi] Ibid., p. 11f.
[xxii] Rose Feitelson to Hannah Arendt, April/May 1952 (Correspondence with friends, p. 464).
[xxiii] Don Siegel, A Siegel Film. An Autobiography, with a foreword by Clint Eastwood, London/Boston 1993, p. 184.
[xxiv] Hannah Arendt to Kurt Blumenfeld, 2. February 1953 (Correspondence Blumenfeld, p. 75).
[xxv] Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, 13. May 1953 (Correspondence Jaspers, p. 251).
[xxvi] Chambers, Witness, p. 526.
[xxvii] Ibid., p. 67.
[xxviii] Arendt, Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973. Volume One, p. 7. Date of entry: June 1950.
[xxix] Dr. Hannah Arendt, Augustin und der Protestantismus, in: Frankfurter Zeitung, 4. December 1930, p. 1.
[xxx] Chambers, Witness, p. 326.
[xxxi] Arendt, Gestern waren sie noch Kommunisten, p. 231
[xxxii] Hannah Arendt to Gershom Scholem, 16. August 1953 (Correspondence Scholem, p. 385).
[xxxiii] Arendt, Gestern waren sie noch Kommunisten, p. 229.
[xxxiv]Ibid., p. 228.
[xxxv] Hannah Arendt to Kurt Blumenfeld, 14. October 1952 (Correspondence Blumenfeld, S. 68).
[xxxvi] Arendt, Gestern waren sie noch Kommunisten, p. 229.
[xxxvii] Ibid., p. 235f.
[xxxviii] Ibid., p. 235.
[xxxix] Klaus Piper to Hannah Arendt, 3. September 1958, quoted from: ibid., p. 196.
[xl] Hannah Arendt to Klaus Piper and Hans Rössner, 9. September 1958 (LoC).
[xli] Hannah Arendt to Hans Rössner, 12. January 1959 (LoC).
[xlii] Wildt, Die Generation des Unbedingten, p. 803.
[xliii] Klaus Piper to Hannah Arendt, 10. February 1959, quoted from: Ziegler, 100 Jahre Piper, p. 196.
[xliv] Cited from: Rainer Nicolaysen, Sie kam, um die Wahrheit zu sagen, in: Die Zeit, 5/2025, 30. January 2025.
[xlv] Wildt, Die Generation des Unbedingten, p. 813.
[xlvi] Nicht fragen. Überleben. Fragen an Marcel Reich-Ranicki von Uwe Wittstock, in: Die Welt, 13. December 2003.
[xlvii] Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, 23. July 1964 (Correspondence Jaspers, p. 594).
[xlviii] Conversation between the author and Hansjörg Graf in January 2016 in Munich.
[xlix] Cf. Ziegler, 100 Jahre Piper, p. 167.
[l] Gerhard Zwerenz, Hannah Arendt und die Obersturmbannführer, https://www.poetenladen.de/zwerenz-gerhard-sachsen99-66-links.htm (last accessed on: 20.8.2025).
[li] Reinhard Baumgart, Damals. Eine Geschichte in Deutschland 1929–2003, Munich 2004, p. 178.
[lii] Cited from: Tilman Jens, Demenz. Abschied von meinem Vater, Gütersloh 2009, p. 54.
[liii] Ibid.
[liv] Walter Jens, Völkische Literaturbetrachtung – heute, in: Hans Werner Richter, Bestandsaufnahme. Eine deutsche Bilanz 1962. Sechsunddreißig Beiträge deutscher Wissenschaftler, Schriftsteller und Publizisten, Munich/Vienna/Basel 1962, p. 344–350, here p. 348.
[lv] Joachim C. Fest, Das Gesicht des Dritten Reiches. Profile einer totalitären Herrschaft, Munich/Zürich 1963, p. 500.
[lvi] Cited from: Gerrit Hamann, Max Merten. Jurist und Kriegsverbrecher. Eine biografische Fallstudie zum Umgang mit NS-Tätern in der frühen Bundesrepublik, Göttingen 2022, p. 621.

[lvii] Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem (German edition), p. 34.
[lviii] Ibid., p. 184.
[lix] Dieter Wechtenbruch to the author, 3. September 2005.
[lx] Hannah Arendt to Heinrich Blücher, 20. April 1961 (LoC).
[lxi] Hannah Arendt to Heinrich Blücher, 8. May 1961 (Correspondence Blücher, p. 534).
[lxii] Haim Gouri, Facing the Glass Booth. The Jerusalem Trial of Adolf Eichmann, translated by Michael Swirsky, Detroit 2004, p. 72.
[lxiii] Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem (German edition), p. 184.
[lxiv] Cited from: Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Geheime Dienste. Die politische Inlandsspionage des BND in der Ära Adenauer, Teil 2, Berlin 2022, p. 1071. The words preceding the quote, including Wechtenbruch's name, had to be blacked out on the insistence of the BND.
[lxv] Dieter Wechtenbruch to the author, 3. September 2005.
[lxvi] Reinhart Koselleck/Carl Schmitt, Briefwechsel 1953–1983 und weitere Materialien, ed. by Jan Eike Dunkhase, Berlin 2019, p. 65. The footnote states that it comes from Hannah Arendt, The Burden of Our Time, London 1951, p. 386.
[lxvii] Hannah Arendt, Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1955, p. 639.
[lxviii] Henke, Geheime Dienste, p. 1071.
[lxix] Ibid., p. 1151.
[lxx] Cf. Willi Winkler, Der Schattenmann. Von Goebbels zu Carlos: Das mysteriöse Leben des François Genoud, Berlin 2011, p. 117–141.
[lxxi] Henke, Geheime Dienste, p. 1051.