



# Hannah Arendt: A Life in Dark Times (Icons)

*Anne C. Heller*

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Hannah Arendt, one of the most gifted and provocative voices of her era, was a polarizing cultural theorist—extolled by her peers as a visionary and berated by her critics as a poseur and a fraud. Born in Prussia to assimilated Jewish parents, she escaped from Hitler’s Germany in 1933 and is now best remembered for the storm of controversy that arose after the publication of her 1963 *New Yorker* series on the trial of the kidnapped Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann.

Arendt was a woman of many contradictions. She was brilliant, beautiful when young, and irresistible to gifted men, even in her chain-smoking, intellectually provocative middle age. She learned to write in English only at the age of thirty-six, and yet her first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, single-handedly altered the way generations of Americans and Europeans viewed fascism and genocide. Her most famous—and most divisive—work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, created fierce controversy that continues to this day, exacerbated by the posthumous discovery that she had been the lover of the great romantic philosopher and Nazi sympathizer Martin Heidegger.

In this fast-paced, comprehensive biography, Anne C. Heller tracks the source of Arendt’s apparent contradictions and her greatest achievements to her sense of being what she called a “conscious pariah”—one of those few people in every time and place who doesn’t “lose confidence in ourselves if society does not approve us” and will not “pay any price” to gain the acceptance of others.

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