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## Book Review

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*Martin and Hannah: A Novel*, by Catherine Clément. Translated by Julia Shirek Smith. Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 2001, 304 pp.

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That Catherine Clément's Hannah Arendt describes her first husband as having abandoned philosophy when he turned to writing novels (245) is both a warning and an interpretive key. It is a warning against the temptation to read novels that deal with philosophical themes as works of philosophy. It is an interpretive key because abandonment is such a central theme in Heidegger and Heideggerian philosophy. This novel is not a philosophical essay--certainly not an essay on Heidegger. But it is a serious exploration of philosophical ideas, some of which become important in the aftermath of Heidegger's "escapade" with Nazism and in his relationship with Arendt; and the abandonment of philosophy for novel writing is, arguably, the boundary at which philosophy's presencing begins.

Having said this, it is important to keep in mind that it is no compliment when a feminist critic locates a philosopher's *magnum opus* between an absent, fugitive, woman and a dead one (in this case, Hannah and Heidegger's mother, 98). But locating *Being and Time* between death and absence is--at the very least--an interesting interpretive move, made more interesting by the gradual emergence of philosophy in the dialogical encounter between Elfriede, Heidegger's wife, and Hannah, his mistress--an encounter from which, in this novel, Martin is almost entirely absent, lurking, as it were, just off stage. This is not a commentary in quite the same way as (if Mary O'Brien is right) *Waiting for Godot*, though it contains significant commentary (particularly in Hannah's voice, but also sometimes in Elfriede's). It is more precisely a philosophical practice that revives an important dimension of Greek thinking, a revival that is a worthy tribute to Heidegger--far more worthy than an uncritical reading or repetition of his words.

Not to make too much of minor profanities precipitated by bad weather and unreliable umbrellas, it is also interesting that the novel begins in 1975 with "God in Heaven" (9) and (almost) ends in the same year with "God in Heaven...When all is said and done..." (299). (It is, perhaps, appropriate here to recall Heidegger's 1946 meditation on the Anaximander Fragment, "Whence things have their origin, there they must also pass away according to necessity...") The time interval between beginning and ending is short, no longer than the length of the cordiality extended by Elfriede Heidegger to Hannah Arendt out of "concern" for her husband at the last meeting between Hannah and Martin, which occurred in Freiburg in 1975. Clément (301) traces the inspiration for her novel to three sentences in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's biography of Arendt that refer to the meeting (though they can hardly be said to describe it). Clément unfolds Elfriede's concern and her cordiality to Hannah into the "all" that is "said and done" in the three hundred pages of the novel.

All that is said and done here reaches back to the childhoods of both Arendt and Heidegger, through a

series of critical moments in German (and world) history. God dies in the middle of this history, by the way, in Heidegger's speech on the occasion of his investiture as rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933 (181). That death, incarnate in Heidegger's embrace of Nazism, is, I think, as strong a motivation for the novel as the encounter between Hannah and Elfriede--particularly given Elfriede's recognition in the aftermath of the war, after Heidegger has retreated to the refuge of Hölderlein's poetry (215) if not his madness, that "Martin's hope was no longer Germany but France" (219). That observation must carry considerable weight for a French philosopher writing a novel at the end of the twentieth century. Was Heidegger's Nazism an escapade or a disease at the heart of his philosophy? And what does it mean that we, like Hannah, return to Martin even "after Hannah's exile, after the extermination, after the birth of Israel, after the war. After Martin had been found guilty of Nazism, ruined"(11).

Clément, of course, does not answer that question and should not be expected to do so. She does, however, do a credible job of posing it in the form of a novel likely to reach a far broader audience than any technical philosophical treatise on Heidegger or Arendt. A novel stands or falls not on its historical accuracy or the philosophical proficiency of its author but on the credibility of its characters, on whether its story rings true and Clément succeeds on both counts. Both Hannah and Elfriede are interesting enough as characters to hold an audience that has no particular interest in the particular historical figures or the philosophy of Heidegger. The meeting of two women who have lived through two wars and the economic devastation following each; who have not only witnessed but also participated in the political transformations of Europe during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century; one of whom has experienced exile, the other the loss of reputation associated with denazification during the occupation of Germany, is itself sufficient for a compelling story--even if the women were not Hannah Arendt and Elfriede Heidegger. Add to the mix the tension of competition in love and struggle for cultural identity as well as the relationship of aging to memory and personal identity, and you have the necessary ingredients for a good story. Clément deserves credit as a novelist for having seen this in those few lines from the biography of Arendt. A more recent biographer, Julia Kristeva, writes that Heidegger was "moved and oddly seduced by the relationship he encouraged between Hannah Arendt and Elfriede Heidegger, his wife" (*Hannah Arendt*, Columbia University Press, 2001, 17). Clément, too, is seduced, and I think she is right to wager that her readers will be as well. She is to be credited for leaving Martin, who must have been a great temptation to a philosophically trained novelist, in the wings. By doing so, she allows the conversation of women--both ordinary (and extraordinary) in their own ways--to become the place in which we as readers confront a violent century in which men particularly have done unspeakable violence to one another, to women, to memory, and to culture. Allowing such conversations to be the place of encounter is not as rare as it once was, but it is, nonetheless, still less common than history told from the (usually male) perspective of soldiers--generals more often than privates.

We warm to Elfriede gradually, and dangerously. She is, after all, described at one point as "Eichmann in skirts" (148). But this is Hannah speaking, and it is Hannah struggling--as Clément struggles--to understand what could have driven Martin into Nazism. (This particularity is important to the novel. The general question of Germany's embrace of Nazism is politically urgent and philosophically compelling, but it becomes a compelling story in a person we encounter as a structuring absence that informs a conversation among others.) It is interesting that Clément's Hannah tries to do with Elfriede exactly what the historical Hannah famously (and controversially) accused the Israeli prosecutor of trying to do with Eichmann. Finding a monster to blame might make the monstrosity of Nazism less painful to deal with, but it would also make its legacy far more dangerous. Hannah and Elfriede agree on the ordinariness, the "banality," of evil--but the risk in this is the diffusion of evil to a point at which no one is responsible

because everyone is guilty, The familiar tightrope Clément walks is that between collective guilt and personal responsibility. That tightrope is remarkably relevant in a context of unreflective patriotism like the one we in the United States live in now. The novel works if it avoids the simple escape of locating the sickness in Germany (or Prussia, or, for that matter, al-Qaeda). This, I believe, is one of the reasons Clément spends as much time as she does on Arendt's critique of and repudiation of Zionism. But an American audience will need also to engage in critique and repudiation of Americanism if the novel is to succeed as more than an historical curiosity (just as the novel's first, French, audience, had to confront Heidegger's legacy in France--as well as the birth of Zionism in French anti-Semitism, 206).

To the extent that Clément offers a diagnosis, it lies in the splitting off of "care" from "Being." (Recalling the Anaximander fragment again, "As it reveals itself in beings, Being withdraws.") Without Hannah, she notes, Martin becomes a Nazi. But, more to the point, he is able to find his feet after Nazism in encounter with Greece mediated by Hannah as a stand-in for the German Jewish intellectual tradition (which includes Heidegger's teacher Husserl)--but, again, between the wife and the mistress, order and chaos, stability and risk, home and a (temporary) resting place. This is an identification of sources uncannily similar to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's--but such a reading seems clearly to have undergirded resistance in both Germany and France.

Part of the "cure" is implicit in Clément's diagnosis: without Arendt, Heidegger becomes a Nazi (with or without Elfriede--though without Elfriede is not an option). So the prescription is to keep Arendt and Heidegger together, not to forsake the political, not to abandon the city, not to renounce friendship. Interestingly enough, the structure of the novel extends this last, grudgingly, to keeping Hannah and Elfriede together as well (and recall that it was Martin who insisted that they come together). But Karl Jaspers is also presented as an antidote, and that provides some direction for further philosophical investigation by readers who are so inclined. If Clément's Hannah is correct to understand Jaspers as "the honor of German philosophy under Nazism" (175), as the incarnation of *philia* (176), as the personification of "the strength of the weak" (177), then Jaspers deserves another look, and Heidegger should not be read without him. It is important that Clément has Elfriede and Hannah explore philosophy's "purpose" immediately after her description of Jaspers's funeral. Heidegger maintained that it had no political utility; and neither Arendt nor Jaspers would necessarily disagree with that assessment--particularly if it serves as an answer to the question posed earlier: "Morality, philosophy. Do they serve any purpose? What philosopher could have prevented those horrors?" Hannah and Martin agree that "a state is by definition unjust" (179). The question is what that means for obedience and resistance. Clément stands in the tradition of Simone de Beauvoir more than Arendt when she poses it. No philosopher could have prevented those horrors, but persons engaged in a practice of philosophical reflection as attentive to chaos and possibility as to order and predictability may be able to find the strength needed to resist them now. There is another ingredient in the antidote, this one prescribed by Hannah's mother Martha: remember Rosa Luxemburg (272). And, in response, by Hannah: "Remember this event," she thinks to herself, "you are living a historic moment, the aftermath of the murder of the Red Rose" (272,273). In the time of this novel, moments are extended, and they ripple backward and forward. Clément strongly suggests that we still live that historic moment, though she also has a student say of Hannah that Rosa Luxemburg has returned (276). It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say that every historic moment, and hence any historic moment we live, is the aftermath of murder--an intriguing embrace of a Western foundation myth worthy of the characters for whom this novel is named.

It is not surprising that a philosophically trained novelist would prescribe a reading list of sorts as a cure

for the disease of which Nazism is a symptom. The list does not exclude Heidegger, even though he was, for a time, a Nazi. But it puts him alongside Arendt, Jaspers, and Rosa Luxemburg--and it demands that he be read with care, in care--with attention to the kind of attention to the care of the world one can confidently expect from friends, though not necessarily from lovers.

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