

HANNAH AND HER CRITICS

Hannah Arendt *paints an enlightening portrait of an explosive post-WWII intellectual*

HANNAH ARENDT: Directed by Margarethe von Trotta. Screenplay by von Trotta and Pam Katz. Cinematography, Caroline Champetier. Editor, Bettina Böhler. Music, André Mergenthaler. Starring Barbara Sukowa, Janet McTeer and Axel Milberg. Zeitgeist Films, 2013. 113 minutes. Not rated. ★★☆☆☆

Like Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*, Margarethe von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt* has an all-encompassing biopic title, but focuses on one key moment of its subject's life. In 1961, the German thinker and writer Hannah Arendt (Barbara Sukowa) went to Jerusalem to cover, for *The New Yorker*, the trial of Adolf Eichmann. It was a chance to get up close to the horrors of her past; as a young woman, she had been held in a camp in France. After escaping, she came to the United States, reunited with her husband, Heinrich Blücher (Axel Milberg) and, after a decade, published the influential book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

This is, of necessity, a rushed summary of Arendt's early years, which could make for a film just as interesting as *Hannah Arendt*. Von Trotta (whose other cinematic subjects include Hildegard von Bingen and Rosa Luxemburg) assumes a certain level of familiarity with Arendt and her work, but you can certainly pick up the details as you go along. You'll just have to be patient through the first third, which mainly fleshes out Arendt and Blücher's life as New York intellectuals of the 1960s — here seen as a life of cigarettes and cocktail parties, professorial positions and friendly sparring that occasionally gets just a bit ugly, though never where Arendt's friendship with the novelist Mary McCarthy



(played by a tart and wonderful Janet McTeer) is concerned.

Hannah Arendt's greatest challenge is to make cinematically interesting the life of the mind, to show us Arendt as she conceives and writes her *New Yorker* pieces (later published as *Eichmann in Jerusalem*) without resorting to a static montage of the writer at work. Von Trotta uses footage from Eichmann's trial, interspersed with scenes focusing on Sukowa's expressive face, to make vivid what Arendt saw; the director weaves in testimony from the trial without fully recreating it, giving us careful glimpses.

Once Arendt's piece was published, all hell broke loose: Friends denounced Arendt, strangers sent death threats and New York intellectuals could talk of nothing else. Part of Arendt's controversial thesis was the idea that evil can be done by ordinary people, "joiners" who fail to think for themselves and are "terribly and terrifyingly normal." Arendt wrote that some Jewish councils were complicit in the death of their people — an idea which enraged many and led to accusations that Arendt was a self-hating Jew. (For a fascinating take on *Eichmann*, see

this piece in *The New York Times*' Opinionator blog: [wkly.ws/lig.](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/11/opinionator/hannah-arendt.html))

Though von Trotta's film centers on this particular moment in Arendt's life, giving voice to Arendt and her critics (who tend to speak in a distractingly clipped, theatrical style), it isn't about whether Arendt's ideas were entirely right or wrong. *Hannah Arendt* gradually builds a broader portrait of its subject and of the tenuous position of a woman intellectual. Arendt is frequently referred to as arrogant, lacking feelings, but her personal life, with her husband and a group of close friends, is affectionate and full of love. Von Trotta isn't trying to soften Arendt's sharp edges, but to present her as a complete person, with complexities and flaws. If the screenplay is occasionally stiff, the lighting too cozily burnished, Sukowa nearly vibrates at the center of each scene, knotting together Arendt's passion and brilliance even in the smallest moments. Thoughtful, fierce and imperfect, *Hannah Arendt* runs a bit long, but is an inspiring slice of history that might just convince you to go out and read one of its subject's books. ■

ARTSHOUND

Sniffing out what you shouldn't miss in the arts this week

Cruise to downtown Springfield for **Second Friday Art Walk** (5 to 8 pm) and head straight to the Springfield Museum for **The Cruz** exhibit, showcasing the beauty of the automobile in honor of the 15th Annual Springfield Cruz car show. One piece focuses on the story of the late Eugene Hot Rodder Eric Sanders, who passed away in 2008, and whose friends subsequently spread his ashes across the Bonneville Salt Flats from a 1953 Studebaker. Continue on to Haven (349 Main St.) to see Springfield oil painter **Brent Burkett's**

summer-themed canvases in all their dappled-light and porch-swing glory.

Take a break from your hard-knock life, plant yourself in the grass at State Street Park (Burnett & Dakota) and watch the hijinks of Miss Hannigan, Daddy Warbucks and, of course, **Annie**. The 1982 flick starts at 9 pm Friday, July 12 — or when it's dark enough to see Carol Burnett's glistening gin bottles on screen; free.

The **Oregon Contemporary Theatre** has announced its **2013-2014 season** and audiences can look forward to a mix of the classic and contemporary. OCT raises the curtain in September with **August: Osage County**, followed by **Who Am I This Time?** — adapted from Kurt Vonnegut's short stories by homegrown Broadway playwright Aaron Posner. Winter and spring will be filled with **Tribes**, **The Great Gatsby** and **Clybourne Park**.

Beer can make any Vinny a Vincent van Gogh. Sharpen your pencils and head to the Ninkasi patio for **DIVA's Drink & Draw** event 6 to 8 pm Thursday, July 18. Models provided.

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