

Blüchers, vor allem dabei auf seinen autobiographischen Lebenslauf, zurückgreifen kann. Dem Autor gelingt deshalb, trotz des Eindruckes gelegentlicher psychologischer Überinterpretation beim Leser, ein einfühlsames Bild der beiden. Das betrifft nicht nur die Charakterisierung der jeweiligen Persönlichkeit Arendts oder Blüchers, sondern auch die Schilderung der Strukturen und Ausformungen ihrer Liebesbeziehung in den verschiedenen Lebensphasen. Das Außergewöhnliche dieser Denk-, Liebes- und Lebensgemeinschaft bekommt seine Konturen durch die gelungene Darstellung der Einbettung dieser Beziehung in die politischen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Zeitumstände.

Bildeten Hannah Arendt und Heinrich Blücher ein „exemplarisches Paar“, wie der Autor meint? Man kann in der Tat die These vertreten, dass jetzt aufgrund unserer besseren biographischen Kenntnisse das Paar Arendt-Blücher neben das andere berühmte Liebespaar dieses Jahrhunderts tritt, nämlich Jean Paul Sartre und Simone de Beauvoir – ja dieses vielleicht sogar in der zeitgeistigen Prägekraft ablöst. Aber: ist es nun das Paar Arendt-Blücher, oder ist es nicht vielmehr, wenn man auf die jüngsten Untersuchungen zurückblickt, das Paar Arendt-Heidegger? Diese Frage ist in dem Buch nicht aufgelöst, sie wird in den nächsten Jahren viel Diskussionsstoff bieten. Aber aufgrund des Buches von Neumann, zu dem man parallel den bereits veröffentlichten Briefwechsel zwischen Arendt und Blücher lesen mag, weiß man mehr über die Person Heinrich Blüchers und über die Beziehung beider zueinander. Hans Jonas sagte in seiner Totenrede über Hannah Arendt: „Man spürte eine absolute Entschlossenheit, sie selbst zu sein“. Im Grunde genommen galt das auch für Blücher. Nur so konnten beide eine Intellektuellenexistenz führen, die der Macht des Wortes vertraute, und die doch zugleich von der Macht des Herzens getragen war.

Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott

HANNAH ARENDT AND RALPH ELLISON

A curious thing happened in the month of May. While at work on Hannah Arendt's role in American political culture for a book project, I happened to read several articles about the American Black author Ralph Ellison's life and work in *The New York Times*. The occasion for his retrospective was the posthumous publication of the unfinished manuscript *Juneteenth*, which Ellison had intended to complete the trilogy which began with *The Invisible Man*. What caught my attention, apart from a curious parallel to the history of Arendt's *The Life of The Mind*, was the headline of Edward Rothstein's article, "Faced With 'Parvenu' or 'Pariah', Ellison Settled on Artist" [15 May, 1999]. Rothstein speculates that while Arendt developed her typology to unravel the highly charged issue of Jewish assimilation in Germany, it might equally be applied to the problem of racial minorities in America. Rothstein asks, "Is it necessary to become a parvenu to become American? Can one remain a pariah and be American?" What, indeed, might an "American Negro tradition" mean? I was prompted to add another question. Is the status of "artist" a privileged category in America which relieves the writer from obligations to any cultural group or ideology and makes disinterested judgment possible? This question, it occurred to me, is as pertinent for Arendt herself as for the subjects of her pariah-parvenu typology, such as Rahel Varnhagen and Franz Kafka. From the outset of her professional life, Arendt attempted to exist in what she termed a *nunc stans*, a "no place" in, but not necessarily of, the given worlds of religion, race, class, national identity and gender. As if in response to my musings, ten days later, also in *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakatuni reviewed *Juneteenth* [25 May, 1999]. While not mentioning Arendt directly, she revisits

Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott is currently under contract to the University of Chicago Press for *Hannah Arendt Discovers America*, a research project funded in part by a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Her previous Arendt study was *Hannah Arendt: Love and Saint Augustine*. With Judith C. Stark. 1996. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. Contact: Professor Department of Political Science, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, 48197 USA, Fax 734-662-9249 / 9952 e-mail: PLS_Scott@online.emich.edu

the same dilemma. Kakatuni writes that Ellison's *Invisible Man*, published in 1952, "established him unequivocally as a modernist master". But it did not place him securely in the category of Negro protest writer. The book's focus on personal identity, evoked both through the protagonist's intense inner experience and the abstract idioms of literary analysis, was rejected by younger radical writers in favor of the violence, sexuality and politics in the works of Richard Wright and James Baldwin. Yet Ellison continued to write about the social dynamics of race and personal identity as if they were separable, though intimately related, human conditions. The Arendt-Ellison connection has proven to be an even more direct thought train than either Rothstein or Kakatuni indicate, though the journey takes an ironic turn. Arendt was herself famously insistent on the independence of the individual thinker from determining categories, and on the importance of multiple referent points for identity and action, a condition she termed "plurality". She preferred to term herself a "writer", a "political theorist" and an "independent" thinker, rather than a politically engaged intellec-

tual. This assertion of critical distance extended, even more famously, to her identity as a Jew. In the oft-cited 1964 response to Gershom Scholem in *Encounter* [January, 1964], she refused to declare “love” for the Jewish people. She wrote, “I do not ‘love’ the Jews nor do I ‘believe’ in them ... I have never in my life ‘loved’ any people or collective”. She could not agree with her former friend that her Jewish identity placed any limitations on the subject matter or tone with which she approached her writing. In this insistence, she situated herself squarely on Ellison’s terrain. But there is another very direct link to Ellison as well. In the aftermath of the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* Kansas United States Supreme Court decisions in 1958, American debate polarized between those “liberal” writers who favored federally enforced desegregation as a matter of 14th Amendment rights and those “conservatives” who were always suspicious of federal power over the States, particularly when it came to education. The issue was joined by Arendt when she attacked forced integration in print in one of the “little journals” of New York which had become her favored venue, *Dissent* [Winter, 1959]. Arendt’s efforts to get “Reflections on Little Rock” published are chronicled among her papers in the Library of Congress. It was the first, but definitely not the last, instance of a highly publicized falling out between Arendt and the prevailing consensus among the New Deal liberal, largely but not exclusively, Jewish, community of intellectuals in New York who wrote for the *Commentary*, *Dissent*, *The New Republic* and *Partisan Review*. George Lichteim’s rejection of the piece for *Commentary*, and *Dissent*’s careful distancing from the article, even while publishing it with a flourish, give a rich portrait of the tenor of the times in the late 1950’s. Lichteim wrote to her on November 21, 1959, that he had “had some trouble here getting the view accepted that something which affronts American

Jewish-liberal sentiment in some respects should nonetheless be published”. He suggested toning down her “rather dogmatic” and “factually wrong” commentary on constitutional issues which, he not so subtly noted, “the native of this country” might know more about. Arendt rejected his suggestions, and when *Dissent* published it, complete with dissenting views and her responses in the following issue, she took the opportunity to reiterate her point that pride in one’s identity should not mean “pushing one’s way out of one group and into another”. [*Dissent*, 1959, no. 2]. Yet, in the “Preliminary Remarks” she inserted before the text of the article itself, she reminded her readers that she may not have appreciated the “role education plays in the political framework of this country”. This was because, she is “writing as an outsider”. Her alien status, Arendt hinted, was not only a function of the obvious fact of her German Jewish origins but also because she was New Yorker by choice. “I have never lived in the South, and have even avoided occasional trips to Southern states”. Arendt acknowledged that “what she wrote may shock”, though she was silent on the impact of her authorial voice, which Lichteim termed “dogmatic”. Yet, she almost pleaded with her readers to take her “sympathy for the cause of the Negroes ... for granted”. In Arendt’s understanding of existential givenness, as a Jew by birth and history she could appreciate the Negro story of “oppression”. What she would not automatically adopt was a political judgement in favor of court-ordered integration, since for her politics and personal integrity did not exist in the same realms of experience or behavior. Ellison, however, seemed either not to have read or not have been convinced by Arendt’s arguments, and angrily accused Arendt of being entirely off target in her criticisms of Negro families in Little Rock. In a replay of the firestorm of criticism which had greeted her 1961 “report” on the Eichmann trial for

The New Yorker, as well as her book-length study in 1963, Ellison went on the offensive against Arendt in 1965 for her “failure to grasp the importance of this ideal (of sacrifice) among Southern Negroes”. He did so in the course of an interview with Robert Penn Warren, one of several interviews with American Negro intellectuals published under the title, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* [1995. New York: Random House]. For Ellison, crossing the lines of hostile White parents under the protection of federal troops, was a act of heroism in defiance of the “invisibility” forced on Negroes by the dominant power structure in the South. This public, political act was essential to the personal integrity of both the children and their parents. Their goal was to become fully American by becoming fully and publicly Negro. Ellison wanted to note for the record “the basic, implicit heroism of people who must live within a society without recognition, real status, but who are involved in the ideals of that society and who are trying to make their way ...”. Negroes, he wrote, had to “understand themselves ... in relationship to other Americans”. And “although action is necessary, it must be guided – tempered by human compassion”. Arendt’s own understanding, as an outsider, had been flawed. She had “charged Negro parents with exploiting their children during the struggle to integrate the schools”. But her accusation, had no experiential base in reality. “She had absolutely no conception of what goes on in the minds of Negro parents when they send their kids through those lines of hostile people”. It is, insists Ellison, a necessary “rite of initiation” in which the child must confront “the terrors of social life with all the mysteries stripped away”. Arendt, of course, had argued in the *Dissent* article that adults should not use children to make public points about issues such as mixed racial schooling which she felt were more properly confined to the non-political world of social life. For Arendt, who based on her own

experience with assimilation in Germany, social discrimination was the inevitable and acceptable price to be paid for "plurality". Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, drawing on a 1964 television interview with Christian Gauss, gives us the additional moving portrait of a young Arendt insisting on dealing by herself with anti-semitism as a school child, rather than having her mother intervene on her behalf. [*Hannah Arendt: For Love of The World*. 1982. New Haven: Yale University Press. 11-12] But Little Rock, Arkansas in 1958 was not Weimar Germany, and for Ellison Arendt was "way off into left field". Compounding the ironies in Ellison's outrage is that he had been accused of the same sin of a modernist belief in the self unencumbered by social determinants. In the same volume of interviews, James Farmer is questioned by Warren about the relative merits of Ellison and James Baldwin. Farmer points out that there is no direct connection in Ellison's fictional writing to social or political action. Although neither writer had "been in the streets", Baldwin's writing had at least been "oriented toward the street". Also in the mid-1960's another critic, this time a Jewish, "New York Intellectual", Irving Howe, speaks to the issue of authorial vantage point and modernist idiom in "Black Boys and Native Sons", [*Dissent*, Autumn 1963]. Howe much prefers Baldwin and his predecessor Richard Wright to Ellison. The trouble is that Ellison's work is marred by the "postwar zeitgeist" of the 1950's with its love for America and the illusion of "unconditional freedom". Even worse, "to write about the 'Negro experience' with the aesthetic distance urged by the critics of the fifties is a moral and psychological impossibility", for Howe, because "plight and protest are inseparable from that experience". However, the story does not end there because, according to Young-Bruehl, Arendt read the interview and wrote to Ellison praising his remarks, admitting in private but never in print that she had indeed missed the point of

struggling for public identity by means of personal, familial heroism. [YB, 315-316. Library of Congress. July, 1965]. Yet it appears that while Arendt was willing to absorb Ellison's "ideal" of sacrifice in her own agonal model of action, memory and storytelling, she would not modify her stand on the question of whether education was the appropriate forum for this example of "natality". Nevertheless, Arendt's sense of common cause with Ellison as an artist, even if he did not reciprocate it, was clear. Perhaps Arendt also remembered that 1963 issue of *Dissent* when not only had Ellison been skewered by Howe, but in an adjoining article Marie Syrkin had done the same to her in *Hannah Arendt: The Clothes of the Empress*. Both American intellectuals, voyagers from the margins to the center of American cultural life, stood accused of failing their own "people" by adopting a chilling critical distance from their real "experience". In the end, experience was indeed the guide for both writers in New York at mid-century. Both Arendt and Ellison traded heavily on their outsider identities for keys to the city – the New York City of the modernist avantgarde. However, neither wished their writing to be defined and thereby constrained by their Jewishness or Negro race. For both, the debate about whether art should serve a socio-political purpose or exist according to its own rules of form and content was really no contest. Ellison's "ideals" of freedom and sacrifice, like Arendt's pariah-parvenu, plurality and natality paradigms, were not lived experiences as such, but their retrospective conceptual vapor trails. They were not meant as calls to action, but as ways of understanding what had occurred, and as signs of what might yet come to pass. Both career trajectories developed in tandem, though her vapor trail was the more consistently brilliant and controversial, and both intersected briefly on the contested field of desegregation. ┘

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