

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy: An Unlikely Friendship?

Barbara Kraft · Wednesday, August 26th, 2015

My [talk](#) on Saturday, August 29, 3:30pm – 5pm, at the Palms-Rancho Park Library in Los Angeles, is inspired by Carol Brightman’s remarkable book *Between Friends – The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary Mc Carthy*, which was published in 1995 by Harcourt Brace. Their written dialogue began in 1949 after a rocky start and ended with Hannah Arendt’s death in 1975. Brightman describes their correspondence as “an epistolary romance” because it framed the tale of a passionate friendship that was improbable on the face of it.

The two women first met at a party in New York in 1945, where Mary McCarthy made an offhand remark that evening, saying that she almost felt sorry for Hitler in that he seemed to want the French citizens of occupied France to like him.

The remark outraged Hannah Arendt, A German-born Jew. “How can you say such a thing in front of me – a victim of Hitler, a person who has been in a concentration camp.”

Three years later they met on a subway platform where Arendt approached McCarthy saying, “Let’s end this nonsense. We think so much alike.” McCarthy apologized for her Hitler remark and Arendt admitted she had never been in a concentration camp, only in an internment camp in France.

Thus was the beginning of an emotionally and intellectually sustaining life-long epistolary friendship (1949-1975) between an American orphaned at 6 and a European uprooted by Fascism, that ended with the death of Arendt of a heart attack in December 1975.

The Palms-Rancho Park Library is located at 2920 Overland Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90064. This event is free.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, August 26th, 2015 at 10:39 pm and is filed under [Fiction](#), [Discourse](#)

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