



# Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts

*Caroline Heller*

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## **Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts** Caroline Heller

**A stunning elegy to a vanished time, Caroline Heller's memoir traces the lives of her parents, her uncle, and their circle of intellectuals and dreamers from Central Europe on the eve of World War II to present-day America.**

In this unforgettable dual memoir of her parents' lives and her own, Caroline Heller brings to life the lost world of European café culture, and reminds us of the sustaining power of literature in the most challenging of times.

Heller vividly evokes prewar Prague, where her parents lived, loved, and studied. Her mother, Liese Florsheim, was a young German refugee initially drawn to Erich Heller, a bright but detached intellectual, rather than to his brother, Paul. As Hitler's power spreads and World War II becomes inevitable, their world is destroyed and they must flee the country and continent. Paul, who will eventually become the author's father, is trapped and sent to Buchenwald, where he survives under hellish conditions.

Though Paul's life nearly ends in Europe, he reunites with Liese in the United States, where they marry. Their daughter Caroline, restless and insecure, carries the trauma of her parents' story with her, but her quest to make peace with her heritage is eased by her love of books and writers, part of her family legacy. Through the darkest years of Hitler's rule, Caroline's parents and uncle had turned time and time again to literature to help them survive—and so she does as well.

Written with sensitivity and grace, *Reading Claudius* is a profound meditation on the ways we strive to solve the mysteries of our pasts, and a window into understanding the ones we love.

## **Praise for *Reading Claudius***

"This fine book contains moments of emotion so pure that in the end, we too fall in love with the writer's past."—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Heller plunges us lovingly and convincingly into [a] lost world."—*The Boston Globe*

"Caroline Heller writes with both honesty and delicacy. I was particularly enthralled by her finely drawn portrait of prewar Central Europe: a lost world whose memories are inestimably valuable and fiercely beautiful but which, without accounts like this, would fade forever."—**Anne Fadiman, author of *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down***

"*Reading Claudius* is much more than a work of riveting personal history. It is a feat of passionate, radical integrity. Caroline Heller has wedded the greatest level of care in her scholarship to an even deeper form of search: that in which imagination becomes not only an act of love but an instrument of truth."—**Leah Hager Cohen, author of *No Book but the World* and *The Grief of Others***

"A deeply felt and deeply thought memoir, it manages to unearth a whole lost world with aching tenderness and regret."—**Phillip Lopate, author of *Portrait Inside My Head***

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