

NONFICTION

Ten thinkers of lasting significance

Women in Dark Times

ALICJA GESCINSKA

How do we hold on to hope in dark times? How do we stay human when faced with inhuman conditions? And what can we do when fundamental values such as freedom, tolerance and pluralism come under pressure? These are the central questions explored by Alicja Gescinska in 'Women in Dark Times'.

In this book – the result of twenty years of reflection – the Polish-Belgian philosopher offers a contemporary response to Hannah Arendt's 'Men in Dark Times' (1968). Arendt portrayed ten thinkers (eight men and two women) who, in her view, offered light and hope in periods of darkness. Following in this tradition, Gescinska presents the lives and work of ten women who 'looked evil in the eye and stood tall'.

With 'Women in Dark Times', Gescinska once again searches for what enables us to persevere in humanity's bleakest moments. She argues that if evil is intrinsic to human nature, then so is goodness. The result is a profoundly rich book, reminiscent in structure and spirit of Michael Ignatieff's 'Comfort' (2021) and Jan Brokken's 'Baltic Souls' (2010) – works that also highlight the enduring optimism of thinkers, writers and artists living through hellish times.

Gescinska's focus rests on ten remarkable women, among them well-known figures such as Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, Etty Hillesum and Rosa Luxemburg. She also shines a light on the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, philosopher Edith Stein, journalist Martha Gellhorn, Jeanne Hersch, philosopher Barbara Skarga and Latvian political thinker Judith Shklar.

Through their words and actions, these women resisted the oppression, dehumanisation and destructive impulses of their era. They became beacons of light in humanity's darkest hours – often at great personal cost, from death in concentration camps to a life in exile.



AUTHOR



Alicja Gescinska (b. 1981) is one of the leading young philosophers in Belgium and the Netherlands. Her book 'De verovering van de vrijheid' (The Conquest of Freedom, 2011) drew much praise. Her debut novel 'Een soort van liefde' ('A Kind of Love', 2016) won her the Debuutprijs 2017 and earned her a nomination for the Confituur Boekhandelsprijs. She has also presented the philosophical television programme 'Wanderlust', featuring philosophical conversations with internationally renowned philosophers, writers, scientists and artists. 'At Home in Music' was nominated for the Socratesbeker 2019. Photo © Koen Broos

ORIGINAL TITLE Vrouwen in duistere tijden. De Bezige Bij, 2025, 368 pp.

PRIZES Socrates Cup 2026
Nominated for the Libris Prize 2026

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TRANSLATION RIGHTS Marijke Nagtegaal - m.nagtegaal@debezigebij.nl

TRANSLATION GRANTS Patrick Peeters - patrick@flandersliterature.be