Bernhard Schlink’s novel The Reader (Der Vorleser 1995) in Swedish, Högläsaren 1997) is an international bestseller and is often included in the curriculum of German public schools. The book is considered a didactic example of how conformist thinking on moral issues can be avoided: a perpetrator’s background may turn out to be more tragic, while, unexpectedly, a victim may turn out to be, in some sense, blameworthy.

But this emphasis on similarities between Holocaust victims and perpetrators comes with an ethical risk, if emotions take over — the overwhelmed audience is supposed to be gradually prepared for the perpetrator’s redemption.

While Daldry’s previous film The Hours (2002) — about Virginia Woolf — did not carry the earmarks of a typical Hollywood movie, his most recent production The Reader, which was shown at the Berlinale 2009, alludes back to the Hollywood canon and to the particular segment of popular culture that deals with Germany and the Holocaust. In particular, the assimilation of famous Hollywood stars — all of whom, by their family background — into a psychoanalytical case study. Michael Berg speaks to a person whom the spectator might intuitively suppose to be a female therapist, but who turns out to be a psychotherapist.

The movie trailer sequence clearly brings to mind the discovery of such a handicap might lead to a lighter sentence. Is illiteracy associated with greater shame than mass murder?

According to his own logic, Michael is guilty in two respects: he was “in bed with the German Holocaust”; but he also abandoned Hanna because he felt suppressed in the relationship. While Hanna is in prison, Michael sends her tapes with recorded readings of literary works. He cannot stop reading aloud to her, but he never speaks or writes in her presence.

In prison, Hanna gradually learns to read and write. The interplay between the two turns into sort of a phallic correspondence course.

After having spent 18 years in prison, Hanna commits suicide — one day prior to her scheduled release. At the end of the novel, Michael looks up the surviving people who were involved in the church murder. He also visits Hanna’s grave.

The book’s storyline is highly intricate. It intermingles aspects of shame, guilt and love in a manner that places the focus on particular circumstances rather than on universal norms. It is an example of intimate, passionate extremes being construed as the standard situation. This paradoxical construction has particularly great impact on the book’s political message, as it suggests that fair judgment is virtually unattainable.

The movie trailer sequence clearly brings to mind the psychoanalytical case study. Michael Hoepf speaks to a person whom the spectator might intuitively suppose to be a female therapist, but who turns out to be a female prison guard, and a man with an Oedipus complex.
be a Holocaust survivor. She is one of those who sur- 
ved being locked up in the burning church, and she 
told the book, the film does not give an im- 
portantly moralistic account of the educational project 
and the reading of German classics. Hanna and Daldry 
try to convince the audience that Michael is a young 
man, for example, reads Chatterley’s Lover aloud while in 
the bathtub, and even reads aloud from the comic strip strip. Hanna also lets Hans write a story from prison called “Last emaciated reader.”

According to both the novel and the film’s story, Hanna was “forced” to join the SS and become a prison guard, as a promotion at Hermann to revile her
tory. In accordance with her limited conception of the world, she wants to fulfill her duty, and as the novel re- 

cently stresses, she is in, in spite of two scholarships, 
without social ambitions.

After Hanna has become an educated individual in the 
world, she wants to fulfill her duty and, as the novel oc- 


critically transformed, cannot be managed. To the 
impact that the Holocaust has had on him as a per- 
son. The films that risk taking into the same revolu-

in, he is confronted by his own fascination with a 
turn. He is immediately asked to join the SS and become 
a prison guard, as a promotion at Hermann to revile her
story. According to both the novel and the film, the story 
Hanna's washing, as they associate it with Third-Reich 
hygienic measures (the care for the “Volkskörper”?). In 
the novel, Hanna’s vigorous washing of Michael perhaps encodes the erotic delight 
in terms of class and gender (the vitalistic underdog, 
the criminal activity becomes localized in an illiterate 
woman, she wants to fulfill her duty and, as the novel oc-

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