

The Reader:

### Historical Context to the Reader:

response to student protests (frustration with living conditions, university curriculum, and remaining nazi presence)

- 1968 - big protest against german emergency acts (would allow govt to limit civil rights)
- legacy of student activism and democratic spirit
- WWII lasted 1939-1945 and story sets in 1958 at beginning
- Work in translation:
  - Can affect the meaning
  - Since the novel was intended to be read in German society, some meaning may be lost/ misunderstood because of lack of cultural context
- Bestseller in Germany and U.S. and translated in 39 languages
- First German book to reach number one in the New York Times bestseller list
- -Written when first generation after Nazis had matured to adulthood - 1995
  - generation called the *Nachgeborenen*
- •The books read in the novels were selected from the enlightenment to represent the idea of moral and ethical values while the german classics represent german heritage
- •Originally criticized for “cultural pornography” claiming that it was revising history so the readers related with the perpetrators of war.

### Themes:

- Major themes of illiteracy, time, love, and guilt.
- Post-WWII German guilt
  - Reflects how the post-war generations deal with the Nazi guilt
  - Criticized by some as “justifying” the Nazis
  - *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*
    - “reconciliation with the negative past”
  - Aftermath of Holocaust
    - Who and how to reintegrate
    - Nuremberg trials
  - 14th best book for German Readers.
  - The book also studies the pathway to redemption and forgiveness and shows how the nation of Germany was anxious to move on from a time that they would like to put behind them, and shows why this should never be possible, as many higher-ranking SS officers went on to fill posts in the judiciary and in government after the war.
  - The novel deals with a time in german history that most german people would like to forget. The novel studies the pathway to redemption and forgiveness, and depicts how the nation of Germany was anxious to move on from a time they want to put behind them. But, this novel shows why this should never be possible.
  - The Allied forces held the Nuremberg Trials to try the Nazi's for war crimes after WWII
- Generation Conflict
  - Second generation in Germany was shamed by guilt, but still held trials to hold Nazi war criminals to justice

- Allied occupation officials were interested in a denazification of Germany and saw the reconstruction of the German court system as an important step in this direction. Allied Control Council Law No. 10 of December 1945 authorized German courts of law to pass sentence on crimes committed during the war years by German citizens against other German nationals or against stateless persons.
- There were people that grew up following Nazi ideals, so after WWII, there was difficulty in coming to terms with what happened
- Deals with the moral issue on dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust and how shame should be assigned
- Responsibility
- Motive
- Illiteracy
  - •Hanna's illiteracy is ironic bc Germany has the highest literacy rate in Europe  
Represents the ignorance people had to the wrong doings that they or their peers committed during the war

### **Connection to plot of The Reader:**

- The trial
- How Michael and his fellow students viewed their parent's generation
- A parable is a succinct, didactic story, in prose or verbs, which illustrates instructive lessons.
- The reader is a bildungsroman and contains a tripartite structure.
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