



Schlink Context

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Family and Upbringing

- He was born in 1944 in the small town of Bethel near the city of Bielefeld, which lies towards the Dutch border
- This makes him young enough to have missed experiencing World War II, while his parents' generation did experience it
- His mother was a theology student, leading to influence from religion
- His father was an academic, professor, and pastor who criticized the Nazi policies; his criticism led to his removal from his job during Nazi rule
- Youngest of four siblings

“[Schlink’s father] became a victim of Nazi persecution, rather than a perpetrator, and was sacked in 1937 for his membership of the Bekennende Kirche [the Confessing Church], followers of Martin Niemöller, the pastor who had called for them to break from the Protestant church in protest at Hitler's policies. Edmund then became a pastor and the family moved to Heidelberg when Bernhard was two.”

Education

- He studied law at West Berlin's Free University of Berlin
 - Graduated in 1968
- He received his Juris Doctor degree from Ruprecht Karl University (University of Heidelberg) in 1975
- Graduated from Albert-Ludwigs University in 1981

Career as a Lawyer

- Was a judge at Constitutional Court of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia in 1988
- Philosophy professor at Humboldt University which was where the inspiration for the setting of *The Reader* was.
- Schlink has taught European law at a college in America and says he likes the country and the culture. "But the older I get the more I realise I really am a European. I wouldn't want to live there, although I really enjoy going there."

Student Life

- Schlink's own time as a student in the 60s and early 70s coincided with momentous events in German society. He met many of those who later became protagonists in the radical student movement but says, "I was interested in it all, but not much more than that. I always hated, and still hate, mass events. Even in concerts when people clap rhythmically I find it frightening. I never liked the demonstrations when they chanted 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh' and then jumped three steps. I did read Marx and Lukacs and tried to follow what was going on, but we lawyers tend to be measured in our political opinions. We are not prone to become extremists."
- "I can't say I'm thankful about being German because I sometimes experience it as a huge burden. But it is an integral part of me and I wouldn't want to escape it. I have accepted it."

Career as an Author

- A German lawyer and judge, the son of a pastor, he trained as a masseur and made jewellery before writing crime fiction.
- He published his first novel in 1990 and then embarked on a trilogy of detective books featuring Dr Gerhard Selb, a former Nazi prosecutor who saw the error of his ways and turned private detective
- Has a habit of writing stories with an older female protagonist in a romantic relationship with a much younger male protagonist.

Writing

- “I did a great deal of research into it, but I never had an objective beyond telling that story. I'm sure the things I think about and worry about in other contexts play into the stories I write. But I do not know how they do that, and I'm really uninterested in the epistemology of my writing.”
- "For a long time contemporary German writing was considered serious and difficult and not a particularly good read. That has now changed and the positive response to Schlink's book has helped make publishers more open to other new writers."
- Schlink denies he is an autobiographical writer, saying "because I have experienced some of these things I use them. We can only write about what we know on some topics."
- Influenced to write in response to reunification of Germany (allowed problems to be addressed again now that Cold War tensions had eased) and recent genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia that caused him to question why genocide is so universal

Ideals / morals

- “I think loving someone who committed a crime while not distancing oneself from that person entangles infinitely. At least [that was] what our generation experienced,” he said.
- I think that is something we have to do in this world. We must try to leave it a better place than we found it.
- Going back to before, growing up in the fifties and sixties, the question of how to relate to the parent generation ... how to deal with this generation was the issue for my generation
- To write stories, but more importantly to read the literature, means building bridges between the past and the present, observing both banks of the river, and taking an active part on both sides