The Reader: comparison of the book with its film

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# INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.1</td>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.2</td>
<td>Why did I choose this book?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.3</td>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>ABOUT THE BOOK</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.2</td>
<td>Bernhard Schlink</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>ABOUT THE FILM</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.1</td>
<td>Stephen Daldry</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2</td>
<td>Cast</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.1</td>
<td>Kate Winslet</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.2</td>
<td>David Kross</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.3</td>
<td>Ralph Fiennes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>CHARACTER’S DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.1</td>
<td>Michael Berg</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.2</td>
<td>Hanna Schmitz</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.3</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.4</td>
<td>Characters who appear in the book but not in the film</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.5</td>
<td>Characters who appear in the film but not in the book</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>PLACES DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.1</td>
<td>Places that appear in the book but not in the film</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.2</td>
<td>Places that appear in the film but not in the book</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BOOK AND THE FILM</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.1</td>
<td>Scene One</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

Before I start talking about The Reader, I think I should first of all explain why I chose this topic as my research project, what were my motivations, my objectives and why I did everything the way I did.

I.1 MOTIVATIONS

First of all, I had to choose the topic of my research project, but, luckily, that was not a really hard thing to do for me. Actually, I had been thinking about what I would do for my research project for a long time. I had always feared the time I would be cursing Batxillerat and doing my research project, so I had a lot of ideas. But, it was not until I spent a year in an English boarding school that I considered the option of doing the project in a foreign language.

But I still had to find a good topic to do it about. While I was cursing the 4th of ESO a pupil of the school Institut Francesc Ribalta did his research project about comparing a film and a book in English. That was when I started considering the idea of doing this research project. Of course this was not my final decision, I had another option and that was the autism on children. That was because I enjoy spending time with children and I have always been interested in disabled children. I had already read two books where the main character was a boy with autism, and I found them very interesting. I wanted to learn more of the effects of having this condition and how they and their families cope with that. This was my second option but I do not think I would have done it English.

I took the final decision while I was in Germany for a year as an exchange student, so I needed a research project that could be easily done from another country, and comparing a film and a book is the same if I do it here or in any other part of the world. I also did not want to lose the English I had learned while I was abroad and I wanted to learn more, so I thought that by doing this project I would learn vocabulary
and I would improve my writing. Furthermore, I love reading and when I read a book and then watch the film I, like I suppose many people do, look for differences between them.

Once I knew that I would be comparing a book with its corresponding film I still had a very important decision, which book do I want to compare with its film?

I.2 WHY DID I CHOOSE THIS BOOK?

Again, I decided the book I would do when I was in Germany. First, I had the idea of analysing a book by Nicholas Sparks, he is one of my favourite authors and many of his books have a film adaptation. But his books are all a bit simple; they did not fulfil my expectations on the project.

Then, I watched the film *The Reader* for the first time with my German host-family and we all thought that it could be a good one for my research project. I thought it would be a good book because the story is just not a simple love story, it is a story that makes you think about what you would do or how you would react to a lot of situations the characters get involved.

And, last but not least, because I was at that time living a German life I wanted to learn more about the country, and maybe understand why people did what they did during the Second World War. I also wanted to find out more about how the *Nachgeboren*\(^1\) dealt with the situation, because many people only think as war victims those who were there who suffered it. But there are many people who are victims but they are not recognized as so because they did not live the war, like the *Nachgeboren*.

\(^1\) *Nachgeboren* is a German word. It is formed by two words: *Nach* that means *after* and *geboren* that means *where born*. So it means those who were born after and it refers to the generation that was born right after the Second World War.
I.3 HYPOTHESIS

By doing this project I would like to know why there are some differences when a book is turned into a film. Is it only to attract the public? Or is there some other reason? The producers could nearly always make a film that is identical to its corresponding book, but they hardly ever do it. I also want to see what kind of differences can be found, are there any differences in the decoration? Are the characters different? Or can the plot vary from the book to the film? These are the answers I would like to have answered when I am finished with my research project.

I would like to study those things and I am first going to read the book and watch the film, of course. Then I am going to concentrate in each character and place (the setting), and do their description like it is in the book and like in the film. This way, I can see where the differences are if there are any. I am going to do a part for the book and another for the film when the character or place is important or they have many differences, but if they are similar I will compare them together. Then, I am going to analyze each scene of the film and I will compare it to the part that corresponds to the book, writing down all the differences. I am going to deduce which was the producers' goal when they introduced new scenes, new cities, new situations... I decided to do some interviews to people that have read the book so I could have more opinions, to see if they also found the same differences as me. But, at the start I am going to write about the book and the film to have some general information.
II. ABOUT THE BOOK

The Reader is a German book written by Bernhard Schlink in 1995. The original title in German is “Der Vorleser” it literally means, “someone who reads out loud”. The book was published in 1995 and two years later in the United States. It has been translated in nearly 40 languages. The English version is translated from the German by Carol Brown Janeway.

The story deals with the generation that came right after the Second World War, called the Nachgeboren or those who were born after. It shows the public the problems these people had, and that the only victims were not the only ones who lived the war. The genre of the book has a particular name and in German is: Vergangenheitsbewältigung which means.

The book sold over 500 thousand copies alone in Germany and it has won several awards and nominations. It is the 14th book most read by German people. After being featured in Oprah’s Book Club, it sold over 2 million copies in the United States. It also sold many copies in England and France, and it won some awards in South Africa. It also got various criticisms, mainly because of the sexual relation and the age-difference between the two main characters. And because of the relation Schlink made between Hanna’s culpability and illiteracy, some publicist say that even if you do not know how to read, you still know what Hitler was doing to the Jews and that illiteracy is not an excuse for Hanna’s past.

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2 Vergangenheitsbewältigung is a German word that is formed by two words. Vergangenheit is the past and bewältigung can be translated to: ways to cope. So, it means: the ways people deal with their past.
II.1 SYNOPSIS
Michael Berg is a normal 15-year-old teenager living in West-Germany right after the Second World War. One day on his way home he falls ill and a woman twice his age, Hanna Schmitz, helps him. Over the time, the two become lovers and Michael falls in love, until one day, Hanna disappears.

The boy, now a young adult studying law, sees Hanna again, but this time she is being judged for a horrible crime and she refuses to defend herself. As the trial advances, Michael realizes the secret Hanna has been keeping all her life. Could it be that Hanna is more ashamed of her secret than being a murderer?

II.2 BERNHARD SCHLINK
Bernhard Schlink was born in 1944, in Bielefeld, Germany. He grew up in Heidelberg with his three older siblings and his parents. His father was a Theology teacher but he lost his job because of the Nazis, so he became a pastor.

Schlink studied law in West Berlin’s Free University, he graduated in 1968. He worked as a judge from 1988 to 1992, then he became a law professor in Humboldt University in Berlin. He retired in early 2006, and since then he resides in New York and Berlin.

His most important work is The Reader, which was the first German book to reach the number one spot in the New York Times. Apart from The Reader he has other novels, like Flights of Love, which are several fiction stories collected together.

It is easily visible the similarity between his life and Michael Berg’s life, so some journalists say the book is a semi-autobiography.
III. ABOUT THE FILM

The film was released in December of 2008 in cinemas. It was written by David Hare and directed by Stephen Daldry and they began filming in Germany in 2007. The film won many prizes, including a Golden Globe Award and an Academy Award\(^3\) for Winslet’s acting.

The rights were bought by Miramax Films in 1998 but filming did not begin until 2007 when Stephen Daldry was signed to be the director and Ralph Fiennes was cast for the older Michael. When filming began, Winslet was already filming another film (*Revolutionary Road*) and due to bad arranged schedules she had to be replaced by Nicole Kidman. Winslet went back to filming *The Reader* when Kidman had to leave because of her pregnancy. They had to wait until David Kross, who plays the young Michael, turned eighteen to shot the sex scenes.

The film was very well received; it even won two awards in the category *Top 10 films of 2008*. Of course, it was also criticized like book, mainly because of the same issues: using Hanna’s illiteracy as an excuse and the sexual relation Michael and Hanna have.

III.1 STEPHEN DALDRY

Stephen Daldry was born in May of 1960 in Dorset, England. His father died of cancer when Daldry was fourteen and the family moves to another part of England. He graduated in English in the University of Sheffield and he spent a year travelling thorough Italy.

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\(^3\) The Golden Globe Awards and the Academy Awards are two famous, American film awards. The Academy Awards are more known as The Oscars.
His career as a director began in 2000 when he directed *Billy Elliot*, his next big film was *The Hours*, the film received an Academy Award for Nicole Kidman's job, after this two films he directed *The Reader*. He was nominated for an Academy Award for best director in the three films. He recently won a Tony Award for directing *Billy Elliot: the musical*. His next film with be *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, which is to star Tom Hanks and Sandra Bullock.

He was in a relationship for thirteen years with Ian MacNeil. Currently he is married to Lucy Sexton and they have a daughter: Annabel Clare, born in 2003.

### III.2 CAST

The cast of *The Reader* are all German actors apart from Kate Winslet, Ralph Fiennes and Lena Olin, the two first are English and Olin is Swedish.

#### III.2.1 Kate Winslet

Kate Winslet plays the role of Hanna Schmitz. Winslet was born in October of 1975 in Berkshire, England. She has received many awards and nominations. She became famous after starring alongside Leonardo DiCaprio in *Titanic* (1997). Her next film will be *Movie 43*, which is set to be released in April 2012. She has been married twice and she has two kids.
III.2.2 David Kross

David Kross is a young German actor and he plays the role of young Michael. He was born near Hamburg, Germany in July 1990. He started acting in 2002 and he became known when he appeared in *The Reader* with Kate Winslet. He appears in the new Steven Spielberg film *War Horse*. Kross has two brothers and a sisters and he enjoys playing basketball.

III.2.3 Ralph Fiennes

Ralph Fiennes is an English actor, he plays the adult Michael in *The Reader*. He is mostly known for his role as *Lord Voldemort* in the *Harry Potter* film series and his appearance in *The English Patient*. He was born in Ipswich, England in 1962. His next film will be *Warth of the Titans*; the release date is in March, 2012. He married his girlfriend of ten years but they divorced four years of marriage.
IV. CHARACTER’S DESCRIPTION

IV.1 MICHAEL BERG

Michael is the narrator of the whole story; he narrates his whole life, focusing on his and Hanna’s relation. He does it ten years after Hanna’s death.

Book

Michael Berg is a German teenager living in West-Germany who was born right after the Second World War. Michael had always been healthy, but he is diagnosed with hepatitis at the age of fifteen. He describes himself as a tall teenager, with long limbs and wearing cheap glasses, we have no description of his skin or hair color, but his hair is always tangled and messy. He likes to read a lot, he even writes some poems and he studies hard in school, he is in the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} grade during his relationship with Hanna. He has nice manners that he gets from his family (three siblings, a loving mother and a cold father). He is sensible, emotional and intelligent, he feels unsure about the way he looks and has poor self-confidence, although it improves thanks to Hanna; he feels superior to the others boys in his class due to the fact that he has a love affair. He is very mature compared to the boys his age, he is also independent and extremely reserved towards other people. He still does not know what he wants to be when he gets older, but he does like controlling what he has to do beforehand, although he does not always do what he intended to. He lets Hanna control him a lot and he is the one who always apologizes, he is scared of losing her. Like most of his generation, he has some trouble coming to terms with his country’s recent past.

After Hanna disappears Michael has a hard time getting used to it. His last years of school and his first years in university were easy and happy for him, although he does not remember much. At that time he was arrogant with everybody and he acted like he was superior. He studies law in university and he studies hard. During his years in university
he travels a lot to get away from Hanna’s trial. He is tormented trying to decide if Hanna and him are guilty. At the end he decides that Hanna is guilty, but not as much as she appears to be and that he is also guilty for having loved a criminal. Although he feels nothing when he thinks about Hanna, he says he is unable to face her and that he would not know what to say if he met her. We have no physical description of him during this time.

When Michael finishes his exams he begins practicing as a clerk. Around that time he marries Gerturd and they have a daughter, Julia, which he loves very much. But the marriage only lasts five years. After the divorce, he has many affairs with women and Michael tells them more things than he ever told Gertrud. When he finishes his state exams he has to choose what profession he wants to do within the law, and because he does not know what to do, he ends up working as a legal historian and he has to spend a year in America. He starts reading to Hanna on a tape when she has been in prison for eight years. When Hanna sends him notes he does not write back or visit her but he keeps all her notes. We have no physical description of him and we only know that he still likes to plan everything and he is still reserved. Ten years after Hanna committing suicide, he decides to write their story.

**Film**

He is portrayed by David Kross, a young German actor. Michael is seen as a tall and thin teenager, he has dark blond hair, the color of sand. He has dark sapphire blue eyes and pale skin, a typical German look. Kross has a long face, with a sharp nose, a little mouth, a long forehead, and pointy ears. He does not wear glasses like in the novel. Michael dresses with nice clothes, always clean and well ironed, usually a button-down shirt, a woolen shirt-less pullover and long trousers. It is shown that he is a good handball player, but the book does not mention it.

In the second part Michael studies law in university like in the book. He is distant with everybody, but not as much as in the book. He has gained some weight, his hair is nearly always not combed and it is a bit longer. He always dresses with a shirt and a
tie. He is seen smoking a lot of times. He is still portrayed by the German actor David Kross.

In the third part Michael is portrayed by Ralph Fiennes. His life is the same as in the book, there are no noticeable differences. He has light brown hair with a receding hairline. He has a high forehead, little blue eyes, a sharp nose and a long mouth.

**IV.2 HANNA SCHMITZ**
She is the second main character. She is seen first in her thirties and until her death.

**Book**

Hanna was born in a German community in Rumania, near Hermannstadt in October of 1922 but she moved to Berlin when she was sixteen. She worked at the Siemens factory, but in the end, she ended up in the army when she was twenty-one. During the war she was a guard in a concentration camp for Jews. After the war ended, she never lived in one place a long time. When she meets Michael she works as a streetcar conductor, and she still does when she meets Michael. She has no family and she is thirty-six when Michael is fifteen. Hanna is a strong woman; she has a strong, feminine and voluptuous body which Michael finds beautiful, but it is not heavy. Her hair is dark blond and long to the shoulders, her eyes are light blue that sometimes appear to be gray. She has high forehead and cheekbones and a square chin, her full lips form a perfect curve. In short, she has a broad-planed strong womanly face. Her skin is pale like most of the East-European people. She has smooth and warm skin even though her body is firm and strong. She has a little birthmark on her right shoulder. Hanna is an illiterate woman, she cannot read or write, this is a fact that she has been hiding as well as she can during all her life, but we -the readers of the book- do not find it out until the second part of the book. She is meticulously clean; she showers more than once a day and always wears freshly cleaned clothes. Hanna is an intriguing and silent person, Michael has never crossed
her in the streets and he does not know what she does when she is not working or with him. She is a bit dominant towards Michael as they always have to do things her way and Michael rarely has a say in things. She refuses a raise at work as a streetcar conductor and, instead, she moves to Hamburg.

In the second part of the book, Hanna is being judged for her past, she is 43 years old. The trial does not go very well for her because she cannot read the indictment or the daughter’s book, so she does not know how to defend herself. She has changed slightly; she has some furrows, but they are still hard to notice. She is very exhausted as she has some circles under her eyes. At the end of the trial she is sentenced to life. We do not have many descriptions about her during this period of time.

Hanna spends eighteen years in prison and in that time she learns by herself (with the help of Michael’s cassettes) to read and write. During most of the years she takes real good care of herself but in the last few years she gives up: she eats a lot and she does not shower anymore, this is the way she deals with what she did during the past. Toward the other women in prison she is friendly but reserved and everybody respects her. She still feels something for Michael because she has a picture of him in her cell and she takes his hand when Michael visits her. When Michael visits her, he finds she has become much older: she has gray hair and furrows everywhere, she has gained a lot of weight and she even smells like an old person, but her voice has not changed. She hangs herself in her cell the day she has to get out of prison.

**Film**

In the film, Hanna is portrayed by Kate Winslet. Hanna’s body is rather thin than voluptuous, but with nice curves. She has dark blue eyes, and curly dark blond hair. Her eyebrows are darker than her hair, she has big lips and a long neck. She has a mole just above the right side of her lips. Her personal life is the same as in the book, there are no differences here. Like in the book, she tries as hard as she can to hide
the fact that she does not know how to read or write. She shows really little emotions, her lips are usually in a tight line. She is really similar to the character described by Bernhard Schlink, the author of the book, and personally, I think Winslet did a very good job in portraying Hanna.

In the second part, Hanna (also portrayed by Winslet) has some gray hair and furrows. She is not as clean as she is in the first part. She resides in a prison cell and she gets no visits. It is visibly seen by the way she talks that she is scared of being judged and that she does not know how to defend herself.

Winslet had to endure everyday six hours of preparing her in order to make her look old. She is the same as in the book, the only differences are that she does not get fat and I think that her voice changed a lot.

**IV.3 OTHERS**

1. **Michael’s mother**

**Book**

She is in her forties and a stay-at-home mum. Mother of four, she loves and cares for her children, spoiling Michael a little bit more than the other three. She usually makes her husband make the big decisions. Michael gives us no physical description of her and he does not reveal us her name. She is only seen in the first part of the book.

**Film**

Michael’s mother is portrayed by Susanne Lothar. She has blond, short curly hair and brown eyes. She is really thin and is always with a tensed expression, like she is constantly suffering or thinking hard. She has everything tidy and clean. She believes Michael no matter what “No, he’s not lying, Michael never lies” (Daldry, 2008, min.16). We do have a name for Michael’s mother in the film: Carla Berg. We see her again in the second part when Michael goes to visit her with Julia. It is a flashback as
Julia is a little girl. She is seen much older and sad, with gray hair and furrows on her face.

2. Michael’s father

**Book**

Mr. Berg is a philosophy teacher whose work is more important to him than his own family, he is always thinking about his work. Michael feels that his father treats the family like pets, he cares about them, but he does not love them like he should. He is not very talkative and he rarely shares his feelings. He works at home and only goes to the university to give the lectures, he wrote two books about the philosophers Hegel and Kant. During the Nazi’s time, he had lost his job for giving a lecture about Spinoza and had worked as an editor for hiking maps. Michael and his siblings, when kids, had to make appointments to talk to him, like all of his students did. He dies before Hanna’s suicide, but Michael does not say exactly when. Again, we do not have any physical description or the name.

**Film**

Matthias Habich plays the role of Michael’s father. He is seen with light brown hair, similar to Michael’s hair but with a few white streaks. He looks old enough to be Michael’s grandfather. He is often seen with a book in his hands. His name is Peter Berg. He is not seen in the second part of the film like in the book.

3. Michael’s younger sister

Seen briefly, we do not know her physically or how she is called. Michael describes her as cheeky but saying it must be difficult for her being the youngest of four. She is the most rebellious form the four children; she sometimes hitches rides which her parents strictly disapprove and she also shoplifts some clothes.

In the film she is portrayed by Alissa Wilms. In the film, her
name is Emily. She is red-haired and with a lot of tiny freckles on her face, she has a pretty, young face. She is indeed cheeky and rude like the book says.

4. Michael’s brother

He is three years older than Michael and usually mocks him. The two brothers are always fighting and insulting each other, the older one tends to always win. They share a room, and when Michael is ill, the older brother has to move and sleep on the sofa for some months.

In the film he is not seen for a long amount of time and he never talks. He has black short hair and a high forehead, a round face, little mouth and little ears. His name is Thomas and he is played by the German actor Florian Bartholomäi.

5. Michael’s older sister

Michael has a good relationship with her, although she appears as little as her brother and sister. Michael tells her most of his secrets, but he does not tell her about Hanna. She is studying German literature. The narrator does not give us her name or her physical description.

In the movie she appears as little as in the book. The actress is Friederike Becht, and in the film she is called Angela. She has curly black hair, the same color as his brother’s, Thomas, she is pretty and well mannered.

6. Sophie

Book

She is Michael’s friend during high school, they go to the same class after tenth grade, when girls are accepted in Michael’s school. They have a good relationship, he has a crush on her, and so does she. Sophie lives only a few houses behind Michael’s. She has brown hair, brown eyes and a tanned skin. Michael comes close to telling her about Hanna when Sophie asks him why he sometimes seems so
distant and why he always leaves early or comes late, assuming it is because of his illness, Michael says that maybe he is going to tell her sometime, but he never does. Shortly after Hanna disappears, Sophie is diagnosed with tuberculosis and has to spend three years in hospital, only coming back when Michael is starting university. After so long time isolated she feels lonely, so it is easy for Michael to win her heart. After they sleep together, Sophie realizes that he is not interested in her, and asks in tears “What’s happened to you, what’s happened to you?” (Schlink, 1995, p. 89). Michael does not speak about her again.

**Film**

The character is played by Vijessna Ferkic, a pretty and young German actress. She is seen a little shy. She has blonde, long and straight hair, usually in two long plaits. She is really German looking, with blue eyes and pale skin, although she has some freckles on her skin. She is not seen in the second part of the film, she is not the one who has a little relationship with Michael like the book says, instead, in the film, it is another girl who is studying law with Michael, Marthe.

**7. Holger Schlüter**

One of Michael’s best friends during his teenage years, he is interested in the same things as Michael, history and literature. They are in the same class and he also gets along with Sophie, so the three of them usually hang around together.

Portrayed by Moritz Grove, in the film, he is Michael’s classmate and best friend. He has blond, short hair, brown eyes, and face shaped like a triangle. He jokes a lot and is very interested in girls.
8. Michael’s professor

**Book**

We do not know much about him, Michael does not give us his name or any description. He is quite old and he is one of the few teachers left that work on Germany’s past and the trials related to it. During the war, he had to exile from Germany, he returned when the war ended but he no longer acted like a German man. He dies when Michael is taking his final exams and he goes to his funeral.

**Film**

The actor is Bruno Ganz, and in the film he is called Professor Rohl. He is seen as a serious man and distant, but he seems to be a good teacher. He has light brown eyes, a big nose and big ears and a little mouth. He has gray hair but he is already a little bit bald, and he has a lot of furrows. He is always dressed in a suit.

9. Judge

When he is in a court room he gets easily irritated but outside he seems an intelligent and harmless man. In court, when he gets irritated he takes of his glasses and stars directly to the one who is talking. While he was studying everything turned out good, he took the right classes and seminars, he passed the final exams with high marks and he had got a good degree. He likes being a judge and if he had the chance he would do it all over again.

Portrayed by Burghart Klaussner, in the film he is seen as a serious man, like no one dares to disobey him. He is not seen outside the court room like in the book, as in the film Michael does not go to him for advice.
10. Other defendants

Book

There are four other defendants apart from Hanna. They are all about the same age and the five of them had been guards in the same concentration camp and they were there the night of the fire. Michael only describes briefly one of the defendants, she is a bit fat and cruel, she is continuously pointing at Hanna as the only guilty defendant. At the end of the second part of the book, they get terms in jail unless Hanna, who is sentenced to life imprisonment.

Film

In the film there are not five defendants but six. They do not seem very interested in the trial, one of them is even knitting, and the others are not paying much attention to what is said. Their names, apart from Hanna’s, are: Rita Beckhart, Caroline Steinhoff, Regina Kroit, Angela Zeva and Andrea Lumen. The five of them are sentenced to prison four years and three months. We can see in the picture three of the six defendants and a guard. They are all portrayed by German actresses.

11. The daughter

Book

Michael does not tell us many things about her; he says he does not remember her face as it had been during the trial. We know that she had been with her mother in a concentration camp, on the death march and in the church the night of the fire, she and her mother had been the only survivors. She has published a book in the United States in which she talks about her time in the concentration camp.

At the time of Hanna’s death she resides in New York.
York, near Central Park. She does not want Hanna’s money, she only keeps the tea tin because she had a similar one where she kept her treasures when she was a child. Her face looks like it cannot get old, like she had a lifting. She seems like a nice woman but she is still haunted by her memories of the past.

**Film**

![The daughter (third part)](Image taken from the film)

She is really similar to the book. She is portrayed by Alexandra Maria Lara when she is young and by Lena Olin when she is old (it is the same actress that portrays her mother). Her name in the film is Ilana Mather. She has black wavy hair and brown eyes. She has a soft face with pale skin. She loves very much her mother and she is really patient with her. When she is old she has brown hair and brown eyes, she is old and pretty. She does not want to forgive Hanna or any of the other guards, she is still a lot affected for what happened to her when she was a child. Like in the book, she does not want Hanna’s money and she keeps the tin.

**12. Julia**

**Book**

In the book Michael does not tell us many things about her. She is Michael’s and Gertrud’s daughter, but her parents got divorced when she was five years old. At the start of the divorce she does not understand it and she wants a little brother. When she is a teenager she lives in a boarding school but Michael wants her to live with him.

**Film**

In the film she is seen much more as in the book. She is seen first when she is five after her parents’ divorce. The young actress is Ava Eusepi-Harris. She has brown, long hair and a round face. Her eyes are brown and little. She does not see her grandmother very often.
The older Julia is portrayed by Hannah Herzsprung. She has long, curly brown hair and a high forehead. Her eyes are here blue and her face is long. She spent some time in Paris, but we do not know if she had lived in a boarding school like in the book. She feels guilty for her father’s behaviour toward her, but Michael tells her it is not her fault. At the end of the film Michael tells her all about Hanna.

13. Prison warden

She is the director of the prison Hanna spends her last twenty years. It is said that her institution is extraordinary and that she is good at her job, Michael likes her. She is small and thin, she has dark blond hair and she wears glasses. She looks insignificant until she starts talking. She talks with force and warmth at the same time and she moves a lot her arms while she talks.

In the movie she is called Louise Brenner and the actress that portrays her is Linda Bassett. She seems like a serious woman, like no one dares to disobey her. Her face makes it look like she is always angry and ready to scream at someone. She has black hair with some white strands. She has a round face with blue eyes and a little mouth.

IV.4 CHARACTERS WHO APPEAR IN THE BOOK BUT NOT IN THE FILM

1. Rudolf Bargen

He is one of Michael’s friends, he sits beside Michael in the 11th class. He is calm and reliable, a nice person. He is tall and strongly built, he is a hockey player and likes to play chess. He was in Michael’s old class in 10th grade, they had never spent
time together, and nevertheless, the two soon become good friends. He is not seen in the film, instead, next to Michael sits another friend of his, named Holger.

2. **Gertrud**

Gertrud is Michael’s wife but they divorce when Julia (their daughter) is five years old. Michael and Gertrud met when they were skiing with their friends and they decided to get married when Gertrud got pregnant. She also studied law and after finishing the final exams she starts working in the judiciary. While they were married, Michael tells us that she does not feel good in his arms because she is not Hanna. She does not appear in the film but Michael does mention that she works as a state prosecutor.

3. **Driver**

He is the driver that takes Michael near the concentration camp. He is middle-aged, he has a tired face with a scar on his right cheek and he has well combed black hair. He is Jewish and he had suffered during the war. He was standing in a line, naked, with other Jews, and they were all being shot. But he was standing on the edge and he fell into the pit and was not killed.

4. **Handicapped man**

He is the handicapped man Michael tries to help while he is eating at the guest house. He is old, short and he has a big, bald head. He has a wooden leg. He is unfriendly and cruel because he laughs at Michael along the other man when Michael tried to help him.

**IV.5 CHARACTERS WHO APPEAR IN THE FILM BUT NOT IN THE BOOK**

1. **Marthe**

She is in university with Michael and she also attends the seminar about Nazi’s trials. She lives in the same residence as Michael. From the first day of the seminar she
wants to seduce Michael and have sex with him. The actress is Karoline Herfurth, a German actress known for her role in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*. She has straight blond hair but with the sunlight her hair color looks strawberry-blond. She has a square face and some freckles. She has big brown eyes and big lips.

2. **Dieter**

He is studying law and he is in the same seminar as Michael and Marthe. He is a little bit rough and he always says what he thinks. At first he liked the trial because he thought it was justice but as it progresses he feels it is disgusting. He is portrayed by Volker Bruch. He has light brown hair and blue eyes. He usually has circles under his eyes and he has a mole on his right cheek.

He does not appear in the book but when Michael goes to the professor's funeral he meets with a former student who was also in the seminar about the Nazi trials, so it could be him.

3. **The mother**

She is one of the two victims that survived the night of the fire. In the book the judge and, the defendants and their lawyers travel to Israel to interrogate the mother, but in the film the mother attends the trial.

In the film, she is called Rose Mather although Michael always calls her *The Mother*. She is portrayed by Lena Olin, the same actress that plays the older daughter at the end of the film. She is an old woman with gray, curly hair. She tells the judge what happened the night of the fire. She seems to be a nice woman.
V. PLACES DESCRIPTION

1. Hanna’s building (the old one)

**Book**

The building is found in Bahnhofstrasse, Hanna’s apartment is on the second floor. It is a big, old building that used to be for rich people, but with the smoke coming from the trains – the train station is just over the street – the building got all dark and dirty, so it no longer belongs to rich people. The building has four floors, the first one is made of sandstone blocks, it has a courtyard where wood is stacked and above it there are lines from wall to wall full of laundry, in the courtyard there is a workshop where people are constantly working and it is heard in all the building. The front door is placed between two pillars, on top of those there is a lion, one looking up the street and the other one looking down. The other three floors are the apartments, they are made of brickwork, there are some balconies and windows. The stairs are narrower above than at the bottom and with iron banisters on each side, the paint has worn out and the green linoleum on half of the wall was worn out to nothing. The building has no mirrors, and mainly, no decoration. It always smells of cleaning fluid, sometimes mixed with the smell of food or laundry, also it is always clean. It is by far the largest building on the street and Michael is always amazed by its grandeur and he used to think what kind of people would live there.

**Film**

The building where Hanna lives is really similar to the one described in the book. It is an old, big building that used to be for rich people as we can see that it once had had nice banisters but now, they are old and dirty, it also has a nice wall paper but now it is scraped off. It is a tall building like the book says, but it is not the biggest on the street. The front door is big and made of wood, above it there is written: Schreinerei R. Berger but I do not know what it might refer to, it was written time ago as some of it is erased. Indeed, there is a lion in each side of the front door but over the street there is not a train station, there is a building in construction. The first floor has a dark
hall with stone floor and a little courtyard where some men are constantly working with wood. The other floors are apartments and it is seen that there are eight bells, so I suppose there are eight apartments.

2. Hanna’s apartment

**Book**

Hanna lives in a little apartment on the third floor of the massive building. The biggest room is the kitchen, equipped with a stove and a sink, a table with two chairs a cabinet, a wardrobe, a couch with a red cloth thrown over it, a bath tub and a boiler. The room has no windows and the only sunlight comes from the door that leads to the balcony, but when the door is open you hear the screaming of the saws from the yard and smell of wood. The apartment also has a small living room with a dresser, another table with four chairs and a coal stove, but the coal stove is not used a lot, there is a window that faces Bahnhofstrasse, with a view of what had once been the railroad station. There is a windowless toilet, so when the toilet smells so does the hall and the whole apartment.

**Film**

In the film, Hanna’s apartment is on the second floor and not on the third one like in the book, but everything else is really similar. It has a little hall where Hanna keeps the things she needs for work. The kitchen, the living room and the bed are all in the same room, separated by some kind of wall made of thin wood and glass. The bathtub is in the kitchen but it can be separated by a curtain. The wardrobe, the couch and the table are not in the kitchen, like in the book, but in the living room. There can be seen two big suitcases above the wardrobe, indicating that Hanna moves in and out a lot. The living room is not dark like described by Bernhard Schlink in the book, instead there is a lot of light coming from two big windows -one in the
kitchen and the other in the living room- and the door that leads to the balcony. A funny thing I found is that the entrance door is never locked, not even when Hanna is not at home. The first picture shows Hanna’s bedroom and the second one is the living room. Most of the first part of the movie is filmed in Hanna’s apartment as it is the only place the two main characters meet.

3. Michael’s house

Michael lives in Blumenstrasse, on the second floor of an old building. His house is big and nice decorated, it is a common house for a family. They have a piano, and a nice grandfather clock. They have pictures everywhere, the table is set with nice cutlery and plates. Michael shares a room with his brother but we do not know if his sisters also share a room. They have many bookcases as his father is a philosophy teacher and he is always reading. One of the rooms that has more books is the father’s office. Michael only tells us about his house when Hanna goes there to have supper when Michael’s parents are away.

In the film the house is really similar, there are not any big, noticeable differences. We can see the dining room in the picture.

4. Michael’s classroom

Michael goes to a German school who only admitted boys until Michael is coursing the 11th grade. His classroom has the door at the front, clothes hooks on a wall, and big windows on the other wall, the windows look onto the mountains, the Heiligenberg (it is for those mountains that Michael’s hometown could be Heidelberg), streets and the river. At the front there is the blackboard, some maps and diagrams and the teacher’s desk on a little platform. The room has no
The Reader: comparison of the book with its film

Institut Francesc Ribalta

decoration or cupboards with old books. The walls are painted yellow and white, the lower half is yellow, painted in oil paint, and the upper half is white.

In the film the classroom is similar to the one in the book. The only differences are that the door is at the back and not at the front, there is a cupboard at the back of the class and the walls are not yellow and white but dark green and white.

5. Concentration Camp Struthof-Natzweiler

Book

Michael visits it twice, first during the trail and then when Hanna is already dead. It does not look like a concentration camp anymore because it is full of snow; Michael thinks it could be a place where families spend their winter holidays. The barracks and the watchtowers are painted gray-blue, but there had been more barracks during the war. In one barrack Michael finds the ovens of crematorium and he also sees a white house with a sign indicating that it had been the gas chamber. This is not the camp Hanna had worked in, this is the one Michael had nearest.

Film

In the film it does look like a concentration camp and there is no snow. The watchtowers and the barracks are made of brown wood and they are not gray-blue like in the book. Inside the barracks there are many bunk beds together without any space between them, they are made of old wood that it seems like it could break any minute. There is a big gas chamber and two ovens of crematorium. A thing that is not said in the book and is really shocking is what we can see in the picture. They are cages full of shoes from the people who died; they kept them and all their belongings.
6. Hanna’s cell

It is equipped with a bed, a closet, a table with a chair, some shelves and a sink and a toilet. There is nothing on the table but the shelves are full of the cassettes that Michael sent to Hanna and books. In the self above the table there are some books, an alarm clock, two mugs, tea tins, instant coffee and the cassette machine. There is a window made of glass bricks. Above the bed there are some pictures and slips of paper. They are poems, recipes Hanna wrote, photos of meadows, woods, flowers… and a newspaper photograph where Michael appears.

In the film the cell is really similar. It is all like described in the book but there is no toilet and she does not have Michael’s photo hanging above the bed. We can see in the image the pictures and notes Hanna has above her bed.

V.1 PLACES THAT APPEAR IN THE BOOK BUT NOT IN THE FILM

1. Hanna’s building (the new one)

The building Hanna had lived in during her stay in Bern, Michael’s hometown, is no longer there, instead there is a new building in its place. The building was built around the eighties, it is nicely decorated with balconies and arched windows. It has five floors, on the ground floor there is now a computer store, once there were a pharmacy, a supermarket and a video store. The other four floors are apartments, lots of tiny apartments for tenants that move in and out a lot.
2. Hanna’s building in Michael’s dream

It is the building Michael sees in his dreams. The building is the same, but it is not in Bahnhoffstrasse or in Bern, in every dream it is in a different place. Usually it is in the countryside, surrounded by fields and no trees and there are no high mountains. The house is dark and dirty like the real one, but the windows are so full of dust that it is impossible to see what is inside. Michael does not tell us about is dreams in the film, so it does not appear.

V.2 PLACES THAT APPEAR IN THE FILM BUT NOT IN THE BOOK

1. Michael’s classroom in university

In the book, Michael does not describe anything about his classroom in university, we know that he spends time there but he says nothing in particular. In the film, they spend a lot of time there.

It is a big classroom, typical for a university. At the front there are two doors, a big and two little blackboards. All the other space are desks that form a semi-circle, every row is higher than the one before so the students can see the teacher and the blackboard even if they are in the back. At the back of the class there hangs a little clock. It is a bright room with a lot of sunlight as it has two big windows.
VI. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BOOK AND THE FILM

VI.1 SCENE ONE

1. The first noticeable difference is that the film starts with an adult Michael, in Berlin 1995, when the book starts when Michael is fifteen. Grown up Michael is seen with a really pretty woman, who goes around the house naked, it does not look like they share a serious relationship as she did not even know Michael has a daughter and she does not stay for breakfast. He tells her he is going to meet his daughter that afternoon. The book tells us nothing about that.

I suppose the producers of the film started the film differently because they have to attract the public eye from the first moment, and a pretty naked woman is usually more interesting than a simply ill teenager. So this difference is to get the people attached to the film from the first scene, which is always really important for a film to succeed. Also, with this difference we know that the scene that comes next is a flash back and that Michael is now an adult.

2. When the film first shows the young Michael, it says in the screen: Neustadt, West-Deutschland 1958. In the book, it is not clear where Michael lives because he once mentions at the start of the book that he lives in Bern but I found in various sites in the internet that he lives in Heidelberg, this could also be right because Michael says that it is possible to see the Heiligenberg from his classroom, and these are mountains located near Heidelberg. Bern could be a town near Heidelberg or just a neighbourhood in Heidelberg, and that is where Hanna lives. Heidelberg and Neustadt are both cities in West-Germany, near Frankfurt. Heidelberg is much bigger and has twice more habitants than Neustadt.

We can see in the picture the scene at the start of the film where...
it says where the story takes place. The boy is Michael, when he is about to throw up on his way home.

In the end, this does not matter much, the director himself said in an interview that it is not important where Michael lives, as long as it is in West-Germany “*Michael Berg [...] lives in a small town, we name it Neustadt but it could be anywhere. In fact, for Mr. Schlink, in the novel it’s Heidelberg*”. 

3. When Hanna is helping Michael, the book says that Hanna tells the boy to get another bucket and help but in the film, Hanna does it all by herself.

4. Another little difference is that in the book, Michael is diagnosed with hepatitis and in the movie the doctor tells the mother that it is scarlet fever. I cannot think of a reason why in the film it is scarlet fever and not hepatitis. In either disease, Michael has to spend several months in bed, although scarlet fever is contagious and hepatitis not.

5. The second chapter from the book does not appear in the film, the one where grown up Michael says he has had a lot of dreams about the building Hanna lives in. In the film, they could have shown the older Michael tossing in his sleep and then the dream, and the film would be a little more intriguing, because then the public wants to know which building it is the one in the dream and why he is dreaming about it. I think they decided not to show the dream because if there are too many changes in time (too many flash backs or flash forwards) people might get lost and it keeps cutting the thread of the story.

**VI.2 SCENE TWO**

1. When Michael goes to see Hanna for the first time, he does not know which door it is so, in the book a man that is coming out of the building directs him to Frau Schmitz on the third floor but, in the film Michael looks at the name tags on the bells, even though he does not know Hanna’s name and he goes directly to Hanna’s apartment.

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4 I found the interview in the movie’s official website: [http://www.thereader-movie.com/](http://www.thereader-movie.com/)
I think this is a little mistake the film has because it is impossible for Michael to know which floor and door Hanna lives in, he has never been inside the woman’s apartment. There are the names on the bells but Michael still does not know Hanna’s name or family name. When I first saw the film I thought “How does he know where to go? Or has he already tried every apartment in the building?”.

2. After Michael runs away from Hanna’s apartment after the little incident where Hanna catches the teenager looking at her, it is seen in the motion picture that Michael observes her when she is working as a streetcar conductor, it does not happen in the book, Michael does not even know what her job is. I suppose it is done this way to show that the boy is attracted to Hanna from the start. And it is also done because, in the book you can read how Michael feels, and we can see that he cannot get her out of his head. But in a film, it is really difficult to show people’s feelings and thoughts, so with this difference we can see in the film that Michael spends a lot of time thinking about Hanna after his second encounter with her.

3. A minor difference is seen when Michael goes back to Hanna’s apartment, it is said in the novel that the boy waits for over an hour for Hanna to arrive when in the film, Hanna shows up just after Michael arrives.

This is a little difference that might lead to some confusion because in the book, Michael goes to Hanna’s place to talk to her and because he wants to apologize for his behaviour. The problem is that, in the film people might think that Michael goes to Hanna’s just to observe her. The public might think this because when Michael hears Hanna coming up the stairs the public sees that he is taken by surprise and he acts like he does not know how to react. Maybe the producers of the film wanted to make it look like Michael was just observing her. But, of course, not everybody watching the movie is going to think that Michael did not want Hanna to see him in front of her door. In fact, the majority of the public is not going to think about this minor thing, after all, they just want to relax and have a break from their lives by watching the film.
VI.3 SCENE THREE

1. We can read in the book that Michael argues with his little sister and his brother when he arrives home late for dinner after making love with Hanna the first time, in the film his brother does not take part on the bickering.

2. While in the book it is really important to Hanna that they have to have a shower before making love, they do not do it in the film.

This is a little difference but it is really important because in the book, the showers Hanna takes have much more meaning than just being clean. Hanna feels guilty for what she did in the past, for what she did to the Jews in the concentration camp, for being a Nazi and even for being illiterate so, for her, having showers is a sign of purification. She believes that eventually, thanks to having a lot of showers the water will make her forget her past or forgive her for what she did. Even more, she showers before having sex with Michael because she knows it is not right to have sexual relations with a minor, nowadays it is illegal to do so, and I am sure that at that time in Germany it was badly seen to everyone. And Hanna does not only have a sexual relationship with Michael, she also takes advantage of him because he is young so she can have someone who reads to her without knowing her secret. That is the true reason she has showers before making sex, not because she wants not to be dirty.

It is seen in the film that Hanna and Michael spend some time reading in the bathtub, and Hanna is sometimes seen having a bath. But it is not shown or said that it is really important.

3. It is not shown in the film when Hanna gets angry and throws Michael out of the house for cutting classes to be with her and tells him that he can only go when school is finished. This fight is not shown in the film like the fight they have during the trip is. In the film there are two fights, the one where Michael takes the street-car to surprise Hanna and the one on Michael’s birthday. I think the producers only showed two fights because they knew that many people did not like the book because of the sexual relationship the main characters have. So, if they do not show so many fights it is not so easy to see that Hanna is only taking advantage of Michael and then the film is going to get more public and better reviews.
VI.4 SCENE FOUR

1. In the movie, Michael is seen at school playing handball, which he is really good at, but the book never shows us Michael playing sports during school time.

The makers of the film decided to show that Michael is good at handball because the previous scene he said to Hanna: “I didn’t think I was good at anything” Dalry (2008). So, this difference is to prove that Michael is wrong and that he is good at something. In the picture we can see Michael playing handball at school, he is the one on the right.

2. There is a little difference in the order of how things happen in the film. The book says that when Hanna orders Michael to read to her before making love, it is still before their first fight, the one where Hanna ignored Michael when he was in the streetcar. The film shows this after the fight, already in scene five.

VI.5 SCENE FIVE

1. The trip the lovers take during Easter is two days shorter in the film

2. A little but significant difference is that, when Michael and Hanna are eating one day during their bike trip, Hanna looks with a sad and jealous expression at some scout boys who are reading the menu and laughing at something that is written in there, this does not happen in the book.

In the first picture we can see the scout boys reading the menu, and in the second one it is how Hanna looks at them. The two pictures are taken from the scene where it all happens. I suppose Mr. Daldry (the director) added this little scene to give the public a hint about Hanna’s illiteracy or just to make Hanna’s character a little bit more
intriguing.

3. Another thing that has the film and not the book is that Hanna starts crying overwhelmed with emotion when she hears a children choir singing in a little church. With this we can see that Hanna is a soft woman after all, she is not as emotionless as she seems to be.

4. In the middle of the scene, we see the adult Michael looking at the poem he wrote for Hanna on their bike trip, he gets in the car and the radio is playing a song sung by a children choir, similar to the one Hanna had cried for, listening to it makes him remember and he turns the radio off with a sad expression. He is late for work as a judge. They show the scene with Ralph Fiennes, the adult Michael, so we can see that he is still not over Hanna and that he thinks about her a lot.

5. It is not seen when Hanna gets really angry at Michael when they are on the trip because Michael leaves to get breakfast and leaves a note, but Hanna denies it and hits him with a leather belt. It is the same difference as the one in scene three and it is for the same reason: because the public does not like seeing how Hanna mistreats Michael. In this fight is even worse because Hanna hits Michael in the face with a leather belt.

6. It is also not seen how Michael had to steal some things for her little sister to have the house for himself for a week, or how Hanna goes to eat at his house when he is home alone.

**VI.6 SCENE SIX**

1. In the new class, Michael does not sit beside Rudolf Bargen but Holger, one of his best friends and they are not in the middle row, like the book says, but the one to the left. Rudolf Bargen does not appear in the film.

2. It is not seen in the film that Hanna and Michael give each other animal nick names and Hanna starts calling him other names besides Kid. I believe the film does not show it because it is not important.
3. The film adds a little scene, Michael is at the pool and Sophie asks him why he always leaves early, but Michael does not answer.

4. It is also shown in the movie how Hanna gets promoted at work, we do not see it in the novel. And, in the book they say she can be trained to be a driver but in the film they say she will be working in the office. This change in the film is because working in the office means reading and writing a lot, nearly all the works related to reading or writing. A driver also has to read but not as much as someone who works in an office.

They show in the movie how she gets promoted because in the book we know Hanna was promoted when Michael talks to Hanna’s boss, but Michael does not talk to him in the film. So they have to show how her boss tells her she is going to be working in the office.

5. The day of Michael’s birthday, it is said in the book that Michael goes for a short time to the party his friends have prepared for him, but in the movie he goes straight to Hanna and not to his surprise party.

6. It is not said in the book that Hanna slaps Michael when they get into a fight that same day of Michael’s birthday.

7. In the film, Michael does not see Hanna at the pool that last day like in the book, he just senses something is wrong and goes back to Hanna’s. Also, in the film Michael discovers that Hanna has left when he goes back to her apartment and sees that Hanna and everything she owns is no longer there, Michael cries himself to sleep in now, Hanna’s old bed. He returns home the next day to an angry, disappointed father, a worried mother, and curious siblings. In the film, he does not go to the citizens register to see where Hanna has gone to live.
VI.7 SCENE SEVEN

1. The film adds another scene, that is when Michael is old, and he goes to see his daughter like he said to the lover in the first scene. He meets with Julia, his daughter, after a long time, she has been in Paris for some time. Michael apologizes for being so cold when Julia was a child, saying he was never open to her or anyone.

In the book, Michael tells us some things about his life is now, but really little each time, and the film would be very confusing if it were like that. That is why they made this scene. We can see in the picture the moment they both meet at the restaurant after a long time.

2. The first chapter of the second part of the book is not shown in the film. It is the chapter Michael tells us the difficulties he had to get over Hanna, how his last years of school and first years in university went and the time when he slept with Sophie. The movie shows straightly Michael in university and Sophie does not appear in the second part. I do not understand why in the film they do not show this chapter because I think it is an important one to see how much influence Hanna had in Michael’s life.

3. Again, there is a scene in the film that is not in the book. First, we see Michael and Rudolf having fun in the kitchen and Marthe watching them, it seems pretty clear that Marthe is interested in Michael. Then, Marthe goes to Michael’s room while he is working there. She wants to spend the night with him because she says with a seductive voice: “Are you sure you will work tonight?” Daldry (2008). Michael answers saying that yes, he is going to work, then Marthe says goodbye and leaves the room.

The first chapter of the second part of the book is not in the film and we cannot see how Michael stills thinks about Hanna, but I think that with that scene we can see that Michael is not very interested in girls.
4. The students and the professor attend the trial every day and they travel by train and not by car like in the novel. I suppose because it is easier to film in a train than inside a car.

5. When the students are in the train going back professor Rohl asks Michael what he thought of the trial and the young man says it was not what he expected, then Rudolf interferes and says he found it exciting because it is justice. Then, the students are in class and professor Rohl tells them how the main question has not been “Was it wrong?” but “Was it legal?” and that when a person kills another one, usually the murderer knows that it is wrong to do so.

The producers and Daldry added this scene to make the film more interesting and intriguing, this way the film is not boring and more people will watch it.

6. In the book they do not read the daughter’s book, but in the film they read some parts.

7. The questions that asks the judge are not in the same order as in the film but this difference is not important.

8. The court does not travel to Israel to interrogate the mother like in the novel, instead, in the film, the mother travels to Germany to attend the trial. There is this difference because it is easier to film in one place and this way the public does not get confused.

8. The daughter (Ilana Mather) does not interrupt the trial to explain that Hanna had special prisoners, she tells it when she is being questioned by the judge. She also has to point the defendants that she recognizes from the camp, a thing that it does not happen in the book. The film shows this with some, sad background music to add more drama to the plot. This way, the public wants to know if she is going to point at Hanna or not. We can see in the image the moment where the daughter points the defendants that she recognizes from the concentration camp, we can see the judge in the background.
9. In the book Michael explains us the death march and how all the prisoners died after he reads the book, but in the film it is the mother who explains it all to the judge. She explains the march and the bombing but she does not tell us how she and her daughter managed to survive.

VI.8 SCENE EIGHT

1. In the film, all the students from the seminar are in class with Professor Rohl and they talk about the trial. Dieter says that he first enjoyed the trial but now he finds it disgusting and that those six women (the six defendants) were not the only guilty ones, that there were many more Nazis. When Michael replies that they are trying to understand Dieter answers back irritated saying that there is nothing to understand when six women let three hundred Jews burn to death. Dieter blames all the generation before him what happened during the war. He says “How could you let this happen? And better, Why didn’t you kill yourself when you found out?” Daldry (2008). When Dieter remarks that Michael is always staring at Hanna and Michael denies it, Dieter says he would take a gun and shot Hanna himself.

This debate does not appear in the book but it can be related to the second chapter from the second part of the book because this is the chapter Michael tells us that the whole class said their parents were guilty for Germany’s past. Although in the scene, it is only Dieter who says it. We can see in the image how Dieter answers back at Michael.

2. In the film Michael goes to visit the concentration camp before Hanna admits writing the report but in the book he goes there at the end of the trial, while the court is in Israel to interrogate the mother.

3. It is not seen how Michael goes to the concentration camp, so the driver with the scar is not seen. The handicapped man Michael meets when he stays in the guest
The Reader: comparison of the book with its film

Institut Francesc Ribalta

house is also not shown. These parts are not shown but it does not matter because they are not relevant to the story, they are not important.

VI.9 SCENE NINE

1. When Hanna admits having written the report so she does not have to give a sample of her handwriting and Michael discovers her secrets, in the movie, they show some quick flashbacks of moments when Hanna avoided reading. These flashbacks are there because this way the public can guess that Hanna is illiterate.

2. In the film Michael goes to talk to Professor Rohl and not the judge and his father like in the book. When Michael tells his professor that he has a information that could help a defendant, Rohl tells him that he has an obligation to tell the information to the court, but Michael says he cannot do it because the defendant herself wants to keep it a secret. The professor tells Michael that he should visit the defendant. This conversation is really similar to the one Michael has with his father in the book.

3. In the film, it is seen how Michael takes his professor’s advice and goes to visit Hanna. But while he is accompanied by the guards to go where Hanna is waiting anxiously, he turns around and leaves without seeing Hanna. We can see in the image how Michael leaves the prison without facing Hanna. This little scene is in the film to make the public eager to know what they will say to each other or to know if Michael is going to convince Hanna about telling the truth about her. And, again, it is difficult to show people’s thought in a film, and with this scene we know that Michael is not prepared to talk to Hanna, that he does not know how to face her.
VI.10 SCENE TEN

1. In the film, the night before the verdict has to be read aloud Michael goes to Marthe’s room and they make love without saying anything, Marthe just says “Are you coming in? You took your time” Daldry (2008). While Marthe is sleeping Michael leaves the bedroom but he wakes up Marthe and Michael tells her that he has to spend the night alone.

This is not in the book because Marthe does not appear in the book, instead Michael has a one night-stand with Sophie. This is to show that Michael has no serious relationship with a girl, and even more when Michael leaves in the middle of the night. Again, this is just to make the film more interesting so the film gets more viewers.

2. In the film all the defendants apart from Hanna are sentenced to four years and three months of imprisonment but in the book Michael just says receive terms in jail, but we do not know how much time.

3. It is shown in the film how Michael goes to visit his mother with Julia. It is in 1976 (it is written in the screen) and right after Michael and Gertrud divorce because Michael tell his mother. In this scene the public learns that Michael father died but Michael did not even attend the funeral, after Michael tells his mother he is getting divorced she says: “You don’t come for your father’s funeral but you come for this.” Daldry (2008). Michael excuses himself saying that it is hard for him to visit the city, but he does not tell the reason to his mother. After they have eaten Michael sees all the books he had when he was a teenager and he starts reading one out loud, it is easily noticed that he still longs for Hanna and the time they spent together. While he is reading a book that he had read to Hanna he has the idea to send tapes of himself reading to Hanna. We can see in the image Julia, Michael and his mother eating in Michael’s old house.

With this scene we know that Michael has been isolated from everyone because he had not visited his family for a long time. We can also see that Michael is still affected
by Hanna as he does not visit his home-town very much. In the book Michael himself can tell us himself what he feels but it is more difficult in a film to show people’s feelings. And, of course, it is also to make the film more interesting.

**VI.11 SCENE ELEVEN**

1. It is not seen in the film when Michael goes skiing with his friends or anything during the five years he was married to Gertrud.

2. It is also not shown how Michael goes to the funeral of the professor he had during the trial and how Michael finds a student who was also in the seminar. It is not in the film because the conversation Michael and the former student have is really similar to the one that Michael and Dieter have in scene eight. And also, it is not an important scene.

3. When Michael receives a note from Hanna for the first time, he does not seem to be filled with joy, instead he is surprised and he looks like he is about to cry.

**VI.12 SCENE TWELVE**

1. In the book Hanna spends eighteen years in prison and in the film it is over twenty years. This difference does not matter much.

2. In the film Michael gets the letter from the prison warden when Hanna has to be released the week after but in the book Michael receives it a year before Hanna’s release. I suppose this difference is here not to make the film too long.

3. When Michael visits Hanna in prison they do not talk outside like in the book but in the canteen. I think the difference is there because if they talk outside, sitting on a bench, it does not look like they are in a prison, but a canteen of a prison is a more typical place to show in films.
4. In the film, Hanna has not gained weight like in the book. The prison warden tells Michael that Hanna does not take care of herself like she used to for the past few years, but she does not tell him that she eats more and it cannot be seen. It is not so important that Hanna gains weight, so Winslet did not have to gain weight to film the scene.

5. In the film, when Michael and Hanna say goodbye they do not hug like in the book. It looks like they are about to hug each other or kiss on the cheek, but they do not. This way, the public waits for a hug or a sign of affection and they are deceived when they only say “take care” Daldry (2008). We can see in the picture the moment they say goodbye.

6. It is also not seen in the film how Michael talks on the phone with Hanna the day before she has to be released.

VI.13 SCENE THIRTEEN

1. In the film the prison warden does not ask Michael anything about his and Hanna’s relationship, she just takes him to her cell and reads him the part of the letter that concerns him. I suppose that it is not shown because we already know their story and we do not want to hear it again.

2. In the film, Hanna does not have Michael’s pictures hanging on the wall of her cell, she has some photos of woods and fields like the book but not the newspaper picture that Michael appears in.

3. In the book Michael says that he does not cry in front of the prison warden, he says that he is about to cry but he does not want to cry in front of her. But in the film he does break down when the warden reads him Hanna’s letter. This way, the film is more emotional and dramatic and the public might even end up crying.
4. Michael does not ask the warden to see Hanna’s corpse like in the book. Maybe because some people find it gross to see dead bodies.

VI.14 SCENE FOURTEEN

1. The whole scene (scene fourteen) is in the film but not in the book. It is in January of 1995 and Michael goes with his daughter, Julia, to visit Hanna’s grave. When Julia asks his father who was her, Michael tells Julia the whole story. We can see in the image Michael’s car arriving at the church where Hanna’s grave is.

The producers had to add this whole scene because in the film Julia is seen quite a lot, so there had to be another scene with her. With this scene, we know that at the end, Michael gets over Hanna and he is honest with his daughter. This way, the public can have a little bit of a happy ending.

2. In the film, Hanna’s grave is behind the church where Hanna hears the children choir when they were in the bicycle trip. It is behind the church where Hanna started crying full of emotion. But in the book we do not know where she is buried, only that she is buried in a cemetery.

3. The last chapter from the book is not seen in the film. It is the one Michael tells us ten years after Hanna’s death that he decided to write their story. Instead of this chapter in the film there is the scene where Michael and Julia visit Hanna’s grave.
VII. INTERVIEWS

I decided to add interviews in my research project because I thought that I needed more opinions about the book, I thought that just one opinion was not enough.

Here are the questions that I am going to ask:

- Name:
- Age:
- Sex:
- Profession:
- When did you read the book?
- In which language did you read it?
- When did you watch the film?
- Did you like the book? And the film?
- Did you read the book first or watch the film?
- Did you notice many differences between the book and the film?
- Which difference was the most important for you?
- Do you think Hanna is guilty for what she did during the war or she had couldn't do anything else?
- If you were in Hanna’s situation, would you also lie about being illiterate?
- And in Michael’s situation, would you tell the truth to the judge?
- Why do you think Hanna always showers before having sex with Michael?

VII.1 OBJECTIVES

With these questions I want to know if the interviewed people enjoyed the book and the film, and if they did not enjoy it, I want to know if it is for the same reasons I mentioned in About the book and About the film. I also want to know if they found many differences between the book and the film. I will ask some questions that they will have to give me their opinion about the characters and they will have to tell me what they would have done if they were in Michael’s or Hanna’s shoes. This way I
can have more opinions about the main characters, if it is not normal how they acted or if somebody would act that way. And the last question is going to be about a difference that I have explained in VI.3 SCENE 3. I want to know if they think that Hanna also showers because she feels guilty and she wants to clean herself for what she did during the past.

I had some problems finding people that had read the book because not many people have read the book. Many people know about the book or they have watched the film, but I only found two people that had read the book and watched the film. The two interviews can be found in the Annex – Interviews.

**VII.2 CONCLUSIONS**

One interviewed person did not like the book and it is for the same reason as many journalists around the world: he did not like the way Hanna treated Michael. When I asked if they had found many differences between the book and the film the two said that they are really similar, that they did not find many differences. Even though they both found a big difference, one said that the film has flashbacks and the book is uninterrupted, it has no flashbacks or flash-forwards, The other said that the film had not the rougher scenes, the ones where Hanna mistreats Michael. The first difference the first man found is to make the film more interesting, not so boring and the other one is there because the producers knew that the book got bad reviews because of the lovers’ relationship, because Hanna takes advantage of Michael, so they did not show the scenes that this stands out the most. In both cases it is to gain more public, although the first one could also be so the public can understand the effect Hanna had on Michael.

When I asked if they thought that Hanna was guilty they said different things. One thought that Hanna is not guilty because the job had to be done, and the other one said that what she did is inexcusable and that she should have protested against what she had to do. They both agreed in the next question, they said that if they were Hanna they would tell the truth. They all gave me different answers for the question that asks what they would do in Michael’s case: one does not know what one would
do, another would not tell the judge but would talk to Hanna and the last one would tell the judge because it could help Hanna’s case.

And for the last question I also got different answers. In the first interview the person answered that Hanna has a shower before making love because she wants to be clean, because of her dignity. And the last person said that Hanna is an obsessive-compulsive person and that is one thing that she has to do every time.

But of course, in every question there is no right or wrong answers because it is only what people think.

I thought that the answers would be always very similar but I was wrong because in the three interviews I got different answers to every question. That means that the book can be represented in many different ways. Depending on people’s beliefs and their ways of thinking it is going to vary what they think of Hanna and Michael.
VIII. CONCLUSION

Now that I am finished with this project I would like to explain the difficulties I had, if I enjoyed working on it and, of course, I have to answer all the questions asked in the hypothesis.

I have to say that I really enjoyed doing this research project, I found that looking at a book and a film so closely has been really interesting. I had never done that before and I discovered there are many interesting and odd things to see. I found curious that, in some parts, what the characters in the film said was exactly the same as what they said in the book, no word had changed. I also enjoyed writing in English all the time because I really like talking and writing in English.

I think *The Reader* was a good book to work on because the book and the film are quite similar but they have some little differences, so it was a good one for doing a comparison. I also learned some things about the *Nachgebornen*, before doing this project I had never heard about this generation that suffered the effects of the Second World War.

While doing the research project I had some difficulties. The first one was that while I was in Germany I still did not know if I could be able to validate the year and study 2nd of Batxillerat or if I should have to repeat and study 1st of Batxillerat. Anyway, I started my research project there, at that time I did not have a tutor and they assigned me one the first day of school in September of 2011. Luckily, I was given some more time to finish my project because I began working on it later than all my classmates. Another problem I had was when I had to do the interviews: only a few people had read the book and watched the film, it was hard for me to find people who had done both. So I decided to do the interviews via internet, in a forum about *The Reader*. I found two forums who talked about *The Reader*; an English one, the *Book Club Forum* and a German one, *Bernhard Schlink: Der Vorleser*. In the first forum I found some users discussing *The Reader*, so I posted my interview and I asked them if they could answer it for me. They answered me that the forum does not help New

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5 *The Book Club Forum* is an English website where people can discuss the book they want: [http://www.bookclubforum.co.uk/community/](http://www.bookclubforum.co.uk/community/)

6 *Bernhard Schlink: Der Vorleser* is a German website where students can find information about the book: [http://www.christoph-schmidt.de/vorleser/content.php?action=home](http://www.christoph-schmidt.de/vorleser/content.php?action=home)
Members and students do homework. Then, I decided to write in the German forum, I would have to translate everything from German to English but I decided to do it anyway. I posted my interview and nobody answered, even now there is no answer, people have looked at it (that means the forum is still active) but no one answered my questions. The only option I had left was to look for people who had read the book and watched the film. At the end, I only found two persons who had done it, many people watched the film but not read the book.

Now, to my hypothesis, I found that most of the differences are only to attract more public. For example the first difference that can be found, the one where the older Michael is seen with a pretty, naked woman or the two times where Michael’s and Hanna’s fights are not shown. But there are some other reasons: sometimes because in a film it is hard to show people’s feelings and thoughts, so sometimes they have to add new scenes or make something different, for example the scene where Michael is shown watching Hanna after she catches him looking at her while she is changing. And sometimes there are differences only because it is easier to film a scene like the one where Hanna does not get fat like the book says. But, all in all, I would say that a book and its film are not identical because the director of the film wants the public to be interested in the film from the very first moment. Of course, the writer of a book also wants to quickly attract the readers as quickly as possible so they read the whole book, but it is different from the way a film director has to deal with it. In my opinion, the writer has more time to draw the public attention; readers know that, usually, a book is not interesting until you have read some of it. When watching a film the public usually expects something exciting to happen in the first ten minutes or so but when reading a book people usually do not expect something exciting to happen in the first ten pages. So, the director has to make the first scene of the film interesting, exciting, shocking or intriguing for the public not to change the film they are watching.

Although there are some characters and settings that are in the book and not in the film and vice versa I found that there are not many differences in the characters or in the settings, they are all pretty similar. In this case, the film’s and the book’s plot does not change.
There are some differences throughout the film and the book, but most of them are little and they are not important. The only big difference that can be seen is that the film has a lot of flashbacks and flash-forwards when the book is all in chronological order.

In a film there are differences because it is an adaptation, it is not a copy of the book. The director of the film is not the writer of the book, so, of course, some things are going to change. The director is going to adapt the movie his/her way, adding some things one likes or not showing the ones he/she dislikes. And I am sure that Daldry has not the exact same personality as Schlink, so of course there are going to be some differences.

I think Bernhard Schlink should be happy with the way Stephen Daldry adapted his book. This is because I think the film reflects very well what Schlink is trying to do throughout the book: is Hanna’s illiteracy an excuse for her behavior during the past and in the relationship with Michael?. In my opinion, I found that the film was a very good adaptation of the book and it reflects the most important and moral things of the book, like Hanna’s illiteracy, the Nachgebomen or how Hanna takes advantage of Michael.

By doing this research project I have learned why there are differences when a book is adapted into a film. I have also learned to analyze and criticize a book and its corresponding film. And, as I hoped, I have improved my English.

Now that I have finished my research project I have to say that there was no need for me to be scared when I was cursing ESO, because the project is not so difficult to do, you only have to work hard on it. And one has fun doing it because you choose a topic that you like and that you are interested in.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for helping me and encouraging me while I was working on this project. I also want to thank my tutor: Imma Novell, for helping me with this project.
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IX.1 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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X. APPENDIX – CHAPTERS’ SUMMARY
INDEX

I. Part One ................................................................. 3
II. Part Two ................................................................. 9
III. Part Three ............................................................... 16
I. PART ONE

1

Fifteen year old boy, Michael Berg, starts throwing up on his way home from school, after days of feeling weak. Hanna, a woman he does not know and considerably older than him, helps him and takes him home. That same day, the doctor diagnoses Michael with hepatitis. After 5 months, when he is finally healthy, his mother tells him to thank the woman who helped him the day he got ill.

2

A grown up Michael recounts that the building on Bahnhofstrasse, where Hanna had once lived, is no longer there; instead there is a modern building with a computer store on the ground floor and lots of apartments on the other four floors. He describes the old building as a dark, dirty place due to the passing of years and the smoke from the trains. He explains that he has had a lot of dreams, where he sees the same house but in another place and always wakes up at the moment he is opening the entrance door.

3

Michael, again as a teenager, finds himself in front of the building on Bahnhofstrasse. He finds out Hanna’s name: Frau Schmitz (Frau meaning Mrs. in German), the first name still remaining unknown to him. He does not remember what they talked about at Frau Schmitz’s tiny apartment while she was ironing. He only remembers the woman’s face as it was years later and he has to reconstruct it if he wants to remember how she was when he was fifteen. He just knows he found her beautiful.

4

When Michael is about to leave, Frau Schmitz tells him to wait for her because she has to leave and they can walk together. Michael waits in the hall as she changes her
clothes in the kitchen, but the door is a crack open and he sees her changing her stockings. Frau Schmitz catches the teenage boy looking at her, he runs away out of embarrassment. When he calms down, he starts wondering why he couldn’t take his eyes from her, she was not the type of woman he used to dream about, and she was much too old. But now, as a man, he realizes it was not her body or face but her movements. He had asked over the past years some of his girlfriends to put on stockings and never found it mesmerizing like he did with Frau Schmitz.

A week after the incident, Michael is standing again in front of the building. For the whole week he had not been able to stop thinking about her, but he was fantasizing about her too, therefore he decided that he had to go to see her or he would be trapped in his own fantasies. He does not know why he went there, but sometimes, he thinks something and then does the entire opposite thing, “I think, I reach a conclusion, I turn the conclusion into a decision, and then I discover that acting on the decision is something else entirely” Schlink (1995).

Michael waits for an hour in front of Frau Schmitz’s apartment until she comes back from work. Michael is relieved because she does not look annoyed or mocking, just sad. She tells him to go and fetch some coal form the basement. Michael comes up from the basement dirty and full of dust, so Frau Schmitz tells him to take a bath. As Michael finishes, Frau Schmitz comes with a towel and wraps him with it, Michael has his back to her, but as she drops the towel, he realizes she is naked too. He starts having an erection and Frau Schmitz touches it, they start kissing and touching and at the end they make love.

That night, in his bed, Michael falls in love with Frau Schmitz. After they make love, Michael goes back home. While eating he announces to his family that he is going back to school, he makes this decision because, otherwise, he does not know how
he can meet her. Michael is the third from four children. His older brother, with whom he shares a room, he is constantly fighting with him. He has two sisters, an older one and a cheeky, younger one. He has a loving, caring mother that spoils him a little bit more compared to his brother and sisters. His father, a philosophy teacher, spends his whole day thinking about work, his life is his work and not his family.

Michael goes to see Frau Schmitz every day at one o’clock, when her shift ends, but he has to cut some classes in order to get there in time. After six or seven days, they have a real conversation and she tells him her name is Hanna, he tells her his name. He then explains he will have to repeat 10th grade because he missed a lot while he was ill and he should now be in school. At that, Hanna gets very angry and tells him to leave, she tells him that from the next day, she is going to be working until half past five. That he can go to her house, only if he had worked hard at school before.

Hanna and Michael see each other every day until the end of the school year, Michael passed the class, they start having real conversations and as Michael asks Hanna about her past, she does not really want to talk about it and always answers the same: “The things you ask, kid!” Schlink (1995). When Michael tells her he has to read a play for school, Hanna asks him to read it to her, at first Michael does not want to and tells her to read it herself. The next day Hanna announces that first he has to read to her half an hour, only after that they can make love. Grown up, Michael meditates why thinking about those times with Hanna makes him now sad, he had been genuinely happy, but maybe it was because of the way it ended.

Michael takes the street-car at four thirty in the morning to surprise her, he gets on the second car when his lover is on the first one. During the entire trip Hanna ignores
Michael, even when the street-car is empty. Michael gets off, returns home and waits for Hanna at her apartment. When she arrives, he demands why she acted like she did not know him, why she treated him like any other passenger. Hanna replies that it was him who did not want to know her because he was on the second car and Hanna was on the first one. She tells Michael to leave and he does so thinking he will not come back, but he is back at her apartment in half an hour. Finally, Michael apologizes and they make amends, but in the next several weeks Michael never argues, he admits mistakes he never did and he feels like she sometimes bullied him, like she was taking control of him.

11

During the Easter holidays, the two lovers make a four-day trip by bike, but Michael has to sell his stamp collection to pay for it. Nevertheless, the trip is a total success; they share a room as mother and son and make love every morning. Although they have one fight, one morning Michael leaves to get breakfast leaving a note saying where he is, but when he comes back Hanna slaps him with a leather belt on the face, afterwards Hanna starts sobbing and says he cannot leave like that. After that, they make love and Hanna calms down. Michael asks why she got so upset, explaining he left the note on the bedside table and Hanna denies it, saying there was no note anywhere, Michael looks for it but finds nothing. In some way, the fight made their relationship more intimate. He even writes a poem about their relation.

12

After the trip, Michael’s family goes away and he stays home alone for a week, but he has to steal jeans and a sweater for his little sister so she would stay in a friend’s house, she does not go with their family either. He invites Hanna over to eat at his house. Hanna is stunned by all the books Michael’s father owns, she asks if some of them were written by his father and if Michael would write some in the future. Michael wants to stay the night at his house but Hanna feels like an intruder so they go back to Hanna’s apartment.
It is Michael’s first day of school in the 11th class. But some changes have been made in the school system, girls are now accepted. Next to Michael sits a nice, brown-haired girl, Sophie, Michael gets attracted to her a little during the first school day.

Summer comes and Michael’s love for his lover starts fading away very slowly. He often goes with his classmates to the pool, and spends not so much time with Hanna. When he turns sixteen in July, his classmates prepare a party for him at the pool, and it is hard for him when he has to leave to go to Hanna’s when his classmates do not want him to go. He meets a bad tempered Hanna, she does not even know that it is his birthday as she had never asked. They start fighting, Hanna insulting Michael, at the end, like always, Michael begs for her pardon afraid that he might lose her.

Michael starts betraying Hanna, he never sleeps with other girls, he just tells nothing to school his friends about Hanna, he does as if she did not exist. Not even when Sophie asks him why he is always late or leaves early, she assumes it is due to his health. He thinks about telling her some day, but he never does.

Michael never meets his lover unexpectedly in the streets, and he has no idea what she does when she is not with him or working. One day, she does not want him to read, instead she bats him directly and they make love, but really different this time, with more passion. After that, Michael goes to the pool with his friends feeling a little numb. When the feeling has passed, he sees Hanna at the pool, staring at him. He does not run to her, instead, he thinks what she is doing there and then stands up to go to her, when he looks at her again, Hanna is gone.
The next day Hanna disappears. When Michael goes to her house at the usual time, she is not at home, so he decides to call the streetcar company and they tell him that Hanna did not go to work that same morning. He then goes to the owner of the building and they tell him that she has moved out, that very same morning. He goes to the street car company and the manager tells him she called some hours earlier explaining that she was leaving and she would not come back and that two weeks earlier Hanna had the chance to be trained as a driver. Finally, he goes to the citizens’ registration office, Hanna has moved to Hamburg, a far away city. The passing days Michael is depressed, throwing up and not eating much, his body longs Hanna, but he feels guilty that she had left because he did not acknowledged her and he did not run to her that last day at the pool.
II. PART TWO

1

It takes a while for Michael to get over Hanna, he calls her name sometimes at night. His family moves to another part of town, so he does not have to take other routes to avoid Hanna’s building. Not long after that, Sophie gets ill with tuberculosis, she does not come back until Michael is starting university. They sleep together but Sophie then realizes that he is not interested in her. Michael remembers his first years in university, studying law, as easy years, without any complications at all.

2

The next time Michael sees Hanna is in a trial. His teacher makes some law students follow a related trial to the Nazis. The trial takes place in another town, from Monday to Thursday, every day a different group of students goes, and the following day they report what happened to the class. With all the other students, they blame their own parents for what they did during, or after, the war. Even if it was just letting everything happen and not doing anything about it.

3

The first day Michael goes to the trial is on Thursday, it had begun on Monday. He only recognizes Hanna when her name is called, the defendants had their back to the public. Hanna is now forty-three, she had worked during the Second World War for the SS. Michael wants her to be locked up in a cell, he wants her away from him, so he does not have to meet her again. Hanna is interrogated, but she does not give a good impression from her to the judge.

4

Michael goes every day to the trial, but he only sees Hanna’s back. Through all the trial he feels numb, he does not feel a thing for Hanna or the things they are accusing
her of, he learned how to ignore the feelings when Hanna left. He imagines the time they had together or Hanna doing all the things they accused her, but he still feels total numbness.

5

During the second week of the trial, they read the indictment; the five accused women had been guards in a camp near Auschwitz. One main charge is the selection in the camp, every month sixty women were sent to Auschwitz, clear that they would be all killed, the guards were the ones to pick who would be killed. The other main charge is when, one night, there was a bombing during a march and the guards had locked up the prisoners in a church. A bomb fell on the church, burning it down, the guards could have unlocked the doors, but they did not and hundreds of women burned to death. A daughter and her mother survived, and later, the daughter had written a book about the camp and had published it in America, these are the only witnesses they have.

6

They do not read the daughter’s book during the trial, to Hanna’s clear disappointment. She does not want to recognize that, at the first questioning, she admitted to having the key from the church. But there had been more than one key to the church for different entries, they had all been left outside in the locks. On the other hand, her court record, which was approved and signed by Hanna, said that she had had the key to the church. Hanna describes how they selected the women that had to be sent to Auschwitz, when the judge asks Hanna why they killed people to make room for new prisoners she replied: “I…I mean… so what would you have done? Schlink (1995).
During the trial, Hanna confesses some things voluntarily and the other defendants’ lawyers take advantage of that to exonerate their clients. Another lawyer asks her if it is true that she had special prisoners, young, weak girls, and when she got tired of them, she sent them to Auschwitz. The daughter answers from the public and says that it is true that Hanna had special prisoners, they did not have to work and Hanna gave them special barracks and more food. In the evening they went to her and she made them read to her, night after night, then, they were sent to Auschwitz to die. Michael sees Hanna’s face for the first time after their separation, and he realizes that she has turned considerably older, with some lines under her eyes and on her cheeks. Michael knows Hanna chose the delicate girls because she knew they could not have stood up to the torturing work and poor food, they would have been sent to Auschwitz anyway, so she wanted to make their final month of life tolerable, yet Hanna said nothing about it.

An older Michael explains the daughter’s book, how he did not really recognize Hanna in the book because all the guards and prisoners are not really described. When the camp was closed, all the women had to walk through the snow and after a week, half the women had died. The book’s author refers to it as: “Death march? No, death trot, death gallop” Schlink (1995) then, they found the church in an almost deserted village. When the fire started burning the steeple, they only heard the fire, but they were unable to see it, they did not know what it was until it collapsed. All the prisoners started screaming for help, but the mother only wanted to get away from all the screaming women so she went to the gallery. There, the flames where closer there but it was so narrow that the fire did not reach it. They stood pressed between the walls and stayed there a whole day and when they went out, some of the remaining villagers gave them some food and clothes.
The judge asks the same question to all the defendants, “Why did you not unlock the doors?” Schlink (1995) and all the women answer the same, they could not, because they were in shock, wounded or too busy taking care of the wounded ones. But a report found in the SS archives says otherwise, it lists the names of the dead prisoners and the wounded guards, it indicates that some guards had stayed behind, letting the fire burn the church and preventing any attempt to escape, among those guards are the defendants. All the defendants say that the report is totally wrong, until one defendant tells the judge to ask Hanna, saying she wrote the report. When the judge asks Hanna, she says all the guards discussed what they should write, but the other defendants disagree. When the judge asks for Hanna’s writing so he can compare it to the one in the document, Hanna admits directly to writing the report, assuring they do not need to compare the writing.

Michael realizes Hanna’s secret, Hanna cannot read or write; she is illiterate. That is why she had people read to her, why she had refused the promotions, why she had said there was no note when Michael had left to get breakfast that morning while on their bike trip. That is why she had admitted writing the report, so her secret would not be revealed. Michael wonders how Hanna could bear being exposed as a criminal but not as an illiterate, she was evil enough to become a criminal just so her secret would not be revealed? Michael still feels guilty for not acknowledging her when he was a teenager, but he now knows that he had not driven her away, she was running away from being discovered. He also feels guilty for having loved a criminal.

After Hanna saying she wrote the report, everything becomes very easy for the other defendants. The villagers who testified could neither confirm nor deny that Hanna had been the spokeswoman or that she had made the decisions, like all the other
defendants affirmed. Michael debates if he should tell what he knows to the judge or not, and asks advice to friends but explains different situations.

12

Michael goes to see his father to seek for advice, again, not telling him the real circumstance. They never had a close relationship, as a philosophy teacher, he and his siblings had to make appointments to talk to him when they were children, and they still do not talk much, “Philosophy has forgotten about children. […] Forgotten them forever, not just sometimes, the way I forget about you” Schlink (1995). At the end, Michael’s father tells him that he has no right to tell the judge although he should talk to Hanna, but Michael feels unable to face her and thinks she deserves a little time in prison. Michael forgets about this talk and does not remember it until after his father’s death, when he tried to reconcile happy memories of him.

13

The court goes to Israel to interrogate the mother who escaped from the fire. During these two weeks Michael wants to concentrate on his studies, but he is unable to do so. He is too distracted thinking about Hanna, imaging her at the camp with the prisoners, sending them to Auschwitz and making them read to her, he also remembers the time they spent together and he sometimes dreams of her exciting him sexually.

14

Michael decides to go to a concentration camp, he goes to the one that is nearest to his town. He hitches rides and walks to get there. One of the drivers, a man with big scar on his right side of the face asks him where he is going. When Michael tells him, the driver falls silent and after some seconds, he asks the boy why he wants to go there. He tells Michael he once saw a picture of Jews being shot in a camp somewhere in Russia, they were all in a line, some were standing near a hole and
most of these were falling into it. Michael asks the driver if it was him who was there on the edge of the hole, at that, the driver’s face goes white and he tells Michael to get out of the car. Michael walks fifteen minutes and arrives at the camp.

15

Michael returns to the concentration camp the coming winter, during both visits he tries to imagine the long row of barracks and all the prisoners, he even sees a building that used to be a gas chamber. He decides to sleep in a cheap guest house the first time he visits the camp. While he is eating, he sees an old, handicapped man sitting at the bar, four men are sitting behind the old man and they start throwing cigarette butts, aiming at the bald man’s skull. When Michael has had enough, he stands up and screams to the four men to stop. To Michael’s surprise, the handicapped man stands up, takes his fake wooden leg on his hands and starts laughing along with the other four men, going to their table. The next day, Michael hikes back to his town.

16

Michael goes to the judge because he feels he has to do something, but he does not reveal Hanna’s secret, he just has an easy chat with the judge, who is very nice when he is not in a court room. He does not talk to Hanna either, he does not have enough will to do it. When he leaves the judge’s office he does not feel used by Hanna anymore, he just feels numb like at the beginning of the trial.

17

The verdict takes place and Hanna is sentenced to life imprisonment, the other defendants receive only terms in jail. Hanna appears to the court room with a black suit, which looks like the uniform for people who worked for the SS, Michael does not know if Hanna is aware of the image she is giving to all the other spectators, who
start calling her names. At the end, when Hanna is lead away, she looks straight ahead and does not even glance at Michael.
III. PART THREE

1

Michael spends the first six months after the trial in the library, studying, not making any friends, even though he agrees to go on a skiing trip during the Christmas holidays. While all the others ski in jackets, Michael skis only with a shirt, saying he is never cold and that he likes to be ill. He still feels numb. At the end of the trip, he has to go to the hospital due to high fever. He starts wondering again who is guilty and who is not for what happened in the past with the Nazis, he thinks that if Hanna is guilty, then he is guilty too for having loved her.

2

Michael gets married while he is still clerking. He marries a young woman he met at the ski lodge, Gertrud, smart and loyal, and who is also studying law. They get married when Gertrud finds out she is pregnant. When Julia, their daughter, is five years old, they get a divorce because Michael feels that something is wrong in the way Gertrud moves or smells and he cannot stop comparing his relationship to Gertrud to the relationship he shared with Hanna. He feels bad because they do not give Julia the warmth of a family she longs for. He has some other, short, relationships with other women, he decides they have to move or taste a bit like Hanna. He tells them about Hanna, telling them more about him than he told Gertrud.

3

While Michael is still taking exams, the professor Michael had during Hanna’s trial dies, and Michael goes unwillingly to the funeral, getting on a street car to get there, thing he does very rarely. After the ceremony, he talks with a man who was with him during the seminar of the trial. Michael’s old friend asks him why he did not miss a day of the trial and confesses that all the students wondered if something was going on between him and Hanna, because Michael always stared at her during proceedings, Michael answers that he was just interested in the trial.
After Michael finishes the exams, he has to decide what profession within law he wants to do. At the end he takes a research job a legal history professor offers him. He takes this job because he does not know what to become. Gertrud tells him that taking this job is an escape from real life, he agrees but nevertheless, he takes the job.

Michael starts reading to Hanna on tape; he tapes himself reading books and then sends them to Hanna in prison along with a cassette player. He starts with the Odyssey and some other writers. He sends the first packet in the eighth year of Hanna’s imprisonment, and the last one in her eighteenth, when Hanna is released from prison. Then Michael starts writing poems himself and reads them to Hanna too. In the tapes, he never speaks directly to Hanna, he never asks or comments on anything.

In the fourth year of their uncommunicative relation, Michael receives a note from Hanna: “Kid, the last story was especially nice. Thank you. Hanna” Schlink (1995). The handwriting seems like one of a child, but Hanna learns to read by herself with Michael’s tapes. Michael is really proud and happy for her, but feels sorry for her failed life. Notes come regularly, but always short, explaining which author she liked and which she did not want to hear again or just commenting daily things like the weather. Michael does now write back but he keeps all the notes and he keeps reading to her, even though she can now read herself, he even sends tapes when he is one year abroad in America.
Michael gets a letter from the prison Hanna has been during the past seventeen years, saying Hanna will probably be soon released. They ask him if he could help Hanna, find her an apartment and job and visit her regularly. They want Michael to visit her soon in prison. They contact Michael because he is the only contact Hanna has had during the seventeen years. Michael finds her a cheap apartment and gets her a job in the tailoring business, but he does not visit Hanna in prison. After a year, the warden calls Michael and tells him Hanna is getting out the following week and that he should visit her one time before her release.

Michael visits Hanna for the first time, she is really different, with deep burrows and gray hair, she has grown much older, she even smells old. She recognizes Michael and still calls him kid, she takes his hand while he explains her where she will be living and the job she is going to have. Michael asks her if she feels bad for what she did in the past, she answers saying that she feels like no one understands her, so no one can explain why she did what she did, only the dead understand her and they have been with her a long time in prison. Michael tells her about Gertrud and Julia. Shortly after that, they say goodbye and as Michael hugs her, he feels awkward having her in his arms, like she does not belong there anymore.

The week before Hanna’s release, Michael keeps himself busy with work or furnishing Hanna’s new apartment and making everything ready for her, he tries not to think about his visit, not to think how Hanna had used him or why he betrayed her. The evening before he is due to pick her up he calls the prison and talks to the warden. She tells him that Hanna is going to have it particularly hard because normally, when people are about to be released they can spend some hours outside
prison, but Hanna refused it. He speaks to Hanna on the phone, asking her what she wants to do tomorrow, and then realizes that her voice has stayed young.

The day Hanna has to be released, she commits suicide hanging herself. Michael goes to the prison and the warden starts questioning him about his relationship with Hanna, why he sent all those cassettes, then she assumes Michael knows Hanna was illiterate. Michael cannot answer because he is afraid he is going to start crying, the warden, sensing Michael's discomfort, drops the subject and takes him to Hanna's cell. There, Michael finds some of the cassettes he sent Hanna, the other cassettes, Hanna liked to send them to the aid for blind prisoners, there are also some books about concentration camps and life in these. Hanna had some pictures and notes above her bed, and Michael recognizes a newspaper photo of himself when he was graduating, seeing this, he feels the tears coming up again.

The warden explains how Hanna had learned to read and write by herself, she borrowed the books Michael read to her from the library and followed word by word, letter by letter. She asks him why he never wrote to Hanna, Hanna always hoped he would write, but was disappointed every day when the mail came, Michael in unable to speak. Hanna left a note to the warden before killing herself, it says that the tea tin Hanna owned has to be given to Michael Berg along with the seven thousands marks in the bank, and that he should give it all to the daughter who survived that awful night form the fire, she can decide what to do with it.

Michael wants to know how Hanna was during those years, the warden tells him that she had lived like it was her choice being in prison, she was respected by the other prisoners. She was friendly but also distant, she had authority too. Her decisions in an argument were always accepted and the other women turned usually to her for advice, and she was meticulously clean. But a few years back, she changed; she started not to wash herself and to eat a lot, she got fat, smelled, and no longer impressed the other women.

Michael demands to see Hanna, the warden accepts but tells Michael Hanna’s death is a blow to her. She is angry to Hanna and Michael because he does not want to
say what was between the two lovers that might have led to Hanna’s suicide. Michael stares at Hanna’s dead face for a long time, until he recognizes the living, young face in the dead and old corpse.

11

Michael suffers from Hanna’s death; he longs for her and keeps dreaming about her. To complete Hanna’s instructions, he goes to New York, where the daughter lives. Michael tells her Hanna’s story, but the daughter says she cannot Pardon Hanna for what she did. When the daughter asks him what was between him and Hanna, Michael tells her the truth, that they had had an affair in the past and he read aloud to her, she is the first and last person he ever reveals this, he also tells her about his cold marriage and the distant relation he has with his daughter who is living in a boarding school. Michael tells her Hanna had known what she did to people in the camp and during the march, and that she dealt with it during her last years in prison. They decide to give the money to some Jew organization for illiterates, if they can find one, and Michael can do it in Hanna’s name, the daughter decides to keep the tea tin, she had a similar one during her stay in the camp until it was stolen from her.

12

The first few years after Hanna’s death, Michael judges himself for what he did, asking the same questions he had in the past: was he guilty for having loved her? Had he betrayed her? Or he feels fury towards Hanna’s actions. Finally, the fury and the questions faded “Whatever I had done or not done, whatever she had done or not to me—it was the path my life had taken” Schlink (1995). Soon after Hanna’s suicide, Michael decides to write his and Hanna’s story because he wants to recapture it and he wants to let go of the pain and the guilt he feels. When he returns from New York, he donates the money, in Hanna’s name, to the Jewish League Against Illiteracy, shortly after that he receives a letter thanking Ms. Hanna Schmitz. With the letter in his pocket he goes to visit Hanna’s grave, it is the first and last time he stands in front of it.