

Contrast Hanna and Michael's attitudes to their relationship with each other

In Part one of *The Reader*, the attitudes of Michael and Hanna to their relationship are constantly changing as Hanna becomes frantic and has moments of irrational temper. Hanna mentally dominates Michael, however this does not prevent him from falling in love with her; unfortunately, this emotional attachment is not reciprocated.

From the outset Hanna shows she is not interested in having an emotional and loving relationship with Michael. She takes no notice of his 'facts' or personal details- his age or even wanting to know his name *'My name was on the front of my books.... But she hadn't paid any attention.'* However, it can be argued that Hanna cares deeply for Michael despite it not being as apparently displayed. When she finds out that Michael's priorities do not include his school work, she is infuriated and throws him out of bed; telling him that the work she does is 'idiotic' and forces him to place a greater emphasis on his work by threatening to stop seeing him. She does not want him to end up in the same employment circumstances as hers and in doing so forces Michael to surpass his expectations. This can be seen as an even greater symbol of love than simply speaking the words, despite Michael being ignorant to this at the time. Occasionally, Hanna behaves in a very cold and callous manner and is both verbally and physically abusive; yet her deepening feelings towards Michael are revealed yet again when he ignores her on the train. *'She turned around and stared at me coldly. 'You didn't want to know me.'* This is a wild accusation, and an obvious display of her anger for being dismissed by him. From this point, Hanna emotionally distances herself from Michael; illuminating her fear of getting hurt and being let down by the boy she may love. She does not want to give him 'the power' to meddle with her emotions. *'You don't have the power to upset me'*- this is an example of an obvious lie as she is extremely hurt, but tries to convince both Michael and herself that her feelings are entirely independent from Michael's actions.

"Do you love me?" she nodded. On the surface it shows she loves Michael; however this response is instantly followed by Hanna bathing Michael and then making love to him; which poses the question- is this 'love' that Hanna assures Michael she feels genuine? Or is she simply seeking comfort; trying to bury her past and looking for companionship in a world where she is alone.

This is greatly contrasted to Michael's attitude towards Hanna as he falls headfirst into the relationship and claims he has *'fallen in love with her'* after their first sexual encounter. Nevertheless, he questions himself and the feeling of 'love'- *'I feel I've been indulged and I must make it up to her somehow, by trying at least to love her'* which suggests he feels guilty about them making love and now owes it not only to her, but to *'the world'* to attempt to love her. As Hanna and Michael continue meeting, Michael's attitude towards her shifts and as readers, we get the impression he feels hurt as Hanna does not make an effort to get to know him personally; *'My name was on the front of my books.. But she hadn't paid any attention'*- Michael wants her to get to know him, and conversely he wants to get to know and love her.

The situation on the train highlights both Michael's extraordinary effort and also his failings to display this love he has for Hanna. His love soon turns to frustration and finally humiliation *'What was I to her? Neither the driver nor Hanna looked back at me as they heard the bell... I set off in tears.'*

Michael shows an enormous amount of sacrifice to please Hanna, and when she dismisses him; he always comes back- *'and half an hour later I was back at her door'* which symbolises the desire he has to love her; and for this love to be returned. *'I admitted mistakes I hadn't made... I begged her to love me'* reflects his desperation for Hanna to love him back; however he is also aware that Hanna may not have ever loved him; which is something even now in the present, he is uncertain of. *'My love for Hanna... I don't know about her love for me.'*

When Michael moves into fifth form, he enjoys the company of the girls; having a new found confidence, which his relationship with Hanna has provided, and allows him to *'be comfortable and open in a friendly way.'*

Hanna is no longer Michael's priority and the love he had for her is wavering. He becomes integrated with his peers and keeps his relationship with Hanna a secret- a first betrayal. *'I told myself I wasn't close enough to my friends to tell them about Hanna... But no matter what I pretended to myself, I knew I was betraying Hanna.'* She becomes a burden to him, and although he is *'ashamed'* to see *'Hanna as illness'*, it is a thought that lingers.

As the novel progresses, Michael's narrative voice changes, becoming more mature, self-aware and honest with himself, as oppose to indulging in childhood whims and fantasies.

When Michael finds out that Hanna has left, Schlink deliberately does not immediately comment on Michael's emotions as this demonstrates Michael's shock and confusion. Did Michael really love Hanna? Or was it only his *'body that yearned for Hanna'*? He feels accountable for her departure as he did not *'immediately run to her'* when he spotted her at the pool. This indicates Michael did not have a great emotional attachment to her; although it can be argued that he did love Hanna, but due to her *'half heartedness'*, Michael unwillingly became detached; and as she vanished, so did his love for her.

The emotional and loving relationship between Hanna and Michael is difficult to swallow. Hanna's true feelings towards Michael are never precisely known, as Michael is the narrator and therefore the feelings she demonstrates may be subjective to his disposition. Nonetheless, in part one the relationship they had seems to have benefited them both. Being with an older woman gives Michael confidence and he becomes more popular and excels in school. Hanna manipulates Michael, which he believes *'she enjoys'* and because she doesn't discuss her past, it is easy to assume her motives. Part one ends leaving us with both anticipation and uncertainty as to how their relationship and attitudes towards each other will progress, and if Hanna will ever admit her feelings to Michael.