



About the author:

EDWARD REZNIK (born 1960) is a screenwriter and playwright with twenty feature films and TV series to his name, including the award-winning German-Ukrainian-Russian co-production *4 Days in May* (2011). He writes for theatre, radio, and film. *Therapy* is his first work of fiction, drawing on his ten years of experience as a practicing counselor. Reznik adapted *Therapy* into a feature screenplay that was recognized in the Best Script category at film festivals in Berlin, Toronto, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Tel Aviv, and Chicago. Edward Reznik lives with his family in New York.

Selected Bibliography

2022 — **Therapy**, *novel*

Awards

Winner of **Best Script Award** at Berlin, Toronto, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Tel Aviv, and Chicago film festivals

Shoah drama



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Therapy

The Sopranos meets Persian Lessons in this highly pitched Bildungsroman set against the horror of the Nazi past. A Jewish psychologist in pre-war Berlin saves a young German from suicide and offers free treatment to help the young man discover his new, self-confident self. After gaining the desired confidence, the young man becomes a member of the SS and ends up as a security guard in the same concentration camp where the psychologist and his family are being held. It is now up to the psychologist to test the effectiveness of his skills and will by helping his patient regain his mental health in the face of the hell of the Shoah. Reznik draws on his ten years of experience as a practicing psychologist to explore the challenges of a young person coming of age in apocalyptic times.

Berlin, 1933. Richard, 19 years old, is plodding through a dull, lonely life, working shifts as a labourer in a fish factory and as an assistant at a hospital morgue. While donating blood to earn some extra money, Richard meets Aida, who has the same rare blood type. The next day Richard visits the psychoanalyst Joachim, who happens to have recently prevented Richard from committing suicide. Joachim knows that Richard cannot afford to pay for his sessions, but he feels a duty to help suicidal patients and offers to treat Richard for free. Richard blames himself for his mother's suicide and feels an obligation to share his mother's fate. Joachim tries to help Richard free himself from the heavy psychological legacy of his mother and gain self-confidence.

At a therapy session, Richard meets Joachim's daughter by chance – she turns out to be Aida. Unbeknownst to her father, Richard takes Aida to a movie and then arranges a nocturnal excursion to the morgue where he works. However, self-doubt and an internal ban on happiness prevent Richard from developing a relationship with Aida – he breaks up with her.

Ulrich, an influential German official, brings his son Theo to Joachim's office for treatment: Theo displays a romantic interest in men, which is both a cause for criminal persecution and a threat to the father's career. Joachim agrees to help Theo, and he does: after reconfirming his sexual inclinations, Theo leaves for Hamburg and finds a lover. There, members of the youth wing of the SS burst into their hotel room, photograph the couple, and arrest them. The furious Ulrich blames the incident on the psychoanalyst; he will ensure Joachim is deprived of the right to practice in Germany.

Prompted by Joachim during therapy, Richard seeks out his father, who turns out to be Ulrich. The high-ranking SS official promotes his illegitimate son in the Nazi hierarchy. Through his father's support, Richard seems to have gained what he needs: inclusion in a large and powerful structure, good money, recognition, and a purpose in life. Richard no longer considers psychotherapy necessary, so he cancels his future appointments with Joachim but resumes his relationship with Aida. Together they move into a new apartment that Richard receives as an SS officer. In public, Aida, unlike her parents,

refuses to act as a Jew – she does not wear a six-pointed yellow star, feeling shielded by Richard's status. At parties, she feels as German as other girls, enjoying the happiness of a young woman in love.

Obviously, these relations threaten Richard's career as well as Ulrich's, and Ulrich demands that his son break up with the Jewish girl. Afraid of betraying his father's hopes and love, Richard obeys, and Aida returns to her parents.

Ulrich manages to hush up Theo's homosexual scandal, but now Theo must immediately marry. Ulrich makes sure Theo's boyfriend never gives evidence in court; the young man is found dead in a prison cell. When Theo learns of his lover's murder, he attempts suicide but is saved by his brother. Theo explains his reasons for the attempt not with sorrow over the death of his boyfriend or the impending marriage, but jealousy of Richard, who is Ulrich's more successful son. Unaware that Richard overhears their conversation, Ulrich assures Theo that Richard was taken into the house only to stimulate Theo to act properly. Disillusioned and embittered by the betrayal of his newly gained father, Richard rapes his father's young wife and leaves the house, hoping to reconnect with Aida. He finds Joachim's flat empty – Ulrich has made sure the Jewish family was deported out of turn.

Ulrich sends Richard away from Berlin to serve as a guard in a concentration camp. Among the prisoners, Richard recognizes Joachim. He searches for Aida and her mother in the female zone, where he is told that both have died. Richard will never know that Aida was not murdered in a gas chamber with her mother, but that she survived through hardships, torture, sexual violence, and the loss of a newborn child until her eventual liberation.

Severely mourning Aida's death and shaken by the beastly atrocities in the hellish camp, Richard pleads with Joachim to resume therapy. Joachim is desperate at the loss of his family and does not aspire to survive. But he cannot turn Richard down. In their journey to Richard's childhood and the young man's real self, Joachim gains the only reason to live – as a dying prisoner and a desperate old man, he is set to save this person.