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Author(s)	Kevin Thomas
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# 'LOVE IN GERMANY': A LIGHT ON NAZISM

By KEVIN THOMAS,  
Times Staff Writer

In Andrzej Wajda's mesmerizing "A Love in Germany" (opening at the Cineplex Friday) Hanna Schygulla does what perhaps only a great actress can do, which is to play total abandon without looking silly.

It is 1943, and Schygulla is wearily running a grocery store in a small German village near the Swiss border while her husband is away in the army, stationed in Bavaria and about to be shipped out to the eastern front. She has, however, managed to get a young Polish prisoner of war (Piotr Lysak) to haul crates of fruits and vegetables for her. Amid tumbling potatoes she and Lysak are overcome by passion and fall into an affair of an increasing recklessness born of a mutual desperation. As their romance escalates, so does gossip about it, which could cost Lysak his life.

Schygulla and Lysak may be foolish, but in their courage and honesty they lay bare the Nazi paranoia that has almost everyone else in the town in its fevered, poisonous grip. Wajda, long Poland's leading director, was attracted to the Rolf Hochhuth novel upon which the film is based because it allowed him to reveal Nazism as an evil infecting an entire people, not just its infamous leaders.

Wajda welds the personal and political into a galvanic experience in which the fate of the individual reveals the nature of the society in which he or she lives. "A Love in Germany" bluntly lays the responsibility of the Third Reich on its everyday citizenry; no wonder its filming did not proceed without incident or that its reception in West Germany, according to Wajda himself, was cool. Yet Wajda is so superb as director, so knowledgeable of human nature, that you don't have to be a German to see yourself in his people.

Most important among them are Marie-Christine Barrault, Schy-



Thomas Ringelmann plays Hanna Schygulla's young son.

gulla's equally sensual neighbor who sees in Schygulla's folly an opportunity to grab the grocery store for herself, and Elisabeth Trissenaar, who is Schygulla's best friend. But in the light of the loss of her own husband in battle, Trissenaar understandably regards Schygulla's betrayal of her husband with Lysak an outrage. There are brief but crucial appearances by Daniel Olbrychski, Wajda's favorite actor, as another Polish prisoner of war and veteran director Bernhard Wicki, as a local doctor.

Schygulla dominates the first half of the film with her portrayal of a woman plunging headlong into catastrophe, but the second half belongs to Armin Mueller-Stahl as the local Gestapo leader grappling with the problem of what to do with Lysak while attempting to preserve the honor of Schygulla's husband. A distinguished emigre from East Germany who was launched on a new career by the late R. W. Fassbinder, who cast him in "Lola" and "Veronika Voss," Mueller-Stahl, a stocky, middle-aged man of much presence, is as capable of sustaining a barely controlled hysteria as Schygulla is in sustaining an all-con-

suming passion. Were their implications not so darkly tragic, Mueller-Stahl's attempt to "Germanize" Lysak and thus minimize the scandal might be hilarious, as they involve preposterous Nazi standards, measurements and devices designed to gauge Aryanism.

"A Love in Germany" is framed by contemporary sequences in which a 49-year-old man (Otto Sander) addresses the camera and tells us that he is returning to the village after a 40-year absence, accompanied by his teen-age son and attempting to discover who betrayed Schygulla, who we realize is his own mother. (Hochhuth based his novel on an actual incident; the woman who inspired

Schygulla's role is still living at last report.) Sander's inquiry gives the film an added dimension as he questions one villager after another, all determined to keep a lid on the past.

The investigative nature of the film coupled with its bold style links it closely to such Wajda films as "Danton," "Man of Marble" and "Man of Iron." Wajda has acknowledged that seeing "Citizen Kane" in his youth caused him to switch from painting to film making, and the influence of Orson Welles remains in his work to this day. But Welles never had an actress of the gifts of Hanna Schygulla. "A Love in Germany" (rated R for adult themes and situations) gives the lie to those who insist that Schygulla is nothing without her mentor, the late R. W. Fassbinder.