



CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

## THE READER

2008 USA/GERMANY 123 minutes

Directed by Stephen Daldry

Starring Kate Winslet, David Kross

**Although it struggles under the weight of its source novel's multiple temporal shifts, *The Reader* is for the most part a superbly fluid, elegant film crafted with distinctly European sensibilities which suit the bitter story at its heart. Stephen Daldry's third film brings Bernhard Schlink's bestseller to the screen with all its melancholy and stomach-churning dilemmas intact.**

The Hours screenwriter David Hare delivers an intelligent adaptation of the book, again in roughly three parts, and the performances here, in particular by Kate Winslet in the film's central and most difficult role, are stupendous. *The Reader* is the most meaningful, in that it looks at the legacy of Nazi evil on the next generation of Germans. Schlink's provocative story becomes an analogy for all Germans as they struggled - and indeed still struggle - to balance the shame at their parents' actions and complicity with notions of love, understanding and forgiveness.

The story starts in 1958 in a West German town when the lead character Michael Berg (played by Kross) is 15 years old. While walking home one day, he falls sick with the first symptoms of scarlet fever and is helped back to his parents' house by a passer-by called Hannah Schmitz (Winslet), a bus conductor more than twice his age.

Once he has recovered, the two begin an affair which consumes Michael's thoughts. The two have sex every day after which he reads literature to her at her urging. One day, however, Hannah packs her bags and disappears without a trace, devastating the youthful Michael.

The second section of the film moves forward eight years to 1966. Michael is now at law school and is one of several students who go to witness a nearby

war crimes trial. There he sees Hannah again, in the dock with four other women. All were guards at a concentration camp during the war and they are being tried specifically for letting 300 Jewish women burn to death in a church bombing. Hannah is being portrayed as the ringleader of the group and a stunned Michael realises that he has information which could help her case.

The third section stops at points throughout the next three decades as Michael (now played by Ralph Fiennes) battles his own feelings for the imprisoned Hannah with his disgust for her crimes. This is the film's least successful part, relying on jumps between large stretches of time and heavy ageing makeup on Winslet which jars with the authenticity of what has come before.

Kross is notably natural as the young Michael and he meets every challenge thrown his way from the charged scenes of sex and nudity with Winslet to his character's disillusionment in the second section. Fiennes carries a wrenching sadness in his scenes. But the film belongs to Winslet as Hannah. Speaking with a hard, monotone, German accent, the actress brings a blank, haunted quality to this isolated woman, who is on the one hand lonely and hungry for love, on the other a willing, not entirely unrepentant participant in genocide. As the character ages, Winslet makes her both heartbreaking and pathetic as she achieves a level of remorse.

Mike Goodridge, Screen Daily

Please note that due to distributor issues, we are unable to show *RESPIRO* on 13th October. Instead we will show *IL DIVO*, details on [www.chesterfilmfans.co.uk](http://www.chesterfilmfans.co.uk)

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PLEASE LEAVE ANY COMMENTS ABOUT THIS FILM ON THE REVERSE OF THIS FORM. MANY THANKS.

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TERRIBLE FANTASTIC