

Blu-Ray Review: Kate Winslet, Ralph Fiennes Shine in ‘The Reader’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 21, 2009 - 5:16pm

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Blu-Ray Rating: **3.5/5.0**

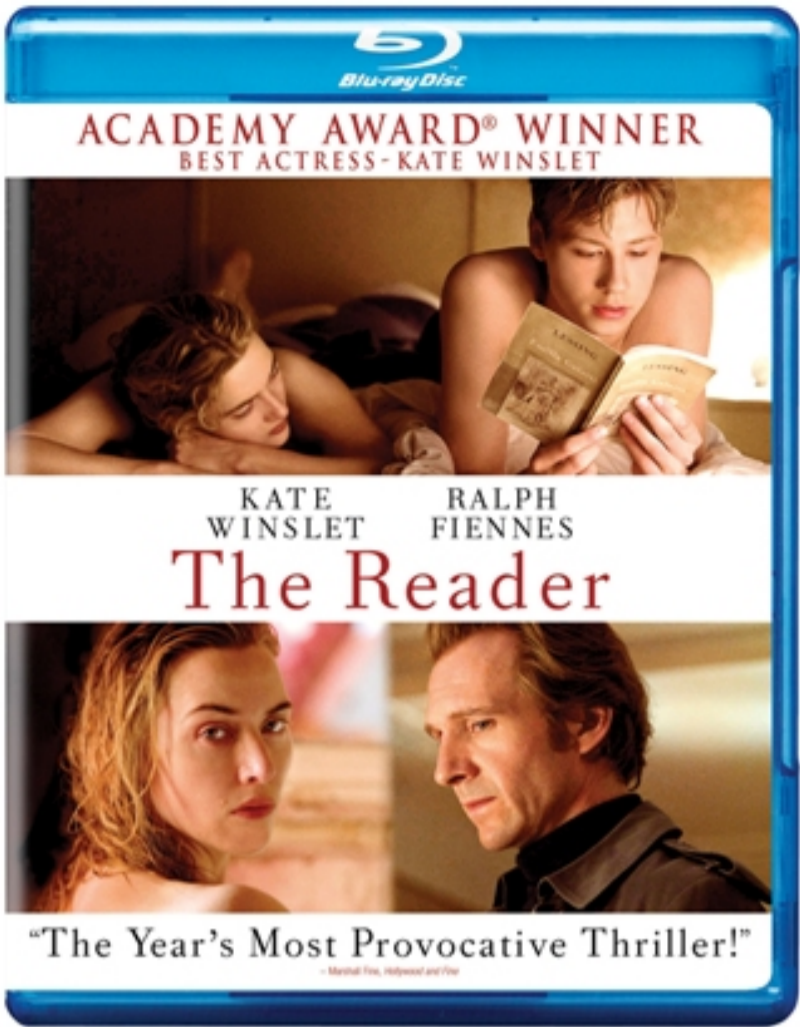
CHICAGO – The rollercoaster of reaction to [Stephen Daldry](#) [11]’s “[The Reader](#) [12]” has somewhat diminished the questionable quality of the actual film. A lot of critics, including this one, thought that the Best Picture nomination was more of a reflection of the power of Harvey Weinstein than the film itself and the controversy over [Kate Winslet](#) [8]’s category placement (lead vs. supporting) and the argument that her award was more for lifetime achievement than what she brings to the role of Hanna Schmitz, steered the conversation away from the movie itself, now on Blu-Ray.

Watching the film again on Blu-Ray, I have three thoughts about the actual movie, now that it can be viewed outside of the awards season. One, Kate Winslet should have always been in lead. She’s the heart of the film and in over an hour of its total running time. How could you possibly compare that to something like [Viola Davis](#) [14]’ ten minutes of work in “[Doubt](#) [15]”?



The Reader will be released on Blu-Ray on April 28th, 2009.
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

Two, the rest of the cast of “The Reader” was unjustly overlooked in Kate’s wake. In particular, Ralph Fiennes is spectacular here. Rent “[In Bruges](#) [16],” “[The Duchess](#) [17],” and “The Reader” and try and find the similarities between the roles or a flaw in any of them. With those three 2008 roles, Fiennes proved again that he is one of the best actors working today.



The Reader will be released on Blu-Ray on April 28th, 2009.
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

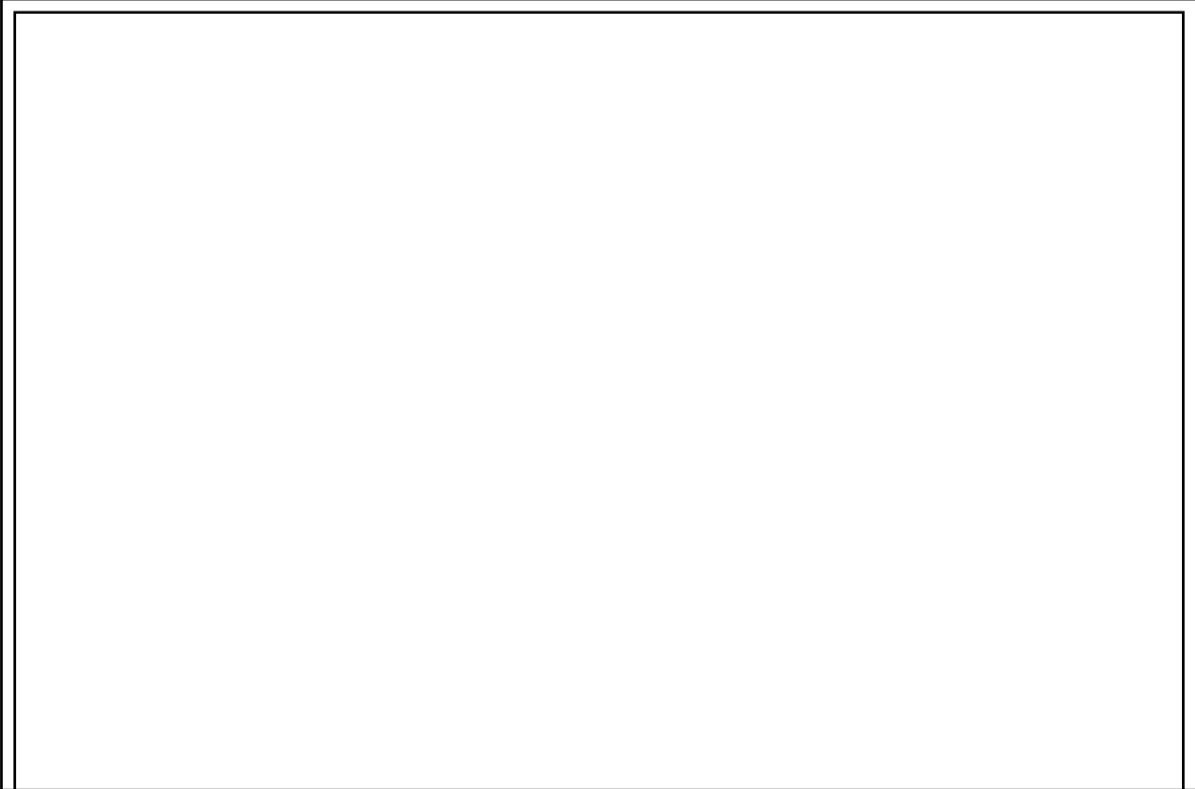
Finally, “The Reader” is better than a lot of us in the critical community gave it credit for. I still don’t think it deserved even consideration for top five pictures of the year. “The Dark Knight,” “WALL-E,” “The Wrestler,” “Rachel Getting Married,” “Waltz With Bashir,” “Let the Right One In,” and “Happy-Go-Lucky” are all vastly superior. But arguments that it is one of the least-deserving Best Picture nominees of all time overshadow what the film actually accomplishes.

The best way to look at “The Reader” is to look at the individual parts, even if the complete sum is a bit lacking. Winslet is amazing. On second viewing, she’s even more deserving of the prizes she won in late 2008 and early 2009. David Hare’s screenplay is good, if not great, but is also unabashedly adult and intellectual. Think how many writers would have softened the sexual edges or looked for more of a Hollywood ending. Hare doesn’t compromise. Even Nico Mulhy’s beautiful score and Chris Menges’ subtle-but-perfect cinematography deserve praise.

“The Reader” may not have been quite as good as the Academy would have viewers believe, but it still well worth at least one viewing. Maybe even two.

In case you’re completely unfamiliar with the film (and it is shocking how such an award-given and Academy-buzzed film could make so little at the box office with just \$34 million domestically), it’s a story about a man named Michael Berg (Ralph Fiennes) coming to terms with his past. When he was young (played by David Kross in flashbacks) he had a torrid affair with Hanna Schmitz (Winslet). Years later, they meet again when she is a defendant in a notorious case.

“The Reader” is about how people come to terms with the darkness of their pasts. There is a lot to like but I feel like the center of the film is not relatable. I never felt like I knew the young or old Michael and that leaves the entire thing at arm’s length. The unemotional nature of the writing and direction make for a film that feels a bit too cold because the lead character gets lost. He’s merely the connection between Fiennes and Winslet. I wanted a film as passionate as the performances by these two great actors.





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Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

The Blu-Ray for "The Reader" is good but not great for such an acclaimed film. Where's the commentary track? And why is the Blu-Ray picture so, well, "eh". The daylight scenes are gorgeous in HD but a lot of "The Reader" takes place in Hanna's tiny, dark apartment and there are definitely problems with the line definition in those scenes. "The Reader" should look better than it does in HD. The audio is serviceable in English 5.1 TrueHD.

The special features for "The Reader" are all interesting, if bizarrely organized and paced. Do we really need to see Kate put on makeup for over 12 minutes in "Kate Winslet on the Art of Aging Hanna Schmitz"? Probably not, although I sometimes feel like any time spent with the lovely Kate is worth it. The 42 minutes of deleted scenes are overwhelming but come commentary or introduction-free. When that much footage is cut from a major film like this, shouldn't the director, editor, or writer discuss why?

Other featurettes include "Adapting a Timeless Masterpiece: Making The Reader," "A Conversation With David Kross & Stephen Daldry," "A New Voice: A Look at Composer Nico Mulhy," and "Coming To Grips With The Past: Production Designer Brigitte Boch."

Ignore the positive buzz about Winslet's continually impressive career and forget the critics who screamed when "The Reader" landed an Academy slot instead of more-deserving films. Ultimately, even with so-so special features and video quality, "The Reader" is definitely worth seeing for yourself.

'The Reader' is released by The Weinstein Company and stars Kate Winslet, David Kross, Ralph Fiennes, Lena Olin, and Bruno Ganz. It was written by David Hare and directed by Stephen Daldry. It will be released on April 28th, 2009. It is rated R.



[18]

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