



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

The UK's largest rural film festival

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The White Ribbon (15)

Director: Michael Haneke

Starring: Christian Friedel, Ulrich Tukur, Susanne Lothar

Germany, 2009, 2 hours 25 minutes, subtitles

Born in Munich in 1942, a son of actor and director Fritz Haneke and actress Beatrix von Degenschild, Michael Haneke studied philosophy, psychology and theatre in Vienna. He became a film critic before making his debut as a TV director in 1973. His feature film debut, *The Seventh Continent* (1989), served to trace out the bold (and often violent) style that would characterize his later, invariably provocative work. One of his most critically acclaimed films, *The Piano Teacher*, won the Jury Prize at Cannes in 2001; while *Hidden* (2005) was a worldwide hit. He has also directed theatre in Germany and Austria.

Fabien Lemercier: "What made you choose to centre your film on this German village on the eve of the First World War?"

Michael Haneke: "I'd been working on the project for over ten years. My main aim was to look at a group of children who are inculcated with values transformed into an absolute and how they internalise them. If we raise a principle or ideal, be it political or religious, to the status of an absolute, it becomes inhuman and leads to terrorism. Another title I considered was *The Right Hand of God*, for the children in the film apply these ideals to the letter and punish those who don't share them 100%. Moreover the film is not just about fascism, which would be too simplistic an interpretation since the story is set in Germany, but about a definite pattern and the universal problem of corrupted ideals."

FL: "Have the themes of violence and guilt returned to the centre of your work?"

MH: "I explore these subjects in all my films. In our society, the issue of violence is unavoidable. As for guilt, I grew up in a Judeo-Christian environment, where this is an ever-present theme. You don't have to be a bad person to become guilty: it's part of our everyday life."

Extracts from an interview with Michael Haneke by Fabien Lemercier

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