



MIKE LEIGH

# Secrets & Lies

After the lonely nihilism of *Naked* (1993), a tense but tender insistence on the importance of human connections is the key to *Secrets & Lies*, Leigh's mid-career masterpiece. Digging into the shame and concealment uncovered when Marianne Jean-Baptiste's Black optometrist finds her white birthmother Cynthia and a fractured family, the film develops into sharp tragicomedy as the friction between the characters grows.

Leigh's trademark improv development process roots the film impressively, giving the fraught relationships an unusual intensity. Looked at beadily 25 years on, editor John Gregory's beautiful balance of emotional family scenes and quiet reflections, leavened with a comic but resonant flurry of photographer Maurice's work shoots, establishes the film's network of needs. Even its oddities add to the rich mix (the French financiers tried to axe a tiny life-in-one-scene drunken cameo by Ron Cook, whose resentful reek adds useful pathos). That heart-stopping eight-minute first meeting scene is still grabby rather than grandstanding, Cynthia's slow mortification showing off Brenda Blethyn's extraordinary performance. But Timothy Spall's less showy bemusement and unease as peacemaker Maurice and Marianne Jean-Baptiste's compassionate Hortense feel equally vital.

Kate Stables, *Sight & Sound*, June 2021

*Secrets & Lies* looks at the lives of Black and white Britons and tries to imagine a way in which both can begin to share the same family blood link.

Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), a young Black professional woman, decides, on the death of both her Black foster parents, to seek out her biological mother. When she approaches the relevant social services department, she discovers for the first time that her biological mother, Cynthia, is white.

*Secrets* is full of other surprises. It bravely subverts stereotypes and challenges easy assumptions. For instance, it allows another insight into questions of race and class. When Hortense eventually meets her biological mother, Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn), she finds a socially inadequate woman who has allowed her dreams to be crushed by the limited horizons and realities of her life. The contrast between their lifestyles is even more acute. Hortense has a professional job and owns her own immaculately decorated flat, while Cynthia works in a factory and lives in a shambolic and crumbling house. Her daughter, Roxanne (Claire Rushbrook), is a road sweeper, and she leans heavily on her brother Maurice (Timothy Spall) for emotional support.

Hortense's presence haunts this film. Until Cynthia has made peace with her, she will not be completely at peace with herself. The climax of this process of soul searching is reached at a family birthday party for Roxanne where, all the family's secrets and lies are laid bare. Amidst the tears and new truths, Hortense, the 'dark stranger', is finally welcomed into the white British family.

Hortense goes forward to her white family – but in order to do this she has to go alone. We see no pictures of her Black foster parents, and her two foster brothers are seen only once, arguing with each other about their inheritance,

but never talk to Hortense. But it is not just her Black foster family (read Black culture) who must remain ‘strangers’ – the Black man, Hortense’s real father, remains somewhere at the edge of the abyss, a dark shadowy figure who in this movie cannot yet be brought in from the cold.

So who was this man who could break Cynthia’s heart – but couldn’t yet be talked about openly? Would he ever be invited to dinner – to the table of equality with the rest of his family?

**Onyekachi Wambu, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)**

**SECRETS & LIES**

*Directed by:* Mike Leigh  
©: CiBy 2000, Thin Man Films Limited  
*Production Companies:* CiBy 2000, Thin Man  
*Presented by:* CiBy 2000  
*In association with:* Channel Four Films  
*Produced by:* Simon Channing-Williams  
*Production Executive:* Phillip Kenny  
*Production Supervisor:* Georgina Lowe  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Stephanie Faugier  
*Production Accountant:* William Tyler  
*Location Manager:* Mark Mostyn  
*1st Assistant Directors:* Jennie Osborn, Chris Rose  
*Script Supervisor:* Heather Storr  
*Casting:* Stern and Parriss  
*Written by:* Mike Leigh  
*Photographed by:* Dick Pope  
*Focus Puller:* Lucy Bristow  
*Clapper Loader:* Dan Shoring  
*Gaffer:* Martin Duncan  
*Stills Photographer:* Simon Mein  
*Edited by:* Jon Gregory  
*1st Assistant Editors:* Ian Seymour, Kate Mackenzie  
*Production Designer:* Alison Chitty  
*Art Director:* Eve Stewart  
*Production Buyer:* Liz Griffiths  
*Property Master:* Nick Rose  
*Costume Designer:* Maria Price  
*Costume Supervisor:* Allison Wyldeck  
*Make-up:* Christine Blundell  
*Title Design:* Chris Allies  
*Music by:* Andrew Dickson  
*Flugelhorn:* Michael Laird  
*Harp:* Helen Tunstall  
*Viola:* Ivo van der Werff  
*Cello:* Chas Dickie  
*Double Bass:* Chris West  
*Music Supervisor:* Step Parikian  
*Sound Recordist:* George Richards  
*Boom Operators:* Loveday Harding, Orin Beaton  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Peter Maxwell, Mick Boggis  
*Dubbing Editor:* Sue Baker  
*Dialogue Editor:* Derek Lomas  
*ADR/Foley Mixer:* Ted Swanscott  
*ADR Editor:* Derek Holding  
*Foley Walkers:* Dianne Greaves, Michelle Greaves  
*Foley Editor:* Bill Trent

**Cast**

Timothy Spall (*Maurice*)  
Brenda Blethyn (*Cynthia*)  
Phyllis Logan (*Monica*)  
Marianne Jean-Baptiste (*Hortense*)  
Claire Rushbrook (*Roxanne*)

Elizabeth Berrington (*Jane*)  
Michele Austin (*Dionne*)  
Lee Ross (*Paul*)  
Lesley Manville (*social worker*)  
Ron Cook (*Stuart*)  
Emma Amos (*girl with scar*)  
Brian Bovell, Trevor Laird (*Hortense’s brothers*)  
Clare Perkins (*Hortense’s sister-in-law*)  
Elias Perkins McCook (*Hortense’s nephew*)  
June Mitchell (*senior optometrist*)  
Janice Acquah (*junior optician*)  
Keeley Flanders (*girl in optician’s*)  
Hannah Davis (*first bride*)  
Terence Harvey (*first bride’s father*)  
Kate O’Malley (*second bride*)  
Joe Tucker (*groom*)  
Richard Syms (*vicar*)  
Grant Masters (*best man*)  
Annie Hayes (*mother in family group*)  
Jean Ainslie (*grandmother*)  
Daniel Smith (*teenage son*)  
Lucy Sheen (*nurse*)  
Frances Ruffelle (*young mother*)  
Felix Manley (*baby*)  
Nitin Chandra Ganatra (*Ramesh, potential husband*)  
Metin Marlow (*conjuror*)  
Amanda Crossley, Su Elliott, Di Sherlock (*raunchy women*)  
Alex Squires, Lauren Squires, Sade Squires (*triplets*)  
Dominic Curran (*little boy*)  
Stephen Churchett, David Neilson, Peter Stockbridge,  
Peter Waddington (*men in suits*)  
Rachel Lewis (*graduate*)  
Paul Trussell (*grinning husband*)  
Denise Orita (*uneasy woman*)  
Margery Withers (*elderly lady*)  
Theresa Watson (*daughter*)  
Gordon Winter (*laughing man*)  
Jonathan Coyne (*fiancé*)  
Bonzo (*dog*)  
Texas (*cat*)  
Peter Wight (*father in family group*)  
Gary Mcdonald (*boxer*)  
Alison Steadman (*dog owner*)  
Liz Smith (*cat owner*)  
Sheila Kelley (*fertile mother*)  
Angela Curran (*little boy’s mother*)  
Linda Beckett (*pin-up housewife*)  
Philip Davis (*man in suit*)  
Wendy Nottingham (*glum wife*)  
Anthony O’Donnell (*uneasy man*)  
Ruth Sheen (*laughing woman*)  
Mia Soteriou (*fiancée*)

UK 1996  
141 mins

MIKE LEIGH  
A COMPLETE FILM SEASON

Bleak Moments

Mon 18 Oct 20:40; Thu 28 Oct 18:00

Nuts in May

Wed 20 Oct 18:00; Sun 31 Oct 11:20 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Alison Steadman, Roger Sloman, Anthony O’Donnell, Stephen Bill and Sheila Kelley)

The Kiss of Death + The Permissive Society

Sat 23 Oct 12:50

Hard Labour

Sat 23 Oct 15:10

Happy-Go-Lucky

Sun 24 Oct 14:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Sally Hawkins, Alexis Zegerman and Kate O’Flynn); Mon 15 Nov 20:40

Meantime

Sun 24 Oct 18:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Marion Bailey and Phil Daniels); Thu 11 Nov 20:45

Secrets & Lies

Mon 25 Oct 14:30; Sat 6 Nov 19:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Sat 27 Nov 15:00

Abigail’s Party

Tue 26 Oct 20:50; Sun 14 Nov 12:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh)

High Hopes

Thu 28 Oct 14:30; Tue 2 Nov 18:45 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Ruth Sheen and Phil Davis); Thu 11 Nov 18:00; Sat 20 Nov 20:30

Life Is Sweet

Tue 28 Oct 17:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Thu 4 Nov 18:15; Tue 23 Nov 20:50

Grown-Ups + The Short and Curlies

Sat 30 Oct 17:15 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Tue 30 Nov 14:15

Home Sweet Home

Mon 1 Nov 17:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Sat 6 Nov 11:45

All or Nothing

Wed 3 Nov 20:30; Wed 10 Nov 20:30; Sun 21 Nov 17:10 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Lesley Manville and Marion Bailey)

Career Girls

Fri 5 Nov 20:50; Fri 12 Nov 18:15; Tue 23 Nov 18:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh)

Vera Drake

Fri 12 Nov 20:40; Fri 26 Nov 17:40 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Imelda Staunton and Phil Davis)

Topsy-Turvy

Sun 14 Nov 17:30 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh and Jim Broadbent); Sun 28 Nov 17:40

Another Year

Fri 19 Nov 17:30 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Ruth Sheen and Lesley Manville); Mon 29 Nov 20:30

Four Days in July

Sat 20 Nov 11:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh and Bríd Brennan); Wed 24 Nov 14:15

Peterloo

Sat 20 Nov 16:20 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Mon 29 Nov 17:40

Mr. Turner

Sun 21 Nov 13:10 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Marion Bailey and Dorothy Atkinson); Sat 27 Nov 17:30

Who’s Who + A Sense of History + A Running Jump

Sat 30 Nov 14:00

MIKE LEIGH’S CHOICES

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)

Mon 18 Oct 20:20; Thu 21 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 14:10; Tue 30 Nov 14:00

Jules et Jim

Tue 19 Oct 20:50; Wed 10 Nov 14:30

The Tree of Wooden Clogs (L’albero degli zoccoli)

Wed 20 Oct 14:00; Fri 29 Oct 13:30; Sun 7 Nov 13:50

I Am Cuba (Soy Cuba)

Wed 20 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 20:10

Radio Days

Sat 23 Oct 13:20; Tue 16 Nov 18:10

H3

Mon 25 Oct 18:00 (+ Q&A with director Les Blair); Wed 24 Nov 20:50

A Blonde in Love (AKA Loves of a Blonde) (Lásky jedné plavovlásky)

Mon 25 Oct 20:40; Fri 19 Nov 21:00

The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan

Sun 14 Nov 14:40; Sun 28 Nov 14:50

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