



**RETURN OF THE OUTSIDER:
THE FILMS OF MIKE HODGES**

I'll Sleep When I'm Dead

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Mike Hodges on 'I'll Sleep When I'm Dead'

The press notes describe I'll Sleep When I'm Dead as 'An exploration of family revenge and the conflicts inherent in trying to escape one's past.' That could be a description of Get Carter.

True, but *I'll Sleep...* has a completely different feel to any other of my films. It's shot differently. It's paced differently. It sounds different. They do all have one thing in common, though: I'm very big on atmosphere, on allowing the territory in which the film takes place to percolate the audience's psyche. When Trevor [Preston] was writing he wasn't thinking of *Get Carter*. His manor is South London, not Newcastle.

Carter relishes revenge whereas Will in I'll Sleep... enters into revenge much more reluctantly.

Although Will is drawn back to the city by his brother Davey's suicide, that's where the comparison ends. The elements of Jacobean tragedy you highlighted in your book on *Get Carter* are absent from this film. At a deeper level, it's more about the changing role of the male. I find the way we react to the idea of a man being raped very interesting. Men are still regarded as gods and for many this is a no-go area. Trevor deliberately set the story in the braggadocios' world of criminals to illustrate how fragile this macho shell is. None of the men can grapple with the fact that Davey ejaculated during the rape. Did he enjoy being buggered? Homoeroticism in male relationships, as witnessed in buddy films, male contact sports, American football in particular, is a tough one for men to comprehend.

So is this a film about masculinity? Were you conscious that you wanted to put male rape on the agenda?

If I were sitting down to write a script I doubt I would have chosen this subject. But patently Trevor was driven to write it. I can't answer why, but I suspect it's because he comes from a tough background where the idea of a man being raped – in other words, being turned into a woman – is so horrifying and incomprehensible he felt compelled to confront it. There's a scene where one of the hard men is found in a body bag, alive, but decked out like a woman in underwear, rouge and earrings. It's a small moment but it speaks for the whole film. Of course, in prisons, particularly American ones, vulnerable men are used as replacements for women.

It's an issue usually dealt with only in prison films.

One element people find difficult to get into their heads is that male rape, outside of prison, isn't for sexual relief. It's about demeaning the victim.

It's an expression of power.

The motivation for the rape would never have surfaced if Davey hadn't committed suicide. And that motivation is as old as Greek tragedy: sexual jealousy, the hatred of an older man for a younger man. Maybe that accounts for my instinctual need to cast Will's former lover Helen and the rapist Boad

as older than written. Again, it goes back to aggressive masculinity; a disastrous urge, a curse. And that, in turn, leads to Will's final, disastrous and sudden surge of anger, a revenge I deny the audience a view of. Instead I offer an ending that suggests that revenge eternally replays revenge. I recognise the film's resolution may not satisfy some people.

The audience might be looking for a conspiracy and could feel let down if they don't find one.

Why should people go expecting another *Get Carter*? I know, simply as a punter, that there are audiences who go to the cinema just to let the film reveal itself. Surely *Croupier* proved that? As for expecting a more complex plot, I'd suggest *I'll Sleep...* is actually the more complex film. It's just that the undercurrents are more hidden. I was 32 then; now I'm 70. Why make conventional films? What a fucking boring way to spend a privileged life. But then a lot of young people probably find my films fucking boring and conventional.

You break those conventions with the ending here.

I trust the audience. They know the end is the beginning and the beginning is already the end. Futility faces us all every single day – that's the grandeur of existence. As Will says, when the film starts and ends: 'The dead are dead. He's gone. What's left to say he was here at all?'

What does I'll Sleep... tell us about the state of the body politic?

The approach to poverty, both material and spiritual, is more subtle here than in *Get Carter*. And two changes in society are particularly evident. First, we use the car as a bubble to cocoon us from the community. The characters are constantly on the move in cars and the world beyond them has the reality of a theme park. The second is the near impossibility of escaping from the state. When Will is fired by the logging company, the manager says, 'You've got no cards. No numbers. It's all numbers nowadays. Fucking computers.' Will is living like an animal on the outer edges of our islands. He's living like an animal because he's trying not to act like one. But when he returns to London he stops living like an animal so he can act like one. As he passes through the hellish Blackwall Tunnel, he throws up. It emphasises the fear and loathing attached to his old life. Towards the end we witness a metamorphosis when he sheds the rough apparel of a bum for the smooth clothes of a gangster, a businessman. Business: that's the jungle now.

As someone who lives in the country, can you relate to Will's sentiments?

I relate to some. I can understand waking up one morning and wanting to shed your persona like a snake sheds its skin. When I have to talk about myself and my life, as I am now – this being my first interview about the new film – I find I begin to dislike myself. And by the time it opens I know I'll feel so shallow, so empty. As with most humans, my ideals don't bear much examination. Maybe that's why so few of us have any ideals left. But because of my desire for the film to be seen I give interviews and talk partly about myself and partly about the project and there's an element of self-disgust attached to that process. So I can understand Will.

The contrast between the country and the city is a common element in film noir, and this is a film noir.

It is a film noir, but I don't think that contrast is correct. There's a scene right at the beginning to remind us that violence is everywhere. That pure vision of the countryside has always been a myth. And anyway I love coming to

London. I sit upstairs on a bus and I'm as happy as a sand boy watching what's going on, sucking it all up. Exploring South London for the locations was great. I'm lucky to have that contrast in my existence.

The most distinctive element of your films is the intensity reached through attention to detail. Your last two films take place mostly at night. Is the elimination of natural light to do with your need to assert control?

I do like the simplicity you get shooting in areas where the lighting can be controlled. Then you can concentrate on the actors, which is what it's all about. In *Croupier* you don't see any sky at all. And in *I'll Sleep... Will never* leaves his Transit until it's dark, as if he were a nocturnal animal.

In Get Carter Margaret tells Carter, 'We are what we are, like it or not.' This idea of the fixity of identity is taken up again in I'll Sleep... when one of the London hoods tells Will, 'You think you've changed. You haven't changed. People like us don't change. Not deep down.'

We do tend to remain the same. Even religious conversions simply take the same characteristics, the same anger, and transform them into... well, in the case of fundamentalism, something lethal. The process of maturing is the only thing that's fun about existing, and the accumulation of knowledge is the most wonderful thing about that process. That changes you, but the core self is still there.

One of the things that lets down the Stallone version of Get Carter is the moment of epiphany where he suddenly develops a sensitive side.

Carter, like most criminals, is sentimental. He may loathe his family, but family is it. There's a coldness at the heart of many middle-class families, which is why we often want to escape them, but with working-class people the idea of family is inculcated. Will is sentimental about his brother Davey, yet he fucked off earlier without telling him. Intuiting something has happened, he comes back and is again moved by his love for Davey. But he's too late.

Interview by Stephen Chibnall, *Sight & Sound*, September 2003

I'LL SLEEP WHEN I'M DEAD

Director: Mike Hodges
©: Will & Co Productions Ltd
Presented by: Revere Pictures, Seven Arts Pictures
Executive Producer: Roger Marino
Co-executive Producers: Robert O. Kaplan, Richard E. Johnson, Trisha Van Klaveren
Produced by: Mike Kaplan, Michael Corrente
Co-producer: Marisa Polvino
Line Producer: Eliza Mellor
Unit Manager: Louise Rowe
Production Manager: Emma Fowler
Production Co-ordinator: Monique Mussell
Finance Director: Jeffrey Gage
Production Accountant: Wendy Ellerker
Location Manager: Pat Karam
Post-production Co-ordinator: Helen Walker
1st Assistant Director: Richard Whelan
2nd Assistant Director: Tamana Bleasdale
3rd Assistant Director: William Dodds
Director's Assistant: Merry Irwin
Script Supervisors: Amanda Lean, Beverley Winston
Casting Director: Leo Davis
Casting Assistant: Melissa Holm
Voice Casting: Brendan Donnison, Vanessa Baker
Supporting Artists: Casting Collective Ltd
Written by: Trevor Preston
Director of Photography: Mike Garfath
Camera Operator: Gordon Hayman
Focus Puller: Rawdon Hayne
Clapper Loader: Shaun Coble
Gaffer: Ray Potter
Rigging Gaffer: Reg Boddy
Electricians: Brian Miller, Avelino Fernandez, Mark Packman, Terence Potter
Electrician/Best Boy (Wales): Martin Smith
Grip: Bill Geddes
Stills Photography: Keith Hamshere
Graphics Consultant: Philip Castle
Editor: Paul Carlin
Production Designer: Jon Bunker
Art Director: John Ralph
Set Decorator: Gillie Delap
Prop Master: Alan Bailey
Costume Designer: Evangeline Averre
Costume Supervisor: Sarah Touaibi
Make-up/Hair Designer: Dorka Nieradzic
Make-up Artist: Isabelle Webley
Titles Design: Steve Masters
Digital Artist (Studio 51): Michael Lenny
Music Composed by: Simon Fisher Turner
Musicians: Gilad Atzman, Alex Balzama, Andrew Blick, Frank Harrison, Asaf Sirkis, Reba Rochester, Yaron Stavi, Simon Fisher Turner
Sound Designer: Max Bygrave
Sound Recordist: George Richards
Sound Maintenance Engineer: Chinna Boapeah
Dubbing Mixer: Paul Carr
Dialogue Editor: Tim Owens
Foley Artists: Jenny Lee-Wright, Pauline Griffiths
Foley Editor: James Mather
Stunt Co-ordinator: Jim Dowdall
Stunt Performers: Derek Lea, Paul Herbert
Laboratory: Technicolor Film Services Ltd
Voice Coach: Jill McCullough
Animals: Ann Head
Publicity: Denise Breton

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://www.bfi.org.uk/join)

Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

Cast

Clive Owen (*Will Graham*)
Charlotte Rampling (*Helen*)
Jonathan Rhys Meyers (*Davey Graham*)
Jamie Foreman (*Mickser*)
Ken Stott (*Turner*)
Sylvia Syms (*Mrs Bartz*)
Malcolm McDowell (*Boad*)

the counsellors
Alexander Morton (*Victor*)
John Surman (*pathologist*)
Paul Mohan (*coroner*)

party people
Damian Dibben (*David Myers*)
Amber Batty (*Sheridan*)
Daisy Beaumont (*Stella, drugs seeker*)
Lidija Zovkic (*Philippa, model*)

Will's crew
Geoff Bell (*Arnie Ryan*)
Desmond Baylis (*Jez, cannibal*)
Kiris Riviere (*Big John*)

Turner's gang
Brian Croucher (*Al Shaw*)
Ross Boatman (*Malone, chauffeur*)
Marc O'Shea (*Paulin, hired gun*)
Dave Alexander (*Little Billy Swan*)
Lesley Clare O'Neill (*Mrs Turner*)

in the forest
Emma Dewhurst (*Mrs Calgani*)
Francis Magee (*Algar, foreman*)
Mark Hardy (*Calgani*)
Bruce Byron (*Eddy*)

in the city
Jacqueline Defferary (*Annie, waitress*)
Tim Plester (*Hair, taxi driver*)
Noel Clarke (*Cyri*)
Abi Gouhad (*shopkeeper*)
Peter Sproule (*cyclist*)
Eric Scruby (*barber*)
Sophie Jones-Cooper (*hotel maid*)

UK-USA 2003©
103 mins

Mike Hodges interviewed by
The British Entertainment History Project:
<https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/mike-hodges>

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk