



GARY OLDMAN

Meantime

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

In Leigh's TV film about an East End family faced with unemployment and recession in Thatcher's Britain, Oldman plays Coxy, volatile skinhead friend of the two sons, terminally shy Colin (Roth) and more outgoing Mark (Daniels). The performances (by a superb if then little known cast, which also included Alfred Molina) are excellent throughout, while Leigh's grasp of the dynamics of family life works wonders.

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'I get cross with filmmakers who say "Oh I hate my films. How can you watch your own films?" That pisses me off. I don't get it because if you don't like it, how in hell's name can you expect anyone else to? When the NFT shows *Meantime*, I will go and sit at the back because it will be good to see a print on the screen, it will be good to see it with an audience and I've got a real soft spot for *Meantime*.' (Mike Leigh, 1997)

A contemporary review

How can the reality of a lifetime of enforced leisure, a lifetime on the dole, a lifetime spent accepting week by week the charity of an indifferent nation, be brought home to those of us fortunate enough to be in work, in Britain, on New Year's Day 1984? Mike Leigh, a percipient analyst of human subterfuge, of the games we play to avoid our responsibilities, addresses the subject. In *Meantime*, his latest 'devising', he seizes the audience by the lapels and delivers the sort of ferocious head-butt which one of his characters, the East End skinhead Coxy, seems forever on the point of administering to every immovable object which comes his way.

The Pollocks – defeated Frank, the father; ferret-like Mark, the older son; and slow Colin, his brother, called 'Muppet' – live out their unchanging workless days on a Chigwell housing estate. Nothing happens: rubbish blows across the neglected lawns, slouching fatigue overcomes all but the most hardy. Mavis Pollock, the wife and mother, a sort of Dandy Nichols without the caricatured music hall charm, scowls at her useless menfolk, sullenly ministers to their needs. She escapes to the bingo palace, but even there things go wrong: her handbag is full of ballpoint pens which won't, at the crucial moment, write.

Elsewhere, on some alien planet, at the other end of the Central Line, lives Mavis' sister Barbara, who years ago took herself in hand, learnt secretarial skills, spruced herself up, married the obtuse John Lane, obtained a middle-class sufficiency. But Barbara has no children: she takes pity on the gormless Colin, with his twitch, his skew-whiff, taped-up specs, seduces him away from Chigwell with the offer of a token job, makes great play over the hours he must keep, seems to be giving him a start. Charity, Mark knows, is hard enough to take from the servants of the Crown, let alone from one's own family ... Matters come to a head.

The Pollocks and the Lanes are observed disinterestedly, some would say with a cruel disinterest. They are in many ways, like most of Mike Leigh's characters, an appalling shower. But spend time with them (and as usual their

lives, their litanies of woe, have a mesmeric power) and one begins to discern the authentic lineaments of their humanity. The squabbling which marks every waking minute of the Pollocks' lives is a sign that they are still alive: a couple of rounds in the gym, a tonic to keep them on their toes.

Barbara, repressed, chattering Barbara, shooing poor suet-like Mavis out of her immaculate kitchen, has a wholly unexpected streak of firmness in her character. She holds her own with notable good sense when arguing with the council's Zen housing officer who comes to inspect the Pollocks' defective windows but who instead offers a tendentious lecture on grains of sand which should not be allowed to grow into heaps, the moral of which escapes the uncharacteristically silent Frank and Mavis. She may have offered Colin charity, have lacked the sense to realise the hurt she caused or the insight to see why she made the offer in the first place, but she nevertheless likes Colin, is patient with him, can ruffle his hair with genuine affection.

Meantime is at times painfully funny. But one has the feeling that Mike Leigh has not pulled the throttle all the way out: the mockery is more muted than on occasions in the past. From time to time, however, he and his faultless ensemble (Marion Bailey, Phil Daniels, Tim Roth, Pam Ferris, Jeff Robert, Gary Oldman) go all out: there is, for example, one marvellously choreographed scene, in which the Pollocks crisscross the screen with farcical precision in an attempt to extract Colin from the bathroom, which is infused with pure good humour. Mike Leigh and his photographer Roger Pratt focus one's attention with compelling ease: the skinhead rolling in a barrel, thumping the sides in manic desperation; Hayley, the object of Colin's affection, so shy that she seems intent on shrivelling up every time one sees her; Frank and Mark Pollock drawing their money with twisted, feverish contempt.

In the end, Colin negotiates the Central Line and somehow stumbles his way to Aunt Barbara's house (a bedroom is to be redecorated, the equipment has been laid out in apple-pie order), but Mark beats him to it and after a tug-of-war with Barbara persuades Colin not to take the job. Barbara is one of those controlled heroines whom Mike Leigh delights in testing to the limit until they snap with dramatic effect. In this case, after the boys' departure, Barbara hits the bottle and gives herself over to inconclusive tears: John, needless to say, is baffled. This however, is not the heart of the matter.

Colin finds his way back to Chigwell, swathed in a parka, hood up. There is a row to end all rows. Why on earth did he turn down the job? Mark half-defiantly confesses his devilish role. The storm rages, Colin remains sunk in silence on the bed. And then, in an unprecedented show of animation, he yells at his thunderstruck parents to leave his room. He goes to bed still in the jacket. Next morning, an awe-struck Mark cautiously pushes back the hood; the brothers regard each other; Mark extends a hand and reverently caresses his brother's shaven dome. The haircut is a first sign of independence, cost £1.20, a peculiar act of half-understood defiance. This is no longer the myopic Muppet Kermit but the dauntless 'Kojak'. The bleak landscape is lit up by a moment of optimism.

John Pym, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1983/84

MEANTIME

Devised/Directed by: Mike Leigh
Production Companies: Central Production, Mostpoint, Channel Four
Producer: Graham Benson
Production Manager: Vivien Pottersman
Production Assistant: Caroline Hill
Production Accountant: Neil Chaplin
Accounts Assistant: Lisa Whitmore
Unit Runners: Simon Henson, Hugo Wyhowski
1st Assistant Director: Chris Rose
2nd Assistant Director: Steve Finn
Continuity: Heather Storr
Casting Director: Sue Whatmough
Director of Photography: Roger Pratt
Focus Puller: Brian Herlihy
Clapper Loader: Adam Walton
Camera Grip: John Abrahams
Gaffer Electrician: Ted Read
Electricians: Roger Bonnici, John Cantwell
Stills: Ed Buziak
Graphic Design: Mon Mohan
Editor: Lesley Walker
Assistant Editor: Jeremy Hume
2nd Assistant Editor: Toby Reisz
Art Director: Diana Charnley
Assistant Art Director: Chris Seagers
Carpenter: Steve Ede
Painter: Jim Ede
Prop Master: Dave Newton
Prop Man: Steve Wheeler
Prop Buyer: Peter Walpole
Costume Designer: Lindy Hemmings

Wardrobe Supervisor: Sue Gibson
Makeup Artist: Sandra Shepherd
Music: Andrew Dickson
Musicians: Andrew Dickson, George Khan
Sound Recording: Malcolm Hirst
Boom Operators: Mike Shoring, Eddie Dougall
Dubbing Mixer: Trevor Pyke
Dubbing Editor: Charlie Ware
Assistant Dubbing Editor: Peter Joly
Unit Driver: Roger Pomphrey
Unit Publicist: Joanna Campling

Cast:

Marion Bailey (*Barbara*)
Phil Daniels (*Mark*)
Tim Roth (*Colin*)
Pam Ferris (*Mavis*)
Jeff Robert (*Frank*)
Alfred Molina (*John*)
Gary Oldman (*Coxy*)
Tilly Vosburgh (*Hayley*)
Paul Daly (*Rusty*)
Leila Bertrand (*Hayley's friend*)
Hepburn Graham (*boyfriend*)
Peter Wight (*estate manager*)
Eileen Davies (*unemployment benefit clerk*)
Herbert Norville (*man in pub*)
Brian Hoskin (*barman*)

UK 1983
112 mins

GARY OLDMAN

Meantime

Mon 17 Oct 20:40; Fri 28 Oct 17:50

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead

Tue 18 Oct 18:05; Sun 6 Nov 18:20

Bram Stoker's Dracula

Wed 19 Oct 20:25 (+ intro by Christopher Frayling); Sat 29 Oct 20:30;
Wed 23 Nov 18:00

Prick Up Your Ears

Fri 21 Oct 20:30; Sun 13 Nov 18:20; Fri 25 Nov 20:40

JFK – Director's Cut

Sun 23 Oct 16:00; Sat 19 Nov 16:30

True Romance

Mon 24 Oct 20:40; Tue 22 Nov 20:30; Tue 29 Nov 18:00

The Firm – Director's Cut

Wed 2 Nov 21:00; Thu 10 Nov 18:15

The Contender

Fri 4 Nov 18:00; Mon 14 Nov 18:00

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy

Sat 5 Nov 20:20; Thu 24 Nov 17:55

Mank

Tue 8 Nov 20:15; Sat 26 Nov 17:20; Tue 29 Nov 20:20

Darkest Hour

Sat 12 Nov 12:20; Sat 19 Nov 20:30; Mon 21 Nov 14:30

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