



EVENTS

# Mike Hodges in Conversation

With a career that spans film and TV – including highlights such as *Get Carter*, *Flash Gordon*, *Croupier*, *Tempo* and *World in Action* – Mike Hodges is an auteur filmmaker who has proved himself adept at making quality films across many genres. Tonight, Samira Ahmed hosts this conversation with Hodges as he reflects on his career to date and looks forward to his next film, an autobiographical documentary.

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Mike Hodges' spasmodic career as a director illustrates many of the besetting problems of the British film industry. Born in Bristol on 29 July 1932, Hodges had a comfortable middle-class upbringing, qualifying as a chartered accountant. But two years National Service prompted a desire for a more creative occupation and he worked in television in the 1960s, producing and directing hard-hitting documentaries for *World in Action* (ITV, 1963-89), then making profiles of European directors for the arts series *Tempo* (ITV, 1961-67). This combination of gritty, combative realism and European modernism informs his most important work, the crime thrillers, a genre, which Hodges felt, could delve 'deep into the underbelly of society. Done well they can be like an autopsy of society.'

Mike Hodges wrote and directed two television thrillers, *Suspect* (ITV, tx. 17/11/1969) and *Rumour* (ITV, 2/3/1970), before gaining the opportunity to direct his first feature, *Get Carter* (1971), for which he also wrote the screenplay. The story of London gangster Jack Carter's return to his native Newcastle to investigate his brother's sudden death, is told in a detached, analytical style, matched by Michael Caine's frightening yet compelling performance. The film evokes a society in the throes of profound change, capturing a mood of disillusionment that signalled the replacement of 1960s' idealism by the 'rampant materialism' of the '70s. Carter is an ambivalent figure, a seemingly emotionless killer who weeps at the exploitation of his brother's daughter, and whose death symbolises the end of an era. *Get Carter* has now acquired cult status, regarded as one of the finest, and most influential British crime thrillers, but at the time of its release it was considered soulless and too violent, and was poorly distributed.

Hodges' next film, *Pulp* (1972), was based on his original story of a sleazy pulp fiction writer (Michael Caine), caught up in a real life murder mystery. An intermittently successful comedy-thriller, *Pulp* was also poorly handled by its distributors who found it hard to market.

Although the film had little impact, Hodges' reputation was sufficiently well-established for Warner Brothers to invite him to direct *The Terminal Man* (1974). Hodges' adaptation of Michael Crichton's sci-fi thriller, about a computer scientist (George Segal) who becomes psychotic after a brain implant, was too tough and uncompromising to be a commercial success.

Now judged a box-office risk, Hodges' career floundered with scripts unmade and a disagreement with 20th Century-Fox that caused him to withdraw from

the direction of *Damien: Omen II* (d. Don Taylor, 1978) after three weeks. The decade ended on a higher note with *Flash Gordon* (1980), a modern version of the 1920s cartoon character. Hodges found the production chaotic but managed to 'let go', producing a lavish and enjoyable comic sci-fi romp. The 1980s showed Hodges' versatility, but he suffered further problems with financing and distribution. *Morons from Outer Space* (1985) was another sci-fi spoof, written and starring Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones. Hodges embraced the idea of aliens being stupid and uncooperative as refreshingly 'anti-Spielbergian'. *A Prayer for the Dying* (1987) was another grim thriller about the impossibility of an IRA hit-man (Mickey Rourke) renouncing violence. The film is difficult to judge as it suffered drastic re-editing and the substitution of what Hodges deemed to be crassly inappropriate music. Hodges disowned the film and had a public row with the producers.

He was given full control of *Black Rainbow* (1989), which he wrote and directed, a hybrid psycho-supernatural thriller shot on location in North Carolina about a stage medium (Rosanna Arquette) who may indeed have terrifying powers of prophecy. Once again, despite excellent reviews, the impact of this perceptive film was undermined by severe distribution problems in both America and Britain.

This apparent failure meant that Hodges did not direct another feature film for nearly a decade, returning with *Croupier* (1998), a European co-production led by Channel 4, based on an original screenplay by Paul Mayersberg. An ironic, existentialist fable about greed and the corrupting power of money, *Croupier* draws on both film noir and European modernism. The archetypal anti-hero Jack Manfred, superbly realised by Clive Owen, is a struggling author-cum-croupier who gradually turns into his dark self, Jake, whose one desire is to 'fuck the world over'. It was Hodges' best film since *Get Carter*, the fluid camerawork and tautly economical direction creating a stylised world where the tawdry casino with its mirror walls becomes a modern limbo in which the gamblers play for their souls. Although *Croupier* also suffered from a very limited release in Britain, its substantial success in America led to its re-release in Britain in summer 2001 where it was received warmly by both critics and audiences.

Hodges has argued that films should have a soul, try to express often-difficult truths about the human condition and contribute to the formation of a meaningful national identity in the face of the onslaught of American money and culture. The vicissitudes of his career have exemplified that struggle, and he has remained true to that purpose. The success of *Croupier* and the status of *Get Carter* as a modern classic have led to a renewed interest in his work and to further projects: a documentary about the representation of serial killers, *Murder by Numbers* (2001) and another existentialist thriller starring Clive Owen, *I'll Sleep When I'm Dead*, released in 2003. Both enhanced his reputation as one of the most significant voices in post-'60s British cinema.

**Andrew Spicer, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)**

Mike Hodges

Born Bristol, July 1932  
All UK unless stated

- 1958   **Once upon a Time** (children’s TV series) writer
- 1962   **The Sunday Break** (TV series on religious topics) editor
- 1963   **Rave!** (TV series, tx 29.6.63-27.7.63) screenplay
- 1963-5 **World in Action** (TV doc) producer/ director; including:

Goldwater (tx 30.6.1964)

The Flip Side (tx 22.9.1964)

US Elections (tx 29.9.1964)

Canada (tx 6.10.1964) collaboration with Douglas Keay

Vietnam (tx 3.11.1964)

State of the Unions (tx 1.12.1964)
- 1965   **Tempo** (TV arts magazine) executive producer; including:

A Successful Failure (tx 18.7.1965)

Harold Pinter (tx 3.10.1965) producer

Tempo series on ‘Entertainers’:

A Guided Tour of Zero Mostel (tx 23.1.1966)

Never Whistle in a Dressing Room (tx 30.1.1966)

A Tale of Two Talents (tx 6.2.1966)

You’ve Got a Nerve (tx 13.2.1966)

Stop It, You’re Killing Me (tx 20.2.1966)

Don’t Let the Wig Fool You, Mate (tx 27.2.1966)

Meet the Duke (tx 6.3.1966)

‘Tempo International’:

In Cold Blood (tx 1.5.1966)

Tativille (tx 8.5.1966)

Girodias Rides Again (tx 15.5.1966)

Blood, Sweat and Champagne (tx 22.5.1966)

Jazz in Wonderland (tx 29.5.1966)

The Offenders (tx 5.6.1966)

It Happened in Paris (tx 12.6.1966)

The Image-Wizards (tx 19.6.1966)

David, Moffett and Ornette (tx 26.6.1966)

When the War Was Over (tx 3.7.1966)

The Pursuit of Nancy Mitford (tx 10.7.1966)
- 1967   **New Tempo** (TV arts magazine) executive producer/ director:

The Information Explosion (tx 1.1.1967)

Nostalgia (tx 8.1.1967)

Noise (tx 15.1.1967)

Violence (tx 22.1.1967)

Heroes (tx 29.1.1967)

Expendability (aka Disposability, tx 5.2.1967)

Stimulants (tx 12.2.1967)

Leisure (tx 19.2.1967)
- 1968   **The Tyrant King** (children’s TV serial, tx 3.10.1968-7.11.1968 director/producer/screenplay
- 1969   **Playhouse: Suspect** (TV, tx 17.11.1969) director/producer/screenplay
- 1970   **Playhouse: Rumour** (TV, tx 2.3.70) director/producer/screenplay
- 1971   **Get Carter** (USA/UK) director/screenplay
- 1972   **Pulp** (USA/UK) director/screenplay/production company, Klinger-Caine-Hodges
- The Frighteners: The Manipulators** (TV, tx 28.7.1972) director/screenplay

- 1974   **The Terminal Man** (USA) director/producer/screenplay
- 1978   **Damien   Omen II** co-screenplay; also uncredited original director, replaced by Don Taylor
- 1980   **Flash Gordon** director
- 1983   **And the Ship Sails On/E la nave va** (Italy/France, director Federico Fellini) dubbing director of English version
- Missing Pieces** (TV movie, tx 14.5.1983) director
- The Hitchhiker: WGod** (episode of TV series, tx 26.11.85) director
- 1984   **Squaring the Circle** (TV, tx 31.5.1984) director
- 1985   **Morons from Outer Space** director
- 1986   **Florida Straits** (TV movie, tx 26.10.1986) director
- 1987   **A Prayer for the Dying** director
- 1989   **Black Rainbow** director/screenplay
- 1994   **Dandelion Dead** (TV, tx 6+13.2.1994) director
- 1994   **The Healer** (TV, tx 19+20.9.1994) director
- The Lifeforce Experiment/ The Breakthrough** (TV, tx 16.4.94, director Piers Haggard) screenplay (written 1992)
- 1997   **Croupier** (Eire/Germany/France/UK) director
- 2001   **Murder by Numbers** (co-directed with Paul Carlin)
- 2003   **I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead** (UK/USA) director

RETURN OF THE OUTSIDER: THE FILMS OF MIKE HODGES

- Suspect + Rumour
- Sun 1 May 14:20
- The Terminal Man (director’s cut)
- Mon 2 May 14:50; Mon 16 May 20:40
- Mike Hodges in Conversation
- Tue 3 May 18:15
- Black Rainbow
- Tue 3 May 20:40; Sun 22 May 18:10
- Pulp
- Wed 4 May 18:15; Wed 11 May 20:50
- I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead
- Thu 5 May 18:00; Mon 30 May 17:50
- Morons from Outer Space
- Fri 6 May 18:05; Wed 18 May 20:50 + World in Action: The Flipside
- Flash Gordon
- Sat 7 May 12:00; Thu 19 May 20:20 + The Tyrant King: Episode 1: Scarface
- Squaring the Circle + World in Action: Goldwater for President? or How to Win Friends and Influence People
- Sun 8 May 11:50
- A Prayer for the Dying
- Sun 8 May 15:20; Sun 15 May 18:10
- Tempo
- Tue 17 May 18:00
- Murder by Numbers + The Hitchhiker: W.G.O.D
- Thu 19 May 18:30
- Dandelion Dead
- Sat 21 May 13:10
- New Tempo
- Sun 29 May 11:50

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