

THE CRYING GAME (1992)

"Funny the way things go. Never the way you expected."

Credits:

director: Neil Jordan

screenplay: Neil Jordan

cast: Forest Whitaker (Jody); Miranda Richardson (Jude);
Stephen Rea (Fergus); Jaye Davidson (Dil); Jim Broadbent
(Col)

Background:

The script is based on Irish writer/filmmaker Neil Jordan's short story about an IRA man who defects and falls in love with the wife of a British soldier he has once held hostage. The final screen version seems to have been influenced by Jordan's earlier film success, *Mona Lisa* (1986), in which a criminal on the lam pursues and protects a mysterious love object (played by Cathy Tyson, an actress who may have been the model for Jordan's casting of Jaye Davidson here). After the screenplay was rejected by several Hollywood studios, the film was produced by Stephen Woolley for less than four and a half million dollars. Although it played to relatively indifferent audiences in England, *The Crying Game* became a tremendous critical and commercial success in America, earning five major Academy Award nominations and nearly ten times its production costs in gross receipts before video release. Much of the credit for its box office success should go to the American distributor, Miramax, which created a remarkable publicity campaign surrounding the film's "surprise" plot twist.

Fergus is played by Stephen Rea, an Irish stage actor who happens to be married to Dolours Price, once an IRA member who was sentenced to life imprisonment for two terrorist car bombings in 1973. She was released in 1981. The key role of Dil is portrayed by Jaye Davidson, who had been employed in a number of temporary jobs in London (including cutting hair, dressing up as Pluto while working for Walt Disney, and buying fabric for fashion designers) before being "discovered" at a party for British director Derek Jarman.

Cinematic Qualities:

The most significant achievement of *The Crying Game* is surely its **script**, which provides both witty, poignant moments of dialogue ("Even when you were throwing up, I could tell you cared"; "Shouldn't you be in mourning?" Jimmy asks Dil. "I am.") and fascinating turns in the plot ("Funny the way things go. Never the way you expected," Dil says). The film's fundamental ironies are reinforced by an exceptional **sound track**, framed by Percy Sledge singing "When A Man Loves a Woman" over the opening horizontal (right to left) tracking shot and Lyle Lovett (**not** Tammy Wynette) singing "Stand By Your Man" over the closing horizontal (left to right) tracking shot. The title song, "The Crying Game," is performed three different times by 1) Kate Robbins (at the Metro),

2) Dave Berry (a tape of his original recording, a hit in Britain in the early Sixties), and 3) Boy George (over the final credits). Attentive viewers might also notice Jordan's predilection for **high-angle shots**, often in place of conventional establishing shots, which provide a sense of destiny and diminish the characters' heroic potential.

Questions for Discussion:

1. The film is most obviously about questions of identity, calling into question the definitiveness of such issues as gender, race, ideology, and nationality. "It's amazing how these details take on such importance," Jody says. The theme is reinforced by Jordan's continual play on personal names: Jody/Jude; Fergus/Paddy/Jimmy/Pat. At the same time, however, Jody's fable seems to assert fundamental distinctions between the scorpion and the frog. How does the film resolve these questions about human "nature"?
2. Some critics have been offended by the film's representation of political and gender issues. Is **The Crying Game** misogynistic? Does it deliberately obscure the "nature" of the IRA? Are the larger social issues the film raises overwhelmed by the twist of the plot?
3. How does the opening third of the film--the colloquies between Fergus and Jody--set up the larger themes developed in the Tottenham sequences?
4. In many ways, **The Crying Game** is a conventional bildungsroman, Fergus' rite of passage from innocence to experience or from sinfulness ("I'm not good for much," he admits to Jody) to redemption. But what is it that he learns through his experiences? And what are the crucial stages in this process?