



# O'Horten

Autumn  
Season  
2009



90 Minutes, 2007, France, Norway  
Director and Writer – Bent Hamer  
Cast – Baard Owe, Espen Skjønberg, Ghita Norby, Henny Moan

A drama focused on a life-changing moment in 67-year-old train engineer Odd Horten's existence: the evening of his retirement.

## Synopsis

Odd Horten (Baard Owe) is a man with a lot of time on his hands. The character at the center of Bent Hamer's wry social comedy, O'HORTEN, is a former train driver who struggles to adjust to the freedoms of retirement.

Hamer carefully outlines the rituals from Horten's working life: recurring visits to a local tobacconist to fuel his pipe-smoking habit, a pre-work routine in his Oslo apartment, and visits to a small-town hotel where the kindly female owner treats him with considerable fondness. Most of Hamer's movie takes place in the snow-covered Oslo night, where Horten encounters a series of erratic characters as his own behavior slides into nonconformity.

O'HORTEN is a wonderfully amusing piece, with Hamer demonstrating his innate ability for offbeat comedy. The strange atmosphere and long silences are reminiscent of the work of Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki, and the oddball denizens of the Oslo night are similar to the way-out characters of Jim Jarmusch's MYSTERY TRAIN.

Hamer's movie is a compelling exploration of a loner who has had all the familiarity stripped from his world, and flounders as he seeks to find meaning in a life shorn of routine. Owe's deadpan delivery is flawless, and his restrained performance offers few clues as to what is going on in Horten's head, requiring the audience to ponder the motivations for his increasingly peculiar behavior. The mixture of humor and poignancy are kept in a delicate balance throughout, with Hamer gently steering his small cast through a film full of richly rewarding subject matter.

## Review (Phillip French, The Observer)

Scratch a 21st-century Scandinavian, the movies tell us, and you'll find a 19th-century peasant underneath, and such is the case with the latest movie by Bent Hamer, who followed Kitchen Stories, the charmingly eccentric comedy about conformity in Sweden and his native Norway, with Factotum, a celebration of that extreme American non-conformist Charles Bukowski.

O'Horten is a "comedy of retirement", in which longtime servants of public and private institutions listen to patronising speeches, receive their gold-plated watches and head off into life's uncertain twilight. The finest recent example is About Schmidt, starring Jack Nicholson. The 67-year-old Odd Horten is a taciturn, pipe-smoking conformist (played with delicate precision by Baard Owe) who has driven trains between Oslo, Bergen and points north for 40 years, is given a "Silver Locomotive" by his peers (the retirement timepiece), and faces a future in which he is no longer keeping a train, and his life, on the rails.

Everything goes slightly wrong. He misses his last journey, just escaping arrest as a pederast. He's detained and strip-searched as a terrorist trying to sell his boat, named after his demented mother resident in an old folks' home. A dedicated conformist, he attracts eccentrics, among them a mad ex-diplomat who believes he has the ability to drive blindfold through Oslo. Fortunately for him and the audience, there's an attractive widow waiting for him on the station in Bergen. The helicopter shots of Horten's train snaking its way through Norway's wintry wastes are beautiful.