

KEN LOACH

THE SOCIAL NAVIGATOR

Ken Loach's work has become a byword for a brand of naturalistic, socially conscious British filmmaking. But there's more to him than that says **John Hill**, looking back over some of the director's lesser-known early films as the BFI launches a major retrospective. Overleaf, **Michael Brooke** rediscovers a lost 1969 Loach, while **Antonia Bird**, **Luc Dardenne**, **Nell Dunn**, **Tony Garnett**, **Jimmy McGovern** and others pay tribute to his work



PIECES OF HISTORY
Much of the pioneering 1960s and 70s TV work by Ken Loach, opposite, has been difficult to see, including 'Days of Hope', top, and 'Diary of a Young Man', below



Ken Loach, who turned 75 in June, first entered television in 1963. Since then he has been responsible for over 50 television plays, documentaries and films, and he continues to make a film virtually every year. No history of British film and television over the last 40 years can fail to acknowledge the significance of works such as *Up the Junction* (1965), *Cathy Come Home* (1966), *Kes* (1969), *Days of Hope* (1975), *Riff-Raff* (1991), *Raining Stones* (1993), *Land and Freedom* (1995), *My Name Is Joe* (1998), *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) and *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006). The last few years have seen the DVD release of two box-sets entitled *The Ken Loach Collection*, and even half-forgotten films such as *Family Life* (1971) and *Black Jack* (1979) have made a welcome reappearance.

Loach's work now seems as well known as it's ever been, but the very fact that he has made so much means, almost inevitably, that we tend to hold a selective view of it. This is particularly true of his work for television, much of which has been difficult or even impossible to see. When Loach joined the BBC in 1963, it was still not common practice to retain recordings of TV programmes. It's therefore testimony to the quality of his work that so much of it has survived. Some of it, however, does appear to have gone forever, including the very first piece he directed: *Catherine* (1964), an experimental TV play dealing with the break-up of a marriage starring Kika Markham and Tony Garnett (later Loach's producer on a number of key works). One of the episodes Loach directed for the groundbreaking series *Diary of a Young Man* (1964) was only discovered in the last few years while another (Episode Three - 'Marriage, or For Better or Worse') remains lost. Even one of his productions for the famous *Wednesday Play* series, *Wear a Very Big Hat* (1965), starring Neville Smith as an aggrieved Liverpool mod, is missing.

Unless some industrious BBC archivist uncovers copies of them, these productions are destined to remain unknown to all but those who saw them at the time of their transmission. What's also surprising, however, is how difficult it has been to see the TV material that did survive. At the time of writing, the only one of Loach's TV works available on DVD is his heartrending tale of homelessness *Cathy Come Home*. While some dramas (such as *Up the Junction*) have enjoyed an occasional TV repeat, a major series such as *Days of Hope* - responsible for igniting both public controversies and academic debates - has not been shown on TV since 1978.

This month's release of the box-set *Ken Loach at the BBC* (including *Cathy Come Home*, *Up the Junction*, *Days of Hope* and six other works) looks set to remedy this situation - but only partly so, given that it will not include important works such as *Diary of a Young Man*, *The Coming Out Party* (1965) and *The Golden Vision* (1968). Meanwhile his work for commercial television - particularly the documentaries he made for Central Television and Channel 4 in the early 1980s - remains inaccessible. In the wake of the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979, Loach decided it was more important to make documentaries than drama, given how long it could take to bring fictional films to fruition. This decision resulted in the production of a four-part series about trade-union democracy, *Questions of Leadership* (1983). Even though Loach



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← agreed to cuts, Channel 4 refused to transmit any of these programmes and they have remained close to impossible to see ever since (partly because, unlike with most of Loach's work, even the National Film and Television Archive has not held copies of them).

It is of course extraordinary that so much of the work of Britain's leading filmmaker should have proved so difficult to see. This partly reflects the uncompromising bent of Loach's politics that has led him straight into controversy and battles over censorship. But it also reflects the relative lack of cultural status of TV in comparison to film. Loach himself has consistently rejected the idea that there is any fundamental difference between making work for TV and cinema. Virtually from the beginning of his TV career, his productions involved the use of film; along with the producer Tony Garnett, he fought to have shooting on 16mm accepted as a legitimate way of making TV drama. *In Two Minds* (1967) was his first production for TV to be shot entirely on film, and thereafter all his TV 'plays' were, in effect, films. Indeed, Garnett was so convinced of the cinematic qualities of *In Two Minds* that he explored the possibility of showing it in cinemas, and only failed to do so in face of opposition from within the BBC.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Loach's fellow director Stephen Frears declared at the time of the transmission of *Days of Hope* – subtitled "four films from the Great War to the General Strike" – that there was simply no British cinema film of comparable importance then being made. Ironically, Loach and Garnett had originally planned that the second film in the series would be made for cinema release but, due to the state of the British film industry at the time, had failed to raise the necessary funding. Despite both the popularity and clear cinematic ambitions of Loach's TV films, it's precisely because they did not appear in cinemas that they have so often been ignored in historical accounts of British film.

Transcending realism

The separation of Loach's television films from his later work made for the cinema (though still commonly funded by TV companies) has also had an impact on the critical perception of his films. Loach has, of course, consistently chosen to use TV and film as a way of drawing attention to the social and political situation of 'ordinary' people at the bottom of the social ladder. He has also attempted to do so by employing methods of filmmaking that he regards as faithful to the actuality of people's



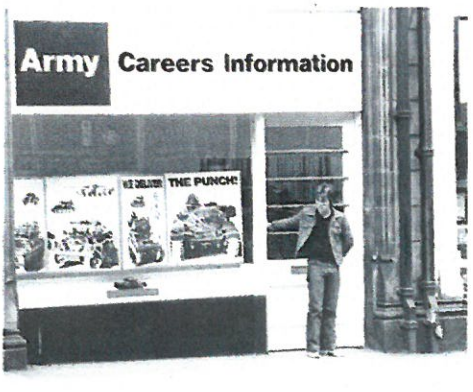
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lives. As a result, the most common terms employed to describe Loach's work have been 'realism', 'naturalism' and 'documentary drama'.

It would, of course, be absurd to claim that Loach does not belong to an international tradition of realist filmmaking. But the characterisation of Loach's 'realism' has often been highly simplistic, playing down the 'artistry' involved and reducing it to a single formula or method. If we take the long view of Loach's career, examining his film and TV work together, it soon becomes clear just how varied – and how far removed from the stereotyped conception of a 'Loach' film – some of it has actually been.

Take the following example. A woman dressed only in her underwear inspects a band of Grenadier Guards, along with various other characters from her past, who subsequently pursue her across open ground. When she falls down a well-like hole, her pursuers peer down at her while a teleprinter at the bottom of the screen reports on the absence of a meaning to life. The woman then wraps the rope that has been thrown to her around her neck, before being pulled to her death. You could be forgiven for thinking that this unsettling dream sequence might be the work of a Bergman or Fellini (or at least someone heavily under their influence). In fact, it is part of Episode Five ('Life, or A Girl Called Fred') of *Diary of a Young Man*, one of Loach's contributions to Troy Kennedy Martin and John McGrath's picaresque tale of a young northerner on the make in London.

The series was accompanied by a manifesto, written by Kennedy Martin, calling for a break with TV 'naturalism', and the episodes directed by Loach remain startling for the way in which they appropriate devices adapted from Brecht, Eisenstein and contemporary European art cinema. Although realism and modernism are commonly counterposed in critical writing, Loach's early work straddles the two, drawing on a variety of elements taken not only from documentary but also from the tradition of 'film art', from Soviet montage through to the *nouvelle vague*. Thus while *Up the Junction* is rightly remembered for its controversial tackling of contemporary social issues such



as abortion, it's also a formally audacious work that Tony Garnett referred to at the time as "not a play, a documentary or a musical" but "all of these at once". The same might be said of Loach's 1965 TV play *The End of Arthur's Marriage*, a Brechtian musical and satire co-written by Christopher Logue and Stanley Myers, in which a youthful John Fortune literally sings the praises of an overpriced watch and the main characters purchase an elephant from London Zoo before leading an impromptu procession of Lambretta-riding mods.

Those were bold but ragged experiments that are almost overloaded with ideas and invention. More disciplined but no less memorable is *In Two Minds*, Loach's first go at filming David Mercer's screenplay about schizophrenia. Influenced by the ideas of the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing, the film sets out to suggest how schizophrenia is less an identifiable physical illness than a label employed by the medical establishment to pathologise certain kinds of social condition. At first glance the film might seem to be heavily indebted to documentary, making use of interview techniques associated with a popular documentary series such as *Man Alive*. But the interviews in this case are being conducted by an unseen psychiatrist (or Laing surrogate), and the 'look' of the camera oscillates between the 'objective' standpoint of the imaginary TV interview and the 'subjective' point of view of the observing doctor. Even more radically, the psychiatrist departs the film halfway through, whereupon the camera – entirely unexpectedly – assumes the point of view of his former patient.

It was the wish of both Mercer and Laing that the experience of madness should be invested with a proper meaning, and one of the ways in which the film sets out to achieve this is through its use of subjective camera and stylised *mise en scène*. As a result, *In Two Minds* ends up looking much less like a documentary than a film by Bergman or Resnais (who himself later worked with Mercer on *Providence*), in which the boundaries between objective and subjective modes of perception have become blurred.

Loach did, of course, go on to remake *In Two Minds* for the cinema as *Family Life*, but it's a rela-



tively flattened-out version of the earlier film, in which many of the features that made *In Two Minds* so extraordinary – extreme close-ups, zooms, disorienting point-of-view shots, jump cuts, stylised compositions, interior monologues – are abandoned in favour of a more measured observational style. While *Family Life* remains a powerful and moving film in its own right, there does seem to be a strong case for arguing that it's the relatively unknown Loach TV film rather than its made-for-cinema counterpart that's the more artistically complex and exhilarating.

Blurring boundaries

What *In Two Minds* also indicates is how complicated Loach's negotiation of devices associated with documentary has been. It was, of course, the supposed mixing of fact and fiction in *Cathy Come Home* that sparked a controversy regarding the legitimacy of the documentary-drama form. Although the play was based on writer Jeremy Sandford's research into homelessness, the production itself mainly employed devices that were reminiscent of documentary – location shooting, casual camerawork, voiceovers – rather than what could be said to constitute 'genuine' documentary material. What made Loach's later *The Golden Vision* particularly unusual, therefore, was that it really did mix documentary and fiction.

Written by Neville Smith (with some help from ITN newscaster Gordon Honeycombe), the film follows the lives of a group of fanatical Everton supporters, whose passion for football takes precedence over the most fundamental events in the life cycle (birth, marriage and death). While the fans are fictional characters, played with great gusto by a cast of local club entertainers, the film also intercuts its fictional scenes with specially filmed footage of Everton personnel, including the club director John Moores, the manager Harry Catterick and the "golden vision" of the film's title, the Scottish centre forward Alex Young. While the genial nature of the film's comedy successfully immunised it against the kind of criticisms that had been directed at *Cathy Come Home*, the way in which it employs overlapping sound and montage to run together factual and fictional material actually makes *The Golden Vision* the more formally transgressive work.

Although it was a common complaint of the time that Loach's appropriation of documentary devices perpetrated some kind of fraud on the spectator, a more useful perspective would be to identify how a work such as *The Golden Vision* explicitly

YOUTHFUL PROMISE
From the start Loach's work has focused on the condition of the young in Britain, in such works as, from left, 'The Golden Vision', 'Looks and Smiles' and 'Up the Junction'

OUT OF SIGHT OUT OF MIND

Forty years after it was suppressed, a controversial Loach film is finally seeing the light of day. By Michael Brooke

In 1969 two distinguished British directors named Ken made films for television that would not only rank amongst their most controversial works, but also raised troubling questions about the limits that can be placed on creative endeavour by copyright holders and sponsors. Ken Russell's deliberately provocative Richard Strauss biopic *Dance of the Seven Veils* did at least get a single BBC broadcast in February 1970, before the Strauss estate made its views wrathfully clear. It has not been screened legally since, a ban that notionally exists until the relevant copyrights expire at the end of 2019.

By contrast, Ken Loach's documentary never got beyond the rough-cut stage, and there's no onscreen title: over the years, it's been referred to as *In Black and White* or simply *The Save the Children Fund Film*. It was jointly funded by the SCF and London Weekend Television, and intended for screening by the latter. But after viewing Loach's initial cut, the SCF refused to endorse the film, asked LWT to write off their investment, and even sought to have the negative destroyed.

So what caused the problem? The film was commissioned to mark the SCF's 50th anniversary, and intended to present examples of its work in the UK and Africa. Loach filmed the first part in Blackburn without incident. He then flew to Nairobi, where an American-born teacher at the fund's flagship school, Starehe, claimed that the school was essentially grooming its pupils to become pro-British members of an artificial new middle class. As the director described the situation to Graham Fuller for the book *Loach on Loach*: "The kids were being given a Western education, wore Western clothes and got up every morning and saluted the British flag. The libraries were full of cast-off books from the public schools, so you'd find Biggles and P.G. Wodehouse in a library for African kids. The headmaster was a guy who had the record for shooting more Mau Mau than anyone else."

Since Kenya had been independent since 1963, Loach interpreted this as a form of British neocolonialism, and accordingly devoted much of the documentary's second half to the subject, before concluding that Kenya would benefit from a genuine socialist revolution.

Neither the tone nor the content (the film opens with a quotation from Friedrich Engels) should have come as a surprise to anyone familiar with Loach's political views. Although this was his first out-and-out documentary, he had previously included non-fiction elements in the BBC plays *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home*, and the latter in particular was seen as a campaigning film, the charity Shelter being a key beneficiary. While Loach could legiti-



CHILDREN'S HOUR
Loach's documentary depicted the Save the Children Fund's work in Kenya as neocolonialist

mately be accused of biting the hand that was feeding him (the film was effectively useless as the intended promotional and fundraising vehicle), he seems to have been under the impression that because LWT had put up most of the budget, a genuine investigative documentary would be the most worthwhile way of spending it.

Loach's regular producer Tony Garnett was apparently unaware of the content of the film until Loach returned from Africa with the raw footage, whereupon he quickly realised that he had a major problem on his hands, not least because he would be the one having to deal with the ensuing fallout. At one point Garnett was seriously worried that he might be sued by the SCF, and that they would succeed in having the negative destroyed. Ultimately, while the film was never shown, Garnett successfully negotiated a compromise whereby all the material generated by the project (film stock and associated paperwork) was stored in the vaults of the BFI National Archive, where it has remained since 1971.

This was Loach's first experience of serious censorship, an issue that would blight much of his career in the 1980s when he resumed his documentary output with a series of television films about the trade-union movement and the miners' strike, some of which were extensively edited before transmission, others of which were not shown at all.

Over 40 years on, the SCF finally seems to have relented. At time of writing, the film's first public screening is scheduled for 1 September as part of the Loach retrospective at BFI Southbank, though some legal issues still need to be straightened out first. As the world premiere of a 'lost' film by a major British auteur, it will be shown in a very different context to the single late-night ITV screening that was originally planned, though at least now there's no chance of anyone mistaking it for an hour-long SCF infomercial.

engages in an active appropriation and hybridisation of a variety of filmmaking conventions. Thus while the film does, in part, seek to invest its drama with the authenticity of documentary, it does so in a way that leaves room for elements of both formal playfulness and fantasy. It's surely a rather unusual form of 'documentary drama' that ends with one of the central fictional characters coming on as a substitute at Goodison Park and scoring the winning goal for his beloved team.

Although rarely discussed in studies of Loach's oeuvre, *The Golden Vision* is nevertheless one of his most accomplished and straightforwardly enjoyable works (anticipating his recent, similarly playful football film *Looking for Eric*). It has, however, been overshadowed by the film that he went on to make shortly afterwards. Written by Barry Hines and shot by Chris Menges, *Kes* is probably the best known of all the director's works, and the one that came to define his evolving style. Although it contains all sorts of odd and quirky elements that hark back to his earlier work, *Kes* is generally regarded as marking a new turn in Loach's filmmaking. As Loach himself explained, he wanted to achieve a more sympathetic way of looking at his subject-matter, dispensing with the overt narrational devices of his earlier work in favour of a less interventionist approach to capturing action that involved positioning the camera further back from the actors and permitting scenes to play out more organically.

As a result, his films acquired a quieter, more meditative tone – despite their often increasingly radical political outlook. This can be seen, for example, in a later collaboration with Neville Smith, *After a Lifetime* (1971). Made for London Weekend Television, this film, like other Loach works, fell victim to cuts and delays, partly as a result of its sympathy for the political radicalism underpinning the General Strike of 1926. Dealing with the death of a political activist, the predominant mood is however elegiac rather than polemical as the film gently – and often humorously – observes the different ways in which the dead man's family and friends respond to his loss.

Something similar might also be said of *Days of Hope* which, by virtue of its open advocacy of revolutionary politics, could arguably be said to be the most radical TV drama ever to have been shown on British television. It certainly irked the conservative press of the time (which attacked its "left-wingery") as well as the BBC management, who fretted over its lack of balance. But while it would be difficult not to notice the film's political sympa-

thies, it is hardly the piece of agitprop that some of the fevered critical reactions suggested.

Loach himself indicated how he had sought to make "a measured, thoughtful film" that would "allow time" for its contents "to register". This was partly accomplished through the unhurried pacing of the series, its downplaying of spectacle and adoption of a distanced, observational viewpoint composed of shots that are held for longer than would normally be expected. Loach's style is sometimes criticised as no more than a vehicle for political messages, but it's also possible to see how his films of this period constitute a kind of 'slow cinema' based on patient observation of the ordinary and undramatic, even when supposedly dealing with extraordinary and dramatic historical events.

Indeed, by the time he made his 1981 cinema feature *Looks and Smiles*, Loach was becoming concerned that his approach to filmmaking had, in fact, become too "lethargic" and "arty-farty". Only recently available to view once more on YouTube, *Looks and Smiles* has hitherto been one of Loach's most neglected works. But looked at again, it's hardly the disappointment that Loach's own comments might suggest. Written by Barry Hines, the film was partly conceived as a follow-up to *Kes*; it follows the exploits of a young working-class lad as he searches in vain for the job that will keep him off the dole.

Shot in luminous black and white by the great Chris Menges, *Looks and Smiles* mixes elements of both European art cinema and British social realism as it evokes the frustration and ennui of life without a job, while also sustaining a strong sense of social and physical context. The film's rich visual imagery of Sheffield's public spaces not only captures the reality of a city facing economic decline, but also suggests the inner mental landscape of the characters who live there. As it turned out, *Looks and Smiles* was to prove to be Loach's last feature for a number of years, as he decided to concentrate instead on documentary production. It is, however, one of a number of early Loach films that not only remind us how good his work can be, but also encourage us to question how much of it we can truly lay claim to know.

John Hill's book *'Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television'* is published by BFI Publishing. The DVD box-set *'Ken Loach at the BBC'* is out now. *'Kes'* is rereleased in cinemas on 9 September. A *Ken Loach retrospective* plays until 12 October at BFI Southbank, London

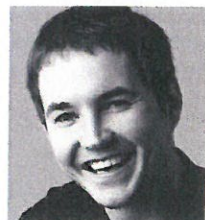
FEATHERED FRIEND
David Bradley as Billy in *'Kes'*, still Loach's best-known film – and an inspiration for Luc Dardenne, facing page



ON LOACH

What is he like to work with? How have his films influenced others? Collaborators and admirers pay tribute to Ken Loach

COLLABORATORS



MARTIN COMPSTON

You never see the script with Ken – he gives you a page day by day, so you have no idea how the film ends. It's a very useful tool, in that it keeps you excited. Sometimes, if you know

what's happening next, you let your energy drop, but when you don't know, you can't wait to get your hand on that piece of paper. Sometimes he doesn't give you anything – he's famed for the little curveballs he throws to the actors. But they're not gratuitous. They're to get the best reaction possible. **Martin Compston has acted in Loach's films 'Sweet Sixteen' and 'Tickets'**

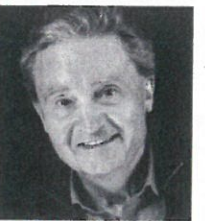


NELL DUNN

I was living in Battersea and working in a sweet factory, trying to be a writer and having lots of stuff turned down. *Up the Junction* [her 1963 short-story collection] is about people living in Battersea, working in factories, working in bag washes, working in the candle factory at the bottom of the road, going to the wash-house to wash their clothes, going swimming in Tooting Bec open-air pool, and having fun. It's about being young. I was just writing down what I heard and describing what I saw in quite an immediate way.

The process of adaptation [into a TV play] was pretty simple. I wandered about Battersea with Ken, showing him the things that I loved. The labour was divided pretty simply: he was in charge of everything to do with structure, and I was in charge of dialogue. So he would say, "We need more dialogue here" or "We need a link," and I would try and do it. Ken's *Up the Junction* did feel like a film of the book. But he was totally in charge of making it into a whole thing rather than little jagged bits and pieces.

Nell Dunn worked with Loach as the writer of 'Up the Junction'



TONY GARNETT

The Wednesday Play was my first job behind the camera. We put on 30-something feature film-length single dramas in a year. When we got into production, we needed a

lot of directors, and Ken was one of them.

Ken and I got to know each other, and got closer and closer. We were clearly overlapping both polit-

ically and aesthetically. I'd met him earlier, because I'd acted in a studio television play directed by Ken called *Catherine*. He was a very young, inexperienced director, so I got virtually no direction from him. One of the things I regret is that he has seen me acting, and I never got the chance to see him acting, which has meant he's been able to send me up for decades, and I've not been able to return it. He'd given up acting by then.

So we became good friends during the course of the first *Wednesday Play* series. *Up the Junction* was a series of loosely connected vignettes of teenage people in South London. What attracted me and Ken first of all was the authenticity. It just rang true – Nell [Dunn]'s writing is like that. And there's something very poignant, very moving about the sheer energy of teenagers. It was irresistible material, perfect for what Ken is good at, and he made a very good job of it.

There were some techniques used which were probably novel to most of our audience. One of the things Ken and I would talk about was post-war Italian cinema. We were very enamoured of many of the films coming out of Eastern Europe. We were quite fond of Brecht, too. So there was some attempt, on the one hand, to draw an audience emotionally into the predicament of the characters, but on the other, we didn't want them to wallow in that. We wanted them to judge.

Tony Garnett produced several of Loach's TV plays, including 'Cathy Come Home' and 'In Two Minds', and features, including 'Kes' and 'Family Life'



JONATHAN MORRIS

I first started working with Ken in 1980. I was very young. He was allocated me, and wasn't particularly happy about it. I was a staff editor at ATV, which became Central Television,

in Elstree. It was on a documentary called *Auditions* about three young dancers in search of work.

The difference about working on a Ken Loach film... is that the actors are given freedom. They don't have to hit marks. Actors can go and pretty much do as they feel, so if they're drinking or smoking they don't have to take a drag on a cigarette at a particular moment, so the problems are really continuity, which is why Ken tends to shoot quite a few takes. But of course what we get is a great performance, because there's no hang-ups about what they've got to do, or whether they've got to put on a strange accent.

Jonathan Morris has edited many Ken Loach films over the last 30 years, including 'Raining Stones', 'Land and Freedom' and 'The Wind That Shakes the Barley'

WRITERS AND DIRECTORS



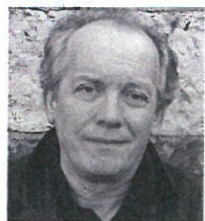
ANTONIA BIRD

For me he's a hero, because he's stuck to his beliefs. He's made films about things that matter deeply to our society, and he's continuously done it through his career. I found

The Navigators [2001] the most profoundly moving piece of television drama – probably the best in the last 15 years. It was about something that was real, it was beautifully made, the acting was great, and it was completely captivating and engaging. It wasn't boring or banging it on the head – it was entering into people's world and lives and work.

During the 1980s, when nobody would employ him, he made a documentary called *The Red and the Blue* [1982]. It's so simple: he just filmed at the Labour party conference and Tory party conference, but the way he edited and intercut between the two was world-class. It opened my eyes to what you can do with documentary material, without voiceover, without telling the audience what to think or what to feel.

Antonia Bird is the director of 'The Hamburg Cell', 'Face' and 'Priest'



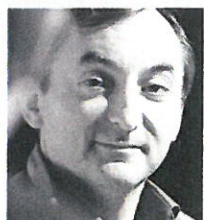
LUC DARDENNE

The first Ken Loach film I saw was *Family Life*, in 1973 or 74. I remember feeling indignation at [the girl's] situation, and compassion and comradeship for her. I've always admired this film – its immediacy, urgency and freedom.

In the mid-70s I also saw *Kes*. Its sudden ending – the boy burying his kestrel – is unforgettable. This boy and his bird stay with you for a long time after the film is over. Another moment in that film that my brother [co-director Jean-Pierre Dardenne] and I often talk about is the football-match scene, with the PE teacher [Brian Glover] who sees himself as Bobby Charlton. It's marvellous! Only Ken Loach could film that.

But the film of his I most admire is *Raining Stones*, a dense film, penetrating and accurate in its realism. It's a masterpiece. It manages to denounce the brutal exploitation of the underclasses, their humiliation, and at the same time to identify their refusal of divine justice in that magnificent scene where the priest absolves Bob of murder. Loach's characters come from the same background as ours, even if his perspective on their situations is more 'political' than ours.

Luc Dardenne is the co-writer and co-director of 'Rosetta', 'The Son' and 'The Child'

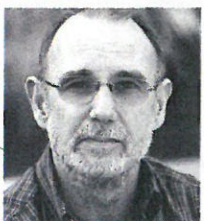


PETER KOSMINSKY

Watching *Days of Hope* was the single thing that most powerfully motivated me to become a filmmaker. What struck me at the time was the power of the medium as he demon-

strated it. There was one particular scene: no speeches, no exposition – it was purely done through a raucous scene of soldiers in a pub, and the transformation caused by a song. All you wanted to know about what was really going on in the minds of these young recruits – really little more than potential cannon fodder, and they knew it by that stage of [World War I] – had just been laid bare, far more eloquently than could have been done in an article or a novel.

Peter Kosminsky is the writer-director of 'The Promise', 'Britz' and 'The Government Inspector'



JIMMY MCGOVERN

TV drama at its best convinces you that what you're seeing on screen is actually happening. And there's nobody better than Ken for that. Just the reek of authenticity – it's that that makes him stand out.

That big scene in *Land and Freedom*, where they talk about collectivising the land and how they're going to organise it – it's just a debate. Every rule in the book says you cut that scene. I would never attempt to write that scene. And yet you watch it, and it's mesmerising. That's because of the way he's cast it – he's got people who've lived it. They look real, they sound real, it means a lot to them.

Another scene: in *Riff Raff*, with Ricky Tomlinson in a bath, and the Arab women walk in. Afterwards Ricky says, "They don't see much of the old white sausage over there, do they?" I'm watching this with my mouth open. That's not politically correct in any way whatsoever, but it's so human and so funny. Ken can be so political, but he can portray the working class as they are.

I'd do anything for Ken. I've tried to get him – I've planned strategies to get him – but he does his own thing with his own people. I'd give my right arm to work with him, but I think every other writer would as well.

Jimmy McGovern is the writer of 'Hillsborough' and the writer/creator of 'Cracker' and 'The Street'

Interviews by Mark Duguid, Ed McGown, Geoffrey Macnab and Gemma Starkey. Full versions of these interviews and more are available at www.bfi.org.uk