

## Bachelor's project

**NTNU**  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Art and Media Studies

Khaleel Etwebi

# A camera for a Knave

Documenting a fictional life

Bachelor's project in FILM2000

Supervisor: Ilona Hongisto

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## **A camera for a knave: Documenting a fictional life.**

### **1. Introduction**

A dimly lit room, color washed walls, two brothers, a young man and a child, sharing a small bed, and then an alarm clock breaks the silence. Every time I watch the opening sequence of *Kes* (1969) by the British film-maker Ken Loach I find myself left in awe and wonder, fully engaged in the seemingly eventless scene and its realism. Throughout the film, I felt like I was watching a documentary about the real life of real people and that this fictional film seems to be documenting real life events. The degree of realism the film managed to convey about the characters' struggles, social class and daily life has mesmerized me and left me wondering where did that feeling come from? What was it in the film visually that made its story believable, so real and the performances to be so natural?

In my thesis, I will be raising several questions as for what makes *Kes* a social realist film and what are the cinematic elements that the film shares with documentary films. Furthermore, I ask how social realism is achieved and affected by the cinematic devices that Loach uses or abandons in this film, for example, the way the main characters are portrayed, the usage of real locations and nonprofessional actors, the way the scenes and locations are framed and filmed, the distance of the camera and the viewer to the subject, and other cinematic devices that make this film a social realist one. I will be looking into the cinematic language that Ken Loach has developed and consistently uses to tell such a political and a social realistic story as well as the documentary devices he employs under the umbrella of a fiction film.

To achieve that I will be referring to some of his earlier works and searching for the cinematic devices that Ken Loach brought from his early documentary/TV work he made for the BBC and how he managed to alter them and use them in his fictional work for cinema, blurring at times the boundary between investigating documentary/TV reportage and cinema, fact and fiction. In order for me to understand his work and social realism as a cinematic movement, I'll be referring to a selection of academic work on the subject of social realism of several film scholars who wrote about, interviewed, and studied Ken Loach, his work and social realism in general. Specifically, John Hill, Jacob Leigh, Graham Fuller, Samantha Lay and others.

### **1.1. A short summary and the film's theme**

*Kes* tells the story of a young boy named Billy Casper (David Bradley) who lives in a town in northern England called Barnsley. The town is one of several towns in Yorkshire famous for its coal-mining industry, where the lower working class makes up the majority of its residents. The film shows us different episodes from Billy's life that spans couple of months. Billy is neglected by his own family, his mother (Lynne Perrie) and older brother Jud (Freddie Fletcher), and he is neglected as well by his teachers at school who see him as a hopeless troublemaker with no academic future whatsoever. Billy begins to drift away from his family and schoolmates to avoid trouble, and he finds temporarily solace in life when he finds a young Kestrel (a small falcon) and begins to learn how to train it. Proving, by doing so, to everyone around him, but mostly to himself, that he is capable of achieving success in life. Nevertheless, the harsh reality closes in around him and eventually kills his hope.

*Kes* is the second feature film for Ken Loach. His first feature was *Poor Cow* (1967) and previously to that he worked for BBC and made several dramas for TV, like the documentary drama *Cathy Come Home* (1966) which was part of *Wednesday Play* (a TV series dedicated to social issues that aired from 1964 to 1970) a drama that discussed the problems of homelessness and public housing in Britain at the time. Throughout his career Ken Loach has made several films that tend to be viewed and classified as social realist films, but it is in *Kes* that I believe his depiction of social issues matured both visually and thematically. To me, a social realist film aspires to express the lives of its characters in a way that is truthful to their social status, location, and their time. It is a film that turns national statistics into dramatic stories with ordinary people at its center as its heroes, and by doing so it brings neglected social problems back to the limelight.

One can see *Kes* as a protest against the country's educational system. It describes and shows how a great number of children in schools all around Britain are abandoned and thrown into labor work by the country's terrible educational system. A system that functions with unsympathetic and rigid rules and that retains mostly teachers who lack faith and hope in their pupils, which in return weaken the students' faith in themselves. (See Leigh, J. 2002. p.64.) The film is based on a novel by Barry Hines called *A Kestrel for A Knave*. Hines, who is a schoolteacher and the son of a former coalminer, adapted his own novel to a manuscript for the

film. Hines wrote all the dialogue in the local dialect and worked closely with Loach to help bring the authenticity of his words to the screen. The title of the novel comes from an old roman law that states what kind of a bird a member of each social class is allowed to keep and it is the epigraph that the novel starts with: “An Eagle for an Emperor, a Gyrfalcon for a King; a Peregrine for a Prince, a Saker for a Knight, a Merlin for a Lady; a Goshawk for a Yeoman, a Sparrowhawk for a Priest, a Musket for a Holy water Clerck, a Kestrel for a Knave.” (*Selected from the Boke of St Albans, 1486, and a Harleian manuscript*). (Hines, B. 1968. p.7.)

Billy is the knave in the film, which refers to a male servant or a man of humble birth or position. Billy's world is his home, his town and his school with the coalmines looming in the distance covering with its smoke the light of hope for a better future. It is as if Billy moves from one prison to another. He goes from his house to his school, surrounded by walls and people who try to corner and pin him down. It is as if he cannot escape his destiny which is going down the pit like his older brother. One can see Billy as a blameless character where he is a victim to the harsh and indifferent adult world. Unlike characters from Loach's earlier works like Cathy in *Cathy Come Home* Where she and her husband try to put up a fight against the authorities and protest against the injustices of the country's housing system, Billy is not portrayed as a rebel who is fighting against the unjust system but rather as a vulnerable little kid who is trying in the best way he can to cope with the hostile and bullying circumstances and environment he finds himself in, both at home from his brother Jud or outside in the world. Billy manages to get by in this world by stealing, lying, and eventually avoiding and drifting away from every single human being in the city and finding his comfort and solace with his bird.

## **2. Main content**

### **2.1. The British new wave and social realism**

Ken Loach was a part of the new wave of British film directors who came after the Second World War and who were concerned with telling stories about and inspired from the daily lives of the British society's different social classes. Loach was one of the film directors who was also inspired by Italian neorealism, the French avantgarde and films coming from Eastern European



countries. He was inspired by social realist films and theories, where politics, social class, and the struggle for basic human rights, be it individual or national struggle, are affecting and shaping the director's cinematic expression. (Fuller, G. 1998. p.38.)

Ever since he started making TV plays and working as a director in early 1960s, Loach's work was shaped and influenced by his political stance as a socialist. His works often if not always have individuals from the lower class as their protagonist:

“The British new wave films constituted an important landmark in the cinematic representation of the working class, caught at a key moment of economic and social change. In particular, the films reveal an anxiety about the demise of the traditional working class, associated with work, community and an attachment to place, in the face of the affluence associated with consumerism, mass culture and suburbanization.” (Hill, J. 2011. p.113).

Ever since he started making films, Loach had carefully chosen scripts and adopted novels with social realist themes. Films about struggling people who are often betrayed or overlooked by their own society. Where the story is told visually in an emotional way that borrows its essence from melodrama and the documentary's sympathetic look. According to Richard Armstrong, “Loach deals in strong emotions and audience identification, characters we tend to associate with Hollywood melodrama, shaped by wide shots, long takes, naturalistic acting and the looser exposition of documentary. Locating identifiable feelings in an identifiable Britain lends Loach's films the apparent patina of everyday working life.” (Armstrong, R. 2005. p.97).

*Kes* is a good example of a work of social realism from its theme and visual form to its message. It can be described as a film that aims to show the life of an individual from a certain social class and through it comment on the society as a whole, and this portrayal is done in a realist way. This is to say that the story is told visually in a way that reduces the extensive use of cinematic devices and the intervention of the director on the actors' performances, using instead what is often characterized as natural performances. Social realist films are often independent, dealing with marginal characters and using real locations and unprofessional actors to tell a story that is tinged with its director's political believe. (Lay, S. 2002, p. 9.)

## **2.2. Casting and collaborating with the actors**

As mentioned before, social realist films often avoid the usage of well-known professional actors and rely instead on local amateur performers. John Hill (2011) explains that *Kes* was the first film where Ken Loach adopted this approach and decided to work with non-professionals. Previously he had only cast professional or semi-professional actors in main roles. In *Kes*, the majority of the cast are amateurs, with the exception of Billy's teacher Mr. Farthing played by Colin Welland who had some experience in acting from before. Ken Loach himself was the grandchild of a coalminer. He associated deeply with the lower and middle class and he felt an urging need to make the film in a manner that portray their lives in a truthful way.

In *Kes*, the whole cast came from the area where the film was shot, and they all spoke their native dialect in the film. This came from the belief that social class is something embedded within the person's movements, posture, and way of talking and that it cannot be completely faked or acted. To Loach it is essential that the characters' dialect and way of talking and overall life situation is second nature to the actors. One can argue that method actors can embody the characters they portray, but such embodiment has its own limits as it often lacks that subconscious imprints that time leaves through upbringing and experience in the behavior of individuals from a certain social class or geographical area that an outsider cannot absorb in a short period of time as Loach explained: "You carry your class with you in how you talk, how you behave, how you pick up a fork. You can't really act it, and you can't act a dialect." (Hill, J. 2011. p.121). Nevertheless, Loach would later on in his other films tend to balance his usage of professionals and non-professionals across his productions and rarely completely rely on one over the other.

To achieve a realistic and naturalistic performance from his cast, Loach works following a method that makes his characters quite accessible to his actors. He works in a way that allows his actors to embody their new roles instead of acting them. Loach gives his actors habitual and familiar tasks that they can perform, and he places them in locations they are familiar with. David Bradley who played Billy is walking the streets of his own town and sitting in his own real classroom interacting with his real classmates. In a way, he is doing the things he used to do in his daily life, the camera just happened to be there. Loach wants the actors to react rather than act. He wants them to arrive at a particular scene not knowing what is going to happen. That is

why he almost never gives his actors the whole manuscript, and always shoot his scenes in a chronological order allowing the actors to go through the journey of the characters they are playing together at the same time. Fearing what their characters would fear, discovering what their characters would discover. Their reaction becomes the characters' reaction. (Fuller, G. 1998, p.46, 96-97.)

The film is full of genuine reaction shots, but one particular scene stands out. It is the scene where Billy and the other boys are going to be punished for smoking by the School headmaster, Mr. Gryce (Bob Bowes). It starts with a long sermon by the headmaster about the new generation's lack of morals and respect for their elders. It is a sermon that the boys have probably heard in their school from their real headmaster and teachers for countless times. Thus, they are reacting in a truthful way by just naturally being there. When it came to the actual caning Loach did not tell the kids that they are going to be really caned with a stick and not just act it. Their reaction to the painful caning is genuine and is one of the difficult moments to watch in the film. Their reaction is not merely truthful because they are feeling real pain but because they are receiving it unwillingly from a source of authority that they are taught as students not to object to. At that moment they became one with their characters and their pain became one. So in a sense, Loach's approach to working with actors and the performances he managed to receive from them can be seen as a documentation of the actor's journey within the realm of their fictional character, where reality and fiction intertwine and they are hard to tell a part.

### **2.3. The visual style of *Kes***

*Kes* marked a change in Loach's visual style. It was partly due to his collaboration with the cinematographer Chris Menges and their common appreciation for Eastern European films of the 1960s primarily Czech new wave films (Fuller, G. 1998, p.38). This collaboration came at a vital moment in Loach's career and it helped to direct it visually in a way that harmonized more with Loach's humanist and socialist eyes. Chris Menges had previously, like Loach, worked in documentary. He even worked with the Polish cinematographer Miroslav Ondricek on *If...* (1968) just a year before collaborating with Loach in *Kes*. Ondricek who is famous for working with the Czech filmmaker Milos Forman on *A Blond in Love* (1965), one of the most critically acclaimed films from the Czech new wave. It is clear that Menges found Ondricek's method of

working interesting and he, together with Loach, was inspired by the Czech way of filmmaking and saw it as a great example. Ken Loach even said that “[t]he work of directors like Milos Forman and Jiri Menzel and others who worked in the sixties still came across as very humanist, compassionate films. They weren’t soft in any way, but had a very sharp, wry wit. At times, they were quite savage but still with strong humanist streak. That’s what we took from them, anyway. They made us feel that they were the kinds of films we wanted to make.” (Fuller, G. 1999. p.38).

This balancing between being humanist compassionate film on one hand and not being soft in anyway with its handling of its characters and main subject is in my opinion what Ken Loach wanted to achieve in *Kes*. He wanted to adapt this way of filmmaking to avoid the shortcomings he felt from his previous work for the BBC. He wanted to avoid the reportage feel his previous work gave and the way the camera chased like a news reporter after its subjects rather than observed them with a humanist eye. Loach further explains that “[w]e talked a lot about that (meaning Loach and Chris Menges) and decided that the effort shouldn’t be to make the camera do all the work, but should be to make what is in front of the camera as authentic and truthful as possible. The camera’s job was to record it in a sympathetic way and to be unobtrusive, not to be slick. So, when we came to do *Kes*, there was a conscious move away from newsreely, chasing kind of photography to a more reflective, observed, sympathetically lit style of photography.” (Fuller, G. 1998. p.39).

### **2.3.1. The camera as a sympathetic observant**

Loach and Menges often placed the camera on a tripod further away from the characters, used long telephoto lenses and zoomed in, framing the characters in a medium close-up to a close-up shot. They followed the action by panning the camera as its placed on a tripod and tilt it following with it the semi predetermined movement of the character. By semi-predetermined I mean that Loach did not use markers for the actors (which are markers placed on the floor where the actors have to move from one marker to another saying specific line of dialogue on each one) as he saw it as a distraction to their performance and an artificial layer that stands against the achievement of a realist and a natural performance. Instead he preferred to let the actors move freely in an area he knew the director of photography will be able to cover. (Fuller, G. 1998. p.41-42).

Placing the camera this way attains two things, first of all it gives the actor the room to move around and not be aware of the presence of the camera which results in a more believable and convincing performance, secondly it allows for the scene to be shot in one long take which gives a sense of reality where the screen time is equal to that in reality and that cuts and edits does not interfere with the audience's perception of the events as they unfold. Long takes which are one of social realism's key elements help to establish and maintain a sense of spatial coherence where the viewer can place the character in relation to their environment. It helps as well to build a form of connection between the characters and the places they inhabit. (Fuller, G. 1998. p.41)

There is a scene in the film that illustrates this concept perfectly. It is the scene at the betting shop when Billy goes to place the bets on two horses that his brother asked him to do. The camera follows him as he runs to the shop, then goes inside squeezing himself between two men who stand at the entrance, then we see him inside the shop from a distance as he talks to a woman behind the counter and then goes and asks one of the customers about the winning chances of the two horses chosen by Jud. After Billy is advised not to place money on weak horses, he chooses not to and leaves the shop. The camera is in the eyesight of Billy and the other people at the betting shop. It pans and zooms and follows the events from a distance, not interfering with his mission. This method is used in almost every scene in the film. Loach at times films from opposite angles and cuts between the two angles in conversational scenes between two characters, like the scene at the library when Billy talks with the librarian trying to loan a book about falconry.

“The sequence shot -or long single take- ensures that the director will do without the various expressive tricks and effects that the medium offers him, and that at the same time, his entire interest will be oriented towards setting out a sign, whose iconic nature may not be reduced to a simple figurative relation, but also involves the whole spatio-temporal development of the phenomenon translated into images or of the action invented as the dramatic root of the event on screen.” (Williams, C. 1980. p.222).

In the betting shop scene, in addition to his placing the camera at an observational distance from Billy and filming him with a telephoto lens, Loach lets us observe in one continuous shot the location and the situation when he does not cut directly after Billy's exit of the shop to the next scene, but he rather let the camera hangs there briefly showing us the face of an unknown

customer. This shot lasts for few seconds after our main protagonist has left the place, strengthens the realist depiction of the betting shop and its inhabitants. It shows us and establishes, even for a brief moment, a link between Billy and other people who are visiting the betting shop that we did not notice as we are focusing on Billy. The conscious decision of placing the camera at a distance, shooting Billy's movement in one take and allowing the scene to last for several more seconds before cutting, helps us establish a connection between Billy and his environment. A spatio-temporal connection where Billy's small journey is captured in real time and covered in one place. It helps us connect Billy's small journey of entering the shop and deciding not to place his brother's bets with the other costumers at the shop. In other words, it sets Billy's journey in a greater context with little use of editing.

### **2.3.2. The less the merrier**

Another idea that Loach drew from the Eastern European films that affected the film visually, was their use of light; how they used natural light and how they minimized the use of artificial light to avoid crowding the scene for the actors. A process that Ken Loach elegantly described when he said to Graham Fuller that:

“The idea was to light the scenes in such a way that the space we were shooting would be lit rather than the shot itself. That was very important because it meant we could dispense with the idea of actors having to hit their marks and that liberated them to move about at will. We also wouldn't be concerned with bathing them in a pool of light or catching a light in their eyes, which is the traditional way of shooting someone. We wanted to light the space, so the light fell democratically but unostentatiously on everyone. Not only is it more pleasing this way, but the lighting isn't then saying, 'This is the leading actor in the scene or the film and these other actors aren't so important.' This is what we did on *Kes* and it became a central tenet of how we worked.” (Fuller, G. 1998. p.39-40).

For Ken Loach, this way of working with light helped him avoid predictable manipulation of the viewer's attention towards what and who is or isn't important in a given scene and instead to equally observe the action with a humanist eye that avoids being interventionist in its attitude towards the action unfolding in front of it. This method of working brought with it a great deal of

advantages for the actors who were largely amateur ones standing for the first time in front of a camera.

In *Kes*, Ken Loach has reduced the use of songs, montages and voiceover in comparison to his earlier work. For example, the whole training sequence when Billy catches and trains his bird can be seen as a montage of sorts, but it is done in a different manner to a standard montage in mainstream films. The sequence lasts for about 4 minutes, from the point Billy captures the kestrel to its flying from a post across a field to his hand. It spans a period of several weeks and it differs from typical montages in that it has a low pace of cutting from one image to another, and it does not have a song or an upbeat melody, which are often used to unite the images together and adds a layer of continuity to the sequence. On the contrary, in the training sequence Loach uses voiceover as a form of continuity, and it is the only place where voiceover was used in the film. It is worth noting that the voiceover is quite unique in the sense that Billy is not talking directly to the viewer, rather it seems as if he is reading the instructions out from the falconry book that he stole and not him telling it to us in a voice-of-god manner. It seems as if we are sitting there with him as he sits alone in his cold living room reading the instructions in the book slowly and aloud in a way that he never probably does in classroom.

The different use of voiceover demonstrates the shift in Loach's directing style. We are observing Billy as he observes life rather than observing life through him. Loach's new take on the usage of voiceover and montage further illustrates the change in his visual and directorial style as a filmmaker that he developed as mentioned before with his director of photography Chris Menges and that can be seen as a result of his pursuit towards a more observational style that some documentaries possess, and his avoidance of using the camera to grab the viewer's attention like some other documentary films do with their hand held cameras.

### **2.3.3. *Cathy Come Home* and the subsequent “documentary look” of *Kes***

In his last TV play *Cathy Come Home* and before starting making feature films, Loach began to explicitly experiment with blending fiction and documentary filmmaking, both visually as in the way of filming and in storytelling by, among other things, using interviews with real residents of the residential area where the characters lived. This stems from the fact that the main characters, despite being professional actors, and the real residents of the filming locations are both ‘living’

the same situation and are ‘sharing’ the same problem. That being public housing. For Loach this ‘documentary look’ has brought with it a sense of realness and of truth that was raw and unpolished. Such visual elements that were often associated with documentaries helped or perhaps tricked the viewer to see the films as reality and to see the actors as real people. Even the time of the day the plays were aired on television was of great importance to Loach as he explained to Fuller: “For about forty weeks a year, the *Wednesday Play* aired every Wednesday at 9p.m., after the late evening news. We were very anxious for our plays not to be considered dramas but as continuations of the news. The big investigative documentary programme at the time was *World in Action* and we tried to copy its techniques and cut with rough, raw, edgy quality, which enabled us to deal with issues head on.” (Fuller, G. 1998. p.15). Using similar visual techniques to news reports was a factor in leading the viewers to believe that what they are seeing is rather real and not fiction and it suited the story that Loach was trying to tell. As the housing problem that the character Cathy in *Cathy Come Home* is facing is rather a real topical problem that the British society were facing at the time.

In his later productions, Loach stopped directing plays for TV and went on to make films to be shown in cinema theaters together with his producer Tony Garnet who produced most of Loach’s work for TV. They had established their own independent film production company called Kestrel films. (Hill, J. 2011. p.104.) This change came with a change in Loach’s visual style which manifested itself in *Kes*. He began to abandon some of his documentary inspired techniques used earlier like the use of interviews and the extensive use of voiceover and the rawness of TV news reports. For example, in *Cathy Come Home* we hear a voiceover of a man who reads statistics of how many families around Great Britain that are homeless. The voiceover is the voice of a newscaster that gives the audience facts about the current situation of homelessness in Britain.

This in a way helps the viewer to put the main characters housing problem in a bigger perspective, showing that it is a national crisis rather than an individual case. But this approach to deal with social problems as a news report carries with it the risk of not exploring the relations between the characters in a dramatic sense and for the viewer to experience their story as statistics. It is this approach to handling social issues that Ken Loach abandons in *Kes*, where he aims to show the human relations and predicaments his characters build and face respectively through a more sympathetic and cinematic eye. He later notes: “We rejected that earlier style of



editing pieces of narrative with factual information because although it might have been appropriate at the time, in the end it seemed to inhabit the development of characters and their relationships. And it often seemed a crude way of saying things that were better implicit than explicit.” (Leigh, J. 2002. p.117).

Nevertheless, he aspired to keep the sense of authenticity and realness he found in documentaries into his fictional work. Most of all, he brought from documentary the concept and practice of observation; to observe his characters’ lives as if they were free spirited individuals living in the real world and not fictional ones. To use the camera as a bystander that sees what the character sees when they see it, instead of using the camera as an eye of God that follows a predetermined path in a world where the characters have no control over their fate. As John Hill points out, “Loach has described his increasing dissatisfaction with ‘the go-in-and-grab-it type of filmmaking’ which he associated with productions such as *Cathy Come Home* and the element of ‘modishness’ that he felt marred *Poor Cow*. In *Kes*, therefore he sought to move on from what he increasingly regarded as an overly ‘exploitative cinema style’ in the direction of a more ‘sympathetic way of looking at the subject’.” (Hill, J. 2011. p.117).

There is a scene in *Kes* that seems to align with the *cinema-vérité* documentary tradition or direct-cinema. A tradition in filmmaking that implies direct access to life through showing life as it is with an encouraged intervention of the filmmaker as a means to capture its truth. (Williams, C. 1980. p.224). It is the scene where Billy’s mother and Jud are out on a Saturday’s night at a local bar. This scene is the only scene that does not exist in the original novel. It seems that Ken Loach wanted to document a kind of broad sense of working-class culture. Because we are suddenly introduced to the hardworking men and women of Barnsley as they enjoy their leisure time in a local club. It is only in this scene that we see people from the working-class having fun and enjoying themselves.

We observe them from a distance at the beginning, as we see a group of local musicians performing a song with lyrics full of adult humor. Then Loach cuts between two different conversations, the first between Billy’s mother, her lover, and her friends and the second between Jud and his friends. The scene continues as then a small tension rises between Jud, his mother, and her lover. What is most interesting in this scene is when Billy’s mother begins to talk about her son Billy and his future to other women who probably have children in the same

school with him. Billy's mother talks about how he is doomed in such an educational system that does not nurture and believe in his abilities. The scene suddenly feels like a documentary where we see and overhear worried parents in a townhall discussing their children's problems. Suddenly, Billy's mother is not a main character inhabiting her own world but rather a member of a larger group who faces the same problems as her.

#### **2.4. Untraditional social realist elements**

Although Loach in *Kes* does rely heavily on the previously mentioned cinematic devices to tell his story in a realist way, he does as well use other cinematic devices that are not often associated with social realism. For example, extra-diegetic music and on-screen titles are used in a few sequences. The film also has some characters that are quite clichéd, as opposed to being multifaceted, such as the teachers at Billy's school.

There is a scene in the second half of the film where Loach uses these unconventional devices. That scene is the football match scene, which starts with the entrance of the Sports master Mr. Sugden (Brian Glover) as he runs across a football field to non-diegetic music of a marching brass band melody holding a ball in his hand and jumping in the air imitating the movements of professional football players as they warm up for a match. The music here is used to illustrate Mr. Sugden's character by associating the character's behavior with brass music that is loud and demands attention. This starts a whole scene full of humorous lines and slapstick comedy details. Mr. Sugden plays a team captain, a referee, and a PE teacher at the same time. His character seems to be a cliché of a PE teacher. The way he talks, behaves and how he takes football seriously imagining as if he was a professional player are all too familiar to most of us who have had sport classes. Mr. Sugden, the school headmaster, Mr. Gryce (Bob Bowes) and all the teachers fit perfectly to the image we have on teachers. They are self-centered authoritative figures who are keen to express and show their mistrust and disappointment over the new generation and their nostalgic memories from the past. The viewer finds humor in these forms of cliché/familiar character presentation and even though it is not a multifaceted representation, it still is a realistic one, simply through its familiarity to the viewer.

Later in the football scene when one of the teams scores a goal, the score appears written on the screen as "Spurs 1- Manchester United 0" even though this is not a traditional cinematic device

used within the realm of social realism, but still it matches perfectly the overall comedic nature of the scene. I think Loach does not set out planning to use every criteria that critics has used to classify films as social realist ones, but rather he sets out to use every cinematic device that helps to ignite and maintain an emotional response from the viewer that is true to the moment and authentic to the experience of the characters. Loach's intentions, in my opinion, are not to manipulate the viewer to feel a certain type of emotion, but rather to minimize his interventions as a filmmaker and let the moment itself speak the truth to the viewer. This minimization does not mean the absence of Loach as a filmmaker but rather his main work is done before the camera starts to shoot. His choice of the right cast and placing them in locations and situations they can relate to, is what adds authenticity to the scene, even if their characters and dialogue are tinged with cliché. It is as if Loach is the football manager and his team is his cast. He chooses his most suitable players and train them and when the match starts and the camera starts filming, he steps back and watch.

This football match scene further illustrates Loach's ability to change and move from one emotional mood to another and to observe sad fleeting moments. An example is when the two team captains, Mr. Sugden and a student named Tibbutt (David Glover) are choosing their teams out from a horizontal line of shivering students standing in the cold. Mr. Sugden and Tibbutt alternate in calling for their chosen team players, the line becomes shorter and shorter until the two remaining players are Billy and an overweight student. Mr. Sugden calls for Billy to join his team and then Loach cuts to a shot of the overweight boy walking towards Tibbutt's team. He is the last in line and he ends up in a team that did not want him. Tibbutt did not call his name and therefore he remains anonymous to us viewers. This heart wrenching moment of not being chosen nor wanted, that we can all relate to, illustrates Loach's sympathetic observational style. The camera films the boy from a distance, and it hangs there as he joins the back of Tibbutt's team. Loach then cuts to the beginning of the match to a more comedic scene of Mr. Sugden/team captain/referee foul and humorous play in the field. Later, we see another moment in this football sequence where Billy and another student talk about how they cannot bare the cold anymore. It is one of the few sequences where Billy is having a conversation with another boy of his age without bullying or being bullied. Loach even further balances his use of humor in the football match scene by following it with a darker scene where Mr. Sugden punishes Billy by forcing him to take a bath in freezing water. (Leigh, J. 2002. p.79.)

## **2.5. Endless cycle**

*Kes* is a harsh presentation of the working class's economic situation and the cultural and social disadvantages of a child born to a lower-class family. Instead of breaking free from the economic and cultural shackles that constrain them, Loach's characters often find themselves trapped in an endless cycle of violence and failure. "The narrative structures of social realist texts tend to operate cyclically or episodically. Social realist texts resist resolutions and the future is rarely bright." (Lay, S. 2002. p.21). So, in a social realist film we rarely come to a peaceful conclusion to the predicaments the characters find themselves in. The end of the film is often a bleak one and even if the events of the film end at a happier note, there is still nevertheless an absence of resolution. A feeling that the same old problems of abuse, neglect, and trouble will return and hunt the protagonist again. People in Loach films often, if not always, find themselves in this ruthless cycle with no exit. Cathy in *Cathy Come Home*, Billy in *Kes*, and even in his recent work especially his latest two films with Daniel and Ricky in *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) and *Sorry We Missed You* (2019) respectively.

Loach's characters are in an endless struggle with no end in sight trapped in this vicious cycle that they cannot escape from. Their failure to gain a better future and emancipate themselves is not due to their powerlessness, but rather because of the oppressing system's dire need to hold them in that position for it to function. Talking about Billy, Loach said:

"He's absolutely trapped. In the film, through the story, you see a whole side to life that the world cannot afford to see, that it cannot afford to acknowledge. At the time, in the North of England, boys like Billy were needed for unskilled labour. People who saw the film said to us, 'Couldn't he get a job in a zoo?', which misses the entire point, because if it's not Billy who's going to be exploited as unskilled labour, it's going to be someone else in that predicament; the world requires him and people like him to fill that role." (Fuller, G. 1998. p.44)

Avoiding a so called a happy end was crucial to Ken Loach. As he mentioned in the aforementioned quote with Fuller, that Billy is not living in a land with an educational system that is capable to recognize his talent and fully nurture his potentials. Even if Billy was encouraged to pursue his love for animals and find a job at the zoo, there will always be someone else who will take his place down at the pit. This approach to depicting reality is seen in Loach's

portrayal of the town, its industry, and its nature. Countryside is portrayed in the film as a place where the industrial and nature are in constant fight with each other. As they exist in the same city. Just like good and mischievous, hope and despair in Billy, who at one point in the film literary rises above the city in a scene where he takes a break from delivering newspapers and rests on a green hill reading “The Dandy” comic while the industrial factories and coal pits are lurking in the horizon. In social realist films, characters often try to escape the social and emotional predicaments they find themselves trapped in by physically standing up on a hilltop and looking down on the city. In a way, they rise above their situation and look down upon it as if they managed to detach themselves from their troubles and escape their prison for a moment to return to it again. Billy rises high up like his kestrel feeling free for a moment, but nevertheless he is still a captive and bound to return to his societal cage.

### **3. In conclusion**

In my thesis I discussed how Ken Loach approached and created a social realist film in *Kes*, through analyzing his method of casting and working with nonprofessional actors, the use of real locations and his collaboration with the cinematographer Chris Menges and their subsequent decision of camera placement, usage of light and recording the action as a sympathetic observant. Furthermore, through viewing his earlier work of documentary/fiction done for the BBC in *Cathy Come Home*, I looked at the cinematic devices that he brought with him and further used differently or abandoned in *Kes*, from the use of voiceover, montage, long takes and editing. Additionally, I discussed some cinematic elements that Loach used in the film that are not traditionally used in social realist films, like the usage of extradiegetic music and on-screen titles. I pointed out, as well, that it does not overall affect the social realism in the film and the feel of authenticity, and on the contrary how it helps to change and alternate the mood in the film from heart wrenching realism to comedy. I discussed, as well, the themes of social injustice in the film and how the characters, like most characters in Loach films and social realist films in general, are trapped in an endless cycle, unable to break free from it. There remains several questions unanswered due to the limitations in time and space within this thesis that I hope to search on in future papers, like the spectator’s understanding of realism and how we as viewers

experience the lives of others on screen and be able to connect with it on a human level and how social realist films change or rather affect the way we view our daily lives.

In a way *Kes* remains one of Ken Loach's most beloved and admired films with its breathtaking social realism. It is a film that relies on a sympathetic approach to filmmaking, documenting a fictional life with the mindset of a documentary filmmaker and the sense of drama and structure of a fiction film auteur. *Kes* truthfully depicts its characters' social class, their hopes, aspirations, and fear. It uses some cinematic devices and abandons others, following the conventions of social realist films that came before it and straying away from these conventions in some other scenes. *Kes* is a film where Loach changes his approach to filmmaking, following his characters as a sympathetic observer and breaking free from the confinements and restrictions of TV drama and news reports. Breaking free both in form and content towards a more realistic cinema, capturing fleeting truthful moments of childhood innocence, hope and despair.

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