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Versus: The Life and Films of Ken Loach

By Unknown

If you say how the world is,
that should be enough.
Just the sense of simple connection between people.
Just being.
If you make films about people's lives,
I think politics is essential.
It is the essence of drama, the essence of conflict.
Ken wants to make films about how the world is actually run.
There are two powerful forces at work in society...
..and they are enemies.
Like all of us, he's a contradiction.
Ken appears to be so respectable and well-mannered...
..he doesn't seem to be a danger to anyone, does he?
He could be at home at a vicar's tea party.
But there he is, the most left-wing,
subversive director this country has probably ever had...
Perfect gentleman.
Ken's acted brilliant.
Bastards.
You might be able to find something here that would work for...
- ..the working flat.
- Oh, yes.
You know what I mean?
Because suddenly you're in a whole different...
Yes, it may take a while...
We're almost at the mouth of the Tyne,
so the River Tyne is just down there,
then there's the Fish Quay area and...
Today is, what, the 10th of July?
And we'd like to start shooting the film on the 5th of October.
That's three months.
That's tight.
It's all quite manageable, isn't it?
Scale-wise.
I had the phone call from Film Four,
who were saying that they can't fund the film.
They just don't think it would be a good enough investment for them.
But I'm also talking to the BBC.
My fear with the BBC is that, politically,
the film may just be too tough for them to take on.
It's quite iffy, really. It's quite edgy.
God knows why I'm doing it, really.
I must be mad.
All things considered, it would be nice to be on that side,

because then it'll be in shade.
There's something quite...
..well-kept about it.
'You do have to be on your game.
'That's the fear, isn't it, that you just let people down
'and that you're just not sharp enough.'
You miss a trick,
and if you miss too many tricks in the course of shooting,
then you don't do justice to the story.
That's the...
That's the danger
of employing an old director.

HE CHUCKLES:

Hmm.
I think I should keep taking the...
Keep the ointment and the pills
and the elastic stockings and...
..all the support mechanisms in place...
..for the antique director.
As they're approaching the bell tower,
the noise is getting louder and louder...
The rope's fairly long, so they can move about a bit.
I first met Ken when I acted for him.
He didn't direct the actors at all.
I mean, I rehearsed for a week and we sort of barely met.
I remember he was quite stropky,
and I did have second thoughts about casting him,
cos he asked questions all the time.
He looked sort of like a bank clerk, really.
He made no impression on me.
So that was my first impression of Ken -
he made no impression.
In the early '60s, the BBC was changing.
They were expanding to BBC Two,
so a number of working-class ruffians like...
us got jobs,
which we would never have got in the BBC before.
We had one morning entitled What To Do With Your Cameras.
There wasn't a rude reply, as you might imagine,
but we were given a tour of a TV studio,
but no kind of instruction at all.
All right, very quiet now. Ready.
BBC drama was photographed stage plays

with clumsy electronic cameras in a studio.

The working class were not represented...

I do hope that the price for dropping this charge is not only a high one...

18. Two next.

..and posh actors could always play down, as they said.

"Oh, I'm going Northern."

It was a class-ridden English society, and we came in wanting to change it.

We were asked to produce a series of contemporary single dramas about the world as it actually was.

So, that was our brief, to stir up a bit of trouble.

It was a magical medium to work with, and so that's compulsive.

Because you're not only dealing with drama and actors and performance and telling a story,

you're also dealing in images and light and movement.

I mean, all those things.

I moved to Battersea because I didn't like Chelsea.

I got a job in a sweet factory, packing chocolate liqueurs...

..and bought a little cottage for 700.

There was always a big queue for the bath.

And also, a telephone -

there was always a big queue for the telephone.

They had one queue for the bath, the other for the telephone, cos I think I was the only bath in the street.

That's where I was,

and so I wrote about what was around me.

I wanna be loved by you

Alone, scoop-boop-be-doop.

Where do think you're going, all dressed up like the Queen of Sheba?

Ken found the book,

and he was just aching to do it.

They were just absolutely what I was looking for, because they were little events, little moments, little relationships.

Get him worked up, give him a love bite, that'll do it.

The lads taking the girls on the motorbikes and going round an empty house - it had an energy and a kind of febrile...

..scent of danger.

They became a script very quickly with just a little editing, really.

He told me what HE wanted.

He told me what he wanted, and I tried to do it.

The problem was it had to be shot on location.

And I put it through the works at the BBC, as though it were a

studio show, so that there wouldn't be any alarm bells going off.

Hey-hey!

Ken had the lovely Tony Imi stripped off,
with his camera held high above his head,
filming these girls leaping in the water.

Basically, we were saying that the working class people had sex.

I mean, that's all right if you're doing...the aristocracy.

I mean, they're allowed to.

But the working-class people were having sex and enjoying it,
and they weren't even married.

I mean, this was... In 1965, this was horrifying.

Every week, there were 18 to 20 million viewers.

You knew that people were writing stuff
about the people you came from.

Quick, get the clobber!

You know, they weren't plays with cucumber sandwiches
and French windows. You know, they weren't.

I would have cut my arm off to have...

..got that film made...

..because of the backstreet-abortion scene of Ruby.

It was during the war, during the bombing, my mother got pregnant.

They didn't want another child.

Abortion was illegal, so it had to be...

..an amateur.

And something went wrong with it.

And she died a few days later

of what they called galloping septicaemia.

I was five.

Sometimes a film's an accident, you know,

and sometimes it comes from a moment or a character or an incident.

You know, Ken has been talking about

hanging up his football boots.

Excuse me while I laugh. Yes, hanging up his football boots.

Now, the job centre...

Again, we want it... If we're doing Newcastle, we want city centre...

And of course, after the Tories coming back in again,

with these welfare cuts and the sanctions,

you could just see his anger rise again,

and so I didn't think it would be long

before he was on the hunt for another story.

Cos, I mean, in this scene,

it's just the sense of people waiting and wakening up,

so it would just be the reception and the...

Paul wrote a character, a very simple character -

a man in his late 50s, early 60s who's trying to get back to work after caring for his wife and dropping out. He was a carpenter. Just the hurdles he faces, the difficulties he faces, the world that he faces. When the thing kicks off with Rachel and the two kids... Any film-maker who says, "I can change your mind," with absolute confidence - you just don't know. If we as human beings are touched by the story, and we do that well, then you've maybe got a chance of touching other people. That's what gives you the motive to actually do the damn thing, because there's something inside you that burns to do it. We lived in Nuneaton, which is in the middle of the Midlands. My dad was one of ten children. He did an apprenticeship as an electrician in the mine, and then he got this job in a machine tool factory. He worked seven days a week. He would go into the factory at six o'clock every morning, and be back at six o'clock at night. He did quite well, he became in charge of the maintenance and became a foreman. I mean, he had a huge respect for craftsmen, I mean, he... Craftsmanship. When we were doing Macbeth at school, he got a dagger made in the joinery workshop, and it was just immaculate. Just the delight in craftsmanship was... Was one of his defining characteristics, really. In a way, he was a working-class Tory, and the Daily Express came in to our house. Only later did I realise how right-wing it was. We had one week's holiday, and we would go to Blackpool. My mother, when asked where we were going, she'd say, "Blackpool, but the north side, the north end," because that was seen as slightly more refined than the south end where the Pleasure Beach was, it was a bit too proletarian. But the big treat was seeing the shows and the great comics. Very much the humour of poverty, and the humour of... ..bodily functions. The hysteria would be something to behold. People would weep, WEEP with laughter. And my old man, who was not given to a lot of laughter, would... He would be doubled, he'd have to get his handkerchief out to mop the tears as they ran down his face.

Let me now ask our audience,
how many of you have seen the play Cathy Come Home, or have heard about
Cathy Come Home, have read about it in the newspapers or magazines,
or heard it discussed?
If you have, will you push your buttons?
Let's just see how many of you know about Cathy Come Home.
Let's have a quick look.
Some 90% of our audience know Cathy Come Home.
It was during that Wednesday Play season
that Ken and I gravitated towards each other.
We both wanted to do the same thing.
We wanted to make films on real locations
about the lives of actual people.
Cathy Come Home had been turned down by the BBC twice
as being too political.
We could take your children into care and turn you out,
- just like that.
- Please don't do that.
But we're not going to. We're going to give you one more chance.
But I must emphasise, this is your last chance.
We knew there was a housing problem,
but I didn't know there were homeless, and neither did Ken.
Come along then.
That's it then, Cath.
As you were doing it, you're thinking,
"How can I shoot this in such a way that it is credible,
"so that I really believe it?"
If you were watching a documentary, you would believe it.
So, that's our...
..standard.
We thought, "Let's shoot in sequence,"
because then an actor has time to develop a character,
to have a past and an unknown future.
If you shoot the story in the chronological order
it would have happened, you don't need to work out,
"How would I feel if I'd been through that?"
You know, and you just have that memory
in your stomach, really.
Somebody told me you've got these places they call halfway houses.
Carol White was just a natural choice to play Cathy.
Reg might come back to me.
She could just be.
He's drifting away from me.
And that's great acting when you can get that.

And Ken had the knack of encouraging that from an actor.
It was so different to anything we'd ever seen before,
because it was shot in an observed way and not in an immaculate way,
but actually told the story
more truthfully and more realistically
than I think I'd ever seen before.

Get back! Get back!

Ken, as a director, was becoming much more confident -
determined to get what he wanted for the film.

There is one scene where Carol White has her children taken away from her
at the railway station by social workers.

It still stays with me.

It's one of the strongest scenes I've ever seen in any film.

You're not having my kids.

You're not!

SHE SCREAMS:

It had to be shocking.

It couldn't be other than shocking.

If we'd staged it with extras walking past,
it just wouldn't have had the impact.

We just put it in a real place and let it happen.

The reception - it was extraordinary.

At the first showing, the Daily Mail called Cathy Come Home,
"A dramatic battering ram."

The Guardian said it was,

"Undoubtedly one of the most successful pieces
"of social reforming drama we've had on television."

People didn't know.

I think there's been enormous confusion in the public mind
as to whether this is, in fact, fact or fiction.

I mean, what is there to prevent you next time, when you want to
make your point a little more strongly,
to introduce fictional statistics as well?

Well, I thought it was a brilliant piece of propaganda
of a highly charged and emotional kind.

The script was written, there were 60-odd actors in it.

The fact that Ken Loach is such a good director that the actors
often don't look like actors is hardly my fault.

Part of the enormous kerfuffle...

..was an invitation to the Ministry.

So, Ken Loach and I went down Whitehall
to see the Minister.

And we sat down in this huge, beautifully appointed office -

I mean, I've never lived in anywhere as big as that -
and it was very English.

Tea was on quite nice china with biscuits,
but then he said, "But what can one do?"

And I looked at Ken and Jeremy, and I said, "Well, build more houses."

And he looked at the senior civil servant
who looked back and then went...

Smiled at each other as though...

HE SIGHS:

"If only it were that simple."

We were ushered out into Whitehall and that was the end of it.

I did kick myself afterwards that it wasn't more political.

We'd let everybody off the hook.

The starting point is, "What is the core of the story?"

Are the people valid?

Are they true? Is it significant?

Is it worth telling?

Then you've got to find people who can bring that to life.

Then there's the qualities of the character, their age, their class,
where they're from, all of which you can't hide,

and you look for someone who can listen.

He's trying to find some essential quality in the actor
that he can use.

It's less about acting, it's about, sort of...

you as a person, I think.

I think you want actors who don't put up defences.

You want actors who let you into their minds, into their thoughts,
into their weaknesses.

And many actors erect defences. They have...

They'll develop a technique,

which is about giving the impression of something,

and presenting something,

but you want to get beyond that into who they really are.

So, vulnerability is a really important quality.

But then you have a responsibility not to exploit that,
you know, they have to feel safe.

They have to feel safe in order to allow themselves to be vulnerable.

When Carol came for her audition,

she had a gift of intimacy that's quite unusual.

He saw her...

I suppose, her talent, to be completely there.

She was a nice girl, Carol.

I think her big mistake was going to America.

She should have stayed here.
Carol White had a quality.
She was undefended,
and that worked when she was with people who cared about her,
who loved her like Ken and I did.
But then she was seduced into Hollywood,
and they don't take prisoners there.
And she got into drugs and emotional difficulties,
and she died really quite young.
Theatres have a magic about them.
We had a theatre company used to visit every three weeks.
I used to go and hang around like schoolboys do,
just for some connection to these mysterious, magical people.
But Dad had a passion that I should be educated,
and was fierce in his instruction
that I couldn't go out on weekdays.
Only 60 boys a year passed the exam to go to the grammar school.
It was a ladder for bright, working-class kids to get out.
We had an election in school, it would have been the '50 election.
To my shame, I stood as the Conservative candidate.
Ken and I escaped.
We were lucky.
Why not my friend down our street who had to go to a secondary modern?
So when a novel called *A Kestrel For A Knave*
arrived on my desk, we read it in one day.
And we said, "We're going to make a film of this."
It went to something that Ken and I were very, very affected by.
The fate of working-class adolescents.
The central idea was that all kids are remarkable,
and we learn something about one boy who is cast as a failure
by the school and the world.
But we know he isn't.
And so we thought, well, if this is true,
then we can go to any school and we will find Billy Casper.
This is Billy Casper.
Billy Casper cheats.
Steals.
Lies.
Fights.
Because... Well, because he has to.
My dad was a coal miner, my mum was a seamstress,
she'd worked as a cleaner.
Whatever it took to make ends meet.
I just knew I couldn't handle working in a coal mine.

And then I received a letter, delivered by hand,
and there in purple writing, it said something along the lines of,
"Dear David, we would love for you to play the part of Billy Casper
"in our film, A Kestrel For A Knave."
I can't possibly explain how excited I was.
I wasn't frightened, because I felt this is where I belonged, in a way.
Come on.
Come on.
What determined a lot of the things about Kes, and the way it looks,
begins with this central image of the bird which flies free
and the boy who is trapped.
That is clearly what connects to people.
Ken and I, we quickly found a way that was particular
and a good and simple way to work.
Basically, dealing with people who hadn't acted before,
how do you remove the camera crew from the experience?
Our whole style of observational film-making
came through conversations with Chris.
We both saw the Czech films.
The camera has its own...
Its own sense of being a person observing.
You become a person there.
It seemed to bring out the humanity
of the people in front of the camera.
What I found amazing was that he trusted me so much.
Ken would explain a scene to me in very brief terms,
so that when we came to do the actual speech that Billy does
in front of the class,
I had only been given less than 24 hours to actually learn that scene.
But I think Ken wanted that rough quality.
Then, when it got to know me, I fed it on my glove.
And after a while I put it two inches away from its claws.
Like that, like.
I didn't want him to learn it too word-for-word,
because the point of the scene is not to tell the audience
how to train a kestrel.
The point of the scene is for a boy who can never string
two words together to become articulate.
I got about 70 yards from there, in the middle of the field,
I called her.
"Kes. Kes. Come on, Kes. Come on then."
Nowt happened.
So I thought, "Well, I better walk back and pick her up."
So, when I were walking back, I saw her flying - she came like a bomb.

About a yard off the floor, like lightning, head still,
and you couldn't hear the wings - there weren't a sound
from the wings. And straight on to the glove. Wham!
And she'll grab me for the meat.
Anyway, I were pleased with mysen...
With Ken as a director,
there is another side to his loving relationship with the actors,
his capacity to allow.
And that other side is his...
..ruthlessness.
The children being beaten in Kes...
The fact that he would allow those kids to be beaten is horrific.
I couldn't do that.
No. He had a point to make,
that the headmaster had only one response to this situation,
and that was the response at that time in our history -
beat the kids.
Same old faces.
Same old faces.
We were told we weren't going to get hit, so we hold out our hands,
thinking that this is when Ken Loach is going to say, "Cut."
But he didn't.
Ah!
A regular little cigarette factory, aren't you?
Sir.
Put that rubbish away.
Now, I hope it's going to be a lesson to you.
I don't suppose for one minute it will be.
I don't doubt, before the end of the week,
you'll be back in here again for exactly the same crime - smoking.
I've noticed only sons with devoted mothers to have characteristics
that other people may not have.
Their self-belief is absolute.
They seem to retain...
..the infantile omnipotence that is appropriate in a five-year-old.
And if you become a film director,
that omnipotence, as it were, can be preserved,
because a world is created for you,
in which you are omnipotent.
And you can be quite benign,
but it is your world to manipulate how you wish.
She says it's not just her.
There's four other women, four other families.
It's me and my boys and four other families.

And this... She was in a hostel, was she?
My phone rang at about five o'clock, and it was my agent,
and they said I'd got the part, and it was a real sort of...
It was a bit ridiculous, really.
It was a real moment.
My mum was downstairs cooking dinner.
I shouted her name really loudly
and she dropped everything in the kitchen.
Ken give me a ring as well just to say,
"Glad you're onboard," and I thanked him and that was it.
I think the girl that Paul's written is quite complex.
You want the girl to be sharp, to have ambition,
to see possibilities in the future.
But, when tough times happen,
I think I can imagine Hayley taking a realistic view of where she is
and doing just what is necessary to survive.
I suppose that's the battle at the beginning, isn't it, between the...?
Getting out of that situation to here... So anything's got to be good.
- But at the same time, there's some real shit...
- Yes, yes, yes.
It's like being a spy. It's like being a spy, it's like...
You go, "Is there any sort of, like, script?"
And you go, "Yeah, well, you get two pages in a toilet
"in the centre of Newcastle behind the hot water pipes."
And you go, "OK."
It's really sort of quite...
It's exciting, but it's also a bit sort of, "Oh, God, am I going to...
"Am I going to get the stuff I need?"
But, yeah, you know, he's made plenty of films
so I'm sure the process works, you know.
- I don't like that shirt for him.
- No, no, no.
It was just to get you in a...
- Yeah, nice shirt.
- Yeah.
David is as close as I think we could find
to the Dan that Paul wrote.
He's the right age, he's a working-class man from Newcastle.
He started work laying bricks
and has experience doing comedy and some acting.
It means he's got a real sense of how to deliver a performance.
He communicates very directly, eye to eye.
So, I think what he does is very truthful.
Hi.

We just wanted to show you this.

You got it.

It's the undertaker.

Oh, my God, that's a bit serious.

- Detective...

- I have reason to suspect...

I think this is probably too much, really.

- Too smart?

- Much too much.

- Yeah.

- Much too much.

I mean, he looks like a Labour politician that you want to...

Who's betrayed his promises.

I was pretty surprised at the intensity with which, later on, all his work is imbued with a political flavour, very strong political flavour.

So, yes, it was very surprising, because there wasn't any evidence of that in the years we were together when young.

Oxford was an extraordinary experience.

It was only then that I became really aware the ruling class had a face, and it was the faces of these gilded youths who inherited the world, and who expected to rule it.

And did.

I met Ken when we were both auditioning, I think, for a play in Oxford, and you'll see in the photograph a rather slenderer version of myself in the foreground, but in the background, giving a character performance, shall we say, is young Loach, heavily disguised by beard and on one leg and a crutch.

All of which he made the very most of, and I detect, though I didn't detect it at the time, being heavily upstaged by Ken.

He was much the same shape and size as he is now - slender, sylph-like indeed, maybe.

Self-effacing.

Apparently self-effacing.

Nimble and brisk.

That was a big event for my mother and father, to get to Oxford and to do law, but it became plain I wasn't going to be a lawyer, much to my mum and dad's dismay.

My father said, "Well, you can go off and be an actor, "but you'll never have two pennies to rub together."

When we came back from Barnsley, and he shot Kes -

couldn't get it released.

The exhibitor thought, "It won't take a penny,

"so why waste money on marketing?"

They'd open it in six cinemas in Yorkshire, thinking,

"Oh, that'll be the end of that."

And it broke the house record in every one.

Then suddenly, we had a hit.

While we were making it, I literally, sort of...

What's been happening?

And what had been happening were the May events in Paris in '68...

..the Vietnam war was raging...

..and disillusion, even amongst not very political people,

with Wilson and the Labour government.

I was interested in politics since my teens.

I had known a lot of Communist Party members.

Ken was not political...

..but he became more and more interested in politics

as we did our work together.

And, of course, I introduced him to Jim Allen,

which was another political step to the left.

Jim Allen was a Manchester lad.

A lot of people say up North, "He was as rough as a bear's arse."

He'd been a docker,

he'd worked on the barges, he'd been a bus conductor,

and he obviously had this gift for writing.

He was the opposite to Ken.

They were chalk and cheese.

We're very different people.

He's a very private person.

I'm a bit of an extrovert.

I like to get drunk, I love pubs, etc.

I think one thing that brings us together is that...

..we have the same kind of political approach to life.

We would like things to be different.

I don't think Ken had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth,

but I don't think he'd ever had the knocks or the hardship

that Jim Allen had had.

He knew about being blacklisted,

he knew about being on the dole and out of work and stuff like that,

and I think he was able to put it on paper, in writing,

for Ken to understand.

What he got was that there were two powerful forces at work in society.

There is capital and there is labour,

and they are enemies.

If you make a film about a socialist movement,
it's a given what the class conflict is.
It's... How do you win the power?
And who is there to stop you?

CHEERING:

Solidarity!

CROWD:

Solidarity forever. #
Jim had been through it.
What I want to know is,
what is Brother Hagen doing about our long outstanding claim
for a two and sixpence an hour increase?
He knew about the betrayals of trade union bureaucrats.
Now, listen, half a crown an hour, you must be bloody...
He knew that the role of the Labour Party
was to deliver the working class to betrayal.
I believe that those are the men that can win the struggle,
could win it much quicker only if we can get help from other workers.
Jim made the ideas flesh in his writing.
That drama of political argument, driven by need...
..I think was the essence of drama, it was the essence of conflict.
The problem with the BBC is that I didn't know how far I could push.
If I didn't push far enough or hard enough,
I'd be missing an opportunity.
If I pushed too far, we'd be dead.
As usual, with The Big Flame, I had not shown the BBC anything,
because they would have hit the roof.
I just said, "It's a love story,
"a sort of Romeo and Juliet between the son and daughter of two dockers,
"one Catholic and one Protestant."
And that's what I told the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board,
who owned our location.
Now, everyone in favour of the resolution, please show.
But what we actually did was get a strike going.
And then the dockers stayed on the dock...
..declaring a soviet.
The root cause of our problem lies in the capitalist system of
private ownership and calls for the nationalisation of the dock
and the shipping industry under the workers' control.
I was in London and I got a phone call to say the film was off,
because the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board had seen the script.
And I laughed, and said,

"Do you honestly think the BBC would allow
"a film about dockers declaring a soviet on the docks of...
"Do you think they'd allow that to happen? Come on."
And they were reassured.
All day long, convoys of troops have been arriving as this takeover
by 10,000 Merseyside dockers enters its second day.
And eventually, of course, the Army was brought in.
They were betrayed by their so-called friends and leaders
and ended up in court and were sent to jail.
This theory of social revolution becomes as dangerous
as a loaded pistol in the hands of a criminal.
Officer, arrest those two men.
I think Ken's politics gelled in that early work with Jim and me,
and when he got it, he got it.
And...
you won't shift him now.
Obviously, we use the hallway, we use this room, the kitchen,
the bathroom, the stairs.
'If you make films about people's lives, politics is essential.'
When she collapses, we'll probably take some stuff round here...
If you're making a film about a family, what determines those lives?
And then at some point,
she'll make her way round the bed
and then we'll cut to him on that shot.
The starting point is, where do we live?
What work do you do?
How does that affect your relationship?
Do you go on holiday? What did your parents do?
What was your upbringing?
They're all this result of political struggle over generations.
So, in a way, you can't walk away from it.
The present situation is not the fault of the miners.
We are the victims of an industry that has been ruined
by private ownership, and this private ownership
is also ruining the country.
We would've gone on working together,
but things were closing down.
The regime at the BBC made it plain that we weren't welcome.
The British film industry...
There was certainly no place for the kinds of films that we wanted to do.
There was a period when he couldn't find the money for his films,
and neither could anyone else.
And what happened was that my generation,
we all went to the United States and we were able to make films about

American life in a way that Ken absolutely was not prepared to do.
Family Life - in England, they said it didn't take enough
to pay the usherettes.
Black Jack - that opened in a soft porn cinema in Leeds.
What it was doing up there, God knows.
With that track record,
there was no chance of getting a feature film made.
It was as though a time was over,
a period of one's life was over.
Ken was also in a state of some...
..difficulty.
It was very...
personal.
It certainly changes you.
I mean, anyone who loses a child will be changed with it forever.
Before that, you know what a kind of happiness is,
and after that you never do.
And there's a stone in your stomach that never goes away, really.
So...
We were driving along the M1 on a Sunday.
A car on an inside lane
had a defective...
Was defective in some way.
A wheel came off, the car drove into us, it pushed us into a bridge,
the upright of a bridge.
My wife, Lesley, was...
Fought for her life for six weeks and survived.
Her grandmother was killed.
Our eldest son,
who was seven, survived, and I survived.
Our second son, who was five, was killed.
And that's...
..how that happened, really.
And...
Well, it...
Well, it changes you.
- MARGARET THATCHER:
- We will not disguise our purpose,
nor betray our principles.
We will do what must be done.
We will tell the people the truth,
and the people will be our judge.
I was struggling.
And there was this sudden desperate mood in the country.

Day after day, factories were going to the wall.
Mass unemployment.
And this was raging.
I didn't know how to respond.
So, I tried documentaries,
but with disastrous consequences.
Three cheers for the destruction of Maggie's government.
Hip-hip!
Central Television proposed this series of films by Ken Loach,
wonderful film-maker, about the British trade union movement.
Hooray. Commissioned immediately.
In the press, all you would read about were union barons
encouraging their members to strike.
The reverse was the case.
People at the shop-floor level were ready to fight Thatcher,
but the trade union leaders were doing a deal.
That is the biggest load of codswallop that I have ever heard.
Because we obtained, for...
The films arrived. Unfortunately, each one said,
"The leaders of the trade union movement had betrayed the workers."
"The leaders of the trade union movement had betrayed the workers,"
and film number three said,
"The leaders of the trade union movement had betrayed the workers."
How can those at the bottom...
how can the working class actually control the leaders?
The chairman of Channel 4 thought,
"This is a left wing rant, I'm not having it."
And they stopped them.
But the way they did it is very interesting,
because they did it in a very British way.
They didn't say, you know... Like, if it was in Poland or somewhere,
they'd say, "OK, you're sent to... Go to the salt mine."
They didn't say that.
They said, "Let's think about this."
"Let's provide a little balance."
I don't mind dealing with the questions. What I don't want to be
is tricked into saying something, then you're going to marry it
to something somebody else says.
It was quite clear that the trade union leaders knew
what was going on, they knew what Ken was up to,
and they did everything they possibly could to ban the films.
I think, as far as I'm concerned, you've not been fair with me.
And if you want to put this on the camera, you can.
At which point, the chair of the channel announced that he had taken

unilateral action and he'd sent the films back to Central as untransmittable.

End of story.

The miners' strike was the pivotal event of our post-war history, and everybody knew what was at stake - it was the success of the Thatcher project, or its defeat. I tried the usual channels to make a film about it, without success. Everybody said no.

Who am I to ask them why
this pit must live,
that pit must die?

Ken came and said, "Look, a lot of good work's being done here, there's a lot of poetry and songs coming out of the strike, and I'd like to do a film about that."

And I said, "What a great idea.

"Let's do it."

These treble lines of blue
that escort the scabs through the gates...

I think he thought he'd made an arts film.

There was a pause again when we'd made it, and they said, "I don't think we're going to be able to show this."

ITV companies in those days, 15 of them, every so often had to rebid for the right to broadcast.

And the power of withholding the franchise was being murmured about and being invoked.

I said, "Well, that's what they're writing about.

"If you listen, this is what their poems are about,

"this is what their songs are about,

"about police brutality."

"Can't show that."

We are talking about people who are losing their franchises, ie, an entire company's future.

And they saw this looming, because Ken had been banned over there, as some of them thought, for good reasons.

I mean, it was like that at that stage...

I don't think that's good enough.

I mean, you either believe...

You either have integrity as a broadcaster or you don't.

I think they had no integrity by suppressing it.

We must have overheard that the films were being cancelled, and we just became completely incensed that this was happening, and thought we would write to Channel 4.

I think we might have written a couple of letters, I think we might have written, and then a couple of weeks later, written again,

to say that Dad was really tired,
and had been going up and down to London a lot,
and we thought that was outrageous.
It was a touching act of family solidarity,
which was very nice of them.
He was mortified that we...
..had all written.
I mean, it's excruciatingly embarrassing
and completely undermined his authority.
In the midst of this failure to get anything broadcast at all,
Jim Allen had been beavering away on a play.
I thought it fell within the spectrum
of work that we could support.
I knew that it would be...
..provocative, but I had little idea how provocative
and what a storm it would raise.
I went to the Royal Court and I met Ken,
his polite, charming, quiet, self-effacing self,
and I thought to myself,
"How did this guy direct that stuff?"
Because I had expected
a more Oliver Stone-type presence, you know.
Two weeks into the rehearsal,
we began to hear the rumblings of discontent.
Good evening. You won't have seen Jim Allen's
controversial courtroom drama, Perdition.
The play is based on the events which led to the extermination
of Hungarian Jews, and accuses Zionist leaders of collaborating
with Nazi Adolf Eichmann in sending them to the gas chambers.
Jim found this story that a deal was done by certain Zionist leaders
in Budapest,
that they would keep secret from the other Jews who were going to get on
the trains, they would keep secret the destination of those trains,
provided Eichmann gave permission for 1,000 or several thousand Jews
to escape to Palestine.
And it was a shocking, shocking bargain.
People who hadn't read the play were beginning to give judgment about it.
They were saying that the play was anti-Semitic and that it was
selective in what it showed.
What would you say was Eichmann's biggest problem, Dr Yaron?
And, within a week, every newspaper had a huge full-page article.
This was serious.
Outside, a storm was brewing.
One of the actors had a swastika painted on his door.

There was a sense that this was now a kind of...
Not just a controversial play, but a potentially dangerous play.
My relationship with Ken broke down completely.
He had an inflexible set of principles
that really couldn't be questioned.
I suppose I became more and more uncomfortable with my position
of defending the play.
Jim Allen, you've seen, around this table,
the offence your play has created and the distress it causes.
Do you still think it would be right to put it on?
Yes. It causes distress to these people who are here
as the representatives of Zionism.
It lets the skeletons out of the cupboard
and they will do anything possible to prevent the public
seeing Perdition and making up their own mind.
They bowed to pressure. Just before we were due to open,
I said, "Max, you'll have to tell the cast and it's your decision".
So they sat in the auditorium and he sat on the stage,
and he said he was going to cancel it.
And they tore him to pieces.
Ken Loach stood on that stage,
and I really wish that I had memorised what he said,
but it was articulate and it was...
..ruthless
and it was accusatory.
He left the stage like a broken man, and well he should be.
I mean, I think that was despicable.
I mean, I think I made two mistakes.
One was on putting the play on,
and the second was on taking it off.
So I am not proud of my own behaviour over that time.
But, at the same time,
we headed into an area that I thought was far from clear.
Max is... It was not a mistake, it was cowardice.
Cowardice isn't a mistake, it's a choice, and it's a moral choice.
He chose cowardice.
What he reminds me of is of the old knights who used to go at each other
with big long lances and try to kill each other from their horses.
Ken is much more of the kind of knight who dislodges the other rider
with his lance and then stands gently and respectfully over them
as he pushes back a small opening in their armour
and slits a vein
and watches them bleed to death.
And he did that in the Royal Court that day,

and I watch him do it when he's on television.
You see, the thing about it is, what they call intractable,
what they call unchanging...
..it's what makes him be that powerful.
And it's a wonderful thing to see such quiet power.
It's an amazing...
It's an amazing thing to watch.
And I would not like to cross him.
Every son or child, I think, remembers that moment
when they realise their dad is not all-powerful
and can't sort out every situation.
It was the first time I'd really seen him
with a sort of defeated look on his face.
We were forbidden to talk about the commercials -
it's even now a kind of elephant in the room.
I think it was either make them or we move house.
After that experience, I was pretty well unemployable, really.
It didn't sit very happily with...
With me at the time, having expressed the views I'd expressed,
but I didn't see the alternative, really.
Come on, man. Flick it in, go on.
Useless! Absolutely useless!
How can you miss from the six-yard box, tell me that?
Your mum could do better than that.
Useless!
(Caramac. The golden creamy bar.)
I did one for McDonald's, yeah,
which, erm, sits really badly on my conscience.
- You like that?
- I do like it, but do you?
Well, let's have that, then. I love it, really.
- Honestly, really.
- He's driving me mad.
Big Mac. I'll have a Big Mac, please.
100% beef, 100% big.
Sometimes only a Big Mac will do.
Here's me berating other people for betrayal, and I've done that.
When we were growing up, there was a complete firewall, I would say,
between our family life and the film industry.
OK, here we go. And turning over...
And... OK, Dave.
We thought Ken Loach was somebody else.
You know, we thought he was another person.
Good, that worked quite nicely.

Yeah, we'll just try one more like that.
I remember, when I was very young,
kind of realising that he was my dad, you know.
And up to that point I think we'd thought
he was someone else entirely.
Don't go in. Who's put that pillock in?
Jesus Christ.
He was always away a lot,
working away from home.
So, he wasn't around.
There were times when he wasn't around very much.
We'll race back as soon as we can.
Can you bear one more? Can you bear it, yeah?
There is a side of him that works,
and there is also a quiet side to my dad,
quiet and reflective and quite private.
Get the lad!
Ken Loach is fearless, indestructible, fiercely loyal,
absolutely driven.
Fucking hell.
But my dad is very distinct from that person.
As a failed actor, he loves musicals.
He loves dancing, and he loves...
Not that he dances, thank God.
But he does love musicals and, sort of, the more camp
and the more glossy they are, the better.
One singular sensation
Every little step she takes. #
It's not contradictory to me.
I guess, in musicals, they have quite a sort of simple morality,
which, I guess, you know, is quite nice, isn't it?
And I suppose it's escapism.
You know... And he's a bit camp, isn't he?
So, he likes all that.
He likes men dressing up.
- KENNETH WILLIAMS:
- Hold hands. This is an upstick.
Up with your sticks, this is a hand-hold.
- I beg your pardon.
- I mean, this is a stick up.
The first professional job I got was understudying in a revue called
One Over The Eight.
Oh, stop messing about.
Kenneth Williams and Sheila Hancock were the leads.

There was this funny little man who was understudying Kenneth.
I mean, it's an unlikely place for him to have been.
I have an image of him in the wings.
I think he was a bit scared.
We had to go through the dance routines with an actor
called Jill Gascoigne - she had to gallop across the stage.
As she arrived, I had to grab her round the waist and swivel her over
and put her upright.
And I was hopeless at this.
And she was a bonny lass, she was not...
sylph-like, at least, but, I mean, very...
Good dancer. But I would seize her round the waist,
and she'd be saying, "Get me over, get me over!"
And, invariably, she would end up with her head on the floor
and her legs waving
and my anxious face peering in between them.
Well, he just suddenly turned up at the theatre.
He was a very strange-looking young man with a rolled umbrella and a tie
and a suit and a briefcase.
I mean, it was funny.
He played Br'er Fox, and that's how I met him.
To me, when he was on stage,
his brain always worked marginally before his instincts,
so that he sort of thought about it and then acted it.
It's a bit naughty to say this,
but he was the sort of actor he wouldn't dream of employing,
if you know what I mean.
Curious journey people go on...
Ken didn't make a film for nearly 12 years.
Here was a first-class director who had actually been virtually silent
in the cinema for a decade.

TRAILER:

Police said the car failed to stop at a roadblock outside Dungannon.
And a high-ranking British inspector has been assigned to the case.
When he made Hidden Agenda, nobody would put it on.
Nobody would even give it a press show.
I think you lose confidence, you know,
if you go for a few years and you don't make a film, you think,
"I'm not going to be able to do it again. I'm going to forget the words to
say."
It went to Cannes.
The right-wing press went for us.
There was a Tory MP who denounced it before he'd seen it,

a familiar tale, where he said it was the IRA entry at Cannes.
Hidden Agenda.
Every government has one.
The film was a success at Cannes,
despite that,
and he was known again,
and suddenly he was able to make films.
When he made Riff-Raff,
the National Film Theatre took it up,
and the critics all said, "Wonderful film."
And the bathroom here, which I think you'll find very impressive.

SPLASHING:

THEY GASP:

THEY SHOUT IN OWN LANGUAGE

What are you doing here?

Who are you?

Who are you?

I'm checking the plumbing.

Get out of there.

Everything seems to be working.

Once the political climate had changed a little,
and once it became possible to raise a bit of money from Channel 4,
or even cobble together a bit of distribution money around Europe...
..he just...

..took off where he'd left off
with an opportunity.

He found a group of people that shared his outlook
and wanted to make films with him.

I certainly remember him carrying himself much freer,
just being happier.

He knows that he's found...

..what he's looking for when he finds it.

I got a phone call off him.

"Rick," he said, "I'm doing this movie," he said,

"and it's about more or less a battered wife.

"She's got to have had a couple of kids to this fella,

"a couple of kids to that fella, been knocked about and battered."

He said, "But I can't find what I want, can you help me out?"

And I said, "How many do you want?"

And he went, "No, I'm serious." I said, "So am I."

He picked a girl called Crissy Rock.

Come along and share the good times while we can

I beg your pardon

I never promised...

I said, "Look, if I'm not what you want

"or I think you made a mistake,

"you can sack me and tell me to go and I'll understand,

"cos I'm not really an actress."

Woooooo!

And he goes, "No, but I trust you.

"I know you can do this."

As a director, the most precious thing you've got

is the actor's instinct.

If you've acted a bit yourself, you know, however badly,

you know how open actors can be and how vulnerable they can be,

and how easily they can be blown off-course.

He's got that gift to go inside.

He talks to you and he says,

"If this is happening, how would you handle that?"

I'm Kevin McNally from Social Services.

- This is my colleague...

- Sarah Thompson.

He actually makes you believe that you're that person.

We came to a decision last week where we will have to take the baby

- to a place of safety...

- What's safer than here?

The baby is safe, and you have no right, and you have...

We can go with the baby to the court if we want.

But you don't need to take, OK?

- It is something that...

- Just go to your office!

- Jorge, it's illegal...

- Just leave us!

The anguish of losing your children when in fact

you are capable of looking after them...

I mean, that was the point of the story.

It's a kind of well of experience.

People have said, "Well, this isn't acting, she's just being herself."

But, actually, the ability to tap into your own emotions

and express them in a fictional scene is absolutely acting.

You don't realise he's doing it.

So you're just raw, he just picks a raw piece of silk up,

and he makes it into a beautiful purse.

Neil. Neil.

You OK?

Right.

Right, one word before we start.

We hear it, we hear it.

And if you do it really realistically, it sounds right.

If you don't do it realistically, it sounds wrong.

Hayley, Hayley.

Do you mind just being there?

I'm working from somewhere I've never worked before,
which is not having seen a script.

It's kind of a dream, you know, shooting chronologically,
not knowing what happens.

It's what you want, because it means you're going to be able to do it
then and there, and it's just about you and who you're with.

- Would you like to go and see Agnes?

- Agnes?

When I went to the food bank, and we saw the extras outside,
I found it really overwhelming.

The reason it's so raw is because you're stepping into people's lives,
and these people that are using this place,
they're in this position and they're around you doing it with you.

It'll be from there round to the fruit and veg.

It's the purest environment you could ever have.

That's what all this very,
very precise preparation and precise casting is all to achieve,
this truth, I guess.

It fundamentally changed how I approach acting,
and it's never been the same since.

171, take 3...

You know, there's no marks, there's no action, there's no cut.

You don't have the script as your document, you're just...

You're reacting as it happens, you know, on film.

So, it becomes all emotion and not intellect.

It's all right, it's all right.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

It's OK, it's OK.

It was like going on this adventure with all these people
who you became very, very close to.

We had gone on this journey,
which felt, to us, as close as it could possibly be to reality.

Oh, Jesus Christ. I can't take much more of this.

So by the end, certainly for me, it didn't feel like I was performing,
I was just kind of swept up in this world that we'd created,
that we were invested in, that felt completely authentic and real
and truthful, and that was because Ken set it up that way.

The reason to do films like the Spanish Civil War

or the Irish Civil War - they're high points in our story. They're critical moments where if things had gone differently, we would have a different world now. We try to gather people who, if the situation were to recur, might do that again.

It was a People's Army, to fight fascism. So, it was a very... It was a very... happy bunch of brothers and sisters.

- How's your arm?

- It's much better now, I had the stitches taken out two days ago.

- What are you doing here?

- Bernard gave me seven days' leave. And then it reached the point where Blanca, the girl who has really embodied the revolutionary spirit - she's shot.

Of course, they didn't know this. I said, "Can I have a word?" And she said, "What's up?" and I said, "Look, I'm really sorry, but you get shot here." And she said, "But I don't want to die." And we both got quite upset, really. Of course, no-one knew about it, and they were just... Couldn't believe it, really, that she'd gone. And the Palme d'Or goes to... Ken Loach.

What people in England don't realise is how much he is adored, not just in France, but all over Europe. Here is someone over 70 who still believes, and they find that very moving. We didn't expect the film to win the Palme d'Or, but then, what was remarkable was this, just, outburst of fury by Tory politicians and right-wingers. One of the most bizarre was a guy who wrote for the Telegraph, I believe, and he said... ..that he hadn't seen the film and he didn't want to see the film, because he didn't need to read Mein Kampf to know what a louse Hitler was. We don't set out to provoke. The purpose of it is to try and understand how power operates, who has control of a narrative. The choices that a character makes... ..are totally affected by the society in which they live. Like Robbie in Angels' Share...

You know, he's a kid who's just become a dad,
and he's totally caught by his history, by his family,
but he's absolutely determined to just build a future
for this baby in his arms.
Or this kid, trying to buy a caravan,
buying the drugs because there's no other way to earn some money
so that he could rescue his mother and be with her.
Even Looking For Eric, I mean,
right behind that comedy on the surface is a disintegrating family.
You know, so there is kind of tragedy in the laughter.
Je suis...
Eric Cantona.
Fucking hell, it is you!
What the fuck, man?!
Wait till the fucking lads hear about this!
You just hope that resonates without being explicit, you know.
You see the delicate surface of those characters' lives.
But the great political questions are a way down there,
like the bottom of the iceberg.
How could Ken be a political danger to anybody?
He loves cricket.
He would really be at home in the 18th century,
cos he loves the architecture and the furniture.
I got some e-mails from him last night, and I thought,
"God, he's on e-mail." I mean, "He's discovered e-mail."
What's happened?
He even disliked the phone.
He's a very conservative...
..quiet gentleman.
The point is that Ken...
..will not be deterred.
I'm not a shirker, a scrounger, a beggar nor a thief.
I'm not a national insurance number or blip on a screen.
I paid my dues, never a penny short, and proud to do so.
I don't tug the forelock, but look my neighbour in the eye
and help him if I can.
Here he is now, coming up to 50 years of film-making...
..and the politics comes first, not in a party superficial manner,
but you can only have the energy to do that
if there's something burning inside you.
It's like he's got this big V8 engine in this skinny little body,
and that just drives him on.
And I think, even if he probably wanted to stop,
I'm not sure he could, really.

He is speaking for the people who are not catered to,
what they call the voiceless.
People walk out of theatres and say, "Yeah, I really...
"That was just like watching the people down the road."
Ken wanted people to recognise, from the inside,
their own lives reflected back to them,
and that was politics.
Given the tides of political conflict,
trying to make little films in the middle of that is like a cork
bobbing on the waves - it doesn't stop the tide.
You are a small voice amongst many,
many much louder voices.
Is it worth doing? I don't know.
It's like Marlon Brando, you know, in Rebel Without A Cause.
They say, you know, "What are you rebelling against?"
He said, "What have you got?" And whatever institution,
whatever government, whoever's there, Ken would...
It wouldn't be good enough for Ken.
Bastards.