

## INTRODUCTION

This book has two aims: to describe the thematic and stylistic consistencies in the work of Ken Loach and to provide an account of the development of his career. By combining the two, I hope to present a personal aesthetic history.

Within the context of the mainstream film and television industry, Loach's linking of art and left-wing politics distinguishes his work and provides him with a consistent frame of reference, yet his politics present him with creative challenges. Themes recur in his films over a long period of collaboration with different writers, yet Loach's handling of these themes changes throughout his career. This book examines the changing methods which Loach uses to incorporate his political beliefs and those of his writers into his work. It refrains from judging his political beliefs; instead, it evaluates how his films express them – it studies his work as a film-maker. This evaluation derives from a study of mainstream, narrative fiction films, some made for television and some made for the cinema; although in Chapter 4, I write about the documentaries that Loach made during the 1980s.

The book moves chronologically through his career; each chapter studies closely one, two or three of his works. The exception is Chapter 1, which is introductory: it attaches three key themes of the book to a discussion of two scenes in *Carla's Song* (1996). The themes are realism, politics and melodrama. Chapter 2 examines works from the beginning of Loach's career, focussing on *Up the Junction* (1965), *Cathy Come Home* (1966) and *Poor Cow* (1967). In the 1960s, collaborating with writers like Troy Kennedy Martin, John McGrath, Nell Dunn, Christopher Logue and David Mercer, Loach experiments with aesthetic strategies that are indebted to the vogue for loosely Brechtian techniques.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 3 analyses *Kes* (1969), Loach's second cinema film. *Kes* exemplifies the director's growing interest in finding more subtle ways of expressing his

political concerns artistically. This chapter scrutinises his consolidation of his methods of directing the camera and actors.

Chapter 4 discusses the impact that the writer Jim Allen had on Loach's work. Allen believed in revolutionary left-wing politics, and he influenced Loach's politics and aesthetics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Together with the producer Tony Garnett, Allen and Loach made the four-part television serial *Days of Hope* (1975) at a time when a schism existed in cultural and political debates on the left in Britain. *Days of Hope* attempted to intervene directly in these debates. Chapter 5 finds its subject in Loach's connection to documentary. From his use in the 1960s of unspecified voice-overs and observational shots to his neo-*vérité* style in *The Gamekeeper* (1980) and *Looks and Smiles* (1981) and, beyond this, to his documentaries of the 1980s, Loach's work sometimes seems to lie between documentary and drama, often controversially so. This chapter reflects on the relationship between non-fiction and fiction in his work. The final, sixth chapter examines three films from the later phase of his career: *Raining Stones* (1993), *Ladybird Ladybird* (1994) and *Land and Freedom* (1995). It describes the style in which Loach, in what can be described as his mature period, employs genre paradigms as narrative frameworks for his films, integrating these with a developed realist aesthetic.

Overall, this book interprets and evaluates aesthetic changes in Loach's work. It claims that style and form are not equivalent. An account of a film's style and a director's style includes an account of what is expressed and how. V. F. Perkins' distinction between style and form is germane:

We do not deduce the standards relevant to Rembrandt from the essence of paint; nor does the nature of words impose a method of judging ballads and novels. Standards of judgement cannot be appropriate to a medium as such but only to particular ways of exploring its opportunities. (Perkins 1978: 59)

This book is concerned with the 'particular ways' that Loach explores the opportunities of the medium of film. In *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell argues:

You can no more tell what will give significance to the unique and specific aesthetic possibilities of projecting photographic images by thinking about them or seeing some, than you can tell what will give significance to the possibilities of paint by thinking about paint or by looking some over. You have to think about painting, and paintings; you have to think about motion pictures. (Cavell 1979: 31)

In an earlier essay, 'A Matter of Meaning It', Cavell suggests that although philosophers will occasionally write that paint is the medium of painting or words are the medium of literature, a medium is not made up simply of the physical materials themselves, but of the materials applied in characteristic ways. We can describe wood or stone as

the media of sculpture, as we can describe celluloid as the medium of film but, Cavell contends, 'what needs recognition is that wood or stone would not be a medium of sculpture *in the absence of the art of sculpture*' (Cavell 1995: 221). I follow Perkins and Cavell in taking as my primary method the aspiration to interpret films as accurately as possible.

This book studies the work of a director, but it comments on his collaborations, acknowledging his work with key creative personnel, although the book does not investigate who did precisely what on which films. In an open and sustained way, Loach collaborates creatively with writers, producers, directors of photography, editors and production designers; therefore, although I write phrases like 'Loach uses', 'Loach cuts', or 'the film cuts' as shorthand, and although I do not mention every contributor by name, I do so for convenience of writing and reading and because we can assume that Loach either makes or approves of many final decisions. In addition, long-standing collaborators learn what will meet approval.

Film-makers in cinema and television collaborate; individual artists shape their relationships with their collaborators according to their personality, ambitions and circumstances, and according to the economic, social and political contexts in which they work. Loach maintains long-term relationships with both collaborators and institutions throughout his career. On the one hand, he works closely with writers, producers and directors of photography; we need only think of the reputations and contributions of producers Tony Garnett and Sally Hibbin, writers Barry Hines and Jim Allen, or cinematographers Chris Menges and Barry Ackroyd to remind ourselves that Loach is a collaborator. To account for his work is to account for those collaborations. On the other hand, despite the influence of the BBC and of Channel 4 on his career, he has maintained an autonomous distance from mainstream institutions within the film and television industry. Some of his projects have been suppressed or handled with reluctance by their commissioners; but he has never had projects taken away from him; he has always maintained the option of 'final cut': 'It's never been a problem. I've never been in a situation where anybody else has moved in. I think that would be intolerable really. That's a different business.'<sup>2</sup> Because of his films' low budgets, in comparison with Hollywood, his control over projects is not surprising; but this book proposes that one result of this control is that despite his frequent testaments to the contributions of his collaborators a reference to Loach suggests stylistic and thematic consistencies. On the issue of authorship and films, Cavell maintains that:

As long as a reference to a director by name suggests differences between the films associated with that name and ones associated with other such names, the reference is, so far as I can see, intellectually grounded. (Cavell 1996: 8–9)

This book recommends reasons that a reference to Ken Loach suggests differences from the work of other film-makers; I hope that the following chapters make these reasons evident.