

Programme Notes



Monday 23rd October 19:30

The Old Oak (15)



This might be Ken Loach's last film and whatever you might think of his muscular socialism, his films will be missed. I continue to show *Kes* to my students (in tandem with Barry Hines' superb novel) to illustrate the iniquitous world we live in.

The Old Oak is the third in a trilogy which gave us *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) and *Sorry We Missed You* (2019), films you couldn't take your eyes from. Loach was thinking of retiring a decade ago but the political world changed and he continued to feel he had something to say: *I, Daniel Blake* raised questions in the Commons.

Whereas *I, Daniel Blake* explored our attitude to austerity, *Sorry We Missed You* ripped apart the gig economy. Now, in *The Old Oak*, it is the ugliness of refugees housed in hostels across the UK and then abused and attacked by local people radicalised by social media. But Loach provides a deeper analysis: rather than attack the racists, he treats them sympathetically - they are little different from their victims. Market forces and political interests have put them in the same position as the wretched refugees who they have been encouraged to hate to feel good about themselves.

Reviews

As ever, Loach shows himself to be the John Bunyan of social realism. He is the fierce plain-speaker of political indignation with a style that is unironised and unadorned, shot by Robbie Ryan in simple daylight fashion, using first-timers and non-professionals in front of the camera. It is a film-making language utterly without the cynical twang that is de rigueur for everyone else. I hope that this isn't Loach's final film, but if it is, he has concluded with a ringing statement of faith in compassion for the oppressed.

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian, September 2023

*This is a sobering film indeed. While Loach's films typically offer some relief, there's precious little humour here. TJ's dog Marra gambols on the beach but, narratively speaking, Loach taught us not to get too attached to pets as long ago as *Kes* (1969). *The Old Oak* seems to promise a moment of transcendence as Yara and TJ attend an afternoon choir rehearsal at Durham Cathedral, but Loach purposefully swerves it, and Yara is reminded of the ruins of Palmyra.*

Pamela Hutchinson, bfi.org.uk, September 2023

Yara is vibrant, and a gifted shutterbug, but she and her mother and siblings have escaped the Assad regime; the rumour is that her father was killed by it. We hear these kinds of stories all the time, but Ebla Mari makes Yara's despair over her missing and possibly murdered father, and her agony at having had to abandon her country, incredibly layered and precise. Her performance doesn't allow us to phone in our empathy.

Owen Gleibermann, Variety, May 2023

Cast

Dave Turner	TJ Ballantyne
Ebla Mari	Yara
Claire Rodgerson	Laura
Trevor Fox	Charlie
Chris McGlade	Vic
Col Tait	Eddy

Credits

Director	Ken Loach
Writer	Paul Laverty
Producers	Rebecca O'Brien, Pascal Caucheteux, Grégoire Sorlat, Vincent Maraval
Editor	Jonathan Morris
Music	George Fenton
Camera	Robbie Ryan
Country	UK/France/Belgium
Running time	113 minutes

Film Facts

On being told that the director of *Scrapper* described their film as 'not a Ken Loach film', Loach has said, *"I'd be interested to see [Scrapper]. You present people so that you have empathy with them. The camera position has to be where someone might stand or sit. The lens has to be like a human eye. You don't want an ultra-wide angle or telephoto lens... Find a common humanity between the observer and observed, and you get solidarity. But if it's too bright, you recoil"*.

Dave Turner is not a trained actor, but a retired fireman and trade union rep; at the time Loach came calling, he was managing a pub in a former mining community in County Durham.

Ebla Mari has said, *"I am from an occupied place; my village is on the road to Syria so I'm really close and I can see Syria from my window. I have family there I have never met and I can hear the bombs in the distance. I can also see Palestine from where I live so I grew up surrounded by this life"*.

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