



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Kes

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Kes was Ken Loach's second feature film, and marks his move away from the self-conscious experimentalism of his earlier work.

As before, Loach developed a close partnership with the author of the source work, in this case Barry Hines, on whose novel *A Kestrel for a Knave* the film is based. Loach worked with both Hines and producer Tony Garnett to adapt it as a film script.

The dominant theme of *Kes* is the way in which the education system stifles the talents of many young working-class children, offering them little choice but to follow the narrow path laid out for them by an industrial capitalist society which sees them as fit only for unskilled manual or office work. This theme runs through much of Loach's work.

The influence of Italian neo-realism filmmaking can be traced in *Kes*, as in *Poor Cow* (1967). Loach explained, 'the camera's job was to record in a sympathetic way and to be unobtrusive, not to be slick.' Loach and his cameraman Chris Menges didn't, as is common in fiction films, mark spots for the actors to hit, but instead tried to accommodate the actors' movements. Loach, though, has admitted that throughout his films, including *Kes*, 'I lay traps, as it were,' for example by moving furniture. The apparent simplicity and directness of Loach's filming thus contains an element of manipulation which is hidden from both the audience and the actors.

Casting is also a striking feature of *Kes*. Colin Welland, as the English teacher, Farthing, was the only professional actor in the cast, although several, notably Brian Glover as the bullying Games teacher, went on to acting careers. All of the pupils, including Dai Bradley, who gives a remarkably natural performance as Billy, came from the Barnsley school in which the film was shot, while the headmaster was played by the school's own head. As with several Loach films, many of the adult cast were found in local clubs where they worked as entertainers and comics. Loach has commented that he casts for 'authenticity of age, class or region,' believing that even skilled actors cannot disguise their class origins under the close scrutiny of the camera.

Initially, there were difficulties in getting *Kes* shown, and it had a patchy release after opening in Doncaster. Since then, however, it has become one of Loach's best known and admired films.

Ros Cranston, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

The kestrel in 'Kes'

'We never thought of the kestrel as a symbol,' Ken Loach claimed in *Loach on Loach*. But it is impossible to watch the British filmmaker's humanist 1969 tale – of how the limited horizons of teenager Billy Casper are briefly opened when he trains a kestrel – and think of the falcon as anything but a symbol of freedom. While the fate of many working-class boys like Billy lies underground in one of Barnsley's collieries, his kestrel demonstrates her mastery of the sky, soaring and swooping high above.

It's said that the eagle is the raptor of the emperor, the peregrine that of the prince, while the smaller, more abundant kestrel is 'used by persons of a lower rank', according to J.E. Harting in *The Ornithology of Shakespeare* (1871). Hence the title of Barry Hines's book, on which *Kes* was based: *A Kestrel for a Knave*. Harting even suggests its name could derive from 'coystril', meaning knave or peasant. While Kes doesn't feature in the film as much as the title suggests, she gets her close-up when Billy shows her to his teacher, and it's impossible not to share his reverence for this small chestnut-brown assassin.

Richard, Barry's brother, a self-taught teen falconer, inspired the novel and trained the three kestrels that performed in the film – Freeman, Hardy and Willis (Hardy proved the most competent and willing actor). One of the three birds was even plucked from the same nest hole in Tankersley Old Hall that's seen in the film.

Kes came at a time of renewed concern for falcons and the environment, with J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine* and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* recently published. *Kes* reportedly sparked a craze for training kestrels (Richard Hines tells in his autobiography how he rescued one caught on an electricity pole by its leash). But since 1970 UK kestrel numbers have fallen 44 per cent, due to urbanisation and pesticides.

After the film's success, Disney asked to adapt Hines's novel, but wanted Kes to survive at the end. Hines declined the rights. Many readers may be happy to know that Freeman, Hardy and Willis were hacked back to the wild, just as Richard's kestrel, the original Kes who inspired the book and the film, was.

Isabel Stevens, *Sight and Sound*, September 2021

KES

Director: Kenneth Loach
©: Woodfall Films Ltd
A Kestrel Films production
Released Through: United Artists
Presented by: Woodfall Films
Producer: Tony Garnett
Production Supervisor: David Griffith
Assistant Director: Keith Evans
Continuity: Penny Eyles
Adaptation: Barry Hines, Kenneth Loach, Tony Garnett
Based on the novel Kestrel for a Knave *by:* Barry Hines
Director of Photography: Chris Menges
Lighting: Lee Electric (Lighting)
Editor: Roy Watts
Art Director: William McCrow
Wardrobe: Daphne Dare
Music Composed/Conducted by: John Cameron
Sound Recording: Tony Jackson, Gerry Humphries
Sound Recorded at: Twickenham Film Studios
Sound Editor: Peter Pierce
This film was also made by: Peter Allchorne, David Clarke, Michael English, Arthur Evans, Paddy Holman, John Matthews, Michael Messenger, Eddie Price, Franco Rosso, Nicola Webber, Michael Barnett, Harry Daly, Jane Harris, Sean Hudson, Robert Matthews, Ray Orton, Edward Riley, Fred Ruff, Eric Wicks, Harry Bell, Jim Duffy, Terry Lewis, Mike McDuffie, Bert Payne, Anne Robinson, John Williams, Tony Woodcock
uncredited
Technical Adviser: Richard Hines

Cast

David Bradley (*Billy Casper*)
Freddie Fletcher (*Jud Casper*)
Lynne Perrie (*Mrs Casper*)
Colin Welland (*Mr Farthing*)
Brian Glover (*Mr Sugden*)
Bob Bowes (*Mr Gryce*)
Bernard Atha (*youth employment officer*)
Laurence Bould
Ted Carroll
Agnes Drumgoon
Desmond Guthrie
The 4D Jones
Joe Miller (*Mrs Casper's friend*)
Julie Shakespeare
Geoffrey Banks (*maths teacher*)
Duggie Brown (*milkman*)
Stephen Crossland (*schoolboy*)
David Glover (*Tibbutt*)
Martin Harley (*younger boy*)
Joey Kaye (*pub entertainer*)
Robert Naylor (*MacDowall*)
George Speed (*schoolboy*)
Zoe Sunderland (*librarian*)
Eric Bolderson (*farmer*)
Beryl Carroll
Billy Dean (*fish and chip shop man*)
John Grayson
Trevor Hesketh (*Mr Crossley*)
Harry Markham
Frank Norton (*schoolboy*)
Leslie Stringer

UK 1969
111 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**The Manchurian Candidate**

Mon 1 Aug 14:40; Fri 5 Aug 18:00; Sun 14 Aug 14:40

M

Tue 2 Aug 18:15; Wed 10 Aug 20:45; Tue 23 Aug 20:50;
Mon 29 Aug 12:00

Sweet Smell of Success

Tue 2 Aug 20:50; Sat 13 Aug 18:10; Mon 29 Aug 18:30

Dance, Girl, Dance

Wed 3 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Pamela Hutchinson, Film Critic and Historian); Thu 18 Aug 20:45

Gaslight

Thu 4 Aug 18:15; Mon 8 Aug 20:45

Persona

Fri 5 Aug 20:50; Thu 11 Aug 21:00; Wed 31 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large)

Raging Bull

Sat 6 Aug 20:30; Thu 11 Aug 20:30; Fri 26 Aug 20:30

La Haine

Sat 6 Aug 21:00; Fri 19 Aug 20:50; Wed 24 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Ginette Vincendeau, Professor of film studies at King's College London)

Citizen Kane

Sun 7 Aug 14:30; Tue 16 Aug 18:15; Wed 24 Aug 20:40

The White Ribbon (Das weisse Band)

Tue 9 Aug 17:50; Sat 27 Aug 17:50

Kes

Tue 9 Aug 20:45; Mon 15 Aug 18:15; Tue 30 Aug 20:40

The Night of the Hunter

Wed 10 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Director of Public Programme and Audiences); Mon 22 Aug 20:45; Sun 28 Aug 12:20

Notorious

Thu 11 Aug 18:10; Wed 17 Aug 20:45; Sun 21 Aug 12:20; Thu 25 Aug 18:15

Bigger Than Life

Fri 12 Aug 20:40; Wed 17 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large)

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