

Looking for Eric Study Notes



Directed by: Ken Loach

Certificate: 15

Running time: 116 mins

Synopsis:

Eric the postman is slipping through his own fingers...

His wife has gone, his stepsons are out of control and the house was chaotic even before a cement mixer appeared in the front garden. Life is crazy enough, but it is Eric's own secret that is driving him to the brink. How can he face up to Lily, the woman of his dreams that he once loved and walked out on many years ago? Despite the comical efforts and misplaced goodwill of his mates, Eric continues to sink.

In desperate times it takes a special friend to help a lost postman find his way, so Eric turns to his hero: footballing genius, philosopher and poster boy, Eric Cantona.

Realism and Comedy

Director Ken Loach typically produces films that fit into the social realism genre. This often involves working on location with non-professional actors in order to capture the most authentic characters, emotions and landscapes onscreen. Such techniques have been employed in films including *Sweet Sixteen*, *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* and *Cathy Come Home*, resulting in an aesthetic that makes the work of Ken Loach so identifiable.

However, *Looking For Eric* is clearly being marketed as a comedy.

Marketing a film is all about maximising the cinema audience. In the case of *Looking For Eric*, the comedy aspects of the film have been emphasised over other aspects, such as the director. However, the film contains other strands that are quite obviously not comic, nor intended to be read in such a way.

1. Consider how the balance between comedy and realism works in the film. In what way do the more serious scenes or issues in the film work alongside the overtly comic moments?
2. As an audience member, is there any point at which you could feel conflicted by this combination of social realism and comedy?

Comedy is a comparatively cheap genre in terms of production costs, as it doesn't rely on expensive special effects and is not tied to any specific time or place. The genre's sole purpose is to amuse and entertain the audience, who will have expectations of the nature of the humour from the trailer, poster and other marketing devices. Comedy can make for good box-office returns: combined with Ken Loach's spare, social realist style, where there is little need for expensive costumes, sets and actors, such returns can be maximised.

3. The inclusion of Eric Cantona in the film, as the device which enables Eric to start getting his life back, is more in the vein of magical realism than social realism. Explain whether you think the genre of the film means that an audience is more likely to suspend disbelief.

A Very British Comedy?

The talent drawn on to produce the world of Eric Bishop combines a number of well-known Manchester comedians, some of whom have had national success – for example, John Henshaw is currently well-known for the Post Office campaign. In addition to the talent playing the supportive friends of Eric Bishop, the humour itself can be described as very British. The central source of comedy in the film comes from the friendship between Eric Bishop and Eric Cantona. This relies on an affectionate send-up of the persona of Eric Cantona (King Eric), evidently with the full co-operation of the infamous footballer.

The cast members provide links to themes common to Ken Loach's work, such as unionisation. However this time, the work force is not important because it is fighting for better representation or conditions, rather it provides a place where the largely male cast can exist in sufficient numbers to provide the background and the follow through for the footballing metaphors that permeate and bring to life the narrative.

The topic of a man with recurrent debilitating panic attacks may not seem an obvious choice for a comedy. However, the way that Eric's friends gather around him after his car accident is the source of much humour. The main point of contact between Eric's home life and his worklife is through his relationship with Meatballs.

4. Think about the scene where Meatballs is leading a visualisation with Eric and his friends.
 - a) How is humour generated?
 - b) How important are factors like gender and camaraderie?
 - c) What do we learn about how Eric's workmates feel about him?
 - d) Is there anything particularly British about the humour in this sequence?
5. If you were remaking the film for Hollywood what, if anything, would you change about the script? Think about specific scenes, content, humour, dialogue etc.
6. Could the light-hearted treatment of mental illness be considered at all insensitive, or even offensive? Explain your viewpoint in detail using examples from the film to support your answer.