

THE FIRST DRAFT.

I knew the moment I'd finished Lynn Barber's wonderful autobiographical essay in Granta, about her affair with a shady older man at the beginning of the nineteen-sixties, that it had all the ingredients for a film. There were memorable characters, a vivid sense of time and place – an England right on the cusp of profound change - an unusual mix of high comedy and deep sadness, and interesting, fresh things to say about class, ambition and the relationship between children and parents. My wife Amanda is an independent film producer, so I made her read it, too, and she and her colleague Finola Dwyer went off to option it. It was only when they began to talk about possible writers for the project that I began to want to do it myself – a desire

can never be, however hard they try. Even before this film's release, we have taken it to the Sundance Festival in Utah, and Berlin. And I have befriended several of the cast, who, by definition, are better-looking than the rest of us...What has literature got, by comparison?

I wrote the first draft of 'An Education' on spec, some time in 2004, and while doing so, I began to see some of the problems that would have to be solved if the original essay were ever to make it to the screen. There were no problems with the essay itself, of course, which did everything a piece of memoir should do; but by its very nature, memoir presents a challenge, consisting as it does of an adult mustering all the wisdom he or she can manage to look back at an earlier time in life. Almost all of us become wiser as we get older, so we can see pattern and meaning in an episode of autobiography – pattern and meaning that we would not have been able to see at the time. Memoirists know it all, but the people they are writing about know next to nothing.

We become other things, too, as well as wise: more articulate, more cynical, less naïve, more or less forgiving, depending on how things have turned out for us. The Lynn Barber who wrote the memoir – a celebrated journalist, known for her perspicacious, funny, occasionally devastating profiles of celebrities – shouldn't be audible in the voice of the central character in our film, not least because, as Lynn says in her essay, it was the very experiences that she was describing that formed the woman we know. In other words, there was no 'Lynn Barber' until she had received the eponymous education. Oh, this sounds obvious to the point of banality: a sixteen-year-old girl should sound different from her sixty-year-old self. What is less obvious, perhaps, is the way the sixty-year-old self se,

however, clearly wasn't convinced that there was any commercial potential in the film at all, and that was that. This reflected a pattern repeated many times over the next few years: there was interest in the script, followed by doubts about whether any investment could ever be recouped. Sometimes it felt as though I was in the middle of writing a little literary novel, and going around town asking for a five million pound advance for it. Our belief in the project, our conviction that it could one day become a beautiful thing, was sweet, and the producers' passion got us through a few doors, but it didn't mean that we weren't going to cost people money. Another problem with the film's commercial appeal was beginning to become apparent, too: the lead actress would have to be an unknown – no part for Kate or Cate or Angelina here – and no conventional male lead would want to play the part of the predatory, amoral, possibly

anything about it. The decision we made during that time made the script more morally complicated, and the film is the richer for it.

Beeban and I had a cloud hanging over us, however. She was attached to another movie which, like ours, had spent a long time in development. Eventually it became apparent that she couldn't do both, that they were going to clash, and reluctantly (I think and hope) she decided to go with the project which had predated ours. We were back to square one.

When Carey's mother visited the set, she told us that Carey had always cursed her youthful looks, but here they worked for her: I cannot imagine any other actress who could have been so convincing as a schoolgirl and yet so dazzling after her transformation. And, of course, she can act. This was a huge part for any young actress - Jenny is in every single scene - but I don't think one ever tires of watching her, though. There's so much detail, so much intelligence in the performance that it's impossible to get bored.

My only contribution was a small panic when I'd watched her audition on DVD - she was so clearly, uncannily right that I was concerned when I heard she hadn't yet been offered the role. And yet this small panic, expressed after producers and director and casting agent had seen the audition, and long after she'd been cast in other high-profile productions, is easily enough for me to claim that I discovered her; so I will, for years to come.

ORLANDO BLOOM

"Oh, God, you can't ask him," I said. Well, they'd already asked him, and he'd already said he wanted to play the part of Danny. Arrangements were made for the care of his dog.

A couple of weeks before shooting, I was asked to talk to him about a couple of lines in the script. He called me at my office, and told me that, much as he admired the writing, he wouldn't be able to play the part. He hoped we'd be able to work together on something else. Confused, I called my wife and told her that, as far as I could tell, Orlando Bloom had just told me he wouldn't, after all, be playing the part of Danny. Amanda spoke to his agent.

"No," she said. "There has been a misunderstanding." (It was clear, I felt, from the tone of her voice, who had misunderstood whom.) "He just wanted to talk to you about the script."

I replayed the conversation in my head. We already had a wonderful cast lined up,

were. And eventually somebody believed us. The American financiers Endgame Entertainment liked the script and the cast and the director enough to enable the film

