



RICHARD EYRE: WEAPONS OF UNDERSTANDING

The Ploughman's Lunch

The Ploughman's Lunch

Director: Richard Eyre

Production Companies: Greenpoint Films, A.C. & D. (Plant Hirers), Goldcrest Films and Television, Michael White

Executive Producer: Michael White *

Producers: Simon Relph, Ann Scott

Production Manager: Luciana Arrighi

Production Assistant: Rachel Neale

Assistant Directors: Simon Relph,

Christopher Figg, Linda Bruce

Screenplay: Ian McEwan

Director of Photography: Clive Tickner

Editor: David Martin

Assistant Editors: Michael Parkinson, Simon Harris

Production Designer: Luciana Arrighi

Art Director: Michael Pickwood

Costumes: Luciana Arrighi

Costume Associate: Joy Kleiner

Wardrobe: Rita Wakely

Make-up: Elaine Carew

Title Design: Nicholas Jenkins

Music Composed and Conducted by:

Dominic Muldowney

Music Recording: John Richards

Sound Recording: David Stephenson

Sound Re-recording: Gerry Humphreys

Sound Editor: Richard Dunford

Cast:

Jonathan Pryce (*James Penfield*)

Tim Curry (*Jeremy Hancock*)

Rosemary Harris (*Ann Barrington*)

Frank Finlay (*Matthew Fox*)

Charlie Dore (*Susan Barrington*)

David De Keyser (*Tom Gold*)

Nat Jackley (*Mr Penfield*)

Bill Paterson (*lecturer*)

William Maxwell, Paul Jesson, Andy Rashleigh (*journalists*)

Christopher Fulford (*young journalist*)

David Lyon (*newsreader*)

Polly Abbott (*Gold's assistant*)

Peter Walmsley (*Bob Tuckett*)

Bob Cartland (*editor*)

Pearl Hackney (*Mrs Penfield*)

Simon Stokes (*Edward*)

Anna Wing (*woman at poetry reading*)

Ken Drury (*young man at poetry reading*)

Richard Cottan (*student at poetry reading*)

Peter Birch (*barman*)

Ken Shorter (*squash coach*)

Orlando Wells (*Tom Fox*)

Witold Schejbal (*Jacek*)

Libba Davies (*Betty*)

Sandra Voe (*Carmen*)

Andrew Norton (*Pete*)

Cecily Hobbs (*Carol*)

Clare Sutcliffe (*Jill*)

Robert McIntosh (*dad in commercial*)

Vivienne Chandler (*mum in commercial*)

Nicole Kleeman (*daughter in commercial*)

Bernard Mullins (*son in commercial*)

Alan Mitchell (*junior minister*)

UK 1983

107 mins

35mm

A BFI National Archive Print

Ian McEwan on 'The Ploughman's Lunch'

Could you tell me something about how you came to write The Ploughman's Lunch and to work with Richard Eyre?

We made a film for television [*The Imitation Game*], and that was a very successful collaboration from our point of view. I think one of the problems for writers in films is that it's a director's medium and writers tend to get used. Working with Richard meant working with someone whose habits are those of a theatre director, who respects writers, and who really is far more intent on coming to terms with a script than trying to get writers to produce scripts which feed into directorial fantasies. I wrote a first draft, and of course Richard and I talked, and second draft changes were largely to do with incorporating the Falklands into the film. But any changes Richard suggests are always towards ways of saying better what you are already saying, rather than barging in with 'Why don't we make the man a rat and the woman a cockroach ...?' So I felt confidence in him and, perhaps more importantly, I felt a shared 'world view'.

Having made a film set in 1940, we both wanted to make a film set in the present, and we shared the feeling that whereas the American cinema, or for that matter Hungarian, or Italian or French cinema, managed to reflect some contemporary reality, we had very little in British cinema that showed us ourselves. That was, very loosely, where we began.

Did you receive development money?

No. I started writing in April 1981, but the film wasn't, in a sense, set up. There was talk of Channel 4 funding, but at that time Channel 4 hadn't got on the air, and there was – no doubt very creative – chaos. So I made a virtue of necessity and decided that the best way to maintain control (I can't think of a better word) was simply to take a year of my own time. I proceeded in a very leisurely way, telling Richard I was writing him a film. But we didn't talk for a long time after that, though I had a working title – *The Ploughman's Lunch*.

I had told Richard that little anecdote ['The ploughman's lunch is a completely successful fabrication of the past' on the part of advertising men] and we both agreed it was a good starting point. It proceeded outwards from that, and what I did was to mooch around: I went to the Greenham Common peace camp, I went to Poland, I went to the Conservative and Labour Party conferences. I asked to spend a day watching the television news being made and, by a series of Chinese whispers on the phone, the message got relayed wrongly and I ended up going to Radio News. But as soon as I stepped in there I thought this is where the film must be. It was perfect! It had... a paradoxical quality: something of the dowdiness of a staff common room in a rather cheesy boys' grammar school, but clearly also the voice of the State was emanating from this place. You expected to see dust, chalk dust...

Why did you go to the newsroom?

One idea was that contemporary 'reality' is something that people make up. We have to have the world interpreted to us, and just as we were proceeding from the idea of the ploughman's lunch and the fake past, I also wanted to have some fake present. That's not to talk cynically because novelists themselves create fake realities. News is a form of fiction and I wanted to see how it's made. As soon as I walked into the newsroom I knew I wanted a

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Play for Today: Comedians + intro by
Sir Jonathan Pryce (tbc) + Sir Richard Eyre
Sun 1 Dec 18:40

The Ploughman's Lunch

Fri 6 Dec 18:10; Wed 18 Dec 20:50

Play for Today: Just a Boys' Game
+ **Screen Two: The Insurance Man**

Sat 7 Dec 17:45

Iris + intro by Professor Lucy Bolton,
Queen Mary University of London
Thu 12 Dec 18:10

Philosophical Screens: Iris

Thu 12 Dec 20:00 Blue Room

Play for Today: The Imitation Game

Fri 13 Dec 18:10

Notes on a Scandal

Sat 14 Dec 18:10; Sat 28 Dec 14:45

The Dresser

Sun 15 Dec 18:00

Stage Beauty

Thu 19 Dec 20:40; Sun 29 Dec 15:10

The Cherry Orchard

Sat 21 Dec 17:40

Sunday Premiere: Tumbledown

Tue 17 Dec 18:10

Performance: Suddenly Last Summer

Sun 22 Dec 15:10

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character who worked there. It was the year of the Royal Wedding, and for a long time I thought the film was going to be about the press corps in relation to the Royal Family.

When I went to the Party conferences I became quite determined that the film should end at the Conservative Party conference, and towards the end of that year I had become fairly certain that what I wanted to write was a love story whose ins and outs would, in some way, reflect some of the ins and outs and deceptions and alliances of the Suez crisis... I wanted to find a metaphor that would work in two directions, both for private deceit and national deceit or, more crucially, forms of private self-delusion. I think the most potent lies are the ones we tell ourselves, and this is even more so on a national level.

Is there a sense in which this generation is now rewriting its history?

I don't see it as a film about a generation at all. They are my age, but they are singularly untouched by what I would regard as the formative time, which would be the late 1960s. So in this respect I would regard them as slightly anomalous. I think it was possible for lots of ambitious people to come pouring out of Oxford and Cambridge and hardly be touched by the move towards political radicalism in this country, but just hunt down the jobs in town in their third year, and wonder if they'll get that place with *Vogue* or on the BBC's trainee director course, or whatever people were pushing into. These people in the film are contemporaries, but the film wasn't meant to suggest that this is what happened to the generation of '48 or the class of '69.

Whose footage of the Conservative Party conference was it?

Ours. That was the first week's shooting.

It seemed to me that apart from one shot with Michael Heseltine it could have been a montage.

No, it couldn't possibly. There's a slow pan off Margaret Thatcher to Jonathan Pryce biting his nails, and she is in shot with him framing the whole of the rest of the screen. It was all shot there in the last two days of the conference, and it wasn't clear what would happen because we had to shoot all that first, before the main shoot. We were having problems with our permissions up to the last moment, but we got in quite successfully because we had Channel 4's blessing and, through them, a connection with ITN. And we had official permission from the Tory Party. We went in as ourselves, shooting a feature film, a romantic comedy! They had seen the script and they had no objection to it.

But you do cut the speeches. For example, the Thatcher speech about 'telling the people the truth' becomes a very poignant commentary on the film.

The conference is the kind of reality you behave selectively towards, just as you behave selectively towards all your material. I sort of wrote their speeches in advance and they seemed to give them more or less word for word. I went the year before and I knew the kind of things that happened. The script simply gave the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister lines about national identity, destiny and the younger generation. Resounding phrases about the nation. And they repeated them. Of course, they were talking about the Falklands as well, and it couldn't have been better unless they had actually been making speeches about Suez. But credit for all that should also go to Clive Tickner and a tiny crew wielding a 35mm camera in such a limited space, and to Richard Eyre for devising some kind of logic for the sequence.

Interview by Jill Forbes, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1983