

Irvine Welsh on the original choices for Trainspotting

Trainspotting author Irvine Welsh has revealed he originally thought Ewan McGregor was a Londoner and Robert Carlyle was too small to play Begbie on the big screen.

Welsh, 65, also revealed that English actor Christopher Eccleston was originally asked to play Francis “Franco” Begbie, the Trainspotting psychopath, in the 1996 movie.

Trainspotting, set largely in Edinburgh, transformed McGregor and Carlyle as well as co-stars Ewen Bremner and Johnny Lee Miller, into household names.

But Welsh has now admitted he didn’t picture some of its stars as the characters he originally wrote in his iconic 1993 novel.

He told BBC Scotland series The Big Scottish Book Club that he was so convinced by McGregor in Dennis Potter’s 1993 TV serial Lipstick on Your Collar, that he believed the Perth-born star was from London.

And he said that, while Carlyle was “fabulous” as Begbie, Lancashire-born Eccleston, who starred alongside McGregor in Shallow Grave, was more like the muscular character he had in mind.

He said: “Obviously you see some more than others. I remember I really liked Ewan McGregor as an actor. He was a squaddie in one of those Dennis Potter things and he was really good in

it. He was this kind of Cockney squaddie and I thought he was a Londoner basically.

“Then Danny (Boyle) sent me the Shallow Grave screener. It was great and I thought they were a bit kind of New Town snobby for me. So I thought once they get my Leith guys in there, in these roles, with that energy, it’ll work really well.

“I didn’t see Bobby (Carlyle) as Begbie at all. I saw Begbie as a much more physically bigger guy, but I was so pleased because he’s such a great actor and he brought that mad kind of Cracker energy and it was fabulous.

“But Christopher Eccleston was originally asked to play Begbie and I thought he would have been fabulous because he was just this big guy. But I think it would have been too much like Shallow Grave, basically the same cast.”

The characters returned in the Trainspotting sequel, T2, also reappearing in some of Welsh’s other writing, and the author said he would continue to go back to them in future.

He said: “I think I’ll go back to them all. To me it’s like every character becomes like a tool in a box basically and when you’re doing a job you kind of think ‘this one will do but I’ll maybe have to sharpen him up a bit because he’s a bit worn’.

“It’s also, I’ve been writing them for quite a while now and you kind of want to find out what’s happened to them.

“The last time, Begbie had gone from being a warm blooded psychopath to being a cold blooded psychopath which is kind of much more dangerous. Give him another ten years he’ll probably be in politics.”



Irvine Welsh – Edinburgh International Book Festival – Day 17,
Edinburgh School of Art, 29th August 2022 © 2022 J.L. Preece