



Out of the Shadowlands

With two more successful films to his credit, Sir Anthony Hopkins tells PAUL KEERS why he is now happy to be in the spotlight

"I've played quite a lot of characters who have a lot in reserve, and don't actually give much, are rather secretive and withdrawn. Someone said to me that I'm very good at holding secrets as an actor."

When Anthony Hopkins recently held court at The Dorchester, it was with the object of letting a few of those secrets go. Hopkins – now Sir Anthony Hopkins, although everyone calls him Tony – was in town to talk about his latest film, *Shadowlands*, in which he plays the Oxford academic C.S. Lewis. And it came hot on the heels of the Oscar nomination for his role as Mr Stephens the butler in his previous movie, *The Remains of the Day*.

As Stephens, Hopkins portrays an immaculate, pristine robot of a man, hiding his feelings behind his sense of duty; as C.S. Lewis, he plays a slightly blustery, romantic intellectual. "The only thing they have in common," says a friend, who watched the actor take on both roles, "is a history of repression." But that is a thread which runs through all of Hopkins' great roles, and through his life as well.

Anthony Hopkins portrays the most powerful emotions with staggering economy. Long ago, he rejected what he once described as "honking and hooting acting", the loud, blustering style of the classi-

cal Shakespearian actors, in favour of his own minimalist technique. He exudes feelings from his expressions; he can grieve in a glance, freeze with a stare.

He has trembled with the volcanic angers of a Hitler, a King Lear and a Captain Bligh; oozed the chilling ruthlessness of Hannibal Lecter; projected the brisk certainty of Henry Wilcox; and, now, the repressed desires of Stephens and the grief of C.S. Lewis. So how does he summon up such extraordinary emotion?

"I don't know where it comes from, all the tears," he says, softly. "Not that I'm in pain – I don't go home at night and then gnash my teeth, because I've done my job, and I'm cold and detached about it. But it's within me and it works, and I'm very relieved it shakes me about.

"It's an odd process, acting. I think it's all locked up in the subconscious mind somehow, and I get the odd sensation that it triggers back way into my past, like a fast replay back into some state when I was a child. And I think that's where it comes from, some lost... pain."

Hopkins was born and brought up in a village near Port Talbot in South Wales. "I experienced the loneliness of being an only child, and being sent away to school, and defending myself against people," he admits, "and I suppose that's

carried on into my fifties now."

As a young boy, in a small, working class community, fame was the spur. "Richard Burton and I were born in the same town," he remembers, "and I went and asked for his autograph. He was on his way to a rugby match in Cardiff and he signed my autograph book.

"I remember thinking with such envy and yearning, God, I'd love to be like that, just love to have that... whatever it was, confidence.

"And I remember that day, making a sort of grandstand decision for myself that I was going to do something with my life."

Burton himself, of course, has legendary associations with The Dorchester, the place where, as *The Times* described it, "he raised hell so high it went through the roof." After his death, Hopkins attended a Burton party in The Dorchester. "They were all singing Myfanwy for all they were worth," he later remembered, "and I was thinking, oh God, I hope they don't see my lips, because I can't speak a bloody word of Welsh." Hopkins is now a member of The Dorchester Club in the hotel's basement.

But like Burton, it has been a long journey from Port Talbot to Park Lane. In fact, Hopkins only achieved his present movie star status at the second attempt. As he puts it, "I've been on the merry-go-round twice, really." ▽

His first spin on the Hollywood carousel came in the late Seventies and early Eighties, with films like *A Bridge Too Far*, *Magic*, *The Elephant Man* and *The Bounty*. But he was struggling with a reputation as hard-drinking and argumentative. Despite a well-publicised rescue by *Alcoholics Anonymous*, he never seemed to get the parts his talent deserved.

In 1984, he returned to London and the stage. "Common sense dictated I was doing the right thing," he said later. "I could, after all, end up like some British actors who go out to Hollywood and sit around the pool until their teeth fall out."

Instead, he created the stage role of Lambert Le Roux, the monstrous South African media tycoon, in *Pravda*. He was acclaimed: one critic described his performance as "the greatest in post-war theatre." And after a *Lear* and an *Antony*, Hopkins finished the Eighties as a West End lead in *Madame Butterfly*.

With the movie role which followed he really conquered Hollywood – his Oscar-winning performance as Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*.

"I had no illusions, but I'm a good actor, and I know what I'm doing, and I knew it was going to be good. I sensed it was going to be a great big hit. When I went back to England in 1984, I thought, "That's my film career finished. I'd go back to theatre, because I wasn't getting very good scripts in Hollywood towards the end. And then suddenly I'm back, and the night I got the Oscar I touched the ceiling. I thought, I've achieved everything I ever wanted to achieve."

The pinnacle of horror – is that perhaps why the following films, like *Shadowlands*, are so gentle by comparison? "What, to

get away from Hannibal? Nothing as absolutely deliberate, really. I just haven't been offered any psychopaths since Hannibal!"

But it is certainly the screen, rather than the stage, where



Hopkins sees himself. Apart, again, from Richard Burton, Hopkins had no role models among British stage actors, and he has no respect for their clique. From childhood, he admired instead American celebrities, from Bogart to Brando to Harrison Ford.

"There tends to be a terrible snobbery in England, or there was, where people would say "Oh, they're just film actors." But I've always liked them, found them very watchable. So I'm caught."

Caught, that is, somewhere between a star and a craftsman actor; between the celebrities of Hollywood and the serious actors of the English stage.

"I'm a mid-Atlantic actor, I suppose," he suggests. "I'm not the stuff of luvvies. I don't hang around with them. People like O'Toole and Burton were never part of the gang."

From *Lear* to *Bligh*, from *Le Roux* to *Lecter*, Hopkins has excelled at portraying men who display the certainty that comes with absolute power – or absolute

madness. It's a certainty which Hopkins admits he lacks in himself and admires in his characters. It's their conviction, he believes, which makes them so charismatic.

"I am attracted to those parts,"

he agrees. "I like people who are very certain, because sometimes I'm not, but my credo in life, my design for living, is: get on with it. Don't waste time.

Get on with your life. Make mistakes, but don't look back. Get on with it.

"I hate indecision. I make many bad decisions, which prove to be wrong later on, but I'd rather make them wrong than not make them. So I admire those characters, they're made of very strong, powerful stuff.

"You can't say it nowadays, because you'd be called a fascist, but we have no

heroes, we have no certainty in anything today," he says, his voice sinking to a near whisper. "Lambert Le Roux was an attractive figure – in the theatre anyway, in the imagination – because he represented that very symbol of certainty. That's why many of the old people in Russia want Stalin back.

"And there's something in these characters, in these extraordinary creatures who rise every 50 years or so, that is awesome. Absolute certainty. They have no doubt at all. We had one in this country with Margaret Thatcher, she had no doubt at all about anything." For the only time in our conversation, a chill descended.

In the end, Hopkins himself claims to be certain of little, except his present happiness – but that's not such a bad thing about which to be certain. "I'm having the best time in my life now," he insists. "Because I'm successful, and I'm happy. I'm still uncertain, still insecure, but I'm happy." □

the great repression: Hopkins as the reticent butler in the praised Merchant-Ivory production, *The Remains of the Day*.