
After filming away for a year, *Glass Man* finds actor **ANDREW SCOTT** in a reflective mood about his nuanced screen characters, writers he admires and his first love, theatre

MAKING CONNECTIONS

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The irony of interviewing Olivier and Bafta award-winning actor Andrew Scott amid the primary coloured hues of a child's bedroom was not lost on me, for Scott is inherently inquisitive—a child-like quality that is often dimmed during adulthood, but not in Scott's case. Searching for a quiet room in the location house, we settled between a sturdy cot, soft toys and squiggly drawings. The scene was set.

Growing up in Dublin, Scott remembers being “really fascinated with old movies on TV” and benefitted from acting classes aged seven as a means “to combat shyness ... It's a myth about actors, that they're very extroverted.” His friends from those very classes still question his shyness but Scott argues, “I feel like I'm able to disguise it much better.”

Shedding disguises and pretences is at the core of Scott's characters. From Lieutenant Leslie in Sam Mendes's *1917*, to Jim Moriarty opposite Benedict Cumberbatch in the BBC series *Sherlock*, to C in *Spectre*, Scott always evokes empathy for his complicated characters. Scott's indomitable quest to learn is undoubtedly what draws him to such engaging roles. “There are times where I'm playing romantic things or times where I'm playing someone quite dark, or where I'm playing parents, I see sort of weird connections with what I've chosen to explore. Or maybe there are things I've wanted to explore so I'm attracted to them, but I definitely relate them to what's going on in my life.”

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Scott's roles are never intrinsically bad or good for he does not "respond to those characters ... I feel like I always look for something where the argument isn't too easy, even in something comedic. They've all got struggles as well. I think that's what audiences really respond too." The response to Scott's performance as the priest in Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* was palpable, so much so that there was a 25 per cent increase in sales of canned gin and tonics, and a 162 per cent spike in internet searches for religious porn as a result of his flawed but fanciable role.

We can find yet another compelling depiction of a fully rounded character in Scott's latest film role as Sir Rollo in Lena Dunham's *Catherine Called Birdy*. A coming-of-age story set in 12th century Britain might not sound relatable "but it's so much about family dynamics and societal pressure", and for Scott's character his battle with masculinity. These complexities are addressed with a frank lightness of touch, putting the audience at ease. For example, we are faced with Birdy's menstrual blood in neither a shocking nor violent way, purely a "literal representation" of the female experience that has long been absent from the big screen. "Essentially *Catherine Called Birdy* is a feminist story. What we're trying to represent is the messiness and the complexity of humanity."

Scott's face lights up when discussing this film, "Isn't it wonderful? I was so charmed by it, it's so funny." Dunham is indeed responsible for the film's infectious charm and wit. "Birdy is so distinctive because it's full of her energy – that is Lena's energy, which is quite surprising and incredibly warm. The set was just a really happy place to be. I can't speak more highly of [Lena]. She's somebody I really love and it's so lovely to see that the film is so like her, it's original."

Scott is in a unique position having worked alongside two talented writers who have captured the zeitgeist in their creations. While he has learnt so much from working with Waller-Bridge and Dunham, Scott stresses how their talent transcends "one hit wonders" or only being categorised as cool. "Cool is one of the worst things in the world. I mean what's cool? Saying something that you're apparently apathetic about? I don't see any value in that ... There's so much more within them that's much more durable than just being cool. I'm really excited about what Phoebe's doing next because



I know it will be surprising."

Surprising is a considered choice of word from Scott for he loves "connecting with people who are socially bold, the people who say things unexpected".

Throughout the pandemic Scott made new connections with soon-to-be drama graduates as a mentor. "I definitely got as much out of it as they did. Everybody thinks that you go to this sort of utopian place when you're successful and you're supposed to know everything." This period of time with his students was a welcome reminder "of what's important as an actor. One thing that kept coming back to me is that your individuality is everything. Trying to disguise who you are is always a recipe for disaster."

Teaching comes naturally to Scott having grown up surrounded by the profession in his family. Looking back at his own childhood education Scott notes how "so many things aren't taught. In Ireland we had religious education every day as much as maths and everything else. There was a

real opportunity there to learn about what religion is, which is ultimately kindness and treating people the way you want to be treated."

Instead religion was taught by rote. "The way you learnt it made it kind of meaningless. Any teacher that went off the curriculum and was able to understand who you are and was able to see people's particular skill sets I think [had] a great skill. I really notice it with directors because if you have a whole company of actors you have to be able to understand that what's going to help one person is going to hinder another actor, and everyone's on different frequencies."

Wherever our conversation veers off to, Scott always manages to bring it back to his first love, theatre. "Talking about it, I really miss it actually ... I look forward to getting back into it." When reading scripts Scott always looks for good writing, "I always say a writer is an actor's best friend ... you can't play a good part unless it's well written."

Scott actively avoids "safe theatre", as he describes it. "I hate the feeling when you know what's going to happen, when you know somebody's about to start a speech because in real life you don't know when you're about to go on a rant, it evolves. All that stuff is still something I think about every time I do a play, the liveness of the audience. You know when people make mistakes on stage it's always a thrill. There's no more silent an audience than an audience that's just witnessed a mistake. Actors are always devastated when that happens, but actually I think it makes the audience appreciate" how vulnerable theatre is.

Despite his accomplishments, Scott never shies away from vulnerability. "It's true to say [there are] opportunities that could make me much more comfortable but I think comfort is overrated a little bit. You can make successful films but in my mind they're not the

kind of films I want to watch or be in."

Unlike the glittering superficiality surrounding Hollywood, at Scott's core lies an unwavering sense of integrity, a quality perhaps anchored by the slow-burning journey of his career. "I didn't feel like a failure back then but also I don't feel like I'm a success now. I feel, like, 'Ok, this is the stage where I'm at so what am I going to do to unlearn stuff or to keep yourself engaged with what I'm doing?'"

Scott is fearful about the echo chamber algorithms create on social media, feeding you with what they predict you'll respond to when in reality "love and humanity in life manifests itself in such surprising ways", whether that be his mum chatting with strangers on the bus or Scott himself striking up a conversation with the security zguard at his local Sainsbury's.

Like his messy characters, Scott sights the black and white approach to social media as "dangerous" for not allowing for ambiguity. "What you're required to do in 280 characters or less is to say something that shuts down the person, so actually it's the death of a conversation ... That sort of authoritarianism about what we're supposed to say is so dangerous. You really do need antagonistic voices."

This juxtaposition finds its way into Scott's life too. The day before our interview Scott was exhausted after a 11-hour flight only to discover that he couldn't enter his flat because of work he's having done. Scott was plucked from the eternal sunshine of Los Angeles and thrust onto the rainy streets of London.

Instead of feeling defeated Scott decided to hop on a train and visit a friend. "We're not here long, so you can't just dismiss an entire day ... Actually, opportunity arises, a golden moment arises every single day, it's just being conscious of it."

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