Film Close-Up: Anthony Hopkins

by Joey_Berlin

Anthony Hopkins elevated grisly horror to an art form with his Oscar-winning role as a manipulative murderer in "The Silence of the Lambs." Hopkins is back playing another calculating killer in "Fracture," a new thriller pitting the acting heavyweight against rising star and recent Oscar nominee Ryan Gosling.

ANTHONY HOPKINS - Anthony Hopkins stars as Ted Crawford in New Line Cinema's release of Gregory Hoblit's 'Fracture.' CNS Photo courtesy of Sam Emerson.
Hopkins stars in "Fracture" as Ted Crawford, a millionaire who shoots his cheating wife and tries to take down Gosling, the young prosecutor, while he's at it. The case looks like a no-brainer but Hopkins has a few surprises. He goes toe-to-toe with Gosling in a battle of nerves and wits.

Hopkins was knighted in 1993 and was allowed to keep the title of "Sir" after he became a U.S. citizen in 2000. But he prefers to just go by Tony. His career began on the stage; however, Hopkins has been acting in films since his 1968 debut opposite Katharine Hepburn and Peter O'Toole in "The Lion in Winter." He is well-known for playing Hannibal Lecter, and Hopkins is perfect for English period dramas like "The Remains of the Day" or "Howards End." He also delivered an unforgettable performance as Oliver Stone's "Nixon."

In November, Hopkins will appear in the mythical adventure "Beowulf." At the end of the year, on New Year's Eve, he will celebrate his 70th birthday.

Q: Is Crawford, your character in "Fracture," a genius?

A: I think he's bit wacko. He's a little crazy to shoot his wife. She's having an affair. He could have divorced her, but to kill her is a bit strange. But I think he does a peculiar mental exercise to see if he can perform the perfect crime. And I suppose there are people around who've done things like that.

A case in point is Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment," the motiveless murder, or Shakespeare's Iago who just malignantly destroys people's lives and at the end says, "It's just because I can and I choose to." And I think this is what Crawford is, he's made of the same material. He's very smart. But it's the smartness and intelligence of somebody who's really, I suppose, quite disturbed.

Q: So it was not just a broken heart that drove Crawford to murder?

A: I think it was rage and pride. "How could she be false to me?" It's like Othello. That's his flaw. And I

think with Crawford, his weakness is his pride, his narcissism, his arrogance.

I knew a director whose mantra was, "I never make mistakes." And he's a horrible man, and he's a horrible human being, this guy. He worked a lot in television and he was a sadist; he bullied people. He always bullied people who couldn't fight back, like the makeup people. And I had big fights with him 'cause I wouldn't put up with it.

But he said, "I never make mistakes." "OK, fine. Well, here's your big mistake: we won't work with you." So he's unemployed, he's been unemployed for years. People won't go near him because he's a pig. So you pay the price.

I think this character, Crawford, he's made his own rule, too: "I don't have any weak points."

Q: The audience seems to root for Crawford in the first half, and then turns against him in the second half. Was that what attracted you to the film?

A: No, what attracted me to the film was the way the whole thing was written. I have read a few scripts over the years. There's no perfect script but sometimes when a really good one comes along, it's an instinct, it's an intuition. I mean it'd be silly to say you can feel it when you pick up the envelope. But my agent said, "I really recommend you read this. Greg Hoblit's directing it."

I said, "Oh, that's good. I love his movie, 'Primal Fear.'"

Q: You can tell that fast whether a script is likely to be good?

A: Usually I can tell even by looking at the way the pages have been set up. From the way the dialogue is spaced out and if there's not too much stage direction, my instinct is to say, "This is good," 'cause they're not over-explaining it.

And I liked the way it just looked on the page. I liked the grammar of it, Crawford's speeches. They were precise, they didn't need room for improvisation.

Q: What was your impression of your co-star, Ryan Gosling?

A: He's a great actor; a wonderful actor to work with, very smart, intelligent and the up-and-coming big star.

I'd seen "The Notebook" and I hadn't seen "Half Nelson" because I think he did that before we started filming ours. I saw that he was nominated and it was a wonderful performance. He's a great young actor. He's very naturalistic as well. He takes his time. I mean, he's a bit like James Dean, I guess, yeah.

Q: He was talking about how he had so much admiration for you. He said it almost kept him from performing on set. Do you get that a lot?

A: Well, I'm not aware of it. I hope I don't intimidate people 'cause I think I'm easy to work with. I like a good sense of humor. I like to keep things up a bit on the set, you know. Sometimes actors can dominate the set and make it miserable, or directors certainly can. And that's awful, to make life miserable for everyone when you're not allowed to speak or you're not allowed to make a mistake.

There's a few of those around. I've worked with a few of them. They're horrors. So I always buck the system. I really go in and try and, you know, make light of it. So that's what I do.

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