



# BEAUTY...

She might be wearing corsets in *The Wolf Man* and *The Young Victoria* but she's Blighty's most exciting new export. Meet Emily Blunt, now a Hollywood hottie...

WORDS **MATT MUELLER**  
PORTRAIT **JAMES DIMMOCK**

Blunt by name, blunt by nature? *Total Film* is getting a ticking off for being late. “How rude!” the 25-year-old London-born actress shrieks. And then, later: “I love that you’re going, ‘Did they give you huge breasts?’”

Now, it must be said that we never uttered those words — merely mimed the added boost of cleavage that typically comes from being trussed up in a corset by moving our arms slightly forward and squeezing them in towards our (very flat) chest. This was by way of inquiring if the studio behind *The Wolf Man* demanded — as studios are wont to do — that Blunt enhance her bust for her role as damsel-in-distress Gwen Conliffe. It must also be stressed that Blunt’s shock is firmly of the mock variety.

Sporting a black ensemble (loose-fitting top, tights, snug shorts) set off by a single splash of colour (red, spiky, boot-cut heels), she flashes her slightly hooded, almondy eyes, cracks a grin and then bursts into laughter. “The corset certainly helps,” she grins. “It gives you a wishful-thinking body.”

Ensnared in Blunt’s cosy sanctum-for-the-day — a plush firelit lounge in the Covent Garden Hotel — she issues a friendly greeting before settling back into an overstuffed sofa. Her natural voice recalls the educated, “posh” accent she deployed to lacerating effect in *The Devil Wears Prada*, minus that character’s haughty, frost-coated demeanour. In fact, her throaty giggles and easygoing warmth give Blunt the air of being one of our transatlantic cousins. Maybe spending so much time with her ex (crooner Michael Buble) in Vancouver, Canada, rubbed off. Or, more likely, she’s just one of life’s jammy gits: a smarter, prettier, more poised version of *Happy-Go-Lucky*’s beaming sprite.

She loves to laugh, is fond of the quip. Svelte of frame and waifish in stature, Blunt insists tales of inflicting culinary deprivation onto herself to thin up for *The Devil Wears Prada* are “completely overblown... I was sneaking doughnuts whenever I could”. Claiming she eats “like a truck driver”, an afternoon snack of Thai green curry is delivered to her lap. “Thanks Rupey, I’m starving!” the actress chirrups to Rupert, her publicist. It’s not quite wolfed down but she does polish off the plateful in due course.

Come November 2009, Benicio Del Toro’s horrendous, hirsute man-beast will attempt to wolf down Blunt in Joe Johnston’s reboot of the enduringly mythic Universal howler... “I think I’ve been better known for the baddies,” she muses, “but I’m the picture of purity in



**High fashion: (clockwise, from left): Emily as Emily in *The Devil Wears Prada*; with Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway in *Prada* again; as Prudie in *The Jane Austen Book Club*.**

brains, which Blunt admitted when we met for the first time on *The Young Victoria* set last year.

In between observing the robed-and-crowned actress re-enact Victoria’s lavish coronation, *Total Film* wandered over to say hello and was promptly regaled with droll tales of corset agony (“I hate it — so over it,” she moaned), swishing-gown peril (“If one more person steps on my train, I might swing some punches”) and screeching herself senseless while chasing Prince Albert round the palace (“She was tasty in a fight... She had an *appalling* temper on

**‘I think I’ve been better known for playing baddies, but I’m the picture of purity in *The Wolf Man*’**



her”). She also expressed unqualified delight at being cast in the first place.

A year later, while tucking into her pungent curry, Blunt repeats the story: “I was quite pushy in wanting this part and I definitely sought it out. I basically said to the producers, ‘I am well-aware that people are going to be bartering for this but I want you to give me a chance — because I can do it.’ And then I walked out of there thinking, ‘God. That was so presumptuous of you.’ But it seemed to work. Maybe there was something royal in *demanding* the role.”

This *Young Vic* zeroes in on Victoria’s oppressive childhood (suffocating mother; scheming stepfather) and the mistake-added years of her early reign, although at its core is the diminutive royal’s love affair with Prince Albert. “It’s the greatest love story of monarch history,” states Blunt. “He was dignified and selfless in wanting her to be the best version of herself she could be. He’s my definition of a real man.” >>

*The Wolf Man*. I had to find my deepest honesty and the best version of myself to play that character.” She also had to “do a lot of running and screaming. And I’m a really bad screamer. They’ll probably have to dub me.”

*The Wolf Man* gave Blunt her second corset part in succession, coming after *The Young Victoria* — the actress’ first proper lead, in which she plays Britain’s longest-reigning monarch during her vibrant, passionate, gorgeous youth. Well, scratch that last one — Queen Victoria wasn’t much of a looker even before she became the dumpy, sour-faced mourner lodged in most people’s

Unlike her podgy regal counterpart, Blunt wasn't groomed for anything apart from being a well-brought-up barrister's daughter from Roehampton. She studied the cello and was educated in bohemian schools but, lest you think she's lived a blessed existence, she was also struck by a severe stutter when she was nine that got progressively worse into her early teens.

"By then, you're lead by fear with it," she says. "But I had a great teacher who wanted me to be in the class play and had the know-all to say, 'Can you do any accents?' So I mimicked a northern accent and it did seem to help. I think it was a way of escaping it, if I were to pretend to be someone else. But it's a disability and it is frightening and it shouldn't be teased because it's not an easy thing to live with. It comes back sometimes if I'm tired or nervous."

Although acting helped her conquer the affliction, she still feels she stumbled into her profession by accident. "I don't remember having a burning ambition to do it," admits Blunt, who landed an agent by chance while performing a school play at the Edinburgh Festival.

underwear-clad Jane in *Charlie Wilson's War*... And, of course, neurotic, flint-edged Emily in *Prada*. Blunt based her imperious assistant to Meryl Streep's fearsome editrix on "a couple of people I know who shall remain nameless. It wouldn't be fair. No one ever knows themselves so you shouldn't say, 'This is who you are.' It would be a brutal shock to most people!"

Blunt had her own shock in store acting opposite Benicio Del Toro in his Wolf Man guise. When her co-star was buried under the layers of Rick Baker's phenomenal lupine make-up, Blunt found their scenes together "absolutely terrifying... He still looks very human, but very, very frightening. I'm not a fan of slasher movies but I was excited to be a part of this because it was gothic and mythological and ominous – it's more like a classic ghost story."

As for her illustrious co-stars, Blunt brands Del Toro "a goof with a massive, raucous laugh" and Anthony Hopkins "the best mimic you will ever meet. He does Olivier, Gielgud, Tommy Cooper... I followed him around like a bad smell. I'm sure I irritated him." Having recently



**'I'm prepared to fight for the roles I really want. But I don't have an expectancy to get everything I want'**

"He sort of casually said, 'Would you like to try it?' I don't mean to sound casual because it's demeaning to other people's ambitions. I'm very lucky and I don't forget that at all."

Landing one of the two sapphic leads in Pawel Pawlikowski's *My Summer Of Love* and garnering a Best Supporting Actress Golden Globe for telly drama *Gideon's Daughter* served as Blunt's fortuitous, double-whammy launchpad, sparking the usual Hollywood meet-and-greets with gushing casting agents, execs and producers.

Blunt started as she means to go on, opting for intriguing and eccentric character parts that allowed her to show her range and ward off lazy typecasting: prudish Prudie in *The Jane Austen Book Club*; pothead skater-chick Norah in Sundance entrant *Sunshine Cleaning*;



**Drama queen: (clockwise, from above) Blunt as *The Young Victoria*; Vic at her coronation; as Jane in *Charlie Wilson's War*; as Tamsin in *My Summer Of Love*.**

purchased a flat in London using her readies from *The Wolf Man*, the well-travelled, well-read actress is poised on that knife's edge between street-level anonymity and daunting intrusion: "I don't feel hounded by this business and I hopefully won't ever. I can still go and get a pint of milk in my pyjamas."

And yet – demonstrating wisdom beyond her years – Blunt is more than aware that to carve a career as distinguished as those of her wolfish co-stars, she's going to need to swing a few punches herself. "You've gotta fight. And I am prepared to fight for the roles that I really want," vows Britain's latest star-burst. "But I don't have an expectancy that I'm going to be able to get everything I want. And if you can live with that, then you'll be alright."

***The Young Victoria* opens on 6 March and will be reviewed in the next issue. *The Wolf Man* opens in November and will be reviewed in a future issue of *Total Film*.**

JAMES DIMMOCK/CORBIS OUTLINE



# ...AND THE BEAST

Benicio Del Toro is one of Hollywood's great character actors. Now, in *Che* and the forthcoming *The Wolf Man*, he's taking centre-stage. So why is his heart still in ensemble playing?

WORDS **KEVIN HARLEY** PORTRAIT **GREG WILLIAMS**

He's big, Benicio Del Toro — 6ft 2in. Superstar big. Meeting *Total Film* in a London hotel, he sinks his rangy frame into a sofa, tugs a cap over thick, straggly hair, fiddles with a big, fat cigar and flashes a big, fat conspiratorial grin. Trainers? Big and phat. Eyelids? Big and heavy too, Bob Mitchum-style, >>

**Guerilla tactics: (left) Del Toro fights for Cuba as Ernesto Guevara in *Che Part One*; (below) as Jack Jordan in *21 Grams*.**

although his eyes are warm, sharp and fast. With an imperious finger-click, the big guy – he’s big, OK? – issues an order to his PR: “Please, da coffee!”

He’s joshing, of course, but Del Toro’s standing is now such that he probably could click for coffee. Part Oscar-weight character actor, part leading man, he’s the star as heavyweight performer – distinct and elusive, always recognisable as mumbling Fenster from *The Usual Suspects* but quick and clever enough to shape-shift between roles. He has delivered blazing support and ensemble turns: drug-bloated Dr Gonzo in *Fear*

‘I had to stay within the lines as Che. There was a sense of responsibility to history’

And *Loathing In Las Vegas*; troubled border cop Javier Rodríguez in *Traffic*; talking corpse Jackie Boy in *Sin City*. But Del Toro can also hold an ample cast tight at the midriff, as he does in *Che* – Steven Soderbergh’s audacious epic about Argentine doc-turned-icon Che Guevara – and as he surely will again in Joe Johnston’s upcoming howl at *The Wolf Man*.

In person, he’s charismatic as hell, grabbing your attention with a ready grin and clipped sentences. You can hear the actor in the pace and clarity of his diction, proof that Fenster was, of course, all act. And he talks up a storm about the Method. But he’s also extremely quick to downplay himself, cutting fast to the bottom-lines of filmmaking. “Movies. Is. Teamwork,” he’ll assert, in bullet-points: “And movies. Cost. Money.”

*Che* throws his twin poles – great lead, great team-man – into relief on-screen and off. Del Toro nurtured the role since he was a young Bond baddy in *Licence To Kill*, but he’s quick to stress the group effort behind the film.

“It all originated in a bookstore in Mexico City, when I first saw a picture of Che. Not the classic one, not the [Alexander] Korda one, but one by Rene Burri. I bought a book, a collection of letters that he wrote to his father and



force performances in film history that doesn’t rely on the close-up”. Penn was spot-on: Del Toro holds you rapt but cleaves to the call of a film about an icon forged in the wider forces of history and collective effort.

*Che* demanded fresh discipline of Del Toro. Previous form had found him elaborating on characters as written, splashing gaudy colours screen-wards. No dice this time: the man came complete. “You know when you were a kid and you had to paint with crayons?” he says. “It was a drawing and you had to fill it in and they’d say, ‘Stay within the lines’? I was one of those kids that always went outside the lines. But with this one, I had to stay within the lines. There was a sense of responsibility to history. It required a lot of reading, travelling, investigating...”

He met people who knew Che, a level of research and rigour he relishes. He wasn’t always so disciplined: born to middle-class parents in Puerto Rico, he lost his mother at the age of nine, wrestled with paternal “discipline issues” and upset his dad further by ditching business studies. But Method guru Stella Adler’s acting studio would focus him on the rigours of thespian with an aspiration to greatness.

“That goes back to Stella Adler and all of my teachers. Arthur Mendoza. I think it was Goethe, the German playwright, who said, ‘Would that the stage were a tightrope where no incompetents would dare to tread.’ Adler’s approach to acting was like that. There is bad-good, better, so-so good, medium-good... And there is *always* a possibility to do better.”

That wasn’t always enough to propel his career, mind. Bit-parts in *Big Top Pee-Wee* (Duke The Dog-Faced Boy,

GREG WILLIAMS/ART & COMMERCE/CAMERA PRESS, RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE, ALLSTAR, © 2008 MORENA FILMS/GUERRILLA FILMS/TELES CINEMA ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

remember? No?) and *Licence To Kill* preceded *Fearless* and *Swimming With Sharks*. The former two he paints in practical terms: “You gotta learn how to crawl before you learn how to walk before you learn how to run.”

The latter two saw him chafing with his directors over his out-of-leftfield improvisations, incidents he now recalls with humour. “Yeah!” he grins. “We’ll leave that for the past, though. We don’t look back if we don’t have to! Nah, it was all good. It was more of a problem with me than anyone. I was being rigid. Now, I don’t have to be that rigid because I get paid more. Back then, I didn’t get paid, so I had to be rigid. It’s a process of learning. I think – I hope – I’m better with my social skills now when it comes to being professional.”

Then came Bryan Singer’s blistering directorial debut, *The Usual Suspects*. Hand me the fuggin’ keys? Del Toro swiped ‘em. And the movie. Typically, he sees this as a gift of the ensemble. “Bryan Singer, Christopher McQuarrie and the whole cast were encouraging and embracing choices. I could be doing something and an actor would be like, ‘Dude, what are you doing?’ But it all starts with the director’s willingness to embrace it. Then the cast being friendly about it... It was the first time that a movie was as much fun as being in an acting class for me. And it took me, like, eight years to get to that place...”

He capitalised hard and fast, bull-charging no less than four films in 1996. Quantity presided over quality, though, and hard work wasn’t enough to rescue 1998’s *Fear And Loathing*. He piled on pounds, stubbed out a ciggy on his arm... And he still had to watch as the (underrated, incidentally) film flopped.



**Baring all: (clockwise, from above) Del Toro as *The Wolf Man*; enjoying a cigar as *Che*; as Javier in *Traffic*; as Fenster in *The Usual Suspects*.**

Did that sting? “Oh, fuck yeah. I think it’s a good movie...”

Strong turns in Guy Ritchie’s *Snatch* and Christopher McQuarrie’s *The Way Of The Gun* got him back to work, but it was a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his performance in *Traffic* that really vindicated Beno, who’s smart enough to recognise both the reasons behind and the worth of it.

“It definitely was some kind of comeback because at that point my cheque book looked pretty grim. But it’s a combination of the work you do, with the people you work with. Movies are not done alone. Soderbergh was there, who thought I was right for the part. When I was doing it, I didn’t think any different to any other movie I’d done



that has been successful or not. I just saw it was another job. Then it came out and it was what it was. People liked and enjoyed the movie and it was recognised. Good for me, good for the movie.”

The benefits were double: Del Toro could now co-instigate projects such as *Che* and attract director interest in other instances, too. “You get good filmmakers approach you. I got the chance to work with Alejandro González Iñárritu [*21 Grams*], Billy Friedkin [*The Hunted*], then Robert Rodriguez with *Sin City* for a little part... I met him when I was doing something for *21 Grams*. Robert was there and he came over and he says, ‘Hey man, I like your hair. Hey, call me up!’”

More good, hairy fun is expected from Joe Johnston’s remake of *The Wolf Man*, a chance for Del Toro to loosen the leash after *Che*’s rigours. *Total Film* has seen footage from the finished movie and is pleased to report it’s set to remain faithful to the original Universal 1941 monster movie, from the striking shadow play to the hirsute man-beast scampering around on two legs. So, we shouldn’t expect a top-to-

**‘I could take chances with the character of *The Wolf Man*. Imagine it, jump out, invent...’**

bottom reimagining, then? Del Toro remains tight-lipped.

“I haven’t seen the movie so I can’t sit down and talk about *The Wolf Man*,” he says, ever the tease. “I hate to say something about it because you might write it down and then it’s not in the movie and no one talks about it or it’s terrible or whatever. But yeah, I shed everything. I didn’t have to go through about 20 books to find out something about the character of *The Wolf Man*, ya know? I could take chances. Imagine it, jump out, invent.” And, you suspect, get bigger in the process. **TF**

***Che Part One* is out now and was reviewed last issue. *Che Part Two* opens on 20 February and will be reviewed in the next issue. *The Wolf Man* opens in November and will be reviewed in a future issue.**