

'I want to do King Lear next year. And then say adios'

Anthony Hopkins grants Total Film a rare audience, discussing everything from his angrier days to his latest film, *The World's Fastest Indian*. But is Wales' first son really mulling retirement?

WORDS MATT MUELLER PORTRAITS BILL REITZEL

Although he may disagree, it's no fluke that Anthony Hopkins' CV is stacked with real-life figures, including some of the most towering names of the 20th century (Richard Nixon, Adolf Hitler, Pablo Picasso, CS Lewis) to men whose lives were a little more modest (Burt Munro in his new film *The World's Fastest Indian*, a working-class New Zealander who broke the land-speed record in 1967 on a souped-up 1920s' Indian motorcycle). Hopkins is a submersive chameleon whose own subtle, taciturn personality allows him to vanish under the skin of the person he's playing.

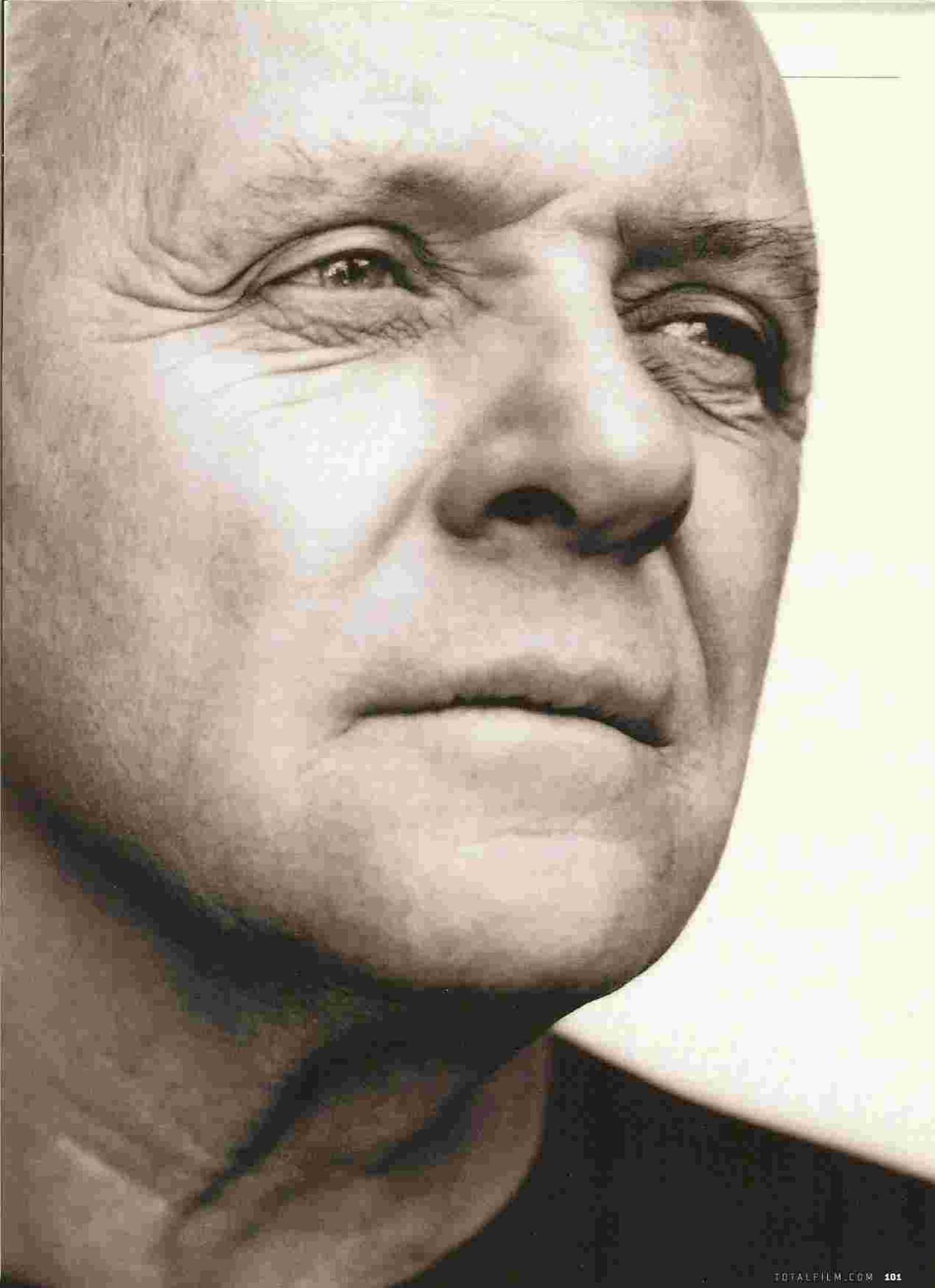
Nor is it a coincidence that Hopkins' most renowned, iconic role – Hannibal Lecter – is a blood-curdling sophisticate, able to charm and seduce but flip the switch in a millisecond to unleash the rage-fuelled currents underneath. He won Best Actor playing Lecter in *The Silence Of The Lambs*, and has always been able to channel the demons of his past into his deep-rooted performances (he was tormented throughout his youth by alcoholism). That reservoir runs deep, and although it made him one of the most difficult and (his own word) arrogant young actors of his generation – a director's nightmare – in recent years he's "learned to appreciate directors."

Meeting the 67-year-old actor in the flesh is a rare privilege these days: he hardly ever does interviews and

is known for his aversion to the British press (a naturalised American, he lives in Malibu with his third wife, antiques dealer Stella Arroyave). So *Total Film* feels like we're being granted an audience with the Dalai Lama when we meet up with him at the Toronto Film Festival. Even though directors are spoilt for choice when it comes to casting British thespian "Sirs" – Kingsley, McKellen, Caine, etc – Hopkins still towers above them all.

Dressed in a peach-coloured linen shirt and pale trousers, his silver-grey hair swept back, Hopkins is a mellow, soft-spoken presence and – true to past interrogations – not prone to self-examination about this whole acting lark. "I keep it simple. Just learn the lines and show up," is his modest assessment of his talent. These days, he's content to mix it up professionally between the ones he does for quality (the upcoming *All The King's Men*), the ones he does for the bank balance (the only rational explanation for *Bad Company*) and the ones he does for friends (*Alexander*, *The World's Fastest Indian*). Hopkins signed up for the latter on the strength of his renewed friendship with Kiwi director Roger Donaldson, though this was more pleasant than the pair's tempestuous time making *The Bounty* 21 years ago. It's an upbeat, albeit a bit schmaltzy telling of Munro's story, with Hopkins winching the film up several notches with a performance that packs in charm, determination, eccentricity and humour. >>

BILL REITZEL / CORBIS OUTLINE



But — shock horror — despite his prolific work rate in recent years, Hopkins drops the ‘R’ word into his conversation with *Total Film*: retirement. It’s not definite, but it’s playing on his mind. Meantime, though, there’s a legendary career to discuss. “I’ve been in this business for 50 years,” he muses. “It’s a wonderful life and I’m so appreciative of it. I’ve had my moments of trouble, but my philosophy is like Burt Munro’s: I have no beliefs — my uncertainty and doubt in life are what keep me free.”

The *World’s Fastest Indian* got a great reception last night. Do you ever feel insecure when your films get their first public airings?

Not really. I’m a passenger in this film. I’d worked with Roger 20 years ago, on *The Bounty*, and I was going to do Hemingway with him, which may still happen — it’s a very good script called *Papa*. But the Hemingway film was not certain, so when Roger dropped out, I gave up on it as well. A few months later I just happened to phone him to see how he was and he said, “Did you get my message?” I said, “What message?” He said, “I’ve just sent a script over to you.” So it was kind of coincidental, me doing *Fastest Indian*. So when we started filming I thought, “I’m just going to go along for the ride and give him all of my support.” That’s why we got on so well, because I thought, “It’s his dream and I’m not going to fight anymore.” When I was a young, feisty, arrogant actor, I used to fight people all the time...

How do you feel about the film now that you’ve seen it?

I like it because it’s a real blokes’ film. Women seem to love it but it is about a bloke in a shed down in New Zealand. All those actors we worked with on the film, they’re all like Burt Munro. You know, “G’day, mate.” And it’s the first time I’ve played a character like that... Because I’ve played these weird characters, you know, Hannibal Lecter and *The Remains Of The Day*, and they were fun — no regrets, I’m glad I did them. But looking back in hindsight, if I’d given it any thought at the time, I would have said, “Oh God, I wish I didn’t have to do that now.” So I’m glad I’ve got the chance to do this one, because it’s different to anything else I’ve done. And I like these tough-maverick movies.

What’s the state of play with *Papa*?

Well if this one goes well, with the combination of Roger and myself then maybe we’ll be able to do the Hemingway movie. He’d like to film it in Cuba [where Hemingway spent over 20 years]. He’s been to Cuba, he knows Castro, but it’s the administration in America that’s the problem. Hemingway’s house is there and, according to Roger, Castro said, “You can come here and do it.” The American administration may not allow that, but you never know.

Is *Papa* the sort of project you’d feel more involved with, maybe less of a passenger on?

Oh yeah. Well, no... What’s interesting is my newfound, whatever-it-is, laid-back attitude. Working with Gwyneth Paltrow in *Proof* — I’ve always wanted to work with her; she and Jodie Foster are the best actresses I’ve ever worked with — we had a good director, John Madden, who’s very precise, knows what he wants. And this is a whole new thing for me — I just sit back and do what I’m told. It feels like I’m sitting in the passenger seat and he’s driving and I’m thinking, “Oh, this is nice scenery” and maybe doing a bit of navigating. That’s who I feel like, and it’s a kind of healthy detachment. But I’d love to do Hemingway. He’s such a big, boisterous lover of life, a complete macho man, and yet the other side to him was he was very tortured. The alcoholism beat him in the end and he committed suicide.

You’ve played a lot of real-life figures: CS Lewis, Picasso, Hitler, Nixon. Is there something more tangible for you about playing real people?

It’s just that they offered me those parts [laughs]. Hitler was a long time ago, that was *The Bunker*. Picasso, I’m still not quite sure about that one. I think it would have been better to let that one pass.

Your performance in *Nixon* was extraordinary, though.

I thought Oliver was crazy to offer me that. I said, “Why?” and he said, “Because I’ve read about you in magazines. You feel like an outsider.” I said, “Oh, well... I suppose I am.” But I enjoyed playing Nixon. I don’t know, it’s just one of those things that these parts come along and they offered it to me and they’re really well written.

How do you prepare for a role?

I’m meticulous about learning the script. I always make sure I really know it, go over it and over it and over it until I feel comfortable with it. People say “How many times?” and I say, “Well, I go over it maybe 200 times,” just to scare the hell out of them. And I only use that number because then I trick my brain into saying, “I know it, I know it, I know it,” and once I feel comfortable, I can go along and act it and there’s no strain, no “What do I say next?” I know it so well that I can just let it happen.

Did you personally have any interest in motorcycles, or ever feel like a speed freak when you’re behind the wheel?

Not really. I did play another speed king. I played Donald Campbell for the BBC years ago in a film called *Across The Lake* [concerning Campbell’s water-speed record attempt]. I admired Campbell, he was a different kettle of fish to Burt Munro. He was more angry and bitter because he’d been given a bad time by the British press; they called him a coward. I remember watching interviews with him just before he was killed. They said, “Are you afraid, Donald?” and he said, “Only fools are fearless. Courage is having fear but riding over it.”

Have you ever identified with that kind of driving passion that Burt Munro and Donald Campbell both had?

Not in that physical way, because I’m not addicted to speed. I’m not a bungee jumper, I don’t freefall, none of those things grab my attention. I wonder if I’d have the courage to do those things... But as for my own personal life, in acting, when I was younger I wanted to be very successful and all the rest of it, which doesn’t compare to this kind of life. Although it is about drive, I suppose. One of the people I got to know years ago, which was a great privilege, was Laurence Olivier. He seemed to be like a racing driver as an actor. He was like a laser — that was his power. And the only actor I’ve met since who had that same quality of laser-like determination is Russell Crowe.

‘When I was a young, feisty, arrogant actor, I used to fight people all the time’

You worked with Crowe right at the start of his career on an Australian film called *Spotswood*...

The first day I started working with him, I thought, “That guy’s got it.” The best way to describe Russell is like a shark, he’s like a shark circling round. You could see it in the way he was figuring things out. Just before he became the big hit in *LA Confidential*, I was asked if I would do a film interview about him. They asked me about him and I said, “Oh yeah, I could see it in him, he was different from the other guys.” He was argumentative. He argued with the director all the >>



FILM CHOICE

Need a swashbuckling, vampire-hunting cannibal? Anthony Hopkins is your man...



MAGIC (1978)

Richard Attenborough's horror provided early proof that, while Hopkins had ham as well as Hannibal in him, he was no dummy. OTT but commanding as a ventriloquist losing his mind, he puts several retrospectively recognisable traits to work here, not least external humility masking inner rage and an innate sense of vocal control. "I was trying to get a rhythm," said Hopkins, not for the last time. Setting another career precedent, Hopkins worried that he was the wrong person for the role. ★★★

THE ELEPHANT MAN (1980)

Hopkins exudes tactful complexity as Dr Frederick Treves, the surgeon who rescues John Merrick – the 'Elephant Man' from whose reminiscences David Lynch's mournful monochrome classic was partly derived. Dedicated dignity and conflicted calm are the keynotes of Hopkins' delivery, made marvellous by how fully he integrated Treves' inner struggles into a coherent character. "I've found out how to be as simple as possible," Hopkins said at the time. Crafting something intricate from simplicity was to become a keynote of his work. ★★★★★



THE BOUNTY (1984)

Hopkins fuelled comparisons with Charles Laughton by playing two roles made legendary by the great character actor: Quasimodo (in 1982's *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame*) and, in Roger Donaldson's film, Captain Bligh. Hopkins' character study is more sensitive than Laughton's monumental sadist and it sketches out the figure of the repressed Englishmen he would later perfect. *The Bounty* also amplified Hopkins' no-nonsense reputation by his on-set chafing with his director, though this did not stop the pair reuniting for *The World's Fastest Indian*. ★★★ >>



THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (1991)

A pinnacle, played to the camera and no worse for it. The man nicknamed "Mad Hopkins" at school had perfected his ability to transform on-stage projection into on-screen introversion, ideal for the caged turbulence of Dr Hannibal Lecter. Hopkins' unblinking, tasty take on Thomas Harris' clinical cannibal drew on 2001's HAL for the voice, rats for the hair and cats for the scare. "Very graceful and very dangerous," is how Tony described the character. "I've always been very turbulent." ★★★★★

HOWARDS END (1992)

Not for the first time, Hopkins expressed doubts about his role in this Merchant Ivory adap of EM Forster's families-at-war novel. Was he the right person to play a character so lacking in warmth as decent but dreary Henry Wilcox? Still, James Ivory's film rests heavily on the foundations of Hopkins' performance, in which a well-placed moustache helped the Welshman to capture an essentially clipped Englishness. Ivory himself had no such quaims: "He has tremendous range," the director gushed. ★★★



DRACULA (1992)

Hopkins anchored Francis Ford Coppola's unbridled direction by making an earthy vamp-hunter of Van Helsing, tearing into the meat on his plate in ribald reference to an earlier role. Hopkins saw this latest doctor as a man who had visited "the murkiest depths" and emerged like "burnished steel", his unshaven looks deliberately designed to recall the wily Walter Huston in *The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre*. Fittingly, Hopkins saw something of his younger self in the film's lead, the then-turbulent Gary Oldman. ★★★

THE REMAINS OF THE DAY (1993)

"Underneath that ice-blue gaze," Hopkins' co-star Emma Thompson said, "you can see the flames." Replacing his psycho-cannibal, ✕

time. And I said to the director, "Listen to him, he's got a point. He's good – let him do it!"

Did you see yourself as a younger man in Russell?

Yeah, I did. There's a photograph of me here from 1970 [pulls out photo]. This young lady gave it to me and I looked at it and I thought, "I was a bad boy then." I thought, "God, this is an unhappy camper but... Boy! I'd take on anyone back then!"

I don't know Russell that well but I admire him and, you know, whatever he's got to do really. I really like him because he's ballsy, he's got guts, he's macho and all the rest of it. He's going through his bad boy period but he's basically a nice guy.

The first film you did with Roger Donaldson was *The Bounty*, with Mel Gibson. Was Gibson similar to Crowe at that age?

Yeah [laughs]. I'd mended my ways by those days, I'd got off the sauce and all that. Mel was still in it... He'd get into fights in the bars in Tahiti and Liam Neeson used to go out as his kind of henchman to try and calm him down and get him out of trouble. And Mel would come in with bruises sometimes. "Aw, Tony," he'd say, "Jesús Christ, I'm really hungover." In those days he had his troubles, as we all do. But I think it's wonderful to have gone through all that.

You've said you were much less patient with directors when you were younger. Was working with Roger on *The Bounty* a difficult experience?

Yeah, that was mostly my fault. Well, we were both responsible because I suppose, in those days, you would have called Roger arrogant. He's a New Zealander and he had that kind of Antipodean chip on his shoulder. And, of course, I thought, "If you want to give me trouble, I'll give you trouble." So we had a go at each other a few times, and it was unpleasant.

But I met him at a gathering for Dino De Laurentiis a few years back. I said, "Hello Roger, how are you mate?" He said, "Well, a lot of water's gone under the bridge and we had our troubles but you were fucking marvellous in the movie. So whatever you had to do." I said, "Well, maybe we'll do another one then..." We had a couple of lunches together and we were sort of casing the joint, feeling each other out. He said, "Do you think we'll get on this time?" I said, "I'm sure we will." On the first day we were filming, we were shooting the scene where the wheel comes off the trailer. He came up and said, "Hello, Tony, that was a good take... Do you mind if we do another one?" I said, "No." He said, "Really?! Jesús, thanks a lot, mate!"

But you are renowned for hating to do loads of takes. Do you just feel like you can nail it straight away?

Well, some directors just shoot because they don't know what the hell they want. Spielberg will sometimes do a lot of takes, but he does it for a reason. You don't mind doing it when you know that they're in charge, that they know what they're doing. But you get directors who don't know what the hell they're doing and you say, "Why do you want to do that?" "I don't know." Well, don't come on the set then. Know your job.

Does it drive you crazy when you get rewrites on set?

Apparently, when Jerry Bruckheimer gave you rewrites on *Bad Company*, you would just throw them in the bin...

Well, if rewrites come in time then I can learn them. It's when they start rewriting on set... He would rewrite stuff and I just said to him one day, "Why are you doing this? Are you trying to torture us? I want you to know that I'm throwing these new pages in the trash." He stopped giving them to me after that.



Life in the fast lane: *The World's Fastest Indian* casts Hopkins as a real-life record-breaking speed demon Burt Munro.

Having played Hannibal Lecter three times, do you have a favourite out of the three films?

I actually think *Red Dragon* is the best of the three. It's the most interesting and frightening and scary. I tried to play him differently than I did in the other two films. I said to [director] Brett Ratner that I didn't just want to repeat what I did in *Silence Of The Lambs*, so Lecter is so much angrier in *Red Dragon*. No charm. Just lethal.

You hold the record for winning the Best Actor Oscar for the shortest amount of time on screen: you're only in *Silence Of The Lambs* for about 17 minutes...

It's a short role. I just remember when Kathy Bates was up on the stage and read out "The Oscar goes to Anthony Hopkins," I looked around because I really thought Nick Nolte would get it. I didn't have any expectations of it at all. And when all the so-called stuff hit the fan because Jodie wasn't going to do *Hannibal*, and Jonathan Demme wasn't going to do it, my reaction was a mild, "Oh, okay." But I didn't even give it any thought that I should try to persuade anyone. I didn't care quite honestly. If it was going to happen, it would happen. And it did, as it turns out.

How was it working with Oliver Stone for a second time, on *Alexander*?

I like his sense of humour – he likes to needle you and I just give it back to him. He'd say to me on *Alexander*, "You're getting old... Do you know your lines?"

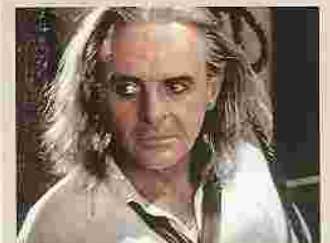


« feline leer with a gait evocative of a post-stroke zombie, Hopkins is powerfully pent-up as Stevens, the stiff butler in the Merchant Ivory movie of played-down passion. Again, Hopkins built a rich character on acutely simple foundations: "We had a butler working with us on the film from Buckingham Palace. The only tip he gave me was, "When you're in a room it should be even more empty." ★★★★★



SHADOWLANDS [1993]
After *A Bridge Too Far*, *Magie*, *Young Winston* and *Chaplin*, Hopkins acted again for Attenborough as CS Lewis. The Narnia author's emotional repression recalls Mr Stevens, but he's kept on the right side of sentimental by Hopkins as Lewis falls for the tragic poet Joy Gresham. His co-star Debra Winger got something of Hopkins' measure: "He has led a wild life and he has been pushing it down and suppressing it for years. It only comes out when he acts." ★★★★★

NIXON [1995]
Another role Hopkins had to be talked into. Oliver Stone relished his reticence. "That doubt gives him some of his margin of greatness," said the director. Stone saw in Hopkins' *Remains Of The Day* role the "depression and isolation" he wanted for his intimate epic of a fallen President; Hopkins, however, took the gig for rather different reasons. "I could stay here making nice, safe BBC movies for the rest of my life," he said, "so I decided to risk it." The risk worked: Hopkins doesn't mimic Nixon, he occupies him. ★★★★★



THE MASK OF ZORRO [1998]
"Now I'm in my autumn years, I may as well have some fun," Hopkins said. *Zorro* was his self-confessed "two hours of popcorn", recalling hours spent at the Regent Cinema in south Wales when he was young. By this time, he claimed to finally feel like he belonged in his "own skin". It shows in a nicely nimble performance, with Zorro played as an ageing swashbuckler who comes out of retirement to train a protégé, Fluff, but flashing-blade fun. ★★★★★

and "You know, this morning you were terrible, but yesterday you were great. What happened?" He said to my wife, who was on set and sitting by the monitors all day, "What sort of a wife are you? Your husband's falling apart here, you should be doing something. Look at him, the poor man; he's a wreck..." [Laughs] I love Oliver. I mean, he's a crazy man but he's a brilliant genius.

The box-office reception for *Nixon* was pretty frosty, and the critical reception to *Alexander* was daggers-out. Does that affect you at all?

Not really. *Nixon* was a hard movie to sell. And I haven't even seen *Alexander*. I don't usually watch the things I'm in. This is the most I've ever watched the movies, this one here. I've seen it three times.

Do you ever seek out scripts or do you just wait to see what offers roll in?

I just wait for stuff. Send it along, and my agent calls me and he says, "I've got a good deal..."

I'm doing a Robert Zemeckis film, like a *Polar Express* set-up, called *Beowulf*. It's based on the Saxon poem. And I'm doing *Bobby* with Emilio Estevez. He's a friend of mine and he sent me a great script. It's set in the Ambassador Hotel on the day of Bobby Kennedy's assassination. I'm the executive producer on it. I've got another movie in January, *Harry And The Butler*, and then

'I think Red Dragon is the most interesting and scary of my three Hannibal Lecter films'

maybe Hemingway next year. And at the end of it all, I'm looking to do *Lear*, maybe in a year or so.

How far along is *Lear*? Are you planning to follow the vogue of doing a modern Shakespeare adaptation?

I know somebody who's interested in producing it, one of the money guys at Miramax. I think it would be interesting to go back to the old traditional thing of setting it in Denmark or a craggy area of Britain, shoot it near the coasts in winter, set it in the Dark Ages. I'm not that keen on them when they dress them up too much.

Have you played King Lear on stage before?

Yeah... Badly. No, it was okay. But I want to do *Lear*, then maybe say, "Adios."

What, retire from acting completely?

Yeah, maybe. I want to see what I've got left in me. Make sure I had a good go at it...

The World's Fastest Indian opens on 24 February and will be reviewed in the next issue of Total Film.