



# Coriolanus

RALPH FIENNES GIVES SHAKESPEARE'S BRUTAL PLAY A MODERN MAKEOVER FULL OF STAR POWER. TOTAL FILM GOES ON SET AND TRENDS CAREFULLY THROUGH THE RUBBLE.

ETA 20 JANUARY 2012

OSCAR MATHS WILL S + MODERN-DAY PARALLELS  
+ GRITTY CAMERA + HEAVYWEIGHT THESPS

NODS BEST ACTOR RALPH FIENNES,  
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS VANESSA REDGRAVE

**C**ome awards season, you can always count on a good Shakespeare adap to cough up at least one or two performances worthy of Oscar affection. Such is the case with Ralph Fiennes' directing debut *Coriolanus*. You wouldn't invite them over for dinner, but the titular Roman military man and his forbidding patriotic mother Volumnia – as portrayed by Fiennes and Vanessa Redgrave – make two of 2011's most compelling screen characters, locked in a menacing symbiosis that's as fascinating to watch as it is unsettling.

"As a story of power, politics and unbending wills of different personalities – Coriolanus, his

mother, [enemy general] Aufidius – it has so many resonances to things that are happening now," declares Fiennes. "The issues of pride, honour and authoritarian states, and eternal themes like family, mother and son, feel very relevant."

Fiennes has a reputation for brooding intensity, and meeting him on the Serbian set of *Coriolanus* does nothing to dispel the notion. Sitting opposite *Total Film* in his trailer, near the bombed-out husk of what was once Belgrade's diplomatic nightlife hotspot before NATO shells took their toll, his character's appearance certainly cries ferocious passion. His head is shaved, his face caked in rivulets of fake blood and he's wearing the camouflage-patterned battle uniform of a proud military hero whose status as his city's beloved saviour unravels after his tyrant's attitude explodes into public view.

"Coriolanus is tough to like," admits Fiennes, "but that's exactly why I like him. He's a tragic figure, but tragic figures don't have to be likeable. But what was interesting in my experience of playing him on stage was that audiences, against

their initial instinct, start to sympathise with him because they see that he's just trying to hold to his own truth. It's like the character Daniel Day-Lewis played in *There Will Be Blood* – hard to like but compelling. Coriolanus is a lost boy in a man's body."

The play itself is one of Shakespeare's most obscure and least performed, but Fiennes and screenwriter John Logan have given it a vivid, visceral modern-day overhaul, spiced up by the Balkan setting and some *Hurt Locker*-esque camera moves (courtesy of DoP Barry Ackroyd), all the while managing to avoid anachronism despite clinging to the Bard's glorious original verse.

Listening to it flow off the tongues of Fiennes and his co-stars (Gerard Butler excepted – although he still makes a mean, moody Aufidius) is a genuine treat, and a lesson in how to keep Shakespeare relevant. Fiennes has done himself proud his first time behind the camera – and somehow keeps his wits enough to deliver a mighty performance along with it.



**A DANGEROUS METHOD**

**ETA** 10 FEBRUARY 2012  
**OSCAR MATHS** CRONENBERG + PERIOD MOVIE x  
 BIG-BRAINED TOPIC + STELLAR CAST  
**NODS** BEST ACTRESS KEIRA KNIGHTLEY, BEST SUPPORTING  
 ACTOR VIGGO MORTENSEN, BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY  
 CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON, BEST COSTUME DESIGN  
 BEST ART DIRECTION

After being banished, the bitter, bilious Coriolanus links up with his former sworn enemy Aufidius to launch an assault on Rome – leading to the film’s signature scene, the moment that his estranged wife Virgilia (Jessica Chastain) and mother come to beg the Big C to spare the city he once stoutly defended. Except in Volumnia’s case, she doesn’t really do begging and... well, let’s just say that a mother’s stern, abiding love is a forceful thing. As played by this pair of expert Shakespearean practitioners and previous Oscar candidates (Fiennes: two noms, no wins; Redgrave: six noms, one win), it’s the spine-chilling sequence that should bring them both an avalanche of awards-season love.

“It’s been extremely tough,” Fiennes tells us on set about the challenges of trying to act and direct simultaneously. “There are days when it feels seamless and days when it feels crazy. It was always a two-headed creature in my mind because I wanted to play the part and I had a very strong idea of what the film should be. And I have never regretted it...”

**Hands on:** (main) Ralph Fiennes gives tips to Focus Puller Oliver Driscoll and DoP Barry Ackroyd; (top to bottom) directing Gerard Butler and Vanessa Redgrave; getting in on the action.

**R**ou never set out to win Oscars because, making a film, there are so many things that can go wrong,” explains Keira Knightley, cradling a cup of tea in London’s Shoreditch House on a cold October afternoon. “But the fact that people are mentioning it is fabulous because that means the film is getting a good response.”

No, you don’t set out to win Oscars, especially if you’re a committed artist and agitator of all things status quo like David Cronenberg, but if ever a film was going to appeal to the Academy, it’s *A Dangerous Method*.

Based on Oscar-winner Christopher Hampton’s (*Dangerous Liaisons*) dense but accessible screenplay – itself based on his play *The Talking Cure*, which first began life as a screenplay – it’s set in Austria at the turn of the 20th Century, and tracks the birth of psychoanalysis, as Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen) and his rapt pupil Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender) dig into the brain to exorcise deep-rooted afflictions. But then Russian patient Sabina Spielrein (Keira Knightley) arrives in town with an extreme case of hysteria, coming between the beard-stroking men with her jutting, writhing tics and her need to be bent over the desk and administered with a damn good spanking.

Packed with heated, transgressive content but lensed with Cronenberg’s signature composure and elegance, one wag wrote it “plays not unlike a Merchant Ivory version of *Rabid*”. But will it tickle the Academy’s fancy? “It would mean an awful lot,” says Knightley. “But the other side of it is, if a film gets Oscar buzz and then *doesn’t* get nominated, everyone goes, ‘Urgh, we failed’. And we haven’t failed, because the film is *exactly* what we wanted it to be.” She pauses, takes a delicate sip of tea. “And that in itself is a fucking extraordinary thing.”

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