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## Entertainment : Film & TV : Interviews

### Eddie Redmayne: Savage Grace

19 Nov 2008

**The joy of interviewing the 'rising star' or the 'one to watch' is their unbridled excitement about acting. Eager to talk about current and future projects, they're still in the throes of passion for their craft.**

To be fair, the media mill hasn't had the chance to twist their words out of all recognition yet making them wary, but the interview with the 'acting legend' or the 'Hollywood icon' is simply a fulfillment of the publicity clause of the contract they signed 18 months earlier. More often than not, journalists are forced into sycophantic arse licking or the interview won't go ahead. Puff pieces do not good writing make and humourless publicity people breathing down your neck dictating which subjects are on and off limits is hardly fuel for a relaxed chat.

There's no such nonsense from the candid, charming and, oh, ever so gorgeous young actor **Eddie Redmayne**. Britain's current 'next big thing' causing ripples in Hollywood and the star of **Savage Grace** (out now on DVD).

Do I sound slightly fawning? Well, sometimes the subject matter is so unequivocally eloquent and charming it's difficult not to gush. Read the interview below and judge for yourself why Redmayne has become the go to guy for edgy, challenging roles on screen and stage.

26-year old Redmayne has trailblazed through an abundance of gay roles, most noticeably in *Savage Grace* as the heir to the Bakelite fortune Tony Baekland, who had an incestuous relationship with his mother and eventually murdered her. He followed that by playing the gay son of the Democratic nominee for the US presidency who embarrasses his father by dressing up as Muhammad and simulating a sex act on his male friend in the recent Royal Court Theatre production *Now or Later*.

His first stage role also involved same sex incest as Jonathan Pryce's son Billy in Edward Albee's 2004 production of *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (He won best newcomer prizes at the Evening Standard and Critics' Circle Awards) and there were distinct homoerotic tendencies running through his first film *Like Minds* opposite Tom Sturridge.

On the straight side of acting, he recently starred in the BBC's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as Angel Clare and had parts in *The Good Shepherd*, *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* – his perfect diction lending itself well to period drama (he studied at Eton College and then Cambridge University).

Currently filming a new drama by Stephen Poliakoff, he took some time out to talk to me about his career so far, what it's like having a threesome with Julianne Moore and Hugh Dancy and his regret that fans haven't seen fit to throw their knickers at him on stage. C'mon boys, I know times are hard, but you must have a spare pair of Calvins somewhere in need of a new home!

**"Wait a minute. That's Julianne Moore – wonderful actress and screen icon – and that's Hugh Dancy – old mate with a silly beard – and we're all snogging each other!"**

**Hi Eddie. Thanks for taking time out to talk to me. Have I interrupted your filming?**  
Absolutely not. There are massive weather issues with trying to shoot a summer film in the middle of winter. I'm off for the day, so it's fine.

**What are you shooting at the moment?**  
A film by Stephen Poliakoff that, at the moment, is called *1939*. It's set in that year and it's about a Welsh aristocratic family who are so fearful of repeating the First World War that they bribe Hitler. So it's a film about a conspiracy and quite different from stuff I've been doing recently.

**Are you playing a gay character because you seem to play them quite a lot?**  
I'm not for once, which is rare.

**The role of Tony Baekland is quite a controversial one – did you have any reservations about accepting it?**  
As a young actor, it's incredibly rare to be cast in a part as meaty as that. When I read the script I was astounded by it and then I read the book, which was a wonderfully fleshed out version of the script. He was an extraordinary man so I had absolutely no reservations whatsoever. I was desperate to try and get that part.

**It's one of those stories that, if you didn't know it were true, you wouldn't believe it.**  
Julianne (Moore, who plays Barbara Baekland, Eddie's mother) spent a lot of time saying that if it were fiction then the piece would seem too vulgar, too sordid. Yet when you read the book it's the most extraordinary tale of Greek tragedy proportions. It's the story of the complete collapse of family within the context of wealth and indulgence that was so extreme.

**How would you describe Tony's relationship with his mother?**  
Tony is an only child, but one gets the sense that he is born out of almost social reasons to have a plaything and he was forced to perform at an early age for his parents at parties.

As a consequence of his father and mother having no real job and living this extraordinary social existence, which involved flitting from wherever the season was, he spent his life traveling. He never had the occasion to spend enough time anywhere to form true friendships. So he was a dandy and flaneur in the real sense of the word and was never given any time to establish roots.



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I think as a consequence of his parents vanity, and certainly his dad running off with his first girlfriend, there was not only the effect that would have on the young guy, but the abandonment of his mother by his father. These things ended up forcing a claustrophobia between the mother and son, which ends up being a symbiotic yet tragic relationship and they can't live with or without each other.

**How difficult was it filming a sex scene with Julianne Moore as your mother?**

Actually, the real embarrassing moment was doing that scene in the audition. You don't actually physicalise it, but you're sat opposite each other and at that point you've never met the person and you're entire knowledge of them comes from having seen them on the big screen. Sitting there opposite Julianne in the office in New York while she's saying some of that stuff is just beyond extreme.



But, of course, when you get to the reality of shooting the film it ends up being a load of flesh coloured thongs. Which type or shape of thong are you going to end up wearing? It's so desexualised. And there were 15 Spanish guys with cameras all around you. It's in no way a sexual experience.

Although I've been very lucky to work with some very beautiful women so far.

**"As a young actor, it's incredibly rare to be cast in a part as meaty as [Tony]...He was an extraordinary man so I had absolutely no reservations whatsoever. I was desperate to try and get that part."**

**You have though, haven't you? I've been looking at your CV and you've done pretty well for yourself lately.**

I've played quite a few gay characters as you say and when I manage to play straight ones I've been very fortunate to have incredibly beautiful love interests. Yes. It's hilarious because when my gay friends saw *Savage Grace* they were like, "Oh my God, Unax Ugalde (who plays Tony's first boyfriend in the film) and Hugh Dancy, you lucky bugger!" And all my straight mates are saying, "Elena Anaya (who plays Tony's first girlfriend in the film) and Julianne Moore, are you kidding?"

**You had the best of both worlds...**

I did.

**Can I confirm for my readers if you are gay or straight?**

I'm straight.

**So how did you psychologically prepare to kiss Hugh Dancy? Do you do anything different when you do a sex scene with a man as opposed to a woman?**

No. The weird thing is my first big play in London was *The Goat* and that was playing a gay, confused New Yorker with incestuous tendencies who had to snog his dad. So from the outset of my professional career that's been the status quo – incest or omni-sexuality! I had to snog Jonathan Pryce and he was playing my dad!

Since then everyone has always asked that question about kissing men. Hugh was slightly awkward because he's a mate. Even then there was the three in the bed scene with Julianne and Hugh and there was a slightly out of body moment when I thought, "Wait a minute. That's Julianne Moore – wonderful actress and screen icon – and that's Hugh Dancy – old mate with a silly beard – and we're all snogging each other!"



**And it will be on film forever. Something to show your grandchildren.**

God. I really haven't got to the stage of considering that stuff yet, but yes, there you go.

**You do seem to pick characters that have an ambiguous sexuality and they seem to be slightly disturbed in many ways.**

For me, it's always about finding different challenges across the board. The complexity of playing these characters and damaged young people has been thrilling for me to investigate. I've also played much more straight down the line stuff, like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The reality of situation is that you're brought in for things you look or sound right for.

**"From the outset of my professional career that had been the status quo – incest or omni-sexuality. I had to snog Jonathan Pryce and he was playing my dad."**

**You always seem to pick roles that centre on the screwed up middle class and it's interesting that you're now working with Stephen Poliakoff who excels in that area.**

That's really interesting. I hadn't thought of that. The other thing that's interesting is that, in England, that tends to be what I've done but, in America, I've been in a film called *Yellow Handkerchief* that comes out next year and my character is an adopted Native American Indian from an extremely poor background. Certainly in the UK the hypocrisies or the indulgencies of people with too much wealth or too much time, or moral hypocrisies like *Tess*, are things that I've done on film and been fascinated with.

**You're playing a mortician in *Powder Blue*, is that right? Has that finished filming now?**

Yes. I play a LA mortician with completely black hair, a sort of Goth looking character. He's also a puppeteer who has a phobia that when he meets women he's attracted to he ends up having asthma attacks and passing out, but somehow manages to end up with Jessica Biel. I think he's probably the most screwed up of all of them.

**Well, he's not doing too badly if he ends up with her.**

Tell me about it. It didn't please my then girlfriend too much.

**You've just finished a run at the Royal Court Theatre with *Now or Later* and that's the first time you've been on stage for a while. How was that?**

It was the most extraordinary thing. I was nervous doing it. It was the first time I'd done a play for four years and, again, it was an incredibly meaty role. It was terrifying, but I was in the safest pair of hands with Dominic Cooke (artistic director at the Royal Court). It was a piece of work that I was incredibly proud of because it was a beautifully written piece. It was exposing because I hadn't done a play for a long time and hadn't played a character on stage from beginning to end. You do feel a sense of the weight on your shoulders a little bit, but most people liked it.



It was fascinating for us because it was about the election night in America and the personal and the political. Again similar to *Savage Grace*, with a Greek tragedy quality, and what happens to a small family, but the ramifications are bigger. It made me get so excited about the American election.

**Will you keep working in theatre even though your film career is picking up?**

Oh, definitely. I haven't really watched a large amount of films and the whole film world is relatively new to me, so it's been an education over the past few years. But the reason I got into acting was for theatre.

**And you were a Burberry model for a little while. What's it like being part of the fashion world? Quite different to film and theatre, I'd imagine.**

It is a completely different world, but what's interesting is Christopher Bailey (Burberry creative director), is someone I have met a few times and admired. I don't know much about the fashion world but, from the small amount I've done for press and promotionals, I know it can be intimidating. Christopher was a really lovely man and he's very supportive of young musicians and artists across the board in England. So when asked if I wanted to be a part of that I was completely thrilled – to be prancing around in gold chain mail was hilarious.



**I'm going to find that picture.**

It was a really fun couple of days. It's very different having a film camera on you and playing someone to actually standing still, posing. It's more self-conscious. What was hilarious doing the Burberry shoot was that I was flanked by Lily Donaldson and **Agness Deyn** and it was meant to be a hi-energy shoot, throwing your arms up and stuff, and they looked like incredibly beautiful animals. When I tried it they were like, "Right Eddie, can you calm down please? Keep your mouth closed, keep your chin up", so it is an art for sure.

**"It's always about finding different challenges across the board. The complexity of playing these characters and damaged young people has been thrilling for me to investigate."**

**Now that you're getting a bit more famous are you starting to get recognised on the street?**

You know, most of my work has been in America and so really, until *Savage Grace* and *Tess* came out, I'd never ever been recognised. It's changed a bit and it's hilarious because there's that moment when people are half looking at you and you're half looking at them and not knowing. And I'm so bad with names and faces. The occasional times when people do come up to me and go "Hi", I always pretend I know them because I'm so bad with faces and names generally. Only after a few minutes in I realise they are someone who has seen *Tess* or something.

Obviously, it's amazing when someone enjoys what you've done because you never really think anyone sees it. I watched *Tess* on my TV at home and I don't know why, but you don't really believe that anyone else is doing the same and so it's great when people come up to you.

The worst thing is when people come up to you with the confidence of knowing you from somewhere, but not knowing where. So they say, "I definitely know you from somewhere, don't I?" and then you go, "Well, er, I don't know". Then they say, "You're an actor, aren't you? What have you been in?" That question, well, I could go on for quite a long time.

**And then they ask if you're famous or not...**

Yes. Oh, I know. My friends find it suitably entertaining when I speed through M&S or somewhere. "God, you were quick".



**When people have come up to you, have you had any strange fan experiences? Has anyone ripped all their clothes off in lust yet?**

No. I wish I could say something as extreme as knickers being thrown on stage but no, not yet.

**Who would your dream leading lady or man be?**

**Natalie Portman** I think can be absolutely formidable. I worked with her on *The Other Boleyn Girl*. One of my favourite films is *Leon* and she blew my mind with that. She's a wonderful person as well, so I'd love to work with her again. There are a load of young British actors like Andrew Garfield, **Ben Whishaw**, Charlie Cox and Tom Sturridge. There are a few of us who are up for the same sort of stuff. A few of us have discussed how it would be amazing to all work together. But I don't know what that would be, maybe *The University Boys*, or no, not now because we're probably too old for that. You'll have to wait for *The Midlife Crisis Boys*.

**As you get more famous, how are you going to stop your ego running wild?**

God. I live with two flatmates and I'm flanked with brothers who find the whole thing hilarious and they take any opportunity to rib me, so my head is being kept firmly under water.

**Do you come from an acting family?**

No, not at all. Mum came with me to a premier once and Christopher Bailey gave her the most extraordinary Burberry dress to wear, so as far as she's concerned I've done my duty.

**What did I tell you? His mother must be so proud.**

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**Savage Grace** [2007]

**Studio:** Revolver

**Released:** 10 November 2008

**ASIN:** B001E454IO

Buy *Savage Grace* online now. See more films from Tom Kalin when you buy *Swoon*, Julianne Moore in *From* and the excellent *Boys Don't Cry* from the same producers as *Savage Grace*. Plus, watch the trailers below.