



Everett, Rupert (b. 1959)

by Richard C. Bartone

Encyclopedia Copyright © 2015, glbtq, Inc.
Entry Copyright © 2002, glbtq, Inc.
Reprinted from <http://www.glbtq.com>

Since 1989 when he came out in a press interview in Paris, Rupert Everett has defined and re-defined himself for the mass media as a gay male actor, being notably open about his homosexuality. While Everett's career has led to heightened attention and debate regarding Hollywood's acceptance of openly gay movie stars, it has deflected attention from his own considerable accomplishments as a screen and stage actor.

After a stunning box office and critical success in *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), Everett found it impossible to control Hollywood's publicity machine and he was swamped with queries from entertainment magazines about his homosexuality. In response, he succeeded in shattering stereotypes and helped advance public discourse about homosexuality, gay actors, and the film industry. Recently, however, he has charged that homophobia in the industry has cost him a number of roles.

Everett was born into an upper-class British family on May 29, 1959. His parents sent him at age seven to a prestigious Roman Catholic school, Ampleforth, in York. Everett has commented that "The most lasting effect of my childhood is the rejection I felt by my mother." Growing up away from home, he added, "calcifies your heart."

He became involved in theater at Ampleforth. Then, at age 15, he transferred to the Central School for Speech and Drama in London. Two years later, the intensely individualistic and rebellious young man was expelled on grounds of "insubordination." When accounts of this incident surfaced in 1990s news reports about Everett's moodiness and difficulties on film sets, Everett, admitting bouts of insecurity and lapses of confidence, finally told the press that "neurosis and insecurity can appear as arrogance."

Everett completed his theatrical education as a member of the Glasgow Citizens' Company, which he joined at the age of seventeen.

Everett's first major success came in a London production of Julian Mitchell's play *Another Country* (1982) and in the film adaptation directed by Marek Kaniévski (1984). He played David Blakeley, a young, gay Soviet spy modeled on the life of Guy Burgess. He also earned acclaim in the British film *Dance with a Stranger* (1985), directed by Mike Newell.

Despite these successes, however, Everett was unable to break into Hollywood films during the 1980s. After a fruitless period of seeking work in Hollywood, he returned to Britain to concentrate on his stage career and also to pursue roles in European films. He appeared in nine films that went unnoticed in the United States.

Among his most memorable stage roles was that of Flora Goforth, an old dying woman frantically recalling her life, in Tennessee Williams' *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More*. He also performed in productions of Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, Coward's *The Vortex* and *Private Lives*, and an adaptation of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.



Rupert Everett (left) at the 2007 Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in Sydney, Australia. This image was created by Vicki Neave and appears under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 License.

Everett emerged as a film actor in the mid-1990s, first receiving attention for his performances in Nicholas Hytner's adaptation of Alan Bennett's *The Madness of King George* (1994) and Robert Altman's *Ready to Wear* (1994).

But J. P. Hogan's *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) shifted Everett on the path from character actor to movie star. Favorable audience responses to Everett at test screenings of the unfinished movie led to shooting and adding 17 minutes of on-screen time for the actor. Everett's character evolved from a friend of the character played by Julia Roberts to a closer, more appealing "gay confidante," with insight, charm, humor, and suavity, a distinctly different role from the gay comic sidekicks of earlier Hollywood films.

In John Schlesinger's *The Next Best Thing*, Everett attempted to focus attention on alternative families. He spent a year re-writing the original script, removing stereotypical elements. (In arbitration, Everett lost his demand for a scriptwriter credit.) In this film, he plays a gay man who fathers a child with the character played by co-star Madonna, then has to fight for custody of the child when another man enters her life.

Everett believes that he was able to give the character he played greater depth as a result of his sexuality in real life. According to the actor, he and Madonna intentionally blurred the division between their characters and themselves to allow the public "real access to our lives."

Everett's openness as a gay actor, coupled with his success playing gay roles, led to a great deal of discussion about whether openly gay actors could be accepted as movie stars. More specifically, the question was raised whether Everett could be convincing in a heterosexual love scene.

Since Everett has managed not to be pigeonholed in upper-class British dramas, where his aloof, erudite, defiant, and privileged persona received much praise, he probably can avoid being pigeonholed in gay roles. Among the upper-class British dramas in which he has appeared is Oliver Parker's film based on Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* (1999). He plays Algernon Moncrieff in the same director's film version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002).

In P. J. Hogan's *Unconditional Love* (2001), Everett plays a British valet, "a really bitter queen," searching for the murderer of his lover, a rock star, with the help of a woman (Kathy Bates) who fanatically adored the singer. Despite a stellar cast that includes Julie Andrews, Lynn Redgrave, Jonathan Price, and Dan Ackroyd, the film was never released theatrically, and premiered in 2003 on cable television.

Recently, Everett has reassessed the impact of coming out on his career. Although he does not regret coming out, he told television host Tina Brown that in Hollywood "Gay actors could only go a certain distance," and charged that his sexual preference cost him roles such as the lead in Chris and Paul Weitz's *About a Boy* (2002). He also told her that he was denied a role in *Basic Instinct 2: Risk Addiction* (2005) when an MGM executive told him "I was a pervert and would never be accepted by the American public in this role."

In 2004, Everett lashed out at the homophobia in Hollywood executive suites, lambasting Hollywood as "a trophy business," adding that "it's not a trophy thing to be gay." Although playwright and screenwriter Paul Rudnick has declared that Everett is "universal crush material," appealing to both men and women, the actor now feels that his openness has caused studio executives to stereotype him.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of Everett's recent films have been produced outside the United States, in Britain, Germany, and even Russia. The most acclaimed of these recent roles is his flamboyant portrayal of Charles II in Richard Eyre's *Stage Beauty* (2004).

Everett is also a novelist. He published *Hello Darling, Are You Working* in 1994 and *The Hairdressers of St. Tropez* in 1995.

Bibliography

Casillo, Charles. "Rupert Everett Close Up." *New York Native* (December 26, 1994): 18-20.

Goldstein, Patrick. "How One Actor Changed a Movie Before It Even Came Out." *Los Angeles Times* (June 6, 1994): F1, F10.

Karger, Dave. "The 'Best' Man." *Entertainment Weekly* 387 (July 11, 1997): 30-32.

Miller, Mark. "Meet Rupert Everywhere." *Newsweek* 134.2 (July 12, 1999): 64-66.

Patrick, John. "Rupert Everett: The Best Thing." *Encounter* 9.6 (March 22, 2000): 6-7.

"Topic A with Tina Brown: Slutty Stepsister Gets Her Due." www.gawker.com (October 11, 2004).

Vilanch, Bruce. "Rupert Everett: Leading Man on the Rise." *The Advocate* (January 20, 1998): 30-33, 37.

About the Author

Richard C. Bartone, Professor in the Department of Communication at William Paterson University of New Jersey, teaches a course in Media Representation of Lesbian, Gays, Bisexuals, and the Transgendered. He has worked as a documentary film and news archivist for CBS News and served as Senior Associate Editor of the journal *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television*.