

# ALBERT NOBBS

Peter Anderson

Before each paragraph I have presented some vocabulary: it is in block capitals and is underlined in the presentation.

## The Project

Glenn Close (GC) did the play on stage in 1982. That is when she was first introduced to the story. She says: 'It never left me.' She acted the part in an off-Broadway theatre where you're just feet away from the audience and she felt the power of the character. She wanted to produce a film and in 2000 started the project and after several delays it finally was released in 2011.

ART HOUSE: a cinema that mainly shows films made by small or foreign companies – cinema d'essai, cinema d'autore

Studios used to make movies like this. Now they don't. They're so-called art house movies. This film is one of GC's dream projects of her life.

## Comedy vs Tragedy

LUDICROUS: ridicolo, comico, assurdo – LUNACY: pazzia (LUNATIC: pazzo - not 'lunatico' which is 'moody') – POIGNANT /pɔɪnənt/: struggente, toccante, acuto, cocente – QUIRKY: originale, strambo

GC always felt it was deeply funny – 'a human comedy'. The human comedy is tragic and comic. All the great clowns have something tragic about them as well as something that makes you laugh.

In the greatest tragedies there is a huge place for comedy. The ludicrous nature of life, the tragedies that make such idiots of us all, and the aspirations that make idiots of us all and just the lunacy of being on the planet. The thing about this is to take something that has been so poignant, so inherently sad and have such a good laugh with it. It's a fantastic ensemble of actors it draws. They're all bringing this quirky kind of humanity to each of these characters.

GC wants to create an emotional connection with anyone who is watching it. That means something that will change them for a couple of minutes, a week. I might leave thoughts in their heads that will actually make a difference. We seek to find these stories, to be able to tell them.

## The Character

Albert Nobbs (AN) as a character doesn't have the tools to achieve her dream – she doesn't know that – all she has is this longing and it's the story of her trying to achieve that without the knowledge of how to. It's her attempt to achieve her dream that makes us love her.

TO GET BY: cavarsela, farcela

All around her are these wonderful characters each trying basically to get by in an incredibly repressive society in Victorian Dublin, in Victorian England, in which women had no rights. If you were somebody like Albert, the possibilities were hugely limited and as a woman she was more limited than even that.

TO PRETEND: fingere, far finta (not 'pretendere' which is 'to expect, to demand')

GC didn't want everyone to look like idiots because Albert looked like a woman. They wanted to make a character that was astonishing in her invisibility as to who she really was. What does that do to your face to be a man for 30 years? She was inspired by an Albanian woman who lived as a man in a culture where if you didn't have a male heir you got a woman to live as a man. It's not someone pretending to be a man, it's someone living as a man. The burden of her face is lifted by the artistry of the make-up staff who worked for GC.

The remarkable fancy dress party scene is one of the highlights of the film. The dialogue between the doctor and Albert: 'Are you not getting dressed up?' says the doctor to which Albert replies: 'Well, I'm a waiter.' And the doctor's who's dressed as a doctor, says: 'I'm dressed as a doctor. We're both pretending to be ourselves.' That would represent the theme: how we make ourselves in the world, how we present ourselves as a specific thing, whereas, in fact, behind the mask there is a chaos of hundreds of characters.

### **Hubert – interpreted by Janet McTeer**

RESILIENT: able to become healthy, happy, or strong again after an illness, disappointment, or other problem - avere buone capacità di recupero – TO PUSH BACK: to arrange at a later time for sth; postpone (posticipare) – TO BRING FORWARD: to change the date or time of an event so that it happens earlier (anticipare) – THROUGH THICK AND THIN: nella buona e nella cattiva sorte, in ogni circostanza, fedelmente – MATE: BrE informal way of talking about a man – but it translates also 'sexual partner' = compagno/a in una libera unione, marito, moglie, coniuge.

He is the person who allows Albert to be himself. He allows him to dream of love, of not being alone. Hubert is a woman who has lived her life as a man. She has a wife who is incredibly happy. She is herself – she is happier as Hubert than she would be as her other female self. In seeing Hubert and her wife so happy together, that you can love regardless of gender, sex, race, colour, whatever. Albert has lived his life by avoiding any kind of relationship and fills his life with work. He dreams an idyllic future that will never happen. Hubert is less damaged or more resilient. She has suffered in her past and lives her life as a man and finds that she's happiest as a man and meets her wife. They fall madly in love and are happy together.

Janet McTeer was playing Mary Stuart on Broadway when GC saw her. So she went in the backstage of the theatre that same evening and asked her to play the part of Hubert. JMT is 6 foot tall (1m 80) and GC thought she was just right for the part. Although the film was pushed back several times, JMT stuck with it through thick and thin.

JMT thought that GC was a tough woman because she played parts where she appears to be tough. Whereas, she is fun and warm. So kind and incredibly professional – a huge perfectionist. JMT says they have become really good mates.

JMT feels she is an Alpha woman, deep voice, 6 foot 1. She lives a life as a man in the film which could be scary but she thinks it's funny and Hubert – her character – thinks it's funny too. He's a charming Irish bloke. She says she'd love to be a guy just for a day!

### **The Script**

TO HAVE A WHACK AT STH: provare, tentare di fare qc – Let me have a whack at it! = Fammi provare! - A BRUSH UP: un ritocco, una ripassata, una rinfrescata

Istvan Szabo /iʃvən zabo/ – the Hungarian film director lifted the story to a different level with his treatment. She commissioned Gabri Prekop who was Istvan's translator to give it the first whack. She needed it then to be 'Irishized' so she asked Stephen Frears /friəz/ who mentioned John Banville and got in touch with him ignorant of the fact that that he's one of the greatest living Irish writers – sometimes, she says, it's good not to know things –. He came on board and did two versions and a brush up.

## John Banville – the writer

SMALL PEOPLE: gente di bassa condizione, gente comune, gli umili – translated as ‘gente insignificante’ in the extras  
– TO SMACK OF: sapere di, sentire di, puzzare di (fig)

In JB’s view it is a story of survival among the small people, among the invisible people that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have your fire going, the bath filled before you got up. You never saw them. They came from below, up the back stairs. They were rarely seen. They were largely ignored. AN has been working in the hotel for a long time, for decades. He has survived by pretending to be a ‘he’. GC wanted the story to sound authentically Irish – that’s the reason why she involved JB. The essential story by George Moore (GM) was there. GM stayed at the hotel as a child. It smacks of a true story. GM was born in Ireland in 1852 and died in 1933. He was considered an innovator in fiction at the time. The actual title of the book is *The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs*.

JB goes on mentioning the Viscount /vaikaʊnt/ who represents the attitude or lack of attitude towards the underclass. The system couldn’t have been sustained if there had been awareness and sympathy for the people who were pulling the buckets of coal and the jugs of water up the back stairs. If you started to have sympathy for them, if you started to notice them and give them real attention, you would realize the injustice that was being done to them and the system would begin to crumble.

TO FLESH OUT: to add more details about sth in order to make it easier to understand or imagine – Her stories flesh out the world in which these historical characters lived. (= danno sostanza) – dare sostanza, polpa a (un testo, ecc) – TO GAPE: restare a bocca aperta (per lo stupore, ecc)

JB enjoys writing for screen. He loves that his words are fleshed out by people in flesh and blood who speak his lines. He went to the scene of the film and people started to speak his lines: it was a magical moment for him, he’s never got over it. He’s completely childish. He gapes at people speaking his lines.

## Rodrigo Garcia – the film director

INCLUSIVE: deliberately aiming to involve all types of people

RG is the son of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He’s described as being inclusive. He’s not conditioned by people’s insecurities. He has a great sense of humour. What he likes about the Irish is that they have a lot in common with Latin Americans – a similar reluctance to take yourself too seriously. In JMT’s opinion, RG is a cross between Buddha, Woody Allen and Antonio Banderas: he’s this gorgeous, incredibly kind, big-hearted, very clever, sexy, lovely wonderful man.

## Mia Wasikowska and Aaron Johnson – two young actors

Mia was discovered by RG. He describes her as an innately gifted actress although she is only 21. He calls her ‘my movie daughter’. *In Treatment* was the film that showed her to the wider audience. It was followed by *Alice in Wonderland* and *Jane Eyre* which we saw her at *Conca Verde* last autumn.

As for Aaron he says he wants to develop as an actor. He’s been in *Nowhere Boy* and *Kickass* and is only 20. The question is: when did he learn to act? When did he learn how to understand characters the way he does?

Mia and Aaron have a level of artistry and sensitivity that is amazing and – as RG puts it – they could be his children.