

**THE STAR** WHETHER OR NOT SHE FINALLY GETS  
HER STATUETTE, KATE WINSLET HAS WON OVER  
THE MOST IMPORTANT AUDIENCE: ALL OF US

BY MARGOT DOUGHERTY/PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT MAXWELL









# IN

**HEAVENLY CREATURES** a 19-year-old Kate Winslet played a New Zealand murderess in a schoolgirl uniform, combining sinister intensity and madcap buoyancy to riveting effect. A few years later, with the 1997 release of *Titanic*, record-breaking millions fell in love with her as Rose, and although she wasn't yet the gorgeous woman she'd soon become, it was obvious she was an actress with uncommon potential. Winslet renders herself barely recognizable from picture to picture—her hair shifts from period ringlets to punk pelts to soigné urban coifs; her posture and gait mold themselves to reflect the toll life has exacted from the character she's inhabiting. But the boldness with which she assumes each role and the unpredictability with which she reveals it are constants. The 33-year-old recently added two more tours de force to her CV. In *Revolutionary Road*, directed by her husband, Sam Mendes, and costarring Leonardo DiCaprio, she proves, as she did with *Little Children*, to be a deft guide through the bleak marital landscape of suburbia. As a former SS guard in *The Reader*, she portrays a woman whose life has been shaped by a secret she considers far more shameful than having worked in the extermination camps. On a visit to L.A. from New York, where she and Mendes have been living with their three-year-old son, Joe, and Mia, her seven-year-old daughter from her first marriage, Winslet talked about confidence, fear, and her lifelong love of movies. She rolled a skinny cigarette, which she lit and relit throughout the interview.

or hear about a movie that sounds especially interesting, then I can't wait to go, but I'm not the sort of person who watches ten movies in a week. Being a mum, you don't get that luxury of time. In a funny way movies are a great indulgence. I have a terrible time indulging myself in anything, really. I can't go to the gym because that's something for me, and surely I should be doing something for the kids.

## **You come from a family of actors.**

**Do you think it's in the blood?** We were always goofing and skitting and dressing up, but I'm not from great acting pedigree. We're not the Redgraves; we're the Winslets. I'm talking about pub turns and open mics and plays that me and my sisters would create in our living room. There was no specific training. With movies, you really learn on the job. It doesn't matter if you have acting teachers or any of that stuff. Until you're really there you can't know what the experience is going to be like or what you're going to be like as an actor in that situation. There's something magical about the mystery of that.

**Did you always love movies?** I did, but we didn't get a VCR until I was 13. My parents didn't have any money, so it was a hand-me-down from a friend of my father's and needed new wiring and a new plug. Of course, we were just fascinated by this machine and that you could stop it to go to the bathroom! That was the time before satellite TV, and you only had three TV stations and one of them was always very crackly.

**Do you remember the first movie you ever saw?** I think it was *Annie*. Closely followed by *Bugsy Malone*. I'm that kid. I always wanted to be in those films. It wasn't a fantasy about being in the movie but wondering what it would be like with those splurge guns, or to have tap-danced in the orphanage. But I never had an aspiration to be a movie star. I swear to you, that never occurred to me as a legitimate dream. To me, acting and being in the movies were entirely separate things. Being in movies was something that happened to Judy Garland. Not Kate from Reading. It didn't enter my world at all.

**Would you describe yourself as a devoted moviegoer?** I feel sort of embarrassed, but I'm not an avid movie watcher. I'm not obsessive about it. If I read

**What part of moviemaking captivates you most?** I love planning the scenes and sketching things in my head and hoping to hit certain beats. You can have an idea of how a scene will play out, but there is nothing like stepping onto a film set and seeing everything come out in a completely surprising way. The trick as an actor is being brave enough to let that be the way it is and not try to put it back in the box you thought it would be. Sometimes that's tremendous fun. Sometimes it's severely painful because you're surprised by the emotions it's bringing up in you. It's extraordinarily challenging, and I really love it.

**Was there any hesitation about working together with Sam?** Right up to the first day of shooting. I would turn to him and say, "What will it be like?" but in a jokey way. He said, "It will be fine. We'll just get on with it the way that we always do." And we did. Sam is all about letting the actors be, leaving them alone, and coming in and guiding and directing in this wonderfully supportive and subtle way. He knew that I was in Leo's camp, which is how I always am. I'm never right by the director's side on a film set; I'm always by the actor's side. Some days Sam would come up and say, "Shall we have lunch together?" and I'd say, "Oh, my God, no! I've got too much to

STYLIST: ALICIA LOMBARDINI; HAIR: CAMPBELL; MAKEUP: JILLIAN DEMPSEY/THE WALL GROUP; CLOTHES: PAGE 94: CATHERINE MALANDRINO DRESS; WOLFORD STOCKINGS; JIMMY CHOO SHOES; TISSOT EARRINGS; PAGE 95: HERVÉ LÉGER BY MAX AZRIA DRESS; TIFFANY EARRINGS

do. I can't just relax with you! What are you talking about?"

**Joe's still too young, but does Mia understand what you and Sam do?**

She does, and she's intrigued by our jobs. I'm so much in the public eye, I want her to understand where that comes from, that it's from my passion, something I love to do, so she doesn't resent it or have funny feelings about it. So she understands on a positive level as opposed to anything potentially negative.

**You have a palpable confidence. Is that something you got from your parents?**

No. It's something that grows. As a kid, I wasn't confident. I was always quite chubby, and I was teased for it. I was physically very insecure until my midtwenties, I would say, probably until I met Sam, to be honest. And when you have children, you don't think about your physicality anymore. Life is too short. As an actor, I think your levels of confidence swing in roundabouts. You can feel quietly confident about a day of shooting, but you can also get there and your confidence leaves completely. It's hard to take compliments, so if another actor or a director says, "Wow, you did great!" your immediate thought is "You're lying."

**Does anything scare you?** You can't be so selfish as to be scared. You can't do that to the other actors, and you can't do it to the character. Yes, you can be nervous and you can turn to the other actor and say, "I'm really shitting myself—what if I don't get it right?" But then you have to get it gone straightaway. No matter how many times you've done it before or how well oiled a machine you may feel, it's a daily struggle to not be afraid.

**It must have been dicey to do love scenes with Leo while Sam directed, but in *The Reader* you have an affair with a boy played by 18-year-old German actor David Kross. How did you approach that?** My biggest concern was that David physically understood what was going to happen. On the day I said, "I'm going to talk you through this, OK? We're going to be completely naked. I will have a bathrobe by my side, and you'll have one right by your side. If you at any point can't reach your bathrobe, I will give you mine. You need to know there will be a maximum four people in the room." He was like [she assumes a precise German accent], "Really, oh, my Gott, what

about all these crew and these other people?" I said, "They're going to be a million miles away, don't you worry. It will just be me and you, and I promise we will be laughing about this." He said, "Oh, I can't imagine laughing about this." I said, "I swear to you." Within the first hour we were giggling.

**Do you watch dailies?** No, never. It's not an actory thing—"Oh, I don't watch dailies." It's just that I don't feel it helps in any way. When I did *Heavenly Creatures*, I thought it was so great: Watch what you've done the day before, wow, have a glass of wine with the crew. Then I realized, Hang on, this is taking me outside of myself. I don't want to have an objective eye about this. I've got to stay in it. I even have trouble watching playback on set. I only ever watch if I really have to for camera positioning or shadows of another actor. And I ask them to put the sound down—or put my fingers in my ears.

**Do you watch your movies?** Most I only see once. It's the process I love—playing that character, making the film. It's not so much about the end result.

**If you were to win an Oscar, where would you put the statuette?** I have no idea! ■

**Kate Mix:**

(clockwise from top left) Winslet with Melanie Lynskey in *Heavenly Creatures*, as Rose in *Titanic*, with Patrick Wilson in *Little Children*, with Leonardo DiCaprio in *Revolutionary Road*, with David Kross in *The Reader*, and with Jim Carrey in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

