SECRET LIFE of Sean Connery

Story by Sean Macaulay

With an irresistible, raw-edged charm borrowed by Bond but inalienably his own, Edinburgh's 'Big Tam' strode the silver screen for half a century, before his death last year at 90. But by every account – some salacious, others ferocious, all reverent – the character he played best was himself. And nobody did it better

SEAN CONNERY Connery had a 'chemical effect' on women. The romping anecdotes stack higher than the gold bars at Fort Knox Shirley Eaton as Jill Masterson and Sean Connery as James Bond in Goldfinger (1964) MARCH 2021 GQ.CO.UK 163



When it comes to the galaxy of Hollywood and the supernova that is Sean Connery, one can pinpoint the moment of cosmic birth right down to the second. The year is 1962. The setting is Le Cercle casino, Mayfair, London. The game is chemin de fer. A woman in a red dress asks a man in black tie for his name. The reply is three words, punctuated with the snap of a cigarette lighter. Three syllables in fact. Two of them the same. *Bum. Bum-bum.* I don't even have to write them out. It is the most impersonated phrase in cinematic history.

Cary Grant was the most exquisite film star Britain ever produced, a fine-cut gem of self-mocking champagne charm, but Connery, the rough-diamond Edinburgh navvy with feral eyebrows and forearm tattoos, was the biggest, the most successful, the most iconic, the most idolised and the most controversial. He was the epitome of on-screen cool and the patron saint of taking no shit. (When asked the best way to deal with Hollywood, he said, "Get yourself the best lawyer in the world and stick it to them.") And it all started in a makeshift crib in the bottom drawer of his parents' wardrobe in a cold-water tenement flat in Fountainbridge, Edinburgh.

So many British theatrical greats with singular personas are self-inventions – Noël Coward, Cary Grant, Rex Harrison. All from humble provincial origins. All remade with poshified accents. All, crucially, refashioned from within. Connery was no less a self-willed marvel, but he remained elemental, essentially undiluted. Unlike Grant, Connery didn't leave behind his working-class upbringing, but brought it with him. For James Bond, he was polished up by director Terence Young, who took Connery to his tailors and taught him high-life connoisseurship. The eyebrows were trimmed, the nails manicured, the back hair plucked, but his essential self remained intact.

In some of his pre-Bond appearances, he's so rough-edged at times – the eyebrows are positively werewolfian – that his rawboned gusto feels too big for the screen. Even as he says some of the least likely Connery dialogue of all time: "Please don't go. I'm frightened. My life is in your hands. You don't know the power you have, Anna Karenina. Send me away. I can't bring you happiness."

At 6ft 2in and 15 stone, with a buffed-up physique from weightlifting, "Big Tam", as he was known in his youth, was naturally built for the grand battles – exploding volcanoes, mountaintop sword fights, great leaps off the parapet, teeth-gritted hand-to-hand combat, especially if the hands were fake. ("Tell me,

[Dr No,] does the toppling of American missiles really compensate for having no hands?")

With Bond, Connery came of age as part of the 1960s social revolution that overthrew half a century of epicene British leading men such as Leslie Howard and Michael Wilding. "It's such a misconception of an actor," said Connery at the time, "when you see some of the old films, that he should have a grand piano and candelabra and Renoirs and dress for dinner."

He was such a hairy-chested life force that there was no way to accommodate him in romantic comedies or living-room dramas. He made his share of stinkers, for sure, but there are no scenes of squirming social embarrassment or milquetoast timidity anywhere on Connery's résumé. No real smallness. The only time he put on a pipsqueak voice was when he appeared on *What's My Line?*, during which blindfolded guests had to guess his real identity.

Alec Baldwin, who worked with Connery on *The Hunt For Red October*, still vividly remembers their first day together. "He came on set with the uniform, the steel-grey hairpiece, the make-up and I just stood there going, 'Look at this guy. He's the king. This guy is the king.' And he was the king. Handsome as the day is long and an amazing actor."

Baldwin paid homage by mimicking Connery in a scene crawling through a submarine duct, but this was back in 1990, when doing the "s with an h" accent was still fresh. On later movies, Connery's assistant would routinely give younger male costars the two fundamental rules of working with Sir Sean: "The first rule is you must never do the voice. The second rule is you must never do the voice." Inevitably, some brash hopeful would try out their Connery impression at the table read, prompting a swift reply: [insert the voice here] "Ah, shut the fuck up!"

One could do a whole essay on the joys of the Connery voice: the masculine authority, the musicality, the sardonic top spin, the purring

sensuality ("You're a woman of many parts, Poosy."), the ferocious barking of orders even when only for an Istanbul hotel "break-fast" (never "breck"), and, of course, the divinely dead-flat string of 007 quips that accompanied every henchman or assassinatrix termination.

"I think he got the point." (Harpoon gun.)

"She's had her kicks." (Poisoned shoe spike.)
"Shocking. Positively shocking." (Electrocution in a bathtub.)

The one-liners got rote and camp along with the general mid-period sag of the Bond films. But the best ones retain their sardonic zing.

Saturday Night Live comedian Darrell Hammond, whose raucous impersonation of Connery as a vehement idiot took on a life of its own, said his test for a great celebrity impression was how many words were needed before people could guess who it was. With Bill Clinton, he got it down to one word – "lingerie" – thanks to a sleazily extended last vowel. With Connery,

it was down to one syllable. Yes. As in, "Yesh. It's Sean Connery here..."

I quote directly because, amazingly, the great man called me at home once. It was one of those classic dream-come-true moments (for me anyway) - a relaxed, rambling 20-minute conversation with your childhood idol ostensibly treating you as an equal. I nearly missed the call, too, because it was first thing in the morning local time and he initially sounded like an old man pretending to be Sean Connery. (He was 76 and explained he'd picked up a scratchy throat from all the air conditioning while travelling in Europe.) But then he got warmed up and there was no mistake after that. When he described a political event as pathetic - "Oh, it's pa-the-tic..." - the surge in conviction and volume made me feel like Indiana Jones getting scolded by his dad. "You call this archaeology?"

ere's how the call came about. My sister is married to Gordon Brown, the former prime minister, who got to know Connery when campaigning for the establishment of a Scottish parliament in 1997. Later, when Connery was pondering a move back to Scotland, Gordon took him out to see some properties in Fife. One unsuspecting home owner got the shock of her life when she opened her door to find James Bond and the then chancellor of the exchequer on her front step asking to look around – the house wasn't even listed.

Connery didn't end up buying a house, as he was never able to resolve his love of Scotland with his abhorrence of UK tax rates: "They're impossible." As Billy Connolly joked when presenting him the Bafta Fellowship award in 1998, "[Sean] hovers over Scotland like a great colossus... from the Bahamas." But he donated heavily to Scottish causes over the years and supported the arts there often.

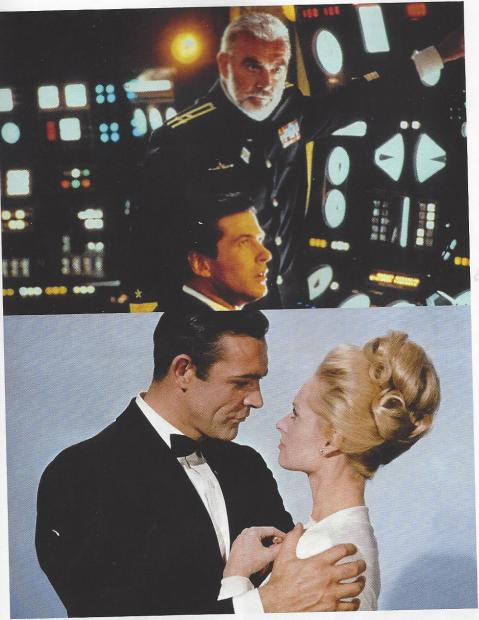
So, in 2006, when Connery attended the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Gordon invited him for dinner up at the house. My sis-

ter's account is that Connery was urbane, charming, drank Scotch and laughed it up, swapping stories late into the night with Gordon and his dear pal Sir David Murray. He and his wife, Micheline Roquebrune, brought gifts for their two boys (rugged little puffer jackets "perfect for a Scottish summer at the beach"). Best of all, when he sat next to

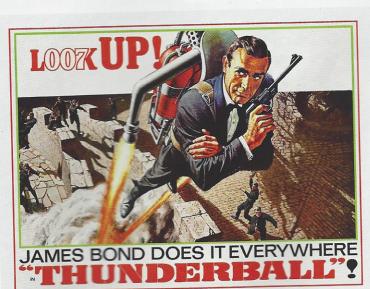
my sister at dinner, his opening line was, "Now, tell me, are you related to the Sean Macaulay who writes above movies for the *Times*?"

Turns out, he liked reading my stuff. Wherever I am in the world, I log on and read his self. Of course, he could just have had a very self as self of the Bahamas and I duly sent of thanks and assumed that was the could be self of thanks and the could be self of thanks and the could be self of thanks and the could be self of than

'He was a gentleman of great passion. But he was not going to drag things out needlessly'



'I'm at an age where it's easier to get out of things than get in them. And I don't just mean my trousers'



From top: Connery with Alec Baldwin in The Hunt For Red October (1990); with Tippi Hedren on the set of Marnie (1964); Frank McCarthy's movie poster for Thunderball (1965), Connery's fourth film as Bond

"Hi, dis is Arnold Schwarzenegger telling you to vote Republican..."

When the Connery call came through from his house in the Bahamas, it was preceded by a bunch of international dialling clicks just like a robocall, so my first thought was, "What the feck are the Scottish National Party doing campaigning in California?"

"Yesh, your letter's been around the horn, as indeed have I, but I'm back at my desk now..." As the penny dropped, I went into a sort of delayed shock. My mouth kept working, but my knees gave way, literally buckling beneath my framed set of original Bond posters: "Everything he touches turns to excitement!" (The Thunderball poster is the rarer version, naturally, with the protruding jetpack.)

y infatuation with Sean Connery had a Freudian dimension and not just because I was named after him. Like many children in the 1960s and 1970s, I saw my first Bond film with my father. He was also from Edinburgh and had brown suede shoes like 007's in Goldfinger and even wore a similar Rolex, so when my parents divorced, Connery was the automatic choice to be my fantasy father figure. He was indestructible and witty and would teach me golf and baccarat and how to taste the jagged edge and attract women who carry their own hunting knives.

Unfortunately, he was no help when it came to passing A levels. Connery dropped out of school at 13 to begin his fabled litany of odd-jobs and pay his "share of the rent". The list is now the stuff of national myth: milkman, coffin polisher, ditch digger, lifeguard, butcher's shop assistant, truck driver (like his father), catalogue sweater model, even a babysitter at one point, plus a three-year spell in the Royal Navy, where he acquired his tattoos and a lifelong distaste for stifling bureaucracy. "My idea of the Navy was more of a fantasy than a reality," he admitted.

When I mentioned how many people in Edinburgh still claimed to have had him deliver them milk, he said, "There must have been eleven horses pulling that fucking float."

He was unabashed about his childhood deprivations, despite colleagues saying he had more than a few chips on his shoulder when he moved to London in his twenties. He could still point out the brass bank plaques he'd polished when he returned with his family in the 1970s for a tour of his old neighbourhood. (They were horrified by the grimness.) And yet he was increasingly reluctant to revisit the rest of his life in more searching detail. He'd wriggled out of an attempt at an autobiography with writer Meg Henderson before he abruptly cancelled the memoir he'd finally completed with Hunter Davies, The Beatles' first biographer. At the eleventh hour, a warehouse of printed copies literally had to be pulped. Davies had spent many weeks at the Connery house working on the book and he remains diplomatically mystified by the decision. (Davies enjoyed the experience and the man immensely, but even after Connery's death, he is still legally bound not to discuss it.)

Tellingly, when the subject of the abandoned >>

I did push him about telling his story fully, making the case that it would be a perfect bookend to *Marnie*, the Alfred Hitchcock movie he made in 1964. Like *Spellbound* and *Citizen Kane*, *Marnie* is a classic "hunt the wound" psychiatric detective story. In this case, a publishing playboy (Connery) tries to unknot the mental mystery of his frigid kleptomaniac wife (Tippi Hedren). It's also a lurid fever dream of Hitchcockian fetishism – Connery is attracted to her because she is a thief – but it has a denouement of repressed traumatic memory coming to the surface.

In Marnie's case, it's the killing of a sailor client by her prostitute mother. Connery lost his virginity in an air raid shelter aged 14 and never looked back on that front. The only hint of a Rosebud explanation is when he reflected on the sternness of his mother: "The simple fact that my mother never kissed me or held me in her arms when I was a child has had lots of repercussions on my life."

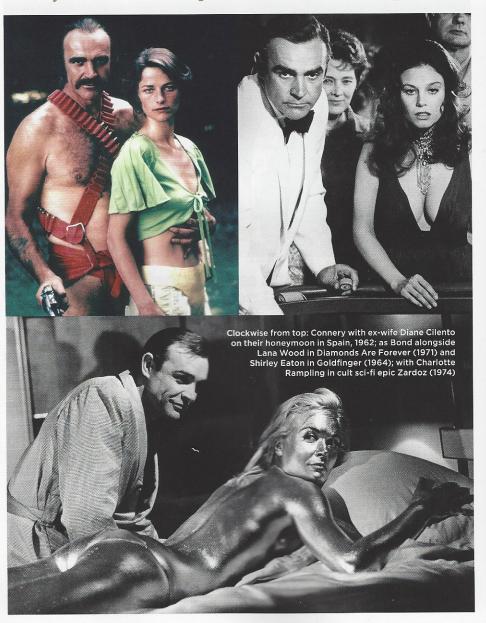
Connery biographer Michael Feeney Callan said Connery's desire to impress his mother was the big driving force. "When I interviewed his younger brother, Neil, Effie, the mother, came up all the time. The dad was more of a Saturdaynight toper. The mum was an improver and a reader. And Connery had this divine curiosity, this relentless need to improve. Much as he loved Scotland, he couldn't wait to get out of Edinburgh. Neil, by contrast, appeared in a spy spinoff film called *Operation Kid Brother* and two years later he was back working as a plasterer."

Connery always claimed he didn't know he had a deprived childhood until it was pointed out to him by a social worker. But the memories of poverty haunted him and money remained a preoccupation his whole life. "I've been screwed more times than a hooker!" He switched off lights in unused rooms. He preferred to drive himself to the set, even on big Hollywood productions. When he voiced the title character for the low-budget Scottish animation movie Sir Billi he met the producers at the airport himself. "We heard 'Beep! Beep!' and there was Sean Connery driving an old Toyota," recalled Glasgow writer and producer Tessa Hartmann. "He jumped out of this old car and shouted, 'Right, come on, kids, get in the back.' We were due to start recording the next day and he said, 'I'll pick you up at half past eight. That's not five minutes before and not five minutes after.' He was a proud man and incredibly successful but humble and very down to earth."

Needless to say, he was unswayed by my pitch for the full, soul-baring confessional and his eventual memoir, *Being A Scot*, was more a mix of national history and softball anecdotes. "I know that people are waiting for me to reveal of all my passionate, torrid affairs and name all of the women who have crossed my



'If I started to behave to any woman the way Bond does, she'd run like a jack rabbit or call the police'



path, but I won't. I will take these secrets to my grave."

Unlike the women, who merrily sang like birds when the tabloids tracked them down or it was time to write their memoirs. There's no way round the subject of sex and Connery. His coauthor, Murray Grigor, said Connery had a "chemical effect" on women and the romping anecdotes stack higher than the gold bars at Fort Knox. I knew one writer who interviewed Connery for a big cover story and then, before publication, he seigneurially borrowed her flat for an assignation (with the writer's late father's ex-girlfriend, no less). The back bedroom was overlooked by an art school, so I still can't help picture a couple of art students squinting out the window, saying, "It can't be him, can it?"

ig Tam was a ladies' man from his early days as a lifeguard and, later, at the local Palais De Dance in his tight trousers and pointed shoes. "It's a wonder there wasn't a plaque behind the old sweetie factory," joked his old bodybuilding friend Jimmy Laurie. Connery really made an impression one night when he showed up at the West End Cafe with a stunning singer on his arm called Maxine Daniels. "You could say there were conventions about the kind of people one socialised with, but Tommy didn't worry about them. Glamorous women especially were drawn to him, theatrical women."

Once he himself entered the world of theatre, he developed a method of requisitioning the dressing room for half-hour spells. A selfconfessed "cut-to-the-chase" man, he was also an ardent romantic who could get very emotional and tongue-tied when smitten. He had a handful of marriage proposals knocked back in his twenties before he married Diane Cilento. "You can't be married to a serious actress like Diana and have an eye for other women," he insisted at the time. And indeed their early days were happy, but Bondmania and his roving eye soon swamped any chance of domestic bliss. "Sean, like so many men, puts women into two categories: those who do and those who don't," said one actress friend who was in the "don't" category. "He wasn't the least bit put out by it. He simply shrugged his shoulders, cooked a perfect meal for us both and we spent a great evening talking and listening to music."

Actor Sue Lloyd, who later starred in TV soap *Crossroads*, had a similar experience on their first date, but not the second. "We got very merry and he came back to my place and stayed the night. All I can say is that he was warm, sweet, lovable. A big cuddly teddy bear of a man."

Carly Simon, before she gained fame as a solo singer, memorably crossed paths with Connery in 1965 while travelling on a cruise ship from London to New York with her sister. She cheekily sent him a note suggesting a preprandial drink and within 15 minutes he called their room, while still in the middle of a massage, no less. At the first meeting, she caught him gazing at their long legs and thought he was "a jungle animal foraging to see if he could drag any remarkable grub back to his magnificent cave". Said cave was the presidential suite,

where he served them cocktails, champagne and shrimp with "What's New Pussycat?" playing on the speakers. "He was extremely polite and not remotely aggressive," Simon recalled in her memoir Boys In The Trees. "Ah, girls, you're so beautiful," Connery said. "You're so funny. Come here, you adorable college girls..." When he suggested they all dance together, she did wonder if he "had simply assumed that anyone who used the word preprandial in a note would be equally well acquainted with ménage à trois and want one too". Simon declined the offer only to find herself outflanked by her sister, who hooked up with Connery on the last night of their trip, when Carly was washing her hair, and didn't return to their cabin until 5.15am, just as the ship was greeting the Statue Of Liberty. Simon broke up their singing partnership over it. "It was the dirtiest possible sisterly trick," she fumed. Twelve years later, she recorded one of the best Bond theme songs, "Nobody Does It Better", for Roger Moore in The Spy Who Loved Me; she admitted that she always thought of Connery when singing it.

Margaret Nolan, who played the masseuse, Dink, in *Goldfinger*, recalled Connery used to give her a lift home in his Rolls-Royce. "But he was actually more interested in my non-identical twin sister, who's very much his type. She's quite petite with red hair and she looks a bit like Diane Cilento, so he obviously likes these quite petite, high-cheekboned women. I remember he was very keen to dance with her!"

"If I actually started to behave to any woman the way Bond does," Connery told *Playboy* in 1965, "she'd run like a jack rabbit or send for the police." But he was a ghoster. Once the bloom was on the rose, the communication dried up fast, as Lynsey de Paul found out. She said Connery wooed her by quoting poetry. He also called her from the set of *The Russia House*, saying he was only thinking of her while filming his kissing scenes with Michelle Pfeiffer.

Lana Wood, who played casino hustler

Plenty O'Toole ("Named after your father, perhaps?") in Diamonds Are Forever, gave a detailed account of her Connery "interlude" in Natalie: A Memoir By Her Sister, starting with their first meeting when she stumbled in on him in his hotel suite and he boomed, "Well, hello there!" "He was stark naked and sitting

on the toilet," she writes. "It was just a matter of time... He was an assured lover given to bouts of spontaneity. Once, returning from a hard day on the set, he came rushing at me as soon as we got to his hotel room. He had his clothes off and was helping me out of mine when I hugged him and got a whiff of Sean after a day of physical exertion. He smelled like the bottom of a lion's cage and did not appreciate my insistence he take a shower first."

More than one biographer of Connery said one of the perils of writing his life story was being inundated by women from around the globe eager to share their tales of flings and

one-night stands – Oslo, Paris, New York, Morocco, Los Angeles... The make-up artist, the reiki instructor, the socialite, the chanteuse, the Polish starlet, the Oscar-winning actress, the Danish designer, the ex-mistress of Norman Mailer, the zaftig BBC receptionists (yes, plural), the costars, more than a few extras on *Zardoz*... Charlotte Rampling, his costar, told me that when it came to pretty women, "Sean was a hunter".

Shelley Winters had an interesting test to see if someone had the makings of a leading man: could you safely leave them alone with your girlfriend? She was able to answer that question herself quite a few times, thanks to romps with Burt Lancaster, Clark Gable, Errol Flynn and William Holden. And in the 1950s, she enjoyed a bouncy train ride with Connery from Liverpool to London with the blinds drawn.

"Only Bill Wyman had a busier 1960s," reckoned one talent agent, "and only Warren Beatty a busier 1970s!" Connery's 1980s and 1990s weren't exactly dull either. Some thought him the "most divine creature imaginable"; others quite the reverse. "He was a gentleman of great passion," recalled one former lover, "but he was not going to drag things out needlessly."

upermodel-turned-novelist Carole Mallory gave her Connery fling a big thumbs-down. "We saw each other a few times, but he was married and I hated having to sneak around... Let's just say he didn't leave a very big impression [in bed]. At least I got a meal out of him."

Florida TV reporter Glenna Milberg was eight months pregnant while reporting a story near the set of *Just Cause* and had her bottom pinched by Connery as he was slowly driving by. "You've got some nerve," she said, thrusting her pregnant belly into his car window. They laughed and she still treasures the autograph he gave her.

These were his "Lion Of Marbella" years, tanned and newly lean again from all the golf,

with lots of photoshoots lounging around in towelling robes and hammocks. But despite his stealth approach, the stories kept appearing.

A Danish-born designer called Helle Byrn came forward to tell her side of their alleged elevenmonth affair. "He's a vampire for women," she said. "He just takes them and sucks them dry."

Connery, she revealed, dropped by after rounds of golf and before going home to tea and took the same approach to contraception as Austin Powers: "Only sailors use condoms, baby." (It's a wonder he never had a paternity suit.) For some reason, Connery did not avail himself of a "Jissbon" sheath, a Chinese condom brand named after its translation of James Bond. (Mr Kiss Kiss, Open, Pinch Tip, Unroll, Bang Bang?)

But even before the wattage of superstardom, he had what his fellow struggling actor Michael Caine called "animalistic sexual power". Many of his early breaks in television, such as playing a boxer in *Requiem For A Heavyweight*, were >>

>> due to the producers' wives casting the deciding vote. "You can hear his balls clanging from here," was the verdict after one audition.

till, all that raw masculinity and workingclass primitivism needed a lot of shaping before it would succeed on the big screen. His years of weightlifting had given him the door-filling physique, but he refined his movement by studying with the Swedish body technique guru Yat Malmgren, who advised him, "Think about cat animals – lions, tigers, panthers – they are very loose."

Connery's languid big-cat sensuality and cut-to-the-chase seductions as James Bond coincided perfectly with the arrival of the pill and the explosion of free love. Shirley Eaton, immortalised with gold paint after her character slept with 007 in *Goldfinger*, said the Bond sex scenes were a world away from the British diet of nudge-nudge *Carry On* comedies. "It was grown-up sexuality. Sean and I just fell into our natural sensuality without any rumpy-pumpy and I think that's what made it so exciting."

Connery still needed to find his performer's confidence to play Bond. He started acting at 23, touring in the chorus of *South Pacific*, and within five years he was starring alongside Lana Turner in *Another Time*, *Another Place*. But the prospect of Bond tested his nerves and his first wife was the unsung influence in helping him play it with total conviction.

Despite the contentious divorce, Cilento remained proud of her contribution to his career. Feeney Callan met her when working on a project with her third husband, playwright Anthony Shaffer. "She was wary at first," he told me, "but we did have a conversation about Sean, how she had coached him for the role of Bond. He had a Shakespearean mindset, she said. He was reading Marlowe. He had played Hotspur and Macbeth. He was studying these texts very seriously and he brought the same seriousness to Bond. She still respected how he had redefined

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the suspense thriller. I don't think she had ever really fallen out of love with him."

Still, their marriage ended badly and indeed her account of the night Connery hit her in a jealous rage is an inexcusable low point. He denied it, but he idiotically double-downed on his views about slapping women in the infamous

Barbara Walters interview in 1987. It's a classic gotcha ambush by Walters, abruptly bringing up a quote he made 20 years earlier, and he walked right into it.

He attempted to give it more context when talking with *Vanity Fair* in 1993 and then made a belated amends in 2006 with a definitive statement against any kind of abusive treatment towards women, but it remains the grim blot on his résumé. And indeed, it's sobering to see just how many times he hit women on screen – and not just as Bond: Gina Lollobrigida in *Woman Of Straw*, Candice Bergen in *The Wind And The Lion*, even poor Audrey Hepburn gets walloped

in *Robin And Marian* so he can carry her to safety. (One should note the Bond villainesses also get to spit in his face, slash him with broken glass, crush his head between their thighs and trap him in a nosediving light aircraft.), It wasn't just him; violence against women was unexaminedly routine stuff in movies for years. And the flipside to his artistry is that he explored male violence in some of his other roles.

It's there most searingly in a film such as *The Offence* from 1973, in which he interrogates a suspected child molester (played by Ian Bannen) so aggressively that he kills him. It's a sick game of cat and mouse and the sadism is queasily intimate. I think it's far and away Connery's bravest performance.

Colleagues often referred to Connery's lack of vanity. He rarely worried about keeping up appearances. He would often throw his Bond wig like a frisbee at the end of a day's filming. "You really have to free yourself a bit to be an actor. You have to be willing to make an arse of yourself." He even wore a dress in Zardoz. But in The Offence, he went further, playing a hulking detective of limited grasp, unravelling under the torment of his own terrible thoughts of molestation. Yet at no point does he dilute the performance to keep his character "likeable". He was a straight-arrow actor, like James Cagney: either full on or not at all. Boredom or disdain crept in on some projects, but he rarely sank to kowtowing to the audience.

He was at heart an artist and he took his craft profoundly seriously. His tearful humility when he, alongside Audrey Hepburn in 1987, received France's prestigious Commandeur De L'Ordre Des Arts Et Des Lettres honour for his contribution to the arts is really something to behold.

In his later years his acting settled into the victory-lap roles of know-all taskmaster to blander, younger stars – what was described by critic David Thomson as his "mercenary mentor mode". He was always shaking his head

pityingly, showing these young pups how it's done, when what he really needed was equal sparring partners.

Off-screen, he met his match in Micheline Roquebrune, his wife of 45 years. She was half his size, but held her own as a partner, armed with a thick French accent and the regal serenity of a Kennedy wife.

"Micheline is a European," explained one friend. "And a bohemian painter." In other words, no tabloid distractions entered her vision. Still, she had her own big-cat protective streak and would go to the set when Connery was filming love scenes. "When his wife came in the afternoon to watch, he could not get out of bed quick enough!" said Valerie Leon, who had a 007 bed scene in *Never Say Never Again*.

Barbara Carrera, who played villainess Fatima Blush in the same film, remembers looking up mid-kissing scene to find Roquebrune staring right at her. "It took us right out of the scene. So Sean had her taken off the set. We laughed about that a lot after filming was long over. Micheline had a great sense of humour about the whole thing."

Connery loved that Roquebrune was a better golfer than him (he felt golf was "the ultimate revealer of character") and that her work won awards. "She's the star these days, not me." Not to be completely outdone, he kept his Oscar and other awards in the bathroom so any guests would still see them. "That's just me showing off a little."

The pair famously met playing golf during a tournament in Morocco while he was still married. They fell into bed for five days and Roquebrune wrote about their first romantic tryst for France's *Gala* magazine as if auditioning for Mills & Boon: "He grabs hold of me and kisses me passionately. Almost brutally. Animalistically. His skin releases a scent, not of hot sand, but more like silex, a warm and intoxicating smell like stones rubbing against each other. I'm transported."

onnery found his best on-screen sparring partner in Michael Caine. Their 1975 high-adventure yarn, *The Man Who Would Be King*, directed by John Huston is a buddy-movie classic. It also has two nice examples of Connery's craft as an actor. One is the tweak he gives to his character's line "My da's name was Herbert Dravot, Esquire and he kept a pub in Pimlico." Connery changed it to the more specific and funny "My dad's name was Herbert Dravot, Esquire... and he was bar steward in a knocking shop in Durham." (Durham also fits his character's Scottish accent better.)

The other example of Connery acting skill is at the finale, when the two rogues, Daniel Dravot and Peachey Carnehan (Michael Caine), are forced to the rope bridge over the ravine by angry natives. In the script, Dravot's falsely earned crown is hurled into the air before he is sent plummeting to his doom. In the film, Connery makes the stronger choice and defiantly pauses to put the crown on his head before walking out onto the bridge as they cut the ropes.

Connery thought Huston was a "real bandit" but loved working with him. "He said the two characters, Danny and Peachey, were really one man. As long as they were together, they could do anything. The moment they started to drift apart, they became like you and me."

I love that "like you and me". Connery's image became so fixed as the invulnerable macho sage that it's refreshing to return to his other roles and see quite how much vulnerability is there. Vulnerability, not weakness. He could play strong, beaten down – excelled at it, in fact. The vodka-shaken smoothness of Bond is the dominant cliché, but the Connery films are full of sweat-drenched beatings, where he's the one on the receiving end.

Some of his most powerful moments are when he finally cracks under intolerable pressure. As in The Hill, one of his favourite movies, when he struggles to stand on a wounded leg while railing against his tyrannical commanding officer.

It's still electrifying, not least because he unleashes his Edinburgh accent at its most

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ungentrified. Like all genuine movie royalty, he could keep his accent even when playing Russians or Arabs and it still made complete sense. Of course, Hollywood logic meant he won his Oscar doing a pretty hokey Irish accent in *The Untouchables* in 1987. This career high point, however, was not matched by a fitting swan song. In fact, his last film, *The League Of Extraordinary Gentleman*, was a rancorous calamity where he butted heads with the director so badly he insulted him at the film's own redcarpet premiere. "I've never been noted for my patience," he admitted. No kidding. His last words to me were, "All right. Get to work!"

mid his later years, Connery struggled increasingly with dementia and needed a helper to steer him around in public when in New York. He could be crotchety to the point of caricature, as in his legal feud with the family's downstairs neighbour over renovations and clogged plumbing. But, conversely, he showed up to support worthy causes, screenings, arts shows, community centres and reached out to people in times of need, such as one local photographer who had lost a son to suicide.

He was a proud father and a doting grandfather, who loved reading bedtime stories. (His bedtime recitals of Nessie's Messy Loch and as Sir Billi the vet must have been the equivalent of Michelangelo building a snowman.) And he was always up for a cèilidh. Glasgow Rangers star Ally McCoist still remembers the party held the night before a Scotland-Brazil World Cup game. "It was an official 'who's who' of Scottish people. Sean Connery was there, Sir Alex Ferguson was there, Jackie Stewart, Kenny Dalglish, you name it, and it was just magical, absolutely magical. Everybody was going crazy the whole night." McCoist was onstage with the band belting out Bruce Springsteen and at one point turned round to see Connery "with his top off, bare-chested, giving it plenty! I mean, what a man. He was just an absolutely fantastic man."

It is always painful to watch a legend grow frail, especially one who was such a life force. But he passed away peacefully in his sleep at his home in the Bahamas and as an artist he had prepared me with his role in *Robin And Marian*. It is my favourite Connery performance, as the ageing Robin Hood returned from the Crusades to fight the sheriff for one last hurrah: wistful, defiant, eternally boyish. "I'd never have a day like this again, would I?" he says to his true love, Marian, as he lies dying from her beneficent poison. She nods and his journey into immortality is complete.

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