



BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH

Transition Completed

Films, Fame, Fans

Lynnette Porter

AN UNAUTHORISED PERFORMANCE BIOGRAPHY

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**BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH,
TRANSITION COMPLETED**

Films, Fame, Fans

Lynnette Porter

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Cover design by Jules Coomber.

About the Author

Lynnette Porter, Ph.D., is a professor in the Humanities and Communication Department at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, USA. This is her fifteenth book. Among the others are books about television series, including *Sherlock*, *Doctor Who*, and *LOST*, as well as films, including *The Lord of the Rings*. In addition, she has written numerous chapters about *The Hobbit*, *Torchwood*, *Heroes*, *Quantum Leap*, and Internet fandom, for example, as chapters within other authors' books. She is a contributing editor, often writing about television or film, for online magazine PopMatters and an associate editor for the journal *Studies in Popular Culture*. She is a frequent speaker at academic conferences and fan conventions, talking about television, film, popular culture, or celebrity studies. In 2013, MX Publishing released the performance biography, *Benedict Cumberbatch, In Transition*. The 2014 follow-up, *Benedict Cumberbatch, Transition Completed*, can be read as a stand-alone book or companion work.

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Introduction

“You can’t get too nostalgic. You can look back and go, ‘That was a great year, a great moment’... I’ve got personal goals and all sorts of things that I want to evolve. I always have been about building a career of longevity”.¹

Benedict Cumberbatch

Star Trek: Into Darkness, The Fifth Estate, 12 Years a Slave, August: Osage County, and The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug - these would be milestones in most actors’ entire career. As part of his “career of longevity,” in the months leading up to the phenomenal professional years of 2013-14, Benedict Cumberbatch accepted a wide range of roles, including smaller character parts in large ensembles (that, in 2013, ended up being nominated for or winning major film awards), a controversial lead, and blockbuster villains [one in a major sci-fi franchise, two others - one requiring motion- capture (mo-cap) - in possibly the largest fantasy franchise ever]. These films are merely a year’s additions to his already-vast resume. Roles released during 2013 and the constant attention paid to Cumberbatch because of them proved to be the final step in his transition from respected working actor to bona fide worldwide star and media celebrity, culminating in becoming the recipient of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Los Angeles’ Britannia Award for British Artist of the Year.

A Fan Experience

My fan experience in the U.S. may be unique because of my region and ability to drive around my home state in search of

^[1] Bill Keveney. “Benedict Cumberbatch’s Very Big Year.” *USA Today*. 29 Jan. 2014.

Cumberbatch performances. The sheer number of events during autumn 2013, however, made finding a Cumberbatch-related project a relatively easy task, even for someone not living anywhere close to a major entertainment hub like London, New York, or Los Angeles, and thus unable to see the actor in “live performance” filming on location, attending a convention, walking a red carpet, or even daring to venture out to a restaurant or theatre to see a friend on stage. Instead, like many Cumberbatch fans, I had to content myself with visits to the cinema.

In October I watched *The Fifth Estate* twice during its opening week (and, unfortunately, found far too many open seats), but a few weeks later I stood in a long line outside a small “art” cinema to get a good seat for *12 Years a Slave*. As I did before *Star Trek*, I bought my *Hobbit* ticket well in advance so I could be among the first in the U.S. to see the film, and I, along with hundreds in the sold-out cinema, cheered when Cumberbatch made his entrance - in May as Khan, in December as Smaug. Then there was the afternoon when, after finishing my teaching responsibilities for the week, I hurried to the closest cinema to catch the last matinee of *August: Osage County*, on the way home stopping to buy the soundtrack CD because Cumberbatch’s character sings one song while accompanying himself on the organ.

Although it is easy to joke that Benedict Cumberbatch may have provided something for everyone during the latter months of 2013, from the intellectualised *Fifth Estate* to the star-powered adaptation of *August: Osage County*, many of these films (*12 Years a Slave*, *The Fifth Estate*, *August: Osage County*) are rated R (in the U.S.), which theoretically limited the audience to adults over 18. Under-18 fans primarily looked forward to *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (as well as the return of favourite consulting detective Sherlock Holmes in early 2014) because, without a guardian over 18, they could not get in to see the actor’s other movies.

Not only were traditional movies part of my Cumberbatch cinematic experience during autumn 2013, but the National

Theatre (or, at least, an NT Live recording of what had been performed in London) brought the actor onto a big screen within a few hundred miles from my home. To see *Frankenstein* (yet again, this time as part of a Halloween celebration) and the *National Theatre Live: 50 Years on Stage* feast of scenes (including one with Cumberbatch), I drove three to five hours each way to be part of the packed house for these cinematic broadcasts. This is not an atypical journey for fans eager to see NT Live (and much shorter than the transworld trips many fans take in order to see Cumberbatch during a live appearance).

If my conversations with audience members before and after *Frankenstein* and the National Theatre's anniversary celebration are anything to go by, these broadcasts have created new Cumberbatch fans, because not everyone who attends NT Live screenings may be film aficionados or viewers of PBS's *Sherlock*. Some who adore *Frankenstein*, for example, found something fresh to admire in the actor's brief scene from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Even when I went to see a movie that does not include Cumberbatch in the cast, I was made aware of yet another of his projects coming soon to a screen near me. A long trailer for *August: Osage County* played before *Philomena* during the Thanksgiving holiday. Audiences first heard Little Charles' Oklahoma accent, saw this sensitive soul cry in public, and likely wished to hug him because of his shy smile. One woman seated near me commented that she planned to see *August: Osage County* because she likes "that nice young man, Benedict Cumberbatch, who plays Sherlock Holmes on TV".

Interviews and promotional events taking place around the world prior to a film's release led to larger audiences for the actor's cinematic work. A few years ago, fewer people would go to a movie simply because Cumberbatch is in it. In the U.S., for example, his higher media profile - including interviews on talk (or chat) shows like *Katie* (in October, to discuss *The Fifth Estate*) and *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and *Conan* (in December) soon after *The*

Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug's Los Angeles premiere - almost guaranteed the actor greater face or name recognition by the end of 2013. By early 2014, Cumberbatch exclaimed in the press that he feared he had overexposed himself (which, he admitted, sounded dirty). More seriously, he told an *Adelaide Advertiser* reporter that "I just hope the public agree because they are seeing a lot of me".²

The performances so briefly mentioned in this Introduction illustrate that Cumberbatch is an actor who will not limit himself to "either/or" acting challenges: to leads *or* supporting roles, theatre *or* film (*or* television *or* another medium). Furthermore, he does not limit himself to roles in mainstream films *or* indies, as will be discussed in later chapters. His is the actor's quest to stretch himself as a performer, sometimes quite literally, and to take on characters who might not be fashionable or easy to like but are thought provoking and illuminating. Perhaps that diversity is what Benedict Cumberbatch can uniquely offer the entertainment industry.

A Performance Biography and Celebrity Studies

Like its predecessor, *Benedict Cumberbatch, In Transition* (MX Publishing, 2013), *Benedict Cumberbatch, Transition Completed: Films, Fame, Fans* explores the nature of Cumberbatch's fame and fandom while analysing his most recent and forthcoming roles. Since the "old days" in Hollywood, when actors under studio contract would often make several movies a year, few actors, even wonderfully talented ones in great demand, have had so many high-profile films released within a year. Of course, industry timing to determine when a movie will be most marketable plays a big part in selecting its release date, which may be months or years after it is filmed. That Cumberbatch has been very busy and has been cast in so many interesting films in the past few years cannot be disputed, however, even when they all seem to arrive during the same awards season.

^[2] Katie Ellis. "Benedict Cumberbatch - From Star Trek to Sherlock to Oscar Night Sex Symbol." *Adelaide Advertiser*. 4 Apr. 2014.

At the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), for example, Cumberbatch not only starred in the gala opening film, *The Fifth Estate*, but had roles in two other films showcased at this festival alone: *12 Years a Slave* (for which Cumberbatch walked the red carpet and was interviewed before the premiere) and *August: Osage County* (which was screened the day after Cumberbatch had to fly back to work on another film). Such a career is unprecedented in recent film history.

This in-depth performance biography explores Cumberbatch's work in four media that have been staples of his career for years: radio, stage, film, and television. In the little more than a year since *In Transition* was published, the actor has, yet again, been busy in all these media. He planned a return to the stage as *Hamlet*, recorded the final episode of the BBC radio hit *Cabin Pressure*, and filmed *The Imitation Game*. He balanced a series of feature film offers, completed voice roles, and acted in, produced, and promoted indie short *Little Favour*. He brightened television or computer screens as himself (on, respectively, *Top Gear* and *Sesame Street*), and he starred as Sherlock Holmes in the third series of the BBC's multiply award-winning *Sherlock*. Merely a "what he did" description could be enough to fill these pages, but *why* and *how* these performances affect the entertainment industry's perception of Cumberbatch and move audiences - individually as fans and, perhaps more importantly, collectively within popular culture - is the focus of this book and what makes it different from "regular" biographies.

This book also differs from the information found on Tumblr, for example, or provided by diligent webmasters who bring the latest Cumberbatch news to a very wide readership. Fan and official sites are wonderful for helping to promote an actor, provide information about his projects, and give supporters a way to connect with each other and share the fan experience. They are able to provide numerous videos or photographs that would be prohibitive for me (or MX Publishing) to buy for publication because of national and international copyrights; they can keep up

with every sighting or newsbreak that a published book cannot. Although I consider myself a fan, what I have done with this book is to step back and analyse not the fact that Benedict Cumberbatch has become a star but to understand *how* his star has uniquely ascended so rapidly and *what* that means to all of us living in a celebrity-oriented culture. In this respect, the current book is much more in line with celebrity studies. I synthesise information and, as a professor/author, put it in a framework to illustrate *why* this actor has changed the face of stardom and the connection between modern celebrity and great acting talent. I also focus on the ramifications of Cumberbatch's explosive celebrity and extremely devoted fandom, which affect the actor (and the public perception of the acting profession) to a degree that astounds the media and even those who work closely with Cumberbatch.

During an *Entertainment Weekly* interview about his critically acclaimed FX television series *Fargo*, star Martin Freeman - who, in *Sherlock*, plays John Watson - discussed his own global fame in light of such television projects and his film role as Bilbo Baggins in Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* trilogy. No stranger to films, fame, or fans, Freeman nonetheless seemed almost horrified by the phenomenon of co-star Cumberbatch's career. The interviewer noted *Sherlock* "mania" that helped propel Cumberbatch into global fame as an actor and a sex symbol, which led Freeman to comment "The trajectory of [Cumberbatch's rise] is very extreme... It's deserved in his case, because he's really good". Would Freeman enjoy that degree of stardom? "But to that extent? No thanks. I like to be a moving target. I've got enough madness in my life without it being there all the time"³

Benedict Cumberbatch may not have envisioned the amount of constant attention given him because of his many recent projects, but this degree of scrutiny indicates his significant role in popular culture and the fact that he represents both the best of acting and the power of celebrity.

^[3] Josh Rottenberg. "Martin Freeman Does Not Want to Be Your Friend." *Entertainment Weekly*. 1 May 2014.

Chapter 1

2013's British Artist of the Year

"I've always had an eye on longevity; I've got loads more goals to achieve. It's not like I've completely conquered the whole thing. That's a lifetime's objective, not an overnight thing".¹

Benedict Cumberbatch

By the time Cumberbatch said this in an October 2013 interview, he had already had a marvellous year, with *Star Trek: Into Darkness* becoming a hit that generated a great deal of new interest in the increasingly popular actor. Before the end of the year he would be seen in four more films, including his first leading role in a major studio production. To underscore Cumberbatch's status as a rapidly rising star and one of the world's hottest celebrities (thanks, in part, to a vibrant Internet following), the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) became the equivalent of his official society "debut" or "coming out party" within the entertainment industry. Although his fine work had been praised for many years, he had not achieved this level of public or industry awareness of him or his film roles, and the screenings, red carpets, and endless stream of interviews attested to the fact that Cumberbatch had truly "arrived".

Four key events in 2013 and two in early 2014 best illustrate that Cumberbatch's career no longer is "in transition" to stardom and international celebrity: earning the "new A-list" cover of the *Hollywood Reporter*, becoming TIFF's "It" man, having media name 2013 the Year of the Cumberbatch, inaugurating BAFTA's "In Conversation" series in New York, being named by *Time* as

[1] James Mottram. "It's Not Like I've Completely Conquered Everything': Benedict Cumberbatch Interview." *Independent*. 4 Oct. 2013.

one of the most influential people in the world, and becoming BAFTA Britannia's British Artist of the Year.

Any one of those popular markers of success would indicate that Cumberbatch's career has "come of age" and earned him a respected place within the film industry, not only in the U.K. or Wollywood but increasingly in Hollywood. This level of success also feeds into and is a result of fervent media interest in everything Cumberbatch is or does.

Hollywood Reporter's "The New A-List" Cover

Cumberbatch well represents the new A-List, as the *Hollywood Reporter's* selection of him indicates. What is interesting is the "old Hollywood"-style cover photo of serious, suited Cumberbatch, his gaze turned away from the camera and toward the future (i.e., the right-hand side of the cover). He looks like a classic, posed Hollywood actor from the studio system's glory days, right down to the white handkerchief in his pocket and his short, dark, tamed hair. The photo portrays Cumberbatch as a highly talented actor, being recognised for his body of work to date, who is part of that new A-list but also recalls the high-class elite status of old-time Hollywood's glamorous stars.

More practically for today's Hollywood and its financial interest in the marketability of celebrities and media projects, Cumberbatch is a hot commodity. Not only does he have many film projects in the works at one time, something that Hollywood respects in a moneymaker, but he has been part of lucrative science fiction and fantasy franchises, as well as had roles in award-winning dramas. He has mass appeal in blockbusters as well as acting cred in "serious" films. He is a celebrity, with the media reporting anything they can learn about him, and he is invited to the best parties in the U.K. and U.S. and royal fetes of the arts. He has an international fan following. He regularly receives television award nominations. In short, he is doing extremely well and generally manages his public persona to great advantage. He checks all the boxes as a member of the new A-list.

According to the *Hollywood Reporter* cover story, Cumberbatch is at the top of DreamWorks' list for everything but a broad comedy. (Even after the commercial flop of DreamWorks' *The Fifth Estate*, starring Cumberbatch, the studio wants to work with him; one of the actor's movies released in 2014 is the animated *The Penguins of Madagascar* from DreamWorks' Animation.) While his career provides an exciting number of choices and potential directions, the actor also has to balance the other side of celebrity - deciding how much to present of himself and how best to protect the most private aspects of his life.

The Hollywood Reporter interviewer commented upon Cumberbatch's ability to be both warm and personable or cool and prickly, depending upon the questions being asked. The resulting portrait paints Cumberbatch as "[b]oth highly intellectual and intensely emotional... At the flick of a switch, he can turn from icy to incandescent, from dignified to indignant"² These contradictory descriptions suggesting the actor's mood shifts illustrate the final stage of Cumberbatch's transition from being "merely" a highly respected working actor to a multimedia star with its accompanying global, especially Internet, celebrity. Sometimes, as discussed throughout the following chapters, he embraces his new lifestyle, which includes fans and paparazzi as well as a plethora of excellent roles from which to choose and the clout to establish a production company. At others, he does not respond well to media scrutiny and chooses to lash out with a harsh comment or to find a way of hiding in plain sight.

That Cumberbatch was selected for the new A-list cover is not surprising, given his remarkable number of high-profile films released in one year or his popularity in *Sherlock*. What may be surprising is that the actor did not "play the game" in this high-profile interview but offered the reporter - and thus his readers - a glimpse of two sides to his public persona, that of a friendly, emotional man who is not ashamed to reveal his feelings about

[2] Stephen Galloway. "The Confessions of Benedict Cumberbatch." *Hollywood Reporter*. 20 Sep. 2013.

important moments in his life and a wary professional who analyses not only an interviewer's questions but the way his responses will be interpreted in the media.

Like the cover photo, Cumberbatch is both a man of his time and of the past. He in some ways seems as old-fashioned as some of the characters he plays. He enjoys books and is frequently reported to be carrying around at least a few tomes, electronically or in paper. He chooses not to use social media because of its frequent "vitriol" yet has a vast Internet following and sometimes uses online chat to converse with fans.

Cumberbatch at times still has difficulty incorporating both personas or types of responses within a single interview or on-camera moment in the spotlight. Yet that dichotomy allows fans to see the actor as more "real" than most Hollywood actors who only seek to deftly present a unified glossy image that is attractive but reflects only what the public wants to see in its stars. Cumberbatch well understands how media and publicity work, but he does not shy away from saying what is on his mind.

Toronto International Film Festival

One of the most prestigious international film festivals is held in Toronto in early September. The timing allows buzz to build for key films likely to be nominated for Academy Awards or BAFTAs. Although having a film at TIFF is a remarkable opportunity to showcase a film to eager public audiences as well as critics and industry insiders, the most highly publicised and therefore desirable are the red-carpeted galas that bookend the two-week festival.

In September 2013, *The Fifth Estate* gained the coveted opening gala spot on the schedule and was shown twice on the same date, once at the Elgin and shortly after, with full red carpet premiere media and fan attention, at Roy Thomson Hall, which seats more than 2,600. The film tackles the controversy surrounding WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange, and as such was highly anticipated.

On the red carpet, director Bill Condon explained the film's acting challenge for Cumberbatch:

You are bringing a dramatic work to life while the person that you're playing is just down the road... [and having] the responsibility to that person... but also to the truth,... to actually including details that person may not like.³

As the director noted to the media, not many actors have the opportunity to play a real person who is still living, much less one as controversial as Assange, who closely monitored the film's progress and frequently commented to the media about his portrayal. That Cumberbatch felt a responsibility to the performance but also to the man he represented on film was a key point to make to the press on the night the film premiered at TIFF.

The gala screening itself was not as well received as DreamWorks might have expected. The director and cast (Cumberbatch, Daniel Brühl, Carice van Houten, Dan Stevens, Alicia Vikander) sat in the auditorium's second tier to watch the film and were rewarded with a standing ovation at the conclusion. Despite the audience's apparent enthusiasm, the press was less charmed in their reviews published a few hours later. One of the most positive critics wrote that

I wouldn't read into [the standing ovation] any Oscars significance.... Cumberbatch... nails Assange with a convincing Aussie accent, a slight lisp, snow-white hair and a somnambulant look in his eyes. Moreover, he gets to his essence: He is a hacker who is brilliant but also an egomaniac.⁴

[3] Bill Condon. Toronto International Film Festival. 5 Sep. 2013.

[4] Scott Feinberg. "Toronto: Awards Prospects Limited for Fest Opener, The Fifth Estate (Analysis)." *Hollywood Reporter*. 5 Sep. 2013.

Despite being lauded with praise for his acting (even though *The Fifth Estate* received mixed reviews), Cumberbatch remained humble during press interviews. He told the *Los Angeles Times* of his appreciation of the ability to work in so many films in such a short time and seemed both gratified and yet in awe of the attention even small roles in an ensemble were gaining him at TIFF. He proclaimed his love for his work when “the variations in characters are there and I’m still learning and progressing. It’s great to have the freedom to play the entire orchestra. I saw that working with Meryl Streep,”⁵ and then he reiterated that he still thinks he has a great deal to learn.

Of course, the media followed him beyond the red carpet, press gatherings, and screening rooms to TIFF’s night life. During Cumberbatch’s few days in Toronto, his “off” time was also reported just as diligently, another sign of his celebrity status. One media item aptly describes the dual nature of TIFF - emphasis on and celebration of film as well as exuberant interest in the actors who star in them: “After several hours of being yelled at, lusted over and praised... , Cumberbatch found escape... at Grey Goose Soho House Toronto, where I saw him drop a few dance moves,” but because of the limitations of his tuxedo, his “grooving was short lived and more for jokes”.⁶ The actor’s moves, on screen or the dance floor, seemed to be of equal media importance at TIFF.

Among the many media-and-fan encounters along the red carpet, one streamed by CityNews is typical. Whereas Cumberbatch could be more expressive during the cast’s press conference for *The Fifth Estate* or in one-on-one interviews scheduled throughout his time at the festival, the red-carpet interviews resembled a gauntlet of cameras and correspondents jammed into a small space leading into the cinema. The CityNews reporter eagerly awaited Cumberbatch’s arrival as the time ticked closer to the screening’s 8:00 p.m. scheduled start. The

[5] Betsy Sharkey. “TIFF: A Bounty of Benedict Cumberbatch Performances.” *Los Angeles Times*. 10 Sep. 2013.

[6] Elanie Lui. “TIFF Party Report: Wait, What Do They Call Benedict Cumberbatch Superfans?” *Globe and Mail*. 6 Sep. 2013.

arrivals walking the press line were running late, in part because Cumberbatch signed autographs for clamouring fans and talked to all reporters waiting for him in the TIFF press area off the red carpet. One journalist advised audiences watching the livestream to “Enjoy the view” as the camera operator found a way to stand on something to provide an elevated view of Cumberbatch talking with the group next to them.

Each time another round of cheers for Cumberbatch arose from the line of fans standing next to the barrier, the actor grinned, called out a hello, and waved. The reporter gushed that he makes fans scream. Cumberbatch, seeming uncomfortable, murmured “Apparently so”.

When CityNews proclaimed this “the year of the Cumberbatch,” the actor laughed nervously and looked down. He effusively thanked the reporter for that designation before humbly adding, “I have very small roles in other films, but they’re incredibly important films, so being associated with them at all is a real honour. To have a lead role in the opening gala film for 2013 is incredible”.⁷

Cumberbatch warmed to the conversation when discussing his role as Assange. He explained that, before he took the role, he knew that Assange was the publisher of the WikiLeaks website, understood its mission, and was intrigued. When he signed on to play Assange, he then did more of what he termed “the actorly thing” by reading the source material and conducting research into Assange and WikiLeaks.⁸

Asked whether Assange is a hero or a villain, Cumberbatch said that he wanted to develop a very human character and let the audience decide how they feel about him. “It’s not for me to judge him. I’m an actor who’s portraying him”. Furthermore, the actor explained that the film does not strive to create heroes or villains but to offer “a very balanced view on very complex issues”.⁹

[7] CityNews Toronto. The Fifth Estate Red Carpet at TIFF. LiveStream. 5 Sep. 2013.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

When another interviewer asked if he would do anything different with the role or what he thought of his performance, Cumberbatch responded that someone more objective than his fans would have to determine the quality of the work, and it is up to audiences (and critics) to determine how well he did. The actor seemed almost annoyed, or at least concerned, by the question. He remained polite but clearly was not going to praise his own performance.

Asked what being a TIFF gala selection meant for the film, he responded, “a huge deal... It’s a film about the fifth estate, which is about journalists, so they’ll come to it and make their minds up, and that’s the way it should be with this film”.¹⁰ Cumberbatch also appreciated that a broad audience can see the films at this festival. He commended Toronto for hosting what seemed to him to be a very public-friendly event that encouraged everyone, not just critics or those in the film industry, to engage with new movies and the people who make them.

Although *The Fifth Estate* may have been Cumberbatch’s most impressive acting project showcased at the film festival, he was also interviewed about his supporting roles in *August: Osage County* and *12 Years a Slave*. Whereas the *Fifth Estate* red-carpet reporters focused on Cumberbatch, he had a lower profile on the carpet for *12 Years a Slave*. Brad Pitt, as a star and producer, received far more attention, as did lead actor Chiwetel Ejiofor.

Because Cumberbatch was running a bit late and needed to talk with a long line of reporters before the *12 Years* screening began in the Princess of Wales Theatre, he walked past his fans on the way in but promised them he would return. About an hour later, he did just that, and the fans who waited were rewarded when the actor posed with them for selfies or commented on posters they had made for him.

No matter where he went, Cumberbatch made headlines and reached a wide audience of fans, critics, and journalists - as well as a global audience reading TIFF reports or watching the events

[10] Ibid.

stream online. During his few days in Toronto, Cumberbatch made the most of being TIFF's "It" man.

USA Today's "Year of the Cumberbatch"

Like TIFF's CityNews reporter, "America's newspaper," *USA Today*, also entitled its recap of the actor's amazing 2013 the "Year of the Cumberbatch". Instead of focusing on Cumberbatch's past achievements, however, the article described the actor's forthcoming projects as evidence that 2014 also would be another incredible year for the rising star.

When he talked about his upcoming role as Amazon explorer Percy Fawcett in *The Lost City of Z*, Cumberbatch described his character as a "brilliant, rather lovely Victorian man who just became obsessed with this discovery he made in the Amazon jungle"¹¹ in the early twentieth century. The actor was clearly enthused about the role, which has been suggested will make him an action hero in the mould of Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones.

Cumberbatch only expressed displeasure when the matter of Alan Turing's recent royal pardon came up in a conversation about the actor's role in *The Imitation Game*. He explained that Turing is the one who more appropriately should have had the opportunity to pardon those responsible for his "appalling" treatment. Cumberbatch hoped that *The Imitation Game* would highlight this "extraordinary" man and shed light on what the actor described as a shameful part of Britain's past.¹²

Even his brief comments illustrate how deeply he feels about each role and the amount of research he has done to understand a character's inner life. As illustrated in the *USA Today* feature, he may benefit from labels like "Year of the Cumberbatch," but he is hardly complacent about his career and looks ahead to multiple new roles on the horizon.

[11] Bill Keveney. "Benedict Cumberbatch's Very Big Year."

[12] Ibid.

BAFTA's "In Conversation"

"I am thrilled to be kick-starting this series of informal conversations with British talent for BAFTA New York and The Standard team... The association with BAFTA is a great honour".¹³ Cumberbatch's selection as the first actor to participate in BAFTA New York's "In Conversation" series perhaps best summarises the type of career the actor is establishing. The calibre of his work and his eloquence in discussing it make him a top choice for special events like "In Conversation," but they also illustrate the actor's ability to retain his "Britishness" (through the association with BAFTA) while gaining a greater foothold in the U.S. film industry. Cumberbatch and U.S.-based BAFTA organisations are a perfect match culturally and professionally.

Outdoors, the February snowstorm may not have been inviting, but the audience's attention and support must have warmed Cumberbatch. Luke Parker Bowles, BAFTA New York's Chairman of Film and Events, hosted the event, and *The Hollywood Reporter's* Scott Feinberg served as moderator. In addition to the standing room only crowd, more than 3,000 people followed the discussion on Twitter via #BAFTANYTalk.¹⁴

Cumberbatch nervously rubbed at the back of his neck several times while he talked, but he glibly answered all questions and seemed to enjoy the professional stroll down memory lane. The interview was reminiscent of those conducted on theatre stages earlier in his career; he frequently elaborated on a response for more than a minute or two.

When asked about his method, Cumberbatch reiterated that each role is unique and has different requirements; therefore, he does not rely on one specific technique. Nevertheless, there are "certain parameters you have to work in as an actor... Timekeeping is one, and I'm notoriously bad at that, and learning your lines". Perhaps thinking of his role as Sherlock, who must deliver many

[13] Richard Horgan. "Benedict Cumberbatch Guarantees the BAFTA New York 'Fun.'" *MediaBistro*. 11 Feb. 2014.

[14] BAFTA, New York. "In Conversation with Benedict Cumberbatch." 20 Feb. 2014.

long speeches very rapidly, Cumberbatch mentioned that he is all right at learning lines, but sometimes it can become overwhelming. One of the most important lessons from his formal education is the way he deals with a text: “Drama school taught me to be very still and centred, and to have a very measured approach to text,”¹⁵ instead of jumping ahead to rely on intuition when deciding how to approach a scene. Although intuition might lead to one way to play a character, taking more time to gain a greater depth of understanding of the text can lead to a more nuanced performance.

At times Cumberbatch worried that one of his comments might contradict another, to the point that he joked that the audience was getting to see inside his head, because as soon as he made one statement, he could see where another perspective also could be true. If there is one recent interview that harkens to Cumberbatch the pure actor, not the celebrity or embodiment of one of his famous roles, it is this one.

Time's Most Influential People in the World

When *Time* created its list of the world's one hundred most influential people, it categorised them by their sphere of influence. Cumberbatch earned a place among the arts' elite. Actor Colin Firth wrote the tribute to Cumberbatch, who *Time* called “the alarmingly talented English star”.

Firth recalled working with Wanda Ventham and Timothy Carlton and wrote that their son seems to have inherited his parents' generosity of spirit and immense acting talent. Firth noted that it is “rare to the point of outlandish to find so many variables in one actor... vulnerability, a sense of danger, a clear intellect, honesty, courage - and a rather alarming energy”. Readers could almost see Firth's deadpan expression when they read his conclusion: “He must be stopped”.¹⁶ Firth wrote the line in jest, but to actors who, unlike Firth, do not yet have their Oscar

[15] Ibid.

[16] Colin Firth. “Benedict Cumberbatch.” *Time*. 27 Apr. 2014.