
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Anya Taylor-Joy

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, October 21st, 2020

Earlier this year I had been impressed by [Anya Taylor-Joy](#)'s spirited characterization of Jane Austen's heroine Emma Woodhouse in the movie *Emma*, masterfully directed by photographer [Autumn de Wilde](#).

When we interviewed her, Anya said, "Emma was forceful, she was going to be exactly what she was going to be. She had found a very clever little loophole in a society that did not allow women to have any agency whatsoever, in the sense that her mother is no longer around and her father is a [valetudinarian](#), so she really is mistress of the house. And when she marries a man she loves, he moves into her house to live with her and her dad and he allows her to be exactly the way that she is. So Emma gets the best of both worlds, which is pretty great."



Anya Taylor-Joy as Emma (c) Focus Features

Shortly before seeing *Emma*, I had been asked by the editor of my Italian magazine *Best Movie* to write about Anya for *The New Mutants*, the much delayed movie where she played Marvel Comics superhero Magik/Iliana Rasputina, younger sister of Colossus, a sorceress with the ability to teleport. She said in 2017, “Magik definitely knows what she wants. She’s dark, arrogant and incredibly spicy, so it was a joy to play her every day.” Then I did some research on this amazing young actress. Anya was born in Miami in 1996, lived in Buenos Aires until the age of six with her parents and five older siblings, then moved with her family to London. “My mother is from London, England and from Zaragoza, Spain, she was born and raised in Africa, in Zambia. My dad is Scottish-Argentine from Buenos Aires.”



Anya Taylor-Joy, *Radioactive* © Amazon Studios

I had admired Anya's performance in *Radioactive* by Marjane Satrapi as the daughter of Marie Curie played by Rosamund Pike. As a young nurse during World War I, *Irène* convinced her mother to ask for government funding to equip a truck with a portable X-Ray machine to travel to battlefields and screen wounded soldiers to determine if they needed their limbs amputated or not.



But I was truly excited when I watched the press previews of the Netflix limited series *The Queen's Gambit*, written and directed by Scott Frank from the 1983 novel by Walter Tevis. Anya plays Beth Harmon, a teenage chess prodigy who defeats one older male opponent after another to become US champion, then finally world champion in Moscow, the Russians notoriously being the best chess players in the world. It's a wish fulfillment fantasy because in real life women never

beat men in the history of chess championships, and they play in a separate league, but it felt good to see those victories represented on screen, and in such visually clever ways. What I found fascinating was to learn more about chess, a game I played with my boyfriend as a teenager, but soon abandoned to devote myself to card games like poker, bridge, canasta, gin rummy, pinnacle, etc, which I played with my friends and family when I lived in Italy, and I still enjoy today. I also played checkers as a child and backgammon in the late 70s, early 80s. Anya said that she played board games with her large family and that her Spanish grandmother, a wonderful lady, was a terrible cheat, but it was easy for her to learn how to play chess because this game built on skills she had developed as a ballet dancer. “I grew up dancing and I always thought there’s something really beautiful about somebody showing you a piece of choreography and then testing yourself to see how quickly you can get it down and improve on it. So in playing chess, particularly the speed chess game that Beth plays (against three opponents simultaneously), I had so much fun remembering all of those tricky little sequences on three different boards. I didn’t realize I loved problem solving, but I do.”

When I spoke with Anya by phone recently, she was in Northern Ireland shooting *The Northman*, a Viking revenge saga directed by Robert Eggers who had helmed her debut film *The Witch* (2015). She has been engaged with Irish actor/director Eoin Macken, 37, since 2017, but she does not talk about him to the press. She does mention the actresses she most admires, Angelina Jolie and Tilda Swinton.

You may [read here](#) the full interview that I wrote for the Golden Globes website.

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