



Johnny Depp: A Retrospective

Steven Daly

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The actor behind a troupe of outlandish characters in director Tim Burton's films—Edward Scissorhands, Willy Wonka, Sweeney Todd, the Mad Hatter—and the swashbuckling Captain Jack Sparrow of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, among others, Johnny Depp has earned the admiration of filmgoers and critics alike. From his film debut in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* through the July 3, 2013, release of *The Lone Ranger*, Depp has proved again and again his ability to slip into and “steal the soul” of an array of characters. In celebration of the actor's 50th birthday this June, *Vanity Fair* contributing editor Steven Daly has created an expansive commentary on each of the actor's touchstone movies.

A budding rock ‘n’ roller, Depp's film career launched when his then-wife introduced him to her former boyfriend, Nicholas Cage. Through his agent, Cage got Depp an audition for *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and director Wes Craven loved how “Johnny was more worldly than all the pretty boys coming in.” Soon after, mired in the teen heartthrob category from his next few works, Depp claims that Tim Burton “rescued” him from being “just another piece of expendable Hollywood meat” when he offered him the title role in *Edward Scissorhands*.

Daly surveys a number of Depp's eclectic characters, such as Gilbert Grape, George Jung, John Dillinger, and Tony of *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, a role to which Jude Law and Colin Farrell contributed, completing the work Heath Ledger began before his death. These characters are evidence, Daly asserts, of Depp “consciously avoiding the kind of predictable leading-man roles that would normally be standard issue for any actor with his combination of looks and ability.” Daly's focus reveals the actor's integrity, as well as the whimsy that sets him apart from other big-name stars. He scatters quotes carefully throughout the text, which provides insight into Depp's decisions, experiences, and passions: “People say I make strange choices, but they're not strange for me. my sickness is that I'm fascinated by human behavior, by what's underneath the surface, by the world inside people.” Hundreds of photographs capture the actor's charisma and the appeal of his enigmatic films.

The author also discusses Depp's current projects, including, beyond acting, his own publishing house within HarperCollins, Infinitum Nihil. The imprint already has a variety of exotic and unconventional books—not unexpected from the man known for his quirky roles—lined up for publication. The first, *House of Earth*, is a never-before-published novel by folk singer Woody Guthrie. Depp is also planning a new Bob Dylan biography.

Commenting—but not dwelling—on circumstances in Depp's personal life that may have influenced his professional choices, Daly finds the perfect balance between brief film plot synopses, character descriptions, and thoughtful critiques of performances. Though his is obviously one narrow perspective, Daly's acknowledges the actor's specific (and few) weaknesses and praises his masterly talents. This comprehensive look into Johnny Depp's career is sure to be an indispensable addition to the center of any fan's coffee table.

AIMEE JODOIN (Summer 2013)

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