

#MeToo stemmed from people not talking

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lous, bisexual French author, played by Keira Knightley, cut a scandalous dash through early 20th-century Paris. Gough plays Missy, Colette's male-presenting lover. It is a distinct shift for her, not only because of the medium, but because of the character's emotional reserve. Set against Knightley's zealous trailblazer, Missy was "the quiet force of empowerment behind her", Gough says.

She warns against trying to understand Missy's gender and sexuality using modern terms. "There were no words for lesbian or trans. Missy identified with both the female and male pronoun, so it's hard to define whether she was one of the leaders of the butch lesbian movement or the trans movement."

Inevitably in the light of recent casting controversies, questions have arisen around a cis woman playing the part. Gough's response is considered but firm. "I'm not going to apologise for my work, because that's disempowering to me as a female who has worked as hard and for as long as I have."

But, she says, she welcomes the conversation. "If there is to be any outcry or any reason for the trans community to use this as another opportunity to become more visible, I am all for it."

Gough points out, *Colette* is progressively "blind" in its casting - with trans actors in cis roles and people of colour playing historically white characters - and she believes that such across-the-board fluidity should be the end goal. "I don't want it to become so difficult that none of us can play anything but what we are, because I signed up to become an actor because I love all of it, I want to play all of it."

Gough's career has been hard-won. Aged 15, she ran away from County Clare to London with a boyfriend, spending six years living in rat-infested squats. ("I am aware of how fortunate I am. Other girls died in those situations.")

After getting a full scholarship to drama school, she spent 15 years building a respected theatre

career, while never knowing how to pay her rent. She was applying for cleaner jobs when *People, Places, & Things* came along.

Now, at 38, she is being introduced to the more unreal echelons of the industry. With her rise have come rails of designer frocks, red carpets, flying film-festival visits, and the chance to meet her childhood idol Bruce Springsteen at a dinner at Anna Wintour's house.

But she's not about to paint it as a fairy tale. "On the Tony trail, you have to do these lunches, I was like: 'Why I am at a lunch for Denzel Washington? I don't know him' - the people serving me food were old enough to be my father. I thought 'I can't live in a country where people don't have access to [the basics].'"

Though her two New York stage turns were equally acclaimed, they weren't equally enjoyable. *People, Places & Things* was the pinnacle of her career: "I was surrounded by people who loved me and whom I loved. Nobody was afraid of what I was doing." Yet *Angels in America* was "a lonely thing, horrible. I think people would worry about me saying I hated it, but I don't care."

Her candour is not careless, more a moral imperative: "All of this shit with #MeToo stemmed from people not talking." When it comes to the past year's reckoning with abuse, Gough says she has never really been "sexualised in the industry - I was too angry, I think - but I was bullied and underdetermined. It was horrible, but I always stood up to it."

Growing up, Gough "didn't have any interest in screen, because I thought: 'There doesn't seem to be anything that deep going on'." One TV audition sticks in her memory, however: she was testing out to play "a really political woman, and when I went to it, the director said: 'The key to this character is in how she f**ks.' And I thought, that's the end of that."

It is thrilling to think that Gough now has the leverage to find the film opportunities to match her stage appearances. Soon, she will star opposite Sebastian Stan in *Monday*, a "romcom gone wrong". There are also rumours she is to take a key role in the forthcoming prequel to *Game of Thrones*. For the first time, Gough is lost for words. "Has that come out? That would be funny, wouldn't it?" She smiles. Dissembling, it is clear again, is not her forte.

'Colette' (15) is out on Wednesday



Strong suit Denise Gough as Missy in 'Colette'



Film of the week

Knightley keeps this Paris literary drama lively

COLETTE (15)

★★★★★

Dir: Wash Westmoreland, 112 mins, starring: Keira Knightley, Eleanor Tomlinson, Dominic West, Fiona Shaw, Aiysha Hart, Denise Gough

Reviews by Geoffrey Macnab

Fin-de-siècle Paris is recreated in extraordinarily vivid fashion in Wash Westmoreland's *Colette*. For all the brilliance of its production design, though, and in spite of two very lively central performances, the film can't overcome the challenge faced by every literary biopic; namely, how to dramatise a life of which large parts are spent sitting at a desk, writing.

ALSO SHOWING

RBG (PG)

★★★★★

Dir: Julie Cohen, Betsy West, 98 mins, featuring: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is such a well-known figure in American popular culture that she is known by her initials alone.

"Law is a consuming love for me," Ginsburg says, and the directors show how hard she had to fight to establish herself in such a male-dominated profession. While at Harvard Law School, she looked after her baby, tended her husband through cancer and still scored top marks in all her law exams. She worked on as little as two hours of sleep a night.

Early on in the film, we hear her characterised as "a witch", an "evil-doer" and "an anti-

American zombie". These are the kind of misogynistic slurs commonplace in today's bitterly divided America. Ginsburg, though, had an uncanny knack of winning the respect and affection of most of her opponents. She likens herself to a "kindergarten teacher", patiently explaining to chauvinistic and naive judges that, yes, sex discrimination really does exist. She made her arguments in such a precise and compelling way that she invariably won cases the media expected her to lose.

RBG isn't a critical portrait of its subject but it is an enlightening and affectionate one, with archive material balanced by plenty of footage of young lawyers who see Ginsburg as their ultimate role model.

Geoffrey Macnab

ONE CUT OF THE DEAD (15)

★★★★★

Dir: Shinichiro Ueda, 97 mins, starring: Takayuki Hamatsu, Mao, Harumi Syuhama, Yuzuki Akiyama

When a zombie apocalypse breaks out during production of an indie zombie movie, its director decides to keep the cameras rolling. Is it real, or an elaborate ruse by a mediocre film-maker trying to get better performances from his cast? That's a question this ultra-low-budget Japanese zombie horror comedy starts unpacking and playing around with in surprisingly inventive ways, transforming what could have been just another derivative self-referential genre mash-up into a genuinely funny tribute to low-budget film-making.

Alistair Harkness