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For Genevieve O'Reilly, Mon Mothma's Explosive *Andor* Speech Was 20 Years in the Making

"It's been a long wait," O'Reilly tells *Vanity Fair* of getting her biggest *Star Wars* showcase to date. "I remember shaking when I was giving it."

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PHOTOGRAPH BY KYLE GALVIN, STYLING BY GRACE RICHMOND, HAIR BY
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THIS STORY CONTAINS SPOILERS FOR EPISODES ONE THROUGH NINE OF ANDOR'S SECOND SEASON.

Star Wars fans knew this moment was coming. With the Ghorman Massacre imminent, lore had it that Mon Mothma—the politician from Chandrila fighting for peace and democracy, while secretly serving as an informant for the Rebellion—would give an explosive speech before the Senate that would officially end her double life and turbocharge resistance to the Empire. In the ninth episode of *Andor*'s second and final season, we reach that point. An elaborate plan comes together to allow Mon Mothma (**Genevieve O'Reilly**) to speak from the dais, against the wishes of her colleagues and the Empire's leadership—and more surprisingly, we hear her unshakable remarks in full.

“I believe we are in crisis. The distance between what is said and what is known to be true has become an abyss. For all the things at risk, the loss of an objective reality is perhaps the most dangerous,” she says. “The death of truth is the ultimate victory of evil. When truth leaves us—when we let it slip away, when it is ripped from our hands—we become vulnerable to the appetite of whatever monster screams the loudest.”

Andor has been profoundly resonant this season, perhaps never more than with that rousing, devastating polemic. It's delivered with exacting delicacy by O'Reilly, who's been waiting 20 years to deliver this very speech.

Caroline Blakiston originated the role of Mon Mothma in 1983's *Return of the Jedi*. O'Reilly, fresh out of drama school at the time, was eventually cast as a younger version of the senator in 2005's *Revenge of the Sith*. O'Reilly's scenes were largely cut from that prequel, and she left the *Star Wars* films for a decade, until *Rogue One*—the movie cowritten by **Tony Gilroy**, the mastermind behind *Andor*, and whose events lead right into *A New Hope*. Her role then expanded in *Andor*.

This speech gives us our richest insight yet into Mon Mothma. “It’s the fulcrum, the crux of who she is,” O’Reilly tells *Vanity Fair*. “The opportunity to get to do that as an actor was everything.”



Genevieve O'Reilly with Ben Miles in *Andor* Season 2.

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***Vanity Fair*: I know Tony likes to outline storylines for actors as much as he can. When did you know you would be getting to make that speech?**

Genevieve O’Reilly: I knew from the very beginning—from the very early stages, even when we were talking about [the show] being five seasons—that the escape from the Senate, that threshold that she had to cross, was always part of her story. Tony said to me that the weight of her emotional work and her value as a character would really be in episodes seven, eight, and nine. I knew that we were heading for that. I was desperate.

What was it like when you got that script?

I’ll tell you something unique about how it landed. Tony is quite engaged as a showrunner. When scripts would land, he would ring; he was often in New York and we were in London. But when *that* script landed, episode nine in particular, he was in London and he came into

my trailer. **Dan [Gilroy]**, his brother, wrote that script. But the speech wasn't the speech we have now. The speech was moments of the speech. So they create this within the architecture of *Andor*: There are these big moments, but there are multiple things going on. The **Diego [Luna]** storyline, the dissident groups, there's all happening around her speech.

In the initial script, you only heard the odd line of her speech. It was peppered with bits. But Tony came in and he said, "What do you think of the script?" I said, "I love where you're going. I love the dexterity of it and I can't wait to get into it." And then I leant forward and took a breath, and he said, "You want me to write the whole speech, don't you?" And I said, "Yeah, I do. I want you to write the whole speech." It was a real mark of him understanding me as an actor: how I like to work, and what I was reaching for, and also what I really wanted for the character.

Within two days he had written that speech then. It was *everything* to work on it. And I went to the director that we were working with, **Janus Metz**, and I said, "Listen, Tony's written the whole speech." And he said, "Okay, well, you have to do the whole speech." It was a really interesting way to end up on that day on that very lonely dais in the middle of a cavernous soundstage in front of a green screen, giving that speech to our very beautiful crew.

So there was no speech written out, beyond short excerpts, until you spoke to Tony?

There were only a few lines in the script. The *idea* was she was giving a speech, but you didn't hear the whole speech.

You came into *Star Wars* as a very small player in a very big world. But here, you're an anchor. It sounds like Tony ultimately handed you the baton.

This character has always been an expositional force: *This is your mission—go off and do it*. She is this pillar of leadership, but there was never exploration around that. He knew that, and he has learnt, in working with me over the years, that I'm really interested in the nuance and the mess and the knotty parts. I think he instinctively understood that I wanted to give this speech. They could do with it what they wanted afterwards, but it was important for me to have that moment to give that speech in the whole—to really understand and discover and wrestle with it.

That speech itself is actually a piece of music, almost, in the way it's been written. It starts with her history. It moves through what was important to her, and then it gets to the crux. And then it hits a punch. I want to know what it is to have to stand up in front of all those people and carve that speech. It was quite a moment for me that day, because you're also isolated in just climbing up those stairs and standing on that dais. The very act of having to carve a whole speech, rather than grab moments, gives you the synergy of character.

It's especially rare—maybe unprecedented—for that moment of synergy to come after playing a character for 20 years.

Yeah, it's been a long wait. But I'm really grateful that I've been given the opportunity to explore her and wrestle her and fight for her in a way that I've just never had before. And how wonderful that it's happened now at this age, with my life experience and my experience as an actor, to be able to infuse that in a way that I just wouldn't have been able to do 20 years ago.



Allister Mackenzie, O'Reilly, and Stellan Skarsgård.

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The speech has undeniable, powerful real-world resonance. Is there a line or an aspect of it that has stuck with you?

I remember shaking when I was giving it, and this was two years ago. It was as potent then as it is now, perhaps even more—the idea of truth being lost, the idea of there being a chasm between what is said and what is true. That has stayed with me. I wonder what you remember most?

I think it's when she's reflecting on her own life and, in so many words, communicating the decision to come forward—the personal side. It's a very human moment amid such a brave political act.

Yes, and that's what the speech gives—the idea that she doesn't quite know. She knows it has to be a speech, she knows she has to hit things, but she doesn't quite know *how* she's getting there. I feel that. For me, it didn't feel like standing and giving a speech. It felt like standing and opening your rib cage and exposing yourself. This is a woman who has lived with masks in this cage of secrets. These masks, she wears perpetually, because if she doesn't wear them, she's useless to the Rebellion. But this is a moment that she can rip open her sternum and be vulnerable to her truth, and really risk speaking truth to power.

Indeed, this is her point of no return. How do you think she gets there over these three episodes? There are several moments in the lead-up where she's like, "I don't think I can do this"—understandable expressions of reluctance.

We don't understand a heroic moment when we're in it. There is an inevitability to her giving that speech, because if she doesn't, then what's it all for? That's what *Andor* is exploring. It's exploring not just the archetype of heroism; it's the messiness it takes to get there. It's the lack of the conscious understanding that the moment might even be heroic. She knows it's dangerous. She knows it's not just crossing a threshold—it's crossing a Rubicon. There is no point of return. She is setting fire to her life. It is in her self-doubt that I recognize her.

How does Luthen fit into that, in your mind? This whole season he's been an almost adversarial figure to Mon Mothma, in trying to get her to see the state of things as he does. This goes back to the beginning of the season, when he has her old friend Tay Kolma killed after realizing he's too much of a liability.

The tectonic plates under her have shifted to a point where she has no steady footing. She needed Luthen. That moment of idealism in regard to Tay Kolma, the idea that she thought she could work her way out of it—Luthen is a brutal realist at that point, and she carries the guilt and the pain of that. But his singular drive and his blinkered vision is what gets the Rebellion there. All her ties are broken, and with Luthen in that, she's afraid of him. She's so afraid of him at the beginning. Without that fear, maybe she couldn't have burned it all down, but everything's a step.

Have you been reflecting back to when you first stepped into this character's shoes, so long ago?

That was back in 2005. I was a young actor out of drama school. I was living and working in Sydney, and they were shooting these big films in Sydney, and they were populating the small roles with those of us who

were around. Caroline Blakiston had played her in *Return of the Jedi*. They were looking for someone who would look like her or be her, and I swear I got the job because I was the palest person in Sydney. [Laughs] I was just really pale.

Stepping onto those sets and getting to work with **Natalie Portman** and **Jimmy Smits**, and **George Lucas** being there—I was just a wide-eyed young actor, soaking it all in. Of course, I was cut from those films; I mean, that was Anakin’s story, and it was always right that they did that. But it was such a positive experience for me. I just took that with me. I learned so much by being there, just by watching, just breathing it all in. And although those scenes were never in what they call the canon or whatever, they live in me. There are those experiences that you take as an actor that shine a light at some point. I just could never ever have imagined that it would’ve been *so* valuable however many years later. It’s just been such a surprise to me.

What struck you about these episodes when you watched them?

We spent five years making these two seasons, and everyone who was a creator and an artist in season one came back for season two. We knew that it was going to be our last shot. So this might sound strange, but the collective ambition of everyone on, particularly, season two was palpable.

What I was struck by when I watched it was that I thought it *caught* that. It doesn’t always catch it. That collective ambition—I could see it there, and I felt deeply proud to be a part of that. I could see that magic that everyone was reaching for.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.