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Come in...and be captivated...



"Wood Panel" by Rosemary Boyle; www.art3gallery.com/Pages/RosemaryBoyle.html

This issue, we are transported back through the halls of time to the majestic age of the Renaissance with writer/producer, Michael Hirst, who takes us by the hand as the royal world of the Tudors comes to life once

again... Hirst brings history alive with deep, instinctual human portrayals of some of history's most influential figures. His work on the Golden Globe-nominated Showtime series, The Tudors, his written portrayal of the great Queen Elizabeth in the film Elizabeth, and the powerfully rendered tale of Columbus in 1492: Conquest of Paradise, are only a few of the ways in which his work enriches our world with the wisdom, glory and lessons in essential human truths of the past. Let the journey begin...

Michael Hirst Interview by Nicole M. Bouchard, Editor-in-Chief

1) You work with the history and literature of Europe as a master sculptor would with marble or clay; drawing out previously hidden intricacies, enhancing features to give a symbolic human face, and breathing new life into the origin materials so that they can be accessed and interpreted by the multitudes- observers are presented with the form and leave taking what impressions they will. In giving such expression to historical and literary figures/themes, your skills remind me of the quote from Till We Have Faces by C.S. Lewis:

“Lightly men talk of saying what they mean. Often when he was teaching me to write... [he] would say, ‘Child, say what you really mean, the whole of it, nothing more or less or other than what you really mean; that’s the whole art and joy of words.’ When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech which has lain at the center of your soul for years... you’ll not talk about the joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?”

Share with us how you came to choose these subjects as your art form via the written/screen mediums. Is your affinity for historic themes and literature a result of childhood exposure to them, education (Oxford and Columbia), visits or extensive travels to significant sites?.. How did you arrive at your current profession (from short stories to notice by Nicolas Roeg and beyond), giving voices to shadows of history?

First of all thank you for the opportunity to try and answer your questions, and for your very kind introductory words. History is absolutely the clay I work with, trying always to give it a human shape. Have I always loved history? I suppose so. I was a lonely and imaginative child. My boyhood fantasy was to turn a corner and see a knight in armor. I was enamored of Napoleon and equally of Nelson. When I was about 14 years old I decided in a history lesson that I would one day have a son called Horatio; and I am pleased to say that next week is Horatio's 12th birthday!

But how did I arrive at my current profession? By accident, like so many good things. I always thought I would be an academic, and spent nearly 10 years in various universities – before meeting the director Nicolas Roeg, who changed my life. Roeg read some short stories I had written and asked me to write a screenplay for him. He was delighted when I told him I had no idea how to write a screenplay and, when I asked him what he expected, he gave me the same answer that Diaghilev had once given the young Jean Cocteau: “Attenez-moi”. Astonish me!

I have been trying to astonish Mr Roeg for the last 30 years.

2) Concerning the tilt of the golden scales of viewpoint~ A good portion of your work touches upon controversial times/themes in history with great delicacy so that the audience can see the issues- be they philosophical, religious or political- from all sides. The powerful sympathies elicited by the work linger so that we the audience are apt to be surprised with the sides we take as the perspectives shift either in the same film/show or amongst your different films/shows that follow in the same time periods, such as in *The Tudors*, *Elizabeth*, *Fools of Fortune*, *The Deceivers* and *1492: Conquest of Paradise*. This dramatic effect is a testimony to the balance you maintain as a writer- there is an element of objectivity just as with a historian yet the characters and their plights are made to be deeply personal beyond facts and dates. How do you go about achieving this balance both in your writing and your personal exploration of history?

I'm not interested in balance and I don't approach my projects with the mind-set of an historian, who may or may not wish to be "objective" (though I question whether such objectivity is possible in any case). I rather take the point that my characters are human beings and that, if I am not interested in them as people, then my audience will not be interested in them either.

Let me put that another way: historians by training and instinct look at historical characters from the outside. They take what is known about what they said, what they wore, what they looked like – and try to create a character from these inert facts. As a dramatist I prefer to work from the inside, imagining them first as poor, naked, forked animals, then as now, with instincts and urges like ours, only dressed in different clothes and different beliefs.

This process allows you as a writer to inhabit your characters and make your judgments of their actions more sophisticated and flexible. Historians are not good psychologists and they rarely provide great insights into character. In fact, usually, they follow one other, like sheep, relying upon simplistic, often repeated evaluations and tired clichés. How else to explain why all the wives of Henry VIII are always described in the same way? Katherine of Aragon is pious but boring; Anne Boleyn is shrewish; Anne of Cleves is ugly and smelly...and so on!

Are such descriptions accurate? I don't think so. They served a purpose at the time, and historians are still repeating them...but that doesn't mean they are truthful! What I find is that, with growing sympathy and engagement, more complex human beings evolve. I was surprised to discover that there was a side to Katherine of Aragon that I loved, and the actress who played her was able to bring out that sympathetic side. Similarly with Wolsey. When you dig down, when you throw away the received ideas, when you look at him as a human being and not an idea,

you find a most complex, fascinating and intelligent man. A man I would like to have known, or at least talked to, probably over a glass of wine... Not just a venal priest...but our first Renaissance prince. A man indeed of infinite variety.

For me the stories of these people become inevitably personal. I lived with them day by day. I could imagine what it was like to be them – which is to say I could imagine what it was like to be Anne Boleyn just as much as Thomas Moore. Indeed, like Henry James, I sometimes felt I understood my female characters more than my male ones!

But maybe I'm just imagining that.

And what I should add is that, for me, the “historical” issues of philosophy, religion or politics are always part of my thinking, part of the texture of the piece. But these issues don't work unless they are embodied in and expressed by characters. Catholicism for Katherine of Aragon, or Protestantism for Thomas Cromwell are not abstract ideas but part of their psychological make-up and as natural to them as the beating of their hearts. And I find that the more subtle and complex they are as human beings, the more subtle and complex becomes the exploration of such issues inside the shows.

3) Walk us through a given day of filming on set from your perspective as a writer/producer of an episode of the Golden-Globe nominated series, The Tudors, and tell us about its creation. It seems so fitting that The Tudors eloquently speaks to history and drama itself, as Henry VIII built the House of Revels for court entertainment and following his break with the Catholic Church, utilized drama to portray viewpoints in attack of opposition or defense.

For a writer, the difference between working on a movie and

working on a TV series – at least as the show runner - is absolute. On a movie, once you have produced a working document, you are expendable. On a movie the director is God. Everyone talks to the director and the director makes all the decisions. It's a director's medium. And even though I was very close to the director of *Elizabeth*, Shekhar Kapur, I felt redundant when I visited the set.

It was very different on *Tudors*. As the writer and show-runner (a role not particularly familiar to European producers but crucial to US shows), I was suddenly God. Everyone asked my opinion about everything – from the costumes, to the sets, to the music. They might not have listened to my answers – but they asked me! They told me they were making my “vision”. The actors would come to discuss their lines, the distributors to record an interview for the DVDs.

I don't say any of this out of vanity. It was a convenient myth for everyone that they were making “my vision”, whereas of course there were so many talented people involved who were actually turning a few pages of script into something different and magical. I take the point that what we were doing – turning history into drama – mirrored the activity of the Tudor stage-designers and playwrights who were making theatre out of their current religious and political controversies. Cromwell, in particular, recognized the power of drama as a political tool. But then the ancient Greeks had understood that too. So don't let anyone tell you, ever, that art and society are different beasts – that art for example is a luxury, but politics a necessity. Politics (as Cromwell knew) is an art form, and art is almost always political.

4) Fiction and non-fiction source material~ on truth and tales of fancy. When working on adaptations of literary works or delving into the chapters of history, how does your process of writing differ? Do you as a writer feel

that characters evolve more naturally from one or the other? For instance, a literary character shows the map of their inner thoughts and feelings while a historical figure is defined by the limits of their recorded actions. In the evolution of plot, pacing and detail, what are some elements of your process when working with history in terms of creativity and research (finding the unusual, quirky facts as you've said)? The art with which you can make textbook history come to life by drawing out the humanity, vulnerability and dramatic aspects of the human condition are remarkable. Examples of this in terms of character include Cardinal Wolsey of *The Tudors*- played by Sam Neil who drove audiences through the full range of emotions (negative to positive), Columbus and Queen Isabella I of *1492: Conquest of Paradise*- portrayed by Gerard Depardieu and Sigourney Weaver and William Savage of *The Deceivers*, played by Pierce Brosnan. Dynamic scenes include the dream sequence of Henry VIII chasing Anne Boelyn, Wolsey's suicide, Cromwell's execution in *The Tudors*, the death of Queen Mary as she battles her inclination to sign Elizabeth's death warrant early in *Elizabeth*, and Columbus' approach toward a native as their men stand on either side in a v-shape, smoke rising in the background between them to further illustrate the separation in *1492: Conquest of Paradise*.

In general, and personally, I prefer to work from “given” material – whether that is adapting a novel or researching historical records – than writing anything original. I am in awe of writers who can create original scripts, particularly comedies. In my opinion, nothing is more difficult.

It's true that there is a difference between adapting novels and dramatizing history. Basically it is almost impossible to adapt a brilliant novel – for the obvious reason that such a novel can be the definitive statement, the final working out of the writer's idea. Moving to another medium can add nothing. A good example is “The Great Gatsby”. This is a perfect novel and any film adaptation can only be a pale reflection.

Some second-rate novels or short stories, on the other hand, can be the basis of brilliant films. In these cases the novelist has not

exhausted the possibilities of the idea. Daphne du Maurier – “The Birds”, “Don’t Look Now” , “Rebecca” is a poor novelist but her books can make great films.

Novelists can map inner thoughts which can help an actor with a role but may not help the screenwriter. It’s a little known fact but most screenwriters have to begin by totally deconstructing and tearing open the novels they have been paid to adapt. As a screenwriter you have to begin again, literally re-imagining the novel – in a different form. Novels and films have very few things in common. A novel is a process. A film is a dream.

At least in working from historical material I’m not inhibited by someone else’s narrative structure. History is formless, it just happens. Movies, like novels, have form – are structured. But with historical material I can investigate and discover for myself the form (which is of course the story I want to tell).

That story is always a human one. And it is true that I attempt to make textbook history “come to life” by revealing or exploring the humanity of my characters. I collect foot-notes like someone who combs a beach looking for glittering fragments of shells because foot-notes are what remains behind when the narrative purpose has been served. In other words, historians don’t want to be deflected from the thrust and consistency of their own narratives so they discard those quirky, odd or irrational events which don’t fit the flow but often reveal unexpected, even contradictory sides to their characters. In life we know that the better and closer we get to know someone then the more complex and multi-faceted they become – otherwise we would grow tired of them. Of course we can’t say the same about ourselves because we have no real way of knowing ourselves – but the principle still stands. People are odd. Scratch away at the surface and even the dullest man will have his strange and remarkable hinterland.

In a series, as opposed to a movie, I have the opportunity to explore and develop that hinterland. It's not quite the same in movies, because in movies character is revealed and not developed (just like in short stories). But the luxury of living with my characters, finding out more about them, beginning to see them as living people full of paradoxes – that has been my joy when writing the Tudors.

5) Building upon the previous question, discuss with us character development (portraying the arc of their role- visually, physically with gesture, philosophically via dialogue) as well as “setting the scene” via the written word (period detail, background, setting) and entering the worlds you are to write about (researching, familiarization).

To answer this question I'll take you through the process of how I chose to write about Elizabeth I and how I decided to portray her.

In 1995 I was approached by a production company called Working Title and asked if I was interested in writing a screenplay either about Elizabeth I or Henry VIII – probably the two most iconic monarchs in English history. Because my wife had recently given birth to a baby daughter – and for no other reason that I can now think of – I plumped for Elizabeth, and was told to go away and write a treatment.

I plunged into a period of research, reading as many books about the Tudors as I could lay my hands on, but also listening to the music of the time, reading the poetry and going to museums to look at artifacts and fashions. I kept an open mind but made notes of incidents in Elizabeth's life that were particularly dramatic or revealing, as well as incredible things that were said about her or by her. For some reason I scribbled all these notes on the back of a roll of wallpaper, perhaps so I could walk up and

down it and try to see some pattern starting to emerge.

I still remember the day I read – and noted – that at some point in her life Elizabeth had an official portrait of herself painted and then ordered all previous paintings to be destroyed. She had chosen her own image – the Virgin Queen, white-faced, pearl-encrusted...and expunged all the other images when she might have looked young, vulnerable – and all too human! It occurred to me that every movie and TV series I had ever watched had portrayed Elizabeth in the way she had chosen to be portrayed, as the iconic and powerful Virgin Queen, and in that moment I had my theme and I had “my” Elizabeth.

I wanted to know what she was like when she was young – her experiences, her feelings, her influences. It turned out of course that she had basically had a terrible and often frightening childhood and youth, her mother having been executed, she herself declared a bastard, and the child of a monster. Even when her sister Mary became Queen things got no better: she was accused of plotting Mary’s overthrow, imprisoned in the Tower and sentenced to death.

Thinking about Elizabeth before she was famous meant that I could think about her as a young woman placed in terrifying situations, rather than as a public and self-conscious figure. I could also avoid the trap of so many British historical dramas – the deferential camera. Because Elizabeth is revered is our culture (having replaced the Virgin Mary in popular consciousness) it’s hard for our film-makers not to collude with her, making their cameras her subjects, looking at her with reverence and never getting too close. Shekhar Kapur, the director of *Elizabeth*, and I agreed early on that our camera would be different. First of all it would be uncertain of her, and look down at her from above, not engaging for fear she might quickly be got assassinated. But the moment she started to understand her predicament and take actions to resolve it, the

camera would look her in the face, testing her resolve. And only finally, after she had vanquished her enemies, would it look up to her from below, like a true and obedient subject.

6) What aspects do you enjoy most about your work? What goes into your decision-making process when choosing a subject? What eras/events in the world would you personally love to work with that you've yet to thus far? Between writing and producing, what do you love most about each and how do they feed into one another? How does it feel when synergy is achieved between your written vision of a screenplay or pilot and the actors/scenery? Do you believe that when you discover a new project that, in the same fashion it in turn discovers you?

As I've already said, I love the research element of my work, perhaps partly due to my academic background. But as I've also intimated, writing the Tudors introduced me to a new and pleasurable sensation of having a group of major characters who I could get to know over time and who became almost as real to me as my friends. Now that the show has finished I feel completely bereft and almost in mourning, although on the other hand I was extremely fortunate in being able to follow so many of them through their lives and to their ends. So there was a kind of closure too, as the Americans say.

I don't choose subjects – they choose me. I've never written on spec and I don't really know what I'm interested in until some new project is proposed. I usually have a gut reaction as to whether it interests me or not, but I have to be honest and admit that at some points in my career my gut was more worried about whether or not I could afford to feed it – and as a consequence I discovered I was very interested in just about everything!

I like writing. I like the physical activity. I was never a producer in the true sense of the word. A real producer goes to find the money and set up the production. He/she has to be tough. I'm not tough like that. I was an executive producer which just meant

I got to be involved in all the creative aspects of the show. Which was brilliant. For the first time, the images I had in my head could be explained to art directors and costume designers, and the show could be the result of people working in harmony, not in conflict. I (hopefully) inspired them, but they always inspired me, creating physical spaces and realities out of a few words on paper.

The boy who had once dreamed of turning a corner and seeing a knight on horseback finally got his wish. On location one day last year, that actually happened to me.

7) Tell us what you can of upcoming projects such as *Wuthering Heights*, *Cry of the Icemark*, *The Royal Physician's Visit* and *In the Skin of A Lion*.

***The Royal Physician's Visit* will hopefully start shooting next spring with Lasse Haelstrom. My new TV series is about the French Revolution, with Working Title and Canal Plus. I'm also writing a script about Mary, Queen of Scots. Projects come and go. Unfortunately about 98% of film scripts never get made. At least in television the odds are better.**

8) When entering the worlds that you're writing about, what is your method of unlocking your creativity- your work space, whether you prefer music or silence, period details around you... what gets you into the creative mindset?

I work in a small "office" in my garden. It's the one place my children respect and even though I can see the house from my window they always phone if they want to see me. I have many books in here but the room is actually dominated by a huge, life-size portrait of Henry VIII which I took from the set of *Elizabeth*. When we bought this house in 2002 and I installed the portrait next to my desk I had no idea that Henry would soon dominate

my life for the next five years.

The other pictures I have around me are images of my family and of the Beatles. I do have an electric guitar beside the desk but that's optimistic – I haven't played it for years. Sometimes I play the beautiful acoustic my wife bought me for my – birthday!

I'm just beginning a new project. The poet Dryden once described the process of creation as "ideas and images tumbling over each other in the darkness" and that's the state I'm in now. And it's wonderful.



"The Heart Soars" by Jane Seymour; <http://www.janeseymour.com/art.htm>

Acclaimed Hollywood actress, artist and writer, Jane Seymour, of 007 Live and Let Die, East of Eden, and Somewhere in Time fame recently penned a new book which is a compilation of anecdotes, personal stories and quotes on the theme of spirituality, entitled Among Angels due out in October. We were able to speak to Jane live about this recent project and her accomplished career.

I had wanted to speak with Jane for some time after reading, Remarkable Changes, on my way from St. Thomas. It was on the second leg of the trip that I found the book in the Philadelphia airport. Jane has been through a great deal of life-changing experiences and has always managed to reinvent her life for the better. What struck me were her experiences of embracing and being graced with life's mysteries. The questions which I planned to ask were answered in her latest book which is not yet published. Though I received the book following our interview, strangely, the questions I had prepared involved topics which she touched upon in this collection of true stories. It was a 'right place at the right time' occurrence. I have a strong feeling that I was meant to read this book. Each time I go to it I am greeted by beautifully rendered watercolors, meaningful quotes and tales of serendipitous experiences. What a beautiful gift to receive and it is one I'll always treasure. I didn't only get an interview with someone whose work I've always admired, but also a symbolic reminder to keep my heart open in the form of this book which is what our magazine is all about. I hope you enjoy this interview about experience with intangible inspiration and hope, paired with the beautiful artwork above. Enjoy!

Jane Seymour Interview by Denise Bouchard

You have just written a new book, *Among Angels*- in it you talk about the 'angels' around us which in many instances are the people who love us as well as that guidance which is unseen.

I had written a nonfiction story entitled "Spiritual Emergency" in the "Our Stories" section of our first issue of the magazine. It was a story of keeping my heart open and of a very serendipitous experience I had. I felt that I was being led that day and many other times in my life by infinite intelligence.

Do you think we're guided by angels?

“Angels have appeared universally throughout history. If you study them closely, every faith has messengers involved in helping others, helping them to keep their hearts open to receive. I’m very open-minded spiritually. I feel a major spiritual connection when in nature, surrounded by birds, the ocean, plants, wildlife... I believe in something greater than myself. I’m constantly learning about different faiths and find that they speak to the same themes, having more in common than not. In folklore, in art and in every major religion, most people have their own ‘angel’ stories whether they call them such or not. Be it a chance meeting, perfect timing, a bit of luck, a close call or an all-out miracle, we’ve all been touched by something extraordinary.”

In your book, Remarkable Changes, you talk about when your father was dying, you had a long conversation with him about God, though he was not a believer, it was such a gift he gave you at that moment and you asked for a sign when he passed on. You soon after found your marriage from that time was ending and you needed to get back to work. Out of nowhere, the Dr. Quinn- Medicine Woman series fell into your lap. I love hearing stories such as this one and I can't get enough of the fact that we are being watched over after a loved on passes on. Tell us more about this.

“It was hauntingly serendipitous that I was being asked to play the role of a woman whose father had been a doctor, who was going West looking toward a new phase of her life, and who would eventually be asked to take care of someone else’s children. My father shared his passion for the history of medicine with me my entire life through his work as a doctor. No one knew I had that background and yet, in my moment of greatest need, I was given this special role that enabled me to support myself, raise my kids and continue in my life. Initially, the show was not planned to be or expected to be the success it was. I’d like to believe that he was sending me a message of love

from heaven.”

In one of your books you talk about St. Catherine’s, your country manor house in England. To describe it here for our readers:

“We’d seen a lovely country manor called St. Catherine’s Court, and we checked at a local agency about it, but were told that it was under contract, about to be sold, and that we couldn’t even tour it. So we looked at other houses, found one we liked, and almost put an offer on it. Later that day, I received my call sheet, which tells actors when and where to show up for work the next day, and the location where we were to be shooting was St. Catherine’s Court! We were thrilled... There was just something about it, beyond its obvious beauty. We found time to explore the grounds and learn a little about its history. The house itself dates from about 950 when it was built as a Benedictine monastery. Later it became a manor house. On the fourteen acre grounds there is a tithe barn where farmers used to come pay taxes to the lord of the manor, and there are two three-bedroom cottages as well as a small church built in 1200.”

To me, this is a strong example of serendipity or ‘being in the right place at the right time’. You say that the whole family gathers, that everyone loves it and a visit there is akin to a spiritual retreat, which tells me that it was meant to be. Would you like to expound on that feeling of serendipity?

“On a number of occasions, I have found myself doing something or going somewhere for no specific reason, and then a miracle occurred. I strongly believe that with an open heart, you can receive the guidance of angels and find the angel within you.

One of the summers at the house we arranged a get-together for the family as well as friends of my mother’s and father’s in the spirit of remembering their lives, sharing stories and discussing old times in a fun, positive way. Instead of a solemn occasion that focused on loss, we were coming together to celebrate their lives and reconnect. Meeting some of these people for the first time or seeing some of them after a long time apart was extraordinary. The whole experience and the way it came together had a definite serendipitous quality to it.”

In Remarkable Changes, you talk about adversity and connecting to the world as a result of crisis. In terms of the unexpected changes life throws at you such as when there were changes in the Hollywood film industry, you turned a difficult situation into a great opportunity to help others. You were working for the Red Cross and they had a measles initiative in Kenya in which they intended to inoculate thirteen and a half million children in one week. You took your twins and a group of young students with you, and you and James made a documentary which is the best form of reality television imaginable, to teach, to change the world for the better. Will there be more?

“Yes, absolutely. Though I still work in films [movies], I’ve also been given the chance to explore other forms of self-expression whether through the documentaries, painting, design, or writing. Life is an emotional, spiritual experience that’s always changing and rather than living in the past or dwelling on a certain point, it’s about recognizing how you can affect the world through whatever talents or gifts you possess. Documentaries are a wonderful way to make people see and understand the problems out there. When I’m working with an initiative, I feel like I’m a part of their team; my gift that I can offer is communication so that their message can get out to a wide audience. Whether work I do is for women’s health, global water or inoculations, I enjoy the variety of ways in which I can reach out and be a part of these important causes.”

You’ve done theater as well as many very memorable movies. You’ve taken on literary and historical characters and brought them to life for us in productions such as Amadeus, The Scarlet Pimpernel, East of Eden and Somewhere in Time. In East of Eden, you set a new standard for a villainess. I love the way that you don’t present just a two dimensional character as in when you played Solitaire in Live and Let Die who had good traits; you mold the characters and they mold you. It seems that you were created to bring us these incredible portrayals. I thank actress Maggie Smith for telling you that your destiny was acting. It has made the world a more interesting place. Discuss character with us.

“You must imagine that you are that person; find yourself in that person. In portraying Kathy from Steinbeck’s East of Eden, it was important to fully discover this character. Within her own mind, her actions weren’t bad but necessary. No matter how extreme, they made perfect sense to her. She was sociopathic. The key was finding out her Achilles heal which turned out to be the curiosity about her children. This unwound her, crippled her literally- which manifested itself in the rheumatoid arthritis in her hands.”

On finding the right one, talk to us about your wonderful husband, James.

“James came into my life when I was broken and down. It was magical to find someone at that time in my life. We complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses. We are like one person. When you’re younger, you think you want something but then when you discover what you really want and need in a relationship, you find that you grow together.

The ability to open your heart comes of your own self, your own psyche and you then attract good to you (in the form of the right people and circumstances) by helping others unconditionally. It opens your life to receive when you don’t allow your heart to become closed.”

“One of the hardest lessons we have to learn in this life is to see the divine, the celestial, the pure and the common, the near at hand- to see that heaven lies about us here in this world”- John Burroughs, from Among Angels

*Editorial Note~ There are quotes from Ms. Seymour's book, Among Angels, interspersed throughout the interview with permission as the book had not yet been released and an advance copy was sent subsequent to our phone interview.

*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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