

INTERVIEW *with* JENNIFER EHLE

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PART II: SPECIFIC WORKS

THEATRE

55.) How did you prepare for the role of Tracy Lord? She seems very over-the-top compared to your previous roles that are far more understated. Have you had a chance to see the film and if not do you plan to see it? [Tom]

~ Still haven't seen the Grant/Hepburn movie. I'm sure I will one day.

56.) You've said that some of the sexual politics in TPS are difficult to justify publicly. Which bits? (Unanswered)

57.) I saw *The Real Thing* in London (two venues) and on Broadway. The London Annie seemed softer and less strident than the Broadway Annie. Did the director do this for the American audience? Why? [Evelyn]

~ Yes, I agree with you that Annie was more strident in NYC than she was at The Donmar; but actually, I found her to be most (and too) strident in The West End — at The Albery, wasn't it?

And nope ... she was harder in the West End, because that where I was at ... nothing to do with anyone else.

It was mentioned to us, when we got to NYC, that we should broaden our performances a bit for the US audiences. This was before our first performance there, if I remember rightly.

58.) Were Henry and Annie just in a relationship, or were they married? Do you think Annie slept with Billy? [Evelyn]

~ Henry and Annie are married.

The 'Brodie Script' scene is, I think, their first scene as husband and wife.

Yes, according to Tom Stoppard, Annie and Billy did sleep together.

59.) *The Real Thing* was one of the most perfect and brilliant plays I have ever seen. You had mentioned in a previous interview that you loved playing Annie and sort of hated the thought of turning her over to another actress. At the time, there was talk that an American cast would replace the original cast when you all returned to England, and also talk about a movie being made of the play. Are there still plans for the movie, and any chance of you and Stephen Dillane reprising your roles? [d_dl] (Unanswered)

60.) You had also mentioned that director David Leveaux pushed you out of the corners, or words to that effect. I was always curious about that statement, and wondered how your interpretation (or opinion) of Annie had changed over time during the run of the play. Speaking of interpretations, were you able to catch Stephen's one-man "Macbeth" in Los Angeles, where his Lady Macbeth was incredibly sexy? [d_dl]

~ When we were rehearsing *The Real Thing* I had a habit of hugging the edges of the stage. David would remind me to claim the space.

I think once a really good part is in your system, you don't really ever stop working on it — I still have ideas I'd like to try for Annie and for Tracy — and for *Design For Living* and for *Summerfolk*.

That doesn't mean that I'd be any better in those roles second time round though. Of course, I'd like to think that I would be.

For example: I would certainly be a different Annie now. A more mature one, I'd hope. But for Annie, it probably would not work as well as the younger choices I made based simply on who I was and what I knew at the time. It would certainly make for a different telling, though.

For instance; why did my Annie get so angry in the 'Brodie Script' Scene? I don't know. I wonder. Perhaps Annie doesn't know either — because, of course, the scene isn't really about Brodie's script but about Annie not feeling that Henry loves and respects her unconditionally; which she isn't necessarily conscious of.

I think it worked in our production, but if I were to do it again now, I might not do it in quite the same way — but then again, I'm not sure that it would be better.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (P&P)

61.) What is your relationship now with the book - do you still reread it? Can you do so without thinking of Andrew Davies' ... unorthodox directions? Are you an Austen fan?

~ I have not reread *Pride and Prejudice* since we finished filming.

I have always loved Austen — *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* are my favorites.

Still have not read *Mansfield Park* or *Northanger Abbey*.

62.) Do you feel possessive about P&P? Are you going to watch the new version due in September? [Sandra, Lizzy] How do you feel about the new film version — do you think it is needed when the BBC version really can't be bettered and is still very prevalent in people's minds? [Stacey]

~ *Pride and Prejudice* is a beautiful story, and I don't think that a beautiful story can be told too many times or in too many ways.

If I don't see the film version coming out this autumn, it will only be because I have been to the cinema maybe five times in almost three years! I do

hope to see it one day because Talulah Riley has become a close friend and I hear she is wonderful in it; and I don't doubt that for a second.

When we were going to film our version there were letters sent to *The London Times* etc., saying "How can the BBC waste our money on another *Pride and Prejudice*, when there is the gorgeous Olivier/Garson one ..." blah de blah ...

I don't think that there can be too many versions of it.

63.) Your performance as Elizabeth Bennet is very acclaimed and loved and Colin Firth's Mr. Darcy has become even more iconic thanks to the Bridget Jones movies. Do you think when the P&P film is released that the film cast will have trouble with the media comparing them to the BBC cast? [Stacey]

~ I hope not, as comparisons are odious. Having an opinion about every little, old thing is overrated in my opinion.

64.) Do you think Keira Knightley is a good choice to play Lizzy? [Lizzy, named after Miss Bennet] (Unanswered)

65.) One of the wonderful aspects of P&P is the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and her father (portrayed by Benjamin Whitrow). Can you tell us about the chemistry between the two of you and how it affected your portrayal of Elizabeth? Does the relationship between these two characters in any way reflect your relationship with your own father? [Tom]

~ I really enjoyed filming the father/daughter scenes with Ben. It was one of my very favorite bits of the filming. They were shot right at the start of the five-month shoot and so, I was not yet exhausted — and they were done all in a clump, with just the two of us there.

The relationship between Mr. Bennet and Lizzie was always my favorite part of the book. It was, for me growing up, *the* love story in the book; and I would weep whenever I reread it and would get to the bit where Lizzie tells Mr. Bennet that Darcy is the best man she has ever known. It is such an important part of the whole female fantasy of the story — the favorite daughter who idolizes her father above all men and then, when he fails to protect Lydia from herself, is exposed as a mere human being.

Then, and only then, is the young woman free to find her own mate and open her heart to him.

66.) Of the following men from P&P- Mr. Darcy, Mr. Bingley or Mr. Bennet - which would you want your son to grow up to be like and why? [Tom]

~ These are the options?! It's amazing the species continues.

67.) Are you still in touch with Colin Firth or any other cast members? [Lizzy] Are you taking part in any of the 10th anniversary events – e.g. the new documentary produced by Toby Stevens? (Unanswered)

68.) What are your best memories from the making of P&P? [Stacey] (Unanswered)

69.) I've read somewhere that you are far less enchanted with your P&P performance than the rest of us are. What would you change? [Jillian] (Unanswered)

70.) Have you thought about what Lizzy and Darcy's married life would've been like?

~ No. I'd hope that they are happy, of course.

71.) How did you find the balance that you did for playing Lizzy? Because I guess from the novel, you have some possibilities in terms of what characteristics to emphasize or de-emphasize. I was so interested in how you approached the character and it was unique next to other portrayals. It had a dash more sass than the rest and it played off Firth's Darcy wonderfully! [Karina] (Unanswered)

72.) A special anniversary edition of P&P is soon to be released on DVD. Will you be taking part in any special features for the DVD? [Stacey] (Unanswered)

73.) Was some of the characterization and interaction between Elizabeth and Darcy at Pemberley based, at least on one level, on their interest in literature with references to *Romeo and Juliet*/*Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Sorrows of the Young Werther* and perhaps *Vanity Fair*? [Daniela]

~ Not that I know of.

74.) I found quite interesting your characterization of Elizabeth as somebody quite immature, a bit of dreamer, with high intelligence but also a tendency to act without thinking about the consequences. Did you see these as the reasons behind some of Elizabeth's mistakes? [Daniela] (Unanswered)

75.) There have been a few sequels to P&P written by other authors-- would you ever be interested in reprising your role as Elizabeth in a P&P - Part II? [Peggy]

~ If Jane Austen's 'long lost' sequel is ever found, then it would be an honor.

76.) Concerning the dresses- did you ever feel awkward having so much of your chest exposed? Were they comfortable? you always seemed so light and easy in them, was it just good acting or did you like wearing them? If you remember, which outfit from P&P was your favorite? [Subi]

~ My favorite dress to wear was the red one.

There was also a very soft, over-washed, faded cream, print one that I called Lizzie's 'Levi's.'

FILM

77.) You have two new films coming out, *Alpha Male* and *River King*. Can you tell us about those films, your role in them and what attracted you to them? Do you know when they'll be released? (Unanswered)

78.) What's the story behind this photo from *Paradise Road* (see below or http://djwan_2.tripod.com/pr_p/Joke.jpg), and that David LaChapelle photo where you look dead?

~ I don't remember! Maybe I had just sung? (Oops, no, that would mean that they would be the ones laughing ...)

The other one you mention was merely what I had been asked to do — lie on the floor as if I were dead while 'my maid' vacuums round me, laughing.

I like that picture.

79.) Why were you credited for *The Hole* and *Born Romantic*?

~ I was credited in *The Hole* because, way back in '92, I told the director about the book and how I thought it would make a good movie.

Credited in *Born Romantic* because I introduced Davey Kane to the pub in Brixton where I used to take Salsa classes. I knew he was writing a script about Salsa and asked him if he wanted to come with me one night — and then, I think, he ended up filming some of it at the pub and the Salsa teacher was in it I believe.

I've never actually seen either of the movies.

80.) What was it like on location with *Paradise Road*? You seem to have made good friends there — Cate Blanchett and Julianna Margulies, for example. What did you all do in your downtime? Are you still in close contact with them, and are you looking to work with them again? Have your friendships changed given that you've taken different career paths?

~ Jules and I played cards morning, noon and night — *Rummy 500*.

Only, we had so much time playing together that we changed it to *Rummy 5000*.

Our apartments were next to each other and whichever of us woke up first would slide a note under the other's door saying, 'Fancy a game?' — and that would be us for the rest of the day, every spare moment.

After the shoot ended and Jules returned to LA, and Cate left for Sydney, and I went back to London; we all bought fax machines and would write each other long letters every day (this was before e-mail was accessible to the likes of us.) I'd wake up every morning and find these long boas of shiny paper folding round the living room.

81.) At the end of *This Year's Love*, do you think Sophie had escaped her self-destructive spiral?

~ I don't know — and I don't like the way I did that last scene with Dougray in *This Years Love*. I remember Davey Kane, the director, saying with some surprise, "You were so nice!" after we had shot my bit — and I said, "Too nice?" — and he shrugged it off with his sweet smile and left it at that.

But I should have taken his gentle hint and been much more offhand and selfish when telling him I'd found someone else. I was clinging to some old fashioned idea of character-development and thinking that I would not have told her story if she didn't behave differently at the end, than she had at the beginning. But in fact, I think that I would have believed more in her happiness at the end, if she had just grabbed it with both hands and not cared how she hurt Dougray's character.

82.) Did Valerie have an affair with Gustav in *Sunshine*?

~ No.

83.) Any interesting recollections from filming *Possession*? I watched it with my mother the other month 'cause she's a fan of yours, and she thought you were just "luminous." [Karina]

~ I admire and like Neil LaBute, so it was a pleasure to be around him.

My husband and I had only recently met then, and were addicted to the card game, 'Racing demon' — we'd play it on a little table in the trailer for hours on end — me with those enormous dresses ballooning about.

84.) In the film *Paradise Road*, your character gives up after she has seen her husband. I was just wondering whether he is actually dead when she sees him in the van? He looked like he was just hanging on to me. Or does Rosemary have such a connection with him that she can tell he was going to die? [Natalie]

~ No, Rosemary's husband is not dead in the truck, but since she knows he was going to attempt an escape (in the European version you know that, anyway ... not sure if you do in the US) she assumes that he must have been recaptured and therefore, further assumes that he will be executed as an example.

85.) Why did Valerie divorce Ignatz Sonnenschein and abandon her children after he came back from the war? It was never explained in the film ... her request seemed so sudden. (Your segments in *Sunshine*, as well as *Possession* were the best part of both films - I wish they would have been longer) [Evelyn]

~ Valerie had, in fact, met another man. It was an important relationship for her, because it was the first love she had experienced that was outside of her own family.

The part of Valerie's lover was a non-speaking one and he was only to be seen just from behind, as he got into a carriage. None of this was ever explained in the film — and I can't really remember what Istvan said about it at the time — but it was always supposed to be sort of opaque.

86.) Do you regret *The Chamomile Lawn*?

~ No, not at all. Should I?

87.) What was it like filming *Alpha Male*? did you have the chance to work with Amelia Warner? Did you get to hang out with everyone, and all go out and get drunk? [Gina] (Unanswered)

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