

THE YOUNG VICTORIA – Emily Blunt Q&A Transcription

[Q = Questions from moderator, critic Mike Hammond, and audience; EB = Emily Blunt]

***Q: What makes this film’s portrayal of the queen unique?**

EB: When I was first reading up about this film, I had no idea that there was this feisty, remarkable girl beneath the black, dour, sour-faced exterior that I’d become aware of in history class at school. So I think I was as surprised as everyone else. I think that everyone knows about the mourning and the grief and the unhappiness, but no one knows about the love and the passion [of Victoria]. Hopefully this film, if it does anything, will help people understand why she mourned [Prince Albert] so ferociously.

***Q: What was the biggest challenge in portraying this character?**

EB: As much as I could, I tried to approach her as the girl rather than the queen because she’s a teenage girl, who is in love and in a job where she’s in way over her head. And, at the end of the day, that’s at least a starting point that I can understand. But subconsciously, the more I read about her, the more I absorbed about her, I think I understood Victoria more than any other character I’ve played.

***Q: Rupert Friend is wonderful as Prince Albert. You two obviously have great chemistry on-screen. How was working with him?**

EB: I never know what to say about chemistry because it’s sort of this ethereal thing that you can’t quite crunch numbers on. Nor should you; it’s either there or it isn’t. I think we really got along; I think we had a lot of fun together and with the script and with the characters. We had very similar approaches to the work, and I think we wanted to make it as real as possible. But chemistry is something that happens or it doesn’t. You can do as much as you can, you can read as much as you want, you can plot out how you want to say this line and do this scene with the person as much as you want, but it either sizzles or it doesn’t.

***Q: Sarah Ferguson (Duchess of York) is a producer for this film. Did you meet her while you were making the movie?**

EB: She came along when we were doing the coronation scene. We were filming it in Lincoln Cathedral, and she came and made tea for everyone; which was very nice, you know. I think she’s so thrilled that this film got made because she had the initial idea. But I think once it started snowballing she very much took a backseat and she said, ‘I don’t know anything about filmmaking, so you go make it. I’ll come and say hi once in awhile.’ And then she’s been pushing it so hard since we’re now opening the movie. She’s been very supportive.

But it’s [also] interesting to talk to her because I got to know more since. She sympathizes – or empathizes, rather – more with Albert being the guest of the house, the outsider. And it was interesting talking to her about that.

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***Q: As an actor, you've done some wonderful work. Since this picture really was hanging on you, was there any nervousness?**

EB: Yeah, big time. Big time nerves, sleepless nights. But that's why it was great to have Jean-Marc [Vallée] because he moved so fast. It was (*donning French accent*), 'Okay, next shot,' 'Okay, moving on,' 'Ok, very good. We move on. Okay.' It was so quick, you know; it was great. 'It's so beautiful. The face is lovey. Okay moving on.'

You couldn't realize what he was saying, but he was quick. There was no time. And it was great; it was the first time I worked in the UK for awhile, and [it was great to have] the camaraderie of that family of people... because everyone knows everyone in the UK and I hadn't seen them all for years. It was wonderful; we had so much fun. It was one of the great, joyous experiences of my career, for sure.

***Q: ['The Young Victoria']'s gotten spectacular reviews here in America, and it's doing great at the box office. And these kinds of films, costume dramas, don't always [do so well].**

EB: To be honest, it was hard to get distribution for this film for that very reason. And Apparition, who's wonderful, they took a chance on it – well, not a chance because I think they actually very much believed in it and believed in films with a human heartbeat. They were our saviors on this one, because they released it in the way that everyone wanted it to be released as well.

***Q: When acting, what elements of yourself do you see coming through in the roles that you play?**

EB: I don't know if I'm aware of what comes through of me and what doesn't because I don't think anyone ever really knows themselves. So I don't know what elements of me always creep in – I'm sure there's a familiarity with most characters that actors play because they can see a through line, since it's the same person playing them.

I think that you can really create moments of being someone else. I don't know if you can totally have that person's thoughts going through your head, because that's crazy, but maybe some people can... I usually really try and understand who the character is, and if I really empathize in what's going on with them – especially in an emotional scene, if the character I'm playing has to be upset about something or is crying – if I don't connect with what *they're* going through, I absolutely will not be able to cry, as an example. I would never be able to sit there and go, 'Right, I'm going to think of a really sad thought that happened to me at 12 and then I'll cry.' That's never happened to me. I very much aim to and it becomes a quest for me to try and understand this person at every moment of the film. Not necessarily to feel like I can become them, but at least to really understand them. And then I love the physicality of being different people, changing the voice, the movements... all of that is very helpful to me. So, what of me comes through and what of the

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character is hard to define, I've always found. I think it should be more self-conscious; as long as you really invest in what's going on with that person.

***Q: How much leeway did the director [Jean-Marc Vallée] give you while filming this movie?**

EB: It depended on the scene. I think for the proposal scene, he knew that that wasn't something we wanted to do over and over again. And we'd said that; we were like, 'Jean-Marc, make sure you know which shots you want to do' because it's a really delicate scene. You don't want to exhaust it or stamp on it too much. So he was very open to that. He was very specific visually with the shots that he wanted to do. *(laughs)* There would be takes where, during my close-up, he'd be pushing me and I'd be like, 'Jean-Marc, you can't – you literally can't push me.' He'd just be nudging me in as the camera was moving toward this elaborate set of mirrors and stuff. It was amazing; he was very much focused on that sometimes.

But then when we really said, 'Jean-Marc, you've got to let us play,' he was wonderful and he'd give us as many takes as we wanted. For example, with the argument scene, we played with that a lot. I think argument scenes should be incredibly messy, because arguments are; they're so messy and vile. So there was lots of overlapping, and he shot a lot of two-shots and what not. So he was very adaptable to what we needed in the scenes.

***Q: What was the most difficult scene to film for you?**

EB: I found the very young stuff the trickiest, partly because of the hairstyle. *(laughs)* I remember looking in the mirror and being like, "I literally look like a spaniel." I mean, to what dogs looking like their owners, I was right on there. But I think it's quite tricky to find that balance because it was a longer time ago when I was 17, 18. So I wanted to recollect what being at that age actually was. So that was quite tricky.

I think the other scene that I found hard but that I loved – it was one of my favorites to do – was the scene where I meet the Privy counsel for the first time. I'd read so much about that day in [Victoria's] life where she was so nervous; she'd lost her uncle, she knew they were all going to judge her, she knew that they thought that she was just a little girl who couldn't handle it. It was the first time really where she'd have to speak publicly like that, so that scene for me was really interesting. There was all this emotion going on and she was so desperate to do a good job, and then I just had to sort of suppress it all, and try and act like I was composed. So I really enjoyed that scene because as an actor there was so much to play with.

***Q: How do you feel about [director Jean-Marc Vallée]'s unique vision?**

EB: He's visually very dynamic. He has a great aesthetic and he's got a modern flair, which was perfect for this film. It was what we were talking about before: when they're too stuffy and too arch, it just distances people. So I don't think he held the whole monarchy element of the film in too much reverence, [otherwise] you lose the freshness of what this film has. I

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think he sees the world in a slightly different light as well, as all great artists do, I suppose. He really was wonderful to work with, invigorating actually. Very energetic, and manic at times. But really, the days just flew by; I just had no time to be nervous...

I think he really understands what actors need. I know he very much dreamt of these shots visually, but at the same time he still understood that we needed an atmosphere to play and to work and to explore whatever we wanted to. So he would play [the Icelandic band] Sigur Rós, which I fell in love with. And the Rolling Stones, randomly, right before the fight scene to get me revved up. He played 'Street Fighting Man.' (*laughs*) It was great. I think he's a bit of a genius, actually.

Q: As an actor, what was it like to balance the public and private sides of Victoria?

EB: She definitely lived a jeweled existence. And that's what I appreciated about the script, that it gave room for that. You get to see what a performance it was for her to be out in the public and the composure that she needed to rally every time something awful was happening; she had to just submarine it. So that was interesting to play as well; that was really fun. The ambiguity of that that you get to play with, [where you had to] suppress all of that that's going on. And I think, also, that you get to see the private side where she's slamming doors and having a hissy fit, as we say in the UK.

Q: Since actors usually go through take after take, what are some techniques that you use to make acting in scenes fresh and new?

EB: There are a few different tricks. I mean, try not to do too many takes as well. That helps when you've got a director who moves quickly. I personally don't like to do too many takes; I think [after three takes] you pretty much got it. Otherwise you just start bashing the moment around the head. But I also think that listening – you *have* to listen. And that's the main trick; when you're acting with someone, be open to different avenues or little streams that the scene might take. Read what your costar's doing, read what your playmate's doing. Be open to it, because that's when new stuff can happen, and it can just be a flicker or nuance for the camera; but the camera will see it. And that's what keeps it fresh.

And listen, some takes are gonna suck. Some takes I'm like, 'Ooph, I'm gonna go again,' because you can feel when it's not there. And when it's right, and when everyone's done a really good job with the scene, that's when you can feel the air shift a bit. You don't remember how you did it, or you don't remember what you said or how you said it, but I think it's almost when you drop all the technicalities that you actually do a good take. But it's all about listening. Just be very aware and open; that's always how I try to do it.

Q: Throughout your career in movies like 'The Devil Wears Prada,' 'Sunshine Cleaning,' and now 'The Young Victoria,' do you feel like your style has been influenced by the costume and style of those films?

EB: It's funny because I feel like in 'The Devil Wears Prada,' my costumes were quite edgy and the character dressed quite hard, and I actually like to dress quite hard as well. So I

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loved my costumes for that; I mean, some of them were cuckoo bananas, but I still enjoyed it. The spectacle of it was really fun. So I think I learned from that movie to take more risks and make it more individual.

But with 'Victoria,' the thing I fell in love with most was the jewelry. I was so interested to see how modern a lot of the jewelry was, and how much we're very influenced by all the periods over the years. But I could've burnt that corset by the end of the film (*laughs*), so I did not take any of the clothes or the clothing tips from the Victorian era with me.