

Originality by Design

Encouraging inspiration
to flourish

An Incurable Romantic Anglophile ~ by Author Mary Ann Bernal

I guess one would say my writing career began in the fourth grade where my teacher was impressed with an original poem of twenty-seven words, and yes, I still remember the verse. Her encouragement remained with me throughout high school when my abilities were recognized during extra credit presentations. Although my college degree is in business administration, I attended creative writing workshops throughout the ensuing years.

Required reading during tenth grade was "Ivanhoe" by Sir Walter Scott and "To Have and to Hold" by Mary Johnston. Why do I recall these particular novels? The aforementioned titles are the building blocks of my literary aspirations.

Ivanhoe, the heroic knight who saves the Jewish maiden, Rebecca, and

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marries his love, the lady Rowena. This story is set during the reign of Richard the Lionheart in 12th century England. Thus began my love affair with the Middle Ages, specifically, Britannia.

In "To Have and to Hold", English soldier, Ralph Percy, buys a wife, Jocelyn Leigh. Over the course of the story, husband and wife are separated, and Ralph Percy does go to the ends of the earth to be united with the woman he had come to love. Romantic, isn't it?

Blend the two tales and, behold, an incurable Romantic Anglophile finds the perfect genres to explore.

Hollywood also deserves some inspiration credit. During my formative years, period blockbusters such as "Ivanhoe" and "The Vikings" appeared on the big screen. And because these films made money, more followed from "Knights of the Round Table" to "Prince Valiant" and so on. You might recall Hal Foster created a Prince Valiant comic strip in 1937 (before my time) and continued through 1971 (Mr. Foster's last).

When did Erik the Viking become a spark? After seeing Kirk Douglas wield a sword, followed by King Alfred, and we must not forget Beowulf.

Of course, life has a way of interfering with literary aspirations, which kept Erik in the recesses of my mind until my son married. Erik now demanded to be heard. He was tired of being in the shadows, he wanted the recognition, he wanted his story told.

Hold on – I needed to learn the craft because there are rules, aren't there? Writing workshops were not enough. With the advent of the computer, more choices were open to me. I could enroll in an online course and participate when I had the time, even if it meant wearing my pajamas and drinking coffee at first light.

Success, I completed several courses, so now I could put paper in the typewriter – not really. No need for correcting tape or white-out and forget carbon paper! We had word processing software and all you had to do was backspace to delete a word, and there was Spellcheck! Wow. One drawback with Spellcheck – causes a person to not be overly concerned with possible misspellings – Spellcheck was on the ball, Spellcheck would pick up the slack if auto-correct didn't fix the error immediately.

Being an organized person and following established guidelines, I created an outline, scribbling a few words next to each chapter heading including the characters controlling the story line,

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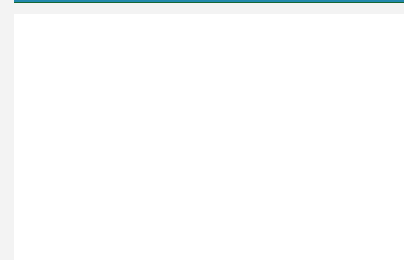
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Erik and Gwyneth, the femme fatale, who arrived on the scene shortly after Erik dominated my thoughts. But I was not able to start writing yet. There were the supporting cast members to be named, there were locations to add, there were maps to draw and a glossary to list archaic words for historical fiction newbies.

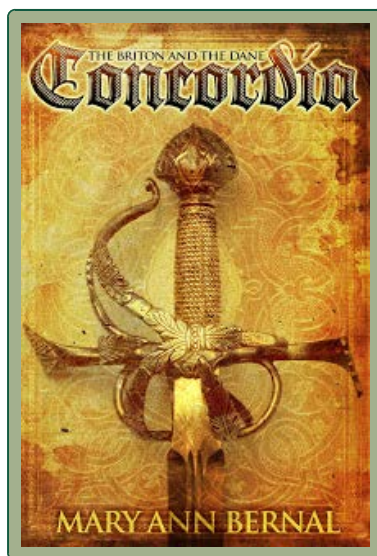
Is it safe to assume the story starts now?

Well, sort of: we do meet Erik and

Gwyneth in the first chapter, and they do continue to dominate the early pages of the novel, but something unforeseen happens, and I wasn't ready for the onslaught of the secondary and less important characters demanding, and I mean DEMANDING more "screen time".

What was happening here? Who were these fictional characters that had come out of nowhere as the story developed? Why should I have listened to them? It was getting out of hand and complicated because now, I had to have a map of Wessex updated frequently so I could remember which character was where at any given moment. Suddenly, I found myself fully immersed in an epic, voluminous narrative, and my Erik the Viking novel had evolved into a trilogy. How could I, in good conscience not tie up loose ends when everyone deserved an ending, happy or not? We, the reader, want to know.

I did not wish to leave Wessex yet and decided to write a character spin-off, a coming of age story with "The Briton and Dane: Concordia". This time I fought with the minor characters, refusing to let them "rain on Concordia's parade." They tried, but they failed. And I was proud of maintaining control. I was in charge, wasn't I? Not my fictional characters.



Reflecting on Erik and Gwyneth's role in the trilogy had me feeling guilty because the trilogy wasn't really just their story, it was David and Helga, and Stephen and

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Elizabeth, and Rigr and Dalla – you get the drift. There was nothing else to do but try again with another novel, “The Briton and the Dane: Timeline.” Grant it, “The Briton and the Dane: Timeline” is a time travel romantic fantasy, and Gwyneth is transported back to England before William the Conqueror’s invasion in 1066. While they might not be the original Erik and Gwyneth in my mind’s eye, it is still their connection, a bond that transcends time. And I was successful! I finally wrote my Erik the Viking novel.

Alas, all good things must come to an end. I had to leave Wessex and move on to other projects. It was hard saying goodbye to these wonderful characters who took up a good portion of my life, but I would not change anything, because I had fun in Alfred the Great’s England.



Mary Ann Bernal

Mary Ann Bernal is an avid history buff who also enjoys science fiction. She is a passionate supporter of the U.S. military, having been involved with letter writing campaigns and other military support programs since Operation Desert Storm. All of Mary Ann’s novels and short story collections are dedicated to fallen military heroes who gave their lives defending our freedom. A prolific writer originally hailing from New York, Mary Ann now resides in Elkhorn, Nebraska. You can contact her

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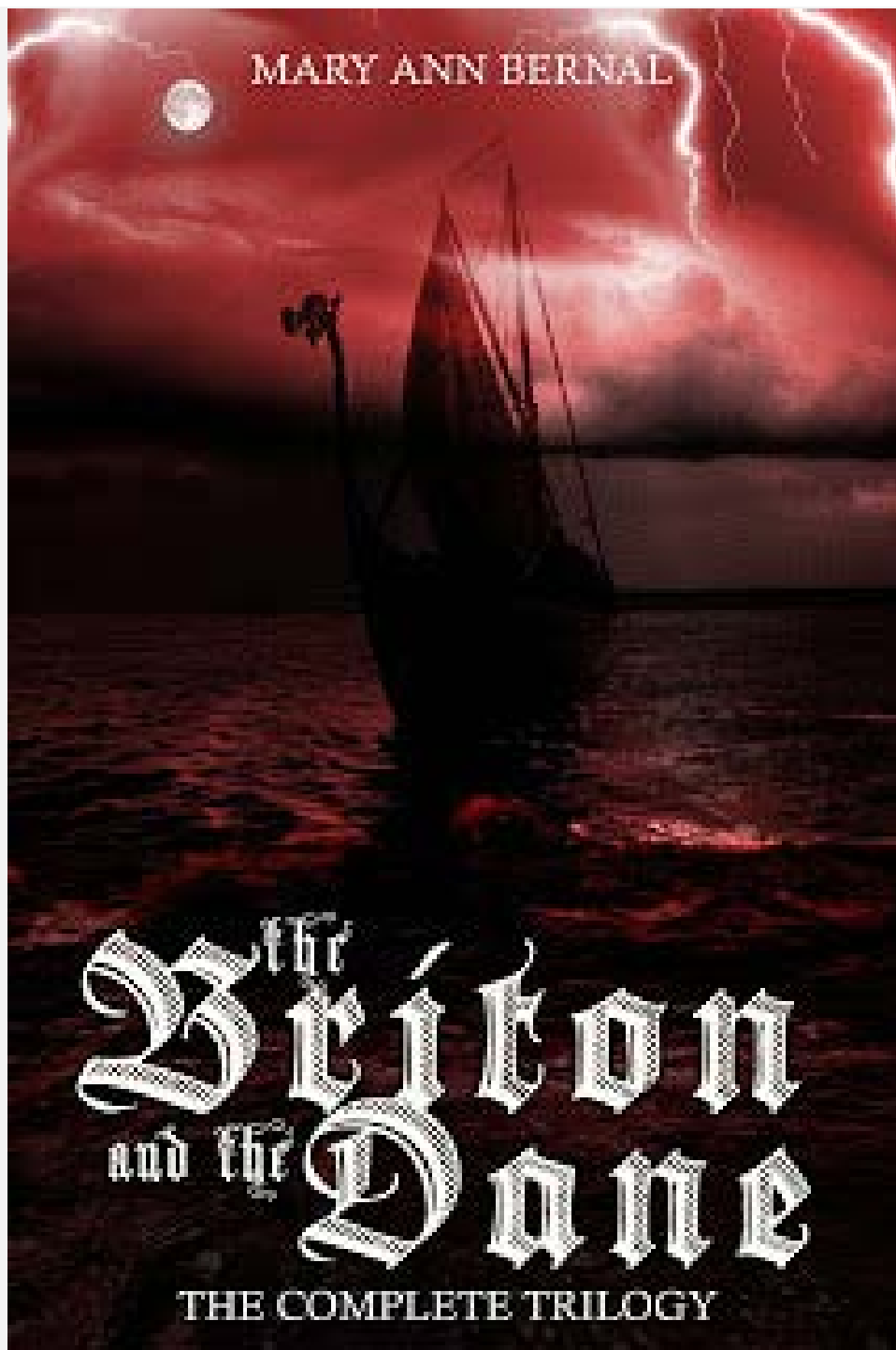
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This series is about sharing a bit of my friend's lives with their dogs. In conjunction with acquainting you with the role my dogs have pla...



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Oh my goodness, the antics and stories these halls could tell if only they could talk! See that second window, first floor, on the r...



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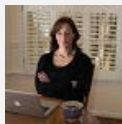
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[It's Just a dog...And that's what makes them so extraordinary ~ by Joanne Jaytanie](#)
Anyone who knows me knows how important my Dobermans are to me. Yes, they are just dogs...pure of spirit and willingness to do anything and ev...



[Our Guest Today is author Jessica Scott](#)
Welcome, Jessica! We're delighted you're with us today. Author Jessica Scott Jessica Scott is the USA Today bestselling aut...



[It's Just a Dog...And that's what makes them so extraordinary, Part 6 ~ by Joanne Jaytanie](#)

This series is about sharing a bit of my friend's lives with their dogs. In conjunction with acquainting you with the role my dogs have play...



[It's Just a dog...And that's what makes them so extraordinary, Part 4 ~ by Joanne Jaytanie](#)

I'd like to introduce you to my friend, Margaret Lehmborg. Margaret is one of the unsung heroes people call on when a dog is in dire need. ...



[It's Just a Dog...And that's what makes them so extraordinary, Part 5 ~ by Joanne Jaytanie](#)

This series is about sharing a bit of my friends' lives with their dogs. In conjunction with sharing with you the role my dogs have play...



[Life without my four-legged shadows ~ by Joanne Jaytanie](#)

It's impossible to believe my sweet Maya left this world a year ago today. How can it feel like both just a moment ago and a lifetime whe...



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