

## Published written pieces by Wilfred Roach

### Film Reviews

#### *Churchill*

It is mere days before the occurrence of the D-Day landing that would ultimately lead to the defeat of the Nazi war machine. Seemingly left out of the final planning for the assault on the French coastline by forces marshalled by Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower (played by John Slattery), Winston Churchill, (played by Brian Cox) who had, through his wartime leadership enabled Britain to survive the Nazi onslaught, feels sidelined by Eisenhower and other military leaders. He is at a loss as to what to do about it. The tale, as directed by Jonathan Teplitsky, brings forth beautiful performances by Cox and Slattery; but Clementine (Clemmie), played beautifully and sincerely by Miranda Richardson, is the show stopper. There are profound insights in vignettes from ordinary people when they were in contact with Churchill that once again highlight that leadership is not just about speeches, suits and dresses but about the authenticity behind the façade of an espoused political philosophy. My sense, certainly evident with the audience I attended, was that they could and did connect with a great man who, despite his significant foibles, had the inner resources to meet new challenges and to triumph. Go see it while you can!

#### *A Quiet Passion*

While the credits rolled at the end of this incredible film, I wondered what exactly had kept me riveted to my seat. Maybe it was the muttering from a man next to me saying, ‘this is a very popular film’, as we looked on at the packed cinema. Not a spare seat in the house and for a film about a long dead American Poet at that! I heard some opinions from the departing filmgoers that cut through the silence which had descended when the film ended. One said ‘what an interesting life’, and another, what became my favourite comment, ‘Oh I don’t know if I could have lived back then. Life seemed so hard.’

I had been aching to see this film. Although it had already been released in the United States and UK some months prior to being shown in Australia, I had deliberately not read any film reviews. I had an inkling that Cynthia Nixon, an actor from the television series *Sex In The City*, had, since ending her lead role in the film, been cited in favourable stage and film reviews. I looked forward to her portrayal of the renowned American poet, Emily Dickinson. Who knows, I thought, it might confirm my instinct as an irresistible cinematic experience.

Terence Davies, the director and producer of this film, pulled together collective and individual performances that were worthy of its main subject. The other noteworthy aspect to his direction was how he aged all the main characters. That had me wondering whether he could convincingly pull it off? He did, and by doing so added credibility to the portrayals of Dickinson and the other characters.

Nixon's poetic cadence when reading Dickinson's poems was sublime. I soon forgot all about Nixon's role in *Sex in the City* where her character was involved in relationships or near misses with men of doubtful quality. Miss Nixon demonstrated that Dickinson was a woman of fearsome complexity who in her latter years withdrew to her bedroom and held awkward conversations with mainly male editors and suitors, out of sight, on the landing in front of her bedroom.

She took to wearing white after her mother's death, and was a woman who seemed to be ethereally attached to the life she inhabited.

The opening scene of the film is at Emily's school. She clearly expresses religious opinions that challenge the prevailing beliefs concerning women in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and their role of having and using their voices to articulate opinions independently of men. Her schoolteachers regard such independence as unacceptable but she is not afraid to stand alone. She is fearless. She does this with laughter, testing the patience of her father Edward Dickinson played by Keith Carradine who himself turns in a fine performance. Edward Dickinson is a patriarch but one who nurtures his daughter's budding talent for poetry. Emily eventually returns from school to her family home in Amherst, Massachusetts, and remains there for the rest of her life.

Emily's poems are the expression of her core being, which slowly emerges from her uncertainty regarding a poetic vocation. After her death her beloved sister Lavinia does not act on Emily's dying wish to destroy some 1800 of her poems, of which only a handful were published during Emily's lifetime, and, at her request, anonymously. What occurred when they were published in the late 1800's and first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is another and fascinating story altogether.

She wrote and argued with her siblings, Austin and Lavinia Dickinson, all her life. They were a critical ingredient to filling out her life.

Emily Dickinson, it would seem, had a fondness for married clergymen but spurned romantic attachments. Her opinions would, I believe, be accounted for as feminist. She was not for turning from a vigorously held viewpoint that women were the equal of men. She would not allow herself to be subjugated by marrying a man to receive acceptance from those of her social class. She could be intemperate in manner and there is a moving scene when she has every reason to be angry, suffering as she was the first stages of what we now know as kidney disease, a condition that would eventually kill her. In that scene she speaks harshly and unfairly to one her family's servants and her father

reminds her that they are ‘not servants, but employees’. Human dignity came before class status and Emily was duly humbled.

I finally understood what kept me riveted to my seat throughout this beautiful film, which, with tears in my eyes was best summed up in her haunting poem, *Because I could not stop for Death*.

Go read it for yourself and check out this delightful film if you haven’t already done so.

### ***A Ghost Story***

I admit to my annoyance that I lost the first draft of my film review of *A Ghost Story*. I had doubts about spending time watching a movie about a man who dies, and is dressed in a shroud with two holes for eyes. I wondered how Casey Affleck and Mara Rooney could sustain that level of engagement for probably more than 90 minutes. I decided to go with my instinct and for me it paid off handsomely. In essence this is a film not so much about death (Affleck’s sudden death) but our contemporary affliction in the Western world of forgetting about the dead and focusing on the here and now. Affleck’s distress at being forgotten by Mara is achingly clear, and as a ghost he’s unable to speak his feelings, seemingly left to mope around all the time waiting for his grieving partner Rooney to realise he’s right beside her. The director and writer David Lowery has directed and written an intriguing film that stretches Mara and Affleck with a minimum of dialogue and maximum tension. As someone who has experienced sudden death and the bereavement that follows, the absence of dialogue allows the pain and longing to be convincingly portrayed by Affleck and Mara. I saw a successful attempt to demonstrate that love doesn’t die it just changes its contours even without the physical presence of a loved one. In the final scene I believe Affleck understands this and he can move on after realising that Mara hasn’t forsaken him. Go see this movie if you can.

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### ***Surprise***

A sunny Monday morning in June 2003 would be a day like no other for me. I was to attend Employment court, about an event that had previously occurred 18 months ago. I knew the Euston area of London (where the court was located); but such knowledge could not prepare me for what was to occur later that morning. I was dressed for the first time in shirt and tie with a beautiful handmade pinstripe suit. I was disgusted with myself. For all the years as a local government officer I had as a matter of principle religiously not worn a shirt and tie, let alone a suit. Not even for a job interview. I was self-conscious of what seemed to be over-elaborate clothing, but then this was a court attendance, so I inwardly accepted my fate and my trusted lawyer had recommended it.

I walked into the marble hall of this employment tribunal building in Woburn Place. I felt a nervous tension with my inner voice consoling me, telling me, 'this is what the long fight has been about', after being suspended from a job I loved and managing a diverse group of team members who I had seen grow and flourish within a large, rules-based, hierarchical local government bureaucracy. I admit rules were broken and I suffered a few bruises to my ego; sometimes to prove a point of principle, at other times from sheer stubbornness. I knew who and what was being defended, and I was aware I needed to know my facts of the case thoroughly when dealing with politicians, senior managers, auditors and central government departments.

That day (specify time to differentiate with the court day), of what was to turn out to be the day of my suspension, came without fanfare. I had had to visit Social Services headquarters to get important documents signed by our AD Mr XXXX. I had travelled up to headquarters by train. On arrival I took the lift up to his office. He had been waiting for me. I noticed that on his conference room table were two A-4 sheets of paper, turned face down; one placed where he was to sit, and the other placed where I was to sit. What struck me was the calmness of the unfolding, although Mr A struck me as being slightly uncomfortable. We both sat down and waited; for what, I wondered?

Mr A instructed me to turn my paper over, and as I did he did the same. I felt strangely calm as I turned and peered down at the letter, which gave me the impression of being hastily prepared, and quickly picked out key phrases such as 'it has come to my attention' and speedily scanned the letter noting, as only an administrator can, 'you are suspended from duties while an investigation...'. The inner voice spoke in a slightly hyperbolic way, saying, 'that's it son, your out!', and I clearly heard A's voice out loud as it intoned the dictum, 'and you have no right to enter any council buildings.' Mr A, like a poor man's version of a police officer had asked me to empty my pockets and hand over my Council ID and keys. I had hardly had time to gather my thoughts or to protest. Who would care anyway? The A had continued, droning in monotone, 'do you understand?' I had looked at him glacially. I nodded my head. I had hated him for his incompetence. Mr A then asked me to follow him to the lift, walked with me, and without much persuasion pushed me onto the busy curb of Kings Street. My only thought at that time was, 'I hope no one sees me.'

Ever since that time I knew my former life was no more, but did not understand why until this summer's day in the heart of London. At the end of what was a process of half-truths and shredding of reputations I had been sacked by AD Mr S. I had never been able to say goodbye to my loyal colleagues. Now today, I was entering buildings where an impartial judge might render justice to me.

I checked into security and was assigned one of those laminated passes with a number to hang round my neck similar to the ones you see in old mug shots of crims of old. I thought, let me go to the toilet and prepare myself. I admit I was nervous. This situation even for me was unique. Even given everything I had withstood thus far, I was not sure whether I was up to getting across the line that day.

When I entered the men's toilet I noticed one cubicle was already occupied. I went to the adjacent cubicle and I felt an intuitive unease but dismissed it, locking the white cubicle door. As I came out of my cubicle, the man in the other one came out simultaneously. As I turned to see who it was, to my amazement I saw Mr S. This was the first I had seen him since the day he had pronounced with dry satisfaction, 'you are sacked.'

We looked at each other for a second without saying a word. I so wanted to cuss him to the ground. What a perfect opportunity to tell him what I thought of him. To cuss him within an inch of his life. But I remained tight-lipped. I no longer cared what he had to say. He had no power over me nor would I seek to waste my time with someone lacking in principles.

We continued to look silently and observe each other. During this time no one else entered the men's toilet. It was strange. As if time itself had stopped. S broke the silence, saying something that offered me no consolation for what I and my community had lost. He said, 'I am sorry.' In that moment I don't know what I wanted to do. Stay and scream, or walk away. I did neither. I was rooted to the spot. What could I say in reply? It came quickly and mercilessly: 'Too late.'

I gathered myself and walked past him out of the toilet towards the court chambers. I was not triumphant. I was sad.

Shortly after the successful outcome of the Tribunal for me I heard on the LG grapevine that Mr S had been sacked for presumably not having done a good enough job in getting rid of me!

### **Yanada (Lewisham) Bio.**

Wil is an experienced storyteller who uses his lived life experiences to share his insights with audiences through written contributions such as the recently published *Living and Loving in Diversity*, the January 2019 publication of Wil's book, *Black, Gay & Underage*, poetic performances at the Sydney Writers Festival 2015 as part of Redfern Writers Group, and his own one-man shows at the Sydney and Adelaide Fringe Festivals. Wil also co-produced *Unspoken Words Festival 2018*. Wil is currently working on a number of solo and collaborative projects. To see more of his work: [www.storysage.net](http://www.storysage.net) and email [wil@storysage.net](mailto:wil@storysage.net).