

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 12 MARCH 2017



## A Cry in the Dark?

### A response to Meryl Streep's Comments made at the Golden Globe Awards on 8th January 2017

David Robertson

Dear Meryl,

That was some performance last night. No – that's not fair. You really meant it and so it should not be judged as just another acting role where you were 'identifying' with the role of the oppressed rich liberals. You actually are one and so you were speaking from your heart. And your fellow Hollywood stars loved it – as did much of the media.

I love your films. So much so that if I see your name on the billboard, it's enough to incline me to pay and go and see the film. You and Helen Mirren are about the only actresses I would say that about.

And of course you were right to attack the crudity and rudeness of Donald Trump. And he was wrong to tweet that you were the most overrated actress in Hollywood. You are a wonderful actress with an incredible ability to do what you talked about in your speech – get the audience to empathise with, and understand the character. But I am assuming that you were not acting in this speech and so let me do you the courtesy of explaining, why outside the Hollywood bubble it really does not resonate. People were saying your speech was 'a cry in the dark – a true story of conscience, conviction and courage'.

Forgive me...but as we say in Scotland 'I hae my doubts'! Your speech was saying what your audience expected and wanted to hear. 'Hollywood Actress Attacks Trump' is hardly 'Breaking News'! So let's look at the substance of what you said:

*You and all of us in this room really belong to the most vilified segments in American society right now. Think about it: Hollywood, foreigners and the press.*

This is an extraordinary claiming of 'victimhood'. You are a multi-millionaire (net worth \$65 million) speaking to a room of millionaires dressed with \$20,000 dresses, Rolex watches, and all the trappings of the Super-rich. You have a media voice at the highest level, political doors are open to you (how many times did you introduce Hilary Clinton?), you belong to the most influential and powerful section of American society and yet you manage to claim victimhood?! You do realise that it is the Hollywood elites which created the celebrity culture which allowed a reality TV star without any political experience to become President? You created the monster which you now complain about! So spare me the tears. I think what really miffs you and your fellow celebs is that whilst you were almost unanimously on the 'right' side, the American people did not listen to you and they voted for the wrong side. Dumb hicks! Ignorant old white trash males (ignoring the millions of young, Hispanic, coloured, female votes). People, who don't recognise the wisdom of the whole West Wing cast campaigning for Hilary, should not get the vote!

*So Hollywood is crawling with outsiders and foreigners. And if we kick them all out you'll have nothing to watch but football and mixed martial arts, which are not the arts.*

I would like to hope that if you ever get out of the Hollywood bubble and the praise being heaped upon you for a 'courageous' speech to people who, at least publicly, agreed with every word you said, you would stop and reflect on the above remark. Because it also helps explain why people voted for Trump. Faced with the kind of elitism and snobbery exemplified in your statement it is little wonder that many turned away from Clinton and the values represented therein.

You will forgive me using your own standards...but most of what Hollywood produces is not art. Or it's really bad art. I like going to our local contemporary cinema and to be honest when we see that a film is from Hollywood, I am much less inclined to watch it. I prefer the independent film-makers, the 'foreign' ones who don't usually have your money or fit into your formula. Sorry for being so arty and snobby – but now you know how the rest of us peasants feel!

*They gave me three seconds to say this, so: An actor's only job is to enter the lives of people who are different from us, and let you feel what that feels like.*

Well, that's not an actor's only job. I think you'll find that making money, introducing politicians, filling gossip columns are all part of the job...but I get your point. And you do it well. But can I ask you to try to empathise with those of us who are not millionaires, who don't have such a voice in the public square and who don't share your corporate, elitist, 'liberal' values?

*It was that moment when the person asking to sit in the most respected seat in our country imitated a disabled reporter. Someone he outranked in privilege, power and the capacity to fight back. It kind of broke my heart when I saw it, and I still can't get it out of my head, because it wasn't in a movie. It was real life.*

Again I would of course agree with you. If it were true. The trouble is that your profession of being upset by Donald Trump mocking a disabled journalist just doesn't ring true. First of all – it didn't happen this year... or indeed last. It happened in 2015 and there has been a Golden Globes since then. Your 'heart break and not being able to get it out of your head' has gone on a long time! Then Mr Trump denies that he was mocking the reporter for his disability – he was certainly mocking but he has used that gesture many times. Whatever, I regard it as rude and unworthy behaviour but then that is the media role he has had for decades so we don't really expect anything else. It's also a bit 'post-truth' and patronising to claim that the Pulitzer prize-winning New York Times journalist was powerless and lacked the capacity to fight back!

But this is where your tears really made me cry. It's good that you are so concerned about the mockery of the disabled. But what about the killing of the disabled? What about those who say that their disability is such that they don't have a right to live? You are an advocate of the right to kill the disabled in the womb, up to birth. Why? Who gives you the right to say that the disabled live such an unworthy life, that they are not worthy of life? Try your empathy here. Try being someone with Downs Syndrome and imagine hearing rich actresses saying that should be reason for you not to be born, because your life must be so bad – or the lives of those around you.

*And this instinct to humiliate, when it's modelled by someone in the public platform, by someone powerful, it filters down into everybody's life, because it kinda gives permission for other people to do the same thing. Disrespect invites disrespect, violence incites violence. And when the powerful use their position to bully others we all lose.*

The lack of self-awareness in this is breath-taking. You and your fellow Hollywood elites regularly humiliate and mock. I have heard Trump and his supporters mocked many times by your class. Maybe they deserve it, but don't preach to the rest of us about not mocking and humiliating when you yourself do the same thing and applaud those who do. Stand up comedians are the go-to prophets of our culture and if they were to obey your injunction not to mock or humiliate they would be out of material!

As for the remark about violence. You are joking! Remove violence from Hollywood and you won't be left with a great deal.

And let's talk about the powerful using their position to bully others. We see that often. So much of sexual abuse is about power and abuse rather than lust. Which is why when powerful men use their power to humiliate or abuse they should be called out and not lauded by

their peers. I'm sure you agree... that was after all your point. So can you explain why you stood and joined in the standing ovation to Roman Polanski at the 2003 Oscars? Mr Polanski was not able to accept the award because if he was on American soil he would have been arrested and put in jail for sexually assaulting a 13-year-old when he was 43. So you, and many of your fellow Hollywood stars, accepted it for him. Where were your tears for the humiliated, dispossessed and powerless then?

*We need the principled press to hold power to account, to call him on the carpet for every outrage. That's why our founders enshrined the press and its freedoms in the Constitution. So I only ask the famously well-heeled Hollywood Foreign Press and all of us in our community to join me in supporting the Committee to Protect Journalists, because we're gonna need them going forward, and they'll need us to safeguard the truth.*

Love that. In this 'post truth' world we certainly need a free press with the right to criticise and challenge the prevailing prejudices of the ruling elites. Including the prejudices so clearly on display last night. I think the real problem for you and your fellow travellers is that you just don't get or empathise with the rest of humanity who don't have your privileges, opportunities and 'choices'. Patrick Nathan tweeted "*Hollywood isn't a bubble. It's a nexus of people coming from all over the world coming together to make art. White rural America is a bubble*". That comment is delusional, elitist, and racist. I would hope you wouldn't support this.

*As my friend, the dear departed Princess Leia, said to me once, take your broken heart, make it into art.*

I think in this last line you give us a clue as to how divided American society (and indeed any society) can be healed. We need real broken hearts. It's all too easy for any of us, whatever particular bubble we inhabit, to blame the 'other'. Maybe we need to have our hearts broken by our own sins before we mourn over the sins of others? Maybe what's needed is not the arrogance and pride of pontificating from the safety of a Hollywood platform, cyberspace, or a church pulpit; but rather a humble and contrite spirit before God. Trump is not the answer, but neither are you and the elites you represent and speak to. And neither am I, with all my faults and sins. I know of only one answer – the ultimate Artist, the Creator of all things, and the Saviour of the World – Jesus Christ. Maybe our 'cry in the dark' should be to Him?



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