



The Pilbara Wanderer

## A Tory and a red

*The Iron Lady* (M, 2010)

Most members will have heard the expression “The Iron Lady”, and many of you may have thought of seeing the film. It is well worth viewing and will no doubt bring back a few memories for people familiar with the Margaret Thatcher era. Meryl Streep adds another excellent role to her portfolio of character portrayals that have garnered her many accolades over four decades. She plays Margaret Thatcher through the later years of her political life, weaving back and forth from the period of her political leadership to her “twilight years” as the present Baroness Thatcher. She is most effective as the elderly Baroness.

Alexandra Roach plays the younger Margaret Roberts in some typically well-cast period scenes, highlighting the move into politics accompanied by future husband Denis. They were married in 1951 and he died in 2003, and it is her memory of, and relationship to Denis that cements the film as almost a form of romantic drama, a love story that did not end with death.

Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1970-1990, and is often linked with the other significant leader of the period Ronald Reagan who was U.S. President during the 1980s as they were both highly profiled in the end times of the Soviet era. Thatcher’s Prime Ministership had many significant events, including high-level disputes with Trade Unions, the Falklands War, continuing IRA matters including the Maze Prison hunger strikes, and the bombing of the Brighton Hotel during the 1984 Conservative Party Conference.

The film is not a straight historical drama, as the writer and director have chosen a psychological approach, with Baroness Thatcher reflecting on her life, mostly with Denis still around, giving input in sometimes odd and amusing ways which irritates her, but also clearly shows their terms of endearment. The film also illustrates present issues with dementia, and this is one of the aspects that has made it controversial—the other being that it is neither an apologia or left-wing critique for Thatcher’s policies, thus satisfying neither party.

There are some excellent and memorable sayings which go to the heart of the psychodrama and they attempt to show how the Thatcher character was built.

“It used to be about trying to do something. Now it’s about trying to be someone”... “Watch your thoughts for they become words. Watch your words for they become actions. Watch your actions for they become... habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. And watch your character, for it becomes your destiny! What we think we become.”

In 2007 Margaret Thatcher’s statue in the Houses of Parliament was unveiled. In her brief speech she commented: “I might have preferred iron—but bronze will do... It won’t rust.” This concluding comment brought to my mind many biblical references, and given Thatcher’s Christian background and deeply held convictions, the lack of any direct Christian consideration within the film makes one wonder why some of these deeper spiritual and eternal questions were neglected.

*Red Dog* (PG, 2010)

Already out on DVD is the popular Australian film *Red Dog*. Any film about a dog is usually a winner, and this one tells the story of the legend of Red Dog, a companion or ‘common’ dog for many in the mining community at Dampier in Western Australia during the 1970s. Much has been written about *Red Dog* and there is a seemingly never-ending range of bumper stickers and souvenirs, but this movie was based on Louis De Bernières 2001 book *Red Dog*. The dog colloquially known as The Pilbara Wanderer has a dedicated statue erected near the entrance to the town of Dampier.

Rio Tinto helped to finance the film and the film does have a public relations aspect about it, as the mining people are basically all warm good-hearted people.

US actor Josh Lucas plays John Grant, the person who is Red Dog’s real master. The film combines elements and references from many Australian films, even in the techniques used one can see the influence of iconic films such as *Wake in Fright*, *Mad Max*, *Crocodile Dundee* through to *The Castle*.

John’s love interest is Nancy (played by Rachael Taylor), the mining company secretary, and one all the miners have an interest in, but the American wins her heart.

The Red Dog legend is told through flashbacks and stories as people gather in the pub while Red Dog is struggling in a room nearby to survive (he has been poisoned). Everyone has their own story to tell, and Red Dog appears as the quintessential companion, match-maker, therapist and good mate.

While promoted as a family film, there are some scenes which need to be critiqued. There are no overt sex scenes, but the main couple end up in bed quickly. The scenes with the pub and drinking and partying are of course the most authentic, but there are some demeaning references to women and the fun attitude toward drunkenness and recovery is something that should never be accepted. Ironically there is little swearing. The one Christian scene reinforces religion in a traditional role.

Red Dog has themes of mateship and loyalty. It is also about people searching for life and truth in a hard world. While it may be stereotyped, at least it did not have the dog sacrificing its life for the town.

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