



Love, Sex, Religion, Death: The Complete Films of Terence Davies

A Quiet Passion

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Directed by: Terence Davies

©: A Quiet Passion Ltd, Hurricane Films

Production Companies: Hurricane Films,

Potemkino, Scope Pictures

Supported by: Screen Flanders,

Enterprise Flanders, Flanders Audiovisual Fund

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Invest

Presented by: WeatherVane Productions,

Screen Flanders

Executive Producers: Andrea Gibson, Jason Van

Eman, Ross Marroso, Ben McConley, Ron Moring,

Jason Moring, Geneviève Lemal, Alain-Gilles

Viellevoye, Dominic Ianno, Stuart Pollok

Co-executive Producer: Mary MacLeod

Produced by: Roy Boulter, Solon Papadopoulos

Co-producers: Peter De Maegd, Tom Hameeuw

Line Producers: Paul de Ruijter, Michael Bowes

Associate Producers: Margaret Appleby,

Rob Deege

Project Manager - Potemkino: Lize Lefaille

Production Co-ordinators: June Beeckmans,

Cathy Vlasuk

Financial Controller: Nick Stanley

Location Managers: Tim Janssen, Oliver Amerigian

Post-production Supervisor: Meg Clark

1st Assistant Directors: Johan Ivens,

Lynn d'Angona

2nd Assistant Directors: Thuline De Brauwer,

Lisandra Soto

Casting: John Hubbard, Ros Hubbard

Written by: Terence Davies

Director of Photography: Florian Hoffmeister

Camera Operator: Donald McIntosh

1st Assistant Camera: Rupert Hornstein,

Darryl Byrne

2nd Assistant Camera: Stefan Bruylants,

Kate Castro

Digital Imaging Technician Supervisor:

Niels Christensen

Gaffers: Dieter van der Eecken, Jesse Goldberg

Key Grips: Bo Molderez, Warren Weberg

[Stills] Photographer: Johan Voets

Visual Effects by: The Fridge

Special Effects: Eric De Wulf, Peter Soete,

Koen Luypaert

Edited by: Pia Di Ciaula

Production Designer: Merijn Sep

Art Directors: Toon Mariën, Katha Seidman

Set Decorator: Ilse Willocx

Costume Designer: Catherine Marchand

Costume Supervisor: Deborah Newhall

Wardrobe Supervisor: Regina Van Eijden

Make-up Designers: Fabienne Adam,

Michelle Van Brussel

Make-up Department Head: Joe Rossi

Key Make-up: Stephanie Stachow

Hair Designers: Frank van Wollegghem, Evie Hamels

Hair Department Head: Jean Henry

Key Hairdresser: Emma Rotondi

Titles: Company 3

Orchestra: Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra

Pianists: Helen Krizos, Joshua Cole

Conductor: Ernst van Tiel

Music Supervisor: Ian Neil

Recording Engineer: Stephen Guy, David Coyle

Sound Mixers: Johan Maertens, Kevin Parker

Re-recording Mixer: Paul Cotterell

Supervising Sound Editor: Srdjan Kurpjel

The biopic is a difficult film to get right, all the more so when its subject is an artist whose significance was understood only after their death. The view from here – a vantage point that makes plain the chain of influence linking Vincent van Gogh to his inheritors, and Emily Dickinson to hers – complicates our perception of the lives of these individuals. It is hard to imagine that Dickinson had no inkling during her life that her work would foment and transform the very principle of poetry – easier to think that she did, that she suspected all along. It's even harder to hold in mind that posthumous fame changes not a detail of the lived experience. Awfully, it is an afterlife to which all but the artist herself are invited.

To writer-director Terence Davies's credit, he has not, with his latest film, fallen prey to the temptation to imbue the poet's 55 years with a sense of building towards. On the contrary, Dickinson's life – as Davies represents it – is conclusively end-stopped, and the latter half of it marred by her certainty that she will go to her grave unread. As a fan of Dickinson, Davies might have spared himself and us the discomfiting truth of her daily life by implying that she somehow chose it; that she paid with her imperfect present for posthumous renown.

Yet instead of making her a martyr, he and actor Cynthia Nixon give us not the world-shy mouse of popular imagination but a woman who is sociable, who bobs downstairs like a kangaroo to make a new friend of the spirited Miss Buffam. This Dickinson is alive in her time: profoundly mindful of its politics of gender, religion and secession; responsive to its literature; awake to and disposed to discuss the fact of being overlooked as a writer of verses. Like slant rhyme, she surprises, as when she smashes a plate on the edge of the table when her father complains it is dirty. She is outspoken, overfull of feeling (often on the brink of tears, moved by an aunt's departure or for reasons less apparent) and frightened by mortality. Few biopics have achieved as full and rounded a subject as this one has.

Born in 1830, Dickinson saw fewer than 12 of her 1,775 (known) poems published. Davies's film proposes – justly, I think – that this was partly a condition of her context, partly owing to her pride. Dickinson's public recognition was prevented as much by the conservatism of publishers (the prevalent opinion that women 'cannot create the permanent treasures of literature', as the editor of the *Springfield Republican* states here), and a general unpreparedness, unrelated to gender, for the uncompromising character of her verses, as it was by Dickinson's single-mindedness and her setting great store by 'integrity'. From start to finish, *A Quiet Passion* finds proof of these qualities in Dickinson. Beginning with her withdrawal from women's college because she 'will not be forced to piety' by its headmistress, the film encompasses the origins of some of the poet's most important relationships, and two further withdrawals: her renouncing publication ('the Auction/Of the Mind' she would call it) and her retreat – in the later part of her life, which was crowded with losses and illnesses – deeper inside her father's house.

Dickinson's character is established primarily through lively dialogue, scripted by Davies, and secondarily through her poetry in the form of voiceover. (These are *whole* poems, not odds and ends, read empathetically by Nixon.) There is a third way: an excursion into the poet's imagination, an erotic reverie in which a man slowly climbs the stairs to her room. The synergy between the traditional song on the film's soundtrack, and the phosphorescing flowers at the foot of the stairs, Florian Hoffmeister's languid camera and the intensity of Nixon's

Cast:

Cynthia Nixon (*Emily Dickinson*)
Jennifer Ehle (*Lavinia Dickinson*, 'Vinnie')
Jodhi May (*Susan Gilbert*)
Catherine Bailey (*Vryling Buffam*)
Emma Bell (*young Emily*)
Duncan Duff (*Austin Dickinson*)
Keith Carradine (*Edward Dickinson*, father)
Sara Louise Vertongen (*Miss Lyon*)
Rose Williams (*young Vinnie*)
Benjamin Wainwright (*young Austin*)
Marieke Bresseleers (*Jenny Lind*)
David Van Bouwel (*concert hall pianist*)
Annette Badland (*Aunt Elizabeth*)
Steve Dan Mills (*Dr Holland*)
Joanna Bacon (*mother*)
Daniel Vereenoghe (*carriage driver*)
Michel Delanghe (*carriage driver assistant*)
Maurice Cassiers (*photographer*)
Miles Richardson (*pastor*)
Luc Devos (*homestead pianist*)
Barney Glover (*dancing soldier*)
Verona Verbakel (*Margaret*, maid)
Yasmin Dewilde (*Maggie*, maid)
Turlough Convery (*Thomas*, butler)
Daan Cools, Eve Cools (*Dickinson baby*)
Eric Loren (*Reverend Wadsworth*)
Simone Milsdochter (*Mrs Wadsworth*)
Tom Kemp (*minister*)
Ross MacDonald (*Mr Wilder*)
Trevor Cooper (*Samuel Bowles*)
Stefan Menaul (*Mr Emmons*)
Bert Bancaert (*looming man*)
Richard Wells (*doctor*)
Noémie Schellens (*Mabel Loomis Todd*)
Maarten Ketels (*Mr Todd*)
Barry Roberts (*funeral hearse driver*)
UK 2016©
125 mins
Digital

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The Terence Davies Estate



Dear Bud: The Creative Mind of Terence Davies

Edge Hill University, the repository of the Terence Davies Archive, curates a free exhibition of previously unseen materials from Davies' personal archive and the archive of production company Hurricane Films. The exhibition will include materials from both Terence's personal life and film career such as family letters and belongings, behind-the-scenes photos, props and draft scripts, highlighting his career long connection to the BFI, his deep love of music and a glimpse of his creative space with an interactive recreation of his working desk.

1-30 Nov BFI Southbank Mezzanine

expression makes this the film's most powerful scene. The yearning for intimacy it expresses is almost unbearably moving, being at odds with the way the poet puts distance between herself and others at this stage of her life.

Physical remoteness and effulgent imagination are also the concerns of a recent biopic by another filmmaker from the north of England. (To borrow, anachronistically, the words of Wendy Cope, bloody biopics about women writers are like bloody buses: you wait for years, then two or three appear.) Broadcast on British television at the end of 2016, around the time that Davies's film was initially to be released, Sally Wainwright's *To Walk Invisible* – about Charlotte, Anne and Emily Brontë – is, as its title indicates, *A Quiet Passion*'s twin.

More or less contemporaries (Emily Brontë, whose name and novel are mentioned more than once in *A Quiet Passion*, died when Dickinson was 18), Dickinson and the Brontës had more in common than simply the trials of publication. Wainwright and Davies take like approaches to these writers' lives, each filmmaker relaying the complexity not only of the subjects' economic and social situations, but also of their practical and emotional accommodation of them. Most interestingly, both films depict the loss of a relative, and in each the treatment of disease and death is direct, unflinching. The material losses these women suffer body forth losses of a non-material kind. They gesture towards the dispossession of something that never was theirs to be taken, and is difficult to show on film: cultural opportunity. Its refusal is more painful in *A Quiet Passion*, Dickinson harder hit. The Brontës had each other at least, though even this had its pitfalls, namely the conventionality that moved Charlotte to demean her sisters' authorial integrity, blocking the republication of Anne's second novel and writing a jaundiced foreword to Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Wainwright's intimation of the pervasiveness of the dominant culture – the risk of cultural integration, of assimilation by the literary establishment – is among her film's many merits. That risk came knocking at the Brontë parsonage, just at it called for Dickinson at Amherst. It was the Emilys who denied it entrance and stood their ground, adamant that their writing not be raked or interfered with. Resisting assimilation may not look like much; these films say it is.

That both productions chose to have replica houses built is not incidental. *A Quiet Passion* has its Dickinson Homestead, *To Walk Invisible* its Haworth parsonage – places whose comfort and containment formed these women and ministered to their creative and spiritual lives. As Virginia Woolf wrote after visiting the parsonage in 1904: 'Haworth expresses the Brontës; the Brontës express Haworth; they fit like a snail to its shell.'

By the conclusion of *A Quiet Passion*, we are left in no doubt as to the kind of woman Emily Dickinson was, or how deeply she felt. And yet she remains a mystery. Davies appears not to have wanted to manage his subject, to be overbearing and work her like clay on his wheel. It isn't for us, he seems to say, to see with her eyes or walk in her shoes. After all, to be a poet is not, in all cases, to wish to be transparent. Not all poetry is confessional, not even all of it personal.

Conveying to a publisher how his adjustments to her punctuation had galled her ('It feels like an attack'), Dickinson explains – with a brusqueness characteristic of the older poet – that there is a difference between 'clarity' and 'obviousness'. Davies grasps this distinction. *A Quiet Passion* has all the wished-for clarity – of vision and of character – but it is not so certain of its subject as to enclose her and divest her of what she prized most: her soul's independence.

Thirza Wakefield, *Sight and Sound*, May 2017