

WFIU Profiles
Interview of Meryl Streep
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Michael McRobbie:

Good evening. I'm Michael McRobbie. Welcome to *Profiles* from WFIU.

On *Profiles*, we speak with notable artists, writers, scholars, and others, to get to know the person behind the public image.

Our very special guest today is the world-renowned stage and screen actress Meryl Streep. Meryl, thank you very much for appearing on *Profiles* today.

Meryl Streep:

Thank you for having me.

McRobbie:

It has been a great privilege to have you at Indiana University this week, and to bestow on you an honorary doctorate in humane letters in recognition of your immensely distinguished career. I should also note that your husband, the distinguished sculptor Don Gummer, previously received an honorary doctorate in 2009, making the two of you, to the best of our estimation, only the fourth or fifth set of spouses in recent history

to both have honorary IU doctorates. So, that is yet another thing to add to the list of your illustrious achievements.

Streep:

(laughter) Honorary Hoosier, that's me.

McRobbie:

That's right.

I'd like to spend just a little time talking about the people and places that have influenced your life and your career. I think, in particular, some questions also about your views on your art and your films more generally. If I could just start by asking a general question about what were the kinds of influences on you growing up before you went to university that were formative to you in terms of the career that you later pursued?

Streep:

Well, when I grew up as a little girl in New Jersey in a middle-class household, I had a mother who was cracked on theatre, and she loved the theatre, and so did her mother. In fact, my grandmother used to go to the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia in 1903 and she saw some amazing, amazing actors there. And it was twenty-five cents. They went every single night to the live theatre. So, this is a long theatre going tradition in the family. But not a lot of money by the time I came around. So, my mother would get us the cheap seats, the *enfants du paradis* up in the top of the theatre, and we'd go and see lots and lots of things. But my mother was an adventurous spirit in many ways. I was a curious child and she was eager to feed my curiosity and so she took me to lots of things. And one of them was the U.N. And I remember thinking, "ooh, this is an exciting place to be." And I thought I would be a translator. I was interested in

difference, people's differences and their commonalities, what we had in common— what I had in common with that Nigerian lady with the great big head wrap. And I loved the sort of romance of these young women—they were all young women—sitting up in the booths in the U.N. General Assembly with their headsets, and they were simultaneously translating one person's language into another's. And it was fantastic.

McRobbie:

You are quite an accomplished linguist, too. I think you've got French, Italian, German from memory.

Streep:

I have a bad memory for Italian, French—not German. I learned Polish for twenty minutes during *Sophie's Choice*. I took a crash course at Berlitz and learned how to speak Polish really mostly to wrangle the diphthongs—the certain Eastern European way of speaking that's very distinctive. And I had to speak Polish in the film. And I had to speak German with a Polish accent. I didn't learn German.

McRobbie:

And, of course you went to university at Vassar, a very fine institution. You did a B.A. in drama there. You were at Dartmouth briefly, and then, of course, at Yale. But what I'm interested in asking you about is, at Vassar, what was it as part of your Vassar education that was most important to you, looking back? What did you really gain from that education that was sort of fundamental to your future career?

Streep

Well, I think I gained access to all sorts of different people, and disciplines, and areas of study that I never had even imagined existed. I went to a public high school, where we studied boys and football pretty much. And I faked my way through a lot of it. I mean, I really was not a serious student, and in those days, you could do that. I mean, it was weird. You could go home at 3:15 and I could do my homework in study hall in sixth period, and at eighth period, go home—and have the evening off to myself. It was a really different time. But there was a lot of dream time in it. And I read for fun, which is something that I'm not sure high school students do so much any more. They're compelled to read, and as a result, often turned off reading because they have to read this, and they have to read it analytically and they have to tear it apart and parse it—and basically ruin it for themselves. And so, that kind of instruction, for a curious mind, it was good for me to have that amount of freedom. But at Vassar, a discipline definitely was imposed by virtue of all the girls that had been to really, really good private schools—and that was a whole other thing. I was encountering active minds. And, in those days, Vassar was just for women. I was there for two years when it was for women, and for two years when they let “them” in. And there was a sea change. It was quite an intellectually interesting time, a fiery time to be there—the late '60s, the war, the draft, the drama of it all.

McRobbie:

So what was the impact of it becoming coeducational halfway through your period there? What was the impact that had intellectually on Vassar?

Streep:

Well, within one year, the leadership of the newspaper, the literary magazine, the student body, were all taken over. Often at a women's college, you would have sort of interesting, eccentric, squirrely minds would come and feel safe to be. And those were

subsumed. They retreated. And it was sort of “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” We all went away. I went to Dartmouth as an experiment in coeducation, from Dartmouth’s point of view. There were 6,000 undergraduate and graduate students there at the time, and they brought in 60 undergraduate women into that—what do you call it?—Animal House? And it was really, really interesting, because there was a very different way that the classroom was conducted. At Vassar, a professor would pose a question, and often everyone would sort of sit and wait and formulate the answer, and someone would say “I think that...” and there would be this sort of gentle unfolding of a discussion. And at Dartmouth, the professor had not even gotten half the question out of his mouth and somebody was standing up and giving his answer—he had not even heard the question. And I thought, “That’s really interesting. That’s a really interesting difference between the way men and women compete with ideas.” And then when we all came together, I saw the girls, of necessity, become more immediately assertive. Aggressive is the word. And that’s something that resides to this day. And I think it’s probably a good thing, but also, the whole world is speeded up. I think there is room for the ruminative, quiet, thoughtful, contemplative scholar.

McRobbie:

Oh, yes. So you really are, I think, clearly just a wonderful advertisement for the power of a liberal arts education, because I think that’s what you really were saying—that breadth of subjects, and, of course, depth in certain areas—I think that was what you were saying was so influential on you.

Streep:

Yes, I studied everything—except math. I studied music—that’s the closest I got to math, and then parallel fifths defeated me. But I do think that it’s an important thing to learn a little bit of everything—at least for the person I became and the kind of actor that I wanted to be.

McRobbie:

Right. And then, of course, you went to Yale for your M.F.A.—you finished that in '75. The education you had there was principally in your craft—in theatre and drama. How impactful was that? By which I mean, sometimes people criticize an academic education in some of these fields for being not related closely enough to what you actually do when you're engaging in your profession. Did you find that experience—that academic education that you got at Yale—really prepared you well for your later career as well?

Streep:

Well, Yale was not part of my academic education, honestly. Though I had one class in the poetry of John Donne, which was particularly wonderful, given by Marjorie Phillips, who was a great, great speech teacher. And that was as deep as it went, really, in the sort of text analysis. Basically, it was a very practical education. I mean, we experimented. Robert Brustein was the dean and it was an experimental time. “No more masterpieces” was his mantra. “No more dragging out the creaky old horse.” Unless you have a reason—that it pertains to this time and this place where and which we find ourselves. So, how does *Henry II* pertain? Why should we mount *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? What's it saying? So things were sort of oversized and abstract and weird. It's also a conservatory, which means that it's a place for budding... not only actors, but directors, writers, dramaturgs, and designers. It was a collaborative education. Everybody got into it. There was a professional theatre attached to the school, and in the third year, pretty much, you were allowed to work in it. Some second year students, if they really needed it, but it was an Equity company. There were teacher/actors who would come in and help. They were actors in the company and they would also help out in the classes. But it was sort of a hodge-podge education.

McRobbie:

Those of us in higher education quite often hear skepticism from outside universities about the value of education in some of the professional areas—journalism, your own field, and so on. What advice would you have for young men and women—aspiring actors who want to enter your profession—about the importance of a focused university education in the field as opposed to just jumping in feet first and hoping something happens?

Streep:

Well, President McRobbie, you don't need an education to jump into show business. I've got news for you. You can have a perfectly wonderful, very highly compensated career without knowing much about anything. But it's the kind of citizen, the kind of artist, the kind of person you want to be that compels you to learn about things. And, you know, it's your only life—so fill it up. Fill up that mind, because what's in there is the only thing they can't take away from you.

McRobbie:

Well, Meryl, I think you know that on *Profiles*, we invite our guests to identify a couple of pieces of music that we then play during the show. And you've identified a song, "Silver Moon," from *Rusalka*, sung by Renée Fleming. This is an opera by Antonin Dvořák. Do you want to say something about the importance of this piece and its significance to you?

Streep:

Well, it was very, very hard to pick, but I think whenever Renée Fleming opens her mouth, we all have to get on our knees and thank God. This is one of her most beautiful performances. But I love her singing. And this particular piece has special significance

for me because I have a video of this with my two youngest daughters, of whom was about four and one who was twelve at the time, dancing to this piece—the entire piece. And it's one of the treasures of my life. If the house burns down, I want that.

[Musical interlude.]

McRobbie:

So, welcome back to *Profiles*. Our guest today is world-renowned actor, Meryl Streep.

Meryl, I want to talk now about cinema as art. Let me just say a little background to this. I became president of IU in 2007, and in my inauguration speech, I announced that we would be constructing a full-scale, high-quality art house cinema on campus. And my argument was that we had wonderful facilities in some of the other arts, but we've had this longstanding, very high-quality reputation in film studies, but we had no facility to show the great masterworks of cinema. And the position I took was the great works of cinema are works of art comparable to the great paintings, the great operas, the great symphonies, and so on, and we needed a facility of comparable quality to show those works of art. So, I'm interested in your thoughts about cinema as art, because there's a lot of cinema that's not very good, but there's a lot that is, in my view, transcendental. What are your thoughts about that?

Streep:

I can imagine where you came to this wonderfully, highly evolved idea. I mean, I'm so intrigued why you have attached in that way to cinema. Because I do think it's a valid position to take, but you're taking it right at the moment when people are just going to start watching films on their wrists, or on the inside of their glasses—causing traffic accidents all over America. I mean, it's sort of amazing that we're zooming forward into a future where everyone will feel slow. Even the kids who are entering freshmen right now will not be able to imagine what's coming. And yet, size does matter.

McRobbie:

Absolutely, yes.

Streep:

And that huge visual, and the overpowering size of the image that you get in a theatre is incomparable. There will be nice clubs where you can hear rock-and-roll, but you're still going to want to hear Renée Fleming and *Rusalka*.

McRobbie:

Right. And part of it, too, is that directors spend a lot of time thinking about the composition of what they're doing, and to watch that, as you say, on your wristwatch or something like that is like taking *Guernica* and putting it on a postage stamp. It becomes all but meaningless after a while.

Streep:

Yes, it does. It does. And the chagrin that directors feel as they see the world becoming less and less demanding—the audience becoming less and less really demanding—jumping ahead just to the explosions. I was on an airplane the other day and I watched a man open up his laptop and watch a film and skip the talking parts. I mean... So we have to work hard to maintain humanity in the face of that.

McRobbie:

Yes, wonderful words. What's interesting is that we opened the cinema less than four years ago, and we have had three times as many people as we estimated would come to an enormously diverse range of films from all over the world, and it has been an

extraordinary success. So it seems to me—I don't know whether you've seen this anywhere else—that there really is a hunger among not only our students but among others as well for the ability to watch film projected in a high-quality environment.

Streep:

Do you know what there is a hunger for, I think? A hunger for curating. Because now we have available to us every single documentary ever made on Netflix or the whole history of cinema, the world cinema, everything is available. Even on just regular television there are, at least in New York, many, many ethnic language stations that broadcast their own thing. And they have subtitles of films for the English-speaking audience. But there's just so much, and you don't even know. But to have a place on campus with a really great sensibility up there—Jon Vickers—pulling together lots of interesting things and curating it for the audience, saying “if you come to this theatre, you'll see something good.” That's what people need, I think. They need the editorial sort of position of somebody that they trust to put it all in a pile and present it beautifully. And that experience, people respond to quality. They love it.

McRobbie:

I'm not certain what your views are on this, but when Werner Herzog was here, I said to him that it seemed a real tragedy that you have the ability to generate extraordinary images artificially now, yet there have been so few really great films you can regard as works of art that have used that capability.

Streep:

Well, that's very true. But that's outside my area of expertise. (Laughter.) Very few things are, but really, I don't know anything about tech.

McRobbie:

(Laughter.) Very diplomatic of you.

Let me ask you another question. I was very intrigued, and in my speech giving you your honorary doctorate, I quoted the comments you made when you gave the gift to help found the Women's History Museum. And there, to sort of paraphrase, you talked about how dads, to this point, had, as you put it, written history, but the moms had history, too, to write. But I was reflecting on your extraordinary output of films over the years through your career, and I was reflecting on the fact that you have tackled, directly or indirectly, some of what have been the biggest issues, really, of the 20th century. You tackled the Holocaust twice, in the television series, *The Holocaust*, and, of course, in *Sophie's Choice*. You tackled, I think really quite memorably, the Vietnam War and its aftermath and its effect on America in *The Deer Hunter*. You tackled maybe one of the most remarkable periods in British political history since the Second World War in *The Iron Lady* and your portrayal of Mrs. Thatcher. And, although it wasn't directly addressed all that often, it really was the end of the Cold War, too, so the Cold War was a kind of a background to that as well. You tackled post-9/11 issues in *Rendition*—some moral issues of significance there. You tackled the nuclear power debate in the 1980s, which some of us remember very vividly, in *Silkwood*. These are big, big issues, all of which you've tackled, in all those movies, in utterly memorable ways. And you were appropriately recognized, I think, for many of those. And, of course, you've done a whole range of other movies, too—comedies and musicals and things like that. But when you think about the kind of history that you mentioned in your quote, these are some of the issues that have really defined the 20th century. Did you consciously set out to grapple with some of those issues or was it more serendipity in terms of what was offered to you in terms of scripts?

Streep:

Well, I mean I gravitate toward them. I wish I could take credit for any of those films that you mentioned. But they, of course, originated in the minds and imaginations of some wonderful writers and directors, and I came on board to give a human face to the story and to pull the audience to the narrative. And that's my job. But I am attracted by gnarly things and things that are sort of difficult.

I was well aware taking on, as a liberal-minded, American, progressive Democrat, I guess I would call myself, that I had very strong feelings about Mrs. Thatcher's policies. And the more I learned about them and about her—it's always the anomalies in someone's CV that is the most interesting piece—where something fell apart, where a position was held beyond a reasonable time limit—all those things—where the passion is and where the patching is done. Because I just think human beings are best, even at the highest levels of diplomacy... I had an extraordinary conversation once with President Reagan on the telephone where he called me at home and I had just had a baby and my mother-in-law from Indiana was visiting in New York for Thanksgiving and there was nothing to eat in the house and I thought it was the Chinese food coming from downstairs. And the phone rang, and they said "this is the White House calling. President Reagan would like to speak to you" And I said, "Oh, shut up, Joe. Leave me alone. I don't have time for this." I thought it was an actor friend. Anyway, to make a long story short, it was during the nuclear freeze time, and I had been very outspoken, and he called me to talk about it.

McRobbie:

Remarkable.

Streep:

Well, it was remarkable, because, you know, I'm just a stupid actress and I'm out there barking about how...

McRobbie:

You're certainly not that.

Streep:

...how he had taken, I had heard, the red phone off the presidential desk. There was no longer any phone line direct to Moscow. And I said that was just unconscionable. Because he was "The Great Communicator." And if he couldn't talk to his counterpart, who could? Because I believe in that. I think you have to, as Sheryl Sandberg says, "lean in," not to take somebody down but to hear them better. People make fun of George Bush because he said "I looked into his eyes and saw a human being..." or "saw his soul." But that was in the context of Putin told him a story about receiving... his mother gave him a crucifix that was very meaningful. He and Bush bonded over their religious feeling. And there may have been something there. There may be an opening there. Why not put your foot in the door and get in any which way you can?

McRobbie:

Right. Let me pursue Mrs. Thatcher a little more. I have argued with my wife, Laurie, and my late mother, and my aunt and other women that there's a lot that women should regard Mrs. Thatcher very highly for. She came to dominate—in a way that no British politician has since Churchill—British politics, in a game that had been totally dominated by men. You've seen what Parliament is like. It's a brutal environment. You can only survive if you're on top of your game the whole time—and she did that for 11 years, and probably almost could have kept going longer, but decided she had had enough. And

so, there's much that is praiseworthy about her taking on what she took on and having been successful so long. Did you come to any thoughts like that? You indicated that you found her more complex as a character.

Streep:

Yes. Endlessly fascinating. But I do think that for the women of Britain, she broke through, even for women of all persuasions, she broke through in that she allowed both men and women to see that a woman could lead. And that's a really important thing, because before that, 50 percent was shut out. Shut out. Even though they had the vote. And they had a very long time getting that... then once they got it...

McRobbie:

That's right. And that's the subject of one of your next movies, about Emmeline Pankhurst, the great British suffragette.

Streep:

Yes. Yes. And so it was a hard won fight to get the vote, and then once they had it, they weren't really regarded as capable. I mean, women were lovely, but not capable of leading. But the great Inez McCormack, this wonderful, wonderful organizer in Belfast, labor organizer, she said "every voice must be at the table." Right now we don't have that in any government. But certainly in the England of the late '70s, Margaret Thatcher broke through for women and she made it possible for... now you go to Parliament, now you go sit in the House of Commons, there are a lot of women there. Many, many more than in the houses of Congress.

McRobbie:

And in my view, she deserved great credit for that...

Streep:

I think so, too.

McRobbie:

She not only broke through, but she broke through definitively because she was so dominant.

Streep:

Yes. She was a leader. Margaret Thatcher showed that it's possible to hold all your cards and to be willing to play them and not let people know whether you will or not.

McRobbie:

Well, I mentioned that collection of your movies. Let me also mention *The Deer Hunter*. I recently read former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' book—one of our alumni of Indiana University, who we also gave an honorary doctorate to a few years ago—and one of the repeated themes in that is the effect that he saw in small, rural American towns of the Iraq War and the ongoing Afghanistan War and so on. And, as I read those parts, I continually thought of *The Deer Hunter*, because that was a movie that, to me, reflected the impact on a small town of the horrors that were happening not only in a war a long way away, but of a deeply unpopular war, as well. Do you see parallels there with what's happening today with what you and your fellow actors portrayed so memorably portrayed in the movie?

Streep:

Yes. I think the burden of our voluntary army is borne by one percent, and it's not the one percent that is the most privileged. So, the people that have the biggest stake in these battles, in these fights that are conducted far away and overseas, but that come home to them most viscerally and painfully are not the most influential people, not the wealthiest people, not the people in the biggest cities who are moving the events of history forward. But the cost is borne at home in these small towns. That's still true. You know, do I want there to be a universal draft? No. But...yes. In a way, yes. Everyone should serve on some level. And then, there'd be a more judicious sort of march into any of these complex situations.

McRobbie:

Well, Meryl, the next piece of music you've chosen is *Jersey Girl*, which, of course you are, by Tom Waits. Do you want to say just a little about this piece of music?

Streep:

No. I just love the Tom Waits version. You know, five minutes before we got on the plane, somebody said, "can you give us three pieces of music for the radio show?" So this is literally off the top of my head. I was looking at New Jersey as I made the choice.

[Musical interlude.]

McRobbie:

Welcome back to *Profiles*, and our guest today is the world-renowned actor, Meryl Streep.

Meryl, I wanted to ask you some questions about what must have been, in some ways, one of the most difficult movies for you to make, and that was *Sophie's Choice*. And the reason I want to discuss this briefly is that my wife, Laurie, and I were in Israel on the West Bank about five years ago and we visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, and the incredible architecture of that building, which becomes so claustrophobic and then moves away from it. And, of course, it is a deeply harrowing experience to go through that museum. And we were standing outside in the Righteous Among the Nations Garden, a beautiful garden outside, and I remember Laurie commenting that museums, memorials, documentary footage, etc., captured, in one sense, the full horror of the Holocaust, but almost in an abstract and distant way. And she, and I remember it vividly at the time, referred to *Sophie's Choice*, and in particular to your famous choice scene, about how that captured in a way she thought maybe even more so than any museum could, the true horror of the Holocaust and the effect it had on individuals. I wonder what your thoughts are on what was, obviously, one of your greatest movies, and the role that movies in general can play in illuminating almost incomprehensibly horrific episodes in human history.

Streep:

Well, I think reading the events of a horrific piece of human history from a distance of a decade or two or three or a century, it becomes less and less possible to enter the bodies of the people who lived through it. One thing actors do is they embody people who are long gone--you know, even if they're invented people—and allow you to enter eras and times in history where you imagine yourself in that dilemma. And they bring home, sort of the moral question at the center of everything, which is, I guess, “what is civilization? What keeps us from devolving into a creature unrecognizable to ourselves

or that we don't want to be?" With *Sophie's Choice*, I think part of the horror of that... you know, Pauline Kael—not my biggest fan—who was a famous film critic, came down very hard on William Styron for this invention, and it was an invention, of this choice. And she said whatever it was she said about its being sensationalist and that this was an invented thing that didn't happen. But it was the thing about the arbitrariness of life and death and how one set of people sat in judgment over another in the most arbitrary way, you know, assigning you numbers on your arm, assigning you to your death or your child to their death. And you only can fathom these unfathomable events if you feel the thing the mother feels. And the only way to do that is through a story, through the empathetic exchange of feeling, where one human being is capable of imaginatively putting themselves into the shoes of another. And that happens at the level of the actor doing it with the imaginary character, and it happens with the person in the audience imaginatively feeling what the character is feeling. It's this beautiful little triangulated connection of the best of human beings... and love. On some level, it's love. Anyway, that's how I explained it to my father when he said: "why do you want to be an actor?"

(Laughter)

McRobbie:

Well, I must say, I think that was a masterpiece, and, as I said, I think it just illustrated the full horrors in a way that has almost proved impossible in other ways.

Streep:

Well, I remember, too, when there was a television program called *Roots*, years ago. And this was when the sort of blatant racism was endemic in the country. It was everywhere. And suddenly, this television program appeared... "from the liberals in Hollywood," and it sort of was an amazing journey because it made the white television viewing audience follow the vicissitudes of a black family—an enslaved black family—from the inside, from that point of view. And it really worked a sea of change on school

children and it changed a generation of people. And *The Holocaust*, similarly, people have said, had the same effect or a similar effect on antisemitism, a battle that continues to have to be fought.

McRobbie:

To this day, right. Absolutely.

Well, let me jump from some of your most serious and complex and deepest movies to a movie that I think is underappreciated for its seriousness and deepness—and that's one of my favorite movies of yours—and that's *The Devil Wears Prada*.

Streep:

Oh. (Laughter.)

McRobbie:

And I'll tell you why. I thought that it captured the role of design and creativity in the fashion industry, which is a multi-billion dollar industry. I was trying to find a figure, and it's probably in excess of \$100 billion as an industry, a huge industry, employing, I assume, hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. And there's a wonderful scene, which I found on YouTube last night and replayed, which is the famous "cerulean" speech that you gave.

Streep:

Yes.

McRobbie:

And I was struck yesterday when you mentioned that you graduated, I think, in costume design. And why this is important to me is that we have an unfortunately named Department of Apparel Merchandising and Interior Design—a fine department, it has superb students in it. We, in fact, are going to be merging it and forming a new Department of Art and Design, but I hear critics say, “why are you teaching people fashion design?” And my answer is always: “watch Meryl Streep’s performance in *The Devil Wears Prada*. Watch that speech. It sums it up better than anything.

Streep:

It’s business. “It’s business school, dear.”

McRobbie:

But it’s also that design is a continuum, whether its interior design, fashion design, mechanical design—all kinds of design—there’s a sort of continuum there. And I wondered—here was probably a movie saying something better than I’ve ever seen it said before in terms of the importance of an industry and serious training in that industry. Do you have any thoughts on that? Was this something that was said from the heart or did you wrestle with those issues when you made that?

Streep:

Well, it’s a scene that doesn’t exist in the book on which the thing is made. It’s a scene that, I remember sitting in my living room with Aline Brosh McKenna, who was the writer, and David Frankel, the director, and I said “you know, this woman runs the most influential magazine that is the qualifier and the signifier of a multi-billion-dollar industry worldwide. Her opinion matters. And it moves money in big ways and changes events in our economy. And there’s no seriousness of purpose. The size of that.” You’re the

chancellor of a big university. You know where the buck stops, you know, and it's a heavy burden, especially on a slender pair of shoulders. And she wore that pressure—and Anna Wintour, who was the target of the book, *The Devil Wears Prada*, wears that responsibility with great seriousness of purpose, and she is both an appreciator and a curator of fashion and understanding of design, but she's a businessperson. And she understands that. And I thought: "that piece is never really explored in a movie about women." So, I said: "let's have a scene where she just takes her through it—takes her through how it works, from start to finish, and how these decisions... what's the expression about how the wings of a monarch butterfly make a tsunami half a world away?"

McRobbie:

Yes, right.

Streep:

And that's what it was, that speech. And we needed it.

McRobbie:

Oh, it's a wonderful speech, one of my absolute favorites. And the movie itself, the theme that you just mentioned, of course, is the same as the Mrs. Thatcher theme, really. Because, in the end, she triumphs over male adversaries, really.

Streep:

Well, I guess, actually. Yes.

McRobbie:

The final thing I wanted to discuss with you—and I've heard you say this before and it sort of fascinated me, and hopefully, you can say something about it. You've indicated that you live in New York, live in Connecticut, and you lived for a period in Los Angeles, and I've heard you say publicly that you gladly got out of Los Angeles and got back to New York. And, of course, everybody thinks of Los Angeles as the mecca of your profession and probably find it difficult to understand why anybody wouldn't live in Los Angeles if they were in your profession.

Streep:

I know, I know.

McRobbie:

And not only don't you, but you also, in your polite, delicate way, are less than flattering about it.

Streep:

Oh, no, that's just me. First of all, it's too bright there.

McRobbie:

(Laughter.)

Streep:

I mean I'm a Troglodyte. I really like London, you know, where it's sort of raining most of the time, and every once in a while there's a brilliant day and everyone's just fantastic,

and they write poetry (laughter) and operas and everything... ..because beauty's withheld and it just emerges in spring. No, there it's just sort of 75 all the time and sunny, and, I don't know, I just feel flattened out in that atmosphere. I like turbulence and storms and seasons and, you know, sadness in the fall when it's all... and I love Christmas and snow, so...I'm just that. I think that goes so deep we can't even track it in our bodies. Although I do notice that there are so many English people in Los Angeles. It's almost as if half the creative population has moved over there, so my theory is debunked. But I have many friends there. I just didn't find that it was a great place to raise teenagers, because, at a certain level of society, the values seem a little crazy. And I needed the rough-and-tumble of New York and the East Coast and sort of everybody mixed up all together.

McRobbie:

You seem to have raised a very normal family and had a...

Streep:

They've all moved to Los Angeles, by the way.

(Laughter.)

McRobbie:

But this must be something that you're very proud of, having achieved that as well. Two daughters in your own profession, as well.

Streep:

Yes. Well, the jury's still out. (Laughter.) We're all waiting. Nobody's in jail yet. My mother used to say that: "nobody's in jail yet." (Laughter.) But yes, I mean, that's a

tribute to my husband and his steady hand on the tiller, because I'm a little...
flibbertigibbet... I'm all over the place.

McRobbie:

Well, let's finish... your last music choice is by the wonderful Joni Mitchell, and it's a
song which we understand is actually called *A Case of You*...

Streep:

A Case of You, yeah.

McRobbie:

...from an album from my student days, *Blue*, I remember it well. Do you want to say
something about this one?

Streep:

Oh, I just think she's our unsung great, great poet, musician... I just adore her. And this
song is in my bones. Do you know? There are certain ones when you're young, they
just go in, and you can just feel them in your marrow. I love this song.

McRobbie:

Meryl, it's been, as always, an enormous pleasure to be able to talk to you today on
Profiles, and we were greatly honored to be able to give you an honorary doctorate. And
I'm delighted that now you and Don both have one.

Streep:

(Laughter.) I know. No more fights.

McRobbie:

And we're extremely grateful to you for your generosity in terms of the time you have spent with us at Indiana University. We hope we can welcome you back again in the future. And with that, thank you very much...

Streep:

Thank you.

McRobbie:

...and we will fade to Joni Mitchell's *A Case of You*.