



BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL

Jezebel

Jezebel, that's where the career really began to take shape. Hal [Wallis] found *Jezebel* for me. I remember David Selznick wanted to sue us because we came out with it just before *Gone with the Wind*. But in a way I think it was truer to the feeling of the South at that time than his film. I've always felt *Gone with the Wind* would have been twice as good if it had been in black and white, more intimate, smaller. It's a pity these days that you have to film in colour, you can't make what is essentially a black and white subject in black and white. *Baby Jane* would have been much too pretty in colour. On the other hand, *Elizabeth and Essex* and *Mr. Skeffington* would have been marvellous in colour. But in the Thirties, the studio was only allocated two colour films a year, because it was so expensive and there was only one process, Technicolor. Those of us who made money at the box office never got colour films because we didn't need that extra attraction. They gave the colour to the terrible scripts, as an added inducement to get the public in.

Bette Davis interviewed by Margaret Hinxman, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1971-72

Jezebel is not entirely typical of the thirties cycle of Romantic Old South films, and contains a number of variations on the plantocracy theme which suggest a slightly less idealised image of the antebellum milieu. The iconography of the Old South is clearly present, of course, complete with magnificent estates, gentlemen planters and chivalrous officers, well-mannered belles, devoted family retainers, and so on. Typically, the focus is on the planter aristocracy, and we get hardly any sense of the wider social context, such as the crucial factor of slavery (which supported the plantocracy) or the presence of other classes of white Southerners.

But where the film excels is in its characterisation of antebellum social norms and mores. Much of this impulse is centred on the Bette Davis character, a Southern vixen whose curt manners disrupt the (usually unquestioned) social rules of Southern womanhood. This apparently subversive figure is nevertheless deeply rooted in Old South ideology – it is not aimed at challenging the plantocracy as such (Julie's identification with the traditional Southern way of life is unambiguous), nor does it upset the genre's otherwise comfortable image of the antebellum milieu.

But [William] Wyler introduces an element of humanism (and irony) into the representation, which previous Romantic Old South films either completely ignored, or simply subsumed under explicitly pro-South propaganda. This is particularly evident in the Henry Fonda character, Preston Dillard, whose relatively liberal polemic on the fundamental weakness of an economy based on slavery, for example, signals at least a partial rejection of nostalgia as the principle driving force behind antebellum dramas (cf. *Gone with the Wind*). *Jezebel* can therefore be seen in terms of a development of certain generic conventions, not completely challenging the ideological constraints, but not completely identifying with them either.

Jim Pines, National Film Theatre programme notes

A contemporary review

Really brilliant acting gives a quite ordinary story vivid life and complete reality. Bette Davis has the courage to portray a detestable character. Julie is mean, cruel, selfish, and tyrannical. Her personality dominates the entire film, and her almost savage intensity has a quality which it is difficult to forget. The supporting players are competent, but have comparatively few opportunities of distinguishing themselves. William Wyler's direction is imaginative and forceful. The old customs of the Southern States are quaint and interestingly shown. There are some terrible pictures of the funeral processions through the streets of the fever victims. Altogether this is a thought-provoking and stimulating picture, but some film-goers may find the Southern dialect difficult to follow.

Monthly Film Bulletin, April 1938

JEZEBEL

Directed by: William Wyler

©/Production Company: Warner Bros.

Executive Producer: Hal B. Wallis

Associate Producer: Henry Blanke

Screen Play by: Clements Ripley, Abem Finkel, John Huston

From the play by: Owen Davis Sr

Photography by: Ernest Haller

Editor: Warren Low

Art Director: Robert Haas

Costumes by: Orry-Kelly

Music by: Max Steiner

Musical Director: Leo F. Forbstein

Sound by: Robert B. Lee

Technical Adviser: Dalton S. Reymond

uncredited

Unit Manager: Robert Fellows

Assistant Director: Robert Ross

2nd Assistant Director: Arthur Lueker

Script Clerk: Freda Rosenblatt

Contributor to Treatment: Louis Edelman

Contributor to Script Construction: Robert Buckner

2nd Camera: Al Roberts

Assistant Camera: Buddy Weiler

Grip: Stanley Young

Gaffer: Cecil Craig

Best Boy: Bob Galbraith

Stills: Mack Elliott

Assistant Editor: Rudi Fehr

Set Dresser: Fred M. MacLean

Assistant Props: George Sweeney

Props: Pat Patterson

Men's Wardrobe: Bert Soter

Wardrobe: Ida Greenfield

Make-up: Herbert Sutch, Karl Herlinger, Carl Axzelle

Hairstylists: Margaret Donovan, Helen Lierley

Orchestration: Hugo Friedhofer

Recordists: B. Berry, Frank Weixel

Boom Operator: J. Jensen

Publicity Director: Robert S. Taplinger

Spring Byington (*Mrs Kendrick*)

John Litel (*Jean La Cour*)

Gordon Oliver (*Dick Allen*)

Janet Shaw (*Molly Allen*)

Theresa Harris (*Zette*)

Margaret Early (*Stephanie Kendrick*)

Irving Pichel (*Huger*)

Eddie Anderson (*Gros Bat*)

Stymie Beard (*Ti Bat*)

Lou Payton (*Uncle Cato*)

George Renevant (*De Lautruc*)

uncredited

Daisy Bufford (*black flower girl*)

Frederick Burton (*first bank director*)

Edward McWade (*second bank director*)

Frank Darien (*bookkeeper*)

Ann Codee (*Madame Poulard, dressmaker*)

Suzanne Dulier (*midinette*)

Jac George (*orchestra leader*)

Johnny Harron (*Jenkins*)

Trevor Bardette (*sheriff at plantation*)

George Guhl (*fugitive planter*)

Louis Mercier (*bar companion*)

Phillip Hurlic (*Erronens*)

Dolores Hurlic (*Errata*)

Davison Clark (*deputy sheriff*)

Maurice Brierre, Tony Paton, Jack Norton (*drunks*)

Alan Bridge (*New Orleans sheriff*)

Georgia Caine (*Mrs Petion*)

Fred Lawrence (*Bob*)

Jacques Vanaire (*Durette*)

Jesse Graves (*black servant*)

Charles Wagenheim (*customer*)

Charles B. Middleton (*officer*)

Franco Corsaro

Roger Valmy

George Sorel

Vic Demoruelle

Louis La Bey

USA 1938©

105 mins

A BFI National Archive print

Please note: this film contains language, images or other content that reflect views prevalent in its time, but that may cause offence today. The film is included here for historical, cultural or aesthetic reasons and these views are in no way endorsed by the BFI or its partners.

Cast

Bette Davis (*Julie Marsden*)

Henry Fonda (*Preston Dillard*)

George Brent (*Buck Cantrell*)

Margaret Lindsay (*Amy Bradford Dillard*)

Donald Crisp (*Dr Livingstone*)

Fay Bainter (*Aunt Belle Massey*)

Richard Cromwell (*Ted Dillard*)

Henry O'Neill (*General Theophilus Bogardus*)

BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL

Of Human Bondage

Sun 1 Aug 12:40; Thu 12 Aug 18:00

Dangerous

Mon 2 Aug 18:15; Fri 13 Aug 21:00; Wed 18 Aug 18:10

All about Eve

Tue 3 Aug 14:30; Sat 14 Aug 20:25; Sun 29 Aug 15:00

Marked Woman

Tue 3 Aug 18:10; Thu 12 Aug 20:40; Sat 14 Aug 14:45

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?

Wed 4 Aug 14:15; Wed 11 Aug 20:30; Mon 16 Aug 18:00;

Sat 28 Aug 17:20

Jezebel

Wed 4 Aug 20:40; Sun 15 Aug 15:30; Fri 27 Aug 18:00

Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte

Thu 5 Aug 14:15; Fri 13 Aug 17:40; Wed 18 Aug 14:30; Sat 28 Aug 20:30

All about Bette Davis

Thu 5 Aug 18:10

Dark Victory

Fri 6 Aug 14:15; Mon 23 Aug 18:00

The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex

Sat 7 Aug 15:00; Sat 21 Aug 11:40

The Letter

Sun 8 Aug 15:45; Tue 17 Aug 17:50

The Man Who Came to Dinner

Sun 8 Aug 18:20; Thu 19 Aug 20:40

The Little Foxes

Mon 9 Aug 18:00; Mon 16 Aug 20:30; Thu 19 Aug 17:40

The Whales of August

Wed 11 Aug 14:30; Thu 26 Aug 20:30; Tue 31 Aug 18:10

Old Acquaintance

Wed 11 Aug 17:40; Sun 22 Aug 15:30

Mr. Skeffington

Sat 14 Aug 17:10; Sun 29 Aug 11:30

The Star

Sun 15 Aug 18:30; Wed 25 Aug 20:45

Dead Ringer

Fri 20 Aug 17:45; Mon 30 Aug 15:20

The Nanny

Tue 24 Aug 20:45; Mon 30 Aug 12:40

With thanks to Martin Shingler

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Thelma and Louise

Sun 1 Aug 18:00; Sat 14 Aug 20:35; Sat 28 Aug 20:20

Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice

Mon 2 Aug 20:40; Fri 13 Aug 20:45; Wed 18 Aug 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by Julie Lobalzo Wright, University of Warwick); Mon 23 Aug 14:30

Bright Star

Tue 3 Aug 20:30; Fri 27 Aug 17:50; Mon 30 Aug 18:10

Boyz N the Hood

Wed 4 Aug 17:45 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic Leila Latif);

Mon 9 Aug 20:50

Les Demoiselles de Rochefort (The Young Ladies of Rochefort)

Thu 5 Aug 17:50; Thu 26 Aug 17:40

The Big Lebowski

Fri 6 Aug 20:45; Mon 16 Aug 20:50; Wed 25 Aug 14:15

Only Angels Have Wings

Sat 7 Aug 12:00; Tue 24 Aug 14:15; Tue 31 Aug 20:30

A Farewell to Arms

Sun 8 Aug 12:20; Fri 20 Aug 14:30; Wed 25 Aug 18:00

(+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large)

Matewan

Tue 10 Aug 14:15; Sun 15 Aug 18:20; Sat 21 Aug 12:20

Cutter's Way

Wed 11 Aug 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large); Tue 17 Aug 14:30; Fri 20 Aug 20:50; Fri 27 Aug 20:50

The New World

Thu 12 Aug 14:30; Sun 22 Aug 12:00

Big Wednesday

Thu 19 Aug 17:50; Sun 29 Aug 18:10

Promotional drinks partner



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