



SILENT CINEMA

The Wit and Wisdom of A.A. Milne

Most of us know the stories and poems of A.A. Milne, creator of *Winnie the Pooh*. Here is a rare chance to experience more of his unique humour in two silent comedies made a century ago, playing alongside the first film Lotte Reiniger made in England, illustrating Milne's poem *The King's Breakfast*.

The Bump

In *The Bump*, C. Aubrey Smith plays famous explorer John Brice, who is idolised by bright young thing Lillian Montrevor. Brice is the type of hero featured in *Boys' Own* stories – a man's man who explores uncharted territory in the name of King and Empire. He has recorded his adventures in several books, which Lillian devours eagerly and, although he appears old enough to be her father, she is thrilled when she meets him at a party. Her beau, Freddy Fane, is devastated to be thrown over but cannot compete with the manly exploits of Brice since his only talent is an aptitude for modern dance steps. Brice accepts Lillian's invitation to tea but since 'he has never been on an expedition by himself before' it takes him six months to find her house, during which time she decides to settle for Fane; their wedding is underway as the explorer finally arrives at Stuccoway Terrace.

While this may point up the fickleness of modern youth, the real target of Milne's humour is British imperialism as embodied by the explorer. The first view of Brice is in close-up, his facial attributes described using arrows and handwritten luggage labels which appear on the screen. The image draws attention to the scars from, variously, 'argument with leopard', 'dual [sic] with scorpeon [sic] in Africa', 'shark bite in Red Sea' and 'legacy from angry bison (N. America).'

Smith was well cast as Brice; his middle-aged upper-class bluster perfectly suits the character of a pompous celebrity. For Lillian, Brice embodies her ideal man, as she tells Freddie: 'If I ever marry, it must be a man who had done things.' But it becomes apparent that on the streets of London, without his native guide and carriers, the accoutrements of an outdated colonialism, Brice is singularly unsuited to life in the modern world – an anachronism more useless than the apparently fatuous 'jazzier' Freddie Fane.

Bookworms

In *Bookworms* Leslie Howard plays a young man in love. The object of his affection is closely guarded by her uncle and aunt, forcing him to invent clever ruses to get close to her. By inserting a note into a library book, intended for his amour Miranda, he inadvertently reawakens the passion between the girl's stern guardians as well as matchmaking the housekeeper with a stranger. With these characters out of the way, the path is clear for Richard to call on Miranda and make his declarations of love. Howard's character is once again a rather feckless youth who lays in bed till all hours and contemplates suicide

or emigration when his romantic plans are foiled. He appears not to have a job or any other occupation to distract him from winning the hand of Miranda.

The story is presented as a fairy tale, with Miranda as the fair maid imprisoned in a castle and guarded by a dragon in the form of the elderly housekeeper-cum-chaperone.

The titles are decorated with appropriate imagery and, in a foreshadowing of Brunel's much more obtuse juxtaposition of text and image in his burlesques, set up oppositions through their content. Thus a card announcing that Miranda 'lived in a lovely Castle' is followed by a shot of an ivy-covered house. Richard is cast as the 'Young Knight' who must defeat the dragon and the Wicked Uncle who protect Miranda, yet he is far from the ideal fairy tale hero. This construction of the plot around fairy-tale references is just one element of the film's thematic linking with books and reading, the title card announcing it as *A Comedy in Two Volumes*. The plot itself revolves around reading and visits to the library and books are the means by which the romantic outcome is engineered. Along the way, there are opportunities to mark out the characters by their reading material, so Miranda is shown buried in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, while her uncle and aunt read more sensational fare such as the biographical work *Life in Mormon Bondage* and *Shadow of a Crime* by middlebrow author Hall Caine. While the humour here is merely in the choice of existing titles, Brunel would later mock such middlebrow literature further through the use of parodic titles and plays on author names in his burlesque *So This Is Jollygood*.

From a monograph on Adrian Brunel by BFI Curator Josephine Botting, soon to be published by Edinburgh University Press

The King's Breakfast

Silhouette film of the A.A. Milne poem for children. This is the first film made in England by Lotte Reiniger.

Among the great figures in animated film, Lotte Reiniger stands alone. No one else has taken a specific animation technique and made it so utterly her own. To date she has no rivals, and for all practical purposes the history of silhouette animation begins and ends with Reiniger. Taking the ancient art of shadow-plays, as perfected above all in China and Indonesia, she adapted it superbly for the cinema.

BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

THE BUMP

Director: Adrian Brunel *
Production Company: Minerva Films
Produced by: Adrian Brunel
Assisted by: Bernard Carrodus
Scenario by: A.A. Milne, Adrian Brunel
By [Story]: A.A. Milne
Photography by: H.M. Lomas
Title illustrations and cartoons by: Carlo Norway
Studio: Bushey Studios *
Cast:
Faith Celli (*Lilian Montrevor*)
C. Aubrey Smith (*John Brice, the great explorer*)
Douglas Marshall (*Freddy Fane*)
Nellie Cooper (*Mrs Montrevor*)*
F.W. Grant (*Mr Montrevor*)*
UK 1920
28 mins

THE KING'S BREAKFAST

Director: Lotte Reiniger
Production Company: Facts and Fantasies
Collaborators: Martin Battersby, Arthur Neher
Story: A.A. Milne
UK 1937
11 mins

BOOKWORMS: A COMEDY IN TWO VOLUMES BY A.A. MILNE

Director: Adrian Brunel *
Production Company: Minerva Films
Producer: Adrian Brunel
Assisted by: Bernard Carrodus
By [Story and Screenplay]: A.A. Milne
Photography: H.M. Lomas
Title Illustrations: Carlo Norway
Cast:
Pauline Johnson (*Miranda Pottlebury*)
Leslie Howard (*Richard*)
Jeff Barlow (*Uncle Josiah Pottlebury*)
Henrietta Watson (*Aunt Priscilla Pottlebury*)
Mrs Richard Podevin (*housekeeper, 'the dragon'*)
Ivan Berlyn (*Ernest*)
UK 1920
27 mins

* Uncredited

With live piano accompaniment by Neil Brand

REGULAR PROGRAMME

DVD Launch: Great Noises That Fill the Air:

Music, Poetry and Performance on Film

Mon 16 Aug 17:50

S.O.U.L. Fest 2021

Fri 20-Sun 22 Aug

Experimenta: Thundercrack!

+ intro by Jane Giles, author of 'Scala Cinema 1987-1993'

Sat 21 Aug 17:00

Relaxed Screening: Stand Clear of the Closing Doors

Tue 24 Aug 18:00

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

Souad + pre-recorded Q&A with director Ayten Amin

Tue 24 Aug 18:00

Terror Vision: Dr Terror's House of Horrors

Thu 26 Aug 20:40

Woman with a Movie Camera: UK Premiere: Copilot

(Die Frau des Piloten) + Q&A with director Anne Zohra Berrached

Mon 6 Sep 20:25

African Odysseys: No Place Like Home (Redux)

+ Q&A with Justine Henzell

Sat 11 Sep 14:00

Seniors' Free Matinee: The Fallen Idol + intro and Q&A

Mon 13 Sep 14:00

Gallivant + intro by Eden and Andrew Kötting

Sat 18 Sep 14:30

Short Films by Eden and Andrew Kötting

+ Andrew Kötting in Conversation with film curator Gareth Evans

Sat 18 Sep 18:00

Projecting the Archive: Flesh and Blood

+ intro by Jason Morell, actor and son of Joan Greenwood

Tue 21 Sep 18:10

Art in the Making:

Cinema Architecture and Atmosphere + discussion

Thu 23 Sep 18:10

Silent Cinema: Nasty Women: A Comic Tribute

+ intro by curator Bryony Dixon

Sun 26 Sep 12:40

Relaxed Screening: Seeing The Unseen (Að sjá hið ósýnilega)

Tue 28 Sep 18:00

Terror Vision: Altered States

Thu 30 Sep 21:00

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