



CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL + PRESSBURGER

Gone to Earth

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Directors: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
Production Companies: London Film Productions, British Lion Film Corporation, Vanguard Films
Production Company: British Lion Production Assets Limited *
A Presentation by: Alexander Korda, David O. Selznick
Producers: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
Assistant Producer: George R. Busby
Assistant Director: Sydney S. Streeter
Screenplay: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
Adapted from the novel by: Mary Webb
Photographed by: Christopher Challis
Technicolor Consultant: Joan Bridge
Process Shots: W. Percy Day
Camera Operator: Frederick Francis
Chief Electrician: W. Wall
Special Portraits: Fred Daniels *
Editor: Reginald Mills
Production Designer: Hein Heckroth
Art Director: Arthur Lawson
Assistant Designer: Ivor Beddoes
Hairdresser: Betty Cross *
Assistant Hairdresser: Eileen Bates *
Music Composed/Conducted by: Brian Easdale
With the: Boyd Neel Orchestra
Sound Recording: Charles Poulton, John Cox
Animals Supplied by: Captain C.W.R. Knight
Animals Trained by: Jean Knight
Cast:
Jennifer Jones (*Hazel Woodus*)
David Farrar (*Jack Reddin*)
Cyril Cusack (*Edward Marston*)
Esmond Knight (*Abel Woodus*)
Sybil Thorndike (*Mrs Marston*)
Hugh Griffith (*Andrew Vessons*)
Edward Chapman (*Mr James*)
Beatrice Varley (*Aunt Prowde*)
George Cole (*Albert*)
Frances Clare (*Miss Amelia Clomber*)
Valentine Dunn (*Martha*)
Richmond Naime (*Martha's brother*)
Owen Holder (*Brother Minister*)
Raymond Rollett, Bartlett Mullins,
Arthur Reynolds, Gerald Lawson (*chapel elders*)
Anne Tetheradge
(*Miss James, Mr James's daughter*)
Peter Dunlop (*cornet player*)
Gerald Lawson (*roadmender*)
Louis Phillips (*country policeman*)
Raymond Rollett (*Hunter's Arms landlord*)
UK-USA 1950
111 mins
35mm – A BFI National Archive print

* Uncredited

In 1950, austerity and rationing still prevailed in Britain, but the Archers – Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger – chose to continue their series of post-war Technicolor melodramas (following *Black Narcissus*, 1947, and *The Red Shoes*, 1948) with an adaptation of Mary Webb's Thomas Hardy-esque novel of 1917, *Gone to Earth*.

Under a co-production agreement between Alexander Korda (London Films) and David O. Selznick, sultry Hollywood star Jennifer Jones played heroine Hazel Woodus. The conflict for Hazel emerges when her husband and Baptist minister Edward Marston (Cyril Cusack) fails to consummate their marriage, and she is relentlessly pursued by the rich squire and hunter Jack Reddin (David Farrar).

This tragic story articulates the dilemma of female autonomy trapped between conflicting male desires of love and lust. Shropshire writer Webb wrote, 'They did not live her life. She had to live theirs,' but ultimately, 'She wanted neither. Her passion, no less intense, was for freedom.'

As a motherless, half-gypsy girl, Hazel's wildness and freedom are expressed through her close affiliation to her pet fox and to the wild landscape of the Welsh/Shropshire borders, the film's main location. This landscape 'with its abrupt change from civilisation to savagery' (Powell) is captured by Christopher Challis's powerful cinematography and contributes significantly to the film's thematic and visual impact.

But Hazel's rebellion is finally steeped in blood and suffering. Designer Hein Heckroth's use of reds for Hazel's costumes hint at her final doom, while Brian Easdale eloquently scored this fate in his music.

As the film neared completion, the British Field Sports Society took objection to its perceived anti blood-sports stance and members were advised not to lend hunting packs to the production company. Powell appealed for help in *The Times* (October 1949) and a Cardiganshire farmer finally lent his own hounds to finish the shoot.

In 1950, Selznick attempted to sue Korda's company for not keeping to the spirit of Webb's novel, but was overruled in court. Consequently, London Films was given the British rights to the film, while Selznick retained the American rights. Selznick later hired Hollywood director Rouben Mamoulian to re-edit the film, which was released in the USA as *The Wild Heart*.

Trish Sheil, BFI Screenonline

With thanks to



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