



CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL + PRESSBURGER

Twice upon a Time

Twice upon a Time

Directed by: Emeric Pressburger

©: British Lion Film Corporation

Presented by: London Film Productions

Produced in association with and distributed by:
British Lion Film Corporation

Produced by: Emeric Pressburger

Associate Producer: George Busby

Assistant Director: Sydney Streeter

Continuity: Margaret Shipway

Written by: Emeric Pressburger

From a story by: Erich Kästner

Photography: Christopher Challis

Camera Operator: Frederick Francis

Editor: Reginald Beck

Art Director: Arthur Lawson

Wardrobe: Ivy Baker

Make up: George Frost

Hairdressing: Gordon Bond

Music by: Johannes Brahms, Corol Maria Weber

Musical Director: Frederic Lewis

Sound Supervisor: John Cox

Sound Recording: Bert Ross, Red Law

Sound System: Western Electric

Publicity: Jean Osborne *

Produced at: The British Lion Studio

Cast:

Hugh Williams (*James Turner*)

Elizabeth Allan (*Ann Bailey*)

Violetta Elvin (*Florence Laroche*)

Charmian Larthe (*Carol-Ann Bailey*)

Yolande Larthe (*Carol Turner*)

Jack Hawkins (*Dr Matthews*)

Michael Gough (*Mr Lloyd*)

Isabel Dean (*Miss Burke*)

Nora Gordon (*Emma*)

Molly Terraine (*Miss Wellington, headmistress*)

Martin Miller (*photographer*)

Lilly Kann (*photographer's wife*)

Isabel George (*Molly*) *

Cecily Walger (*Miss Maybridge*) *

Walter Fitzgerald (*Professor Reynolds*) *

Eileen Elton *

Ken Melville *

Margaret McCourt *

UK 1953©

76 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

+ intro by James Bell with Andrew Macdonald

The only film Pressburger directed alone was this adaptation of a book by his old collaborator Erich Kästner, about identical twins who are separated as babies when their parents' divorce. Each grows up unaware of the other's existence, until by chance they meet on holiday and agree to swap places. A whimsical curio barely released at the time, and all but impossible to see since, it screens on a new digitisation from the negative held at the BFI National Archive.

James Bell

Emeric Pressburger was more than the scenarist whose work Powell rewrote, a fact plain from even a casual look at films either side of their working relationship. His films are distinct, playing with fantasy and personal relationships, rhapsodic and nostalgic. In his partnership with Powell, he created most of their stories, was responsible for most of the producing, collaborated (but never on the floor) in the directing, and worked patiently in the editing room.

Pressburger's one attempt at directing, *Twice upon a Time* (1953), showed how greatly he depended on Powell's sprightly visual cockiness. On the other hand, Powell's films without Pressburger lack ambiguity and are directed with little sensitivity towards the actors. The visualisation was always predominantly Powell's, at least in combination with their designers and photographers, but everything was discussed between the two, and it is at this point that their two imaginations met. Who knows how Powell's or Pressburger's careers would have developed had Pressburger left for Hollywood in 1938 (as the entertainment journalist Pem expected)? As it was, Pressburger started working for Korda on a story that eventually became *The Red Shoes* and Korda, shortly after, introduced them to one another.

Pressburger sometimes saw his pension in the continual optioning of stories that went unmade. If they were turned down, as was his third novel, he relegated them not to the wastebasket but to the drawer of his desk, where like wine, he would wait for them to mature. Sometimes he misjudged it and the ideas went flat, as with *Miracle in St. Anthony's Lane*, which he had written in Paris in 1934.

A few years earlier he had slept rough in a famous Berlin synagogue, planning to creep out just before morning service. Too late, he heard the congregation chanting, and crept down, only to be welcomed as a member of the quorum; the service had not started, and the sounds he had heard had been in his imagination. 'Surely,' he claimed, 'a miracle.' A René Clair-like idea, full of character, with a number of interlocking stories, *Miracle in St. Anthony's Lane* was another story of exile, only a step away from this anecdote. It reached the screen only in 1957, directed by Julian Amyes, converted into *Miracle in Soho*. Originally a story of the German exiles in Paris, it had now become one about Italian immigrants in London.

In all the most successful of Pressburger's writing, his novels included, important and significant events occur inside the heads of the characters. Their limits are those of the imagination. He believed in music's power to translate

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CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL + PRESSBURGER

49th Parallel Mon 6 Nov 20:30

A Matter of Life and Death Tue 7 Nov 18:10 (+ intro by academic Lucy Bolton); Sun 19 Nov 18:30

Philosophical Screens: A Matter of Life and Death Tue 7 Nov 20:20

The Edge of the World + Return to the Edge of the World Wed 8 Nov 20:30; Wed 15 Nov 20:50

Rynox + Hotel Splendide Fri 10 Nov 18:10

The Fire Raisers Sat 11 Nov 12:30

A Canterbury Tale

Sat 11 Nov 14:50; Fri 24 Nov 20:35

Black Narcissus Sun 12 Nov 18:50; Thu 16 Nov 20:50; Sat 18 Nov 20:50; Mon 20 Nov 20:45 (+ intro by author Mahesh Rao)

The Elusive Pimpernel Mon 13 Nov 18:00 (+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI National Archive Curator)

Centre Stage: The Leading Women of Powell + Pressburger Thu 16 Nov 18:20

Ill Met by Moonlight

Fri 17 Nov 20:40; Sat 25 Nov 12:40

The Battle of the River Plate

Sat 18 Nov 18:20; Mon 27 Nov 20:30

Behold a Pale Horse

Sun 19 Nov 11:50 Wed 22 Nov 17:50

The Wild Heart Sun 19 Nov 15:10

Miracle in Soho

Mon 20 Nov 18:10; Sun 26 Nov 18:30

Gone to Earth

Wed 22 Nov 20:45; Sat 25 Nov 17:50

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

Thu 23 Nov 17:45; Sun 26 Nov 14:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Stephen Fry)

The Thief of Bagdad: An Arabian Fantasy in Technicolor (aka The Thief of Bagdad)

Sun 26 Nov 12:00

Library Talk: The interior life of an archive: an evening with the Michael Powell Collection

Mon 27 Nov 18:00

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human experience and translate human ideals; his favourite work towards the end of his life being Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. Powell and Pressburger came close to making a Strauss film that would have taken place entirely within the composer's imagination.

Pressburger's films, from *Abschied* in 1930 to *Miracle in Soho* in 1957, reveal more consistent themes and concerns than their Powell equivalents. Their joint praxis discloses a compatible philosophical view of the world which is essentially anti-Rationalist, expressed not only pictorially but textually, through Pressburger's belief in the primacy of the perceiver and the role of tradition in constructing a morally integrated world.

Kevin Gough-Yates, *Sight and Sound*, December 1995

Contemporary reviews

Unusual domestic comedy drama, with a compelling juvenile interest. Charmian and Yolande Larthe act quite naturally as the girls, while guest artiste Jack Hawkins gives the play star billing in the role of family doctor and narrator. Agreeably mounted and made expressly for the feminine fan, it becomingly wears its heart on its sleeve.

The picture, which employs the long arm of coincidence to bring the twins together, is very ingenious stuff, but, despite its naive fundamentals, it frequently touches the emotions and confidently addresses its appeal to the fair sex. Good staging, including 'shots' of the ballet and the Tyrol, doubly underline its obvious family angle. Human, if extravagant, story, clever and talented child stars, popular supporting players, good atmosphere, intriguing title and homely sentiment.

Kinematograph Weekly, 21 May 1953

The remarkable Jack Hawkins, who, now that British films have at last discovered his worth, can do no wrong, crops up all over the place. He plays 'guest star' in a pretty little picture, *Twice upon a Time*. Jack plays the part of family doctor and commentator – a nice change into civvies. It isn't a big part, but he does it splendidly and comes in very useful because the events are none too easy to follow.

Adapted by Emeric Pressburger from a German original, the film tells of young twins who meet accidentally in an Austrian mountain resort, find that they share the same divorced parents and change places in order to bring Mummie (Elizabeth Allan) and Daddie (Hugh Williams) together again. Fourteen-year-old London twin girls, Yolande and Charmian Larthe, play the children, never having been in a picture before.

The production lacks perfection but I fancy that the clean, benign atmosphere of this little joke will be welcome.

Jympson Harman, *Evening News*, 4 July 1953