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GONE TO EARTH (1950)

Production Company	London Film Productions Vanguard Productions
Producers	Alexander Korda, David O. Selznick
Directors	Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
Screenplay	Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
From the novel (1917) by	Mary Webb
Photography (Technicolor)	Christopher Challis
Editor	Reginald Mills
Production Designer	Hein Heckroth
Art Director	Arthur Lawson
Music	Brian Easdale
Sound	Charles Poulton, John Cox
Assistant Director	Sydney S. Streeter
Camera Operator	Freddie Francis
Technicolor Con.	Joan Bridge

Cast

Hazel Woodus	Jennifer Jones
Jack Reddin	David Farrar
Edward Marston	Cyril Cusack
Abel Woodus	Esmond Knight
Mrs. Marston	Sybil Thorndike
Mr. James	Edward Chapman
Albert	George Cole
Andrew Vessons	Hugh Griffith
Aunt Prowde	Beatrice Varley
Miss Clomber	Frances Clare
Martha Brooker	Valentine Dunn
Mathias Brooker	Richmond Nairne
Brother Minister	Owen Holder
Chapel Elders	Raymond Rollett, Bartlett Mullins, Arthur Reynolds
Miss James	Ann Tetheradge
Cornet Player	Peter Dunlop
Roadmender	Gerald Lawson
Country Policeman	Louis Phillips
Hunter's Arms Landlord	Raymond Rollett

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After THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP - triumphantly restored and revived in its original full-length version by the NFA/BFI this summer - GONE TO EARTH has been the most eagerly awaited case for reappraisal in the Powell-Pressburger canon.

Like BLIMP, this sensual and striking adaptation of Mary Webb's famous Victorian rural melodrama has been unjustly neglected and abused - not least through the tamperings of its producer, David Selznick, who commissioned the

film as a vehicle for his future wife, Jennifer Jones, and hired Rouben Mamoulian to shoot additional scenes before releasing a severely truncated version under the title THE WILD HEART.

Rarely seen for many years, the authentic P&P version has nevertheless been called a "maligned masterpiece". The 1985 LFF audience can be the first to judge as the National Film Archive unveils its brand-new print, restored from master copies preserved in the Archive since 1951. We are delighted that Michael Powell will be present at the screening.

National Film Archive

An article from Films and Filming: January 1982

GONE TO EARTH, like I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING, concerns a woman lured away from a staid man by a more amorous one. But here the lure does not last - because (in the words of Mary Webb's novel) "Both men saw her as they wanted her to be, not as she was." Where, in I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING, the erotic conflict is expressed in terms of charming comedy, in GONE TO EARTH it is rendered as powerful, complex melodrama. This links the film much more closely to BLACK NARCISSUS, another exploration of women possessed by the tension between sacred or pure passion and earthly, profanely earthy desire. As with BLACK NARCISSUS, too, Powell sharpens the dramatic issues by making imaginative changes - alterations or elaborations - to the literary original's events and imagery. In Mary Webb's book, the silk gown which Jack Reddin offers to Hazel Woodus before he wins her - and which she wears after she yields to him - is coloured green. Powell alters the dress's hue to red; and red, with its connotations of violence and sexuality, is the film's dominant chromatic motif. In the early scene at Reddin's house, when Hazel is first tempted by the dress, the lighting has a sensuously crimson tinge to it, which later acquires both sensual and faintly diabolic overtones when it extends to Reddin's face as he continues to pursue her. The red glow takes on a more sombre significance without losing its carnal implications, when it invades the interior of the parson Edward Marston's home towards the story's end, as his mother confronts the situation of Hazel's adultery with Reddin and marital betrayal of Edward. And the hunting pinks of the riders in the narrative's deathly finale crystallise their position in the tale, as embodiments of Man's savagery to the animal kingdom. Reddin, a no less ruthless predator where human beings (especially young women) are concerned, leads the chase of the fox - only to discover too late that Hazel is protectively holding her pet, the result being her fall to her death.

Powell contrasts these symbolic uses of red tints with the sober religious black worn by Marston and by the puritanical local deacons. In further contrast, there is the less puritanical whiteness of Hazel's bridal gown, and of the robes which she wears when her husband baptises her at an alfresco chapel gathering. White, in these scenes, carries a sense of innocence and of youthful hope. Again, Powell suggests Hazel's intense sympathy for the Shropshire countryside and all its fauna by the green dress which she abandons for a red one on becoming Reddin's mistress. And in the finale, she wears - together with a more sedately puce-coloured skirt - a brown fur top, the furry brown connecting her to the pet fox with which she has explicitly identified herself (both of them having lost their mothers).

The pantheism so characteristic of Powell is richly evident in other aspects of the movie. There are the elements of superstition concerning "God's Little Mountain": when Hazel obeys her father and swears by the mountain that she will wed the first man who asks her, the camera pans in a long shot of the forbiddingly dark peaks, with ominously rumbling soundtrack music; subsequently we are given other minatory long shots of the hill range. The strange sense of a haunting on the part of Hazel's feared "Black Huntsman" is conveyed by repeated images of tall trees in mistily swirling light (the shots low-angled and slightly tilted, as if from the viewpoint of a pursued fox, in the manner of Sucksdorff's The Great Aventure), accompanied by a wordless soundtrack

chanting, horns sounding, and thunder-like hooves. In one extraordinary episode, Hazel obeys a "harper's charm" in a book of spells (her mother was a gypsy, her father is a harpist), and ventures out over the rubble strewn hillside, to tie her multi-coloured shawl to a rock crop and wait to see if faery music sounds. When such music does apparently break out, she takes it as a sign of her amatory involvement with Reddin; the camera meanwhile, pans slowly to disclose that the strains emanate from her father's harp...

A similar approach - of dauntingly recurrent, slightly eerie sound-effects and imagery - is employed by Powell to underline Reddin's remorseless erotic pursuit of Hazel, and her scared awareness of him on his horse. She hears that he is searching for her, and shrinks into a corner - her face falling into shadow - as she thinks he may be at the door; he rides suddenly into the frame at more than one point; in one scene, his path converges symbolically on that of the walking Edward, his rival suitor; in the baptism episode, he hovers on horseback in the rear of the composition. When Hazel accepts Marston's marriage proposal with a kiss, a distant surge of hunting horns implies her continued uneasy consciousness of Reddin's carnal appeal and lurking presence. In the superbly shot, vividly detailed episode at the country fair (with its scarlet floats and carts and trains, its flutteringly kaleidoscopic pennants, its passages of country dance almost reminiscent of a Ford Western), Reddin on horse and then on foot catches up with his prey, cornering Hazel under a torch flame which epitomises their attraction to each other.

After she marries Edward, Reddin visits their home. The parson's mother leaves him momentarily alone in the parlour. He senses Hazel hiding nearby (we see her shadow on the staircase wall), and tells her to come down unless she wants him to come up. Slowly she descends the staircase into his and our view; and despite her ostensibly conservative,ultra-respectable black dress, everything about her - as incarnated by Jennifer Jones - from her wary yet sly and fleetingly lascivious glance at him with slant eyes and mouth, to her tautly angular pose and restlessly nervous twists of arms and fingers, betrays her susceptibility to his maleness. The sequence where she keeps his suggested spinney rendezvous is the culmination of the entire suppressed sexual relationship between them, and is brilliantly handled by Powell. Entranced, dreamlike long shots dissolve into each other, of Hazel walking slowly away from or towards the camera, across the deserted landscape. These are matched by long shots of Reddin, riding slowly through avenues of tall trees to meet her; and then contrasted with close shots of their legs as he embraces her, of her bouquet of flowers falling to the ground during their kiss, of her beinglifted into his arms, and of him treading the blooms underfoot. The symbolism of seduction in this last image may not be subtle, but it is unquestionably potent; and a time-lapse dissolve leads to a beautiful, affecting mood of post-coital satiety and mute tenderness, as Reddin rides off homeward with Hazel clasping him, in a tableau of medium and long shots.

The preceding sequences are the most remarkable in GONE TO EARTH, in their extended inventiveness, their qualities as set-pieces. But the film's texture is so intricate that virtually every visual, aural and musical effect is eloquent. The compliment paid to her by a young admirer of Hazel - "Jam! My word, Hazel, you're jam!" - is echoed with bitter irony in the image of the cuckolded, infuriated yet nobly forgiving Marston reacting against his prudishly censorious mother's remarks about his marriage by hurling a jampot to spatter her wallpaper. The doggerel read by Hazel in her book of lore, warning her of the fatal influence of a dark huntsman, prefigures her entanglement with Reddin. Her snatches of song, about female inconstancy and

and men being "deceivers ever", likewise comment on both her nature and her lover s. The psychological and moral ambiguities of the story are unerringly communicated by Powell at various crucial moments. Marston's fateful inability to realise that he should consummate his marriage at once receives delicately sardonic pictorial illustration in the shot of Hazel's disconcerted face when he parts from her on the wedding night, having misguidedly decided to defer to Hazel's supposedly maidenly hesitancy until she comes willingly to him. And the female figure in a painting on the wall reflects his intolerably increased erotic frustration when, some time later, she has still not become his wife in the full physical sense.

Marston's fatally chivalrous delay is afforded equally discreet verbal indication, as Hazel tells him gently that he is mother and father to her - but is eventually spelt out with brutal candour during his showdown with Reddin, who caps Edward's words to Hazel (I am your husband) with the contemptusous "You were never her husband!" True, Edward has his flash of revenge when Hazel, shrinking from her lover as she sees that Reddin has imprisoned her pet fox in a sack and is urging his dog to gnaw at it - whispers affectionately to her husband "Come, my soul!" and Marston asks Reddin with pale triumph, "Did she ever call you that?" (emphasising the polarity of body and soul between the two rivals). But when the puritanical deacons come to upbraid him for taking his adulterous wife back into his house, Marston tacitly admits his own share of responsibility, blame and guilt; he tells the deacons that, if he chose, he could explain to them his part in the breakdown of the marriage - but them adds that he does not so choose, because he despises their pharisaical attitudes.

Edward's virginal inexperience of women, which is at the root of his conjugal troubles (and which he comes to perceive and sadly concede), is mordantly contrasted with the savagely misogynistic credo of Andrew Vessons (Reddin's amanuensis), who unremittingly mistrusts and loathes Hazel for her sensual power over his master. And the affair between Hazel and Reddin acquires piquant sexual ambiguities of hits own, as she tenderly teases him, disclosing to us that during their first love-making he was the submissive, even tearful partner. At this point, we are shown Reddin the male-chauvinist predator, the macho satyr, in a new light - as a erotic energy of the female of the species. Outwardly the hunter (of both foxes and human females), he becomes in coitus the possessed as well as the possesser.

Yet our increased sympathy for Reddin's vulnerability in no way diminishes our compassionate understanding of both Hazel and her husband in their own respective areas of emotional fallibility and defenceless ness. The fact that there are no absolutely evil figures in GONE TO EARTH (not even Mrs. Marston, not even Vessons, not even the deacons) contributes vitally to the story's and the film's, capacity to trouble, involve and move us. There may be elements of Victorian barnstormer cliche in the plot (the lecherous squire; the seduced country girl, the repressed and tormented cleric; the Grundyesque citizens; the eccentrics rurals) and occasionally these may topple into the overtly risible. But Mary Webb's "Mummerset" fruitiness of dialect, which inspired Stella Gibbons to the supreme parody of "Cold Comfort Farm" is in Powell's film treatment almost wholly assimilated and refined into a fabric of valid drama by the sheer precision and economy of the screenplay and the mise-en-scene. Powell's directorial command is apparant not just in his orchestration of images and sound, but in his control of his three principal players. Above all, Jennifer Jones - perfectly cast as Hazel, has a flawless physical rightness; and while her "Loamshire" accent may be dubious and fitful, her understanding of the

role is immaculate. She delivers with a bleakly quiet certitude Hazel's pessimistic declaration, "It seems like the world's a big spring-trap, and us in it". This motif, all Mankind being destined sooner or later to be snared by death, is central to the whole action of the movie, in which imagery and incidents remain tied up to the notion of the hunters and the hunted - right up to the concluding sequence. Here, the juxtapositions of the huntsmen, the fleeing fox and Hazel, the frantically pursuing Marston, the no less desperate Reddin, and the watching deacons, arguably reach their cathartic climax in the briefly glimpsed medium-long shot of the anguished Edward throwing himself down by the cavity into which his wife has fallen. And her fall precipitates the final shot of all, with its soundtrack accompaniment - the hunt's traditional cry of "Gone to Earth!" - rounding out, in melancholy reverberations, the film's wealth of symbolism, by an echo of the end of THE EDGE OF THE WORLD ...

Review by William K. Everson 1981

GONE TO EARTH followed the now rather familiar pattern of any film representing a collaboration between David O. Selznick and a creative director. Selznick, much impressed with both THE RED SHOES and BLACK NARCISSUS, wanted Powell & Pressburger to work for him. He also wanted a star vehicle for Jennifer Jones, whom he was soon to marry. Although both sides agreed (finally) on GONE TO EARTH as that vehicle, it was actually suggested by Alexander Korda, who had owned the property for some time, and had found it a "difficult" subject to handle. The difficulties obviously were compounded when Selznick involved himself in it. Almost immediately the familiar barrage of long cabled instructions began, with frequent demands for changes. Powell constantly had to remind Selznick that what he did with the American version was his business, but that Powell had control over the British version. Selznick countered with repeated threats of lawsuits, though on what grounds were never made clear. In a sense, two films emerged: Powell's original version, and a "streamlined" U.S. version, partially reshot by Mamoulian, and with an opening narration by Joseph Cotten reminiscent of the grandiose prologue narration to DUEL IN THE SUN.

While the Powell original is clearly the better film, in fairness it must be admitted that the revamped Hollywood version was quite brilliantly done. The American edition was some thirty minutes shorter, but since new footage had been added, actually far more than that had been cut. Whether Mamoulian was given artistic control of the U.S. version, or whether, as seems likely, Selznick retained that control is not known, but either way the re-editing was done with both taste and respect for the qualities of the original. A ll of the really striking images in the original, including many that are not directly related to the narrative (one lovely shot with a horse in which natural framing from trees and branches forms an almost CinemaScope shaped image across the center of the screen) are there in the shortened U.S. version. And short of major reshooting, one cannot ever quicken the pace of a deliberatley leisurely film by merely cutting it; one can only enable its story to be told in a shorter time. Even though much of the incidental detail was removed, the American edition still retained that sense of joy in a rural way of life in which the country fair, not even particularly eventful in itself, was still the highlight of the year. Not once does the omnipresence of Burbank or the California hills intrude itself into the stark British countryside with its rocky hills topped by trees twisted into shapes that reflect the constant winds that better them...

In England the film got some good reviews, but not the kind to excite audience interest - and attendance. Coming hot on the heels of another Powell-Pressburger "failure" (THE SMALL BACK ROOM) it seemed to confirm that they had lost the magic touch, which only recently had given them that unbroken quartet of successes, A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH, I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING, BLACK NARCISSUS and THE RED SHOES. While THE WILD HEART could not improve on the original, it was more palatable to U.S. audiences, and did get seen, including on television, far more than the original would have. And unless one looks at both films in direct juxtaposition one to the other, it is difficult to tell where the changes have been made, so skillfully are they camouflaged. Nevertheless, while the reshaping did far less damage than the editing of BLIMP, A CANTERBURY TALE and THE SMALL BACK ROOM, it was yet another contribution to the unofficial

crusade to keep American audiences from knowing Powell/Pressburger films in the form in which they were made.

As with so many of their films, elements that were considered weaknesses at the time prove now to have been merely qualities that were out of the then current filmic fashion, and today they give the film strength and cohesion. There is no British word that has the equivalent meaning to "Americana", perhaps because, a few individuals like Michael Powell apart, the British display little interest in, or passionate affection for, their own landscape and their own past. But in a way, GONE TO EARTH has certain affinities with American films like THE SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS and THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE, although Powell's stylized use of muted colour in using the landscapes as a background is a more subtle celebration of that landscape than one finds in the brighter-hued American films. It may still be regarded as a lesser Powell/Pressburger film, perhaps as something of a courageous misfire, its experimental values unappreciated (the often improvisational nature of the sets, for example, tremendously effective atomsphere evoked only by lighting, a few props, and a modicum of real detail). But I have a suspicion that it will one day be regarded as one of their major works, just as Welles' THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS is now, in many quarters, considered superior to his CITIZEN KANE.

Powell has tremendous respect for Jennifer Jones, unqualified admiration for her performance here, and a belief that had she not married David Selznick and been pushed by him into a series of glossy vehicles, might well have become one of the major actresses of the American screen. He tells many amusing, but also slightly sad, tales about her attempts to elude the determined courtship of Selznick while the film was shooting, and just to concentrate on the acting job at hand. Incidentally, she captures the right regional accent far more effectively and accurately than do many of the British members of the cast. David Farrar seems at times to be aiming at the Clark Gable/ Rhett Butler image, but considering the role itself, and the omnipresence of Mr. Selznick, perhaps that isn't too surprising.

Among the visual splendours of the film are some that were caught quite by accident. For one sequence (readily recognizable in the film) Powell and Jennifer Jones arrived at the location unusually early, well ahead of the crew, to discuss the day's shooting. The early morning mists, rising off the soil and temporarily trapped in the woodlands, created some breathtakingly lovely visual effects which would have been impossible to recreate technically, and which might not re-occur naturally for many days. Fortuitously, Powell had a hand-held 35mm camera with him, and shot the scenes himself, reshaping the continuity a little to accommodate them.

GONE TO EARTH

Contemporary Review by Dilys Powell in Britain Today December 1950

The difficulties of adaptation from the written word to the image on the screen are a common theme of criticism. The problems of length and compression have been gone over a hundred times; everybody has heard about the necessity of economising in dialogue and the impossibility of getting in all the characters, let alone all their words, if a novel has to be squeezed into ninety minutes' cinema. All these questions must be considered when a book in itself solid and persuasive is translated into a film. But a new set of problems present themselves when, as in the case of GONE TO EARTH, the written word of fiction itself (I am speaking, of course, of serious fiction, not of the circulating library stuff) taxes credulity.

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, who have jointly scripted, produced and directed GONE TO EARTH, have taken on a job much more tricky than the usual task of adaptation. The author, Mary Webb, was a gifted woman with acute sensibilities for which she found an outlet in her fiction; the violence of her feelings was successfully communicated, but now and then the human figures which she chose as vehicles were not strong enough in the artistic sense to carry the burden of emotion. That, in my opinion, is the weakness of GONE TO EARTH; the reader apprehends the passions which move the writer, he may sympathize with them, but he is not convinced by the characters or the situations in which they are shown.

GONE TO EARTH (and the film honourably follows the design of the novel) is a story of a Shropshire countryside at the turn of the century. The central figure is a young girl who has grown up in complete innocence of the world; she lives with her cloddish father in a shack in the wilds, keeps a fox-cub as a pet, and is herself a creature of the woods, with the wariness and shyness of an animal. We are asked to believe that the girl has an overpowering attraction for two men: one of them the Squire, a fox-hunting man, a hard drinker, who lives alone dave for a manservant whom he abuses; and the other a Baptist minister, a saintly character, a mother's darling, who sees in Hazel Woodus a pure and fragile creature in need of protection.

The acting, struggling with the realism of the direction, is only erratically successful. As Hazel Woodus, Jennifer Jones now and then comes near the mingled innocence and uncouthness of the girl; and Cyril Cusack makes a touching and sensitive figure of the minister. But as the Squire, David Farrar has not given us much more than the conventional cad of Victorian melodrama. Sybil Thorndike as the minister's mother, and Hugh Griffith as the Squire's manservant, bring conviction to minor characters. But there is one element in the narrative for which no praise can be too high: the rendering of landscape. GONE TO EARTH has been made in Technicolor; and for once the range of colour in the English landscape has been beautifully conveyed. The film was photographed in Shropshire and on the Welsh border. There is no lovelier scene in these islands; and Christopher Challis's photography has caught and held the soft brilliance of the patchwork of the fields and the gentle curves of the hills. Mention should also be made of the music by Brian Easdale, which won a well-deserved award at the Venice International Film Festival.