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Neo-Romantic Landscapes: An Aesthetic Approach to the Films of Powell and Pressburger

Stella Hockenhull

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Neo-Romantic Landscapes offers a reappraisal of the 1940s films of Powell and Pressburger focusing on their use of landscape. Questioning the established notion that the two film-makers, owing to their non-British personal roots, are located as un-British and âotherâ, Stella Hockenhull draws a correlation between the two media of film and painting to suggest otherwise. Emphasising the spiritual aspects of landscape and nature at a time when the experience and imagery of the war years generated a particular kind of âaffectâ arising from the aftermath of destruction, she locates Powell and Pressburgerâs wartime films in their historical and cultural context, notably Neo-Romanticism. By offering a close analysis of films such as A Canterbury Tale, I Know Where Iâm Going!, Black Narcissus and Gone to Earth she finds similar aesthetic qualities in a number of British landscape paintings executed contemporaneously. Drawing on press reviews for contemporary spectator response, Neo-Romantic Landscapes offers a redirection of Film Studies, foregrounding the aesthetic pleasures of cinema in excess of narrative plausibility, thus resituating Powell and Pressburger in the British cultural traditions of the visual arts.

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