



POWELL

A Cinema of Magic Spaces

PRESSBURGER

Andrew Moor

I.B. TAURIS

POWELL & PRESSBURGER

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The film-making partnership of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger was the most remarkable and visionary in British cinema. Between 1939 and 1957 they made an extraordinary range of films, from *The Spy in Black* and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* to *A Canterbury Tale* and *The Red Shoes*. After 1960 their careers faltered, but with champions like Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, and revived critical interest in Britain and the USA, they now find new generations of admirers.

Powell and Pressburger made arresting, perplexing films – mainstream, yet recognisably personal. This illuminating new book looks closely at these classic films to explore their complex relationship to national identity, and their developing interest in exile, borderlands, utopias, escapism, art and fantasy – themes which trouble traditional definitions of British national cinema. Moor takes a variety of perspectives, including space and place, myth and magic, the exotic and the pastoral, art and ideology, to reveal that, while the films of the Second World War belong to the propaganda mission of classical 'British cinema', their visual imagery questions the style of understated realism so revered at that time, as their strangely skewed narratives betray both a fascination and an anxiety about homely images of Englishness.

Moor argues that postwar melodramas such as *Black Narcissus* and *Gone to Earth* depart from the aspirational stories of wartime to reveal a culture of blocked desire, while male-centred films such as *A Matter of Life and Death* and *The Small Back Room* recuperate 'damaged men' and offer ideal images of masculinity. Engaging with ballet in *The Red Shoes* and opera in *The Tales of Hoffman*, their highly expressive, controlled use of design, music and dance mark their increasing aesthetic ambitions, oblivious to British realism and utterly international in character.



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LONDON · NEW YORK

'At last, an in-depth account of the Powell-Pressburger partnership. Andrew Moor does full justice to the richness of their great films of the 1940s, and relates them in fascinating ways to the events of this pivotal decade in 20th-century British history.'

—*Charles Barr*

ISBN 1-85043-947-8



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LONDON · NEW YORK

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