

YOUNG WOODLEY

Screening: Thursday 19th April, 1:30pm



Marjorie Hume

Based on John Van Druten's stage play of 1925, Bentley's film version of this controversial and somewhat scandalous text had an unusual production. Filmed in 1928 as a full-blooded silent, the film remained unreleased. In 1930 it underwent a metamorphosis and was refashioned by Bentley into an early sound feature, or, to use the vernacular of the day: "a vocalized pictorial version". The results were far from pleasing and the film was not a success.

Fortunately, Bentley's original 1928 version survives and it is this unreleased gem, that we will be seeing, almost intact, and it stands as one of the most impressive and sensitively directed British films of the late silent era.

Due in no small part to its supposedly negative depiction of public school life, not to mention its subversive attitude towards authority, the play was initially banned in the United Kingdom after falling foul of The Theatre Act of 1843 and was subsequently turned down by The Lord Chamberlain. *YOUNG WOODLEY* was finally staged in New York in 1926 to notable acclaim. Back across the pond, the play was first produced privately (by Phyllis Whitworth's Three Hundred Club) and then at the Arts Theatre in February of 1928. Shortly afterwards, The Lord Chamberlain withdrew his objections and the play eventually had its official London premiere at the Savoy Theatre. It enjoyed a run of 400 performances and made a star of its lead Frank Lawton who would

THOMAS BENTLEY, GREAT BRITAIN, 1928

reprise his role as Woodley in Bentley's later 1930 film.

Beginning his final term at college, young Roger Woodley is a shy and dreamy student who amongst other things has a passion for poetry and the ideals of romantic love. Despised and distrusted by the principal Dr Simmons and at turns either praised or teased by his peers, he believes he has found his soul mate in the person of the headmaster's wife, the young and beautiful Laura Simmons (played by Marjorie Hume). She shows a genuine interest in the young man and his writings, and a mutual if unlikely attraction soon begins to blossom. Woodley is well and truly smitten and wastes little time in declaring his feelings to Mrs Simmons who, clearly in a fraught and stale marriage, is flattered by the attention and admiration which Woodley lavishes on her. However, their brief liaison enters dangerous territory and brings about a state of affairs where everyone's future is at stake and the prospects of blissful happy endings seem to be a distant hope for all concerned.

Featuring an ensemble of wonderful performances, this is far more than merely a filmed record of the stage production. Bentley directs with commendable restraint and understatement, and what could have come across as sentimental pat is instead intensely moving and believable. The film is especially compelling in that all of these characters are allowed to exhibit their all too human flaws and faults, and for one reason or another each has their hands tied when it comes to trying to decide on what is the right, decent and proper thing to do.

Somewhat reminiscent of both *Tea and Sympathy* and *The Browning Version*, this little seen gem is more than deserving of a much belated reappraisal.

Notes courtesy of Paul Marygold

CAST

Marjorie Hume -
Laura Simmons
Sam Livesey-
Dr Simmons
John Cromer -
Young Woodley
Gerald Rawlinson -
Vining

CREATIVE
ENGLAND

Picture
house
ARTS
CAMBRIDGE

DE MONTFORT
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