

# Gone to Earth

*by Helen Edmundson*

**EDUCATION  
PACK**



shared**experience**



SUPPORTED BY  
CITY OF  
WESTMINSTER

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Education Pack

### Contents

The Pack .....	3
Shared Experience Expressionism .....	4
Company Credo .....	5
An Interview with Nancy, Director and Helen, Writer. ....	6
Who Was Mary Webb?.....	7
The Men in Hazel's Life .....	9
Scrobbesbyrigsri.....	12
Methodism.....	13
Witchcraft and Methodism .....	14
Paganism: Mysteries Revealed .....	15
A Brief Intro to Greek Tragedy .....	17
Violence, Possession, Entrapment...Nature? .....	20
Looking at a Scene for the first time .....	23
Foxhunting Factfile.....	26
Olly Fox, Composer .....	28
Niki Turner, Designer .....	29
Liz Ranken, Movement Director .....	30
What do I Want? .....	31
Discussion Topics .....	34
Writing a Review .....	35



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## *The Pack*

This pack is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing a performance of *Gone To Earth*. I've included background material and also information specifically on our production; including interviews with the creative team.

Although this cannot be an exhaustive account of the whole production, I hope that it introduces some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. Scattered through the pack are questions and exercises that I hope will be useful in provoking discussion and practical work of your own.

Please feel free to write/email Shared Experience with your thoughts and any ideas for future packs. Address at the end of the pack.

*Gillian King*

# Gone to Earth

by Helen Edmundson

## Shared Experience Expressionism



Natalia Tena

**‘During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over.’**

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go *beyond* naturalism and to see into the characters private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of barely suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place feels like than what it realistically looks like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house feels like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

Polly Teale



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson



Roderick Smith



Jay Villiers, Simon Wilson, Nancy Meckler

'At the heart of our work is the **POWER** and **EXCITEMENT** of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience – a **SHARED EXPERIENCE**. We are committed to creating a theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives; giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.

*Nancy Meckler* – Joint Artistic Director



shared**experience**

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## *An Interview with Nancy Meckler and Helen Edmundson,* **the Director and Writer of Gone To Earth.**

***What was it about the *Gone to Earth* story that made you want to adapt it for *Shared Experience*?***



Nancy Meckler

**Helen:**

What is fascinating about *Gone to Earth* is that it is a very passionate and very simple story that is also intellectually engaging. There are so many interwoven ideas that creep up on you and before you realise it you have responded with your heart to what is happening but your head is also really engaged and asking questions.

***What happens in the story?***

**Helen:**

The story is about a young girl who grows up on the outskirts of a tiny village in Shropshire. Her Mother died and she is raised by her Father who makes coffins and keeps bees. It is the story of what happens when Hazel comes into contact with men for the first time. She is very cut off from the world and lives utterly carefree and at one with nature. Suddenly, within days she meets two men, both of whom are much more worldly than she is. One is a very wealthy squire who pleases himself and takes what he wants from life. He wants to possess her. The other is a minister. He is very idealistic and is looking for purity, almost searching for proof that God exists. When he meets Hazel for the first time he falls in love with her and wants to protect and preserve her innocence. It is the story of what happens when she is caught between them..

Because of Mary Webb's understanding of human nature the story is also very funny, it takes you by surprise and makes you laugh. Hazel is such a quirky character - always doing the unexpected. So what the men expect and what society expects is constantly being undercut.

***How will the story be told?***

**Nancy:**

One of the main elements we're using is a chorus of clog dancers who are members of a community, sometimes intensifying what's happening in the story. Because it is a Shared Experience production the dancing and singing will not be used in the traditional sense, but will be transformed into something which can express the themes within the play.

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Who Was Mary Webb ?



- She was born Gladys Mary Meredith on March 25th 1881 at Leighton Lodge, Leighton, a village south of Shrewsbury.
- She was the eldest child of a teacher, George Edward Meredith and his wife Sarah Alice.
- When Mary Webb was just one year old, the family moved to Much Wenlock where she was to spend most of her childhood.
- Mary loved to walk and cycle in the Shropshire countryside. She was a great lover of the natural world, and the inspiration that her rural home provided is evident in her early work. Many of her essays and poems have nature as the main theme.
- In 1910, a year after the death of her father, Mary met her future husband Henry Webb, a teacher who shared her interest in writing. She had been devastated by the loss of her father and writing poetry had proved something of a therapy.
- She married in 1912 and Mary spent an unhappy two years living away from Shropshire. At this time she began her first novel, *The Golden Arrow*, based in the Church Stretton area.
- The Webbs returned to Shropshire in 1914 where Mary finished *The Golden Arrow* (published in 1916).
- Mary's second novel *Gone to Earth* (1917), which was later made into a film, was written in response to her sadness at the cruelty of war. It was written during an unhappy period of her life when she had to spend the majority of her time away from her beloved Shropshire.
- In 1917 her husband Henry secured a job at the Priory School in Shrewsbury and Mary was able to realise her dream when they acquired a small bungalow at Lyth Hill called Spring Cottage. It was here that Mary wrote *The House in Dormer Forest* (1920). She loved living in Lyth Hill and spent many hours enjoying the surrounding countryside and gathering information to include in later novels and poems.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

- But the search for literary success was to take Mary away from Shropshire once again and Mary and Henry moved to London next. Bouts of ill health followed, with alternate periods of nervous activity followed by deep depression. Her marriage was under stress too, due in part to her own possessiveness over Henry. However, she still managed to complete her fifth novel in 1922, *Seven for a Secret* followed two years later by *Precious Bane*.
- Her effort was richly rewarded when for this book she was awarded the Prix Femina Vie Heureuse.
- At last her place in the literary world was confirmed but ironically it was only after her death that the public acclaim for which she had longed was finally given to her.
- The then Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, praised her work at a literary dinner and this triggered off a remarkable demand for her work.
- Her novels became best sellers for a number of years up to the outbreak of the Second World War.

***‘After the war Mary Webb's name was largely forgotten and only in the last ten years has it begun to emerge and her work to be reassessed.’***

- Mary Webb is now considered to be ‘the’ Shropshire novelist. She loved and knew the county intimately. In her novels and poems, she created a timeless landscape peopled with vivid characters whose wisdom illustrates many well observed truths.





# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## *The Men in Hazel's*

### **Abel Woodus (Roderick Smith) The Father**

#### ***Is it different working with Shared Experience than with other theatre companies?***

Every job is different, as you are always working with a different set of personalities. Normally I would start working from the text and do less physical work. With Shared Experience you do a lot of physical work and instead of all (other actors) working in their own way, we create a shared way of working -which has been very enjoyable.

#### ***What do you feel are Abel's vices and virtues?***

Well they intermingle somewhat, his virtues I guess are a love of order and a love of nature and harmony. Vices are again a love of order, there is no need for anything (including Hazel) to be untidy. He is casually violent, probably because he doesn't know any better. His Father treated him the same way and so that's all he knows.

#### ***What does he feel about Hazel?***

Well from the novel and the play I believe that they have a very indifferent attitude to each other, at times almost a disinterested relationship. She does at times remind him of his wife which he finds distressing, so he keeps those feelings at bay.

#### ***How do you think Hazel's death impacts on him?***

Well he's lost his wife, and dealt with that. This would make him retreat further into himself. He would become more selfish, further cut off from the community and even less able to deal with people. There would be a hardening of his heart.



Roderick Smith



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Edward Marston (Simon Wilson) The Husband

### *What do you believe are Edward's vices and virtues?*

His virtues are that he has sought to renounce himself and devote himself to honouring God, by protecting people who need protecting - such as Hazel. To that end he is a selfless man.

His vices are that perhaps he doesn't understand the world, because he is only able to view life through his own ideas, he can't begin to imagine other people's view points. He is very naive.

### *Do you share any characteristics with Edward?*

Only perhaps that he is prepared to speak his mind and that he's not afraid to stand up and profess his beliefs.

### *What does Edward see in Hazel?*

He sees her as an innocent untarnished and pure person. Her innocence he feels needs cherishing and protecting. Her singing is so beautiful that to him it almost seems holy.



Simon Wilson

### *What about physical desire?*

Edward does find Hazel sexually attractive and he wants to sleep with her - there's no question about that, but only within the context of marriage. He takes seriously the tenet of Christian faith which implies that the union between a man and wife is like that of between Christ and the church. Sexual love is a part of that and wholly appropriate and so therefore any extra marital or adulterous sex is perverted, wicked and a corruption against Hazel and a blasphemy against Christ.

### *Why even after their marriage does he not sleep with her then?*

He feels that Hazel is too young and innocent to be introduced to sex and so therefore he feels that his principle responsibility to his wife is to protect and cherish her and he hopes that sex will follow in due time. One of the reasons Hazel agreed to marry him was because he offered her her own room, and he doesn't want to coerce her into sex before she's ready.

### *Which scene has been the most challenging to rehearse?*

I think the final scene is the hardest one because it is very highly charged. It involves very quick changes of gear and emotional pitch and it encapsulates the tension between Edward's need to do good within the community and his love for Hazel.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Jack Reddin (Jay Villiers) The Lover

### *Can you describe Reddin's vices and virtues?*

Well his virtues are that he loves life and pleasure, he's charming and he sees possibility in everything.

His vices could be the same! He seeks pleasure in everything, he needs to control things, he takes what he wants and is not used to people saying no. He is a very powerful man and he uses sex and alcohol as a way to run away from reality.

### *Do you share any characteristics with him?*

Well apart from he's gorgeous, sexy and handsome? No seriously we share having a sense of humour. We are both quite ironic and cynical but other than a love of riding, no we're not very similar. He is far more casual than I am.

### *Do you as an actor think it is important to create a back story or biography for Reddin?*

There are certain clues in the novel and in the text to his character. He has never been married and there is no mention of any siblings. We hear about his parents through an incident he describes. He loved destroying the beautiful objects in his home because he felt that his Mother treasured them more than she did him. His Father flogged him for this.



Jay Villiers

### *What ignites him about Hazel?*

He sees an innocence, beauty and purity that are all long gone from his life. She is like one of the beautiful objects he broke when a child. She also says 'no' to him. He as a hunter has to pursue her, which is very exciting and so he wants her more and more. He experiences a passion with her that he has never felt before; perhaps she ignites the possibility that there is something better within him.

### *Would he tire of her?*

I don't think he would. But the problem is a bit like catching a butterfly - when you hold your fist around it, it dies. In pursuing and catching Hazel he destroys her freedom which is the thing he loves most about her.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## *Scrobbesbyrigscri*

- This was the old English name for Shropshire, the word basically means: 'the shire with Shrewsbury as its head'.
- The Normans changed the name to Salopescira, which is why even today people who come from Shropshire are referred to as Salopians.
- Shropshire is the largest inland county in England and stretches from a point south of Ludlow virtually to the Potteries and from the edges of the West Midlands conurbation to the western slopes of Clun Forest.
- Mary Webb's name is synonymous with the landscapes of south-west Shropshire, and in particular the hill country surrounding the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones, just a few miles from Bishop's Castle. Mary had always been a lover of the natural world and had a particular affinity for her native Shropshire landscapes. This is a very strong theme in her novels, and her love of nature is exemplified by her detailed and perceptive writings.

## EXERCISE

Hazel's home and the surrounding area is of the utmost importance to her.

Relax on the floor of your rehearsal space and try to think back to an outside place you knew when you were much younger - maybe 6 or 7. Remember the smells, the way the ground felt, the plants, the weather. Take your time remembering details. Then slowly sit and then stand and walk around the place you remember. What can you see? What can you touch? How does it make you feel?

Then show someone else your remembered place and give them a small tour, but talk to them as if you are there now. Try to make them see what is in your imagination.

As a group, discuss remembrances of your chosen places. How did they influence the person you have grown into?



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Methodism

Edward Marston had been invited by Mr James and members of the community to take up the position of Minister for the fairly remote position at Gods Little Mountain. Methodism was less than 100 years old, but the community already had a strong religious fervour.

Methodism is a religious movement which was originated in 1739 by John Wesley in the Anglican Church and subsequently gave rise to numerous separate denominations.

The fact that John Wesley and Methodism considered religion primarily as practical, not dogmatic, probably accounts for the absence of any formal Methodist creed. The "General Rules", issued by John and Charles Wesley on 1 May, 1743, stated the conditions of admission into the societies organised by them and known as the "United Societies". They bear an almost exclusively practical character, and require no doctrinal test of the candidates.

Only two sacraments are admitted: baptism - which simply strengthens an already existing faith and The Lord's Supper (body and blood of Christ) - seen as a symbol and not actually the body and blood of Christ.

Wesley imposed upon his followers the strict observance of the Lord's Day, the use of few words in buying and selling, and abstinence from all intoxicating drinks, from all purely worldly amusements and from costly clothes/dress. The church service which he prepared for them was an abridgment and modification of the Book of Common Prayer, but it never came into universal use, sentiment among Methodists being rather unfavourable to any set form of text.

A characteristic institution of Methodism are the love-feasts. In these gatherings of believers, bread and water are handed round in a token of brotherly union, and the time is devoted to singing and the relating of religious experiences.

In the play Hazel and Abel have a 'slot' in the Musical Evening, intended to impress the new Minister:

### Hazel

*Oh God up in the sky so high,  
Why do you let your creatures die?  
When never any harm they've done  
To You or me or anyone,  
Why did You let the cow fall down  
And die upon the stony ground?  
It seems this whole world is a trap,  
That's cold as steel and like to snap,  
And at the time we need You most,  
Oh where, oh where's Your heavenly host?*

Silence. Everyone is thoroughly disconcerted. But then Edward begins to clap, loud and hard. And out of politeness and the desire to please the Minister, everyone else joins in.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Witchcraft and Methodism

In the production of *Gone to Earth*, Mrs Marston worries over Hazel's lack of religious knowledge and belief. Her concern is not that Hazel is ignorant but that she may believe in an alternative religion. Mrs Marston would never mention 'witchcraft', because of the danger and abhorance (to her) in doing so.

During the second half of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, there was growing concern that the popular belief in witchcraft and magic was still widespread. It had generally been supposed that the spread of rational thought and scientific progress had somehow filtered down to the labouring classes.

Since this was not happening, it was assumed that some other force was at work frustrating the enlightenment of the masses. During the same period, the growing popularity of Methodism was also worrying the Anglican establishment. With the likes of John Wesley openly expressing their belief in witchcraft, possession, and divine intervention and retribution, it was not surprising, perhaps, that Anglicans sought to blame Methodism for the continued, pernicious 'superstitious' state of the masses.



Liz Ranken, James Staddon, Paul Parris

Hazel and Abel talk about Hazel's Mother, a Welsh Gypsy:

**Abel** I remember the day she came here, with just the clothes she stood in and that old book of charms as her mother gave her, and smelling of the sea she'd left behind.

**Hazel** And she was sad and quiet.

**Abel** She was. Sad and quiet. And she'd stand always in that into the distance like a mermaid who'd swapped her tail for legs and wished she hadn't.

Abel goes to bed. Hazel finds the book of charms, and runs her hand over it's black leather cover and raises it to her nose to smell it in an attempt to better remember her mother.

She goes to the doorway and stares out into the night as her mother used to do.

**Hazel**

*When will I be away,  
On the wind  
When will I be away,  
Through the air,  
Through the sky  
Through the waves...*

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson



Fiona Clifton-Welker - Harpist

## *Paganism: Mysteries Revealed*

Hazel, in *Gone to Earth*, has been brought up within a pagan tradition. Her mother was a gypsy and her father makes his living from the forest. Paganism can be traced back to Neolithic times and survived up until the middle ages when Christianity became powerful enough to erase it from existence. Paganism is an earth-based religion which lays emphasis on the worship of all aspects of nature.

Ancient people believed that everything had a spirit and were polytheistic in that they placed great importance on the worship of many gods, goddesses and deities. Gods were a part of everyday life and great emphasis was placed on placating them through worship and ritual. Pagans believed that the gods were imminent and entered every aspect of their society, influencing everything from laws and customs to the general workings of their community.

***‘Pagans began to personify the energies of the land, sky and other elements by giving specific responsibilities to individual gods.’***

As Pagans were polytheistic they had gods and goddesses of the forests, the sea and of all aspects of nature. Pagans began to personify the energies of the land, sky and other elements by giving specific responsibilities to individual gods. As ancient civilisations began to develop and change, the gods grew and changed with the people. New gods appeared, ones which were relevant to village life, for example, gods of milling and smithcraft. The old gods remained, but aspects of them changed to conform to the changing people. For example, as war became more prominent, so too did the gods of war, such as Ares and Mars.

Pagans held no belief in heaven and hell as Christians do, rather they believed in re-incarnation: that the body could be re-incarnated in another form. There are many varying beliefs relating to re-incarnation, however the theme remains the same in most forms of Paganism.

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson



Amelda Brown

Edward Marston, as the methodist minister in *Gone to Earth*, would have made home visits as part of his job.

**“ A Methodist Reverend recently spoke of an old bedridden woman, living in the shadow of Mary Webb's hill home, for whom he was endeavouring to smooth the passage to the Great Beyond. Knowing his flock, he was not particularly upset to find his parishioner more interested in mundane matters nearer to hand. Persevering, perhaps somewhat haltingly, he enlarged upon the peace that would ensue in the life to come. The old lady was by no means insensible to her kind-hearted and well-meaning pastor; and to comfort him, murmured, with a sigh, that she would soon be able to lay her ‘tired head on Beelzebub's bosom.’ The reverend hastened to correct the slip of the tongue, referring to the patriarchal bosom of Abraham. For a few seconds the old lady remained quiet, then ventured apologetically but undefeatedly, ‘Ah! Parson, ef ye'd bin a widder as long as oi 'ave, y'd never moind whose bosom it wor.’ ”**

Recollections of W Reid Chappell from the 1920's



# Gone to Earth

by Helen Edmundson

## *A Brief Introduction to Greek Tragedy.*

Nancy (the Director) and Helen (the Writer) often talk of the dancers as a kind of Greek chorus: i.e dancers who can interpret, illuminate and share the emotions of the hero, in this case, Hazel. The *Gone to Earth* company have used the ideas of a Greek chorus as a starting point for rehearsals and ideas. I've included some descriptions & key terms within Greek tragedy to stimulate your discussions of character within the play:



Natalia Tena

### **The Tragic Hero**

(In *Gone to Earth* this would be Hazel)

A man who has achieved, or who has the ability to achieve, greatness but who through a weakness, or tragic flaw in his character, falls into the depths of misery and often to his death. Audiences seeing this happen are supposed to feel a purifying of the spirit as they feel pity for the character because of the terrible woes he has suffered, and fear because of their increased awareness of forces in the world powerful enough to topple even the most mighty and most admirable of men.

Caught up in events of great magnitude, spectators are imaginatively liberated from all that is dull, petty and mean in life around them - they are stirred by the spectacle of human greatness, of man daring to reach out beyond reasonable limits in quest of some glorious ideal. Even when he fails, as fail he must, there is still, for the audience, the satisfaction of having viewed nobility in action.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## THREE KEY TERMS

This terminology is still widely used today in all aspects of writing, from playwriting to journalism. I found the descriptions / explanations of these terms interesting in reference to the three main characters in *Gone to Earth*:

### CATHARSIS

This term is from a Greek word, *kathairein*, meaning to clean or to purify. Catharsis refers to any emotional discharge that brings about an emotional or spiritual renewal or welcome relief from tension and anxiety. The primary idea is that an audience, any audience, filled with confusion and unhealthy emotions, such as pity and fear, comes to see a play developing make-believe actions that would be harmful if occurring in real life. The audience participates emotionally in the dramatic action and goes away psychologically cleansed, purged of injurious feelings and sensations. Literary critics have never agreed whether catharsis means that members of an audience thus learn to avoid the evil and destructive emotions of a tragic hero or that their inner conflicts are quieted by an opportunity to expend pity and fear upon such a protagonist.

### HAMARTIA

An error of judgement. Hamartia, derived from a Greek word meaning fault is sometimes known as the tragic flaw because it represents a fatal weakness that causes the downfall of a protagonist in tragedy. This hamartia may be caused by inherited weakness, by faulty character traits, or by poor judgement; whatever the cause, the result is action or inaction that leads to destruction or death.

### HUBRIS

Arrogance; excessive self-pride and self-confidence. Hubris, a Greek term for insolence, referred to the emotions in Greek tragic heroes that led them to ignore warnings from the gods and thus invite catastrophe. Hubris is that form of Hamartia that stems from overbearing pride and self-assumed superiority.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## CHORUS

Tragedy was not just straight drama. It was interspersed with songs sung both by actors and chorus and also with dancing by the chorus. The modern parallel for tragedy is actually opera (along with its descendant, musical theatre), which is a dramatic form containing song and dance.

The chorus, unlike the actors, were non-professionals who had a talent for singing and dancing and were trained by the poet in preparation for the performance. The standard number of members of a chorus was twelve throughout most of Aeschylus's career, but was raised to fifteen by Sophocles. The chorus, like the actors, wore costumes and masks. The first function of a tragic chorus was to chant an entrance song called a *parados* as they marched into the orchestra. The entrance song took its name from the two ramps (*parodoi*) on either side of the orchestra which the chorus used as it made its way into the orchestra. Once the chorus had taken its position in the orchestra, its duties were twofold. It engaged in dialogue with characters through its leader, the *Coryphaeus*, who alone spoke the lines of dialogue assigned to the chorus. The tragic choruses most important function was to sing and dance choral songs called *stasima*.

Nancy often describes the dancers as like a Greek Chorus, and although the dancers in this production have more creative freedom than a chorus with strict rules and traditions, there is a feeling that the dancers can highlight different emotional states of the hero Hazel and at times they push the action along, underscoring and playing a part in scenes.



- **Read the descriptions of *Hamartia*, *Hubris* and *Catharsis*. Which characters remind you of each word?**

## EXERCISE

Working in small groups decide on one person playing the hero (or main actor in today's terms). Then decide on an emotional story which the actor must share in some way with the audience. Try and give the story junctions where the hero must make a choice. The other performers become a chorus. Try working on the scene in several different ways

- The chorus can only react in movement and abstract sound to events portrayed by the hero.
- The chorus anticipates and maybe even warns the hero about forthcoming situations.
- The chorus expresses the emotions and senses that the hero does at the same time.
- Now for the fourth working of the scene mix and match from the other three.
- What works well for your scene?



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Violence, possession, entrapment. . . nature?

Helen Edmundson sees violence as one of the key themes in *Gone to Earth*:



Natalia Tena

- Unending cycles of violence and abuse are passed down from generation to generation
- The amorality of nature (ie. nature is not moral or sensitive or merciful, but a force which exerts itself in it's own way and sweeps all along with it)
- The need in humankind to test our power and strength and exert it over others – to subjugate, to possess, destroy, control
- The dangers and difficulties of trying to deny our own natures
- The need for man to raise himself above the animal through altruism, mercy, compassion and empathy

Nancy Meckler, on consideration of this subject matter and the handling of it by Mary Webb, the author, suggests:

Helen has tried to look at the story in a mythic way as if it is almost Greek tragedy. Hazel represents innocence. She is a totally pure being, unsocialised by her parents or the world. In many ways she lives like a wild animal. She is so free that she says exactly what she thinks and feels. She lives totally in the moment and in that sense she is like a child in a woman's body.



James Staddon

In the story Reddin becomes obsessed with exerting power over her. He has a compulsion to dominate anything and everyone who comes into his life. Often people who have felt unloved come to a point where they no longer seek it but instead get pleasure from feeling powerful at all times and with all people. Hazel evades his grasp and he must have her for himself. He becomes the hunter, she the hunted animal. He will not rest until he has owned and trapped her.

Edward is a minister who has left a sophisticated life to come to the country to serve God and find some kind of purity. He thinks the civilised world is corrupt and thinks the country will yield a good life. When he sees how innocent Hazel is, he is obsessed with protecting her purity from the world. Even in marrying her, he promises to keep her pure until she is ready to become a sexual being. However, in his own way, he is also trapping her, trammelling her freedom. He is trying to keep her in a clean box so that life can not get at her and spoil her.

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

The conundrum is why Hazel is attracted to Reddin and then why does she go back to him even after he has raped her. This is a good discussion point as it relates to modern women who are used to violent behaviour and keep going back to it. Often the man claims to adore them even though he abuses them mentally and physically.

One possibility is that Hazel is attracted to Reddin and his violence because it at first feels more like life than the quietness Edward and his mother want for her. Once she has truly come to know Reddin and his cruelty to Sally, she is finally able to walk away and seek Edward.

## The Evidence:

Below are four excerpts (taken from many) illustrating the violence in Hazel's life, both in her experiences of it and her attitude to it.

Look at the passages and then consider these questions:



1. Why does Hazel go back to live with a man who raped her?
2. Why does Hazel care so much about physical harm to animals, yet appears to accept it between people?

## ACT I, SC I

*... We hear the screeches of a pig being slaughtered, loud, inescapable. The light is red...*

*A moment later, a man (Abel) backs onto the stage. He has blood on his hands. Pursuing him is a young girl with wild auburn hair (Hazel). She hurls herself at him, beating and scratching him. He fights back, picking her up bodily and trying to throw her aside, but she kicks and twists free and thumps her fists against him. They are shouting at each other, but the words can't be heard above the screeches of the pig.*

*Suddenly Hazel bites Abel. Abel grabs a rake, and hits Hazel across the head with it. She drops to the floor, unconscious.*

---

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## ACT I, SC 3

**Hazel** You sit up on your high horse, don't you? And watch the little fox get torn apart?  
Torn apart and awake all the time.

**Reddin** Yes I do. I do. There's nothing I like better than to watch the kill.

**Hazel** You'll be damned too then! What has the little fox ever done to you?

**Reddin** They're vermin.

**Hazel** Well so are you, then! You're vermin!

---

## ACT I, SC 9

**Hazel** Why didna you hit 'un?

**Edward** My dear girl. What a thing to say.

**Hazel** I wish you had hit 'un. I'd have hit 'un if you hadn't been there.

**Edward** Hazel, you musn't talk like that.

**Hazel** What for not, my soul?

---

## ACT 2, SC 8

*She throws herself at him, beating her fists against him. He catches her arms and laughs, but she pulls one free and begins raining blows on his head. He tolerates it for a moment or two, then suddenly he has had enough. He throws her down onto the ground and rapes her.*

*Her fists bang against the ground, hopelessly.*

*He gets off her. She doesn't move. He sits, staring at the ground. The light is growing dimmer and the thunder still rumbles in the distance.*

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Looking at a Scene for the First Time... (First meeting between Hazel and Reddin)

The following article illustrates the typical rehearsal room process and will give you an insight into Shared Experience rehearsal processes when looking at a scene for the first time.

The actors and Nancy read through the pages just before the section they plan to work on, and then they discuss the idea of the dresses that Reddin offers to Hazel. Nancy explains one of her ideas is that the dresses are 'flown' in and even perhaps attached on a hook. They then become a bait to Hazel, just as you might bait or tempt an animal.

Sally knows that they are bait; she knows Reddin is trying to trap Hazel and she in the preceding page tries to warn Hazel:



Michelle Butterly

- Sally** He found you on the road and he picked you up?
- Hazel** He didn't pick me up! I got up by myself.
- Sally** And why didn't he take you home? Instead of bringing you here?
- Hazel** I dunno. Here was closer, I suppose.
- Sally** And you think if you were some old crone in the road with a bleedin' head, he'd have brought you here?
- Hazel** I dunno...he just wanted to help.
- Sally** And you don't think there's something else he wants?
- Hazel** No. What? He'll be a long time wantin' then, for I've got nothing to give him.
- Pause*
- Sally** (incredulous) Surely you can't be that...?  
But you are, aren't you? You poor cow.
- Hazel** I'm not a cow.
- Sally** Where've you bin?
- Hazel** Nowhere. I haven't bin nowhere.
- Pause.*
- Sally** You've got to go home. Do you understand me?  
  
She hastily begins to bandage Hazel's head.

The actress playing Sally (Michelle) and Nancy discuss briefly why Sally wants Hazel to leave. It is interesting because Sally's thoughts are conflicting -she wants to protect Hazel who is obviously innocent but also she wants Hazel to leave because she is her rival for Reddin's affections.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson



Nancy Meckler

## EXERCISE

Read through the scene with Sally and Reddin on the next page. Hazel can hear them talking, she has a new dress in front of her and you as director have 6 dancers also on the stage. What are your initial ideas? What do the dancers represent to you? Where are Sally and Reddin and how urgent is their conversation? What do they both want to achieve by the end of it? Discuss the scene in groups and then play through different ideas.

They play the section again when Reddin arrives with the dresses and throws them on the floor in front of Hazel. Throwing the dresses gives a different feel to the scene and they discuss the bait idea a bit more. Nancy feels that the dresses on hooks are a beautiful image rather as if each dress represents a woman who has been 'hooked' by Reddin!

Nancy and the actors then move to a discussion about the dancers. They are currently sitting on chairs behind the caged section of the stage. The dancers are not separate performers but are the actors playing the parts not featured in these scenes.

Reddin and Sally leave Hazel with the dresses to try on. In their next scene, in which they discuss Hazel, Nancy suggests they place this scene at the back of the stage - where the dancers are sitting. This area of the stage is now quite crowded and so Nancy asked the dancers to move through the bars when Hazel is left alone and to come further down stage, nearer to Hazel.

This direction practically frees up the back corridor for Reddin and Sally and prompts more discussion about the role of the dancers. Nancy feels they are similar to a Greek Chorus who support the hero (in our terms Hazel) occasionally they may speak to the hero but usually they echo her heartbeat and reflect her emotional state.

The conversation is very lively as there are so many options for the dancers - can they change Hazels' actions? Do they just reflect? Can they anticipate danger and warn Hazel?

It's only the first time they have all looked at this scene, so some questions remain unanswered and many answers will change throughout the rehearsals. It is a very organic and shared way of working which allows the actors and the director to develop over the next few weeks. No ideas are fixed in the early stages because characters are still being explored and are still growing.





# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## The Scene:

*Reddin and Sally leave. Hazel stands up. She is completely unsure what to do.*

*The Dancers feet begin to move.*

*She picks up one of the dresses and looks at it. She puts it down and picks up another one - a white one.*

*Behind the dancers, Reddin and Sally are talking. Hazel freezes and listens.*



Natalia Tena



Jay Villiers



Michelle Butterly

**Sally**

I don't know how you live with yourself.

**Reddin**

What are you talking about now?

**Sally**

Bringing that girl here. She's as innocent as the day she was born.

**Reddin**

And?

**Sally**

She's barely more than a child.

**Reddin**

She's seventeen. She told me.

**Sally**

You're disgusting.

**Reddin**

I rescued her. I'm her knight in shining armour.

**Sally**

If you take that girl's good name...

**Reddin**

Her "good name"?

**Sally**

It'll be a sin!

**Reddin**

Her "good name"!

**Sally**

You just don't care, do you? You just take what you want and...

**Reddin**

Yes I do. Yes I do.

**Sally**

You're an animal.

**Reddin**

If a man's hungry, he eats.

**Sally**

You're an animal. Well, I won't stand by and see you ruin her.

**Reddin**

Sally, Sally, Sally. You're just worried that I'll like her better.

**Sally**

What?

**Reddin**

That's what this is. I know. I know, you see. It's not about her. You don't really care about her "good name". It's not noble, Sally, because you're not noble. You're coarse meat, Sally, coarse, old meat.

*The kettle screeches. Hazel drops the dress and rushes to the front door. She pulls it open. But Reddin hears her and rushes to her. He pulls her inside and slams it shut. He stands with his back against it.*

**Reddin**

Where are you going?



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Foxhunting Fact file

In the novel *Gone to Earth*, Hazel is accompanied everywhere by her half-tamed fox. Throughout the novel Hazel is described as a wild fox; she even meets her death pursued by the fox hunt and dogs. Nancy and Natalia (Hazel) would often refer to the 'instincts and qualities of a fox' when they discussed Hazel.

The foxhunting autumn season starts at the end of August and lasts until October. The main season is from November to March/April. After that, farmers who are losing lambs, piglets or poultry to a fox can call a hunt out, though this is described as a service rather than a sport.

The only people directly involved in a hunt are the huntsman and his assistants who are called whippers-in. The rest are called mounted followers (or the field) and are kept far enough away from the pack to ensure the hounds can work unhindered. All wear the red coat.

A pack will comprise of between 30 and 40 dogs but they are always counted in as couples.

### **Fox:**

A wild animal related to the dog, having upright ears, a pointed snout, red or grey fur and a long bushy tail; anyone notorious for cunning; an attractive young person, esp. a woman

### **Gone to Earth:**

To search or to take refuge in a hole or hiding place

### **Earth:**

A burrow for a fox (they are familiar with several and may use one for a 'home' and others for escape routes -bolt holes)



Natalia Tena

This is a short extract from the novel;  
Hazel is walking home from town late at night, shortly to meet Reddin for the first time.

*“ She passed through the narrow streets where the wind ran up and down like a lost dog whimpering; through the outskirts where on the fringe of the town she saw lights in the bedrooms of prosperous houses. From other houses music floated, or the savoury smell of dinner. As she passed the last lamp-post, she began to cry feeling like a lost and helpless little animal.”*



- **In the novel Hazel is accompanied everywhere by Foxy her 'tamed' fox and she is later chased and caught up in the fox hunt and killed. How does the theme of the fox manifest itself in the play?**

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson



## Capturing the 'Fox'

### Exercise

- Read the stage directions from the end of the play below. How would you dramatise this scene?
- What effects would you use and how many actors?

#### Excerpt from the Play

*Hazel keeps running, tripping over roots and branches in the darkness. The crowd are still coming.*

*Shouts of 'Hazel', the harp, commotion.*

*Hazel is suddenly visible to them all - exposed in the moonlight on the high ledge of the quarry.*

**Edward:** Stop! Stop! You'll drive her...

*But she looks behind her at the pursuing crowd, and as she does so she stumbles and falls over the edge.*

*The dancers stop. All is silent. There is only the sound of her breath for the seconds that she falls. Suddenly in a red light we see her body in its death throes, as she hurtles to the ground. Then all is darkness. Her breath has stopped.*

**Abel:** Gone to Earth...

- How effective was Shared Experience's interpretation and how does it differ to yours?

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Composer

### An Interview with Olly Fox



Paul Parris

#### 1. How do you arrive at creating the sound and music for the play?

Through talking with Helen, the Writer and Nancy, the Director and obviously I read the novel and the script! I try to work as organically as possible and one of the ways to do this is to work closely with Liz, the Movement Director - so much of Shared Experience is movement led.

Also there are nine songs which Helen has written (lyrics and melody) and so another part of my work is arranging these and creating a melodic motif that extends across the whole of the score.



Liz Ranken

#### 2. Were there any specific challenges to overcome?

Yes, writing for the harp which is a law unto itself. It's a Celtic harp which is different from an orchestral harp. Ours has levers instead of pedals and it is hard finding a collection of keys that sounds good. Also balancing actors' voices against the harp.

#### 3. What are the key sounds?

Well obviously the harp, which will be played by a musician on stage each night, she/the harp represented the spirit of Hazel's Mother and also Hazel's relationship to both her Mother and her Father. There is also a fair bit of 'clogging' - the dances that represent Hazel's heartbeat.

#### 4. How does the notion of physical expressionism influence your work on sound?

It makes it bigger and I have a license to be more cinematic - in the sense that the use of movement as an expression of what is going on inside people makes the piece more epic.

#### 5. Do you have a favourite image or scene in the play or novel?

The image of Hazel falling into the quarry.

# Gone to Earth

by Helen Edmundson

## Designer

### An interview with Niki Turner

#### 1. Do you have a favourite image or scene?

I think when Reddin 'flies' the dresses in as bait for Hazel.

#### 2. Do you have any advice for students who would like a career in stage design?

I would recommend getting as much experience in behind the scenes work as you can. I did a degree in theatre design and was signed up by an agent at my design show. I then did some fringe work before beginning designing for larger companies. Prior to my degree I scene painted for a year, which was useful as I met lots of designers.

#### 3. What gave you the idea of the cage? Especially when the novel is so lush and full of nature references?

I didn't want to just illustrate the countryside, I wanted to express more of the emotions, and in the novel, Hazel describes how she feels caught in a trap.

#### 4. Do you plan to watch many rehearsals?

It is always exciting to watch the rehearsal process and see everything develop. It also helps me to be aware about changes in ideas that develop in the rehearsal room. I watch as many as I can.

## Q

- How successful do you feel the design has been?
- Split into four groups. You are a design syndicate for a production of *Gone To Earth* which will be staged;  
a) In the round b) thrust stage c) traverse d) proscenium arch.

Present your ideas to the other 3 groups.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## EXERCISE

- Liz worked with Natalia (Hazel) on developing fox/animal like qualities. In small groups choose a character from the play. What animal are they like? Develop a way of moving/walking that reflects this animal. Play around with levels - how extreme can you be whilst still retaining human believability?
- Cat and Mouse or in *Gone To Earth* Terminology, Fox and Hunter.  
In Large groups, say 22, make 5 rows of 4 people each with their arms outstretched and fingertips touching thereby forming 5 rows or runs. One person is the fox and one the hunter, starting at different sides. The hunter must try and catch the fox that has to run up and down the rows, you can't hang around the edges for too long. At any point you the leader can shout Change! And the rows move 90 degrees thereby changing the rows to a different direction. This is very fast paced and you can change the fox or add another one or more hunters as you wish.

## *Movement Director*

### An Interview with Liz Ranken

#### ***1. How did you research the ideas in this production -especially the clogging?***

I went to Cecil Sharp House -The Institute of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. There I met Pat Tracey, a very famous clog dancer, who had taught Fred Astaire and performed solo concerts at the Royal Albert Hall! I had some group and then private lessons.

#### ***2. Do you have a favourite image or scene from the play or the novel?***

I like the pig killing scene at the beginning. It's also a very challenging scene for the dancers as the sequences are very complicated - they have to have great dexterity in their feet. Luckily all the actors are very good dancers!

#### ***3. What is the difference between working for Shared Experience Theatre and other theatre companies?***

More time is spent training the actors to develop physical strength and to develop physical techniques. Staging often involves creating a physical scenario which comes directly from the point of view of the protagonists.

#### ***4. If a student was interested in becoming a movement director what advice would you give them? Do you have a favourite image or scene?***

I would suggest that they study a degree in dance, learn about Laban's work and Moladen's teaching and practice yoga and pilates.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## What Do I Want?

Each character in the production has a 'want', something that drives them through their lives and the play. This is called the Super Objective. Also there is an 'obstacle' that stops them from achieving their objective.

'Useful words' are images or sounds of words that may help an actor conjure up or inhabit their character.



Natalia Tena

HAZEL WOODUS

<b>Character:</b>	Hazel Woodus
<b>Super Objective:</b>	To be free, to experience everything to the fullest.
<b>Obstacles:</b>	Other people's (Edward's and Reddin's) desires which trap her. When wanting to experience everything in life to the fullest you get trapped by its intensity and left exposed and vulnerable to danger.
<b>Useful Words:</b>	Mercurial, wild, lithe, untameable, auburn fox, yolk yellow, the expression of music, innocent vulnerable creature, a fairy/sprite, the wind as it blows through a poppy field, the intensity of pain behind a tear, the adrenaline in laughter, sugar cakes, delicate beauty.
<b>Favourite line:</b>	'When will I be away, through the wind, through the air, through the waves'.



Paul Parris

JOHN MEARS

<b>Character:</b>	John Mears
<b>Super Objective:</b>	Status, he wants a higher status within the Community and his family.
<b>Obstacles:</b>	Himself.
<b>Useful Words:</b>	Insecure, undermining, cocky, false bravado.
<b>Favourite line:</b>	'A weddin or a beddin either or both'.



# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson



Jay Villiers

## JACK REDDIN

- Character:** Jack Reddin
- Super Objective:** To satisfy all his desires
- Obstacles:** That he is unlovable ('when I see precious things I just want to break them').
- Useful Words:** Possess, own, buy, love, break, smash, horse, hunt, kill, life, love, live.
- Favourite line:** 'Well, well little Hazel no-name, you've given me long enough chase.'



James Staddon

## MR JAMES

- Character:** Mr James
- Super Objective:** Respect
- Obstacles:** Edward Marston
- Useful Words:** Deacon, disgust, respect, congregation
- Favourite line:** 'The time for talking's done, she has to go.'



Simon Wilson

## EDWARD MARSTON

- Character:** Edward Marston
- Super Objective:** To get closer to God
- Obstacles:** God may not exist
- Useful Words:** Protect, serene, renounce, foolish, maroon.
- Favourite line:** 'Her very existence is proof of God'





# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson



Michelle Butterly

## SALLY HAGGARD

<b>Character:</b>	Sally Haggard
<b>Super Objective:</b>	To be loved
<b>Obstacles:</b>	Reddin
<b>Useful Words:</b>	Ginger, disgusting! Cold, thin, shove, grunt, curse, 'ooman growed', my soul, for your own good.
<b>Favourite line:</b>	'The time of the singing of birds is come'



Roderick Smith

## ABEL WOODUS

<b>Character:</b>	Abel Woodus
<b>Super Objective:</b>	To do exactly as he pleases
<b>Obstacles:</b>	His daughter Hazel, Community morality, people in general.
<b>Useful Words:</b>	Natural, harmony, order
<b>Favourite line:</b>	'Gerroff taters!'



Amelda Brown

## MRS MARSTON

<b>Character:</b>	Mrs Marston
<b>Super Objective:</b>	To be Eddie's help-mate
<b>Obstacles:</b>	Hazel
<b>Useful Words:</b>	Shawls, sheep, cakes, My dear, pink, fur-knitting.
<b>Favourite line:</b>	'You know I had always hoped there would be no-one Eddie. But if there has to be I thought at least there would be grandchildren to knit for.'

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Discussion/ Essay Topics

### What Do You Believe?

**Debate the questions and statements below.**



Jay Villiers, Natalia Tena, James Staddon

- Why does Hazel go back to Reddin? Can her actions be viewed in the light of our 21st century understanding of domestic violence?
- When are the key moments in the play for you when the outcome could have gone differently? (consider the choices the characters make and also how fate and religion are believed to influence events)
- Would Hazel have remained with Edward if there was no Jack Reddin?
- It is only human nature to test our power and strength and exert it over others - to subjugate, possess, destroy, control.
- Hazel and Reddin are both caught up in an unending cycle of violence and abuse, passed down from generation to generation.
- There is a need for man to raise himself above the animal through altruism, mercy, compassion and empathy.
- It is dangerous and difficult to try to deny our own natures.

# Gone to Earth

by  
Helen Edmundson

## Writing a Review

### GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A REVIEW

Say what you saw  
Say what you think  
Reflect on your responses  
Write freely from the heart

Don't worry about given theories  
Create your own theories

Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid  
Question that moment  
Find out what it says to you  
Say why it spoke to you

### CONSIDER

- The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
- The set, the costumes, the style of the production
- The themes, the characters, the story, the ending

### The Objects

- The harp, the teapot, the reins, the cakes, the Bible, the clogs, the baby, the dresses

**(and try to say everything you want in just 300 words!)**

Send your review to

Kate Saxon  
Education and Youth Director  
Shared Experience Theatre  
The Soho Laundry  
9, Dufour's Place  
London W1F 7SJ

Or e-mail: [kate@sharedexperience.org.uk](mailto:kate@sharedexperience.org.uk)

