



Sound & Vision ? January 1988

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Article Category:

Sound & Vision

Byline:

News and views about books on radio, TV and in films.

MOONDIAL

The novel version of Helen Cresswell's compelling story **Moondial** was published last autumn. In February the six-part serial which she wrote for television starts on BBC 1.

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Moondial is set in and around the grounds of Belton House in Lincolnshire. Helen Cresswell had for some time wanted to write a story about a National Trust property, partly because she hoped it might benefit from the kind of popular attention **The Secret World of Polly Flint** has brought to its setting, Rufford Country Park in Nottinghamshire. She visited many houses but it was at Belton that her imagination was fired; where perhaps she, like her heroine Minty, felt strongly the presence of another world and another time. She is a writer who admits to being strongly receptive to places, landscapes, echoes of the past and to experiencing uncanny coincidences in her life.

In **Moondial** Minty is brought by her widowed working mother, Kate, to stay for the summer in Aunt Mary's cottage within sight of the big house. Driving home Kate is involved in an accident and, seriously injured, lies in hospital in a coma. Coping with her own grief and anxiety, Minty becomes strangely involved with two equally unhappy ghostly children. Victorian kitchen boy. Tom, is an orphan, ill-treated by his masters; he dreams of growing tall enough to become a footman so he can be reunited with his sister Dorrie. Sarah, from the eighteenth century, is a child of the house but thought of as 'the devil's child' because she is disfigured by a birthmark and left at the mercy of a cruel governess.

The **Moondial**, a sculpture in the gardens, seems to be at the centre of it all, mysteriously able to shift people around in time, demonstrating that more important than linear time is 'the *real* time of hearts and lives'. On its dedication page **Moondial** carries a Latin tag which translated means 'Light and shadow by turns, but always love'; and essentially Helen Cresswell's time fantasy is about the power of love; past and present become powerfully one as Minty tapes her moontime adventures for her unconscious mother to listen to and fights the powers that want to hold people trapped in their pasts.

The television series was filmed on location at Belton House.

Moondial is published by Faber, 0 571 14805 0, £6.95.

THE FINDING

Nina Bawden's story of a boy, found as a baby on the embankment in London, who decides to go in search of his identity, has been adapted for television by Thames TV's **Middle English**. First shown in a 60-minute version in the Christmas holidays, it is being repeated for schools in four 15-minute weekly episodes which started on 12th January. An excellent cast includes Alison Steadman, Moira Lister, Roger Rees and Miriam Margolyes.

The Finding is published in hardback by Gollancz (0 575 03618 4, £6.95) and in paperback by Puffin (0 14 03.2023 7, £1.75).

Also from **Middle English**, in February, a two-episode version of Farrukh Dhondy's **Poona Company**. And, to look forward to, there's an adaptation of Jan Mark's **Trouble Half-Way**, scheduled for the summer term.

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