Abstract

Elizabeth Taylor was one of the major film stars of the twentieth century, embodying all the glamour and allure of Hollywood stardom. Yet her achievements as an actress have often been overshadowed by her beauty and tumultuous life off-screen. To redress this imbalance, Susan Smith offers an illuminating study of Elizabeth Taylor’s work in film, exploring her fascinating trajectory from child to adult star. Smith reveals the influence that Taylor’s early work exerted over her later career and the ways in which her on-screen identity is profoundly rooted in her association with animals and nature. Smith carefully unpicks what made Taylor such a distinctive and dynamic on-screen performer – from the expressive use she made of her eyes to the dramatic significance of her voice – and considers the importance of certain professional collaborations that Taylor forged during her career, most notably her acting partnership with Montgomery Clift.

Dame Elizabeth Rosemond Taylor DBE (February 27, 1932 – March 23, 2011) was a British-American actress, businesswoman, and humanitarian. She began her career as a child actress in the early 1940s, and was one of the most popular stars of classical Hollywood cinema in the 1950s. She continued her career successfully into the 1960s, and remained a well-known public figure for the rest of her life. In 1999, the American Film Institute named her the seventh-greatest female screen legend. Elizabeth Taylor was the ultimate movie star: violet-eyed, luminously beautiful, and bigger than life; although never the most gifted actress, she was the most magnetic, commanding the spotlight with unparalleled power. Whether good (two Oscars, one of the first million-dollar paychecks, and charity work), bad (health and weight problems, drug battles, and other tragedies), or ugly (eight failed marriages, movie disasters, and countless scandals), no triumph or setback was too personal for media consumption.