

The Little Minister

US : 1934 : dir. Richard Wallace : RKO : 110 min
 prod: Pandro S. Berman : scr: Jane Murfin, Sarah Y. Mason, Victor Heerman,
 Mortimer Offner & Jack Wagner : dir.ph.: Henry Gerrard

[Billy Watson](#)
 John Beal; Katharine Hepburn; Donald Crisp; Reginald Denny; Andy Clyde; Alan Hale;
 Lumsden Hare; Beryl Mercer; Dorothy Stickney; Frank Conroy

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Billy Watson in the role of young Micah Dow seems the only interest this holds for the archive. Barrie's plays – like those of Wilde – seemed to bear scant relationship to his life or concerns. A Scottish minister's romance with an aristocrat's wayward daughter? Well... OK..
Source: Moving Picture Boy

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Charming film of James M Barrie story about a Scottish pastor falling in love, with Hepburn radiant in period romance. ***1/2"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"In 1840 Scotland, the gypsy girl with whom new pastor falls unsuitably in love is really the local earl's wayward daughter. Tedious film version of a cloyingly whimsical play."

"Fine production of an old favourite."

– **Variety**

"Although dear Babbie's elfin whimsies are likely to cause teeth-gnashing among unsympathetic moderns, Miss Hepburn plays the part with likeable sprightliness and charm."

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

“J. M. Barrie’s village of Thrums brought to the screen for the third time (Paramount and Vitagraph had both released versions in 1921), somewhat less convincingly, with some of the cast trying to cope with Scots accents. One also needs a strong stomach for the material, about the new minister (John Beal) trying to calm the local weavers, who are being egged on by Bobbie (Katharine Hepburn), an aristocrat who goes around pretending to be a gypsy. The cast includes Donald Crisp, Reginald Denny, Andy Clyde and Alan Hale, in one of his rare bad performances, but who could blame him?”

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

“James M Barrie’s play ought to cloy unto death, but this romance of a Scot minister is charming, subdued and satisfying. *** ”

That Was Hollywood – the 1930s review:

“Katharine Hepburn starred in RKO Radio’s lengthy (110 minutes) adaptation of J. M. Barrie’s novel and play. She was the gypsy lass whose friendship with John Beal’s young minister causes a scandal. Five writers (Jane Murfin, Sarah Y. Mason, Victor Heerman, Mortimer Offner and Jack Wagner) were credited with whipping the emotional drama into shape for Richard Wallace to direct, and Alan Hale, Donald Crisp and Frank Conroy had other roles. With its studio-created Scottish settings, **“THE LITTLE MINISTER”** was particularly expensive to make, but only just failed to recoup its \$648,000 production cost on release. There had been two competing earlier screen versions of the story made in 1921.”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“An early effort in the career of Katharine Hepburn. This charming story, of a proper Scottish minister who falls in love with what he believes is a gypsy girl, is not just for Hepburn fans. ***1/2 ”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Watson:

“Billy was the third and brightest-eyed of the Watson boys – younger than Coy Jr and Harry, older than Delmar, Garry and Bobs. Usually perky, he had to be pathetic as Micah Dow in **“THE LITTLE MINISTER”**, and held his own surprisingly well with Katharine Hepburn.

Billy continued to act. In 1938 he was in **“THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN”**, **“IN OLD CHICAGO”** and **“KIDNAPPED”**, and in the following year in **“MR SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON”**, **“STANLEY AND LIVINGSTONE”** and **“YOUNG MR LINCOLN”**: all prestige films. But he began to switch his professional interest to photography.

In 1958 he joined with his five brothers in the founding of a photographic studio in Los Angeles, though he didn’t quite abandon his earlier career. He is the only one of the Watsons still acting – a regular, for instance, in ABC TV’s **“General Hospital”**.”

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. Call me pernicky, but one would think a book describing itself as *“The Good Film and Video Guide”* would be spared the indignity of reviewing items it clearly thinks sub-standard. There’s no indication from the above that this film holds any interest to the archive at all, aside from the presence of Billy Watson in a minor role, but knowing something of Barrie’s life and psychology does add a little curiosity about what he was writing at the time. Apart from the obvious **“PETER PAN”** (who is never cast as a boy in any case) it’s perhaps surprising how seldom boys figured in his dramatic writing. Watson was 10. He joined several boy-names in **“RAINBOW ON THE RIVER”** (36), but none of his early films – **“TAXI 13”**, **“THE VALIANT”**, **“WANDERLUST”** – made any mark at all.

See subject index under **GYPSIES**, [HISTORY](#) and **RELIGION**.