

Introduction

Cinemas of Boyhood, Part II

Timothy Shary



We are proud to present a second set of essays on the topic of boyhood in cinema, adding to those that appeared in issue 8.2 of this journal. Again, the range of interests is eclectic, further illustrating the diverse concerns that boyhood's representation evinces in movies and all media.

My introductory comments in the previous issue focused on the compelling research about boyhood that has provoked so much discussion in the field over the past two decades, from political sociology and pop psychology to specific studies of the representation of boys in cinema. Given the scope of films discussed in this issue, from Britain and India as well as from silent Hollywood and so-called new Hollywood in the 1980s, I direct my overview to relevant films about boyhood, and to the young actors in them, that have instigated cogent analyses such as those presented here.

Peter Lee's article on the gendered evolution, as it were, of Jackie Coogan in the 1920s brings out many relevant historical tensions about how boyhood has been negotiated on- and off-screen during this decade. Lee points out that Coogan was not the first boy star—he names "Vitagraph Boy" Kenneth Casey, to whom we could add Ben Alexander, John Tansey, Raymond Hackett, and Gordon Griffith—but Coogan became the most famous of his era. He was followed in the next decade by Jackie Cooper who, for his title role in *Skippy* (1931) when he was barely nine years old, became the first child ever nominated for an Academy Award, and who then went on to greater fame in *The Champ* (1931), *The Bowery* (1933), and *Treasure Island* (1934). Coogan and Cooper, alas, became sad paradigms of child stars whose notoriety would soon fade as they entered adolescence, a fate that befell the most famous child star of the 1930s, Shirley Temple, as well as successors such as Bobby Driscoll and Claude Jarman, Jr., who each won great acclaim in hit films of 1946, respectively, *Song of the South* and *The*



Yearling (for which Jarman won a special Academy Award). All these boys were denied respectable adult roles later in life, and the industry continues to exhibit this implicit prejudice against boys' talent as they age into manhood. Witness the more modern fates of Macaulay Culkin, star of *Home Alone*, the biggest film of 1990, and Haley Joel Osment, who was Oscar-nominated for *The Sixth Sense* (1999), neither of whom had a prominent role after the age of 14.

In his article Andy Pope moves our focus to Britain in the 1980s with his examination of films of the 2000s that reflected on patriarchy at that time, particularly *This is England* (2006) and *Son of Rambow* (2007), in which adult authors and directors looked back at their own boyhoods during the turbulent Thatcher decade. With *If...* (1968) and *Kes* (1969), British cinema has a rich tradition of films on boyhood, as Pope foregrounds in his commentary; further examples range from *Oliver Twist* (1948) to *Hope and Glory* (1987), and the eight *Harry Potter* films from 2001 to 2011. If we look more broadly at postwar European cinema, we cannot forget the film that helped to inaugurate the French New Wave—Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959)—as well as other French classics about boys such as *Murmur of the Heart* (1971), *Au Revoir Les Enfants* (1987), and *The Son of the Shark* (1993). In Italy, another film about boys inaugurated a movement just after the war—De Sica's neorealist *Shoeshine* (1946); in West Germany, *The Trapp Family* (1956) would inspire the American blockbuster *The Sound of Music* (1965); and Andrei Tarkovsky made his debut in the Soviet Union with *Ivan's Childhood* (1962). Boys continue to captivate in more recent European productions such as *El Bola* (Spain, 2000), *Libero* (Italy, 2006), *Grave Decisions* (Germany, 2006), *Flight of the Red Balloon* (France, 2007), *The Kid with a Bike* (Belgium, 2011), and *Goodnight Mommy* (Austria, 2014).

Natasha Anand focuses on just one film in her article—*Taare Zameen Par*—an Indian production from 2007 that was released in the US as *Like Stars on Earth*. Through her sensitive study of protagonist Ishaan, an eight-year-old coping with a learning disability, she argues for many revisions in perceptions of boys' education and behavior. International films outside European culture have given us many enchanting images of boys that may be limited to their domestic markets without major film festival attention, such as the special Cannes award that helped propel another Indian film that became a canonical boyhood study, *Pather Panchali*, in 1955. Boys' experiences—and often suffering—continued to be the subjects of films beyond the European market, such as *Pixote* (Brazil, 1981), *Village of Dreams* (Japan, 1996), *Children of Heaven* (Iran, 1997), *Kamchatka* (Argentina,

2002), *Under the Same Moon* (Mexico, 2007), and the recent Oscar nominee, *Theeb* (Jordan, 2015).

We also have two articles that examine movies about teenage boys during the illustrious era of 1980s American teen cinema. Molly Lewis takes a somewhat auteuristic approach in her examination of Francis Ford Coppola's two teen films of 1983, both based on novels by S.E. Hinton—*The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*—finding significance in the director's own boyhood experiences to explain his investment in these two unusual productions. Daniel Smith-Rowsey, in a shorter invited article, makes a case for the significant boyishness of an often overlooked character in the 1980s pantheon of notorious young men, Marty McFly from *Back to the Future* (1985). He mentions many of the well-known films that catered to boys in that venerated decade. Hollywood has continued to promote the pursuits of boys more than girls ever since, as seen in popular productions such as *Boyz N the Hood* (1991), *American Pie* (1999), *Friday Night Lights* (2004), *Superbad* (2007), *Hugo* (2011), and *Chronicle* (2012).

Cinema is still a fertile ground for the evaluation and celebration of boyhood, while it remains capacious enough to welcome more films about girls' experiences. The recent success of series such as *Twilight* (2008–2012), *The Hunger Games* (2012–2015), and the ongoing *Divergent* (2014–2017) films indicates that serious stories about young female protagonists can appeal to a wide audience and avoid alienating the male cohort that drives so much of the market. Indeed, these films also rely on boys as key characters, and we will benefit from further films that portray boyhood with sensitivity and intensity while recognizing its ever-changing nature within a culture that enjoys a healthy questioning of gender.



TIMOTHY SHARY has published widely on youth and film. He is author of *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* (University of Texas Press, 2002; revised 2014) and *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen* (Wallflower Press, 2005), editor of *Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema* (Wayne State, 2013), and co-editor (with Alexandra Seibel) of *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* (Texas, 2007). He has more recently co-edited *ReFocus: The Films of Amy Heckerling* with Frances Smith (Edinburgh, 2016) and written a new book with Nancy McVittie, *Fade to Gray: Aging in American Cinema*, due out from Texas UP later this August. Email: tshary17@gmail.com



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