

films and filming

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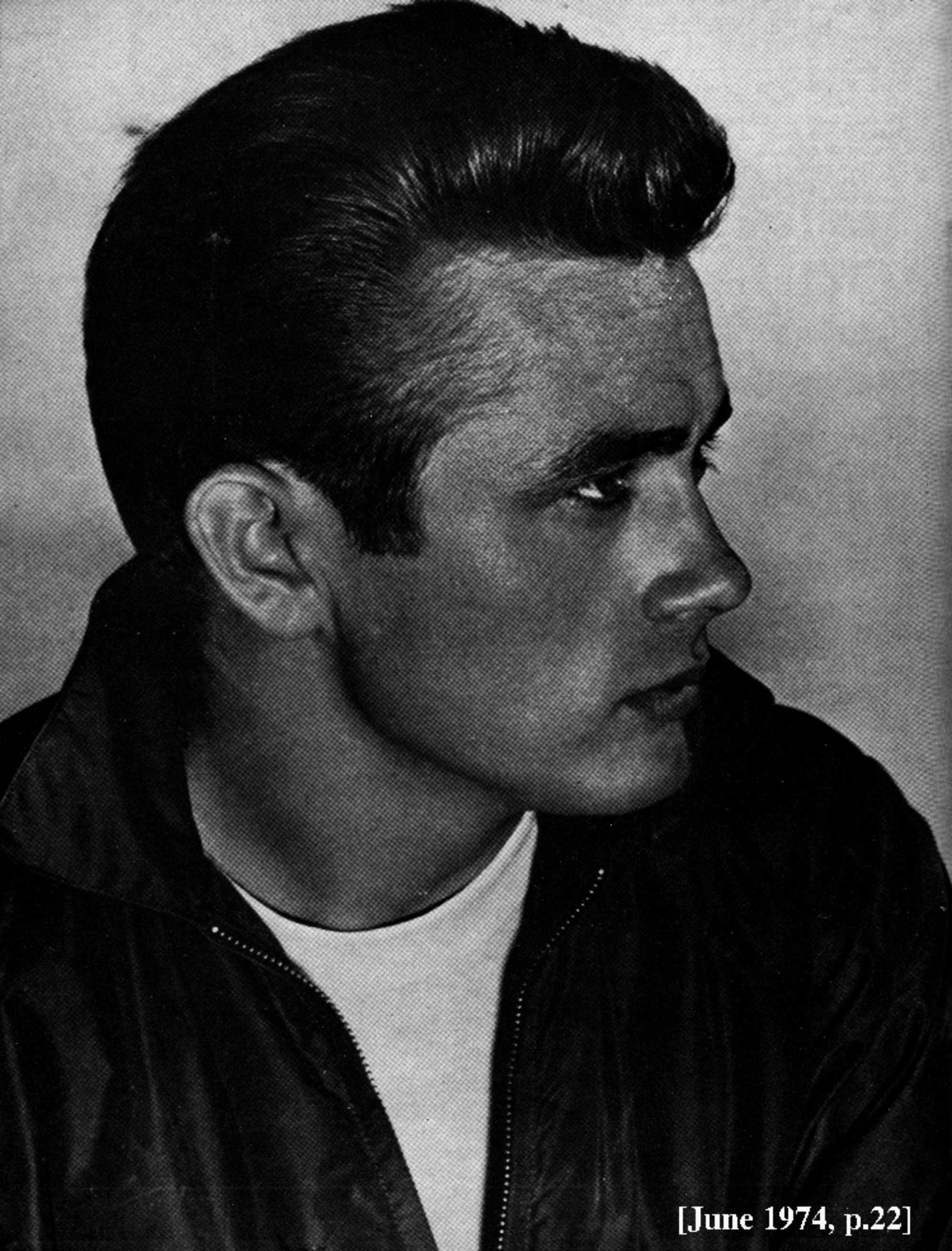
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Cover: Maria A Beluzzi as the Tobacconist, who becomes the subject of a schoolboys' bet, in Federico Fellini's 'Amarcord'—see page 37

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[June 1974, p.22]

Author's Note: The apostrophe in the title was NOT in my manuscript!

Where have all the father's gone?

GERALD JONES

PART ONE

MOVIES have always been more than mere entertainment, more than simple stories dealing with life—in short, more than what we see on the surface. The subject material of motion pictures becomes a mirror of the times, and movies are usually an accurate reflection of the past, present and future direction of our social temperament. It has always been the task of the artist to reflect what he sees in life in such a way as to enhance reality—to improve the condition of his audience if they are willing to take his advice. And this 'artistic responsibility' applies more, perhaps, to the art-form of cinema than to any other, because of the completeness with which an audience can identify with what is portrayed on the screen. Social temperament, therefore, affects what we see on the screen and what we see on the screen affects social temperament.

Interpersonal relationships are, of course, the basic stuff of which drama is made, and family relationships have always been a favourite with screenwriters. In film stories of the 1930s—when movies were 'growing up'—we see the definite emergence of an important theme, as more and more movies portrayed that special relationship that can develop between 'father' and 'son'. Sometimes the man in such stories is actually the father of the boy, and sometimes a situation develops in which a man is 'like a father' to the boy, but may be an uncle or close friend. In both situations, however, the elements of the relationship are the same: the boy sees in the man the qualities that

he would like to emulate, and the moral of the story is drawn around the warm and tender experiences of the man reaching out and helping the boy to grow. These relationships, as reflected in films, are the subject of this article.

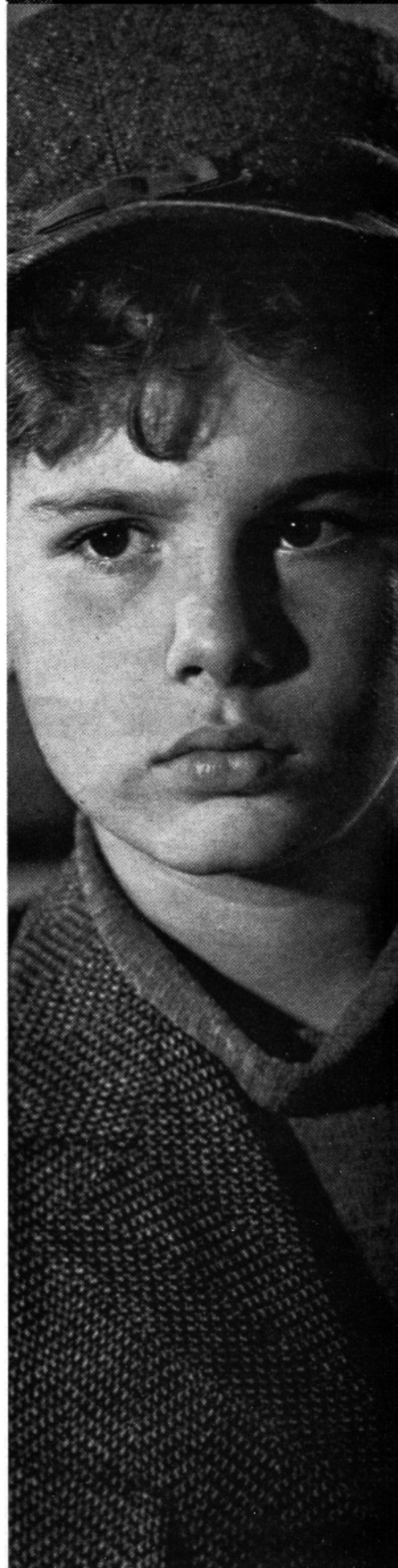
After an initial period of experimentation and momentum-building, the film industry began to settle into a growth pattern which paralleled and reflected the growth taking place at the same time in American society. The early years of the twentieth century were gawky, crazy, childish years: the melodrama of the teens, against the backdrop of a far-away World War which few people understood; the abandon and gaiety of the 'twenties, a time when America became so quickly affluent that all the people could think about was themselves. Much of the drama of those times dealt with shallow romance, superficial 'boy-girl' plots, and very seldom with deeper relationships.

But the jolting depression and the inevitable second world conflict gave a new dimension to American thought. Johnny Doe was maturing, gaining responsibility. Manhood was becoming very important to him—not, as is generally supposed, for his protection, but because manhood was the key to his basic human progress. He knew that a fuller, richer life was only possible through the widening awareness and deeper feeling of maturity. He realised that this maturity has its roots in a secure masculine identity, and so the process of obtaining that identity was naturally of great interest to him. Of course, none

James Dean—'fifties hero of the generation gap who strived to 'communicate' with his father in 'East of Eden' and 'Rebel Without a Cause'

this caption is for the picture on the facing (previous) page (p.22)

Dean Stockwell, Hollywood's most famous child actor of the post-war period, who a decade later took over the leading sensitive roles after the death of James Dean



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of these were conscious thoughts, but the young men (indeed, all of the people) of the 'between-war' period were anxious to know the stuff of which manhood was made, and how to go about obtaining it. The whole subject of 'growing up' and maturing became a very popular and widely-treated theme in the films of that period.

It all began slowly, in simple stories of fathers and sons and the bond between them. As he did in so many areas of film-making, Charlie Chaplin pioneered the 'father-son' film story in his moving 1921 picture, *The Kid*, which co-starred Jackie Coogan in his screen debut. Actually, the tyke was an orphan of sorts who was left on the 'Tramp's' doorstep, abandoned by his mother; however, Chaplin raised the kid as his own and they obviously love each other as much as any father and son. In spite of their life of poverty, they enjoy each other's company and generally have a satisfying life together until the local welfare department decides the boy would have a better home at the orphans' institution. Chaplin's frantic efforts to escape with the boy and the incredible terror portrayed on the kid's young face at the prospect of being separated from his 'father' combine for one of the most heart-rending moments in film history.

We are all aware of films which bring classic novels to life on the screen. Such was the case with *Sorrel and Son*, which was made in 1927 as a silent film and re-

made in 1934 as a talkie. ~~Warner-Baxter~~ played Captain Sorrel in both productions, a proud, dedicated officer of His Majesty's Army who, in the post-war depression in England was forced to make his living as a hotel porter. *Daily Variety* spoke of the appeal of this film in simple terms: 'Through it all, the father and son theme is never relegated to the background. They're pals.' *Variety* also makes an interesting point regarding these films in general: 'It may be a cinch to pull the mother-love thing for box office angles, but the love of a father and son may be intensified many times, although a precarious proposition . . . While the film mob is always willing to accept and ready to understand the heartaches of a mother, they don't fall so hard when it's the old man who is suffering'.

The audiences must have been accepting and understanding, because by the end of the 1920's the trend was definitely gaining popularity. In 1929, the world's ugliest movie star, Louis Wolheim, played a hero-turned-tramp who returns to his old town to find his son (Junior Coughlin) without a home. To provide the boy with an education, Dad turns crook just long enough to pay the bill for military academy, then gets a job at the school as a stableman so he can be near the boy. The film is *Square Shoulders*; it ends with Wolheim's death at the hands of his former crime-partners when he tries to stop them from robbing the academy, and the



'Tarzan Finds a Son' (1939) with Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan and five-year-old Johnny Sheffield as the Boy. They continued their relationship through several films until 1947 when Sheffield became too big for the role

Pioneer of the 'father-son' film story: Charlie Chaplin with Jackie Coogan in 'The Kid' (1921)

These refer to the same film: *Tarzan's Desert Mystery* is the release title, and *Tarzan Against the Sahara* was a working title. *

boy never realises that the man who has become his friend is really his father. Another film from 1929 was *Father's Son*, a seemingly perfect title for a father-son study, but in fact a rather disappointing story from that point of view. The film was re-made in 1931 with an improved, but still incomplete relationship between Leon Janney and his distant, pre-occupied father, Lewis Stone. Because his father is too busy to take time for his son, the boy gets into minor scrapes with everybody until the town doctor, played by John Halliday, realises the boy's problem and at last gives him the attention and understanding he needs. This is an early example of the 'ineffectual father' image which has so characterised the films and TV shows of more recent years. Happily, though, the film ends with the boy and father reconciled, and all the shop-keepers in town breathing a little easier!

Much has been written about the Tarzan films, which appeared one after another, relentlessly throughout the 'twenties, 'thirties and 'forties. Many of these films were fine examples of 'man' and 'boy' working and living together, learning from each other and meeting all odds, striving always towards the happy ending. Anything that can be said of father-son films in general is also true of the Tarzan films. They represent somewhat of a microcosm of all the various possible man-boy relationships explored in pic-

tures. 'Boy' was sometimes a real son, sometimes merely a friend and companion for Tarzan. Some films dealt with the family relationship of Tarzan-Jane-Boy (-Cheetah!), and some dealt only with Tarzan and Boy. The first film in which a boy appeared along with Tarzan was Universal's serial of 1928, *Tarzan The Mighty*, starring Frank Merrill as Tarzan and Bobby Nelson as the boy. Young Nelson was the little brother of Tarzan's new-found romantic interest—her name in the films was Mary Travers—whom he later marries. In sequels, Mary Travers becomes Jane once again, and Boy does not reappear until 1939.

After many variations on the Tarzan theme and numerous different men playing Tarzan, Johnny Weissmuller surfaced as the definitive 'Ape Man', and began a long career during which he played nothing but the jungle hero. Maureen O'Sullivan, who was Jane throughout the 1930s, was also becoming synonymous with her role, and it was that very fact, along with her unwillingness to become further type-cast that led to the revival of the 'Boy' character. The studio executives decided that the only way to get Jane out of the long-running series was to have her die at the end of a film; of course they had to do something to salvage audience interest in the series, so their plan was to add a son to the family. Since Tarzan and Jane weren't married, they would have to find

a son (not, for heaven's sake, conceive one!), but this was easily accomplished: a boy was rescued as the only survivor of a plane crash in which both of his parents were killed, and Tarzan and Jane became his new mom and dad. The film was entitled *Tarzan Finds A Son*, released in 1939, whereupon a long and beautiful association was begun. Weissmuller was given a seven-year contract and he personally selected five-year-old Johnny Sheffield for the role of Boy. Weissmuller was very fond of young Sheffield, treating him like the son he never had. This off-screen relationship carried over into the film roles and possibly for that reason, Sheffield and Weissmuller muscled and buddied their way through *Tarzan's Secret Treasure* (1941), *Tarzan's New York Adventure* (1942), *Tarzan Triumphs* (1943), *Tarzan Against The Sahara* (1943), *Tarzan's Desert Mystery* (1943), *Tarzan And The Amazons* (1945), *Tarzan And The Leopard Woman* (1946) and *Tarzan And The Huntress* (1947). After Sheffield became too big to play Boy any longer, he became *Bomba*, *The Jungle Boy* in another series of his own, and Weissmuller appeared in only one more Tarzan film. It was then up to others to carry on the tradition: Lex Barker as Tarzan and Tommy Carlton as Boy starred in *Tarzan's Savage Fury* (1952), Gordon Scott and Rickie Sorenson played the duo in *Tarzan's Fight For Life* (1958), and Jock



The first time a boy appeared with Tarzan was in the 1928 'Tarzan the Mighty', with Frank Merrill as Tarzan and Bobby Nelson as the Boy

Freddie Bartholomew as a wistful little king who is kidnapped by a soldier of fortune (Victor McLaglen) in 'Professional Soldier' (1936)





Roddy McDowall and Walter Pidgeon in 'How Green Was My Valley' (1941), about a family of simple, honest Welsh folk



Mickey Rooney in 'Boys' Town' (1938)

Mahoney and Jai, the Elephant Boy, were featured in *Tarzan Goes To India* (1962). It is obvious that, again following the same pattern as father-son films generally, the greatest popularity of Tarzan-Boy films was in the late-'thirties-to-mid-'forties era, with their frequency steadily decreasing after that. One exception was the most recent in the Tarzan series, Paramount's *Tarzan And The Jungle Boy* (1968), in which Mike Henry meets the young ~~Ronald Gans~~, a white boy who has grown up wild in the jungle after being separated from his family. Their friendship develops because each is just plain tired of being lonely. The feelings are summed up beautifully when Boy says simply to Tarzan, 'Sometimes in the night I would like someone to talk to. Would you stay with me?' He does.

The Child Stars

AS WE HAVE SEEN, the between-war period was the hey-day of films dealing with father-son relationships. More and more films began treating the subject to the point that child actors became very important to the story-line and began appearing as stars in their own right. Some boys made a career of playing the growing boy who looks with admiration to the mature man as his example and inspiration.

One of the first stars in this arena was the impish, indomitable Jackie Cooper, and his films with Wallace Beery are classics in their own right. Jackie was born in Los Angeles in 1922, and a mere nine years later he appeared for the first time with the man who was to become his screen father. King Vidor directed *The Champ* (1931), in which Beery played a down-and-out prizefighter who decides the only way to win the respect of his son is to make a comeback. The boy lives for a while in luxurious comfort with his mother, but decides to come back to a life of poverty and a dad with whom he shares a great affection. 'Instead of the usual

sweetheart watching at ringside,' writes one reviewer of the fight sequences, 'there is little Dink, whose bright eyes urge on his father.' Four years later, the Cooper-Beery team made another similar picture. In *O'Shaughnessy's Boy* (1935), Jackie Cooper, now thirteen, is taken by his mother when she leaves her circus-performer husband. Beery, who is an animal trainer, can no longer concentrate on his work, loses his courage, and his arm, before he makes up his mind to spend his life looking for the boy. The feeling of audiences toward this touching portrayal was probably summed up by critic Andre Sennwald when he said, 'These professional eyes were blurred when Stubby crawled into the pullman berth with his dad and cried himself to sleep.' In 1934, Cooper and Beery also made *Treasure Island*, the classic adaptation of Stevenson's novel in which Long John Silver and Jim Hawkins sail the high seas together in search of riches and adventure.

Probably the most experienced player in the younger role of a father-son relationship was Freddie Bartholomew, the curly-headed super-star who came to America with his Aunt Myllicent (Cissy) in 1934 and was discovered that very year. He was seen with a number of very important adult stars, including Warner Baxter, Basil Rathbone, Victor McLaglen, Spencer Tracy, Lionel Barrymore and—yes—W C Fields. In 1936 Freddie made two films in which his role involved a relationship with the male lead. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy* he plays a Brooklyn boy who falls heir to an earldom and journeys to England to live with his uncle, the Earl of Dorincourt. C Aubrey Smith plays the stern old Earl who was softened by his nephew's trust and affection. *Professional Soldier* is a strange story of a mythical kingdom and its 11-year-old ruler. Bartholomew, as the wistful little king, is kidnapped by a soldier of fortune (Victor McLaglen) who has been paid to abduct the boy. The youthful monarch mistakes McLaglen for Dillinger (!) and to the surprise of his kidnapper insists on joining

the gang. The 'gang' consists of Michael Whalen, the Professional Soldier's part-time assistant, and Gloria Stuart, the king's governess—both of whom were added to the plot, obviously, for the romantic interest. The real interest, however, is in the relationship between McLaglen and Bartholomew, called by the *New York Times* 'The most amazing co-starring team in film history.' The next year, 1937, Kipling's *Classic Captains Courageous* was brought to the screen and with it a moving story of a 12-year old scamp (Bartholomew) who falls off an ocean liner and is rescued by a Portuguese fisherman (Spencer Tracy). The boy is really a spoiled brat, but he idolises Manuel (Tracy), a rugged but kindly figure who takes the boy under his wing and changes his life. When Manuel is killed and the boy returns to his family, he finds it difficult to allow his father, who was never very close to begin with, to take the place of the fisherman; in an emotional scene and a powerful performance by Bartholomew, he becomes a grieving, bewildered little boy who has lost the one person he really loved. Freddie Bartholomew also appeared with Warner Baxter in the Stevenson tale *Kidnapped* (1938), and played the title role in *David Copperfield* (1935). In the latter film he had a stern taskmaster in the person of Basil Rathbone, but was touchingly befriended by W C Fields in his only dramatic role.

Mickey Rooney was one of the top box-office stars in the 1930's and 1940's and he was cast as the son in a number of pictures. In fact, most of the films in which he played a son were in the famous 'Andy Hardy' series which began with *A Family Affair* (1937) and continued through *Love Laughs At Andy Hardy* (1946). This was a saccharine series of medium-budget films depicting what everyone thought was the typical American family. Though the stories were just a bit beyond belief at times, the ever present 'man-to-man' talks were somewhat refreshing. Judge Hardy, always an even-tempered, fair and honest father to Andy,



Freddie Bartholomew and Spencer Tracy in 'Captains Courageous' (1936)



and Gregory Peck in 'Gentleman's Agreement' (1947), directed by Elia Kazan who went deeper into father-son relationships later with 'East of Eden' and 'Splendour in the Grass'

was played by Lionel Barrymore in the first episode and by Lewis Stone thereafter. In 1958 a fortunately unsuccessful attempt was made to revive the series with *Andy Hardy Comes Home*. Andy is, of course, grown by now and he decides to revisit his old home town, bringing a family of his own by this time. The father-son talks are still part of the tradition, but this time the roles are reversed and Rooney is now speaking fatherly words to *his* son, played by his own real-life son Teddy. Before he was old enough to be Judge Hardy's son (Andy Hardy was *born* an adolescent), Rooney played the son of Raymond Hatton, a circus performer who was hitting the skids of life, in *The Big Cage*, released in 1933 when Mickey was thirteen but looked nine. Hatton's circus career in the film goes steadily downhill, but he is loved by his faithful son in spite of it all. Most of the rest of Mickey Rooney's films (and there were *many*!) deal with friend relationships and romances, with the notable exception of *Boys' Town* (1938). That film and its sequel and spinoffs are discussed later.

In 1928, London was the birthplace of one of the best actors of the child stars, Roddy McDowall. His handsome face and charming smile won him the parts and his ability to create characters and sustain very convincing performances even at a young age won him the critics' praise very early in his career. He made several films in the early 'forties when he was a young teenager which depicted father-son relationships of widely varying types. The action in *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) revolved around the Morgans, a family of simple, honest Welsh folk. The story is told as seen through the eyes of Huw (Roddy McDowall), the youngest of the brood. It is a story of Huw's 'dada', a strong but gentle man, and of the pastor of the community, Mr Gruffydd (Walter Pidgeon), who inspired Huw with spiritual zeal and a thirst for knowledge which helped him all his life. In 1942 Monty Woolley co-starred with McDowall in *Pied Piper*, a tale of the tribulations of a

crotchety old Englishman who finds he must escort two children out of Nazi-devastated France and back to Britain. Along the way other orphans join the group and the man's original resentment toward the task turns to a willingness to sacrifice everything he has for the kids' safety. *On The Sunny Side* (1942) is again the story of an orphan, this time a boy from London who comes to live with an American family. His presence is resented at first by the family's son, but they work out their problems with the help of the father and mother, and all turns out for the best. *My Friend Flicka*, a film from 1943, is a 'boy and his dog' type of film, only in this one the animal happens to be a horse. These kind of films often followed a similar formula, though, and this one is no exception. The animal gets in some kind of a jam (in *Flicka*, the horse is about to die during a storm) and the boy determines against all odds that he will save the stricken pet. Inevitably in these films the boy has a father who is skeptical about the future of the animal (and is usually somewhat distant from the boy as well). Through the miraculous recovery, the father sees the results of his son's solid faith, and their relationship as father and son is strengthened. Preston Foster played Roddy McDowall's father in *My Friend Flicka*.

In 1949, the *Motion Picture Herald* named Dean Stockwell the 'Star of Tomorrow.' He was nine years old when he appeared with Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945). In 1946 he appeared with an all-star cast in *The Green Years*. Here once again, the boy in the story is an orphan, this time an Irish lad who went to live in the Scottish home of his grandparents and there grew to sound and seasoned manhood, due in large part to the tender relationship of the boy to the old grandfather (Charles Coburn). Another orphan tale, *The Mighty McGurk* (1947) is strongly reminiscent of *The Champ*; Wallace Beery plays an ex-prize-fight champ who is now a bouncer in a cafe on the Bowery, and ends up taking

care of an English orphan. It does them both good. Gregory Peck played a father to Dean Stockwell in the Academy-award-winning 'best picture' of 1947, *Gentleman's Agreement*. The story mainly revolves around Peck's posing as a Jew in order to write an article on anti-semitism in the United States. His son and the whole family are brought into the sad effects of the prejudice that follows. *Deep Waters* (1948), still another orphan story, is a romance between Jean Peters and Dana Andrews, a man who makes his living as a fisherman; but this story is unusual in that it is the boy, Dean Stockwell, who finally brings the couple together through *his* admiration of the fisherman. Miss Peters is in love with Andrews all right, but won't admit it to herself; when Andrews arouses the boy's inborn interest in fishing, the lady won't let the lad go with the man—because of her own mixed-up feelings! The boy's frustration causes him to run away and get himself into quite a bit of trouble. It is the strength and understanding of Andrews that eventually sets the boy on the right road, which leads of course to the reconciliation of everyone involved. The ocean-going theme of *Deep Waters* was continued in *Down To The Sea In Ships* (1949), and this time Stockwell was the orphaned grandson of Lionel Barrymore, who takes him to sea in an effort to educate him and instill in the child the family's sea-faring traditions. Captain Joy (Barrymore) is a stern but just master, and quietly suffers deeply when the lad gives his affection to the more likeable first-mate (Richard Widmark). Only when the captain dies in an accident and Widmark and Stockwell bring the ship safely to port does the boy realise the injustice he's done to his lost grandfather. Dean Stockwell was another of the child actors whose performances were always first-rate. He was a fitting complement to the many fine actors with whom he worked, playing the son or young friend with sensitivity and charm.

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American Sons

THERE WERE a number of films in this period ('30s and '40s) which featured actors who were not usually seen in this type of role, but the nature of these films and the stars in them makes them worth mentioning in such a survey as this. Gene Reynolds was in at least nineteen films from 1936 to 1942, and most of these were stories in which he played the part of the male lead 'as a boy'. But there are two films which are worthwhile examples of father-son roles in which this handsome young man starred: in the western classic *Santa Fe Trail* (1940) he plays the son of John Brown (Raymond Massey); and then, in *The Penalty* (1941), he plays in two different father-son-type situations. First, he is seen as the son of a notorious gangster (Edward Arnold) who has deep feelings for his son, but is preoccupied with his own criminal endeavours; then, after a series of violent escapes with his father, the boy is caught and committed to the custody of a kindly young farmer (Robert Sterling). The boy's better instincts flower in no time as he develops relationships with the farmer and the farmer's grandfather (Lionel Barrymore).

A number of films have dealt with the 'down-and-out' man becoming a worthwhile citizen through his relationship to a boy who really cares for and idolises him. (Notable treatments of this theme were *The Champ* and *O'Shaughnessy's Boy*.) In yet another variation on this theme, Adolph Menjou portrays a drunken bum (quite a departure from Menjou's usual roles) who is befriended by a stable boy (Roger Daniel). Together they buy a questionable horse and turn him into a champion. The boy becomes a great jockey and everyone is happy, especially when we find out that all along the boy has been Menjou's long-lost son. This interesting twist, like so many dramatic devices, is a holdover from the Victorian novel (an influence which the film industry took a long time to outgrow). The film, entitled *King of the Turf* (1939), suffers from too many co-incidental contrivances, but is nevertheless a worthwhile story of father-son devotion, made more interesting by the fact that they don't even realise they are related.

We are again reminded of *The Champ* in the 1939 film *Invitation To Happiness*, in which Fred MacMurray plays a fighter who tries to gain the love and

* realise (or, in America, realize)

James MacArthur as the 16 year-old who threatens to disgrace his family in the eyes of a father who is too ready to believe the worst of him, in John Frankenheimer's *The Young Stranger* (1956). The film was known as 'the crew-cut project' as MacArthur was 18, Frankenheimer was aged 25, with producer Stuart Millar (26) and writer Robert Dozier (26)

this caption is for the picture on the facing (previous) page (p.22)

Concluding a study of the father and son relationship in American Cinema by GERALD JONES

Gene Reynolds as the son of a gangster who is committed to the custody of a kindly farmer (Robert Sterling) in 'The Penalty' (1941)



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Claude Jarman Jr with Gregory Peck in 'The Yearling' (1946) Bobby Driscoll with Robert Newton in the 1950 'Treasure Island'

respect of his son (Billy Cook) after being the kind of father who was away so much he was virtually a stranger. His wife (Irene Dunn) finally leaves him and it is not until he fights his best and loses against the champion that he wins back his son's respect and regains the love of his wife.

* deer (fawn)

In this category must be mentioned the classic story *The Yearling* (1946), another story of a boy and his horse in which Gregory Peck plays the sensitive, understanding father of Claude Jarman, Jr. Also in 1946 Walt Disney produced *Song of the South*, which was rarely seen until its re-issue in 1972. It is the story of Uncle Remus (James Baskett), a black man who lives on the grounds of a great Southern mansion and tells stories to the kids, including the white son of the master of the house. The live-action story is just a frame for the animated 'Br'er Rabbit' tales which Uncle Remus tells, but there is a definite warm relationship between the old black story-teller and the young Master Johnny (Bobby Driscoll). After a problem arises when Johnny believes one of the stories, his mother forbids the heartbroken Uncle Remus to tell the boy any more. Feeling useless, Uncle Remus packs and leaves, and Johnny is terrified to lose his best friend who has taken the place of his own absent father. Later, Johnny is seriously injured and lapses into a coma, making it necessary for his father to come home suddenly. Nobody seems to

be able to bring Johnny out of his unconscious state, until Uncle Remus hears that Johnny has been calling for him and goes up to see him. The presence of Remus revives the little boy and the father is both grateful and aware of his own neglect, resolving to be a better father in the future.

When a film is successful in Hollywood, you can be sure to see similar plots, sequels and sometimes complete re-makes of it in the future. *David Copperfield* was filmed twice, and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* three times. *Sorrel and Son*, as we have seen, was made once as a silent film and once as a talkie, using the same star in both productions. *The Champ* gave rise to such films as *The Mighty McGurk*. And the success of *Treasure Island* has led it through two silent films (both of which had girls playing the part of Jim Hawkins!), the 1934 version with Wallace Beery and Jackie Cooper, the 1950 remake with Robert Newton and Bobby Driscoll, and the last in the series (so far) made in 1972 starring Orson Welles and Kim Burfield. In addition there was a spinoff of the 1950 *Treasure Island* success, a pedestrian effort entitled *Long John Silver* (1954), in which Robert Newton and Kit Taylor go home with the treasure and become humanitarians, of all things! (Literary 'piracy', quips Bosley Crowther). *Long John Silver* even became a television show with Newton and Taylor, lasting only one season in 1955.

There was also a string of films dealing with delinquent youths and their benefactors, a string which began with the famous story of Father Flanagan and his *Nebraska Boys' Town* (1938). Spencer Tracy starred as the benevolent Father who took care of the likes of Mickey Rooney, Gene Reynolds and a host of other big and little child stars. Then came *Men of Boys' Town* (1941), again with Tracy and Rooney, but this time supported by the pixyish Darryl Hickman and Rooney's pal, Bobs Watson. There were still others trying to cash in on the success, one of which was *Boys' Ranch*, obviously relying on the similarity of the title to *Boys' Town*. *Boys' Ranch*, however, was basically about only two boys, a good one (Butch Jenkins) and a bad one (Skippy Homeier). As an experiment, they are placed on a ranch instead of in reform school after some misdeeds, and the 'bad' kid nearly ruins the experiment until he is 'regenerated' by the ex-ball player (James Craig) who takes the kids under his protective care.

The late 'forties saw a definite decline in the frequency of father-son films compared to the years previous. These types of stories have continued in films to the present day, but they are now the exception rather than the rule. The reason for their decline is most easily explained when we understand the changing society. Much has been said and written about the lack of sensitivity in society and the breakdown

* influential

W C Fields with Freddie Bartholomew in 'David Copperfield' (1935)

of the family in recent years. Ours is not a society in which males are more secure in their masculinity, but one in which men—fathers in particular—are no longer thought of as suitable examples. Whatever the case, it is a safe bet that trends such as these will be reflected in the films. Since the end of World War II, it has been rare to find audiences wiping their eyes at warm, intimate screen relationships and feeling the deep, positive identification they once enjoyed so much, especially in father-son films. The films have been there, occasionally throughout the last 25 years, but there are not enough of them to maintain any continuity, and they are therefore much less meaningful. It is apparent that television has for some reason established the image of the bumbling father—in many cases the absent father—who is the object of derision, the constant butt of every joke, instead of the source of inspiration for those who need him. When the inept TV father became the predominant picture of fatherhood, the magic went out of the father 'image' in films as well, and the boy, searching for help and direction, had to turn to his peers, Mom, or his own largely violence-oriented, impetuous youth, none of which could really substitute adequately.

Many people have pointed to the post-war 'fifties as the time when the youth-

protest-counterculture movement began getting on its feet. It is no coincidence, then, that positive father-son relationships were few, and the dominant relationship on the screen was one of struggle and conflict. The *New York Times* has described that period as a time when 'the problems of youth from dope to delinquency were shown without fear of box-office failure'.

It all seemed to break loose in 1955, with the appearance of no less than five major films with some sort of generation conflict. In *Blackboard Jungle* Glenn Ford played a teacher who had his hands full with delinquency in his classroom. Also in 1955, *Night of the Hunter* featured Robert Mitchum as a psychopath who posed as a minister and married Shelley Winters in an effort to find a hidden 10,000 dollars. His step-children were the only ones who knew the hiding place, and Mitchum was hardly the model father as he killed their mother and virtually drove the kids into hiding, until they could expose his true intentions. *Night of the Hunter* was directed by Charles Laughton, and also starred Lillian Gish, James Gleason and Peter Graves.

1955 was also the year when Elia Kazan, widely regarded as the most influential director in Hollywood in the 1950's, gave the alienated youth its own folk-hero, in the person of the legendary



Alan Ladd and his son David, as devoted father and son, in 'The Proud Rebel' (1958)

Robert Mitchum as the psychopath trying to trace a hidden 10,000 dollars through his step-children in Charles Laughton's only feature as a director, 'Night of the Hunter' (1955)





Trying to buy love: James Dean as the sensitive if strong-willed son, who tries to earn recognition from his stuffy, religious father (Raymond Massey), in Elia Kazan's 'East of Eden' (1955)

James Dean. Dean's important films can be counted on one hand, but his influence—later carried on by his ever-present sidekick and admirer, Sal Mineo—is still being felt today. The Kazan film which brought stardom to James Dean was *East of Eden*, the story of frustrated love existing between a father and his two sons. In what has been described as a modern Cain and Abel story, Dean plays a teenager who is envious of his younger brother, the favoured son. The father (Raymond Massey) is a stuffy, overly-religious farmer who doesn't understand the boy's moodiness. To make matters worse, the boy learns early in the story that his mother, who was thought to be dead, is really a madam in a nearby town. This leads to a series of explosive encounters both with his younger brother (Richard Davalos) and his insensitive father.

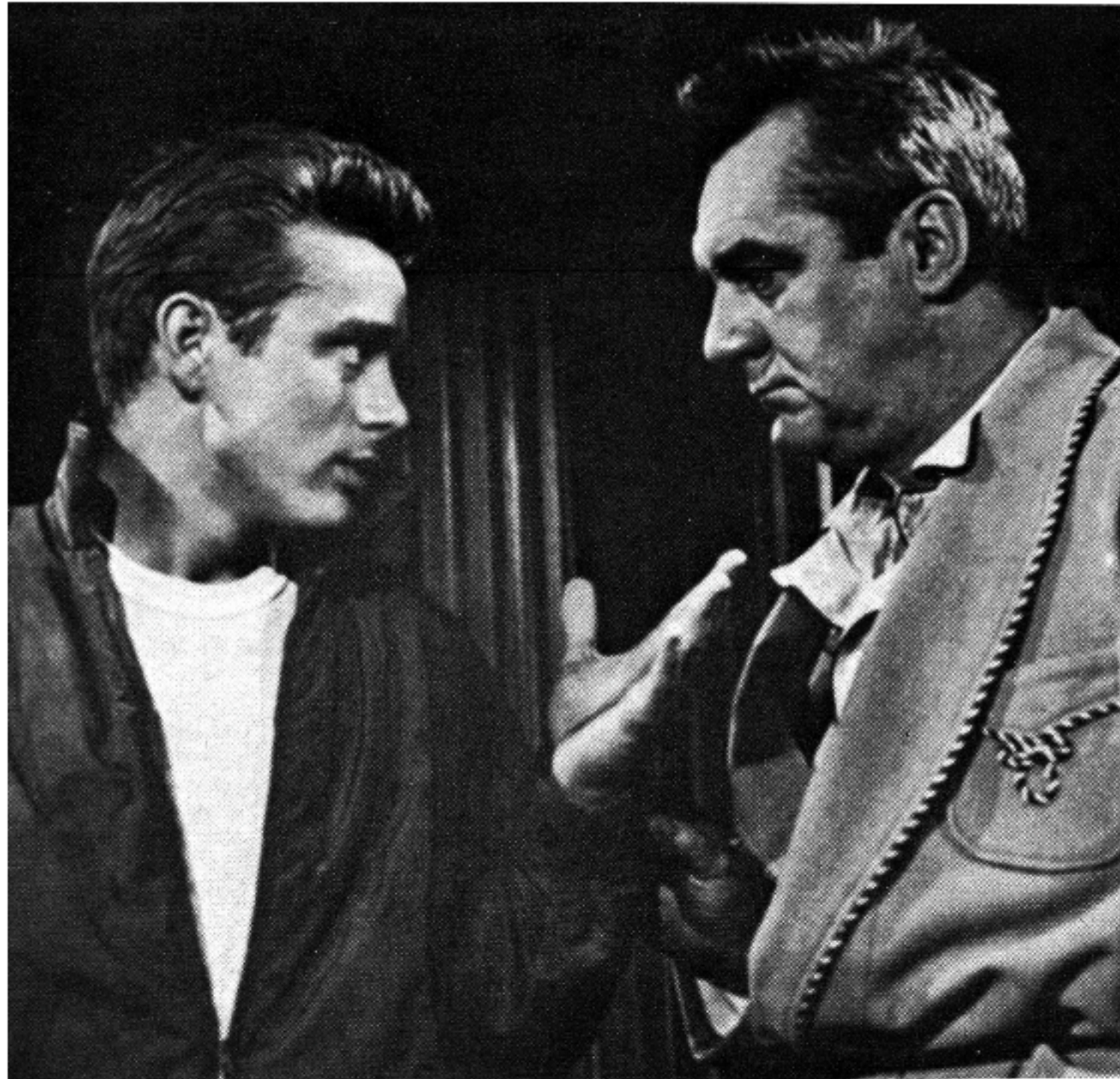
Yet another film, the classic *Rebel Without A Cause*, appeared in 1955 and set the sociological community on its ear. It was basically a story of a boy's reaction to his parents' unwillingness to face their own problems; James Dean's portrayal of the boy continually having to prove his masculinity has become his most famous role. Not wanting to be labelled a 'chicken' he accepts a dare to race in a

jalopy. In the race, a driver is killed and the boy is held responsible for the death, so he runs away with his girlfriend (Natalie Wood) and a young admirer (Sal Mineo). Never were emotions between father and son (not to mention other members of the family and community) at such a fever pitch, and many similar films followed this same pessimistic trend.

After the death of James Dean in 1956,* the tradition of the disaffected youngster at odds with society was carried on by Sal Mineo, who was Dean's friend and admirer in *Rebel . . .* and also appeared with him in *Giant* (1956). In Mineo's first film, *Six Bridges To Cross* (1955), he played a delinquent who later grew up to become Jerry Florea, the gangster. (The adult Florea was played by Tony Curtis.) *The Private War of Major Benson* (1956) was the story of an Army major (Charlton Heston) who becomes the commandant of a Catholic military boarding school. The film was basically a comedy, but the major's lack of sensitivity and stern authoritarian rule was sometimes not so funny. It certainly was *not* a good example of a healthy man-boy relationship to see Sal Mineo going out of his way to concoct mischief and Charlton Heston going out of his way to suppress it. In *Dino* (1957), Mineo plays another delinquent

who this time is returned to his home after three years in a reformatory. He immediately begins to fight with his hated, stupid father (Joe DeSantis) and he is barely rescued from lifelong delinquency through the interest of a social worker (Brian Keith) and his girlfriend down the block.

While fathers were generally becoming weaker, at least some of the films, like *Dino*, gave the youngsters somewhere to turn when their fathers turned them off. A little-known, but beautiful British film is a perfect example of the outsider taking the place of the ineffectual father, and represents somewhat of a reprieve from the tragic alienation of youngsters in other stories (and often in real life). The film was *The Spanish Gardener* (1957), the story of a British consular official (Michael Hordern) stationed in Spain, who is embittered toward life and has an overly possessive nes love for his son. Finding his father too restrictive, the boy (Jon Whiteley) finds a beautiful relationship with the peasant gardener (Dirk Bogarde), who understands the boy's need for robust play and the companionship of other children. Unfortunately, the father becomes an unsympathetic figure, a man trying desperately in all the wrong ways to win the affections of his child.



In 'Rebel Without a Cause' (1955) James Dean also has communication problems with his father (Jim Backus), only this time because the father is weak ('If only he'd knock Mom cold, just once')

Elia Kazan returned to father-son conflicts with his 'Splendour in the Grass' (1961) with Pat Hingle and Warren Beatty



In the context of films dealing with the 'generation gap', John Frankenheimer's important film *The Young Stranger* (1957) cannot be forgotten. The story concerns a film producer (James Daly) whose 16-year old son (James MacArthur) is falsely charged with assaulting a theatre manager in a fight which the father absolutely refuses to believe was self-defence. Obviously, the middle 'fifties was just not a good era for father figures. Even today, the positive father image is only very slowly returning.

Those films which have dealt with positive father-son relationships in recent years, then, are doubly interesting because they must stand on their own. For the most part there is not a climate of acceptance already set up, and the films that stand out as worthwhile are usually outstanding indeed. *Shane* was an important Western of the early 'fifties (1953) which told the story of a small boy (Brandon DeWilde) and his hero worship for a one-time pro gunfighter (Alan Ladd). A few years later Alan Ladd got a role in *The Big Land* for his own real-life son, David Ladd, then co-starred with him in *The Proud Rebel* (1958), a film in which they also portrayed a devoted father and son. Paul Muni in *Stranger On The Prowl* (1956) was a hunted murderer who helped a small boy (Vittorio Manunta) avoid being caught (he had stolen some milk), and in the process of helping the boy gave up his own chance for freedom. This was not a very good film, but is important for the presence of Paul Muni, as well as the genuine adoration of the youngster for his harried partner, which was a heartwarming sight.

In a rare instance of a studio taking a chance, the Hemingway novel *The Old Man And The Sea* was filmed with Spencer Tracy in 1958. It was not the kind of property that would be a sure success and, as it turned out, the film was not very well received; but the performances carried the day. Spencer Tracy was highly acclaimed, and the scenes in which the Old Man demonstrated his independence on the boy (Filipe*Pazos) were truly inspired by Hemingway's poetic style. In 1965 a film was released which told of a war orphan's 2,000-mile journey during the Suez crisis of 1956. After encountering increasingly tough-adult relationships, the boy (Fergus McClelland) comes upon a grizzled, warm-hearted old diamond smuggler (Edward G Robinson) who helps him along his way with warmth and concern. That film was *A Boy Ten Feet Tall*.

Of course, one cannot speak of man-boy relationships in films of the 1960s without mentioning that wacky comedy *A Thousand Clowns* (1965) in which Jason Robards, Jr, leads what can only be described as an off-beat life style. He lives with his teen-age nephew (Barry Gordon) in a cluttered, crazy New York apartment where the most improbable things happen as a matter of daily routine. In the midst of all this blissful nonsense are various attempts by relatives and welfare workers to move the boy to 'better surroundings',

but the boy will have no part of it and the clever uncle fights the never ending battle, in his words, to 'raise his nephew to be a human being, not a chair!'

In 1969 a beautiful story of a New York Puerto Rican ghetto father and his two sons was filmed with Alan Arkin as the father and newcomers Miguel Alejandro and Ruben Figueroa as his sons. The film tells of the father's plan to get the boys adopted by a rich family who will bring them up in a better atmosphere, but no matter how hard he tries, the father cannot deny his love for the boys and the boys refuse to even consider a life without their **Papi. Papi. [it's the film title]**

One of the most moving and at the same time tragic scenes in recent films was in the story of *The Christmas Tree* (1970) in which William Holden has a son (Brook Fuller) who is dying of an exposure to radiation and has only a short time to live. Their enjoyment of living together is necessarily intensified, because the father knows that they are going to have to make up for the years that he would not have with his boy. The film was often overly sentimental and the story somewhat contrived, but the final scene in which the frail youngster dies in his father's arms in front of the Christmas tree was poignant nonetheless.

It is ironic that during a period in film history noted for its lack of strong family images and scarcity of healthy father-son relationships, one of the best films of the year—indeed of the decade—is a story with both of those elements beautifully portrayed: it is of *Sounder* (1972). In it the whole spectrum of the father-son relationship is seen, from fear to respect to bashful affection to tearful, embracing love. The film is a masterpiece of simplicity in which Paul Winfield, as the

father of a sharecropping family, is sent to jail for a year after stealing some food for his hungry family. While he is gone the mother (Cicely Tyson) and kids work the farm, and the oldest son (Kevin Hooks) learns of a far-away school which will take him away from his home, but will allow him to get an invaluable education. His father returns from jail where he has hurt his leg, and the boy doesn't want to leave; but his father insists, seeing that this is the only way for his son to escape the life of a sharecropper, which he surely faces without an education.

After the tearful scene in which the father explains why he wants the education for his boy, there can be no doubt in the boy's or the audience's mind of his complete devotion to that kid and to his family. The story is set in the South of the 1930s, and perhaps the reason the film seems so unusual today is because it is not a story of today. Unfortunately, but truly, it would be hard to imagine that kind of tenderness between a father and son in today's world.

Of course, society today is unstable. The family is an institution which is being seriously questioned and, even today, drastically changed. For a considerable time now it has been the women—mothers, schoolteachers, baby-sitters and the ever-present feminine influence in advertising—who have been raising the children almost single-handedly. The father in our society is generally a distant, unfeeling provider of material security, the 'absentee parent', as it were. When these societal conditions are transferred to family situations in drama, they emerge as the mother who controls the household (and everyone in it) and the father who is no more than a useless fixture at home, sometimes deleted altogether as a charac-

ter. The problem is that 'dad' is really too preoccupied with his job to be a serious influence in the lives of his family. The immediate effect of this is that the young (particularly boys) are hard-pressed to find a model on which to fashion their own identity, hence we often see them trying to forge their own paths and meet their problems without the benefit of experience.

This instability will fortunately not last forever. The trend in movies discussed here is of the past, and as society begins to deal with its changing values, it will begin to settle once more into a recognisable direction. There are subtle indications all the time that healthy relationships are becoming more important to our society and as this importance increases we will again see positive male images reflected in films on a regular basis. Future man-boy relationships will not be as limited as before, and will very likely follow a whole new set of rules. It will be possible, for instance, to see complete father-son relationships between boys and men who are not even related, simply because in our society of fragmented families this is the only way we will be able to give the young people the examples they seek.

Whether we call this movement the 'extended family' or refer to it as 'all people caring for all people', it is bringing with it a re-vitalisation of the relationship between young and old, not so much dependent upon past images and relationships, but rather viewing people individually without categorisation. We will know this change in society has 'arrived' when we once again see on the screen the interpersonal dependence and the trust and warmth associated with past images of 'father and son' that once made us feel so warm about people.



The self-made man (Robert Mitchum) finds he cannot bridge the gap between himself and his son (George Hamilton) in Vincente Minnelli's 'Home from the Hill' (1960)



Nathan Lee (Paul Winfield) and his son David (Kevin Hooks) watch apprehensively as the sheriff and his men approach, in Martin Ritt's 'Sounder' (1972)