

The Webster Boy

(US = "Middle of Nowhere")

UK : 1961 : dir. Don Chaffey : Regal International

: 83 min

prod: Emmet Dalton : scr: Ted Allan : dir.ph.: Gerald Gibbs

[Richard O'Sullivan](#)

John Cassavetes; David Farrar; Elizabeth Sellars; Niall MacGinnis; Geoffrey Bayldon;
Karl Lanchbury

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Kbytes	Ω	□	≠	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Nope – 17 will **not** pass for 14, however hard it tries.
But school films have always shown a marked
aversion to using school-age actors.

Source: *Films & Filming* Aug 62

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A teenager suffers at the hands of a sadistic schoolmaster. Curious, totally unbelievable melodrama."

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"Undistinguished melo, directed in 1962 by Don Chaffey, that takes itself far too seriously. Elizabeth Sellars' ex-lover, John Cassavetes, turns up on the scene after 14 years and makes problems for his already-difficult illegitimate son. 7"

Films & Filming – August 1962 – review:

"Like Orson Welles, John Cassavetes is too big for his films. Both of them bring a huge portentousness, a fey spleen to whatever rôle they have, whether it can support it or not. Cassavetes' peculiar self-projection as a walking, talking, living Anxiety Neurosis sorts particularly ill with the bourgeois vexations of **"THE WEBSTER BOY"**

He plays the American gambler and ex-convict Vance Miller, who returns to England determined to marry Margaret Webster. Fourteen years ago they had an affaire *[sic]*; Jimmy, the Websters' son, is fourteen years old. Father Webster puts two and two together and gives the result to the Headmaster of Jimmy's school, who in turn passes it on to his form-master. Mr Jamieson. Already a problem child, Jimmy is unsettled further by Vance Miller's attempts to ingratiate himself with the boy as a ploy in his groomsmanship. Disaster follows when Jamieson tells Jimmy of his dubious parentage (You have bad blood, Jimmy) and is

overheard by the school stinkeroo who immediately broadcasts the news. Jimmy knocks him down the stairs. His parents, urged by a contrite Miller, remove him from the school but not before Jamieson has exposed his own infamy.

Though spiked at first on the eternal Eternal Triangle, the shady business at the school soon becomes the major issue. To begin with one is prepared to accept Cassavetes' pregnant broodiness at its face value and Geoffrey Bayldon's malign schoolmaster, a steely-voiced thin-lipped ascetic evilness promises well. But the wine proves too strong for the sauce; the story is too anaemic for such intensities. Its bizarre conjunction of sadism and disputed paternities against the backdrop of an English prep school, whose properties are realistically observed, generates an increasingly droll melodrama. The direction by Don Chaffey aggravates the general hyperbole; a long slow tracking shot towards a closed door behind which Jamieson is caning Jimmy is typical. With its dialogue a la Godfrey Winn and the preposterous climax, **"THE WEBSTER BOY"** gets my vote as the funniest straight film of 1962."

- David Gerrard

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video

Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

The Moving Picture Boy entry on O'Sullivan:

"His father was a mechanic, and Richard started elocution and dancing lessons when he was four. Three years later he made his film debut, playing Trevor Howard's son in **"THE STRANGER'S HAND"**, and two years after that, in **"DANGEROUS EXILE"**, he was royalty: a somewhat fictional version of poor Louis XVIII, happily escaped to Wales.

O'Sullivan, by now sporting his characteristic twisted smile, pressed on into a mixture of teenage rave-ups and grown-up weepies: **"THE NUN'S STORY"** (60), **"A STORY OF DAVID"** (60), **"AND WOMEN SHALL WEEP"** (60), **"SPARE THE ROD"** (61), **"THE YOUNG ONES"** (62), then **"CLEOPATRA"** (63, as Ptolemy), **"WONDERFUL LIFE"** (64), **"A DANDY IN ASPIC"** (68), **"THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF HORROR"** (69) and so on into the Seventies.

Hereafter, though, his career lay largely in television. In comedy series like **"Doctor at Large"**, **"Doctor in Charge"**, **"Father, Dear Father"**, **"Man About the House"**, **"Robin's Nest"**, **"Me and My Girl"** and **"Trouble in Mind"**, O'Sullivan became one of Britain's most popular light comedians of the wry, homely kind. As a change of scene, he also played the title role in a **"Dick Turpin"** series."

No further information currently available. For every school film that features genuine 13 and 14-year olds in speaking roles, there are three or four like this one, with pupils who are evidently well past school-leaving age. The rationale (if there is one) appears to be related to the content – material deemed "too intense" for younger actors. But if boys of the appropriate age could handle the situations in **"LES QUATRE CENTS COUPS"**, **"THE SAILOR WHO FELL FROM GRACE WITH THE SEA"**, **"THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND"**, **"KADISBELLAN"** ("The Slingshot") and others, the events played out in **"THE WEBSTER BOY"** seem no especial concern. What is at least as puzzling is that no critics ever make mention of the fact.

Richard O'Sullivan, despite being 17, caught the business end of the cane again that year in another schoolyard melodrama: **"SPARE THE ROD"**, and was still being cast as a naughty schoolboy at 21 in **"CARRY ON TEACHER"**. His more obscure early films included **"DANCE LITTLE LADY"** (54), **"THE GREEN SCARF"** (54) **"THE SECRET"** (55) and **"NO TIME FOR TEARS"** (57). He also made a guest appearance on Richard Greene's TV series **"The Adventures of Robin Hood"**, and played Jim Hawkins for the **"DuPont Show of the Month"** (60), a live revue of scenes from R.L. Stevenson's writings.

See subject index under **CORPORAL PUNISHMENT** and **SCHOOL**.