

SUBJECT INDEX:

**BRATS ~
SPOILT CHILDREN ~
(The Child as DESPOT)**

See also: BULLYING, CRIME / DELINQUENCY,
RASCALS & SCALAWAGS,
THE CHILD AS EVIL IN OUR MIDST



Edith Fellows and Jackie Moran learn the error of their wicked ways in "AND SO THEY WERE MARRIED"

What is a “brat”, beyond being an all-purpose term of dismissal for those who hate children in general? If the defining characteristic of young children – boys in particular – used to be their propensity for free associative mischief, then this had to be seen by our culture as the norm and not “deviant” behaviour in any sense. Mischievous children are therefore dealt with (and firmly too) under **RASCALS & SCALAWAGS**. The brat is a different creature, typically a child of exceptional meanness of character, not necessarily a bully, but guided more by native spite than a healthy appetite for small-scale anarchy.

The term is used in a secondary context for spoiled or egregiously pampered children, where their manners and behaviour, even when not actively malicious, display a total lack of discipline or parental control. The differentiation between rascals and brats, then, is entirely subjective, but these are the kids whose antisocial behaviour lies further up the Richter scale, falling short of outright delinquency or criminality. If the mischievous boy was a spanking magnet, the brat is one congenitally deprived of such remedial treatment. The final gradation on the scale – **THE CHILD AS EVIL IN OUR MIDST** – caters for all the little Antichrists, psychopaths and multiple killers who proliferated on the screen in the 1970s.

Certain child actors specialised in parts of this nature, most notably Jane Withers and Jackie Searl in the 1930s. Both were level-headed, seasoned professionals who simply played well to type, but they became identified in the public mind – as Macaulay Culkin did more latterly – with the sorts of roles they portrayed. His studio dubbed Jackie Searl “*The Kid Everybody Wants to Spank*”. Culkin dodged that label, but attracted a surprising level of malice from the gossiping media, and there would have been loud cheers in some quarters if his come-uppance in “**HOME ALONE 2**” had taken that form, rather than being marched at gunpoint into Central Park – to his presumed death – by comic burglars Pesci and Stern. Culkin was viewed as a brat – off screen as much as on – because he was seen to beat adults at their own game, and adults are sore losers.

“**LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY**”, though manifestly spoilt, was portrayed as essentially a good-natured and well-balanced child, thus he escapes the brat category. Patty McCormack’s character in “**THE BAD SEED**”, though implicitly psychotic, was portrayed as a child who *could* have been brought to heel by more attentive parenting, rather than as a devil in pigtails, so she belongs in both higher categories. Linda Blair’s Regan in “**THE EXORCIST**” was the victim of external/internal control – clearly evil, but involuntarily so, and thus not a brat. The **Just William**’s, **Dennis the Menace**’s and **Penrod**’s – while clearly brats in the eyes of the adults they tormented – did their tormenting without malice or connivance, so belong in the **RASCALS** category. There is a logic to the differentiation, as the list below should make apparent.

And So They Were Married
The Bad Seed
Barefoot Boy

(?)(= Jackie Moran, Edith Fellows)

US 1938: Country cousin *Jackie Moran* (15) is enlisted to help reform spoilt city boy *Bradley Metcalfe*, whose father was imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

Born to be Bad
The Boy Who Cried Bitch (?)
Captains Courageous ('37)
Captains Courageous (TV '77)
Captains Courageous (TV '95)
Cattle Drive
Clifford
The Day of the Locust
Dennis ('87)
Forbidden Adventure

The Gamma People

The Good Son

Home Alone

Le Jouet

Kathy O'

Ein Kinderstar im Waisenhaus

Germany 1998 : "A Children's Star in the Orphanage". Comedy - child-hating TV celebrity helps out at orphanage to deflect criticism, but the paparazzi set a trap for him by engaging one of the orphan boys to run interference.

Little House on the Prairie - "The Nephews"[US TV soap]

My Son, My Son!(= Scotty Beckett)

The Nanny

The New Adventures of Pippi Longstocking

O. Henry's Full House

Overboard

Pampered Youth

Poison Candy

UK TV? 1990 : aka "Little Sweetheart". Variant of "THE BAD SEED" in which two girls of 9 elect to blackmail their new neighbours when they learn they have something to hide. With *Cassie Barasch* and *Ellie Raab*.

Problem Child

Problem Child 2

The Ransom of Red Chief ('11)

The Ransom of Red Chief (TV '77)

The Reivers

She Married Her Boss(= Edith Fellows)

Thursday's Child ('42)

Tomorrow the World

The Toy

The Whipping Boy

Non-fiction

Cutting Edge: "Boys Alone"

Driving Mum Crazy

Modern Times: "Family Values"

(2000).

UK TV 1998 : BBC report on two middle class families in difficulties with their offspring – the one an advocate of "conservative family values" unable to restrain their own boisterous 11-year old son, the other putting their two younger children through an American-run "new learning centre" to curb their "inappropriate impulses". *Recommended*.

What Kids Want.. And How They Get It

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