

The Boy With Green Hair

US : 1948 : dir. Joseph Losey : RKO : 82 min
 prod: Stephen Ames : scr: Ben Barzman & Alfred Lewis Levitt : dir.ph.: George Barnes
[Dean Stockwell](#); [Richard Lyon](#); [Dwayne Hickman](#); [Johnny Calkins](#); [Teddy Infuhr](#); [Bill Sheffield](#);
[Rusty Tamblyn](#)
 Pat O'Brien; Barbara Hale; Robert Ryan; Walter Catlett; Samuel S Hinds; Regis Toomey;
 Dale Robertson; Russ Tamblyn

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Hollywood's Cupid deluxe goes punk – and delivers a so-so performance in a clumsily-written homily with the central message "War is Bad for Children". Well duhhh... More interesting is the theme of individuality vs conformity, especially given that children approaching puberty have an acute need for acceptance by their peer group. Peter could be black of course, or Jewish, but he could also be a boy dancer, a homosexual, an atheist or simply a kid with a heightened political awareness. In either case he's a mutant, does not belong, and we're still busy rooting him out from our midst, are we not?

Source: Classic Movie Kids website



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THE BOY WITH THE GREEN HAIR
An RKO Radio Picture

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Source: *Classic Movie Kids website*

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Thought provoking allegory of war orphan Stockwell, who becomes a social outcast when his hair changes colour. Controversial on its release because of its pacifist point of view. Dale Robertson and Russ Tamblyn appear uncredited. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Well thought through and provocative fable about a war orphan who becomes a social outcast when his hair changes colour. Competent acting. *** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"When he hears that his parents were killed in an air raid, a boy's hair turns green; other war orphans encourage him to parade himself publicly as an image of the horror and futility of war. Muddled, pretentious and unpersuasive fantasy, typical of this producer's do-goodery. One of those oddities which makes Hollywood endearing, but not very entertaining apart from Pat O'Brien's garrulous grandpa."

Children in the Movies comment:

"...In war films children as symbols of the future have an extra urgency. They represent a hoped-for new generation that will eradicate

war and rebuild a new society. This is the meaning and the poignancy of the children's return to the city at the end of Roberto Rossellini's "**ROME – OPEN CITY**" (1945) and of the beautiful fantasy sequence of Joseph Losey's "**THE BOY WITH GREEN HAIR**" (1948), when the ghosts of war orphans encounter the boy in a glade, give him a perspective on his own problems and see in him a symbol of an optimistic future that has learned from the horrors of the past."

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Good intentions are all very well... This whimsy / allegory firmly believes that war and racial intolerance are evil, but is too inept to make its case. The unfortunate cast includes Dean Stockwell (the boy), Robert Ryan, Pat O'Brien and Walter Catlett."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"War orphan becomes an outcast when he finds his hair has suddenly turned green. Fanciful message drama. *** "

Radio Times Guide to Films review:

"One of the last pictures studio chief Dore Schary made at RKO, this somewhat clumsy mix of whimsy and allegory marked the Hollywood feature debut of director Joseph Losey. Howard Hughes ordered wholesale changes to the film when he bought the studio, but the tolerance theme that he detested so much remained largely intact.. Dean Stockwell does well as the orphan whose hair changes colour, and there's some expert support from the likes of Walter Catlett, Samuel S Hinds and Regis Toomey. Most notable, however, are the splendid against-type performances Robert Ryan and Pat O'Brien. From a story by Betsy Beaton. *** "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"A captivating drama with a social message that emphasises the senselessness of war. After an air raid takes the lives of his parents, a boy's hair turns green. The boy, played by Stockwell, becomes an outcast, but he wins the sympathy of other war orphans. Fine acting overcomes some of the muddle in the plot. O'Brien stands out as a likable grandfather.

Also with Robert Ryan and Barbara Hale.
*** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"Early (1948) message pic about discrimination, worth seeing for Dean Stockwell's kid, veterans Pat O'Brien and Robert Ryan and Joseph Losey's first mannered essay in directing. 3 "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Imagine a cosy Disney feature crossed with an allegory on war and racism, and you have some idea of the bizarre flavour of Losey's first feature. A rather simplistic symbolic tale about a war orphan whose hair turns green in protest against his plight, only to be rejected by friends and strangers alike, it's muddled, awkward, pretentious and often downright embarrassing. But the very fact that it is so ridiculous, with absurd moments like the garrulous old grandfather (O'Brien) singing silly songs, lends a certain offbeat charm."

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"RKO has turned out an absorbing, sensitive story of tolerance and child understanding in "**THE BOY WITH GREEN HAIR**". Story is that of a war orphan, shifted around from one relative to another, who finally finds haven and security with a waiter in a small town. Then, one morning, he wakes to find his hair has turned green – and the world turns topsy-turvy about him. Other kids jeer at him; adults are perturbed; even the kindly milkman turns against him when accused of bringing it about through his product.

Film was made by Dore Schary for RKO before Howard Hughes gained control of the studio, and in its small way was one of the things that caused Schary to step out of the RKO setup. Pic had been completed, but Hughes ordered it re-edited and the tolerance theme taken out, on Hughes' general theory that films should entertain only and eschew social significance. Studio found that pic couldn't be re-edited, although it's reported to be toned down somewhat.

Through this parable about the unconscious cruelty of people to what is different, and the need of tolerance, runs another theme, that of

anti-war preachment [sic]. When the boy meets children from war-orphan posters in a dream scene in the woods, and returns to annoy the townsfolk with the message that war

is very bad – is green hair has thus acquired a meaning, to preach pacifism – the film hits a well-intentioned but false note.”





Source: *Star Oasis website*



Jolly old "gramp" Pat O'Brien and concerned schoolmistress Barbara Hale try to raise Peter's spirits – without notable success.

Source: *Boys' and Girls' Cinema Clubs Annual*

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"A young war orphan's hair changes colour, makes him a social outcast, and brings a variety of bigots and narrow minds out of the woodwork in this food-for-thought fable. The medium is the message in this one. *** "

Almost Angels website review:

"World War II has just ended. There are still many war orphans, and Peter is one of them. Passed from relative to relative, he finally comes to stay with a singing waiter who works nights. The boy calls him "Gramp".

Peter gets off to a good start at his new school and things seem to be going well. Before he

finds out for certain that his parents were killed while trying to save other children in England, he joins his class in a clothing drive for the orphans. Then, disaster seemingly strikes – one morning after his bath, he discovers his hair has suddenly turned green!

The video clip at left shows that boys enjoyed singing even back then, and the utter surprise when Peter sees his green hair in the mirror for the first time.

Peter soon learns from a supernatural meeting in the forest with other war orphans – that he has been given a unique opportunity to tell the world that war is bad for children... and everyone else. George Feist of California said of this movie: "I saw this movie in Panama, where I was born, at the movie theater when I

was 8 years old. The images of the movie and its message has stayed with me all these years. Other people can be cruel if you are different. Being different is NOT a bad thing. Live with it and use it to your advantage."

It is possible that this movie is still in some rental stores; it is shown very infrequently on TV; may be available on VHS from Cinema Classics (212-677-6309), and is available 'somewhere' on NTSC Laserdisc. There is no profanity, sex, or violence. Filmed in 1948 by RKO Radio Pictures.

Other Cast: "Gramp" - Pat O'Brien · Mono Sound · Running Time: 82 Minutes · Turner Home Entertainment - Distributed by Image Entertainment."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Stockwell:

"His father, Harry Stockwell, was an actor, and his mother a dancer. When Dean was seven he and his younger brother Guy played leading parts in a Theater Guild production of "The Innocent Voyage". The critics raved, Hollywood swooped, and MGM signed him up. He had a whale of a time with Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra in "**ANCHORS AWEIGH**". Stockwell, a plump, pouting, curly-headed cherub with knowing brown eyes, often seemed something of a prima donna in his early years, yet he could express spontaneous gaiety or genuine pain, and was deservedly the most sought-after boy actor of the Forties. Sometimes, as with Freddie Bartholomew, his arrogance was exploited in a "humbling" drama, for instance in "**THE SECRET GARDEN**" and "**THE HAPPY YEARS**" - the latter showing him at his best.

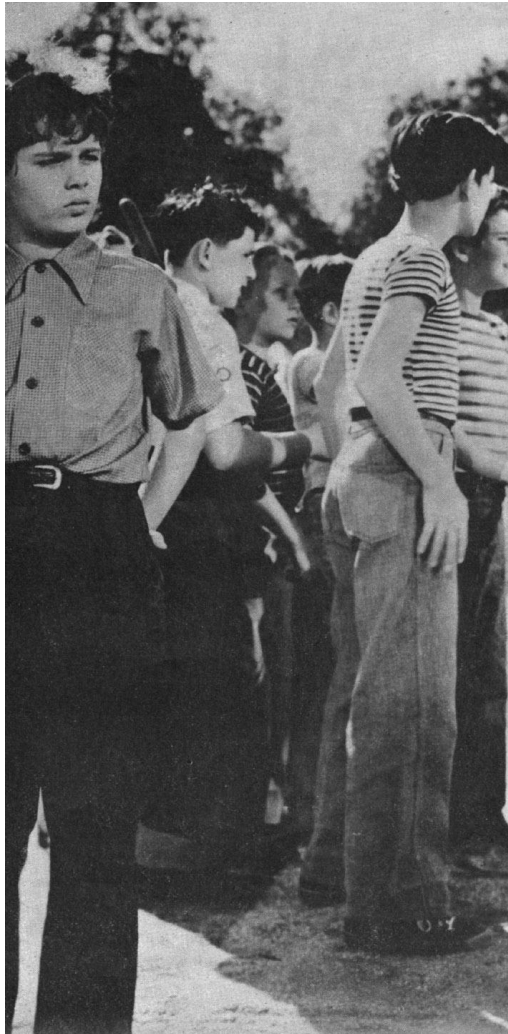
After an educational pause in his career, a leaner and nervier Dean Stockwell returned in "**GUN FOR A COWARD**" (56) and "**THE CARELESS YEARS**" (57). (He must have been sick of Years by now.) Then came three important "classic" parts: as the young nietzschean co-murderer in "**COMPULSION**" (59), as the D.H. Lawrence figure in "**SONS AND LOVERS**" (GB 60) and as the Eugene O'Neill figure (the consumptive younger son) in "**A LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT**" (62). He was an intelligent and personable young actor doing a good professional job. Predictions of his becoming a major star proved ill-founded, and during the sixties he was seldom on the screen.

The next decade began better, with leads in "**THE DUNWICH HORROR**" (70) and "**THE WEREWOLF OF WASHINGTON**" (73), and in two 1971 TV movies: "**PAPER MAN**" and "**THE FAILING OF RAYMOND**". Films now came thick and fast as Stockwell's hair thinned and a wary, hard-bitten middle-aged actor emerged - more interesting, actually, than the younger one. He has lent strength to such varied films as "**HUMAN HIGHWAY**" (82), "**THE MAN WITH THE DEADLY LENS**" (82), "**ALSINO Y EL CONDOR**" (Nicaragua/Mexico/Columbia/Costa Rica 82), "**PARIS, TEXAS**" (84), "**BLUE VELVET**" (86) and "**CATCHFIRE**" (89). His portrayal of Howard Hughes in "**TUCKER**" is a small tour de force."

Purportedly "by his own hand" report in **Hollywood-London Film Parade 1949:**

"In our family we're pretty interested in show business. My father had the lead in "Okla-homa" when it opened in New York. My mother, Betty Veronica Stockwell, is an actress and a dancer. And I was born in North Hollywood, which is in San Fernando Valley where there are lots of studios and is close to Hollywood besides. So you would think it would have been very easy for me to get in pictures. Only it wasn't.

After a while we went to New York and my brother Guy - he's the oldest - and I were in two plays on the stage. One was "Innocent Voyage" and the other was "Chicken Every



Social ostracism is what kids fear far more than war, and is far more endemic to human society, but the film is too limp and comfortable to make any worthwhile observation about it.

Source: Films & Filming

Sunday". That was when Mr Pasternak from M-G-M saw me act and had me test for a part in "**ANCHORS AWEIGH**" with Miss Kathryn Grayson. I won the part and I won a long term contract with M-G-M too. So I went back to Hollywood.

I made "**THE VALLEY OF DECISION**", "**THE GREEN YEARS**" and lots of other pictures. Then in "**GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT**" I was supposed to be Gregory Peck's son and the Hollywood Foreign Correspondents' Association gave me a prize, their Golden Globe award for the "Outstanding Juvenile Performance of the year".

After that R.K.O had me do "**THE BOY WITH GREEN HAIR**". I really have green

hair in the picture, too. It sure looked peculiar for a while, but I got used to it after a few days in front of the Technicolor cameras. Then I went into "**THE SECRET GARDEN**" at M-G-M. Margaret O'Brien and Brian Roper are in it too. Brian was brought to Hollywood all the way from England to play the part of Dickon. They are both wonderful in it so, you can see, I had to remember to keep up the family tradition."

Cast:

Peter**Dean Stockwell**
 Dr EvansRobert Ryan
 GrampPat O'Brien
 Miss BrandBarbara Hale
 Michael**Richard Lyon**
 "The King"Walter Catlett
 Dr KnudsonSamuel S Hinds
 Mr DavisRegis Toomey

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "50 Years of the Movies", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times notes:

“When a young boy learns he is a war orphan, the shock makes his hair turn green. Unable to bear the public ridicule, he runs away.”

“Thought-provoking anti-war film.”

“Fantasy drama with Robert Ryan and Dean Stockwell. A war orphan wakes up one day to find his hair has turned bright green. *** ”

What's On TV note:

“Post-war drama starring Dean Stockwell and Pat O'Brien.”

The Guardian (?) review:

“Losey’s first feature film was corrupted by the influence of RKO studio chief Howard Hughes, who was determined to insert an anti-Communist message and is consequently very uneven. The war orphan who wakes up one day with bright green hair finds himself the victim of rude assault, though whether the allegory is principally about peace or racism is now unclear.”

It's a pity we don't know precisely what alterations Hughes had made to Losey's original cut. The original may have had more bite and relevance, or may indeed have been rescued by merciful re-editing from its own hubris and pretentiousness. No-one has commented above on the peculiarly muddy quality to the film's colour. Viewed today, **“THE BOY WITH GREEN HAIR”** looks even phonier than most computer-coloured black-and-white features of the 1940s (bad as they are). The photography only serves to emphasise the set-bound feel of the film, and nowhere more so than in the bizarre sequence – described by one critic as “beautiful” – in which Stockwell blunders into a literal tableau of dishevelled European urchins who hail him, in stilted poetical terms, as their saviour and emissary.

Peter is a bastard. He is a gypsy. He is of “mixed race”. He is a moslem fundamentalist in a secular society. He is in fact whatever you want him to be. Because the script is so leaden and club-footed it has nothing at all to say about war, which is scarcely the most difficult of targets. War (in the prevailing American view of the 1940s) is something that happens over the hills and far far away. It is not immediate, indiscriminate and without pity. Roberto Rossellini's **“GERMANA ANNO ZERO”**, released the previous year, had infinitely more to say about the effect of war on children, and Fred Zinnemann's **“THE SEARCH”**, released the same year as this, had more to say about the plight of war orphans (though that too had its teeth filed down for domestic consumption).

It's more tempting to read **“THE BOY WITH GREEN HAIR”** as an early, and heavily disguised, attack on incipient McCarthyism in the States. Small town intolerance, and social ostracism, come across more clearly from the allegory than any genuine pacifist sentiment. And whether or not this was Losey's express intention, those themes are far more immediate and relevant to an archive concerning itself with childhood. Ostracism is something every child understands and dreads – because one is too fat, too skinny, wears glasses, speaks with a funny accent, or has a physical disability. The story might have had more impact if

Peter (Stockwell) had been shown, at the end of the film, once more accepted among his peer group, and himself blithely joining them in taunting the next social outcast in his class. Because if there is one profoundly depressing observation to be made on our own twenty-first century culture, it is the alacrity with which **any** minority, no sooner it has escaped overt and direct social discrimination, begins at once to persecute, and join in persecuting, the next minority on the ladder. We have seen it and heard it from women, from black people, from gays, from immigrant groups, and more flagrantly than ever, from the state of Israel itself. If people learn nothing from the direct experience of being oppressed, what hope is there for any of us? Tolerance and freedom of speech are empty and meaningless if we do not extend them to the people we personally would prefer to ostracise.

But the tone of the film is so hopelessly misjudged – “a cosy Disney feature crossed with an allegory on war and racism” sums it up rather well – that it is more irritating than thought-provoking, whimsy-whamsy Irish “gramps” and all. It is hard indeed not to mock. There’s something bizarrely incongruous about Stockwell having his luscious locks shorn off by the town barber (before a caucus of “concerned” citizenry) when – as the womenfolk in France, Italy and Holland found to their cost – this was the standard reprisal against people who had cohabited with the enemy. Dean, you little scamp, what *have* you been up to?

[Stockwell](#) was 12 (but looks 9 or 10) and his performance is scarcely moving or authentic. Popular as he was, and photogenic as he certainly was, it would be hard to single out a film from his boyhood repertoire which displayed any genuine dramatic talent. He moved from lush studio feature to lush studio feature, never giving more than a workmanlike performance. It was only after he returned from a brief and unhappy time out at college that he began to show authentic acting ability. Stockwell was a boy star, not too much of an actor.

To round up those others for you, Richard Lyon (“**ANNA AND THE KING OF SIAM**”) was 14, Dwayne Hickman (“**FOR THE LOVE OF RUSTY**” etc) was 14, Johnny Calkins (“**LIFE WITH FATHER**”) was 13, Teddy Infuhr (“**THE UNWRITTEN CODE**”) was 11, Rusty Tamblyn (“**FATHER OF THE BRIDE**”) was 13, in his first screen role, and Bill Sheffield’s age is not known.

See also subject index under **THE CHILD AS POLITICAL / PROPAGANDA SYMBOL, DISCRIMINATION / PREJUDICE, GRANDPARENTS, [ORPHANS / ADOPTION, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS](#) and [WAR](#).**