

Captains Courageous

US : 1937 : dir. Victor Fleming : M-G-M : 116 min
 prod: Louis D Lighton : scr: John Lee Mahin, Mark Connelly & Dale Van Every
 : dir.ph. Harold Rosson

Freddie Bartholomew; Mickey Rooney; Gene Reynolds; Tommy Bupp; Billy Burrud
 Spencer Tracy; Lionel Barrymore; Melvyn Douglas; Charley Grapewin; John Carradine;
 Walter Kingsford; Christian Rub; Leo G Carroll; Charles Trowbridge; Oscar O'Shea;

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ∅ Z ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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The man's life of the sea – just what Harvey's been hankering for.

Source: indeterminate



Source: indeterminate website

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Spoiled rich-boy Bartholomew falls off cruise ship, is rescued by Portuguese fisherman Tracy (who won an Oscar for the role). The boy learns to love seafaring on crusty Barrymore's fishing vessel. Enthusiastic cast; a top-notch production of Kipling's story. Scripted by John Lee Mahin, Marc Connelly and Dale Van Every. Remade as a TV movie in 1977 with Karl Malden and Ricardo Montalban. Also shown in a computer-coloured version. **** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A spoiled rich boy falls off a cruise liner and lives for a while among fisherfolk who teach him how to live. Semi-classic Hollywood family film which is not all that enjoyable while it's on but is certainly a good example of the prestige picture of the thirties. (It also happened to be good box office). 1977 brought a TV movie remake. Academy Award for Spencer Tracy as

Best Actor, nominations for Best Picture and Best Script. ** "

"Will not have to go begging for patronage... one of the best pictures of the sea ever made."
- Variety

"Another of those grand jobs of movie-making we have come to expect from Hollywood's most profligate studio."
- Frank S Nugent, New York Times

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"Spoiled rich kid (Freddie Bartholomew) is taught how to live his life by Portuguese fisherman (Spencer Tracy). Highly successful, sentimental family film which inexplicably won an Oscar for Spencer Tracy, whose performance is far from his best. The MGM production values are excellent, and it manages to be entertaining and heart-warming. It was voted the third best film of 1937 (after "ZOLA" and "THE GOOD EARTH") in the annual poll of the US film critics conducted by the Film Daily. It also won the Photoplay Gold Medal Award as Best Picture of 1937, voted for by America's cinemagoing public. 7/10 "



"CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS", A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture

Spencer Tracy, looking uncomfortably like a bad Harpo Marx impressionist, fillets Freddie Bartholomew's psyche to find the nourishing sushi of his soul (now beat that for a metaphor!)
Source: indeterminate website

"I used to pray that something would happen to halt production. I was positive I was doing the worst job of my life." – **Spencer Tracy**

"**"CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS"** is as real and immediate as a documentary, yet stylishly and attractively photographed. Some of the process work is obvious, but few members of a 1937 audience would have detected it,"

– **John Howard Reid**

"The Kipling novel was reworked – sugared – by experienced hands." – **Pauline Kael**

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Kipling's fine sea story gets the customary MGM treatment and a cast to match – provided, that is, you're indulgent to Freddie Bartholomew as the spoiled brat who, rescued from the waves, learns humility, and Lionel Barrymore as the skipper. Mickey Rooney is the skipper's son, Melvyn Douglas is the boy's father and, best of all, there's Spencer Tracy as Manuel the fisherman. ** "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
 review:

"Rudyard Kipling's popular story of a spoiled rich boy who falls overboard from an ocean liner and gets picked up by fishermen who teach him humility and the value of honest toil. Victor Fleming, who directed, was a macho type with much affinity for the subject matter, but his personality was not decisive enough to overcome the embalming impulses of MGM studio style. Bartholomew is the lad who grows up, but Tracy, with a thick Portuguese accent, somehow won the Oscar for Best Actor. *** "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"A typical MGM prestige picture of the 1930s and a popular literary adaptation (from Kipling) that became a children's classic. Tracy won his first Oscar as the Portuguese fisherman who rescues a boy who has fallen from an ocean liner. He teaches the boy a thing or two about

life, labour, and courage during the three

months the boy is on board



Top: Mickey Rooney gives a nicely modest, understated performance as the ship's boy Dan, here lending the insufferable Harvey, fresh from the brine, his own clothes.

Source:

Bottom: The reformed Harvey fondly toys with Manuel's instrument, but salty old Captain Briscow has seen that sort of thing before.

Source: indeterminate website

his fishing vessel. Impressive work by the entire cast (including Lionel Barrymore, Melvyn Douglas, Charley Grapewin, John Carradine, Leo G Carroll, and Mickey Rooney), director Victor Fleming ("GONE WITH THE WIND", "THE WIZARD OF OZ"), and cinematographer Hal Rossen. Academy Award - Tracy, Best Actor. Nominations - Best Picture; Marc Connolly, John Lee Mahin and Dale Van Every, Best Screenplay *** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"1937 sea epic in which Victor Fleming achieved exciting action on the fishing boats. It is also Kipling's story of Spencer Tracy with a Portuguese accent teaching the spoiled brat Freddie Bartholomew (perfectly suited for the part) what it means to be a Man. Tracy won an Oscar; Lionel Barrymore, Melvyn Douglas, and in a small part, Mickey Rooney, pitched in well. ** "

That Was Hollywood – the 1930s review:

"More marine fare, this MGM adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's famous novel put Spencer Tracy, with curled hair and a Portuguese accent, in the front rank of stardom as the simple fisherman who befriends a spoiled brat, played by Freddie Bartholomew, and teaches him the way of the sea. Melvyn Douglas was the rich father of the lost boy and Lionel Barrymore the captain of the fishing vessel that picks him up. Mickey Rooney played the captain's son. The writers were John Lee Mahin, Marc Connelly and Dale Van Every, and the director was Victor Fleming."

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Archetypal MGM family fodder, with rich brat Bartholomew falling overboard from an ocean liner, and getting saved by Portuguese fisherman Tracy, who knocks the stuffing out of the spoilt kid¹ and teaches him a few of the less luxurious lessons of life. Based on a Kipling

story, it's hardly great art, but it passes the time. Video: VHS SMV 10058 "

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"The original, and certainly the best version of Rudyard Kipling's famous story about the spoiled rich kid who learns the real values of life when he falls (literally) into the hands of a group of earthy Portuguese fishermen. Spencer Tracy claimed the first of what was to be two consecutive Academy Awards as one of the fishermen, and Freddie Bartholomew is the boy. A heart-breaking ending ensures there won't be too many dry eyes in your sitting-rooms. *** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Taking this Rudyard Kipling story, written when he visited America some years earlier, the producers have made the central character of the spoiled child younger than he was in the book, and for the purposes of the screen have indulged in other slight, unimportant alterations. Spencer Tracy is a Portuguese fisherman with an accent and a flair for singing songs of the briny. Lionel Barrymore is the happy-go-lucky but stern captain of a fishing schooner while Bartholomew, of course, is the boy.

The Kipling yarn, built around a wealthy, motherless, brat who accidentally lands with a cod-fishing fleet, and undergoes regeneration during an enforced three months' piscatorial quest, has been given splendid production, performance, photography and dramatic composition. Young Bartholomew plays the spoiled kid, only son of wealthy father, who falls off a liner bound for Europe and is picked up by Tracy, the fisherman to whom the recalcitrant boy finally becomes deeply attached. Bartholomew's transition from a brat to a lovable child is done with convincing strokes.

His performance is matched by Tracy, who also doesn't seem right doing an accent and singing songs, but he, too, later gets under the skin of the character. Barrymore is himself, as usual. As the father of the boy, Melvyn Douglas gives a

¹ *Blithering nonsense – try watching the film!*

smooth, unctuous performance. One of the fishermen is deftly portrayed by John Carradine. Oscar 1937: Best Actor (Spencer Tracy); nomination: Best Picture”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“This is an exquisite adaptation of Rudyard Kipling’s story about a spoiled rich kid who falls from an ocean liner and is rescued by fishermen. Through them, the lad learns about the rewards of hard work and genuine friendship. Spencer Tracy won a well-deserved Oscar for his performance as the fatherly fisherman. ***** ”

The Virgin Film Guide review:

“For once, a script perfectly suited to its director and star and one of the most lyrical children’s classics ever made. Ignore the typical M-G-M “prestige picture” touches and enjoy the spirited cast performing under man’s man director Fleming, who is reverential to the Kipling story. Young Harvey (Freddie Bartholomew), the spoiled-rotten son of a business tycoon, believes he can lie, cheat and whine his way through life. On a trip to Europe with his father, the young man² falls off a posh ocean liner into the sea and is rescued by a boat filled with Portuguese fishermen. One of the sailors is Manuel (Spencer Tracy), a big-hearted veteran of the seas who has a lot to teach the selfish Harvey about life.

“CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS” is a wonderful sea adventure with a heartwarming drama at its core. Tracy is excellent as the gentle fisherman, turning in a performance that won him a Best Actor Oscar. He reportedly hated his role, however, especially having his hair curled and wrestling with an accent (Tracy loathed externalised acting), but it doesn’t show for a moment. The following year, he won the coveted statuette again for “BOYS TOWN”.
***** ”

The M.G.M Story review:

“Spencer Tracy’s Academy Award-winning performance in “CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS” included such un-Tracylike elements as a Portuguese accent and a spot of singing.

² or “boy”, as we say in English

Freddie Bartholomew’s acting very nearly equalled his in the role of the spoiled brat he fished out of the sea and regenerated during a whaling voyage. Victor Fleming’s direction of the Kipling story was an unqualified triumph, bringing praise also to Lionel Barrymore, Melvyn Douglas, Mickey Rooney, John Carradine, Jack La Rue and Walter Kingsford. Louis D Lighton produced the John Lee Mahin-Marc Connelly-Dale Van Every screenplay. M.G.M reaped massive returns.”

Those Endearing Young Charms caption:

“This is the film story of life aboard the Gloucester fishing schooners and of the deep relationship that develops between a pampered millionaire’s son and a Portuguese fisherman (Spencer Tracy).”

Excerpt from **The Great Movie Stars – the Golden Years** filmography of Tracy:

“...As the battling (mostly against Gable) priest [in “*SAN FRANCISCO*”] he received the first of his nine Oscar nominations (a record for a male star). He was one of a quartet of big stars (Loy, Powell, Harlow) in the screwball “*LIBELLED LADY*”, and then the Portuguese fisherman in Victor Fleming’s version of Rudyard Kipling’s “*CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS*” (37), uneasy with the accent – or so he claimed: the performance is still by far the best Hollywood attempt at that stock figure – the earthy, elemental son of the sea/soil (it is Hepburn’s favourite Tracy performance). He won an Oscar for it...”

“ “*CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS*” (37) detailed the adventures of a spoilt child (Freddie Bartholomew) on a Cape Cod fishing smack and specifically with old sea-dog Spencer Tracy: a surprising performance even from this actor. It was fine enough to win him an Oscar.”

50 Years of the Movies short profile of Rooney:

“...It never happened but it would have been fascinating to see Temple and Rooney trying to charm each other off the screen. In many respects Rooney was the male equivalent of Shirley Temple. He too started young in films – he made his first, a silent, at the age of six in 1926, but his rise to stardom was not as meteoric. Until 1933 he was known as Mickey

McGuire, the name of a character in a series of shorts in which he featured. When the McGuire series ended, he had to find a new handle. Rejecting his own - Joe Yule - he settled on Rooney and into a steady career as juvenile support in numerous movies, although his interpretation of Puck in "**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM**" (35) was well received.

In 1937 he played opposite another child star, Freddie Bartholomew, in "**LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY**", and the teaming was so successful that they were put together again that year in "**CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS**", for which the star, Spencer Tracy, won a deserved Oscar. (It seems Rooney brought Tracy luck: in 1938 they appeared together again, in "**BOYS' TOWN**", for which Tracy got his second Academy Award.)..."

Radio Times review:

"Spencer Tracy landed an Oscar in the unlikely role of a Portuguese fisherman with a penchant for sea shanties in M-G-M's big budget rendering of Kipling's tale, about a pampered young toff who falls off a liner and is scooped from the briny by a fishing crew, who teach him the basics of life. A boffo hit in its 30s prime, now, 60 years on, it shows its age a touch, but

the sum of the parts remains wholesome family entertainment. **** "

"Millionaire's son Harvey Cheyne relies on his father's money and influence to get him everything. Then fate causes the spoiled brat to enter a different world, stranded on a humble fishing schooner."

TV Times (?) note:

"Vintage drama based on the Rudyard Kipling tale. With Spencer Tracy. **** "

Sunday Times note:

"A millionaire's spoiled young son is saved from drowning by a crusty old fisherman."

Daily Mirror note:

"Spoiled rich kid Freddie Bartholomew is rescued by simple fisherman Spencer Tracy after falling overboard in vintage Oscar-winner. *** "

Full review pending. Tracy was absent "for medical reasons" from the Oscar ceremony.

See the 1977 remake and subject index under **BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL, BRATS / SPOILT KIDS, KIPLING, OSCAR WINNERS / AWARD WINNERS, RECOMMENDED TITLES, SEAFARING and SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS.**