

# TEENAGE FLICKS

Week 5: Classic 80s cont. - Rites of passage

## Stand by Me (1986)

Rob Reiner

- Directed by Rob Reiner
- Produced by Bruce A Evans, Raynold Gideon and Andrew Scheinman
- Screenplay by Bruce A Evans and Raynold Gideon
- Cinematography by Thomas Del Ruth
- Edited by Robert Leighton
- Music by Jack Nitzsche

## The Leech Scene

- The short scene underlines the established group dynamic
- Vern – the naive, most juvenile member of the group
- Chris – the streetwise leader, likes to have fun but knows the world to be unfair and discriminatory – very protective of Gordie
- Teddy – the damaged crusader, hides behind his own fantasy to escape his own wrecked home life
- Gordie – the thoughtful, imaginative member of the group
- The encroaching forest which surrounds them illustrates their continued journey into the unknown, not only regarding their search for the body but also their path into adulthood
- The quick succession of close ups, POV shots, mid-shots and long shots help to place us into the mindset of the excited yet discombobulated young boys
- The low angle shot of the murky water highlights that though they may be close to their end point, they won't get there without sacrifice or struggle – this also works as a metaphor for crossing the line from childhood to adulthood *'How are we supposed to get across this?'*
- Initially, when plunging into the unknown waters, three of the them revert to childish behavior, making a game of the situation
- *'This is my age I'm in the prime of my youth'*
- By the time, they 'cross over to the other side' their more childish games have ended and they are forced to confront a bloody reality
- Confront manhood in terms of becoming an adulthood but also 'manhood' and the oncoming threat of sex and sexual frustrations
- It is the point which the boys become much more focused and serious in intent

*"In the book, it was about four boys, but...once I made Gordie the central focus of the piece then it made sense to me: this movie was all about a kid who didn't feel good about himself and whose father didn't love him. And through the experience of going to find the dead body and his friendship with these boys, he began to feel empowered and went on to become a very successful writer. He basically became Stephen King."*

**Rob Reiner**

- King considered it be one of the most successful translations of his work
- It is universally nostalgic, in that it appeals to anyone who has been a teen, regardless of the time period they grew up in, it captures the timelessness of youth
- Though it has heart, it never sinks into empty sentimentality
- It retains a grubbiness, we feel the dirt, the exhaustion, the frustrations and pain
- The film, is far from naturalistic – if examined closely, it oozes manufactured drama, yet it feels less contrived than other similar efforts

## **Dirty Dancing (1987)**

Emile Ardolino

- Directed by Emile Ardolino
- Produced by Linda Gottlieb
- Written by Eleanor Bergstein
- Cinematography by Jeffrey Jur
- Edited by Peter C Frank
- Music by John Morris, Erich Bulling and Jon Barns
  
- Eleanor Bergstein was the younger daughter of a Jewish doctor from New York
- As a child, she often holidayed in similar Catskills style resorts which are depicted in the film
- She was also nicknamed 'Baby'
- She participated in 'Dirty Dancing' competitions
- Producers cut an erotic dance scene out of the film
- This prompted Bergstein to write a screenplay about the dance competitions of her youth
- She pitched the idea to MGM
- She was paired with producer Linda Gottlieb and Bergstein finished the script in 1985
- However, MGM sat on the idea and the project went into limbo
- Bergstein pitched the idea to other studios but it was repeatedly rejected
- Gottlieb thought it a sensible move to halve the film's budget, making it a more palatable venture for smaller studios etc.
- Alongside director Emile Ardolino, Bergstein and Gottlieb took the refined idea to Vestron and the film was greenlit
- Set in the summer of 1963
- 17-year-old Frances 'Baby' Houseman vacations with her family at a Catskills resort
- There she meets Penny and Johnny (Swayze) who are resident dance instructors
- When Penny falls pregnant, 'Baby' stands in as her replacement
- 'Nobody puts Baby in the corner' - Swayze hated the line
- Though, light fluffy and populist the film also deals with more serious issues
- The class structure
- Anti-Semitism
- Abortion

## **Heathers (1988)**

Michael Lehmann

- Directed by Michael Lehmann
- Produced by Denise Di Novi
- Written by Daniel Waters
- Cinematography by Francis Kenny
- Edited by Norman Hollyn
- Music by David Newman
  
- Veronica (Ryder) is part of a clique of popular girls – the Heathers
- She grows bored of the clique but feels trapped
- When the pair 'accidentally' kill Heather Chandler – she becomes a martyr, even more popular in death
- This leads JD and Veronica on a bizarre life of murder
- When JD and Veronica kill Kurt and Ram, two homophobic jocks, they become gay martyrs to the cause
- The posthumous liberalization of flawed people seems to be a critique on American hypocrisy, celebrity culture and popularity

*On one hand, the high school serves as an icon of American democracy and longing for social justice and equality, one place in American life where every young citizen can access equal opportunity and upward mobility. On the other hand, the cultural life of high school operates as the central training ground in the ruthlessly competitive values and viciously hierarchical social structure of American capitalism. Through a series of homologies, Westerberg High School becomes a metaphor for American life and culture during the Reagan and George Herbert Bush administrations. The conflict between democratic values and the social brutalities of 1980s consumer culture resides not just at the heart of the high school experience, but at the heart of 1980s American life'*

**Clare Connors**