

Edinburgh International Film Festival 2016 The Childhood of a Leader *



The biggest disappointment of this reviewer's festival, The Childhood of a Leader held great promise – musical score by Scott Walker, an examination of which childhood experiences might produce the attributes of leadership, a cameo by Robert Pattinson – what's not to like?

The reality was somewhat different. The setting is around the minutiae of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations following World War I in France. Whilst lighting is an important and often beautiful feature of the scenes, many shots are drab and focus on visual flaws: peeling paint, exposed brickwork, stains on a blouse. Walker's music is jarring, discordant and unpleasantly minimalist.

The young American child of the family is struggling to learn to speak French and has a pretty French teacher to help him. Their new country home has a maid, Mona, whom he loves. His mother is distant, strict and not very demonstrative – a cold fish – and his father is distant, indulgent and ultimately violent. The boy is headstrong and needs direction. The rejection of his French teacher (whom he suspects of liking his father) and his mother's sacking of the maid are the catalysts for a deterioration in his behaviour and a refusal to comply.

The house is set on fire by an unknown maid (Mona's revenge?) and the boy has a cataclysmic tantrum. Cut to a Nazi-style convention and the appearance of a bald Robert Pattinson.

The Secret Life of Pets was opening in the cinema next door.
If only...