

I Wish and Moonrise Kingdom

reviewed by [John Petrakis](#) in the [July 11, 2012](#) issue

In cinema, children generally represent wisdom. Their innocence suggests a mind and spirit that has not yet been polluted by anger, disappointment, jealousy, greed, bitterness or any of the other flaws and foibles that accumulate as we turn the corner from adolescence to adulthood. This kids-know-best theme also flourishes in literature, going back at least as far as when Dickens examined the cruelty of 19th-century England through the eyes of David Copperfield and Oliver Twist.

The genre's latest cinematic entries are a pair of very different films from different corners of the globe. The more thoughtful of the two, and the one receiving less exposure, is the Japanese film *I Wish*, written and directed by the great Hirokazu Koreeda, who has earned a reputation as a master at working with children since *Nobody Knows* (2004).

I Wish concerns a broken family and one young son's attempts to heal the damage. Twelve-year-old Koichi is living with his mother, an unhappy checkout clerk, in a town where a simmering volcano looms. His younger brother Ryunosuke lives many miles away in a larger city with their father, a struggling musician with rock-star dreams. (The two brothers are played by real-life brothers Koki and Ohshirô Maeda.)

Once the ever-hopeful Koichi buys into a tall tale—that if he stands at a certain spot at a certain time and makes a wish as a pair of bullet trains pass each other, the wish will come true—his mission is set. He and his impressionable younger brother plot a secret rendezvous at the magical crossroads so they can become a real family again.

A journey film ensues, but to up the emotional ante, Koreeda throws in half a dozen other children, friends of the brothers with hopes and dreams of their own: a would-be actor, painter, baseball player. One boy is willing to forego any dreams of future fame or success if his pet dog will come back to life.

If this sounds corny or overly sentimental, you haven't been exposed to Koreeda's cinematic skills. The children are spontaneous and totally believable, exhibiting the

boundless energy that most adults can only dream about.

Subplots involve a grandfather who wants to open a candy store, a mother whose failed dreams are leaking onto her sad daughter, and—in an awe-inspiring tribute to the legendary Japanese director Ozu—an aging couple who let the children stay overnight at their house during their long journey.

The film's ending is poignant and truthful. Some wishes will eventually come true; some won't. Magic has nothing to do with it. Continuing the journey does.

A different take on the wisdom of children is contained in the latest offering by cult director Wes Anderson. This quirky film, which takes place in 1965, revolves around a pair of 12-year-old loners who fall in love backstage during a Sunday school production of Benjamin Britten's opera *Noah's Flood*. Sam is an orphan living with uninterested foster parents; his only interest in life seems to be acquiring survival skills as a "khaki scout." Suzy is a burgeoning writer of fantasy literature who must endure a trio of annoying younger brothers and a pair of battling parents—both lawyers, played with equal parts eccentricity and sadness by Bill Murray and Frances McDormand.

After a yearlong correspondence, Sam and Suzy plan an escape to a magical island. Once they're on the road (he with an overstuffed backpack, she with her cat and a suitcase full of books), a search party is organized—a posse of oddballs who soon come to terms with the lack of love in their own lives. They include a stoic sheriff (Bruce Willis), an obsessive-compulsive scout leader (Edward Norton) and an uptight social worker (Tilda Swinton).

As the search continues, Anderson, a master at deadpan humor, does a fine job of turning the cute story into something more profound. In the meantime, we are allowed a few more precious moments with Sam and Suzy, who lack Romeo and Juliet's passion but seem a lot more capable in the wild.

The film ends with a curious mix of funny and sad. I was reminded of Wendy's words to Peter Pan: she can't return to Neverland, because "I'm grown up now." Nothing, not even pirates or Indian princesses, can stop the long slog to maturity. But movies about the hopes of children allow us to take a breather before heading on down the road.