The Journey of Child Development

Selected Papers of Joseph D. Noshpitz

Edited by Bruce Sklarew & Myra Sklarew
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INTRODUCTION
John McDermott

In the chapter that follows, as Joe Noshpitz analyzes a popular children’s film of the 1990s, \textit{Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles}, you can see both the breadth and depth of his thinking. Describing the essential characteristics of pop culture, he skillfully takes us beyond the obvious good guys versus bad guys themes, combining insights from Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud with his own, as he delves into the hidden crevices of the inner lives of our children. Specifically, he penetrates the unconscious minds of teenagers in a way that we (and their parents) can accept—and come away with a better understanding of their oft-annoying behavior.

\textit{Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles}, he tells us, can best be seen as a developmental drama, the representation of a life journey, one that focuses on getting through a particularly difficult phase of growing up. This was back in the ‘80s and ‘90s, a time when parents wondered whether the then-current “Turtlemania” was a cause for alarm. They were perplexed about the possible harmful effects of these four sword-wielding, wisecracking, pizza-grinding turtle characters as role models for their own teenagers. Meanwhile, the movie was breaking all records at the box office.

Let me provide some important background that the author skips when he wrote this piece about the movie. After all, the Turtles are old stuff now, and Turtlemania was at its peak 25 years ago.

The \textit{Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles} story begins when a rat named Splinter (yes, that’s right, a rat), who had once been a ninja master (a kind of super samurai warrior, expert at martial arts, coupled with a deep spiritual philosophy), escaped from an evil force called Shredder by hiding underground in a Manhattan sewer. A terrible accident above-ground caused four baby turtles to slosh into his underground hideout
along with a radioactive spill that evidently caused their mutation. The old ninja warrior adopted the baby turtles, naming them, of all things, after Renaissance artists—Raphael, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Leonardo. He raised them in true samurai tradition, teaching them skills in martial arts and the samurai philosophy. But as they grew up, they began to behave like typical teenagers everywhere, desecrating the samurai code they had been taught, turning their underground home into a typical teenage clubhouse, and scarfing down pizza. At night they would sneak out to learn about the real world above. Soon they encountered Shredder and his gang of thugs. The gang captured and held their mentor, Splinter, prisoner until our Turtles, aided by their friend in the real world above, a newspaper reporter named April, rescued Splinter, and all was well again.

Teenagers loved the story, of course. But what about younger kids, the preteens who flocked to the film and bought all of that commercial turtle paraphernalia to be like the Turtles?

The late Bruno Bettelheim, in his classic book *The Uses of Enchantment* (1989), described how traditional fairy tales were really hidden morality tales that allowed children to process their fears and worries. But these fairy tales dramatically changed form with the explosion of the modern media. Themes changed, too. Noshpitz adapts Bettelheim’s method to the Turtles saga, analyzing the hidden theme and offering us reassurance, not just about teenaged sloppiness and eating junk food but about other themes like flaunting independence from parental guidance.

Noshpitz shows how *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* still used the upside-down world of opposites and reversals to disguise the message. The hero is a rat, at the same time a mentor and leader of adolescents. The good guys live in the sewer and the bad guys above ground. Of course, the old fairy tale lesson is the same—hard work pays off in the end. Along the way, though, Noshpitz discusses the changing historical roots of fighting and violence, once a reflection of achieving manhood and now a prohibition. But the fighting is really a side issue, he claims. It is on the side of righteousness. And after all, the Turtles fight together as a team, not against each other. That’s how he gets to his main theme—how a boy arrives into manhood these days. The history alone is worth the read. But the developmental theme is the key.

Joseph Campbell also wrote about the stuff of legend and myth adapted by Hollywood. Old wine in new bottles? Perhaps. But when I would give a presentation on one of the *Star Wars* film series at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, I could count on Joe Noshpitz sitting right there in the front row. As you can guess when you read the essay that follows, he couldn’t
wait to be the first to raise his hand when I finished. Joe would ask, “But Jack, isn’t it really basically an oedipal theme?”

“Yes, Joe,” I’d answer, “but it’s more than that, too.” And off we’d go.

Recently I was honored to present the Joseph Noshpitz Lecture at the annual meeting of the AACAP. The paper was titled “Harry Potter: Passing Fad or Children’s Classic?” As I looked out into the audience, I imagined Joe Noshpitz sitting right there in the front row, his hand ready to shoot up with the first question.

It must be that I miss him—as all of us do.

Reference

Popular culture is an important and fascinating phenomenon, perhaps the closest thing we have to a group mind or a tribal consciousness. It pervades our lives, its usages find their way into our language, and its figures have presence in the inner life of many children and adults. One should not overestimate its importance; it does not compare, for example, with the significance of parents or siblings, but during late latency and early puberty its effects run a close second to the psychological import of school. For some youngsters it may be more important. If nothing else, studying the nature of pop culture is likely to tell us something of the prevailing emotional hungers and yearnings of people, for it is in response to those that pop culture exists, and it is in its influence on those that its significance lays. Pop culture is endlessly dynamic, as performers and creators seek to read the public’s mood and interest and to feed that public what it wants. And, as the public in turn grows and develops and responds, now to this, now to that, selecting its themes with quicksilver shifts of topic and mood, there is a certain cumulative effect to the way that things evolve so that, over time, major alterations in public taste and values can take place.

The way it works is that something catches on—hula hoops or Cabbage Patch dolls or the Beatles—and spreads like wildfire through a particular segment of the population. For a time the flames burn brightly and light up the social sky, and then something happens; some other presence commands the public horizon. For children and younger adolescents, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles have been such a phenomenon; they have had their interval of glory, and they are only now beginning to pass the crest of their popularity and to start the long and steady slide into oblivion that has characterized so many of their notable predecessors. Or perhaps they will follow the Beatles and Elvis Presley into sainthood—who can tell?

Let us consider some of the characteristics that I think contribute to make a particular item offered by the creators of pop culture likely to be accepted. First, it has to address some deep-seated existential problem in society. Often the problem is associated with uncertainty or an area of public stress. Our feelings toward gender issues and male–female interactions are perennial favorites. But husband–wife tensions, the honesty and dishonesty of police, the wisdom of children against the wisdom of their elders, all sorts of challenges to the official—and often the euphemistic—address to emotional issues are likely to be at the core. As we shall see, the theme of coming into manhood is one such that is integral to this movie.

Second, it has to simplify the issue. One of the great bugaboos of humankind, certainly of civilized humankind, is the extraordinary complexity
of at once their inner experience, interactive relationship, and civic, larger community adaptation. The yearning that emerges, among all of us sometimes and among young people much of the time, is for things to be simple. “Lighten up,” “take it easy,” “cool it” are among the common injunctions aimed at least in part toward shaking off the yoke of our complexity and acting as though life were something other than the tangled snarl it so frequently becomes. What a relief it is to know the good guys from the bad guys, to be sure that in the end virtue will triumph over evil and that the hero will get the girl. One need not untangle byzantine motivational intricacies with all their changeability, uncertainty, and ambiguity. As long as the story goes on, one is free from the burden of complexity.

A third characteristic of pop culture is arousal. Such consumable stuff must feed the instincts, must be evocative, and in effect must massage the id. Fight scenes, chase scenes, sex scenes, or merely simple pie-in-the-face, pants-falling-down kinds of slapstick are cases in point. There has to be at least some such payoff.

Allied to that (and number four in the sequence), there is often rather a special kind of morality. Sentimentality, bathos, scenes of reconciliation, all are there, some kind of fairly obvious moral choice has to be made, and, mirabile dictu, it is on the side we know is right. The hero is tempted but stands firm and resists the siren song. The errant one strays but is troubled by conscience, and finally, at the critical juncture, he does the right thing. With this, we all mist over and come away with a sense of uplift.

Finally there is the associated aesthetic. Here we stand on shakier ground because the variety of pop culture’s expressive forms is so vast. Basically, it comes down to how best to tell a story. Accordingly, the means of telling, the coherence of the tale, the skill of the creators in employing whatever media they works in—all these will help determine how well it all comes together. If it is a cartoon, how well is it drawn, how convincingly do the depicted characters convey the intended message, and how well told is the tale of their efforts? If it is a printed story, how good of a wordsmith is the author? If it is a movie, how about pacing and sequence and soundtrack and camera work—all the necessary elements—let alone storyline, acting, sets, and directing? We should never forget that Utagawa Hiroshige designed prints to put on tea wrappers and that Charles Dickens wrote chapters for a weekly serial. This work can be done poorly or well—and to considerable extent that matters too.

With this, we move from the general to the specific work we are here addressing. For purposes of our work, I propose to focus in particular on adolescent development.

First, a few preliminary observations about the style of the telling. The story of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is told largely in darkness. It is the stuff of dream, myth, and legend, with a repeatedly recurring image
of idealized and demonized figures coming out of concealment—that is to say, out of the unconscious—and interacting in various ways during nighttime encounters. The heroes live underground and come to the surface only at night. The villains live in a large warehouse and have their own inner world, which is artificially lit. The darkness emphasizes the mythic tone of the story, a tale of good versus evil, of darkness against light. It is altogether reminiscent of another recent fairy tale adventure, *Beauty and the Beast*. In this story too, the beast-like hero lives in dark underground spaces, comes out only at night, rescues a girl, and brings her down to his world of make-believe.

With so much said, let us move to the main theme. Before the movie begins, the preliminary lead-in tells up something of the character of the ensuing interplay. A young newswoman announces on television that a crime wave is currently inundating the community. Then, as she walks the darkened street, she is frightened by a rat and begins the transition into the world of myth. It is a world of reversals where the good guys live in darkness and the bad guys in light, where the unpleasant rat becomes the revered mentor, and where the deformed and potentially monstrous Turtles are the heroes, and the human followers of Shredder are the villains. In that extraordinary realm, she is accosted by the evildoers, the bad youths. Before they can harm her, however, the lights go out, and these aggressors are attacked by a group of invisible assailants. The mysterious rescuers overcome the bad youths quickly, tie them up, and leave them bound on the sidewalk.

Thus, virtue triumphs, good overcomes evil, the safety of the girl is assured—and the movie begins. This simple morality play is further enhanced by the basic theme that now develops and that will run throughout. It is the story of becoming—how the boy becomes a man. It is one of the conundrums of our time that that everyday sequence, the elementary transformation of the male child as he moves into and through adolescence, has become muffled and confused to the point where masculinity has become an amorphous concept and even a disreputable one, where what was once a self-evident change everyone took for granted has now become one of the most poorly defined passages in the human lifespan. Hence, one of the great appeals of such a movie, albeit symbolically and to some extent in caricature, is that it nevertheless portrays a vision of boy becoming youth becoming man.

To be sure, in this tale, the notion of manhood is defined as being able to fight—and that requires some explanation. It is not so long ago that a real boy was expected to come home from school now and then with a black eye. The important issues then were: Did you fight fair, and did you give as good as you got? Nowadays, a fight by a middle-class boy in a middle-class school would be totally unacceptable and might very well become grounds for a lawsuit. The expected level of decorum and the forms of
acceptable miscreance have both changed dramatically over the last two
generations. Along with this, there has been a radical revision in the defini-
tion of manhood. Or perhaps revision is the wrong term. There has been an
abandonment of the former conception not jeered at as macho, without any
very clear formulation emerging to take its place. The fathers are perplexed
as to what model to offer their sons, and the sons are even more baffled.
The culture has turned its back on direct violence as a virtuous or even a
permissible form of expression, and, despite the fact that they have been
shaped by millennia of violent experience, the males in our society now find
themselves chastened and in some corners excoriated for any such interest.
But no cultural taboo can make all of that phylogenetic pressure simply
give way. The hunger for more simple and direct expression of aggressive,
competitive and combative impulses is rampant. Those who write and pro-
duce media materials respond to this demand and make hours of violence
viewing available in every possible form: cartoons, movies, videos, tele-
vision, and so on. No wonder, then, that the theme of the Ninja Turtles packs
a great deal of combative stuff.

The specific ideal extolled in this presentation is very simple: it involves
excellence in fighting as long as it is on the side of righteousness. This is
a very old tradition, deeply engrained in our culture, and readily evoked
in times of war or national stress. Indeed, once upon a time the notion of
fighting was an honorable one. We have but to think of the model of knight-
hood and chivalry, the knights of our storied tradition did very little else
but fight. Indeed, we always think of them as clad in their somewhat grotesque
garb—their own Turtle get-up, the suit of mail, designed to protect
them during their many battles. Our Old Testament rings with accounts
of battles and alarms, prophesies about war and tales of bloodshed. The
games of male childhood used to be cowboys and Indians, or some other
version of good guys against bad guys. It is only in our time that things have
changed and that the notion of the boy growing into man, the fighter, has
fallen into disrepute. Hence a story based on fighting skills and filled with
fighting sequences will meet wide appreciation among our action-hungry
young. Paradoxically, as the acceptability of fights has in fact diminished,
the frequency and intensity of violence and combat in entertainment (e.g.,
movies, television, video) seems to have increased proportionally. Hundreds
of hours each month are devoted to scenes of violence—primarily because
the market demands it. That is what the young like to watch—in particu-
lar, what young boys like to watch.

The notion of growing up to be a successful fighter in some realm is one
of the dreams of boyhood. Hence, a story depicting the training and prepa-
ration of fighters is bound to be interesting to young viewers. The question
of how one is prepared for such a future is a subtheme of this story. The
concept of the ninja is, of course, one of a super fighter, a master of the
martial arts. Presumably it involves a good deal of training and years of
practice. Thus, the preparation for becoming a man, a fighter, involves a lifetime of hard work and discipline. But that is only part of the story. For it involves a teacher and a special kind of student–teacher relationship. With this, another of the main themes appears: the role of the man as teacher, mentor, parent, or model in the rearing of the boy.

The father–son relationship is of peculiar moment for the story we are studying. The theme of the old man of the tribe as instructing the young boys is as old as mankind itself. No great wonder then that it is central to this story—and indeed offers the major relationship the movie portrays. Again and again, in one form or another, the theme returns to the link between father and son in numerous permutations and combinations.

Leaving that for a moment, there is another theme, prominent and pervasive throughout, that I feel needs address, and that is: The Turtles are grotesque. How does that link with development? It seems to me that in some version or in some limited way, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle is the inner self of every teenage boy. Such a youth has moments when his head is filled with egregious lusts and forbidden images, he masturbates in secret, he may be experimenting with forbidden substances, he hides things from his parents. As a result, there are times when he regards himself as grotesque, misshapen, bizarre. If his inner self were seen, people would shrink away in horror from his ungainly contours; hence that must always be hidden. But, at the same time, he has other moments when he is strong, noble, virtuous, and good; in his heart of hearts he dreams of himself as grand, magical, and gifted with great prowess. He is full of ardent appetites and is basically lovable but is sadly misunderstood by an uncomprehending world. His only recourse is to turn to others who are in similar case, equally deformed within, equally pressed and hagridden by their drives, and to mingle and interact with them.

Now let us consider the oddity of the Turtles in a more general way. According to Harvey Greenberg (writing in *Psychiatric Times*), the idea of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was conceived as a kind of half-mocking commentary on some of the current or recent fads. Shredder, the bad guy of the piece, looks an awful lot like *Star Wars*’ Darth Vader, and all sorts of other borrowings are scattered throughout. The idea of Ninja Turtles as such is, to say the least, far-fetched; in fact it is zany and way out. Evidently it is a pastiche of some prevalent concepts mixed together in an original way—but characterized more by its grotesque peculiarity than by any inherent grace or universality. Yet, that in itself should give us pause, because in recent years the grotesque has come to assume rather remarkable proportions in the realm of teenage entertainment. We have but to consider the garb and behavior of many popular band leaders, and we find ourselves confronting some strange images indeed. It is not so many years ago that one such voice-that-sang-to-youth included a procedure of throwing the entrails of slaughtered chickens in gobs and handfuls out to the uproarious
audience, apparently to their frenzied delight. Bizarre posturing, extreme hairdos, oddly formed beards, offbeat costumes, suggestive imitations of perversity, in a host of ways those who stood before and chanted to our youth strove to render themselves as deviant, as unconforming, as distant as possible from any hint of mainstream acceptability. Shock value was sought, and the grotesque was courted.

Even the affective demeanor of these performers was devoted to excess. They strove to portray an individual brought to the very limit of emotional endurance and then pushed beyond. They were frenzied, ecstatic, abandoned, amok; they flung themselves about in a very extremity of pseudo-passion. They tried to do with song and music what they sensed the youngsters both sought and feared, to feel deeply, to test newfound emotions to the limits, to search for the borders of their control. And they sensed as well that some experimentation with alienation from the culture into which they were growing was a pervasive interest among the young.

The creators of the Turtles, however, did them one better. Instead of enacting the extremes of emotion and depicting the overwhelmed ego, they chose instead to report an image of mastery of all that. To do this, the authors chose to resort to humor as their chief mode of coping. The Turtles are inherently funny, they are given to joking, wisecracking, punning, they are greedy, and they indulge in endless mutual teasing. They are also odd-looking, droll, ungainly, essentially ugly and, best of all, apparently unaware and not self-conscious about their oddness. And therein lies one of the powerful secrets of the Turtles' attractiveness. Albeit grotesque, they are not a whit disturbed by their oddness. They know they must keep concealed but betray no trace of self-consciousness about their deviance. If anything, they are filled with macho good humor; they kid around, banter, tease, and carry on as though they were altogether regular guys. They are akin to the taxi driver who tells his astonished passenger: "It looked like a big toitle—where to, folks?"

What a model for the young teenager who is in the midst of his own awkward body changes and who feels so keenly the inner grotesquerie of his passions and imagery. Here are individuals with even more to worry about than he, and look how cheerful they are—they don’t let it phase them, any of it, and they embody and live out all his fantasies of righting wrongs, combating evildoers, and impressing girls, and all within a framework of spoofs and rollicking good humor, quips, and cranks and wanton wiles galore.

As noted, one of the threads that binds this story together is the theme of coming into manhood. This is a powerful and universal motif that every culture must face and that has evolved some of the best-known and most elaborately developed human rituals. In tribal contexts, it often enough requires an experience of mutilation, such as the pectoral lacerations of the American Plains Indians or the circumcision and subincision of Australian aborigines. Almost always it necessitates some form of ordeal, some stressful
undertaking that demonstrates the prowess and mastery of the youth seeking manhood. This is true even in less warlike societies. The 13-year-old *bar mitzvah* boy must demonstrate his learning before he can say, “Today I am a man.” There is usually a period of intensive preparational training that precedes the ordeal and prepares for it. To be sure, in fairy tales, no training is required. One acquires the competencies of manhood merely by growing from the process of development itself. Thus, in the tale of the prince and his companions, there is a tower in which a prince’s beloved is immured by a wicked old wizard. As the story opens, the prince is going there to rescue her. On his way he meets a series of odd characters—a very tall man, a very strong man, a man with big eyes, and a man with big ears—each of whom seeks to join him. He thus arrives at the tower with a host of competencies he has acquired along the way. Each of the companions assists him, and with their help he defeats the wizard, rescues the maiden, and claims her for his own. Thus, with the additional capacities added by the process of development, he is enabled ultimately to conquer the father figure and to achieve the longed-for oedipal victory. The journey itself is his ordeal and prepares him for the direct oedipal confrontation.

But the usual story in human culture is that of a more or less extended period of training and preparation followed by a ceremonial inflicting of pain, stress, and suffering in the service of achieving manhood. One way or another, the youngster must learn the secrets of the tribe as part of his preparation for the transition to come. Often enough, when he has succeeded, he earns the right to a name. The names accorded the Turtles—Leonardo, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Raphael—are obviously spoofs, another of the reversals, where their ungainly contours are associated with the creators of the most beautiful of all human forms and appearances.

The Turtles, too, had to go through a long period of training. We do not see much of that, but it is described graphically, and they are demonstrably skilled performers at martial arts. Indeed, the themes of hard work, preparation, and acquiring the fitness to perform good deeds are so intrinsic to the Turtles that, as I have noted, their story has about it the elements of a morality play. This is no small part of their appeal; after the relative quietude of latency, teenagers are reencountering their superegos. They are discovering the ambiguities of human motivation and the complexities of interpersonal relationships, so that simplified morality themes, where good guys and bad guys carry evident nametags as to their polarities, are a great relief—and a subject of profound interest.

To continue the discussion of the transition into manhood, let us return to the theme of the father–son relationship. Evidently this can have many derivative forms. There might be a teacher–student interplay and grandfather–grandson, uncle–nephew, even therapist–patient equivalent. As the story gets played out, however, the father–son theme gets reworked in a variety of ways. It is the essence of the interaction between the Turtles
and Splinter. It is stated formally as the connection between Shredder and the youngsters who surround him. It is encountered directly in the interplay between Mr. Pennington, the newspaper editor, and his son, Danny. One way or another, it weaves itself into the story and lends an intense emotional tone to the unfolding events.

The Turtles are depicted as rather heedless, inattentive, and wisecracking as their mentor tries to speak seriously to them. At one point he looks up in mock despair and says, “Kids!” Yet despite all the kidding around, when the chips are down and he is spirited away by the bad guys, the Turtles lament his loss and seek him with such fervor that ultimately they reach him telepathically and achieve a sort of mystical union. His particular form of parenting involved training, discipline, and the pronouncement of many wise saws. This stands in contrast to the rearing styles of Shredder, whose message to his young protégés is: “You can have anything you want whenever you want it.” This theme of hedonism unlimited does not seem to encourage much discipline, but without laboring the logic of it it turns out that Shredder, too, offers martial arts training and has his own corps of bully-boys to serve as foils for the Turtles. Both the upright Splinter and the debased Shredder exemplify symbolic versions, caricatures if you will, of child-rearing systems. The most realistic father–son relationship, seen only in fragmentary glimpses, is that between Mr. Pennington and his miscreant son. This boy is disobedient, steals, runs away, and joins forces with the bad guys but falls under the sway of Splinter’s benign wisdom and is eventually reunited with his father. Here, then, is another of the morality themes: the matter of choice. The young are confronted by both exhortations to do the right thing and obey their parents, and temptations—drink, drugs, cigarettes, theft, gambling, and spending money in profligate fashion—and they must sometimes make hard choices about which course to pursue. This is dramatized once by Danny’s struggles with himself and a second time when in the course of rescuing Splinter the Turtles confront the youngsters who have fallen under the sway of Shredder.

Finally, since we speak of development and becoming a man, what about the presence of a woman? And, indeed, the woman, April, is present more or less throughout—only one woman, to be sure, but still quite a significant element in the story. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the network of relationships around this figure serves as the essential armature on which the story is mounted. Psychologically, at any rate, the theme of coming into manhood involves the seeking and interacting with an appropriate mate. Accordingly, the unfolding of the story of the Turtles is built around a core of romantic attachment. To be sure, the Turtles, as such, are not romantic. Although early on they make a few feeble remarks and token gestures to suggest some arousal by April, there are no true female objects of their passion, and there is no hint of sexual interplay in their interactions. Instead, their efforts are devoted to righting wrongs, protecting the innocent and,
most prominent of all, combating evildoers. When in the presence of April, they strive to entertain her, but they do not become drawn to her or aroused by her; their primary affiliation is with one another and with their mentor. When they deal with the woman, they do so as small children might. They eat her food, they stay in the living quarters she provides (she is the only one in the array of good guys who seems to have any material possessions that amount to anything), and finally, as noted, they act to entertain her. They put on skits and imitations to divert her and make her laugh. The one nonchild element in the relationship is when they act to protect her, both at the outset and subsequently. For them she is a kind of pregenital mother about whom they might harbor rescue fantasies but nothing else.

The romantic attachment does not involve the Turtles. Instead, it is rather sketchily developed between April and an intermittent young male character who keeps appearing at unexpected moments and whose presence is never really explained. This young man is named Casey Jones and, as such, adds to the mythic character of the story by bringing in the theme of the great American railroad saga familiar to every schoolboy. It is a ballad, a song, about the railroad engineer who was one of the models of male vigor and fortitude for an earlier generation; in the Turtles' story it suggests youth and adolescence coming of age and growing into manhood.

As he appears in the story, Casey is at first perceived in a somewhat ambiguous light. He has the same mission as the Turtles, he too battles against the evildoers, despite the fact that he is without the blessing of ninja training, he too is a formidable master of martial arts. His competence derives from the American equivalent of the ninja, namely, he is a former hockey player, a sort of hockey ninja as it were. (There is an old quip: “I went to a fight, and a hockey game broke out.”) Indeed, we first meet him opposing Raphael and besting him at hand-to-hand combat. But it soon develops that Casey is a supporter of the Turtles’ mission. He is a vigilante of sorts, who with the notable exception of clubs, golf sticks, and cricket bats can somehow outninja the ninjas. He tips the balance in one of their battles with the bad guys, covers their retreat, and is a crucial participant in their final victory. His role is a muted one, in some ways minor; he does not appear in the final battle with Shredder, and one may wonder why he is necessary to the story at all. Paradoxically, I would suggest that the underlying dynamic is such that in fact it is his story we are seeing, the story of his meeting, courting, and ultimately joining with April. Indeed, I would go further and say that, despite their centrality, the Turtles are in fact an aspect of his growth and development. They represent the qualities that coming into manhood requires. They are actually part beings—the virility, steadfastness, faith, brotherly caring, filial devotion, protectiveness, and joie de vivre—that manhood includes, or should include. They are also wise guys, punners, sometimes irreverent, and hence all the more typically male—by this culture’s standards. Their part-being status is epitomized
by their mentor, whose name, Splinter, testifies to the fragmentary quality of their nature. Even their opponents have a part-object name, the Foot. Hence, in contrast to the storyline, it is not the Turtles who acquire Casey Jones as a companion. It is Casey who, with the help of the characteristics the Turtles represent, by acquiring *them* as it were, is eventually able to mature enough to get the girl—or, more exactly, to be acquired by the girl. In addition to being the only one in their cohort with any possessions, she is the one who says at the end “Kiss me!”—and thus initiates their sexual engagement. As is inevitable for part beings, the Turtles really cannot develop any sort of fully mature relationship. They go another route; they join to Splinter and to one another in mutual symbiosis. Together they quite literally become one—and it is this mythic group that encounters the equally mythic Shredder and overcomes him and thus allows Casey to move into manhood, to come together with his girl, and to make it possible for the film, and this paper, to end.