



Sound & Vision - March 1981

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News and views about books on radio, TV and films.

Little Lord Fauntleroy

The film of this Victorian classic goes on general release in March. How faithful is it to the original? **Barry Cunningham** went along to a preview to find out.

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The book has been filmed twice before - in 1922 with Mary Pickford playing the boy *and* his mother, and in 1936 with Freddie Bartholemew in the long curls and lace collar which have become associated with the name Fauntleroy. But this film, as the Director, Jack Gold, is quick to point out, is the first in which Little Lord Fauntleroy has been accurately cast as a genuinely American inheritor of his English grandfather's Earldom.

But why the remake? What is Little Lord Fauntleroy to today's audience? Rereading the book it is easy to see its natural screen attraction. The story, which lacks the stodginess of much contemporary work, progresses through set pieces, lightly moving back and forth as the boy's artlessness exposes the kindness buried beneath his grandfather's cantankerous exterior. Humour and pathos come and go like sunshine and showers, and the open-hearted little boy with the beautiful blond curls carries all before him.

The film retains this grand optimistic progress, skilfully managing to avoid the sentimentality which for a modern reader lurks in the book, by bringing out more of the fun inherent in the various formal confrontations. The sentiment of the original it rightly retains and its ruthless manipulation of the heart strings, using much of the dialogue from the book, strikes enough chords to keep the shareholders in Kleenex crying happily into their paper profits. This is largely thanks to the careful and restrained performances of Alec Guinness as the Earl of Dorincourt, Ricky Schroder as the boy and Connie Booth as his mother, Dearest. Add to this dazzlingly talented package some beautiful photography of the English countryside at Belvoir Castle and a selection of lovable characters: old retainer (Eric Porter), folksy Yank (Colin Blakely), and numerous adoring down-trodden poor, and **Little Lord Fauntleroy** will surely have the whole family captive and enchanted.

Of course that's what it's all about, enchantment. A fairy story as distanced from fact as that of Luke Skywalker and the Princess. The message of benevolent autocracy may be literally too big a pill to swallow - but the coating is delicious.

Don't think, just weep and smile, and you and your children, your granny, her granny, your mother's best friend, Aunty Edna, Snotty Edward will enjoy the film and the book immensely. The Penguin tie-in editions are illustrated by the beautifully atmospheric set drawings which introduce and end the film, gradually drawing you into and releasing you from the fantasy. The film accurately retains all the atmosphere, character and emotion of the original; and the book's enduring power is reconfirmed. Like **The Secret Garden**, a comfortable classic.

Meet Yok Yok

YOK-YOK

a new hero for the under fives

The latest character to appear in books and on television, Yok Yok, is the creation of Etienne Delessert and will be seen in a weekly programme for younger children which starts on 3rd April (ITV).

There are six books about Yok Yok from Moonlight Publishing. Each one has four simple stories and full colour illustration. The books are aimed at two to six-year-olds, for sharing with adults and early reading (£1.50 each).

IN VIEW SOON

The Bagthorpe Sage

Don't laugh . They say it's going to start on Wednesday, 25th March. I'll believe it when I see it. (New subscribers puzzled by that remark might like to know that we have been announcing the imminent arrival of Bagthorpes on TV since last March. Ed.)

Vice-Versa

A family serial in seven episodes from ATV based on F. Anstey's classic story of a father and son changing bodies (Puffin). First episode 5th April.

Bertha and the Racing Pigeon

We hear Pam Ayres will feature her book on her BBC-TV Special show the day before publication of the Arrow paperback.

IN PROSPECT

A new series of **Smith and Goody** from Thames.

An adaptation of **Stig of the Dump** in September (Thames).

Also in the autumn we may have **The Coral Island** (Thames) and **The Day of the Triffids** (BBC).

Flambards Sequel

Planned to coincide with a re-run of the very successful Flambards series (Yorkshire TV) comes **Flambards Divided**, Kathleen Peyton's sequel to her Flambards trilogy (OUP, £5.95).

Film Tie-ins

Hippo have three books on films in the pipeline: **My Bodyguard** (February), **Herbie Goes Bananas** (March) and **Oh Heavenly Dog** (May). In April the paperback tie-in for the new **Popeye** film is due from Fontana (£1.95).

Lord of the Rings on Radio 4

The 26-part serial starts in March with a very starry cast of voices including Michael Hordern and Robert Stephens.

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