

Footloose ain't all that bad

Review by R. F. MacDonald

Many critics have been dismissing this film out of hand as a poor man's *Flashdance*; not true, I say. *Footloose* may be about dance but it does not share the sense of personal xenophobia that condemned *Flashdance* to the realm of pornographic fairy tales. Dance in the latter was the only mode of escape, dramatically speaking; the heavy emphasis on physical transcendence was obviously a good marketing move as all those quivering thighs come across more as titillation than expression. Instead of dealing with grim reality, *Flashdance* ignored it, resulting in a rather deranged, almost European style of Vogue magazine slickness that left us waiting for the limousine to turn back into a pumpkin and the designer dance skins back into potato sacks.

Footloose is certainly more down to earth, but that doesn't mean it's a better movie. Its production values are pretty terrible: crappy continuity of film stock, dreadful editing, practically no direction. All there is to recommend it is the acting. Ah, but what acting! Kevin Bacon is probably one of the most ingratiatingly likeable actors at work today. And John Lithgow is simply superb as the Town Pastor who is the source of the controversy. The others in the cast get by, but are overshadowed by Bacon and Lithgow. Obviously since there must have been so little direction, the actors played up to their abilities; in the hands of an experienced filmmaker, as Hitchcock has stated, "actors are cattle." Well, in this case, the



herd got away from the farmer. The results are oddly enough, not too bad.

The narrative, of course, is nothing new, and the eventual "courtroom scene" wallows in clichés, albeit some likeable ones. What it is, of course, is simply an update of those Old Fred & Ginger-hoofer-on-the-loose excuses for a films. The subject matter for those was the foibles of the young and rich. Well, "rich" is out (because rich is immoral aka *Risky Business*)

and "young" is the only thing that matters in America. In Europe, young people don't matter because European civilization is based on age and manners (and/or the lack thereof). So, *Footloose* comes off as corny as its Nebraska setting. Mix in some Scopes Monkey trial-like debates and some beach party (which, by the way, are supposed to be THE NEXT BEST THING) innuendo and you have a pretty dorky story. Mind you, it is nice to see all those concerned, involved members of the "now" generation on the wrong side of the generation gap.

O.K. enough invective. *Footloose* does actually deal with enough issues of concern to the adolescent that it may actually help a few of 'em, including those perpetual ones so perpetrated by the media. It attempts to understand the problems of modern-day teenage existence, solving them through consultations rather than confrontations. It is a movie about coping, not escaping. Therein lies its greatest strength and appeal. After all, this flick has made big bux on a fairly low budget, no small feat in the age of beached whales like *The Right Stuff* and *Scarface*.

A final word, however, about the music. Unfortunately this may be *Footloose's* greatest drawback. Instead of dance music of either soul (i.e. Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, etc.) or new Music (B 52's, Talking Heads, etc.) variety, the film utilizes pasty white glop from the seventies dinosaurs that punk and new wave were supposed to kill off. I mean, Kenny Loggins?

How tasteless. And Mike Reno of Loverboy? How awful! This stuff maeks me wanna puke, not dance! No wonder the town banned dancing, the music was causing too much stomach upset!

Anyways, back to the film. *Footloose* is probably the most likeable of the current spate of

movies about adolescence. It is certainly not the best (that award goes to *Rumble Fish*) and it is definitely not the worst (undoubtedly Tom Cruise's last two). *Footloose* is, in the final analysis, a springy little film that overcomes many of its own drawbacks in spite of itself. No mean feat, either.

To Nanette on the westcoast waiting

Review by Geoff Martin

Ever since the 1979 release of the film *Apocalypse Now* North America has seen a deluge of films and books, fiction and non-fiction, on the American involvement in the Vietnam War.

Letters to Nanette
- a novel by Bob Biderman
The Contemporary Literature Series
Early Stages Press
247 pages \$11.95 HB, \$5.95 PB
plus \$1.50 postage for Canada
PO Box 31463, San Francisco, CA
USA 94131

Most of the fiction deals with all or part of the period of 1965 to 1973, when the United States maintained massive ground strength in Asia; most of the fiction also tends to avoid the politics of the war, concentrating instead on tactics, strategy, and the life of the American soldier.

Letters to Nanette, however, is a departure from this -- it is the story of Pte. Alan Bronstein, a

former student of U-Cal Berkeley and the latest in a family of Jewish pacifists from New York.

The book is best described as a fair modern American novel which is a little too rough around the edges to be regarded as an exceptional accomplishment.

It is written in the form of letters to non-existent Nanette, and, unfortunately, it could have been done more effectively.

The novel attempts to recapture the period of time just preceding the heavy U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, and while this works most of the time, the author lapses occasionally into after-the-fact realizations about the coming Vietnam involvement.

The book also contains a liberal dose of 1960s superficial rhetoric and expression -- all of which were inserted consciously in an attempt to recreate the time, I hope.

All in all, not a bad book, and one which "Vietnam war buffs" are sure to be interested in.

If you are interested in a study of the ideas of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky please write to "Associates of the Gurdjieff Foundation of North America," c/o Burnell, Box 2878, Dartmouth East.

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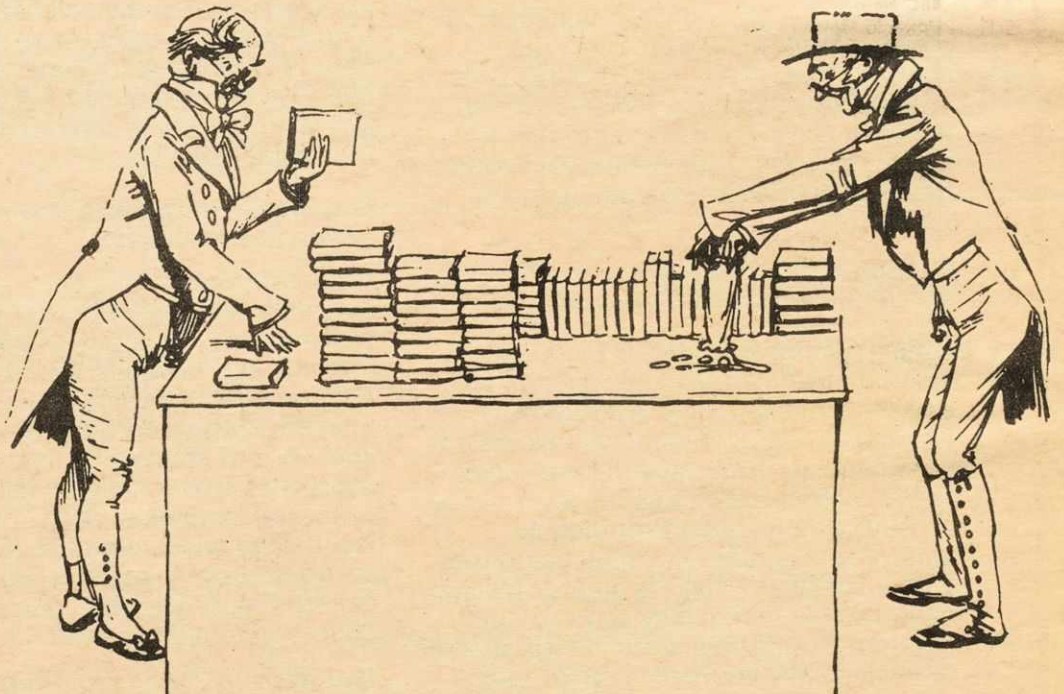
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