



***Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1980) is an upcoming LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that telefilm.**

14 of 20 possible points = *1/2 = excellent film**

**United Kingdom 1980 color 103 minutes live action feature drama telefilm
Norman Rosemont Productions Producers: William Hill and Norman Rosemont**

**Key: *indicates an outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 1 Direction: Jack Gold**
- 1 Editing: Keith Palmer**
- 1 Cinematography: Arthur Ibbetson**
Still Photography: Bob Greene* and Barry Payne*
- 2 Lighting: George Cole**
- 2 Teleplay: Blanche Hanalis based on the novel by Francis Hodgson Burnett**
Continuity: Renée Glynne
Music Editing: Eddy Joseph
- 2 Music: Allyn Ferguson**
Choreography: Ralph Tobert
- 2 Production Design: Herbert Westbrook***
- 2 Art Direction: Martin Atkinson***

Set Direction: Tessa Davies

Props: Andy Andrews*

Costume Design: Olga Lehmann*

Makeup: Roy Ashton

1 Sound

Sound Editing: Michael Crouch

Sound Mixing: Brian Simmons

14 total points

Cast: Ricky Schroder (j) (Ceddie, Little Lord Fauntleroy), Alec Guinness* (Earl of Dorincourt), Eric Porter (Havisham), Colin Blakely (Hobbs, the grocer), Connie Booth (Mrs. Errol), Rachel Kempson* (Lady Lorradaile, sister to the Earl), Antonia Pemberton* (Dawson), Rolf Saxon (Dick, the bootblack), John Cater (Thomas), Peter Copley (Reverend Muldaur), Patsy Rowlands (Mrs. Dibble), Ann Way (Miss Smith), Patrick Stewart (Wilkins), Gerry Cowper* (Mellon, maid), Harry Jackson (Hustings), Edward Wylie (Ben Tipton, Dick's brother), Tony Melody (Kimsey), Kate Harper (Minna, Ben's ex-wife), Rohan McCullough (Lady Grace), Dicon Murray (Georgie), Ballard Berkeley (Sir Harry), John Southworth (Higgins), Norman Pitt (Lord Ashby Delephant), James Hodcroft (First-born Lord Fauntleroy), Lucien Morgan (Albert), Bill Nighy (officer), Christopher Fairbank and Eric Richard (men filling in ditch)

Two film adaptations of Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1886 children's novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy* have met with some degree of popularity. The older of these, David Selznick's 1936 production, starred British native Freddie Bartholomew. It foundered due to that lad's genuine English accent interfering with his credibility as American-born Cedric Errol. The more recent 1980 outing fared better, for Ricky Schroder is an American native and sounds it.

The teleplay version also benefits from location filming at the site of an English castle. No stock footage was required for exterior shots.

Casting veteran Alec Guinness as Fauntleroy's grandfather yielded splendid results. Schroder, however, offers nothing special dramatically in the title role. Unlike his wrenching performance in *The Earthling*.

Author Burnett seemed incapable of creating a credible boy protagonist. *The Secret Garden* offered a juvenile St. Francis figure in Dickon, presumably

someone Colin Craven needed to emulate. *The Lost Prince* was even more fantastic, centering around a youth who for handsomeness, intelligence, courage, and patriotism was absolute perfection. No insecurity, selfishness, faux pas, shyness, awkwardness, impishness, or depression clouded the lives of those paragons.

In the case of Cedric Errol, readers discover what is supposed to be a fatherless urban urchin living in a Hester Street tenement in New York City. They're spared dialogue between Ceddie and street smart peers. Only the poppet's occasional lapses into slang seemingly pinched from pages of Dickens novels even hint at intermingling with slum dwellers.

After at least seven years of silence, the Earl of Dorincourt decides to reopen communication with his daughter-in-law, asking her to bring his only surviving heir to England. Afflicted with gout and pessimistic about maintaining family honor, the old gentleman apparently resolves to take one last chance on a descendant raised abroad in a radically different culture, believing he can mold the boy to an acceptable likeness of himself.

While that should serve to generate nothing but conflict and stubborn refusal on Cedric's part, writer Burnett instead followed the timeworn formula of opposites attracting each other.

Mother and son abandon America at first opportunity preferring Old World refinement hand in hand with title and wealth. Soon a crotchety British lion is domesticated into Toynbee Hall philanthropy by a male version of Pollyanna determined to see only goodness in everyone.

Resemblance of the Earl to Heidi's grandfather should certainly come to mind. Even plot movement from rough-and-tumble city to pastoral paradise copies Johanna Spyri's Swiss classic.

In the Anglo-American tale conflict eventually arises from a rival youngster whose mother hopes to hop aboard the Dorincourt gravy train. Will she succeed in substituting her unappealing brat for cheerfully naïve Cedric?

Not if the Earl and his legal agent Havisham can derail her. Quality, like blood and truth, *will* come out.

Costuming and set decorations leave nothing to be desired in creating essential aristocratic ambience.

Allyn Ferguson's pompous theme music smacks triumphantly of nobility and privilege. Buttressed by color photography in sober, restrained hues awash in Victorian formality and interior lighting par excellence, this version of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* basks in period ambience.

Sound is less successful, with some mufflings occurring which mar line delivery.

Conventional editing keeps the story moving briskly without ever transitioning into more visually challenging territory involving wipes, superimpositions, or extreme close-ups. That is not a defect here, though. Well-timed short dialogues and bridging traveling shots keep motivations transparent and continuity intact.

Blanche Hanalis sagely preserved many of the novel's key lines in her teleplay, being more a conduit than creative reviser. A multitude of nods to Greek chorus are included, sometimes through gesture rather than speech, as butler, coachman, seamstress, and others reflect ironically on the behavior of their manorial lordship.

Rachel Kempson's Lady Lorradaile shines with grace, good humor, and loving concern, bringing real maternal warmth to her character.

Too much ham sabotages Colin Blakely's shopkeeper Hobbs, Patsy Rowland's seamstress Mrs. Dibble, Rolf Saxon's bootblack Dick, and Peter Copley's bleeding heart vicar, all lamentably employing stagy hyperbolic movements rather than tiny, discreet ones that convey so much more cinematically.

Better are Antonia Pemberton's turn as highly adaptable, ultra-efficient head housekeeper Dawson and Gerry Cowper's gossipy, amiable under-maid Mellon.

Despite being exactly a facial ringer for Burnett's heroine, Connie Booth fails to communicate the profound affection and love that beauteous, nobly genteel Mrs. Errol bears for her only child.

Arthur Ibbetson's cinematography and Jack Gold's direction fail to generate suspense or explore unconventional approaches. Nonetheless, they supply adequate framing for a narrative geared to inculcating Christian behaviors in young audiences.

Due to one profanity and some rather rude slang, the film makes appropriate viewing for ages twelve and up. Its dramatic complication involves certain sexual indiscretions that may not be understood by younger audiences.

Recommended to teens especially for an introduction to the writings of Frances Hodgson Burnett. Though the “good as gold” conduct of Ceddie may severely try their patience. For adults, this production serves as a quite respectable showcase for Burnett’s storytelling.

For contrast, check out Mary Pickford’s Ceddie in the 1921 silent film of the identical title. It’s considerably more nuanced than Ricky Shroder’s. You can find this in the Mary Pickford dvd set which is part of the Ligonier Valley Library’s Classic Cinema Collection.