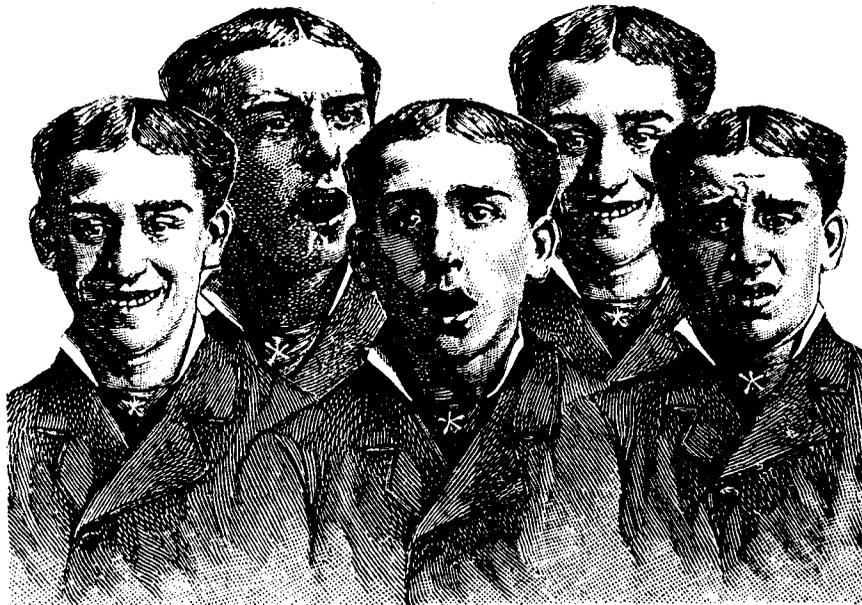


## Sharks

**George Perry: *The Life of Python*; Little, Brown; Boston.**

Three-card monte is a game of chance that's often dealt by those who leave absolutely nothing to chance. To play, the dealer takes three cards, shows their faces to the player, places them face down on the table, then shuffles their position. The player attempts to correctly identify the location of a particular card. A variation on this scheme is the old shell game, a true favorite of con artists. Once, Messrs. John Cleese, Michael Palin, Graham Chapman, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Terry Gilliam worked together in a BBC television program titled *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974) and feature films



including *And Now for Something Completely Different* (1971), *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1974), *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), *Monty Python Live at the Hollywood Bowl* (1982), and *Monty Python's Meaning of Life* (1983). One of their objectives in all of these projects was to expose con men, frauds, and various and sundry affected bigots and beings

through the medium of humor, tasteful, tasteless, or otherwise. Those in the know refer to the group of men through a form of shorthand: the "Pythons." But I'd like to suggest that as time has marched on (perhaps to the downbeat of John Philip Sousa's *Liberty Bell*) they have become the "Montes." The apotheosis of the Montes comes in George Perry's *The Life of Python* which, in addition to being a heavily illustrated panegyric, is a semiauthorized biography ("Although it is by no means official, authorized Python work," Perry notes, "each member went out of his way to be helpful." He then expresses his deep gratitude to them for providing time and heretofore unpublished personal memorabilia). The book is precisely the sort of thing that the Pythons would be apt to parody; it is a text that

extraordinarily fat man who copiously vomits while supping in a rather regal dining establishment and who finally explodes, showering the scene with his waste. One passage in the book, from Monte financial and spiritual supporter and ex-Beatle, George Harrison (ever notice how George is always described as an "ex-Beatle" while Paul and Ringo, to varying degrees, are their own men and John is simply a martyr?), may have been the emetic used to provoke Mr. Creosote:

There are certain things in life which make life worth living, and one of those things is Python. Especially to someone like me. When you've gone through so much in life, and you're supposed to decide what is real and what isn't, you watch the television and you see all this madness going on, and everyone is being serious and accepting it, and you're ready to bang your head on the wall in despair—then someone says "And now for something completely different!" That saves the day.

Life must be trying for poor George; no wonder he was never accused of being "the smart Beatle." Pity, too, all of those who will be taken by Perry's game of six-man Monte at their local bookseller. (SM) □

## A Big Bonbon

***Romancing the Stone*; Directed by Robert Zemeckis; Written by Diane Thomas; Twentieth-Century Fox.**

*Romancing the Stone* is a cinematic Raisenette: sweet, chewy, and individually unsatisfying. It is, in design and execution, sort of a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* for that segment of *The Big Chill* generation that likes to think itself above such "childish amusements" (though that assessment is made only in public after a furtive viewing of Indiana Jones's exploits). The characters in *Romancing the Stone* are grown-ups but not adults:

In *The Meaning of Life* there is a sketch including one "Mr. Creosote," an

one would expect to find in *16* or other teeny-bopper fanzines: details about the boys' Mums and Pops, personal interest and hobbies, where they live. All that's lacking is a checklist with items listing favorite foods, colors, and pop groups—though this last item is implicitly answered.

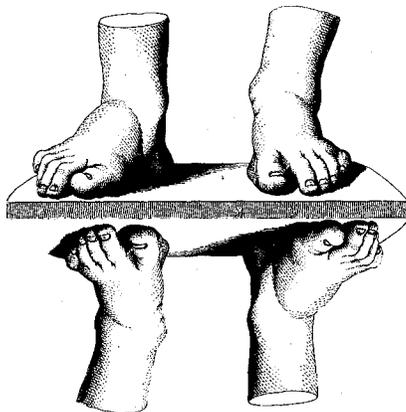
key are a romance novelist who looks not like Barbara Cartland but like a Cartland creation and a swaggering vagabond whose most painful moment comes when he discovers, in a crumbling issue of *Rolling Stone*, that the Doobie Brothers have disbanded. Essentially, the movie is nothing more than a pulp romance brought to the screen, but those who produced it, apparently, like to think themselves to be more arch: that is, in terms of current literary discourse the movie is a self-conscious romance. Somehow, it's implied, by calling attention to its recognition that it is a \$2.95 story line, it makes itself more serious and important. One of the favorite activities of the literary analysts of the generation in question is to examine works of so-called "popular culture" and to make all sorts of grand, sanctimonious announcements about them. Some of these demischolars have accidentally bumped into Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* or some of Barthes's "mythologies," and have consequently worked toward making the banal profound. The results are publication and tenure. Given that *Romancing the Stone* has a "frame" and a number of the "elements" of the popular romance genre, it will undoubtedly take on an outside mantle of respectability. (SM) □

## Shaking a Money-Maker

*Footloose*; Directed by Herbert Ross; Written by Dern Pitchford; Paramount.

Break dancers—those young people who go writhing, flipping, and spinning about like modern, urban, secular dervishes—probably do not think about sex once they've completed their bouts. Rather, they undoubtedly wonder whether there's a chiropractor in the house. Television's *Dance Fever* structurally emphasizes sex through the use of the

over-endowed women who attend the host, but it's obvious that the boys and girls who are up on the stage shaking it for all they're worth have money and prizes on



their minds—be what they may. A brisk foxtrot, I imagine, would be more libido-stirring than anything done on *American Bandstand*. *Footloose* is based on the foolish premise that dancing leads straight

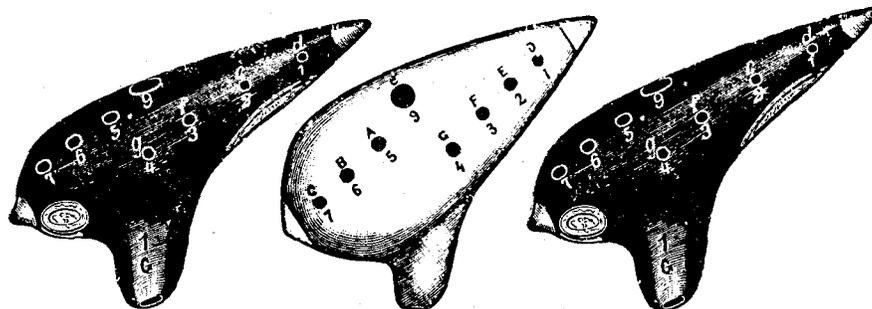
to if not bed, then at least to a car's backseat. Naturally, "uptight" adults are the ones who think this is so, so they've outlawed the practice. Filmic teens, who have always known better than their elders—or at least have in the post-Andy Hardy period—oppose them. Predictably, those who feel themselves "born to boogie" conquer. What is more annoying than the moronic movie itself is the likelihood that the "grown ups" who made *Footloose* spent a great deal of cash on consultants, testing, marketing, etc. in order to tailor the product to be properly simplistic. The teens who see *Footloose* and who side with the kids against the aged powers that be undoubtedly can't imagine that they are being treated in a more ridiculous manner by Hollywood than the restrained dancers are by those in charge. The only "footloose" action that director Ross and writer Pitchford are genuinely concerned with is their own on the way to the bank. (SM) □

## MUSIC

### Post-Modern Muzak

One of the deleterious aspects of enclosed shopping malls is the audible environment—not the sounds of shoppers shouting, scuffling, and struggling about, around, and over imaginary bargains, but the ever-pervasive schmaltz that fills the air. There are the

oriented boutiques play; and, of course, the supposedly soothing sounds of *Spanish Eyes*, *Tie a Yellow Ribbon*, or something by Barry Manilow that ooze from organ stores. The last-named is, perhaps, the most annoying, as it is the result, in many cases, of thrown switches that provide everything from snare drums to a chamber orchestra. The pitch



standard packaged long-playing tapes that the large department stores utilize; the always-too-loud FM radio that teen-

is that anyone with several hundred dollars and the requirement for a new piece of living room furniture can make