



Popular Culture

The old notion that real culture should never aspire to be popular has itself lately become unpopular, even in the academic world. Despite the strong skepticism of some scholars, many researchers have begun to see "pop culture" (everything from dime novels to Hollywood films and top-40 music) as a kind of Rosetta stone for deciphering the myths, hopes, and fears of American society. "There are two ways of spreading light," Edith Wharton once said, "to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." Is popular culture a good mirror? Here critics Thomas Cripps, Jeff Greenfield, Arthur Asa Berger, John Cawelti, and Frank McConnell discuss, respectively, the pop culture boom, daytime television, the comic strip, the romantic novel, and blockbuster movies.



THE FOLKLORE OF INDUSTRIAL MAN

by Thomas Cripps

Scholars cannot agree on the nature of "popular culture," but they *do* seem to know its sources.

They point, for example, to a demographic bulge toward the end of the 17th century that restored Europe's population to the high levels of 1348—the year of the Black Death. This emergence of a new mass audience coincided with the first industrial revolution; cheaper printing and increased literacy soon helped nur-

ture the rise of popular literature. By the 18th century, graphic material could be reproduced; by the 20th, so could photographs. And shortly after physics unveiled quantum theory, popular culture made a quantum leap into radio, motion pictures, and television—all promoted with that sophisticated mixture of marketing and salesmanship made possible by the convenient concentration of mankind in cities.

What are we to make of the cultural fruits of this evolution—a peddler's sack filled with everything from *High Noon* and *L'il Abner* to Gothic novels and molded plastic replicas of Dürer's *Praying Hands*?

Intellectuals, except for such occasional mavericks as Gilbert Seldes, author of *The Great Audience* (1950), for many years stood aloof from the marketplaces and bazaars. Rather than studying popular culture as an expression of the values of a vast, otherwise inarticulate population, many critics were offended by its surface excesses: its directness, shrillness, and apparent simplicity. Others shared a contempt for any art that was "available" and "cheap," hence vulnerable to mass taste and easily corruptible.

And yet popularity, by definition, is what the student of popular culture most wishes to understand, and accessibility and cheapness are its generic traits. These popular arts are built on a new sort of creativity that depends for its success on imaginatively repeated and rewoven formulas and archetypes. Thus, through movies, television, the popular novel, and comics the serious critic of popular culture invites us to see reflections of many values and attitudes—the furniture of the mind—of American society.

Whatever their convictions, most scholars in one way or another regard popular culture as, in Marshall McLuhan's apt phrase, "the folklore of industrial man." Before the industrial revolution, the cultivation of faddish tastes was a perquisite of the rich. A rage for "Chinoiserie" followed 16th-century advances in navigation that allowed costly Chinese *objets d'art* to be brought to the bric-a-brac shelves of the rich. In Holland and

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CANNED ARTS, PASSIVE MILLIONS

Popular culture has always been unpopular among many intellectuals. Distressed by the stage and literary offerings of his day, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) allowed that “my idea of heaven is that there is no melodrama in it at all.” One hundred years later critic Paul Goodman assayed the state of the popular arts and found it wanting:

Half the population sees a two-hour drama every week; the radio nightly presents long hours of vaudeville to millions; records beat out music everywhere; there is no measuring the floods of printed matter, merchandising pictures, cartoons, that have, whatever else, an artistic purpose.

Now this sheer quantity itself is the first thing to explain. But the explanation seems to me to be obvious: people are excessively hungry for feeling, for stimulation of torpid routine, for entertainment in boredom, for cathartic release of dammed-up emotional tensions. . . . The life the Americans lead allows little opportunity for initiative, personal expression, in work or politics; there is not enough love or passion anywhere; creative moments are rare. But they are still feeling animals; their tensions accumulate; and they turn to the arts for an outlet.

They are a passive audience; they do not strongly or overtly react, nor do they artistically participate themselves. There is, of course, no point in overtly reacting to a movie-screen or radio; but it is the audience passivity that has made these canned arts become so important. . . .

And this passive reaction is superficial—this is why it is perpetually sought for again. It does not unleash, like the tragic or comic theater of old, a violent purgation of the deepest crises and thwartings, death, lust, scorn. These things are not purged every morning and night. Rather, *the American popular arts provide a continual petty draining off of the tensions nearest the surface.* Their workings can be fairly compared to chewing gum as a means of satisfying an oral yearning for mother love and sustenance.

Reprinted from *Creator Spirit Come!*: The Literary Essays of Paul Goodman edited by Taylor Stoehr (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977).

England, the preindustrial rich risked fortunes on the tulip craze, yet another precursor of popular culture.

More than any other factor, technology gave the middle classes access to culture. The combination of leisure, discretionary income, and books made cheap by advances in printing contributed to the growth of the novel and to making the 19th century the first great age of popular culture. Developments in structural steel, power sources, and transportation led to

world's fairs and, by the 1890s, to professional sports. In the next century, continuing advances in mass-produced color lithography and electronics gave rise to graphic magazine journalism, comic strips, motion pictures, and broadcasting. Symbolic of classless access to popular expression was the generic name of the earliest film theaters, the nickelodeon—a pleasure palace for a nickel.

Boosting Enrollment

And yet, although we are now awash in a great age to which historians might someday give a name (as flattering as “the Renaissance” or as contemptuous as “the Dark Ages”), we know so little that a precise definition of popular culture eludes us. What are its boundaries, its sources, its mythic systems? And what is the secret of its current success as a mode of inquiry on American campuses?

In German universities it is studied as *Trivalliteratur*, and England's University of East Anglia is a center for the study of pop culture. In America, nearly every college makes some gesture toward offering work in the subject, some of them admittedly to bolster declining undergraduate enrollments in, say, “The Victorian Novel.” (Just change the title of the course to read “The Victorian Novel in the Movies.”) And yet highly motivated students, too, take up popular culture with a brave disregard for consequences to careers or respectability. For them, the top of the heap is the doctoral program in “American Culture” at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. But at least 500 other universities offer work in the field, with the total number of courses approaching 1,000. Still more courses appear under such rubrics as “American Studies,” “Mass Media,” and even “The Absurd Arts.”

The Popular Culture Association—the guild that represents the scholarly community—encourages inquiry so broad as to defy definition. In one recent meeting, an audience heard a prosaic academic paper on the depiction of Jews in silent movies, an analysis of the Wolf Man as tragic hero, and a discourse on matchbook covers. The territory covered by the *Journal of Popular Culture* and the Popular Culture Press is just as extensive, taking up with considerable rigor the iconography of the Coke bottle and the esthetics of the '57 Chevrolet.

If the interests of pop culture scholars are catholic, they are also colloquial. Like a postcard from Atlantic City, a teacher's essay in the *PCA Newsletter* begins: “Thought I'd write you a short account of some Popular Culture curricula reforms occur-

ring on the high school level here in Tempe, Arizona." One almost expects the next sentence to begin: "Some of the guys down at Marge's deli dreamed up this terrific new course. . . ."

This informal devotion to the craft is more refreshing than it is naive, more tolerant than exclusive, and more widespread than parochial. Topics range from ancient folklore to modern myths. Some students invoke the highest standards of traditional scholarship, while others see popular culture as a means of liberating intellectual inquiry from hidebound convention. Social scientists, literary critics, dilettantes, and plain fans share the platform at scholarly meetings. In such an atmosphere, breadth matters more than definition.

No one can say what the future holds for popular culture. Limitless sources of TV, movie, and print production reaching for limitless audiences demand limitless repetitions of formulas, genres, and themes. But as long as purveyors of pop culture speak to the hopes and fears of their audiences, they will continue to produce popular art that can be studied as a mirror of social values—and enjoyed in its own right.

Despite the contempt of many critics, popular culture persists as a lively art and a compelling if unrefined field of inquiry. And if critics still see it as Yeats's rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem to be born, it must be remembered that nowadays to be born again is itself popular.



PASSION ONCE REMOVED

by Jeff Greenfield

About 25 million Americans watch television between the daytime hours of 10 A.M. and 4 P.M. Most of these people are women; most of them are at home; and most of them are regular viewers. What they regularly see are soap operas and game shows—entertainments with far more in common than a mere preference for daylight.

These particular entertainments are the most enduring of broadcast forms, surviving and flourishing despite the fact that

each has been broadcast (on radio or TV) five days a week for more than 40 years. Both play on their viewers' thirst for passion—even vicarious passion—as well as for at least an artificial sense of dramatic peaks in the lives of “real” people like themselves. Whether this occurs through the frenzy of a game show or the never-ending chains of crises confronting the good folk of the soap operas, these daytime dramas work when, and only when, they touch a viewer's concern. And because these shows are as fickle—or as steadfast—as their audiences, to watch the characters on daytime TV is in a way to watch the people watching them.

Of course, for all their similarities, soap operas and game shows, like food and drink, engage the passions differently. The soaps, for example, make an overt dramatic play for the emotions. The game shows must rely on flashing lights and a fantasy environment that grotesquely parodies its own ancestry.

“Real-Life” Crises

In its original incarnations on radio and television, the game show was a *panel* show where erudite guests imparted a mixture of knowledge and wit. But beginning with Louis Cowan's *The \$64,000 Question* (1955), the format gradually shifted away from substance—away from the actual game, quiz, or challenge—and toward a combination of glittering prizes (a new car, \$20,000 in cash) dangled before ordinary contestants.

The formula remains intact to this day. Flawlessly “typical” contestants—they could be any of us, which is the point—are suddenly given a chance to win big. What we are left with is a blend of reality and fantasy, real people dropped into unreal environments where nothing bad—and possibly much good—can happen.

The soap opera operates in reverse: The people are fictions but the crises they face—and face, and face, and face—are very real. Believability comes not from surrounding ordinary people with glamour, wealth, and prizes but from subjecting imaginary people to “real-life” problems in melodramatic form. In direct contrast to the prime-time evening dramatic series, where every

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episode cries for resolution, the essence of the daytime drama is that there is *no* resolution. As in real life, there is generally only another tunnel at the end of the tunnel.

The soap opera was born not in New York or Hollywood but in Chicago during the early years of network radio. The form was a natural for television, especially in the early days when bulky live cameras and cramped studios forced directors indoors to concentrate on the conversational and the intimate. As early as 1942, a soap called *Last Year's Nest* was telecast in Philadelphia. In 1950, CBS began *The First Hundred Years*. By 1952 such present-day staples as *Love of Life*, *Search for Tomorrow*, and *The Guiding Light* were on the air.

Exploiting the Taboos

The sheer longevity of these shows is remarkable. On prime-time television, fewer than half of all new shows last out their first year. A show that runs five years or more is exceptional. Yet on daytime TV, there are many shows that have run for more than 20 years. Actresses like Mary Stuart, on *Search for Tomorrow*, have been in the soaps for more than a quarter of a century.

But what has most surprised and in recent years impressed the scoffers—who have smirked at the endless stream of diseases, amnesia attacks, disappearances, adulteries, heartbreaks, divorces, and miscarriages in the soap operas—is the degree to which these dramas have incorporated social change.

As early as 1963, actor George C. Scott recognized that a “sense of growth and continuity has never been developed in broadcast series at all—except, interestingly, in the old radio soap operas.” This principle has been extended to television. As in the daily comic strips that inspired them, soap-opera characters grow: They marry, have children, mature, even die. The daytime audience accepts this personal, drawn-out form of drama. Soap operas receive thousands of congratulatory cards and letters when a favorite character “marries”; countless telegrams and sympathy cards are received when a character “dies.”

When the restraints imposed by network censors started to loosen, daytime characters began to experience the kinds of problems until recently ignored by prime-time television. On the more contemporary soaps, such as *All My Children* and *The Young and the Restless*, women's lib, antiwar protests, and widespread sexual promiscuity have all been incorporated into the plot line almost as a matter of course. As their partisans, includ-

"THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS"

Since 1974, *Daytime TV* magazine has provided plot summaries of network soap operas. The excerpts here are from CBS Television's *The Young and the Restless*.

January . . .

" . . . Chris realizes Snapper is Sally's baby's father and falls, resulting in a miscarriage. She doesn't want Snapper to know the truth and has only confided in his mother. Leslie is happy her relationship with Brad is growing. Laurie is trying to win Jed from his wife, without much luck. . . .

February . . .

" . . . Leslie returned from her concert tour a success and, with Brad's urging, has bought the restaurant from Sally. Brad and Leslie are engaged. Chris had asked Snapper for a separation for time to think out their problems and decide if he should go to Sally for her baby's sake. Mark Henderson has arrived to finish his internship. Kaye's son Beau has returned home and wants to help his mother. . . .

March . . .

" . . . Leslie's restaurant opening is a success, except Laurie is there and brings Brad's old love, Barbara, from Chicago. Brad finally tells Leslie about his past. Chris and Snapper are slowly reconciling as Chris gains her self-respect. Gwen tried to commit suicide when Greg found her with another 'customer.' Kaye finally called AA. Snapper told Greg about Gwen and Greg beat up her boss."

ing writer Dan Wakefield, have noted, the soaps were the first broadcast dramas to touch on adultery, impotence, alcoholism, drug addiction, venereal disease, mastectomies, and other once taboo topics.

Prime time all but excludes expressions of vulnerability in its characters. But the people of Pine Valley and Hawkins Falls—and yes, even of Fernwood in the semi-parody *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*—do struggle and fail and learn to live with loss and disappointment and tragedy.

Until the 1970s, networks assumed that the daytime form could not be transplanted to nighttime, when men, teen-agers, and children are a large part of the audience. (The one exception: *Peyton Place*.) But as the '70s began, a number of factors combined to bring daytime into the night.

For one, there was a longing for the traditional values of home and family in the air—and on the air. In 1971, *The Waltons* jumped to the top of the Nielsen ratings, in large measure because of qualities that once would have been associated ex-

clusively with daytime. The show features no gunfights or car chases; there are moments of leisurely, uneventful conversation between the younger and older generations.

It is a curious inversion: Where once daytime TV fled prime time, prime time now copies daytime. The evidence is everywhere, from the success of *The Forsyte Saga* and *Upstairs Downstairs* (soap operas with extra starch) to major television serials like *Rich Man Poor Man*, *Roots*, and *Captains and Kings*. Spectaculars aside, even a regular offering such as *Family* reflects a soap-opera sense of continuity. The major characters suffer. They have affairs, consider marriage, drop out of school, worry about mortality.

It goes too far to say that daytime dramas are genuinely realistic. The necessities of the form require too many brushes with the kinds of crises that most families would suffer only a few times in a generation. But both soaps and game shows have certainly tried to move television closer to what Paddy Chayefsky called "the marvelous world of the ordinary." What daytime TV has given prime time is the possibility of exploring characters not through the prism of fantasy, but through a focus closer to the way most of us spend our lives. And that is no mean contribution.



TAKING COMICS SERIOUSLY

by Arthur Asa Berger

New art forms are often greeted with derision. Attic tragedy was denounced by conservative Greeks, impressionism by high-brow Parisians. Americans, too, have snubbed new, indigenous art forms. The comics, for example, like jazz music, are a home-grown American product; and like jazz, they were long ignored by "serious" critics.

As critic John Canaday recently noted, the pendulum has now swung to the other extreme: The comics have changed from

“entertainments to be read while lying on the floor” into “sociological testaments for intellectual evaluation.” Perhaps the pendulum has swung too far. Where once Mussolini banned *Popeye* for being antifascist, latter-day commentators point to a perverse relationship between Batman and Robin; an oral fixation in husband Dagwood’s eating jags in *Blondie*; and (as the government of Finland helpfully pointed out) an apotheosis of “bourgeois” capitalism in *Donald Duck*.

No longer dismissed as trivial, the comics have other feints to parry. Journalists have great sport with academics who “read meaning” into the comics, and the creators of many comic strips vehemently deny that their work is worth fussing over. We are told, constantly, that comics (or film, or television) should be enjoyed and not analyzed—because there is nothing to analyze.

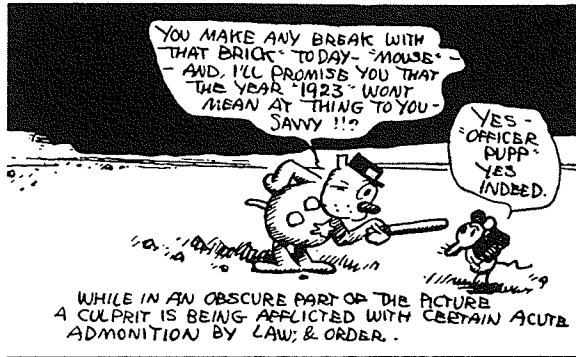
This “know-nothingism” is naive. Like slips of the tongue or dreams, the comics have much to tell us if only we will ask.

One of the first scholarly works to consider the comics was Gilbert Seldes’ *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924). Seldes’ paen to *Krazy Kat* at once boosted the strip into the comic Olympus and created a cult in its honor back on earth. In *The American Language*, meanwhile, H. L. Mencken began tracing the words and phrases comics have given to English such as “jeep,” “wow,” and “grr.” But until recently, most work in the field was done by non-Americans—Italians in particular—who took the same proprietary attitude toward U.S. comics that Britain’s Lord Elgin took toward ancient Greek statuary.

Is a Barnacle a Ship?

The comics themselves are relatively ancient—by pop culture’s standards. They have been with us for more than 80 years, and some have been appearing continuously for 50 or 60. *Mutt and Jeff* started in 1907, *The Captain and the Kids* appeared in 1914, *Blondie* in 1930, *Dick Tracy* in 1931. So rich is the heritage that in 1962, cartoonist Jerry Dumas could introduce *Sam’s Strip*, a feature that depended for much of its humor on a kind of camp familiarity with the comics of the past.

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George Herriman's vaudevillian Krazy Kat (1913). Now hailed as a pop-culture classic, the strip was a commercial failure in its own lifetime.

Beyond a common affection for the medium, however, cartoonists and scholars approach the comics from different directions. For example, by and large the jokes in the humorous or “bigfoot” funnies are culled from the absurdities of everyday life. To the scholar, this represents a gold mine he can sift for clues to the *Zeitgeist*. To the cartoonist, it represents hours of staring at the ceiling. As Mrs. Thurber would say when she caught her husband in a trance at the dinner table: “James, you’re writing again!”

The other kind of comic strip—the serial or narrative adventure stories like *Rip Kirby* or *Apartment 3-G*—relies on a different kind of formula and tells us different kinds of things, both about today’s world and the worlds we have lost. Here the problem for the cartoonist is sustaining reader interest over a period of months, and it is solved not by rooting the story in everyday life but by combining fantastic plots with lifelike characters who share the hopes and fears of us all.

Be it through humor or adventure, the comics open a special window onto the past whether they are overtly opinionated (as in *Little Orphan Annie*) or seemingly not opinionated at all (as in *Beetle Bailey*). Indeed, the “value-free” comics may prove the most valuable, for they constitute an implicit record of their audience’s attitudes, not an explicit record of their authors’.

It is doubtful, for example, that Richard Outcault intended to leave posterity a record of the tumultuous 1890s when he first penned *The Yellow Kid*. And yet it was inevitable that the waves of immigration and the crowding of laborers into city and factory would leave their mark on his work. And so we find beneath the ostensible humor that the hero of the strip—a strange, bald,

jug-eared youth who always wears a yellow nightshirt—inhabits a squalid slum called Hogan's Alley. It is packed with children who are decidedly not childish: They wear derbies, smoke cigars, and may even be bearded. There is something poignant and heroic about the Kid and his friends; they are the first in a long line of spiritual orphans in the comics.

Unlike Outcault, Harold Gray in *Little Orphan Annie* had no qualms about putting his beliefs on the line. But like Outcault's Kid, Gray's Annie is an orphan, not the least because her philosophy is outworn and outdated. Annie spent over 40 years (beginning in 1924) railing against the direction American society was taking and championing the old, small-town virtues of yesteryear. As James Kehl observed in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, "she is more than a modern Robin Hood with a heart of gold and a wicked left; she is an outlet for the expression of the political and economic philosophy of her creator and legal guardian, Harold Gray." An extract from a 1945 strip:

Annie: But *why* did some papers and commentators say such terrible things?

Daddy Warbucks: Oh, I guess it was fashionable to sneer at "big incomes." They fail to mention that most of those big incomes go to pay everyone's bills and make the load lighter for everyone else. I believe that the more a man makes honestly, the more he helps this country and everybody in it. What I think we need is a lot more million-a-year men! Mighty little *they* can keep anyway.

Consciously or unconsciously, "liberal" or "conservative," the comics *do* speak to the daydreams and ambitions of the many, and they survive only when they do. The comics are a populist institution that depends on a powerful but fickle mass audience. Skeptical newspaper editors are forever "dropping" comics to test their readers' reaction. (When *Prince Valiant* was cut from the *San Francisco Chronicle* last year, the newspaper received over 1,000 phone calls. The strip was restored and the editors apologized on page one.) These men trace their roots back to editor Arthur Brisbane of the *New York Journal*, who in 1910 refused to let cartoonist Harry Hershfield sign his own strip, *Desperate Desmond*, on the grounds that only "newspapermen" could have bylines.

"But my strip appears in the newspapers," argued Hershfield. "Doesn't that make me a newspaperman?"

"Is a barnacle a ship?" Brisbane retorted.

THE KID IS FATHER TO THE COMICS

There is considerable disagreement over when the prototype of the comic strip appeared. Some point to Cleopatra's Needle, others to Trajan's Column, still others to the Bayeux Tapestry. Encyclopedist Maurice Horn suggests that the "first strivings" toward the art form (if it is one) are to be found in Leonardo's *Notebooks*, though it was English illustrator William Hogarth (1697–1764), he adds, who first assembled the elements of text and image "into a single whole."

As far as American comics are concerned, however, there is no dispute. On May 5, 1895, Joseph Pulitzer splashed some yellow ink on a cartoon by Richard Outcault and published the result in his *New York World*. *The Yellow Kid* was an immediate sensation, and, according to cartoon historian Stephen Becker, evoked "that first gentle wave of mass hysteria which accompanies the birth of popular art forms."



The comics survive such occasional hostility because they appeal to a constituency the newspapers will never overrule. To be sure, this may have its drawbacks. *The Gumps*, premier symbol of the "Roaring '20s," declined as the Depression advanced. *Terry and the Pirates* and its unrelievedly cold-warrior outlook sank during Vietnam and détente. Still, dependence on a mass audience can also have its strengths. The same gangster-ridden Depression that weakened *The Gumps* spawned *Dick Tracy*; the tumultuous Vietnam era that toppled *Terry* and angered *Abner's* Al Capp helped to launch Garry Trudeau's irreverent *Doonesbury*.

Mocking Rhetoric

To what kinds of aspirations do the comics appeal? George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* dealt with two themes that emerge continually in the later strips: the triumph of illusion over reality and the victory of rebelliousness over authority.

For 35 years Herriman's willful, anarchistic mouse (Ignatz) threw bricks at a lovesick *Krazy Kat* who took the bricks as

signs of love. She in turn was pursued by Offissa Pup who tried desperately and to no avail to keep Ignatz behind bars. Herriman's use of shifting, semi-abstract backgrounds and his remarkable rhetoric show the possibilities of the comic art form. Listen to one of Herriman's characters rhapsodize about work:

Indolence—the sin of the century . . . the error of the era—And labor is so lovely . . . toil so transcendent . . . the witchery of work so wondrous . . . industry looks upon the world with beauty . . . Diligence is a dainty delight . . . Endeavour is an enchanting endowment . . . effort effuses an affluent afflorescent effulgence . . . it is noble to strive, brave to strain, kingly to struggle. . . .

Interestingly, *Krazy Kat*, hailed today as the great comic classic, is more highly regarded now than it was when it was "alive." That it lasted so long was due to the rare intervention of a newspaperman: Publisher William Randolph Hearst so enjoyed the strip that he subsidized its publication for 20 years after it had stopped making money for the Hearst-owned King Features Syndicate.

Some of the other more familiar themes in the comics—the triumph of good over evil, for one—are relative newcomers, arriving with the great adventure strips of the 1930s: *Flash Gordon*, *Jungle Jim*, *Secret Agent X-9*, and *Tarzan*. These strips were drawn by master draftsmen like Alex Raymond and Harold Foster and written with skill and imagination (even Dashiell Hammett tried his hand—on *X-9*).

A Fear of Utopia?

In the adventure strips, the good guys always win. We know that Dick Tracy, who in his 47-year career has been maimed, crippled, and shot countless times, will get his man in the end. But there are many recurrent though less obvious themes: a distrust of rationally ordered societies, of technology, of grand visions. Tarzan prefers the jungle to the encroachments of civilization; X-9 takes aim at totalitarian scheming; and Flash Gordon, who relies on space-age gadgetry, must ever contend with dark forces who put that gadgetry to evil ends. In short, the adventure strips reveal a fear of utopia gone awry.

In most strips, these ideas are never spelled out in so many words. In some, however, the political or ideological content, so submerged in *Krazy Kat* or *Flash Gordon*, appears overtly. So it is with *Doonesbury*, our most important new comic strip (though not the most successful commercially; that distinction

DOONESBURY



© 1970, G. B. Trudeau. Distributed by Universal Press Syndicate.

goes to Dik Browne's *Hagar the Horrible*). Here, the political content is so direct and obvious that the line between comics and political cartoons almost disappears. To the Pulitzer committee which awarded Trudeau a prize for editorial cartooning in 1975 the distinction seems to have already disappeared. Writing social comment under the cover of humor, Trudeau satirizes a number of contemporary figures, ranging from TV correspondents to ex-flower children to Army recruiters. Since his allusions are so immediate, he is a very good guide to the contemporary social scene in America.

Does *Doonesbury* represent the swan song of a dying art form? Some observers think so. They note that many of the adventure strips have been casualties of television, that the syndicates have lagged in developing new talent, and that the edge in innovation has passed from the United States to Latin America, the Philippines, and Japan.

Even if those observers are right, the heritage of eight decades of comic art—and its reflections of our evolving culture—remains. And they may well be wrong: One could as easily interpret the growth of the foreign comic-strip industry as a sign of vigor. The comics are now read by hundreds of millions of people in more than 50 countries. As *Beetle Bailey's* Mort Walker has noted, that's probably the largest number of countries ever to agree on any one thing. That fact alone deserves some scholarly attention.



ROMANCE: THE ONCE AND FUTURE QUEEN

by John Cawelti

Foredestined! *A silken fervor caressed them, a flame consuming beautiful Star Lamont and dashing Captain Troy Stewart in a wave of ripening desire beneath the southern sky.*

Foresworn! *Across a fiery landscape scorched by the fury of slave revolt and the tumult of war—across the oceans and across the years—theirs is a story of surpassing grandeur, from a moment's shipboard encounter through a lifetime of everlasting love.*

Forever!

Everywhere one turns these days the paperback stalls sport torrid scenes of dashing Regency gallants and aggressive, wind-blown ladies embracing hungrily on the storm-swept moors. We are in the midst of a tremendous revival of romantic fiction—the last thing one would have expected from this supposedly cynical, alienated age.

The statistics are striking. Harlequin Books, a paperback series devoted entirely to romance, increased U.S. sales from 14,000 in 1966 to 50 million in 1976. (That same year, Rosemary Rogers' *Wicked Loving Lies* led the Avon Books list with over 3 million copies in print.) By 1977, the Harlequin series alone numbered more than 2,000 different titles. Barbara Cartland, who has contributed more than 200 books (*Punishment of a Vixen*, 1977; *The Temptation of Torilla*, 1977) to the romantic flood, likes to speak of the present not as the age of anxiety but the era of romance.

A romance is a special kind of love story presented in a characteristic style and from a particular point of view. In a way, it is the feminine form of the epic, for where the epic uses what Matthew Arnold called the "grand style" to sing of war and adventure, the romance applies that style to love, courtship, and marriage. Like the epic poet, the romance writer works within a highly formalized tradition that rests on familiar conventions of plot and style—florid language, pseudopoetic rhythms, appeals to destiny, and repetitive epithets ("beautiful Star Lamont"). Everything is larger than life.

The romance is above all a woman's story, the one literary form in which the protagonist and point of view are always feminine. (One exception to this general rule, Erich Segal's 1970 best seller *Love Story*, probably owed much of its extraordinary popularity to the way Segal departed from the romance tradition in this respect while nevertheless remaining faithful to the basic formula.) This feminine perspective explains why, despite its popularity, the love story has been given so little scholarly attention: Most scholars have been men.

Contemporary portrayals of the tender passions can trace their craft back in an unbroken line to at least the middle of the 18th century. By contrast, the Western did not begin until James Fenimore Cooper's first "Leatherstocking" novel in 1823, while there was nothing that could really be called a detective story until Edgar Allen Poe's Dupin tales of the 1840s. Science-fiction enthusiasts claim an ancestry going back to ancient times, but the earliest fantasy with most of the characteristics of modern SF was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* of 1818. The spy thriller is of even more recent origin, emerging around World War I.

Unedifying Parallels

At least three general categories can be distinguished within the mass of "romantic fiction."

In the Gothics, a plucky heroine is beset by mysterious attackers, fortune hunters, insanity, amnesia, ghosts, or any of numerous other perils before finally being united with the hero. The queen of this genre is Mary Stewart, a topnotch popular writer who ranks with Agatha Christie and Helen MacInnes.

The Harlequin-type romances, on the other hand, are generally peopled by clean, delightful young men and women; even the jealous woman is usually generous and understanding. The characters are incontrovertibly moral; sex before marriage is unthinkable.

Finally, there is the recent phenomenon of so-called "women's fiction" that exploded with the 1972 publication of *The Flame and the Flower* by Kathleen Woodiwiss. In contrast to the Harlequins, these books are set in the past, and are brim-

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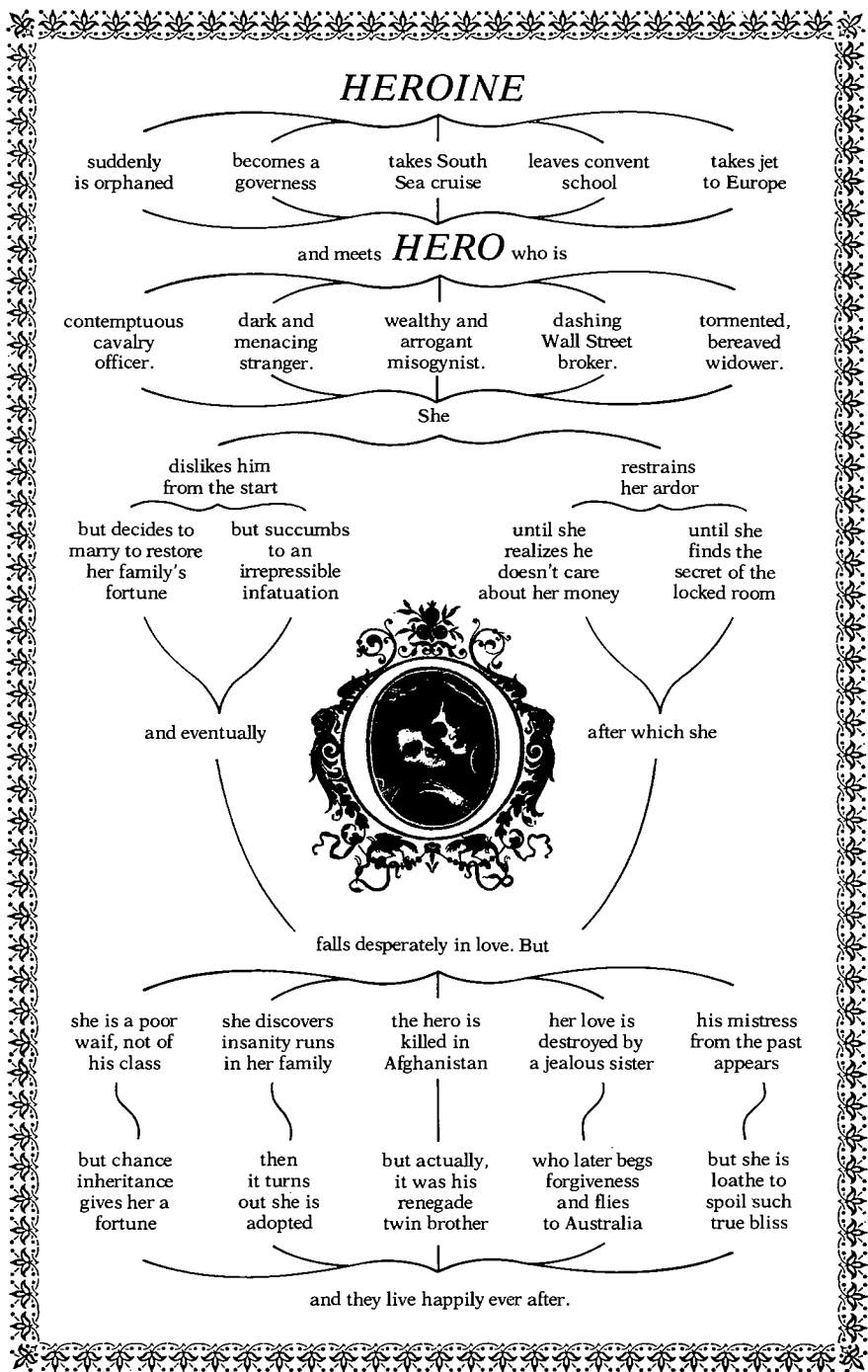
ming with rape, adultery, and prostitution—but, oddly, of a rather romantic, idealized kind.

The less edifying male analogue to romantic fiction is pornography, and the historical parallels between the two are striking. Just as the romance tradition originated in the 18th century with writers like Samuel Richardson, so the first modern pornographic work, *Fanny Hill*, was written in the same period and reads in many ways like a burlesque version of Richardson's *Pamela*. The Gothic romances of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, like those of Mrs. Radcliffe (the most popular novelist in England in the 1790s) and "Monk" Lewis, developed the motif of the alien seducer, which was soon reflected pornographically in *The Lustful Turk* (1828). In the 20th century, the proliferation of styles of romantic fiction has been paralleled by a similar elaboration of the types of pornography—thanks in part to the erosion of "anti-smut" laws. At the present time, romance and pornography are among the healthiest segments, in commercial terms, of the American publishing industry.

The Enchanted World

Parodied, ridiculed, or sullied, the romantic formula has nevertheless proved surprisingly durable over the centuries. Whatever the specific genre—Gothic, Harlequin, or "women's fiction"—the story usually begins with the heroine suddenly being thrust into a new situation. This can be a new job or a long voyage. It can be the consequence of death in the family. For Sara Claremont in Roberta Leigh's *Too Young To Love* (1977), it begins with news of her father's remarriage: to a "young and unknown fashion model called Helen who had come to promote British fashions at the Embassy and had also, it seemed, promoted herself to its Ambassador." This initial change of situation pushes the heroine into a state of affairs that is new, uncertain, and fraught with possibilities. The new world the heroine enters might be called the romantic or "enchanted" world, a place where evil and danger lurk—but also where people fall deeply and permanently in love.

Be it a brooding Gothic, a pristine Harlequin, or X-rated "women's fiction," the romance generally begins with the heroine forsaking her old life for an "enchanted world." There she meets her ideal lover. One plot line works to keep the lovers together; another works to keep them apart—until the last few pages.



Here she encounters the hero—invariably older and more experienced than the heroine, as well as handsome, courageous, daring. He is frequently also wealthier and of higher social standing. Often the hero's easy superiority strikes the heroine as a mark of vanity and arrogance—the first of many misunderstandings. Here is how the hero is introduced in Sella Frances Nel's *Destiny Is a Flower* (1973):

He was tall and slim-hipped, resilient grace being apparent as he slipped his thumbs into the waistband of tan whipcord slacks and surveyed her, almost contemptuously.

If this seems somewhat reminiscent of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, that is not surprising. Austen's novel (1813) is one of the archetypal models for romance fiction.

From the moment of the initial meeting, it is clear that the hero and heroine are ideally matched and strongly attracted to one another. Before long, however, circumstances will conspire to keep them apart. These circumstances usually occupy the entire middle section of a romance and are the chief source of suspense and uncertainty. They invariably involve elements of suspicion, mystery, or unfaithfulness. In Phyllis A. Whitney's *Lost Island* (1970), for example, the heroine has borne the hero a child as a result of a youthful affair. Unfortunately, the hero thinks the child was actually mothered by another woman, his present wife. Though still in love with the heroine, he feels morally obligated to his wife.

Avowals in the Graveyard

The culminating moment of a romance comes when, obstacles surmounted, the heroine and hero avow their love and make plans for marriage. After much suspense, danger, and misunderstanding, the final avowal—as in this typical passage from Sara Craven's *A Gift for a Lion* (1977)—symbolizes a complete and permanent relationship:

She was really crying now, regret for her own foolishness and lack of trust mingling with relief that she had been so disastrously wrong.
 "Ah no, *cara*." There was no mistaking the tenderness in his voice. "The time for tears is past. I ask you again, Joanna, will you be my wife?"

Many of these final avowal scenes take place in settings with traditional associations of magic and enchantment—caves, dark

ERASTUS BEADLE AND THE DIME NOVEL

*Mass-market fiction was born in 1860 in New York City when publisher Erastus Beadle introduced the first in his series of (literally) "Dime Novels"—primarily Westerns and adventure tales for boys. Under the inspired guidance of editor Orville J. Victor, Beadle's total sales between 1860 and 1865 approached 5 million copies; within a decade, thousands of titles were in print. As historian Henry Nash Smith noted in his 1950 classic, *Virgin Land*, "an audience for fiction had been discovered that had not previously been known to exist." Said Smith:*

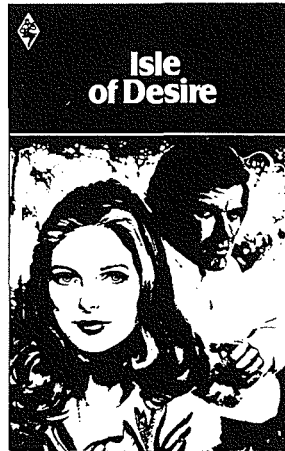
Victor's contribution to Beadle's success was the perfection of formulas that could be used by any number of writers, and the inspired alteration of these formulas according to the changing demands of the market. Victor was what would now be called a born "mass" editor; that is, he had an almost seismographic intuition of the nature, degree, and direction of changes in popular tastes.

Writers on Victor's staff composed at great speed and in unbelievable quantity; many of them could turn out a thousand words an hour for 12 hours at a stretch. Prentiss Ingraham, whose father wrote *The Prince of the House of David*, produced more than 600 novels, besides plays and short stories. He is said to have written a 35,000-word tale on one occasion in a day and a night. Fiction produced in these circumstances virtually takes on the character of automatic writing. The unabashed and systematic use of formulas strips from the writing every vestige of the interest usually sought in works of the imagination; it is entirely subliterary. On the other hand, such work tends to become an objectified mass dream, like the moving pictures, the soap operas, or the comic books that are the present-day equivalents of the Beadle stories. The individual writer abandons his own personality and identifies himself with the reveries of his readers. It is the presumably close fidelity of the Beadle stories to the dream life of a vast inarticulate public that renders them valuable to the social historian and the historian of ideas.

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forests, twilight graveyards, midnight beaches—but now the aura of enchantment can be carried over into the light of the day. Often this is done quite literally with two avowal scenes, one in the enchanted place where the lovers' total passion for each other is revealed, and another, later, in a more ordinary place where all misunderstandings are resolved.

When this double avowal appears, the enchanted scene



Both Pride and Prejudice (1813) and Isle of Desire (1977) spring from a common romance tradition, a point emphasized by modern packaging.

often contains a final misunderstanding that threatens to keep the lovers apart, though they now know that they will be satisfied only with each other; in a poignant interlude, they vow eternal fidelity. Then the final misunderstanding is resolved and the enchanted world rejoins the ordinary world—forever. For even if we know that enchantment is the most ephemeral of phenomena, it seems above all the task of romance to deny this knowledge.

Great Expectations

That, at least, is one basic function of romance. There are others. For instance, the romance also addresses itself to two problems that have traditionally been a part of many women's experience: the legal, economic, and psychological vulnerability that, until recent years, all but the most fortunate women have shared; and the tension between dependence and independence.

Women have always had to cope with the ambiguities of their identities as women and as individuals. Traditional customs and values have dictated that a woman establish a dependent relationship with a male—preferably a husband—and that she find identity in that dependence. As an individual, however, she seeks independence and personal accomplishment. The formulaic structure of romance works to embody a resolution of

this ambiguity by creating a perfect balance. In *Indigo Nights* (1977), Olivia O'Neill spells out this "balance" in a neatly contractual fashion:

"Will you promise to take me with you wherever you go?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Allow me to run my own household and speak to the servants in their own tongue?"

"Willingly!"

"And dress as I like?"

"How can I stop you?"

"And give me"—she hesitated, blushing a little—"half a dozen children who look just like you?"

Several other factors are involved in the remarkable persistence of the romance tradition. First of all, romances present an idealized picture of basic mores. With their portrayal of an exciting courtship leading to a perfect marriage, they help younger women find relief from the confusions of adolescent sexuality while holding out the hope of a permanent and secure love relationship. Romances also convey some sense of the deep significance of the marital choice, thus helping to perpetuate the patterns of monogamous marriage and domesticity. For older women, romances are perhaps more a mode of escape or accommodation, even a palliative for the dashed expectations raised by romantic fiction in the first place. As feminist critics have pointed out, romances may be supporting cultural stability at a high price: the fostering of excessive expectations about sexual roles and relationships. They are no doubt right. And if current notions of masculinity and femininity, now under heavy feminist attack, change a great deal, the romance may change as well. If it doesn't, it may find itself going the way of the Norse saga or the nickelodeon.



WE ARE NOT ALONE

by Frank D. McConnell

At one point in Graham Greene's *The Confidential Agent*, the hero—a hunted spy—hides out in a movie theater. A nondescript Hollywood romance is on the screen, but the hero discovers in it a significance deeper than any intended by its makers: "It was as if some code of faith or morality had been lost for centuries, and the world was trying to reconstruct it from the unreliable evidence of folk memories and subconscious desires. . . ."

A splendid film critic in his own right, Greene realized that the movie comes closer than any other product of our culture to the happy status of the novel in Victorian England. It is at once attuned to individual human concerns and sensitive to the day-dreams of the masses. And, a rarity in this century of lugubriously self-conscious art, the movies are genuinely fun.

That is why they have taken so long to be accepted as a legitimate object of study in the university. American academics, good Calvinists all, have operated for years on the assumption that Kulchur (as poet Ezra Pound contemptuously called it) should hurt, at least a little; that there must be a gulf between esthetics and entertainment. This attitude was concisely captured by the turn-of-the-century wit who said of Wagnerian music, "It's better than it sounds." By contrast, our best "serious" novelists and poets have always understood that we live in a creative and often profoundly humanizing *popular* culture—and that much of this culture is stored on celluloid.

American literature of the 20th century is filled with writers who built their vision of America upon a vision of Hollywood: F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Last Tycoon*, Norman Mailer in *The Deer Park*, Saul Bellow in *Humboldt's Gift*. Others, like Brock Brower in *The Late Great Creature*, and especially Thomas Pynchon in his towering novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, have begun using not simply the fact but also the basic themes and myths of popular film genres in their work. To understand *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, it is not sufficient to have a background in modern fiction and physics. One must also understand that his awesome tale, which seeks a refuge in fantasy from the terrors of the

modern city, swings unfailingly and recognizably between the extremes of *King Kong* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

The popular film, of course, is not of value simply because it prepares us to read Brower, Pynchon, and the rest. The serious celluloid fairy-tale genres—science fiction, melodrama, the Western—are much like officially sanctioned myths; their formulas are predictable. At the same time, these formulas undergo subtle shifts with time. To understand these shifts is, in its way, to excavate that mental city we all inhabit privately—and in common.

As Norman Mailer wrote in his 1961 open letter to President Kennedy on the Bay of Pigs invasion: "I can't believe the enormity of your mistake: You invade a country without understanding its music." Substitute "movies" for "music" and one comes close to stating the necessity of understanding film. In movies that catch the popular imagination, we see ourselves as in a funhouse mirror: distorted, yes, but distorted in a way that reveals more than photographic accuracy ever could. For it reveals who—and where—we really are, what we want and want to believe.

A Philadelphia Western

It is widely believed, for example, that our post-Vietnam, post-Watergate mood is one of moderate self-congratulation. But what is the real shape of this mood? How do we, in our film daydreams, project the new confidence in ourselves we think we have earned? Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* is a film of obsessively unbounded optimism. It insists so strenuously that everything will be all right that we are forced to ask: What is it that we were afraid would go wrong?

The continually implied and finally averted possibility of disaster in *Rocky* is the failure of community. Rocky Balboa is a never-was, a club fighter in the Italian neighborhood of Philadelphia who supplements his scanty fight earnings by breaking bones for the local loan shark; a nobody whose great romance is



with the clerk in the neighborhood pet store, a drab girl named Adrian.

In a bizarre public relations gimmick, Rocky is selected to fight heavyweight champion Apollo Creed on the Fourth of July. The whole community falls in behind him, helps him train, gives him money, lets him pound away on beef carcasses. The night before the fight, Rocky tells Adrian he wants, if not to win, at least to go the full 15 rounds. "If I can do that, I'll know I wasn't just another bum from the neighborhood." He lasts the 15 rounds, losing to Creed only by a split decision. At that moment, bruised, bloodied, exhausted, he is able to tell Adrian, for the first time, "I love you."

Sentimental, of course, but intelligently so. We can trust it because it is so aware of its own sentimentality. Rocky begins as a lonely man trying to be a lonely hero. He discovers that he becomes a hero when he stops being alone. The film is a celebration of the single man who redeems the honor of his town.

It is, in other words, a Western. For in the Western—despite the bitter inversion of such films as *High Noon* (where the town abandons the hero) or *The Magnificent Seven* (in which the Seven are driven from the town they save)—our hopes for the tiny communities of the film West are always, implicitly, our hopes for the larger community in which we all live. Main Street is always Main Street, and *Rocky*, complete with final showdown, simply translates the myths into elementary terms. It tells us that little people can survive—but only if they are faithful to each other.

The Eternal Fairy Tale

George Lucas's *Star Wars* makes the assertion in a different key. Far from simply a science-fiction adventure, this highly self-conscious film is a virtual history of past motifs, situations, and even characteristic bits of dialogue from old Westerns, swashbucklers, war movies, and of course, science-fiction

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BANE OR BOON?

The billion-dollar movie industry depends on an audience of tens of millions to provide the financial margin for experimentation, even failure. But as film historian Kenneth MacGowan pointed out in Behind the Screen, the mass audience is a double-edged sword:

Mass production, mass distribution, and mass consumption stamp the motion picture as the only art that had become big business before radio and television—if radio or television can be called an art. The consequences have not been wholesome. Around 1905, the movies were catering to a semi-educated mass audience; many who sat in the store theaters had only just learned to read and some had trouble with the subtitles. Within 10 years, the level of the moviegoer was somewhat higher. Was it high enough to justify the poet Vachel Lindsay when he wrote: “The Man with the Hoe had no spark in his brain. But now a light is blazing”? The bane of American movies, and to a lesser extent those of Europe, India, and Japan, has been catering to a gigantic audience of 50 million or more. It has hindered experiment and put a premium on the universally obvious. Yet there is always the chance that the experimental or the obvious may prove to have universal validity in terms of high emotion. Then we have daring pictures such as *Citizen Kane* and *The Defiant Ones*, or films of the broad and deep appeal of *Brief Encounter* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

Excerpted from Behind the Screen by Kenneth MacGowan. Copyright © 1965 by the estate of Kenneth MacGowan. Reprinted by permission of Delacorte Press.

movies. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, at least on the celluloid level.

This does not mean that *Star Wars* is “camp”—to use that shibboleth of critics who are excited by popular works they don’t understand. Like *Rocky*, *Star Wars* is an experiment to see if the myths of popular culture have any life left in them. That these myths are still alive is reflected by nothing so much as the movie’s phenomenal (\$200 million) success—in cold cash, the most successful film in history. And for all its self-consciousness and formula predictability, it is a serious film about the possibility of heroism—not within a community but within our own imagination: Can we still believe in ourselves as heroes?

A hero, after all, is a corny thing to be; a century of psychoanalysis, sociology, and political science has taught us that. But *Star Wars*, great popular myth that it is, reminds us that the corniness of heroism, like that of love or honor, does not render it less important. The real “force” behind the famous *Star Wars* blessing—“May the Force be with you”—is that of fairy tales

and their power to humanize even after we no longer believe in their literal reality.

If *Star Wars* attempts to revivify some of the oldest conventions in the movies, Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* does something more subtle, risky, and important. A resolutely popular myth, it is also an uncanny critique of the relationship between popular mythology and our nostalgia for the sublime—for a desire to believe, as the film's advertising copy says, that We Are Not Alone. Roy Neary, the Indiana electrical worker who sees a UFO and is thereafter compelled to visit the site where the alien visitors will show themselves, is a modern Everyman who in his boredom and confusion has become obsessed by a vision of transcendence—a terrible thing to experience, as St. Paul told us long before director Spielberg got around to it.

But Neary is an Everyman whose vision is itself shaped by the pop mythologies of transcendence that surround us. When we first see him, he is watching television: watching Cecil B. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*, that earlier translation of miracle into special effects, of transcendence into kitsch. Later, his daughter watches a Bugs Bunny cartoon about invaders from Mars. And in the climactic sequence, when the UFOs land and speak to us, they speak through a lovely, funny jazz fugue, transforming the giant mother ship into a cosmic synthesizer playing the Muzak of the spheres.

The point is not that *Close Encounters* is a pop gospel of transfiguration. It is something better, an examination of our lives as already transcending their own limitations, if only we can understand our own daydreams. We are not alone because we speak to one another—and nowhere at a deeper level than through the mythology of film.

To say this much implies that the hieroglyphics of popular myths are at once naive and highly sophisticated about their own naiveté. For they rediscover the dignity of clichés and tell us again and again what we can never hear too often: We are most human not in despair or self-loathing but in shared laughter and delight—when, indeed, we are having fun.



BACKGROUND BOOKS

POPULAR CULTURE

Books on "popular" or "mass" culture are nearly as numerous as the formula novels, movies, TV shows, comic strips, popular songs, "pop" paintings, and other manifestations of 20th-century life with which they deal. Some are excellent studies. Others are themselves a kind of "pop" scholarship; these are written according to formula, aimed at the college campus. Sometimes they make good reading, but they often are no more nourishing than spun-sugar candy.

Moreover, few broad theoretical studies of the United States' constantly refurbished, repackaged, and recycled mythology are available. Hence, academic specialists often recommend French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's brilliant but difficult analysis of the mythology and ethnography of South American Indian tribes as background reading.

To date, only two of the four volumes that make up his *Introduction to a Science of Mythology* are available in English translation. (A third is forthcoming.) In the first volume, **The Raw and the Cooked** (Harper, 1969, cloth & paper), Lévi-Strauss writes: "Apart from the fact that the science of myths is still in its infancy, so that its practitioners must consider themselves fortunate to obtain even a few preliminary results . . . there does not exist, nor ever will exist, any community or group of communities whose mythology and ethnography . . . can be known in their entirety."

The second volume, **From Honey to Ashes** (Harper, 1973, cloth &

paper), includes various versions of several myths that recur among different Indian communities. One tells of a "Girl Mad About Honey, Her Base Seducer, and Her Timid Husband." In all of its local variations, this tale of woe underlines the high price paid for nondeferred gratification; suitably modified, the story would do very well for North American daytime TV.

Something slightly akin to Lévi-Strauss's ethnographic scholarship applied to contemporary culture is available in **Mythologies** by Roland Barthes (Hill & Wang, 1972, cloth & paper). But Barthes, a witty Marxist, argues that popular or mass culture does not simply arise out of a community. He sees it as imposed by the Right on the rest of society. His ideological critique covers recent films and literature, wrestling matches, and the (already outdated) art of the striptease.

Popular culture's best ethnography (defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "the social anthropology of primitive tribes") to date may be that offered by Tom Wolfe in **The Pump House Gang** (Farrar, 1968, cloth; Bantam, 1969-77, paper). The people who attract his interest are not passive audiences but members of the media-incited communities that grow up around popular culture fads or celebrities.

In this collection, Wolfe writes vividly about the rituals and codes of *Playboy* creator Hugh Hefner's followers, about the adolescent shop clerks who blossomed into style setters in London's rock-and-clothes-

oriented "noonday underground" of the late 1960s, about the symbiotic relationship between the makers and buyers of "pop art," and much more. His psychedelic style is, of course, characteristic of the New Journalism (itself sometimes regarded as a form of popular culture), which he helped to create.

Arguments rage among academics over the terms "mass" versus "popular" culture. Some writers use the phrases interchangeably. Others more or less define the mass-produced - distributed - consumed product of 20th-century movies, paperbacks, the press, and TV as constituting mass culture. They reserve the term popular culture for folklore and the kind of phenomenon that country music used to be when Appalachian mountain people made it for themselves, long before it spread across all of America and Europe.

Herbert Gans, in **Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste** (Basic Books, 1975, cloth; 1977, paper), has a term of his own. The Columbia University sociologist lumps the mass, the popular, and the high under what he calls "taste cultures," which he defines as encompassing both "values" and "cultural forms": everything from music, art, design, literature, news, "and the media in which they are expressed" to consumer goods "that express aesthetic values or functions, such as furnishings, clothes, appliances."

Many other theoretical (or polemical) books on particular forms of mass and/or popular culture have been published over the past decade. TV is a favorite subject, and Martin Mayer's **About Television** (Harper, 1972) is a good survey, although inevitably some of the shows whose

content he discusses, including "That Was the Week That Was," are now off the air.

Studies of popular culture are often packaged in glossy picture books of coffee-table size. A new one is **TV Book: The Ultimate Television Book** edited by Judy Fireman (Workman, 1977, cloth & paper). Not meant to be a critical assessment, it offers a fine photographic history of the medium and an assortment of personal essays, some thoughtful, some entertaining, by such contributors as sportscasters Eleanor Riger and Heywood Hale Broun, talk show host Larry Angelo, critic Michael Arlen, CBS President Richard S. Salant, former FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson, and Peter Lubalin, the advertising man who went to Soviet Georgia to film the long-lived elders of Abkhazia eating Dannon yogurt. (He says they loved it.)

In the same format is **The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics** edited by Bill Blackbeard and Martin Williams (Smithsonian Press/Abrams, 1978, cloth & paper). It is a parade, in black and white and color, of strips from American newspapers, 1896-1976. The characters range from the Katzenjammer Kids (1897) to the Wizard of Id (1964).

A definitive 785-page illustrated reference book is **The World Encyclopedia of Comics** edited by Maurice Horn (Chelsea House, 1976, cloth; Avon, 1970, paper). It includes a short history of world comics, starting with the publication of William Hogarth's **A Harlot's Progress** in 1734, and a brief analytical summary. Horn concludes that "with the comics' growing cultural acceptance," cartoonists, "no longer dismissed as grubby purveyors of mindless entertainment," and their employers "must expect to be called

into account on aesthetic and ethical grounds" like novelists, publishers, playwrights, and filmmakers.

Among the best of the serious studies of the movies are James Monaco's **How To Read A Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media** (Oxford, 1977, cloth & paper). Monaco delivers exactly what his title promises, with specifics on everything from lenses to the lingo of the film industry. (A "McGuffin" is Alfred Hitchcock's term for the device or plot element that catches the viewer's attention or "drives the logic of the plot," especially in suspense movies.)

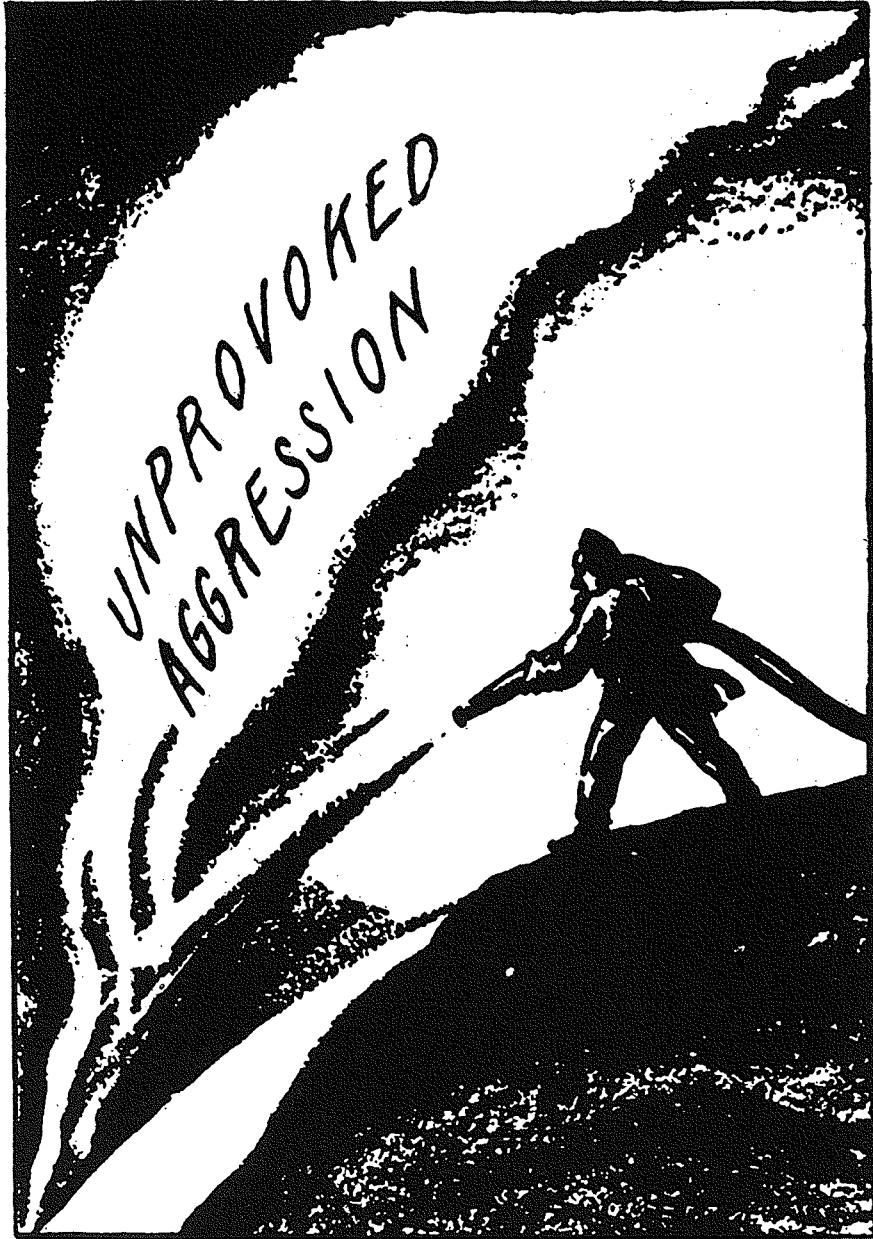
Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings edited by Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (Oxford, 1974, cloth & paper) is widely used in college courses. Its well-chosen essays and the editors' commentary are exceptionally readable and recommended for a general audience. A brand-new course book is **Great Film Directors: A Critical Anthology** edited by Leo Braudy and Morris Dickstein (Oxford, 1978, paper). No comparable work is available. It covers 23 major directors. They include Sweden's Ingmar Bergman (*The Seventh Seal*, 1959, as seen by Andrew Sarris and *Persona*, 1965, as seen by Stanley Kauffmann and Susan Sontag); the Spaniard Luis Buñuel (his films from *An Andalu-*

sian Dog, 1928, to *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, 1972, as analyzed by Carlos Fuentes); Vienna-born Fritz Lang (his American films as seen by Graham Greene, Peter Bogdanovich, and François Truffaut).

Jazz, a special form of popular culture, has inspired an enormous literature. The writer always mentioned first among buffs and scholars is Gunther Schuller; his **Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development** (Oxford, 1968) is a basic book. The Jazz Masters series, published by Macmillan under the general editorship of Martin Williams, director of the Smithsonian Jazz Program, includes one volume by Williams, **Jazz Masters of New Orleans** (Macmillan, 1967), that traces the history and relative importance of the tunes, the bands, and the records. It also evokes a strong sense of what the first jazz capital was like in the years when Jelly Roll Morton, who once asserted that he had invented jazz, was a slim young pianist yet to make his first recording (1923) and Louis Armstrong was still known only as "Little Louie."

All in all, the flood of "pop" culture books shows no signs of abating. "Pop" sculpture, 20th-century musical comedies and country music, 19th-century vaudeville, showboat melodramas, penny postcards, and Valentines—all have their interpreters who continue to get into print.

EDITOR'S NOTE. *Help in choosing some of these titles came from Wilson Center Fellows Frank D. McConnell and James J. Lang and former Fellow Thomas Cripps.*



"Living up to our responsibilities" was the caption under this widely reprinted St. Louis Post-Dispatch cartoon by Fitzpatrick on President Truman's June 1950 decision to send U.S. troops to fight the Communists in Korea.