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Attack of the Clones and the Politics of *Star Wars*

IN MAY 2002, REVIEWERS and critics at the Cannes Film Festival expressed considerable interest in what they described as the unusually high amount of political content in the films screening both in and out of competition: a prime American example of such films being Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine*, a satiric commentary on American gun culture and foreign policy.¹ No attention was paid, however, to the political content of another American film screening at Cannes and almost simultaneously released theatrically across North America: George Lucas's *Attack of the Clones*. Regarded, it seems, both at the Festival and elsewhere, as significant largely for its special visual effects and above all as a test case for digital movie-making and projection,² *Attack of the Clones* should also have received major attention as a rarity in content: a mainstream American blockbuster with an intensely political focus. *Clones*

¹ See, e.g., Kenneth Turan, "Political Subtext Heavy at Film Fest," *Los Angeles Times*, as printed in *The Hamilton Spectator* 16 May 2002: D9.

² Reviewers who liked the film, in whole or in part, praised it largely for visual effects and style: see, e.g., Richard Corliss, "Let the Battle Begin!" *Time* (Canadian ed.) 20 May 2002: 68, David Denby, "Star Struck," *The New Yorker* 20 May 2002: 114–15, Todd McCarthy, "This Lucas Clone is a Force Majeure," *Variety* 13–19 May 2002: 23 and 26. For two examples of the widespread interest in digital projection, see Jon Healey and P.F. Huffstutter, "Digital Movies Save Studio \$\$\$," *Los Angeles Times*, as printed in *The Hamilton Spectator* 16 May 2002: D7, and David Germain, "Lucas Pioneers Digital Use," Associated Press, as printed in *The Hamilton Spectator* 16 May 2002: D7.

is most obviously, of course, a major special-effects achievement and a visual feast (as well as an action-oriented, old-fashioned movie-serial narrative); but through its (stylized) dialogue, thematically-deployed storyline, cinematic allusions, and visual and other symbolism, the film also deliberately raises and comments on a number of contemporary (and timeless) political issues, and most notably provides a scathing indictment of the toxic combination of greed and political ambition that—with extraordinary timing, given the film's production start three years ago—has brought America, over the past year or so, the corporate scandals of all of Enron, Arthur Andersen, Tyco, WorldCom, and more, and the economic and political debate surrounding all of the last American presidential election (fair or manoeuvred?), the President's and other authorities' response to corporate misconduct (protecting citizens or protecting companies?), and the ongoing war on terrorism (necessary or politically-motivated?). *Clones*, furthermore, as the fifth instalment of the planned six-part *Star Wars* saga, is also, in the political and economic rereading it invites of the four previous films in the series, now in part turning the *Star Wars* saga as a whole into an epic commentary on American and international politics and economics, past as well as present, and on the rise and fall of political empires in general as an ongoing, cyclical process in human history, based on human greed/appetite, aggressiveness, hatred, and fear.

The first-made *Star Wars* film, 1977's *A New Hope* (as it is now titled),³ contained political elements: most obviously in its plot based on an alliance of rebel freedom fighters taking on and defeating an evil empire. Presenting an archetypal political situation (rebellion against tyranny), *A New Hope* also worked in part with America's self-image as a freedom-loving nation which originally

³The film's original title, *Star Wars*, by the time of the 1980 release of *The Empire Strikes Back* had become the umbrella title of the saga as a whole, with the first-made film not only acquiring its own (sub)title but also becoming numbered as Episode 4 in a planned series of what was originally to be nine films (see, e.g., Gerald Clarke, "The Empire Strikes Back," *Time* [Canadian ed.] 19 May 1980: 51n2, and Jean Vallety, "The Empire Strikes Back," *Rolling Stone* 12 June 1980: 34) but is now intended to be six. Episodes 7 to 9 were to involve the rebuilding of the Republic after the defeat (at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, Episode 6) of the Empire.

established itself by rebelling (as an alliance of colonies) against an oppressive British empire; and critics pointed out the strongly American archetypes of the rebel heroes Luke Skywalker (a frontier farm boy yearning for adventure) and Han Solo (a space-age western-genre loner/adventurer, with his handy blaster and his preference for "a straight fight" to "all this sneakin' around").⁴ Twentieth-century American and world politics were also invoked by *A New Hope's* imperial stormtroopers—the forces of the thus Nazi-associated evil Empire—and by the film's space-battle finale, involving imperial against Alliance fighter pilots, and modelled on earlier cinematic depictions of World War II aerial dogfights between fascist and Allied forces.⁵ The politics in *A New Hope*, however, in 1977 seemed largely generalized historical background or context for the film's main narrative focus: the story of the journey from boyhood towards maturity of the young Luke Skywalker, following the traditional pattern of the mythological hero's quest—departure (on a journey), initiation (through ordeals/trials), and recovery and return (to a triumphant victory)—as outlined by mythologer Joseph Campbell and as elaborated upon in Andrew Gordon's seminal article on the first *Star Wars* film.⁶ The hero's quest—through which is expressed what Campbell calls the

⁴ See, e.g., Robert G. Collins, "Star Wars: The Pastiche of Myth and the Yearning for a Past Future," *Journal of Popular Culture* 11.1 (1977): 6, and Richard Grenier, "Celebrating Defeat," *Commentary* 70.2 (1980): 58. The quoted words are Han's to Luke, on the Death Star in *A New Hope*. Here and elsewhere in this article, dialogue quotations are from the films themselves, rather than from the printed screenplays or novelizations which often do not accurately represent the finished films.

⁵ For the dogfights' cinematic sources, see, e.g., "Star Wars: The Year's Best Movie," *Time* (Canadian ed.) 30 May 1977: 50, Collins, "The Pastiche of Myth" 7, and Stephen Zito, "George Lucas Goes Far Out," *American Film* 2.6 (1977): 12; and see also Andrew Gordon, "Star Wars: A Myth for Our Time," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 6.4 (1978): 319. Over the years various other political suggestions about *A New Hope* have also been made: e.g., that the Empire in 1977 also represented the USSR, or America under Richard Nixon. Lucas's use not only of archetypal characters but also of archetypal institutions and events has permitted a variety of specific interpretations. (See, e.g., Peter Kramer, "Star Wars," *The Movies as History*, ed. David Ellwood [Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 2000]: 50.)

⁶ See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968) *passim*, and Gordon, "Myth" 320–25.

dreamwork of the culture, the hopes and fears of us all⁷—is more importantly metaphoric than literal, and is often a journey of internal human maturation, with emotional and psychological battles being traditionally expressed in terms of external obstacles such as monsters to be tamed and military combats to be won. Luke in *A New Hope* sets out on a journey to become an adult like the heroic Jedi father about whom he has been told by another father-figure, the wise old Jedi knight Obi-Wan Kenobi; and as a Jedi in training—i.e., as a boy learning how to cope, as he grows up, with the evil (the dark side) he finds in the world around him—Luke manages finally to defeat evil (the Empire), passing the (moral) tests he encounters and becoming a positive force within society. The mythology, and not the political references, became the centre of serious critical interest in the film, for those who did not simply enjoy it as exhilarating special effects and intelligent popular culture fun: a creative pastiche—as Gordon also describes it⁸—of elements borrowed from a variety of popular culture sources such as comic books, popular novels, classic movies such as *The Wizard of Oz*, and the *Flash Gordon* movie serials.⁹

Luke's quest (paralleled and universalized, as also in *A New Hope*, by the similar quests of both Han Solo and Princess Leia) continued to be the focus of the two following films in the original trilogy: *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, Episode 5) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983, Episode 6), both considerably darker and more obviously serious than *A New Hope*.¹⁰ In *Empire*, a hallucinatory jour-

⁷ *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 17–19.

⁸ Gordon, "Myth" 314–19.

⁹ There has also been, however, a minor current of interest in real-life political appropriations—as in the naming of Ronald Reagan's Star Wars missile defence system—of *A New Hope* and its two sequels. See, e.g., David S. Meyer, "Star Wars, *Star Wars*, and American Popular Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26.2 (1992): 99, and Kramer, "Star Wars," *The Movies as History*.

¹⁰ The critical focus on mythology, early on, was intensified by mythological explanations of Lucas's story such as Gerald Clarke's "In the Footsteps of Ulysses," printed in *Time* [Canadian ed.] 19 May 1980: 52, at the release of *Empire*; and Lucas himself from c. 1980 to the present—as in a pre-release *Phantom Menace* interview with Bill Moyers (see Moyers, "Of Myth and Men," *Time* [Canadian ed.] 26 April 1999: 48)—has often commented on his conscious creation of *Star Wars* as classic myth. Myth was also the focus of a *Star Wars* exhibition at the Smithsonian (Washington, DC) Oct. 1997–Jan. 1999.

ney into the id, Luke moves from late boyhood into adolescence, learning now about evil not only in the external world but also within the self: i.e., about his own “dark side”—his impulses towards fear, anger, and hate—and the necessity for self-control to avoid being taken over by such emotions. (His test in the magic tree cave—where the feared enemy he strikes at turns out to be himself—is, as Yoda tells him, a test by “only what you take with you”; and in *Empire* as a whole, through anger, aggression, and fear Luke comes near to self-destruction.) By the end of *Return of the Jedi*, however, Luke finally reaches mature mastery over himself, with the understanding of the importance not only of self-knowledge and self-control but also of the power of compassionate self-sacrifice. The Empire in *Jedi* is finally defeated when, close to the film’s end, Luke, pitted against his father (and therefore also symbolically against certain aspects of himself) by a death-figure Emperor, rejects anger, hatred, aggression, and fear, and maturely accepts his own possible death as the price he must pay for his moral choice.¹¹ Beyond the surface narrative, the Empire thus seemed in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, and increasingly from *A New Hope* to *Jedi*, to be more morally symbolic than politically important: representing how the human individual can become “ruled” by a “dark side” of anger, hate, egotism, and fear, though also providing, as part of the cultural allusiveness of *Star Wars* overall, a generalized historical reality in which to anchor the mythological fantasy. Totalitarian visuals and stormtroopers, for example, in both *Empire* and *Jedi* continued to link the Empire with fascism in general and with Naziism in particular.

Attack of the Clones, however, despite its continuation from 1999’s *The Phantom Menace* (*Star Wars* Episode 1) of the story of the mythological journey from boyhood to maturity of a new hero, Anakin Skywalker (Luke’s eventual father), is first and foremost a political—and politically critical—film: even overtly so in its dialogue. From Jedi knight Obi-Wan Kenobi’s distrust of politicians,

¹¹ For more detail on such readings of *Empire* and *Jedi*, see Anne Lancashire, “Complex Design in *The Empire Strikes Back*,” *Film Criticism* 5.3 (1981): 38–51, and “*Return of the Jedi*: Once More With Feeling,” *Film Criticism* 8.2 (1984): 55–66; and on *Empire*, see also Andrew Gordon, “*The Empire Strikes Back*: Monsters from the Id,” *Science-Fiction Studies* 7.3 (1980): 313–18.

expressed near the start of the film (senators, says Obi-Wan, focus not on political democracy but on “pleasing those who fund their campaigns”), to Anakin and Amidala’s discussions, on romantic Naboo, of democracy and dictatorship, to the deals the hidden Obi-Wan, towards the film’s end, hears being worked out on the planet Geonosis between the intergalactic Banking Clan, the Trade Federation, the Commerce Guild, the Coporate Alliance, and the separatists intent on war against the Republic (“Signing this treaty will bring you profits beyond your wildest imagination ... complete free trade”), the dialogue—with its contemporary political and business terminology—could not be clearer as to the film’s political/economic focus. Lucas’s use in *Clones* of visual quotations from the 1982 dystopian, anti-corporate classic *Blade Runner* (in a chase sequence through the streets and airways of the Republic’s political capital of Coruscant) and from Fritz Lang’s 1926 classic and even more political and anti-corporate *Metropolis* (in the assembly-line sequences on the separatists’ base-planet of Geonosis) then adds emphasis to some of the political issues raised by the dialogue. *Blade Runner* and *Metropolis* are both films critical of what they futuristically portray as the growing political dominance in society of the economic concerns of big business.

Indeed, overtly political dialogue and political visual allusiveness are given primacy in *Clones*; individual human relationships, as in the romance between Anakin and Amidala, are in part subordinated (to the disappointment of many reviewers and audience members) to the political design. Hence the young lovers on Naboo not only discuss politics but also sentimentally cavort together, in an idyllic field of flowers surrounded by cliffs and waterfalls, above all to demonstrate the film’s point that political naïvety is dangerous, leading potentially to dictatorship; for as Anakin comments on how dictatorship works more effectively for the general good than does democracy, the landscape (along with the sentimentality) is visually reminiscent of 1965’s *The Sound of Music*, a film narratively dealing with the coming of Naziism to Austria, and Anakin’s political leanings are thus critically contextualized. Lucas’s dialogue and intertextual methods in this sequence are those of political commentary, not of realism or of romantic fantasy.

Most obviously, of course, *Clones* is thoroughly political in its narrative. After the opening crawl telling of unrest in the Republic’s Senate, the existence of a political separatist movement, and

debate over the creation of an "army of the Republic," the film begins with the attempted political assassination of the anti-war Senator Amidala. It continues into a double plot line involving on the one hand the flight into hiding of the pacifist Amidala and her Jedi protector (and infatuated admirer) Anakin Skywalker and on the other hand the investigations of Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi into the assassination attempt; it moves into political discussions between Amidala and Anakin, and into Obi-Wan's discovery of a vast clone army, ordered by someone unknown, for the use of the Republic; and it ends with the abandoning of attempts at diplomatic negotiations between the Republic and the separatists, a major battle, and preparations for a full-scale galactic civil war. These political matters are not merely plot devices but are given thematic meaning: for the general narrative arc of the film—as summarized in an early dialogue line by the current queen of Naboo ("The day we stop believing democracy can work is the day we lose it")—is of a political democracy, the Republic, gradually turning into a wartime "emergency powers" state which will have become the dictatorship of the Empire by the time of the chronologically-later original *Star Wars* trilogy (Episodes 4–6). The Republic falls from within, not to attack from without; as with the individual characters in the original trilogy, and also in this new trilogy, the danger—here to the state as a whole—is an unrecognized dark side of emotionalism in general, and especially of anger, love/patriotism, hatred, and fear, in the Republic at large, capitalized upon by ambitious or greedy leaders in order to manipulate events to their own political and economic advantage.¹² (The Republic's Chancellor Palpatine, Obi-Wan tells Anakin, is clever at using "the passions and the prejudices" of the senators.) The individual actions and emotions of the film's characters, throughout, are placed within what is now a foregrounded political context, and are shown always to have major political consequences. Anakin's mythological quest from youth to maturity, and similarly Amidala's and Obi-Wan's, involve not only their own moral development but the Republic's as well: and the

¹² Lucas has recently commented (see Richard Corliss and Jess Cagle, "Dark Victory," *Time*, Internet, online at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101020429/story.html>, accessed 30 July 2002: 2) that "It isn't that the Empire conquered the Republic, it's that the Empire *is* the Republic" (italics mine).

political consequences of their thoughts and actions receive more attention than the personal consequences.¹³

This political emphasis of *Clones* should indeed have been expected, given the political content of the first film of the second *Star Wars* trilogy, 1999's *The Phantom Menace*. Reviewers at the time were mystified and put off by *Menace*'s main plot action: an attack, from space, on the peaceful planet of Naboo by a galactic Trade Federation with a droid army and entirely mysterious (even by the film's end) motives. An association was suggested in the film between the Federation and the equally mysterious Darth Sidious: a Dark Lord of the Sith intent on defeating the Jedi knights, the defenders of peace and justice in the Republic; but no overall Trade Federation plan, or point to the attack, was revealed; and reviewers, dealing with *Menace* as an independent film rather than as part of a planned six-part (or even three-part) whole, dismissed *Menace*'s Trade Federation as an awkward and ill-conceived plot device.¹⁴

Clones, however, makes clear that the Trade Federation introduced in *Menace* is a key element of the second-made trilogy as a whole: representing the economic and political greed and ambition—the dark-side unrestrained appetite—of the political and business classes, above all, that in *Clones* is leading towards the death of democracy (the Republic) and the rise of political dictatorship (the Empire). As Obi-Wan Kenobi learns towards the film's end, as he overhears the separatist Count Dooku talking with Trade Federation representatives and other business leaders on the planet Geonosis (a planet visually associated with hell in its red colouring, steam vents, demon-like insect inhabitants, and underground/underworld assembly lines of potentially lethal mechanical devices—

¹³The (rather flat) novelization of *Clones* is much more personal in focus than is the film: containing extensive material both on Amidala's family on Naboo and on the Lars family on Tatooine. See R. A. Salvatore, *Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (New York: Ballantine, 2002) *passim*. For the characters' personal mythological quests as developed in *The Phantom Menace*, see Anne Lancashire, "The Phantom Menace: Repetition, Variation, Integration," *Film Criticism* 24.3 (2000): 23–44.

¹⁴For a discussion of the ambiguities and uncertainties of *The Phantom Menace* as deliberate and thematic, see Lancashire, "Repetition" 33–34.

including cauldrons of molten metal¹⁵), the Trade Federation will give its economic backing, including military support, to whatever politician will promise it unfettered profits. So will other such commercial organizations; and the surest way to power for a calculating politician like Dooku—a former Jedi knight and “political idealist” (as he is described near the film’s beginning)—is to cater to (and to manipulate) the corporate interests gathered around him on Geonosis. Dooku’s intentions may originally have been idealistic; but at the film’s end, as he goes to report to his master, the evil Darth Sidious, on Coruscant, unintentionally or otherwise he is now “Lord Tyranus” (as Sidious calls him; the name is an allegorical label), an idealist gone wrong, serving, in promoting war, the literal but more importantly symbolic dark-side opposite (in egotism, aggressiveness, and hidden ambition or greed) of everything (selflessness, diplomacy, peace, justice) that the democratic Republic and the Jedi are supposed to stand for. War—as Yoda also makes clear in his despair at the film’s end (“The shroud of the Dark Side has fallen; begun the Clone War has”)—is a result of the dominance of the dark side. War suits, at least initially, the greedy Trade Federation, which sees it as leading to the political victory of those who will reward their corporate backers. It also suits those (the Kaminoans—who care about “how big your pocketbook is” [Coruscant diner sequence]—and the Geonosians) who profit from armaments manufacture. And it suits ambitious politicians: not only Dooku, but also the Republic’s Chancellor Palpatine (likely the deceptive outer face of Sidious), who is voted extraordinary dictatorial powers, by a fearful Senate, because of the threat of war. The film’s ending makes clear both Lucas’s political-economic critique and anti-war stance: as we see the corporate-sponsored Dooku go from one hell setting (Geonosis) to another (the *Blade-Runner*-like industrial quarter of Coruscant), to a siren’s song on the soundtrack, to report to Sidious that the desired war has now begun (“as planned,” responds Sidious), and as the democratic Republic’s

¹⁵ For hell symbolism also in *Jedi*, see Lancashire, “Once More” 58; and for Lucas’s own comments on red as associated with hell, aggression, and evil, see Moyers, “Of Myth and Men” 48. The hell of *Jedi*’s Tatooine is indeed partly paralleled in the hell of Geonosis (execution in an enclosure, as entertainment; beast(s), allegorizing the passions, as executioners; a Fett bounty hunter present; outside, an inhospitable landscape with sand dunes over which ships move and into which there is a fall).

Chancellor Palpatine oversees from a balcony the massing of a vast army of stormtroopers and war machines, to the ominous music of the Imperial March from *The Empire Strikes Back*. Palpatine, who by the time of *A New Hope* has become the ruthless, death-dealing Emperor, in *Clones* manoeuvres to achieve power: effectively manipulating others to have the anti-war Amidala sent off into hiding, and subsequently persuading her substitute as Senate representative for Naboo—Jar Jar Binks (in *The Phantom Menace*, as an underwater Gungan, symbolic of the subconscious and emotional side of humankind, as opposed to the rational side represented by the above-ground Naboo¹⁶)—to lead the Senate to grant emergency war-time powers to its Chancellor. War in *Clones* is depicted as a tool, supported by profit-seeking big business, by means of which manipulative political leaders can achieve power and dominance over naïve, greedy, and/or fearful leaders and their followers. Nations, like individuals, can be tempted towards the “dark side”—through ignorance, greed/appetite, and an emotionalism which significantly includes aggressiveness and fear.¹⁷

Political idealism gone wrong (Dooku) and political ambition (Palpatine) are in *Clones* equally dangerous to democracy; the latter uses the former, and both lead to war, which, supported by greed, favours political dictatorship. This conclusion—conveyed both in the narrative and in visuals such as the massed Republican war machines and stormtroopers at the film’s end (totalitarian visuals such as are associated with the Empire throughout the first-made trilogy and with the Trade Federation in *The Phantom Menace*¹⁸)—points ominously towards Episode 3: as the peace-keep-

¹⁶ Lancashire, “Repetition” 34 and n30.

¹⁷ Metaphorically “losing one’s head,” i.e., allowing emotions to overpower judgement, is comically literalized in *Clones* when the head of the always-emotional C-3PO is first lost and then attached to a warrior body on Geonosis. (The more rational R2-D2 effects the restoration of C-3PO’s head to his original body.) A more serious head loss occurs in *Empire*, with the fearful Luke’s aggressive attack on “Vader” in the magic tree-cave; Luke strikes off Vader’s head only to find his own face staring back at him. Boba Fett in *Clones* is decapitated when he leaves his defensive position behind Dooku and aggressively moves down into the arena battlefield.

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Menace*’s Trade Federation droid army readied on Naboo for attack. *Menace* also foreshadows the political decline in *Clones* of the Republic’s Senate, providing it, in its massed rows of similar box seats, with a totalitarian look. See Lancashire, “Repetition” 39n12.

ing Jedi (the Republic's most mature and self-controlled individuals) are all slipping, as Dooku did, towards the dark side. The impetuous Anakin—in training to become a main Jedi protector of the democratic Republic—in *Clones* demonstrates his ignorance/naïvety (“We live in a real world,” Amidala chides him on Naboo, “Come back to it!”), his barely-restrained appetite (for “forbidden love”¹⁹), and his unrestrained emotionalism (being rational “is something I know I cannot do,” he tells Amidala), mixed with a desire for personal power and an indifference to democratic principles (why not a dictatorship, he comments, “if it works?”).²⁰ An early sequence on Coruscant also shows that he has secretly accepted the mentorship (as Amidala has openly accepted the “executive order”) of the ambitious and calculating Palpatine, a dark opposite to Anakin's other mentor, his Jedi master Obi-Wan. Meanwhile the mature Jedi prove also to be naïve (ignorant of the manoeuvrings going on around them), nevertheless arrogantly sure of themselves (“a [Jedi] flaw more and more common,” as Yoda semi-comically points out on Coruscant to the self-confident Obi-Wan and Mace Windu²¹), and aggressive in the rescue of Obi-Wan, Anakin, and Amidala from death on Geonosis. Previously avoiding war (the Jedi are supposed to be “keepers of the peace, not soldiers,” as Mace Windu states near the film's start), the Jedi on Geonosis not only initiate the use of a clone army but also continue with a major battle and actively pursue Dooku, rather than merely effecting the rescue. The visual image of Yoda commanding stormtroopers on Geonosis works together with the film's final image of the Republic's Chancellor on Coruscant at (significantly) sunset, overseeing the gathering totalitarian army, as an indicator of how far the democratic Republic and its leaders have fallen towards imperial dictatorship.

Other symbolism, both visual and narrative, adds to Lucas's political criticism in *Clones*. That the newly-aggressive Jedi, along with many of the Republic's well-meaning political leaders, are losing, from the film's start, the ability to perceive accurately the

¹⁹ “Forbidden love” is emphasized, as a *Clones* theme, in one of the film's trailers; and Lucas (see Corliss and Cagie, “Dark Victory” 2) has defined Anakin's moral problem as one of appetite: Anakin “can't let go” of the things he loves/desires.

²⁰ The dialogue quotations are from the Anakin/Amidala Naboo sequences.

²¹ Near the film's end, e.g., Obi-Wan arrogantly—and wrongly—believes that “Anakin and I can handle” the capture of Dooku. Yoda is obliged to rescue them.

political world around them (i.e., to recognize hidden political appetite, in others or in themselves), is signalled in the opening sequence by the clouds covering the Republican and Jedi capital of Coruscant. (“The Dark Side clouds everything,” Yoda subsequently comments.) The planet Kamino, which turns out to be the site where a massive Republican clone army is being prepared, without the authority or even knowledge of the Republican Senate, is also—as a water-world in part symbolizing (like the warrior Gungans’ water-world in *The Phantom Menace*) the subconscious and its primal desires—not to be found within the Jedi information archives; and Yoda notes that only a Jedi could have erased the files (i.e., symbolically the Jedi themselves are responsible for their own loss of perception). Also, from near the start of *Clones*, Coruscant—the headquarters of both the Republic and the Jedi—has turned from the partially utopian city of *The Phantom Menace* into a dystopian night urbanscape—home to former Jedi Lord Tyranus—and resembling above all the future-noir inferno of Los Angeles 2019 in *Blade Runner*: director Ridley Scott’s powerfully American hellscape dominated by money-focused corporations. Finally, at the film’s end, the Jedi, in activating a clone army, travel to and participate in the symbolic hell of Geonosis, a hell of political military preparations backed by corporate financing; while Anakin and Amidala, both important to the Republic’s future, also move symbolically, as Anakin explains to Amidala his liking for dictatorship and aggressive negotiations (i.e., force) in political matters, from the lushly fertile and watery Naboo first to the barren desert of Tatooine, as Anakin, overcome by anger and hatred generated by love, massacres a whole community of Tusken Raiders in retribution for his mother’s death at their hands, and then also to the hell planet of Geonosis where senator/diplomat Amidala too abandons self-restraint and pacifism—her attempts at the peaceful settling of political differences—and adopts Anakin’s arrogant style of (as she quotes him in the Geonosis amphitheatre) “aggressive negotiations.” (These “aggressive negotiations” parallel those favoured by the manipulative Palpatine. “My negotiations will not fail,” he declares, in relation to the separatist movement, when we first see him on Coruscant; and throughout the film he then manoeuvres towards war.)

Meanwhile Obi-Wan, investigating (like a film noir detective) the assassination attempt on Amidala, moves from cloudy

Coruscant to the stormy water-world of Kamino—a world of the id, as previously noted, where the desire for dominance by force is demonstrated, literally and symbolically, not only in the Kaminoans' preparation of a vast clone army of soldiers all derived (by the arrangement of Lord Tyranus) from the amoral bounty hunter Jango Fett (a buyer and seller of human life) but also in Obi-Wan's own aggressiveness in his pursuit there of Fett. Obi-Wan then also travels to the hell of Geonosis: where he, Anakin and Amidala become the bait to lure the Jedi as a whole into aggressive attack, and where subsequently he and Anakin pursue and attack Dooku, in a cave-like location which, like Dagobah's magic tree-cave in *Empire*, is a cave of the characters' psyches, their primal desires/appetites. Here Anakin, uncontrolled as well as aggressive, like Luke on Bespin in *Empire* is literally and symbolically damaged by his lack of rationalism and restraint. Like all those in the *Star Wars* films who attack their enemies first rather than focusing on self-defence, he suffers for his aggressiveness,²² losing (like Luke) his right hand to his older double-to-be: the former Jedi political idealist who, as servant to Darth Sidious, foreshadows the emotional Anakin's own fate in Episode 3. (We already know that before the start of Episode 4 Anakin will have become Darth Vader, servant to the Emperor as Dooku is to Sidious in *Clones*.)²³ Meanwhile, on the broader national level, the Jedi as a whole (including their powerful Mace Windu) draw their weapons first—without negotiation attempts—in the battle in the Geonosis amphitheatre: thus beginning the Clone Wars which, we know from *A New Hope*, will ultimately destroy them and the Republic.

Thoughtful science fiction is normally a projection, into a futuristic or fantastic dimension, of issues and concerns of the present. In the original *Star Wars* trilogy, as previously noted, it was widely accepted that insofar as the archetypally-designed films reflected and commented on real-world political events and movements (the American Revolution, Naziism, fascism in general, World

²² For this principle in the previous *Star Wars* films see Lancashire, "Complex Design" 41, "Once More" 61–62, and "Repetition" 31 and n21.

²³ The Anakin-Dooku duel in part visually parallels that between Luke and Darth Vader at the end of *Empire*; and, like Vader, Dooku is a father figure (perhaps even literally?), an example of what Anakin can (and we know will) become in Episode 3.

War II), the rebels were both the Americans and, in relation to twentieth-century political history, also their non-American democratic allies. The political context of the first trilogy, though not emphasized, was both archetypal and specific: democracy versus dictatorship, both generally and in the historical past, and also, insofar as the potential for evil empires—and for rebellion against them—is always with us, in the present and potentially in the future as well.²⁴ With the continuing American archetypal protagonist now of hot-rodder and moody teenager Anakin, and with the language—Senate, Republic, Trade Federation, Corporate Alliance, bankers, profits, free trade—of both American and international contemporary politics and business, the second *Star Wars* trilogy is moving strongly into the political and economic world of the present day (though political economics have also always been a part of human history), and is providing us in part with a reflection of the dark-side profit/appetite emphasis of contemporary First World democracies: with the focus on an America whose leaders emphasize corporate profit-making as an ultimate good and rely for security and power on innovative and massive military technology. In other ways too the America of both past and present would seem especially to be mirrored in the archetypal galactic Republic: which was founded, we now learn (in the initial Naboo sequences), in war, and is here moving—with its “grand army of the Republic”—into civil war (the use of the American Civil-War-related term is appropriately twisted, given its speaker, Palpatine²⁵), and is represented by a capital, Coruscant, reflecting in its skyscrapers, diners, clubs, sports bars, and alleyways above all a modern American urban landscape (though also in part visually echoing the architectural styles of the 1930s and 1950s) projected, as in *Blade Runner*, into an economically and politically hellish future. *Clones* is in significant part a critique of the increasing role played by economic and political appetite in contemporary First World international politics in general, and especially in a “Republic” established to be devoted to democratic equality and decision-making.

²⁴ See, e.g., note 5 above.

²⁵ The historical Grand Army of the Republic was a Union veterans' organization, established after the American Civil War for maintaining fraternal bonds among the surviving veterans and for remembering the fallen and aiding their families where necessary. It was active in charitable work, and became for a time a major force in American politics.

A look back now at the first-made *Star Wars* trilogy (Episodes 4–6), in the light of *Clones*, provides additional insights into the political-economic meanings of first three films: which show the fall, in its turn, of the Empire, and the rise once again of the Republic. The opposition to the protagonists (freedom-fighter rebels) in all three initial films is defined in terms of unrestrained economic or political greed: from, at the most basic moral level, the scavenging Jawas and ruthless Tusken Raiders on Tatooine, to Han Solo's greedy employer Jabba the Hutt (appetite incarnate, as his very physical appearance indicates), to Jabba's henchman sent after Han, Greedo (allegorically named), to the bounty hunters for whom human life and death is entirely a matter of money. Han Solo himself in *A New Hope* is initially defined by greed; fixated upon financial reward, he leaves the rebels just before their final battle, and becomes a hero only when he abandons monetary profit and instead comes to the help of his friends.²⁶ On a broader, civic economic level, his paralleled "friend" in *The Empire Strikes Back*, one-time scoundrel and now urban "businessman" and "responsible leader" Lando Calrissian, at first makes a "deal" to save his (and others') economic and political stake in Bespin by selling Han and Leia (as bait for Luke) to the Empire, and only redeems himself when he throws over business concerns and instead tries to save Han. And at the national or international political level, Darth Vader then tempts Luke on Bespin with political idealism and family bonds joined to the appetite for power ("join me ... with our combined strength we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy," "join me, and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son"), in a parallel to the New Testament story of the devil's political temptation of Christ with worldly power;²⁷ while in *Jedi* the power-fixated Emperor even more toxically, in his own temptation of Luke to become a leader on the Dark Side, puts

²⁶ Like the business leaders in *Clones*, offered "profits beyond your wildest imagination" by Dooku, Han in *A New Hope* is interested in "more wealth than you could imagine," as Luke promises him on the Death Star if he will help to rescue Leia. (He retorts to Luke that "I can imagine quite a bit.")

²⁷ Matthew 4:1, 8–10 and Luke 4:1, 5–8. The temptation is also paralleled in *Clones* in Dooku's temptation of Obi-Wan on Geonosis: "You must join me, Obi-Wan, and together we will destroy the Sith."

political ambition together with frustrated idealism and friendship, taunting Luke near the film's end, as the young Jedi watches the rebellion go to apparently certain fiery destruction, with his powerlessness to save his friends from death. Frustrated idealism and an appetite for power, combined with anger, love, and fear, makes a powerful political cocktail.²⁸ In the original trilogy Luke ultimately resists it and defeats the Empire; but *Clones* is apparently preparing us for Anakin to fall (probably in relation to Amidala) to this kind of temptation—and to take what remains of the Republic with him—in Episode 3: for *Clones*' Anakin idealistically wants to be all-powerful so that (he tells Amidala after the death of his mother) he can “stop people from dying.”²⁹ Yoda states in *The Phantom Menace* that “Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering”—and *Clones* demonstrates that fear, especially of death, can lead not only to personal enslavement by the passions but also, on a national and international political level, to enslavement under dictatorship/tyranny. The second *Star Wars* trilogy is providing, more clearly than the first, the archetypal politics—with specific historical and contemporary allusiveness—into which to fit the mythological moral quests of the individual characters of both trilogies, and now of the societies of the films as well. Choices in life, the saga indicates, not only involve individual morality; they also, collectively within a society, are a matter of national and international political morality.³⁰

²⁸ Lucas has recently described (see Corliss and Cagie, “Dark Victory” 2) unresisted attachment to things and people as leading to the dark side through fear of loss and a desire for power to prevent loss.

²⁹ Very likely Anakin's mother's slow, tortured death, at the hands of Tusken Raiders, has been manipulated by Palpatine/Sidious in order to make Anakin more susceptible to such temptation, and may be paralleled with what Anakin himself later, as Darth Vader, does in *Empire* in capturing Han and Leia and torturing Han, to lure Luke to temptation on Bespin.

³⁰ The importance of careful, individual moral choice, which in *Clones* is obviously a highly political as well as a personal matter, is central to the *Star Wars* saga. Only the Dark Side's manipulators (e.g., Vader, the Emperor/Palpatine) and those resembling them in ambition and greed (e.g., Lando in *Empire* selling Han and Leia to Vader: “I had no choice”) declare or believe that destiny and circumstances rule. Anakin's declaration on Naboo to Amidala that he must go to his mother because “I don't have a choice” thus signals Anakin's lack of wisdom.

In the *Star Wars* saga, George Lucas has moved strongly in Episodes 1 to 2 into the broad political territory which has always served as a context, but has not previously been foregrounded, for the stories of the individual *Star Wars* characters. A filmmaker who grew from boyhood to maturity in the 1960s, Lucas is developing his six-part whole as, among other things, an epic political critique—in part from a 1960s make-love-not-war perspective but without a sixties' naïvety about human nature—of the unrestrained political and economic appetite which hundreds of years ago, his films imply in their visual allusiveness (the Roman-like circus/amphitheatre sequences in both *Phantom Menace* and *Clones*), destroyed the Roman Republic (turning it into a dictatorial, bread-and-circuses Empire), which in the earlier twentieth century destroyed pre-Nazi Germany and Europe, with the rise of Hitler and his stormtroopers, and which, the saga indirectly suggests (in its political and economic terminology, American archetypal protagonists, and historical and popular culture references) has the potential as surely today to destroy democratic capitalist nations and especially the republic of contemporary America: aided and abetted by its citizens' (along with some of their Jedi-like leaders') political and economic naïvety.³¹ (All such citizens are potentially Jar Jar Binks: naïve, fearful of loss, prone to panic, and overly trusting in giving extraordinary powers to those who tell them that the gift of such powers is for their own good.) On a broad national and international basis, as well as in individual terms, the decline into tyranny in *Star Wars* is portrayed as coming from the human failure to recognize and to control the dark side, which involves unrestrained appetite of all kinds and "blindness": a recurring image in the *Star Wars* saga (as, for example, in Han's blindness at the start of *Jedi*), and picked up in both the dialogue and visuals of *Clones*: for example, in the eye-patch worn by Amidala's security chief, who naïvely declares his relief at the trouble-free journey to Coruscant ("There was no danger at all") just as the first assassination attempt on Amidala is made. Human desires and fears, *Star Wars* suggests, together with ignorance of their destructive poten-

³¹ Lucas has commented (Moyers, "Of Myth and Men" 48) that the emotional and moral problems we face today are "the same ones that existed 3000 years ago." For the *Star Wars* theme of repeating political conflicts, in cycles throughout human history, see Lancashire, "Repetition" 27–28, 31, and n22.

tial when unrestrained, over time have more than once not only brought about the fall of individuals but also turned democratic nations into tyrannies. Political states rise and fall, cyclically over time, as the wisdom and vigilance of their citizens rises and falls.³²

Finally Lucas pulls into his political *Star Wars* epic, further to advance his political/economic/moral critique, not only allusions, as we have already seen, to American and world history, but also allusions to earlier cinematic depictions of such history. *Clones*, as already noted, on pastoral Naboo echoes *The Sound of Music*: to remind us of how—for reasons of appetite, fear, and blindness—a society can fall, as Austria historically did, to fascism. The Rebel medal-presentation ceremony at the end of *A New Hope*, as has long been recognized, visually quotes from Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *The Triumph of the Will*,³³ with its 1930s historical military visuals, and thus suggests from the very start of the *Star Wars* multi-part epic the potential dangers even of well-intentioned militarism. And *The Phantom Menace*, in using (as is generally recognized) *Ben-Hur*'s Roman chariot race as a visual source for its pod race, further emphasizes the Roman example—as also provided in the general visuals of the Tatooine circus—of the bread-and-circuses mass social distractions which in part make political imperialism possible.³⁴ Episode 3, with its Clone Wars between warring factions within the Republic, may well bring us both allusions to historical civil wars and, for critical/thematic purposes, cinematic quotations from earlier films about them.

³² Lucas has recently stated (Corliss and Cagie, "Dark Victory" 2) that "all democracies turn into dictatorships—but not by coup. The people give their democracy to a dictator ... whether it's Julius Caesar or Napoleon or Adolf Hitler." The original trilogy—ending positively, rather than negatively as will this second trilogy—suggests also, however, that people eventually rebel against dictatorships and turn them into democracies.

³³ See, e.g., Vincent Canby, "Not Since Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe," *The New York Times* 5 June 1977: Sec. 2, 33, Arthur Lubow, "A Space Iliad," *Film Comment* 13 (July–Aug. 1977): 20, Terry Curtis Fox, "Star Drek," *Film Comment* 13 (July–Aug. 1977): 23, and Roger Banham, "Summa Galactica," *New Society* 42 (27 Oct. 1977): 191.

³⁴ *Menace* notably also parallels its pod race, through both visuals and a semi-parodic play-by-play race commentary, with similar mass-entertainment sports events today. *Clones*, of course, as the Republic moves closer to becoming the Empire, provides in the Geonosis amphitheatre a horrifyingly darker version of *Menace*'s show. (For other, more extensive significances of *Ben-Hur* in relation to *The Phantom Menace*, see Lancashire, "Repetition" 32.)

In a year of revelations of a number of American corporate empires built on egotism and greed of which the population at large remained ignorant, of investigations leading, though not to clone armies, yet to the discovery of discreditable actions by some of the very institutions supposed to protect ordinary citizens, of various political leaders revealed to be personally profiting, economically and politically, from businesses in turn profiting from those same leaders, of the growth of fear among ordinary citizens over official warnings of inevitable acts of terrorism to come and of drastic emergency powers required by the authorities to prevent them, and of calls by some political leaders for aggressive military attacks by America abroad as an answer to the country's problems, the blindness of film reviewers and critics to the politics of *Star Wars* is itself a significant comment on America and other First World democracies as Lucas indirectly depicts them in his galaxy not so very "far far away" after all.³⁵

³⁵ One notable exception to the critical blindness has been a review by Michael Sragow, "Universal Themes," *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD) 16 May 2002: 1E (Internet, online at <http://proquest.umi.com>, accessed 6 Aug. 2002), pointing out that *Clones* specifically and the *Star Wars* films in general are anti-fascist and anti-militarist.