Celluloid heroes: A study of fictional characters in popular film as vehicles for cultural myth

Jeffrey Patterson Lawrence
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds/1024

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
CELLULOID HEROES: A STUDY OF FICTIONAL CHARACTERS
IN POPULAR FILM AS VEHICLES FOR
CULTURAL MYTH

by

Jeffrey Lawrence
Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1995

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
Hank Greenspun School of Communication
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 1999
The Thesis prepared by

__________________________
Jeffrey P. Lawrence

Entitled

Celluloid Heroes: A Study Of Fictional Characters In

Popular Film As Vehicles For Cultural Myth

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Communication Studies

__________________________
Examination Committee Chair

__________________________
Dean of the Graduate College

__________________________
Examination Committee Member

__________________________
Examination Committee Member

__________________________
Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

CELLULOID HEROES: A STUDY OF FICTIONAL CHARACTERS IN POPULAR FILM AS VHEICLES FOR CULTURAL MYTH

by

Jeffrey Lawrence

Dr. Richard Jensen, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Communication
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The following study is an examination of three fictional characters from popular film in an attempt to define the role of cultural myth in American society and demonstrate how these myths are distributed through popular culture media. The study will examine the film history of each character, analyze which myths these characters perpetuate, and attempt to explain the impact such myths have on a given audience.

To gain a better understanding of society, scholars need to examine the books people read, the music they listen to, and the films they watch. It is the hope that this study will lend a greater insight to the importance of cultural myth and its significance in reinforcing American values and beliefs. In addition, it is the hope that this study will serve as encouragement for future studies addressing the relationship between communication and popular culture.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Of Literature</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II HISTORY</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Golden Age</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bond, James Bond”</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Cop For All Seasons</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rambolina</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV ANALYSIS</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Functional Tradition</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functionalism</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob At The Gates</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rot At The Top</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Triumphant Individual</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V SUMMARY</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Studies</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the entire faculty and staff of the Hank Greenspun School of Communication. I appreciate
the wonderful opportunity you have given me to study and teach in such a stimulating academic
environment.

This study is dedicated to Dr. Richard Jensen, whose guidance and encouragement made it all possible.
Your wisdom and inspiration have made me a better scholar and a better person.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

American society is permeated with cultural myths that help to formulate this country's history and define its values. Nobody knows whether George Washington really chopped down a cherry tree and then confessed the act to his father. The validity of this story is immaterial. What is significant is how the story serves as a reminder for generations of Americans that the father of their country was an honest man—even as a child. Washington's integrity is an idea most Americans embrace, regardless of whether this story is fact or fiction.

In modern America, the vehicles of public myth include the biographies of famous citizens, popular music and fiction, movies, feature stories on the evening news, and even gossip. The specific details of the stories people tell need not have any particular connection to fact. What gives them force is their capacity to make sense of, and bring coherence to, common experiences. The lessons ring true, even if the illustration is fanciful (Root Jr., 1987, p. 7).

This study will examine the role of cultural myth in American society. By using fictional characters in popular film as examples, the analysis will attempt to show some of the reasons cultural myths develop and how they play an integral role in peoples' lives.

As earlier stated, the American landscape is dotted with cultural myths describing a wide variety of people and events. Figures as diverse as Abraham Lincoln, Jesse James, Ben Franklin, and Babe Ruth all have colorful stories about their lives that are handed down from generation to generation. The validity of these stories is not nearly as meaningful as their importance in defining the values of America and its citizens. A myth is not accepted without expressing many truths—misleading truths, perhaps, but important ones; truth to the needs of those who elaborate and accept the myth, truth to the demand for some control.
over complex realities, and truth to the recognition of shared values, however shakily grounded those values may be (Will, 1997, p. 26).

Ryan argues that while the foundation for a given narrative must have a factual base, not everything in the story need be true:

Exaggeration is an accepted part of many basically non-fictional narratives. These narratives are characterized by a double communicative orientation; the story is offered as a source of information, but is told for the sake of pleasure. When the two goals conflict, tellers are granted some liberty with the criteria pertaining to the informational function. For the sake of a good story, they are allowed to embellish certain facts. (Ryan, 1991, p. 92)

Cultural myth is not limited to long dead historical figures. Recent political leaders have created and nurtured their own public myths. Mythic characterizations of Ronald Reagan were created long before his election, and the drama has been reinforced so intently that political analyst Loye Miller Jr. once remarked, "Reagan's presidency resembles one of those flamboyant Hollywood movies he once starred in" (Hankins, 1983, p. 267). The presidential choice in 1980 was an attempt to align the human with the illusion of the heroic, a person who could act the part of the leading man and who cultivated the persona that was quintessentially American—the classic hero of the old West (Hankins, 1983, p. 267).

Cultural myth also extends into the world of entertainment and popular culture. In the area of film, for example, the line between real-life actor and the characters he/she portrays often become blurred. Though John Wayne never served in the military, General Douglas MacArthur thought he was the model of an American soldier; the Veterans of Foreign Wars honored him with their gold medal, and the Marines gave him their "Iron Mike" award (Will, 1997, p. 12). Wayne filled a need in his audience. He was the conduit that viewers used to communicate with their own desired selves or their imagined past. He stood for an America some people felt was disappearing or had already disappeared. Some critics, like Bentley, argue that Wayne's visible politics escalated the country's involvement in Vietnam. Wayne fans countered that the United States lost the war because there were not enough John Waynes left in the world (Will, 1997, p. 14). In actuality, Wayne never served in the armed forces. This was a source of embarrassment for the actor, who was long considered a "war veteran" by legions of his fans.
Wayne's persona developed into such a powerful cultural myth that he became an American icon. He was the living, breathing representation of American values for many people. Wayne did not become this symbolic institution through acts of heroism or political leadership, he achieved it through the pervasiveness of his films. These films continue to reinforce this image even though the actor has been dead for over twenty years.

Another example of mixed reality involving a film star is Marilyn Monroe. Monroe starred in only eleven movies during the 1950s. Yet in her personal behavior and movies, she created a heroine and cult figure that continues to grow since her death. She created an image of child-woman, sexy but innocent, experienced yet vulnerable, which both she and the onlooker could mold into any fantasy or reality which filled the occasion. The facts of her life, her image, photographs, films, and her early and mysterious death, all played a part in transforming her into the role of present day cult hero (Dick, 1983, p. 280).

While Wayne embraced his film image, Monroe became increasingly disenchanted at being cast as an empty-headed sex symbol. Monroe was not the figure she played on screen, but Hollywood and audiences alike continued to view the on-screen Marilyn and the off-screen Marilyn as one and the same. Her suicide seems to give credence to the theory that she was unable to cope with her celebrity image.

Monroe's plight serves as an example of the problem with real life celebrity heroes—they suffer the same personal failings as the rest of society. Athletes, movie stars, musicians, dancers, popular artists and writers, and television personalities can all be perceived as hero figures by the multitudes. But there are limitations on these heroes. Their humanity is their vulnerability. Transiency is their reality (Rollins, 1983, p. 24). Heroes pay the price for being human, and the price comes high in a mass media society. Even the most benign attentions of journalists almost invariably uncover the flesh and bone behind the legend; the suspension from college, the arrest for DUI, the fling with the stripper, or the suborning to perjury (Rollin, 1983, p. 23). Celebrities like O. J. Simpson, Hugh Grant, and even Bill Clinton are all recent examples of public figures that have gone from famous to infamous. Their names are now punch lines for late night comedians.

This is not to say that heroes no longer exist. If the real life hero has been driven into the shade, it is not so much by celebrities as by that other creation of mass media, the fictional hero of popular culture. After
all, what percentage of the population can identify Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock, and what percentage can recognize the first two astronauts to walk on the moon? (Rollin, 1983, p. 23).

Caughey points out that most people live in two worlds, one real and one artificial. The latter world consists through some form of media—be it television, books, or film. In a person's real social world, they may actually know only a few hundred people. In the artificial world, people are familiar with a swarm of celebrities and personalities, as well as fictional figures of novels, movies, situation comedies, and soap operas (Caughey, 1978, p. 45). Since real heroes often fail in the long run, people turn to imaginary ones. The hero is alive and well within the fictional world of popular culture. Hankins describes society's transition to fictional heroes:

Enter the super hero, bigger than life, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. He/she has a beguiling, utterly fictional presence. Although Americans are often aware of their vulnerability in a nuclear world, they would never want real people with superpowers living among them, even if they were on America's side. The super heroes could too soon become the rulers. (Hankins, 1983, p. 42)

In their search for heroes, audiences often turn to the cinema. On the movie screen, the fictional characters are bigger than life—figuratively and literally. The movie going experience allows an audience member to step into another world, at least for a couple of hours. Jung claims that the cinema "enables people to experience without danger all the excitements, passions, and fantasies which have to be repressed in a humanistic age" (Jung, 1971, p. 478). Entertainment offers the image of something better to escape into, or something that people want which their daily lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes—these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized (Dyer, 1992, p. 18).

Characters like James Bond and Indiana Jones, in their frenetic, cliff hanging adventures, inhabit a world that mere mortals never experience. No one lives in their world; it is the artful construction of an imaginary realm in which certain human abilities—to handle machines, engage in combat, escape from mortal danger—are pushed well beyond the limits of everyday life. Because they are compelling and systematic exaggerations of human experience, these heroes offer the audience an opportunity to enter a
world of virtual experience and to do, vicariously, the undoable (Drummond, 1996, p. 13).

One of the reasons audiences turn to film in search of their heroes is that the movie going experience is more interactive than other forms of media. Through the suspension of disbelief, audience members become participants in the drama. This participation is intensified if the film is viewed in a theater environment. Films show the audience a point of view that even the main character may not see. They are put into privileged space and given a privileged perspective on what is happening (Brummett, 1991, p. 139).

Compare the act of watching a movie with that of watching television. Audience members often watch television while engaged in some other activity—preparing a meal (possibly in another room), doing homework, reading the paper, conversing—and its segmentation allows momentary flashes of attention to be paid to the screen, just enough to pick up anything of interest to the viewer, or to loosely follow what is going on (Fiske, 1986, p. 211-212). In contrast, audiences tend to be much more engrossed in the narrative when watching a film. The film medium offers the viewer a fantasy trip, and audience members become willing participants in the drama.

The impact of film is much more encompassing than just escapism. Often films and their characters become key ingredients in reinforcing values and helping to define the world as seen through the viewer. Identification with the characters and participation in their dramas give audience members descriptions of specific problems, and prescriptions or admonitions about particular resolutions. The audience is not only able to draw morals and advice from the text, but also experience the enactment of particular values and behaviors. This function of rhetorical exchange can be termed therapeutic because the rationale of the transaction and the audience's motivation for participation is curative. The text involves the audience in a psychological situation where there is a problem, and through the characters, formulates psychological responses and resolutions to the problem (Payne, 1989, p. 28).

Films and their characters do function as value reinforcement, but often this is done on a subconscious level. Fiction affords the audience an opportunity to have its attitudes, beliefs, and values reinforced, expanded, or challenged. Such intellectual experiences can be pleasurable even though popular culture
audiences may not be conscious that their transaction with a text is all that cerebral. All that they usually sense is that they enjoyed the movie, the television show, or the best seller (Rollin, 1983, p. 31).

In addition, audiences can give their own meanings to a piece of fiction, even if that meaning is different from what the creator originally intended. The audience plays a part in making the image. Audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions that work for them (Dyer, 1986, p. 5).

While critics of the industry agree that film offers an audience a unique world view, they claim that this view is a distorted one. Motion pictures emerged in the 1890s and rapidly became a subject for contentious debate, celebrated for their ability to achieve remarkable artistic effects, but feared and denounced for their alleged distortions of reality, their debasement of popular taste, and their enormous potential for propaganda and persuasion (Medhurst and Benson, 1991, p. 443).

Film continues to reach audiences in a way that cannot be easily achieved in the everyday world. For example, most members of society are not in the position, either emotionally or financially, to engage in verbal warfare with their boss. But a film audience can still cheer when Dirty Harry hands the captain his badge and tells him it's a "five-point suppository". Does this scene exemplify real life? Probably not. But it is certainly a type of fantasy that many people have envisioned at some point in their lives. Modern film audiences seem sophisticated enough to determine the difference.

On-screen behaviors like the ones Dirty Harry personify appear to be the underlying strength of recurring characters in popular film—they are a known commodity to the audience. If a person goes to see a Dirty Harry movie, they can feel certain that the hero will kill criminals and fight with authority figures. In a James Bond film, the daring spy will thwart evil leaders with high tech gadgetry and seduce beautiful women. In one of the Alien offerings, audiences can rest assured that Ripley will duel with hideous extraterrestrials. These movie formulas are not for everybody—very rarely does a film have universal appeal. However, all of these genres have a loyal following, some of them lasting several decades and extending over two generations. While their appeal is not universal, it is clearly profound. The character's longevity is testament to his/her ability to reach audiences. As Traube asks, "If audiences could not
recognize their ideals, beliefs, or fears among the images circulated by the cultural industry, why would they find those images so compelling?" (Traube, 1992, p. 70).

The film industry also recognizes the power of the recurring hero. Mass media is capable of reflecting society because they are forced by their commercial nature to provide a level of content that will guarantee the widest possible acceptance by the largest possible audience. Thus, there is a definite tendency to create a product that consists of familiar themes, clearly identifiable characters, and understandable resolutions (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 74). Contrary to popular wisdom, audiences are not gulled into attending films by distorted or misleading ad campaigns. A phrase often used by producers refers to a film "finding its audience" and this is a more accurate description of what happens. A film needs to specify its audience, not only in text, but also in its advertising and other promotional materials (Turner, 1988, p. 97).

Just as audiences know recurring film heroes, they are equally known to the industry that creates and markets them. Because consumers have a growing number of choices for their entertainment dollar, marketing has become increasingly important in attracting film audiences. By promoting a recognizable character with an established audience, some of the guesswork is taken out of the marketing process.

Sophisticated marketing and promotional strategies reflect a major change in the commercial side of the film industry. No longer is the film the sole source of revenue. Now popular film is rarely presented to the public as a single product or commodity. Instead, it is a composite commodity, incorporating the "Flashdance" T-shirt or "Rambo" doll into the purchase of a cinema ticket. Film is no longer the product of a self-contained industry, but one of a range of cultural commodities produced by multinational conglomerates whose main interest is more than the construction of images for the screen (Turner, 1988, p. 1).

Just as the face of film has changed, so too have the faces of the heroes being presented to the audience. No longer are audiences drawn to pristine images of squeaky-clean characters. Film heroes who reflect the gray areas of society now seem to resonate with audiences. The antihero has replaced the hero as the central figure in films and literature. What society now imagines when it thinks of a hero is really only one heroic archetype: the warrior. The warrior typically takes a long, and usually solitary journey, saves the day, and rescues damsels-in-distress by slaying a dragon or, in some other fashion, defeats the enemy.
(Pearson, 1986, p. 2). The film characters chosen for this study—James Bond, Dirty Harry, and Ellen Ripley all fit this antihero archetype.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine cultural myths in American society by using fictional characters in popular film as examples. This study will attempt to show how myths are developed and maintained in American popular culture. In addition, the study will explore the role cultural myths play in society with regard to determining values and defining worldviews.

Popular films offer a unique perspective for the study of cultural myth because they both share common ground. Movies and myth are alike in that they are both partially independent of their creators and their audience. Once shown, they acquire a life of their own, and break free from the constraint of being precisely, definitely understood or interpreted by either the narrator or the audience. This independence allows directors, actors, and audiences to assign various and often contradictory meaning to a particular movie (Drummond, 1996, p. 35).

Often the various definitions an audience can assign popular culture involve the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. Characters like James Bond or Dirty Harry become cultural myths because they display qualities the audience admires and sometimes longs for. Myth attempts to answer questions people would rarely think, or dare to think, of asking. In making that attempt, one of its primary functions is to pose—through spoken narrative and the visual imagery of movies—alternative or virtual worlds in which experience departs radically from everyday life (Drummond, 1996, p. 31). By formulating psychological problems and solutions for an audience, texts can influence the way an audience member sees the world or his/her individual position in, and problems with, the world. Participating in the rhetoric of a text may allow individuals to reorient toward and resolve tensions they already experience in their lives (Payne, 1989, p. 29).

The psychological fulfillment audiences gain from viewing a film is testament that the movie going experience differs from other mass media. While the frequency of attendance may vary, few people have never had the experience of seeing a movie as part of an audience in a darkened theater. Even with ever
increasing choices for the general public, movies continue to attract audiences. Obviously, there is something unique and inherently appealing about "going to the movies" (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 83).

To gain a better understanding of society, the scholar need only to examine the books people read, the television shows they watch, and the films they attend. It is the hope that this study of cultural myth involving fictional characters from popular film will lead to a better understanding of how society thinks and functions. The world of mass media is different from the real social world, but it is just as clearly related to it in some way. To clarify this relationship, one might say that media does not manifest actuality of society, but rather reflects, symbolically, the structure of values and relationships beneath the surface (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 24).

Justification

Entertainment might seem on the surface to be non-rhetorical, but in fact discourse which occurs in entertainment is merely embodied in less direct expression, and the elements of discourse are as much a primary basis for entertainment as for any other means of communication. Popular music and television imply, if not express, specific values; popular genres of fiction and film are built upon relationships between the artist, the audience, and the subject (Root Jr., 1987, p. 12).

Studies of non-traditional forms of rhetoric are becoming more commonplace in the field of communication. These new studies have not only reshaped the discipline, they have changed the outlook on how scholars view society. Culture came to be redefined as the processes which construct a society's way of life: its systems for producing meaning, sense, or consciousness, especially in those systems and media of representations which give images their cultural significance. Film, television, and advertising thus become targets for research and textual analysis. Culture is seen to be composed of interconnected systems of meaning. So one might begin by examining comic strips and wind up talking about codes of dress in urban subcultures (Turner, 1988, p. 39).

The goal of this study is to provide an examination of cultural myth and the role it plays in peoples' lives in the hope that it will lead to a better understanding of society. It is believed that the use of film characters as the focus of this study will lend insight that could not be found in more traditional rhetorical analysis. Film and television currently provide people with stories that are becoming traditional narrative.
Although the rhetoric of film and television texts are studied today for political content and value prescriptions, little attention is given to the ways in which folkloric uses of particular texts enhance their rhetorical significance. In the enactment and celebration of contemporary folklore, current political issues and values orientation can supplement or replace traditional morality as lessons of socialization (Payne, 1989, p. 25).

Zarefsky points out that research of non-traditional rhetoric began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when traditional models and paradigms were called into question. Communication studies were no exception. Scholars began to probe in new directions. They examined other rhetorical forms besides the individual orator, other perspectives besides the narrowly historical, and other methods besides the neo-Aristotelian. The resulting studies made more substantial theoretical contributions, exhibited a richer array of approaches, demonstrated more sophisticated methodology and—in many cases—were more interesting (Zarefsky, 1993, p. 205).

The 1980s showed a continuation of new methods and ideas—especially those that engaged the processes, contexts, and meanings of communication. The best known label for these methods is qualitative research. What these methods have in common is lived experience as a subject of systematic study: how people understand who they are, socially and culturally, through their actions, their discourse, and the perceptions they develop about themselves and each other (Lindolf, 1995, p. xi).

In spite of this movement toward non-traditional studies, popular culture still faces a credibility gap among some in the academic community. Serious analysis of film and other popular media still encounters resistance in some circles. Such a stance is itself ideological, for it obscures the political significance of mass entertainment and hinders the processes of social and cultural self-reflection (Traube, 1992, p. 29).

Television and its pervasive nature have also pushed film analysis into the background. Since the advent of television, movies have not been perceived as the social force they once were. The displacement of movies by television as the most important entertainment medium has caused society to devalue the function and influence of film. This attitude neglects the fact that movies are literally larger than life, are attended at one time or another by all segments of society, have an immense appeal to adolescents and
young people, and occupy a special place in the social ritual of the population (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 19).

Scholars want to examine film because it is a source of pleasure and significance for so many in society. The relationships which make this possible—between the image and the viewer, the industry and the audience, narrative and culture, form and ideology—are the ones isolated for examination by film studies (Turner, 1988, p. 40). Medhurst and Benson argue for the close reading of film texts, but suggest formal analysis by itself will not reveal the rhetorical potential of a text, which is always realized in a social, cultural, and political situation by viewers for whom rhetorical response is inescapably an active process of making meanings (Benson and Medhurst, 1991, p. 444).

The present day definition of communication scholarship is far different from the past. The study of films, music, television, social movements, and even such esoteric items like historical monuments all have a niche within the discipline. Popular culture often mirrors society. It is the hope that this study of cultural myths involving fictional characters in popular film can make a small contribution to the communication field. As Thomas Farrell states, "Rhetoric is more than a product, more than a practice; it is the entire process of forming, expressing, and judging public thought in real life. The moods of this practice and process are dependent on the durability of the art" (Farrell, 1993, p. 320).

Review Of Literature

Wide ranges of sources were used for this study. This literature can be categorized into four main areas: communication studies, cultural myth analysis, studies addressing the concept of heroes, and the history and analysis of film. Also, several psychology works were applied with regards to the relationship between media and audience.

Among the books used were Reading TV (Fiske and Hartley, 1978), Rhetorical Dimensions In Media (Jowett and Linton, 1980), The Rhetoric Of Popular Culture (Root Jr., 1987), Norms Of Rhetorical Culture (Farrell, 1993), and Theories Of Mass Communication (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1975). These books were primarily used to understand how film analysis functions within the communication discipline. In addition, they also describe the impact film has on society and emphasized the importance of continued research involving media and culture.
Several academic articles were used for references of film analysis in communication studies. These articles include "Archetypal Alloy: Reagan's Rhetorical Image" (Hankins, 1983), "Television And Popular Culture" (Fiske, 1986), "The Wizard Of Oz: Therapeutic Rhetoric In Contemporary Media Ritual" (Payne, 1989), and "The State Of The Art Of Public Address Scholarship" (Zarefsky, 1993).

A variety of sources were used to describe and define cultural myth. These sources include Tales Of A New America (Reich, 1987), John Wayne's America (Will, 1997), Persuasion: Reception And Responsibility (Larson, 1995), The Mythic Dimension (Campbell, 1997), "Hero As Popular Culture" (Rollin, 1983), "E.T. As Rhetorical Transcendence" (Rushing, 1985), "The Mythic Evolution Of The New Frontier In Mass Mediated Rhetoric" (Rushing, 1986), "Rhetorical Structure Of Oliver Stone's JFK" (Medhurst, 1993), and "Jaws As Patriarchal Myth" (Caputi, 1978). These sources were used to define cultural myth and as a reference for the different types of myth analysis.

Several books and articles were used regarding the study of heroes and the folkloric nature of popular culture. These works include American Dreamtime (Drummond, 1996), Dreaming Identities (Traube, 1992), Rhetorical Dimension Of Popular Culture (Brummett, 1991), and "Marilyn Monroe: Cult Hero" (Dick, 1983). These sources described the need for heroes in society and helped explain how figures from popular culture have been placed in this role.

Many sources were used for capturing the history of the film industry and the origins and film bibliographies of the characters used for this study. Among these works were Film As Social Practice (Turner, 1988), Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, And Video (Ellis, 1982), Heavenly Bodies (Dyer, 1986), Only Entertainment (Dyer, 1992), Bond And Beyond (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987), Rating The Movies (Brown, 1991), Ian Fleming (Rosenberg and Stewart, 1989), Clint Eastwood (Schickel, 1996), Clint Eastwood: A Cultural Production, (Smith, 1993), Alien Zone (Newton, 1990), "Of Human Bondage" (Rayner, 1995), and "The Bitch Is Back" (Thomson, 1997).

Finally, several psychological studies were used to help explain the impact mass media has on audience members and how media is used as a vehicle for value reinforcement. They also examined the role of narrative in society and discussed credibility issues within a given story. These studies include Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, And Narrative Discourse (Ryan, 1991), The Portable Jung (Jung, 1971),

Methodology

The methodology that will applied in this study will involve a two-step process. The first step will attempt to demonstrate that audience members turn to various entertainment mediums for the fulfillment of several basic psychological needs. The second step will be an attempt to show that when audiences view films, certain fictional characters develop into cultural myths within society, especially when viewed in multiple films over an extended period of time.

To illustrate the process of cultural myth development, three fictional characters from popular film will be used as examples. These film characters include James Bonds, from the enduring spy series; Dirty Harry Callahan, the hard-bitten police detective played by Clint Eastwood; and Ellen Ripley, the female action hero from the Alien movies. Ellis claims there are two ways in which cinema can deploy narrative images to a specific audience—through the genre and through the movie star (Ellis, 1982, p. 99). While the films of these three characters could certainly be categorized in genres, it is the contention of this study that these screen images have become "stars" in their own right by becoming a staple of American popular culture.

These characters, through the medium of film, have become an influential force within society. Their influence is an example of media determinism—the belief that the content of a culture, its habits of thought, vocabulary, norms and values, and key symbols, are dictated by the inevitable domination of a medium of communication (Brummett, 1991, p. 5).

To understand how these film characters have become such an influence on their audience, this study will apply Fiske and Hartely's theory of the functional tradition. This theory states that a visual medium like film or television affects an audience in three distinct ways:

1) Individualism- this presupposes a one-to-one relationship between the mass communicator and the individual viewer. The individual has certain psychological needs which he/she brings to the place of viewing and the mass communicator attempts to gratify them. Hence the source is seen as a need-gratification medium.
2) Abstraction- an individual's psychological needs are much the same no matter what society or cultural he/she belongs to. Certainly, culture can be an influence, but Fiske and Hartley argue that there are universal psychological needs which dominate.

3) Functionalism- film or television is used by the viewer to satisfy their psychological needs in a conscious and active way (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 71-72).

What are these needs Fiske and Hartley refer to? According to Katz et al., there are five basic needs that mass media fulfills:

1) Cognitive needs- the need to acquire information, knowledge, and understanding.
2) Affective needs- the need for emotional and aesthetic experience.
3) Personal integrative needs- the need for self-confidence, stability, status, and reassurance.
4) Social integrative needs- the need for contact with family and friends.
5) Tension release- the need for escape and diversion (Katz et al., 1973, p. 164).

Both of these theories point to a needs gratification relationship between the audience and the medium. It is the position of this study that as the medium fulfills these psychological needs within audience members, it acts as an influencing factor in determining social patterns and behavior. When audience members repeatedly return to familiar fictional characters to achieve fulfillment, these characters become institutionalized within the culture (Larson, 1995, p. 232). The earlier mention of Washington and the cherry tree would be one such example. Larson states that this type of myth is Actually a fantasy form of deep and enduring values that most Americans hold. They are expressed as myth in order to simplify them (Larson, 1995, p. 249).

Reich claims that cultural myth gives Americans a sense of identity, both as individuals and as a nation:

The American morality tale defines our understanding of who we are, and of what we want for ourselves and one another. Much is made of the American political distinctiveness of a Constitution inspired by theory rather than by tradition. But there is a subtler yet equally profound cultural distinctiveness as well, a national sense of identity rooted not in history but in self told mythology. (Reich, 1987, p. 5).
Reich also claims that there are specific myths or parables that are continually played out in both real and fictive worlds. These myths represent values and social norms that Americans use to help define themselves. All of the fictional characters chosen for this study display these mythic qualities in varying degrees. These myths include:

1) **Rot At The Top** - this parable is about the malevolence of powerful elites, be they wealthy aristocrats, rapacious business leaders, or imperious government officials. It is a tale of corruption, decadence, and irresponsibility among the powerful, of conspiracy against the broader public. The theme occurs in both real and invented stories of honest undercover agents—Sam Spade, Serpico, Jack Nicholson in *Chinatown*—who trace the rot back to the most powerful in the community. The moral is clear: power corrupts privilege perverts (Reich, 1987, p. 11-12).

2) **The Triumphant Individual** - this is the story about the self mad man or woman who bucks the odds, spurns the naysayers, and shows what can be done with enough drive and guts. He/she is a loner and a maverick, plain speaking, self-reliant, and uncompromising in ideals. He/she gets the job done (Reich, 1987, p. 7).

3) **Mob At The Gates** - this mythic story is about tyranny and barbarism that lurks in the world. American is the beacon light of virtue that shines in the world of darkness. Democracy serves as the model for other people's aspirations, the hope of the world's poor and oppressed. These liberties are fragile; such openness renders free society vulnerable to exploitation of infection from beyond (Reich, 1987, p. 8).

In analyzing cultural myth through the use of film images, this study will try to demonstrate how each of the fictional characters exemplify the mythic qualities listed by Reich. By displaying these qualities, the film characters become hidden persuaders who continually reinforce these same beliefs and values within audience members. Myths do not remain fixed in the past, but travel through time changing form and style. Their function is to stitch together the seams of prevailing reality, to bestow legitimization and credibility upon societal order (Caputi, 1978, p. 306).

Myth analysis is a growing area of study within the communication discipline. Rushing points to the frontier myth as one of the principle narratives used to define America:
America has drawn upon the frontier for its mythic identity, whether fixed upon Columbus sailing the ocean blue or Buffalo Bill conquering the wild West, the American imagination remains fascinated by new and unknown places. Since the beginning, the pioneer spirit has shaped the American Dream and infused its rhetoric. (Rushing, 1986, p. 265).

As study of popular myth has increased, many scholars have turned to popular film for their research. One of the most interesting studies in recent years is Medhurst's analysis of the Oliver Stone film *JFK*. Since its release, the film has come under heavy criticism because of its historical inaccuracies. The flaws in *JFK*—and by extension its director—are well known. The film is said to confuse fact with fiction distort history, cook evidence, slander honest people, substitute speculation for investigation, and foster disrespect for constitutional government (Medhurst, 1993, p. 128).

Medhurst argues that the film's power lies not in its accuracy, but in its reinforcement of the myth of corruption within governmental institutions (what Reich would label "Rot At The Top"): "Propagandist or not, *JFK* is best considered a piece of cinematic rhetoric whose primary means of persuasion are the ambiguities of history and the dialectical tensions that are part of the human condition. Stone's film is an artistic wake up call to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see" (Medhurst, 1993, p. 139). Medhurst further states that analysis of films like *JFK* lend a greater insight to society as a whole: "*JFK* is not only a mythic discourse about America's drift toward covert government, it is also a parable about humanity. Born into a history of their own creation, humans continue to scribble—to make their marks—in an effort to discover the truth about themselves" (Medhurst, 1993, p. 141).

Rushing has also looked to film in analyzing cultural myth. In her analysis of the movie *E.T.*, she claims the film links "the world of time with the universe of permanence through a modern hero myth" (Rushing, 1985, p. 201).

Any analysis dealing with the communicative or persuasive potential of film must, at one point or another, grapple with the problem of how viewers come to "know" or attribute meaning to film images. Such an analysis should utilize the images themselves as a starting point for criticism and examine them in light of their rhetorical impact (Medhurst and Benson, 1991, p. 495).
This study will start with the three fictional characters previously mentioned and demonstrate that they exemplify, within the parameters of their films, the mythic qualities listed by Reich. As audiences return to these characters in their search for need-gratification, the characters themselves develop into cultural myths through a continued pattern of value representation. This study will attempt to demonstrate that these fictional figures become a persuasive influence on audience members through the repetition of certain behaviors and characteristics.

As communication scholars search for a better understanding of the world around them, myth analysis has gotten increased attention in research studies. In order to gain clarity about cultural myths, the vehicles in which the myths are presented must also be examined. By studying the fictional characters of popular film as cultural myth, it is hoped that scholars can gain a better understanding of this phenomenon and its role in society. Ideally, this study will serve as encouragement for further research involving communication and popular culture.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORY

There is a long running debate among critics as to whether movies should be viewed as an artistic endeavor or as commercial enterprise. On one hand, film represents the creative collaboration of many talented and artistic people. These people are the writers, directors, and performers who begin with an idea and pool their talents to create a finished project. On the other hand, most of these projects are financed through Hollywood studios. Without this financial backing, the majority of film concepts would never get off the ground. Film producers and studio executives have different motives for making movies—profit. Their goal is to make money for the studio and its shareholders. Because of these conflicting goals, it is difficult to label the film industry as simply art or consumer product.

This chapter will briefly examine the history of the film industry and attempt to demonstrate how the commercial side of making movies plays an increasingly important role in which films get produced. In addition, it will explore the origins of the film characters chosen for this study and explain why recurring characters like James Bond, Dirty Harry and Ellen Ripley have become bankable commodities for the film industry.

The Golden Age

The period from 1930-1950 has been branded the golden age of film going in the United States. At the peak of feature film’s popularity, audiences attended their favorite cinema as a regular night out, often more than once a week, regardless of what was showing. Going to the movies was the event, not going to any particular movie (Turner, 1988, p. 2). In 1946, American movies attained their highest level of popular appeal, grossing $1.7 billion dollars. Average weekly attendance of movie theaters soared to 90 million people. Roughly 90 cents of every entertainment dollar in America went for the movies, and motion picture stocks reached unprecedented heights (Davis, 1997, p. 2).
During this peak of movie popularity, Hollywood studios produced films that trumpeted family values and glorified the American way of life. Hollywood specialized in lavish, escapist entertainment with plenty of action, romance, and sentiment. The old movie moguls considered themselves the purveyors of family amusement, and their products mirrored the values they considered quintessentially American: movement, pace, material success, optimism, progress, the triumph of right over wrong. True love endured a lifetime, and the uncommitted were expected to live in emotional suspension until their ideal partner came along (Davis, 1997, p. 2).

In the 1950s, two factors changed the viewing habits of the American public. First was a growing demand by audiences for more sophisticated entertainment that mirrored real life. For Hollywood, film noir represented not only a burst of creative energy, but also a means of chronicling and coping with the failings of contemporary life. By dwelling on these darker images, the sumptuous décor and pristine language characteristic of Hollywood in former years were abandoned; instead chaos, uncertainty, moral decay, irrationality, and alienation became keynotes (Davis, 1997, p. 30). Moody method actors like Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, and James Dean became the new cinema stars.

The second factor that impacted the film industry was the advent of television. The crowning blow to the studios came with the introduction of commercial television into American homes. Television had been a technical reality since the late 1930s. In 1946, after government restrictions were lifted, television sets began to be manufactured in substantial numbers. A million televisions had been sold by 1949; two years later, a thousand new television sets were being purchased every 24 hours. By 1955, television sets had become a status symbol for middle-class America; more than half of all U.S. households had one. Watching television quickly became an obsession. Video programming fit more conveniently into the daily schedules of busy Americans than a night at the movies. There was no need for baby-sitters, no problem with parking, and best of all, the entertainment was free (Davis, 1997, p. 15).

Television not only affected box office attendance, it also impacted the number of Hollywood movies that were being produced. With fewer people going to the movies less often, the number of motion pictures being made also decreased. Television situation comedies, police shows, westerns, and other programming categories took over the role once filled by Hollywood “B-movies”. This created a new entertainment environment, what was once a habit now became an occasion. Audiences became more selective in their attendance patterns; they went to a movie rather than going to the movies (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 35).
By the 1960s, an angry, anti-establishment outlook was developing that demanded a redefinition of freedom, a reexamination of traditional values, and the right to explore untried paths. The existential hero, or antihero, became a model—a person who was at war against a social and political system that no longer defended the individual who dared to be different. Hollywood’s old formulas no longer seemed to work. Shifting moods and altered values necessitated a different approach, one that explored contemporary themes and reflected current notions of art and worth. This adjustment did not come easily nor without pain, since producers were forced to readjust their critical assumptions. Actor Paul Newman summed it up best: “The old heroes used to protect society from its enemies. Now it’s society itself that is the enemy” (Davis, 1997, p. 99).

These changes in societal outlook had significant impact on the film industry that is still felt today. The two major aspects of the business of making movies—the difficulty of predicting public tastes and the impossibility of exactly duplicating a hit—make the enterprise of producing film extraordinarily risky. Every business contains some element of risk. But for most executives and investors, the relative probability of success is somewhat calculable. Hollywood does not enjoy this luxury. Each choice is a stab in the dark, every decision a wager against unknown odds. Most ideas for film never make it to celluloid; the few that are produced often lose money. The tenure of top studio executives can be measured in months (Prindle, 1993, p. 5).

In light of all these complexities, moviemakers tend to engage in a form of ritualism—it entails clinging to well-tried formulas with known audience appeal. This creates an atmosphere that minimizes risk, that causes cycles to dominate (imitation of successful movie themes and formats), and for filmmakers to look to the successes of other media for inspiration, and vice versa (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 30).

The results of these changes in the industry mean that not only are less films being produced, the number of new ideas for potential films are also being stifled. New and creative treatments are deemed too risky; tried and true formulas that have been used in the past are the safer bet for studio executives. The first basic test a movie proposal must pass before the financing of its production can be seriously contemplated is market potential. This is the ability of the movie to attract sufficient numbers of patrons to make it a profitable venture. The uncertainty surrounding this speculation creates conditions which tend to constrain innovation, generating reliance on a limited number of formulas considered safe and leads to imitation of breakthrough successes (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 33).
By choosing to emphasize high-cost blockbusters which must appeal to mass audiences and must also include elaborate and expensive marketing campaigns, the major film producers limit the number of movie treatments and themes that find their way to the screen (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 65). Studio executives gravitate toward formula films because of the industry's volatility. The measure of success in movie making is attendance, either in terms of the number of admissions or the dollar value of rental fees which exhibitors return to the distributor. The problem with these measurements is that they are determined after the fact. They do not explain why people attend movies, and consequently are lacking in predictive value. Popularity in the past has been found to be no guarantee of success in the future (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 27).

To help a movie establish an audience niche, film genres are increasingly promoted. The assignation of a movie to a particular genre in the popular culture industry serves a purpose that is related to consumption and reception. The industry attempts to isolate and reach a specific audience and its interests by imposing a particular pre-interpretation on the movie (Smith, 1993, p. 24). Genre stories institutionalize the notion of the-same-but-different entertainment. Within a genre, audiences can be assured that the story elements that thrilled them in the past are present in the current offering. Genre combines powerfully with star recognition to lower uncertainty about the content and quality of a picture. To describe a film as a "western" supplies a good deal of information about it. To describe it as a "John Wayne western" reduces the ambiguity almost to the vanishing point (Prindle, 1993, p. 27).

While assigning a film to a particular genre can help establish an audience, sequels offer a chance to solidify audience loyalty for years to come. Sequels further eliminate variation by casting the same actor in the same role and setting as in the previous success. In modern Hollywood, a sequel is probably the easiest property to finance and sell to exhibitors. Samuel Z. Arkoff, the founder of America International Pictures, describes sequels as "the path of least resistance. In a business that has no signposts, exhibitors can only recognize what they just did well with" (Prindle, 1993, p. 27).

With so much riding on the success of an individual film, marketing and promotions play an increasingly important role in the movie industry. In some instances, their functions have become so important that the ad campaigns cost as much as the actual production of the movie (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 25). In spite of the extensive ad campaigns, moviemakers pay the greatest homage to "word-of-mouth", the recommendations that individuals make to their friends and acquaintances in face-to-face
situations. While producers and distributors would prefer to have good critical reviews over bad ones, even the latter will be tolerated if the audience has good things to tell their peers about the movie (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 64).

Two recent examples illustrate this point. The movies *Showgirls* and *Striptease* were universally panned by critics as two of the worst Hollywood offerings of the year. In spite of these harsh reviews, both films netted a handsome profit for their studios. Conversely, the historical epic *Michael Collins* was well received by critics, but was considered a box office bomb by industry standards. These examples demonstrate that a "successful" film is often judged not on artistic merit, but on financial revenue.

As the film industry has matured, financial success plays an increasingly significant role on the types of films being produced. Like any business, studio executives look to eliminate as much risk as possible. To do this, the industry relies on proven formulas that have generated success in the past. While no film is guaranteed success, producers often feel safer mimicking previous successes instead of breaking new ground. Well known actors, familiar genres, and established film characters all factor in to this duplication process.

The film characters selected for this study—James Bond, Dirty Harry, and Ellen Ripley—have all demonstrated a capacity to draw large audiences over an extended period of time in a series of motion pictures. Such characters represent the ideal vehicle for studio executives. They remain popular with audiences, are easily marketed, and represent less risk for their investment dollar. Producers will continue to market such film characters until audience interest begins to wane. Some characters, like Dirty Harry, are intertwined with the actor who portrays them. Other characters, like James Bond, have survived portrayal by multiple actors and still show the capacity to draw audiences. By briefly examining the history of the film industry, this study has attempted to show why studio executives and producers would be drawn to recurring film characters like the ones chosen for this study. To better understand the popularity of each of these fictional characters, this study will now explore the origins and film history of each of these characters.

"Bond, James Bond"

One of the most enduring characters in motion picture history has been James Bond. The Bond character has appeared in nineteen films that have spanned three decades. Five different actors have played Bond on
screen, yet this mythic figure remains popular as ever. Perhaps no other fictional character in film has
demonstrated the staying power that Bond has.

Bond was born out of the imagination of author Ian Lancaster Fleming, a British journalist who had
grown disenchanted with his work. In one of his persistent daydreams, Fleming vowed he would one day
write the world’s greatest adventure story (Rosenberg and Stewart, 1989, p. 4). Fleming associated this to a
“Walter Mitty syndrome. The author’s feverish dreams of what might have been” (Zeiger, 1965, p. 109).

After completing his first manuscript, Casino Royale, Fleming showed it to his friend William Plomer,
who had connections at Jonathon Cape Publishing. Plomer liked it, as did the editors at Cape. They
published the book in 1953, and Fleming was on his way. James Bond was on his way, too, and this new
master spy’s professional life and reputation began to be indelibly printed on the public’s mind (Rosenberg
and Stewart, 1989, p. 5).

Bond seems to have struck at a basic fantasy that resides in everyone, including his creator. In sitting
down to write, Fleming found that his dreams correspond to those of a teenager. Adolescent fantasies may
modify themselves with age, but at their base, they don’t change all that much. Bond might have qualities
that seem somewhat dated, but he’s an archetype nonetheless, a character whose face and name may
change but will never really go away (Rayner, 1995, p. 77).

While Fleming’s novels were well received, his books were not an overnight sensation. Sales did
increase dramatically in March of 1961 when Life magazine published a list of newly elected President
John F. Kennedy’s ten favorite books. Included on the list was Fleming’s From Russia With Love.
Kennedy may or may not have been a Bond fan; whatever his motivations, news of the endorsement was
on all the Bond novels. Fleming received $100,000 and five percent of the producer’s profit from each film
made (Rosenberg and Stewart, 1989, p. 7).

With his newly acquired wealth, Fleming adopted a jet-setting lifestyle similar to his Bond character. He
traveled frequently, and many of the later Bond novels were written from his home in Jamaica. In an effort
to project the Bond myth, Fleming had the Royal Typewriter Company construct a golden typewriter. All
the later Bond books were written on this elegant machine (Bryce, 1984, p. 103).

When Fleming died in the summer of 1964, his books had sold an estimated 21 million copies in the
English language. The New York Times estimated that his novels alone had earned the author almost $3
million dollars. Although Fleming had passed on, the character he created was just beginning to impact movie audiences (Zeiger, 1965, p. 116). The seeds of the Bond myth had already been planted with the growing popularity of Fleming's books. However, it was Bond as a movie figure that transformed the character into mass acceptance. This transformation was due in large part to the original James Bond actor—Sean Connery.

The Scottish born Connery was making a living as a Can-Can dancer in France when he entered a contest by a British newspaper searching for the man who would play Bond. Connery won, and would go on to make a total of seven Bond movies. The six Bond films in which he starred in from 1963-1971 became known as the “gilt-edged Bonds” for their high tech gadgetry and glamorous locales (Brown, 1991, p. 356).

While Fleming deserves much credit for the creation of Bond, many of the mannerisms that audiences associate to the character stem from Connery’s portrayal. When Fleming first conceived of Bond, he pictured him as “a blunt instrument, suitably flat and colorless” (Zeiger, 1965, p. 93). When it came time to transform the character on to the screen, Connery had little to go on:

I had to start playing Bond from scratch— not even Ian Fleming knew much about Bond at the time. He has no mother. He has no father. He doesn’t come from anywhere and hadn’t been to anyplace when he became 007. My answer was to conceive of him as a complete sensualist, his senses highly tuned and awake to everything. (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987, p. 161)

The Bond myth owes much to the Connery performance. Connery’s notable sexual presence and voice, his youth and athleticism in the earlier films, and his refusal to conform to earlier stereotypes of movie heroes have meant that, for many people, he is James Bond (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987, p. 159). Connery’s performance was so ingrained in the public’s mind that he was brought back to play the character once more after a twelve-year absence. Titled Never Say Never Again, in a playful reference to the actor’s earlier proclamation that he would never play Bond again, critic Jay Brown stated that Connery “proved once again that nobody does it better” (Brown, 1991, p. 356).

Connery’s shadow cast itself over his successors in the Bond series. When George Lazenby took on the part in On Her Majesty’s Secret Service, the producers felt it necessary to refer and attempt to send up the Connery performance. In the pre-credit sequence (a ritual in all Bond movies), Lazenby, as Bond, attempts to rescue a woman from a suicidal attempt at drowning. She is then dragged off by mysterious men who
also attack Bond. In the ensuing fight, Bond wins, only to find the girl has driven away leaving only her shoes behind. Lazenby picks them up and comments dryly to the camera, “This never happens to the other fellow” (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987, p. 159).

Throughout the period in which Roger Moore played Bond, he was continually compared with Connery and told various anecdotes to the press. Moore even revealed his son’s belief that although his father played James Bond in the movies, the real Bond was none other then Connery.

As Connery’s replacements took on the role of Bond, the character’s popularity began to deteriorate with the movie public. Tough, blue-collar action heroes portrayed by Burt Reynolds, Clint Eastwood, and Sylvester Stallone began to replace the highly polished secret agent. Audiences began to look toward screen heroes that were rougher around the edges, and perhaps more violent, then the urbane Bond.

The deterioration in popularity can also be attributed to the declining quality of the Bond movies. This decline is especially evident in some of the later Moore films like Moonraker and A View To A Kill. In reviewing Moonraker, Brown described it as “an embarrassing and vacuous entry in the James Bond series. A criminal waste of a colossal budget, and a real disappointment to Bond fans (Brown, 1991, p. 199).

Part of the problem with these inferior Bond films is that Moore had grown tired of the role. As a result, his performances were not a portrayal of the secret agent but, instead, a parody of it. These films are marred with slapstick humor, and Moore seems to take great relish in poking fun at the genre. Because of this on screen self-deprecation, the Bond myth suffered with audiences. It came as no surprise in 1985 when Moore announced that A View To A Kill would be his last Bond picture.

Bond films enjoyed a brief renaissance in the late 1980s with the arrival of actor Timothy Dalton. In the films The Living Daylights and License To Kill, Dalton brought a renewed energy to the role that had been missing in the later Moore offerings. As Consumer Guide put it, “the Bond series remains the champagne of spy thrillers” (Brown, 1991, p. 167). However, just as audiences were warming to the new Bond, Dalton walked away from the role out of fear of being typecast. It would be six years before another Bond picture would be made.

Part of the reason for the absence of Bond films during this period was the perception that the character was out of date for the politically correct 1990s. How could a blatant sexist like Bond be accepted by mainstream audiences? No other film genre would dare introduce heroines named Pussy Galore, Holly
Goodhead, or Xenia Onatop. The survival of the Bond myth seemed doubtful in such gender conscious times.

The newest James Bond, actor Pierce Brosnan, dismisses such thinking:

Bond is a sexist and a misogynist, but I don’t think he feels he’s a dinosaur. If you think about this man who is in his early forties and who has done this job for many years, if you give that fact credence as an actor, he’s adrift. Bond just goes through life and kills people and takes the women. Anything that comes across his path, he just goes through with it. What is that like for him, day after day? He’s weary. Bond is a hard and dark character. (Rayner, 1995, p. 77)

Brosnan’s assessment appears to be accurate. His first Bond film, *Goldeneye*, released in 1995, debuted at number one and was a box office smash. It was quickly followed by *Tomorrow Never Dies*, which was equally successful. While these pictures were more epic in nature and contained such added twists as Bond’s boss being a woman, the basic formula remains in tact. Brosnan’s third Bond picture, *The World Is Not Enough*, began filming in January of 1999. With the commercial success of these recent Bond films, future offerings seem to be a certainty.

A Cop For All Seasons

The general public isn’t worried about the rights of a killer, they’re just saying get his off the streets, don’t let him kidnap my child, don’t let him kill my daughter. There’s a reason for the rights of the accused, and I think it’s very important and one of things that makes our system great. But there’s also the rights of the victim. Most people who talk about the rights of the accused have never been victimized; most of them probably never got accosted in an alley- Clint Eastwood. (Schickel, 1996, p. 279)

Few film series have defined an actor in then public’s mind as strongly as the Dirty Harry pictures have for Clint Eastwood. Since its controversial debut in 1971, the Dirty Harry character has gone from being vilified by film critics and social liberals to being quoted by two U.S. presidents a decade later. In its twenty-year lifespan, Dirty Harry has become a cultural icon, with Eastwood personifying a screen hero who stands up for the silent majority.

While Dirty Harry and Eastwood have become synonymous for film audiences, the part of the steely San Francisco detective was offered to several other actors first. Universal Studios controlled the rights to
the original screenplay by the husband and wife writing team of Harry and R. M. Fink. The studio had offered the part to Paul Newman, who turned down the part on political grounds. Newman saw the same thing everyone would be talking about once the picture was released: the debate over the constitutional rights of accused criminals (Schickel, 1996, p. 257).

Warner Brothers then purchased the rights to the screenplay and announced in the trades that one of their biggest stars, Frank Sinatra, has been signed for the film. The picture has now been retitled *Dead Right*, and Irvin Kershner was set to produce and direct it. In November of 1970, however, Sinatra withdrew from the project. He had broken his wrist in an accident and could not start the picture on schedule (Schickel, 1996, p. 258).

With Sinatra unable to perform, Warner Brothers offered the part to another actor under contract, action star Clint Eastwood. Eastwood, a former television actor, had grown to international fame under the tutelage of European director Sergio Leone in a trilogy of Italian westerns featuring him as the mysterious “Man With No Name”. Leone took great relish in deconstructing the traditional Hollywood western, and the film series vaulted Eastwood into a major box office star.

Much has been made of how the so-called “spaghetti westerns” were part of a general move in the 1960s toward a debunking of various heroic myths and figures in cinema. This is where the white hat cowboy of traditional Hollywood turns into an antihero, working less for the community and more for himself, rendering his violence less acceptably motivated and less righteous than in previous movies (Smith, 1994, p. 176). The values of the indomitable American hero of legend had been largely discredited. The “Man With No Name”, a more abstract and stylized figure than any hero the American cinema had seen, appeared as a deadpan ironic recuperation of the western hero. Eastwood went through the motions of enforcing justice without ideals—a postmodern John Wayne (Bingham, 1994, p. 173). Eastwood would continue to be viewed as Wayne’s successor throughout his career—albeit a darker, more amoral version—but with similar appeal for film audiences.

In spite of his drawing power, many critics were distinctly unimpressed by Eastwood’s acting. Film reviewer Pauline Kael (Eastwood’s most vocal critic), stated that there is no acting in any Eastwood performance, “He isn’t an actor, so one could hardly call him a bad actor. He’d have to do something before we could consider him bad at it” (Kael, 1974, p. 84). Nonetheless, Warner Brothers knew they had something with Eastwood and offered him the title role of the newly renamed project *Dirty Harry*. 
Eastwood was drawn to the role because Dirty Harry Callahan represented many of the frustrations felt by typical American males in relation to their work and to whatever system they served. At the same time, the part portrayed an impotent rage—a growing sense isolation in a rapidly changing world (Schickel, 1996, p. 280).

While on the surface Dirty Harry might seem like a one-dimensional hero, there are actually many layers to this character. Harry Callahan is richly drawn as a kind of American knothead-hothead, ever at odds with conventional wisdom and conventional manners; yet he is cunning and dedicated and therefore valuable to the powers he serves. The opening act is a succession of punched up confrontations involving both criminals and his superiors. Harry is shown in rebellious showdowns with his bosses interspersed with action scenes of him foiling a bank robber, halting a suicide attempt, and getting himself comically mistaken for a peeping Tom. The underlying premise in these early scenes is to show the hectic pressures of a cop’s life and to demonstrate that in the heat of battle a policeman does not always have the luxury of consulting the rule book (Schickel, 1996, p. 261).

In addition, there is a lonely, solitary side to the character. The audience learns early that Harry is a widower. He seems to have no friends and no recreational activities to escape to. His soul focus is his job as a police officer, and in spite of his unorthodox methods, he is very good at what he does.

There is also a class connotation in Harry that blue-collar audiences seem to identify with. Harry is a working-class hero. He tells the doctor tending his wounded leg to risk causing him pain by pulling off his slacks rather than cutting them off: “These cost $29.50, let it hurt”. This attitude stresses not only the hero’s stoicism, but also the fact that in 1971 $29.50 is a lot of money on a policeman’s salary. He’s shown only eating at cheap diners; the cars he drives are always a few years old. His apartment is very modest. The austerity in which Harry lives and works in allows the film to establish a sort of solidarity with working-class audiences, increasing the feeling that he is put upon and exploited (Bingham, 1994, p. 187).

In Dirty Harry, Eastwood plays a police inspector who must track a serial killer named Scorpio (played by stage actor Andy Robinson), who is terrorizing the city. Scorpio is both a sniper and a kidnapper, and is caught and tortured by Callahan so he can find the location of the kidnap victim. The victim dies, and Callahan is reprimanded by his superiors for violating Scorpio’s constitutional rights. Scorpio is ultimately released because of this violation, and continues his crime spree until Callahan puts an end to it by killing him in a showdown at the end of the film.
While the film resonated with movie audiences drawn to the action genre, film critics were not nearly so generous. *Dirty Harry* shortly became one of the most controversial films in recent memory, with one school of critics arguing that it condoned fascism and police power while others argued that it was about time the screen reflected a sympathetic look at a police officer's frustrations rather than always painting them as dishonest extortionists. If the critics were divided, audiences were not. They stood in line in droves to see Eastwood as Dirty Harry (Schickel, 1996, p. 259).

The context into which the film intervened is important. American culture in the early 1970s was rifled with strife caused by the Vietnam War; the police's lack of credibility and dubious reputation in those years was in part to thousands of incidents of police brutality against antiwar demonstrators. At the same time, citizen rights in relation to the police had been strengthened by the Supreme Court's ruling in the Miranda and Escobedo decisions. These rulings had produced shrieks of outrage by the right wing, whose complaints about the ultraliberal Warren court have continued ever since. In this context, it is not difficult to see *Dirty Harry* as a determined vindication of extremist police methods. Certainly some police personnel read it that way, inviting both Eastwood and director Donald Siegel to speak at various police functions (Smith, 1993, p. 91).

Had this film been released in a less polarized climate, accusations of fascism would have never arisen, but these were not normal times. The war in Vietnam was still on, the college campuses were rife with protest, and a parallel between taking a hard line on crime and a hard line on the war was often drawn in those days. No matter that Dirty Harry never said a word about those issues. No matter that the film carefully particularized his anger. It was easy enough to extrapolate from his bluntly expressed attitude about criminal rights a whole range of unspoken opinions, making Harry a generalized symbol of much that was hatefully illiberal in America (Schickel, 1996, p. 278).

Unlike those cultural products that mask their apparatus and keep their ideological agenda invisible, *Dirty Harry* appeared to be a conscious demonstration of a political strategy. The film was embraced by conservative U.S. politicians, including President Richard Nixon, who lifted a policy against showing R-rated films in the White House theater so he could see *Dirty Harry*. Mainstream reviewers, who are usually blind to politics, condemned the picture as reactionary, forcing Eastwood in interviews to deny he was a right-wing fanatic (Bingham, 1994, p. 180). In spite of his disclaimers, Eastwood carried the label of conservative agitator for a large portion of his career.
The film critics were almost universal in their dislike for *Dirty Harry* and the values it stood for. Critic Stuart Kaminsky made this claim:

Director Donald Siegel knew what he was doing. Each scene is carefully constructed to inflame middle-class phobias and to toy with its most sacred symbols, like the Constitution and the gun. It is an immoral picture, cracking a reactionary whip whose sting can only intensify mistrust and suspicion at various levels of society. (Schickel, 1996, p. 279)

Kael was even more vocal about the film and its alleged threat to democracy: “*Dirty Harry* is obviously just a genre movie, but his action genre has always had a fascist potential, and it has finally surfaced” (Smith, 1993, p. 91).

Audience response was much more favorable than the critical reception and the ensuing cultural controversy might suggest. The film would up being the tenth highest domestic moneymaker for 1972. Various reports suggest that audience reaction was quite vocal and even rowdy in support of Eastwood’s character. It might well have been this kind of response that spawned some of the concern of the critics in their roles as guardians of the integrity of Hollywood products (Smith, 1993, p. 95). In the end, the film’s popular success could not be slowed by any review. Elitist dubiety about *Dirty Harry* never afflicted the mass public—he was their guy, and their pleasure in his kick-ass ways was entirely untinged by guilt. The film ended up generating four sequels, all of which turned out to be hugely profitable, as did other films that cross-referred to it (Schickel, 1996, p. 281).

Eastwood also became a staunch defender of the character and his actions. He dismissed the notion of political labels in favor of the inherent morality that Harry appeals to:

Americans went to Nuremberg and convicted people who committed certain crimes because they didn’t adhere to a higher morality. We convicted them on that basis—that they shouldn’t have listened to the law of the land or the leaders at that time. They should have listened to their true morality. We sent them to jail on that basis. That is how it is with *Dirty Harry*. Somebody told him that this is the way it is, too bad, and he said, “Well that’s wrong. I can’t adhere to that”. That isn’t fascist, it’s the opposite of fascism. (Smith, 1993, p. 99)

In spite of the film’s criticism, *Dirty Harry* was hugely popular and left the audiences clamoring for more. Warner Brothers recognized the demand and quickly followed with the sequel *Magnum Force*, which was released in 1973. If *Dirty Harry* had fascist undertones, *Magnum Force* engages both narratively
and discursively with the same issue. This films pits Callahan against a group of young policeman who form a death squad and the police lieutenant who turns out to be their leader. The death squad begins eliminating high profile criminals that the justice system seems incapable of dealing with. Harry becomes, by default, the most liberal guy around. This political imagery is not very different from the one in which *Dirty Harry* was attacked: an all-American version of the community being protected and saved by the single serviceman whose use of violence and whose willingness to go beyond the strict limits of the law remained unquestioned (Smith, 1993, p. 104). Again, the film was panned by critics but proved successful at the box office.

Eastwood was engrossed in several other film projects, so it was six years before *Dirty Harry* found his way to the screen again. Two enterprising young men had written a screenplay for a detective film that they thought might interest the actor. With no way to contact him personally, the aspiring writers dropped off their script at the Hog Breath's Inn, a restaurant Eastwood owns in Carmel. A restaurant employee saw to it that Eastwood received the script, which after several rewrites developed into the third installment of the *Dirty Harry* series (Schickel, 1996, p. 301).

*The Enforcer* is the story about a group of political terrorists that kidnap the mayor of San Francisco. While tracking down the terrorists, Callahan is teamed with a woman detective who became his partner not through merit but instead because of political quotas. Controversy comes early in the film when Callahan sits in on a panel to interview his prospective partner Kate Moore (played by Tyne Daley). The scene becomes an occasion for a diatribe against the dangers of putting inexperienced women in perilous positions with male partners simply to satisfy affirmative action guidelines—guidelines that themselves are a part of a cynical mayoral publicity plan to ensure reelection. Callahan claims that the possible death of police officers is "a hell of a price to pay for being stylish". The argument is not framed as an expression of sexism, but of simple concern for the safety of personnel (Smith, 1993, p. 124).

While the film carefully steers away from debates involving superiority between the sexes, critics claimed *The Enforcer* has misogynistic undertones that reveal themselves throughout the picture. Such criticism is somewhat dubious given that Moore predictably proves to be a worthy partner and ultimately gives up her own life to save the kidnapped mayor. Despite this ending, the film drew heavy criticism from many women's organizations. Even in light of these criticisms, *The Enforcer* drew large audiences to the theater.
In 1983, Eastwood both directed and starred in the fourth Dirty Harry film *Sudden Impact*. In this picture, Callahan must track a rape victim (played by Sondra Locke) who is systematically killing members of the gang who attacked her and her sister. After wiping out the entire gang, including the police chief’s son who witnessed the attack, Callahan confronts the woman vigilante and ultimately lets her go. In some ways, *Sudden Impact* is the most intriguing installment of the Dirty Harry series. It shows the uncompromising hero putting aside his sworn duties and following his own moral compass.

*Sudden Impact* grossed over $70 million in the U.S. alone. It also gave Eastwood his signature moment, the line of dialogue he will forever be identified with. After Callahan thwarts the robbery of a coffee shop, he points his gun at the gang’s leader, who is threatening to kill a hostage if he is not released. It is then the great moment occurs: “Go ahead, make my day.” It became a vernacular catch phrase in a matter of weeks, with even President Ronald Reagan taking it up. In March of 1983, when Congress sought to raise taxes, Reagan announced he would happily veto any such action and borrowed both the line and Eastwood’s hissed delivery to suggest his resolve (Schickel, 1996, p. 384).

In his presidential bid, George Bush also made reference to Callahan in order to emphasize his own tough stance on crime. These quotations illustrate the fact that in a span of four movies, Dirty Harry went from being viewed as a wild-eyed radical to the poster boy for law and order in society. Considering the controversial debut of the character, this transformation is somewhat astonishing.

Dirty Harry returned to the screen one more time in 1988 in the film *The Dead Pool*. In this picture, a well-known horror film director and his cronies invent a game in which the choose a list of local celebrities who they think will die in the next year. The game becomes reality when an obsessed fan steals the director’s list and begins eliminating its entries one by one. As an added twist, Callahan’s name appears on the list.

There’s only so much an actor can do with any character, and with *The Dead Pool*, Dirty Harry seemed to be played out. *The Dead Pool’s* grosses, though still highly profitable, were smaller than any of the other Dirty Harry films. This seemed to confirm what Eastwood already suspected; that it was time to bestow on Dirty harry his grateful regards and ask him to take an early retirement. It is a decision that he has never regretted, although people still speak wistfully to him about Harry, wondering if someday he might return to the screen. As what, one wonders—a security guard? This nostalgia among fans demonstrates that
Eastwood lives by that long-standing show biz adage—always leave the audience wanting more (Schickel, 1996, p. 432).

Rambolina

The third fictional character to be examined for this study is Ellen Ripley from the Alien series—a four film collection of science fiction thrillers. The Alien films offer two unique perspectives—a look at outer space as a newer version of the western setting, and the placement of a woman in the role of recurring action hero.

For years, Hollywood has produced films depicting the old west. These films were action packed, with simple story lines that spouted the family values studio executives loved to promote. As viewer’s tastes changed and grew more sophisticated, so did Hollywood pictures. While the occasional western popped up like Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid or Kevin Costner’s Dances With Wolves, westerns were few and far between. Audiences viewed them as nostalgia instead of the staples they once were.

Critics argued that westerns had become too dated to reach a general audience. Mythically, the western story does not mix well with the newer, primarily urban values of sexual and racial equality, as well as with the substitution of personal inner space for a scenic place to roam. Locating the frontier story in the city scene fosters a psuedosynthesis of the western’s most enduring dialectic of values—that of individualism versus community—resulting in a subversion of the myth’s purity and power. Rushing argues that what audiences are seeking is not an end of westerns, but instead a new frontier to conquer: “The idea of frontier is inherently paradoxical; while it implies unlimited space on one hand, it encourages conquest on the other. A frontier seems infinite and unknown, but eventually it becomes confining and familiar. Like desire, it vanishes in its fulfillment” (Rushing, 1986, p. 266).

As a replacement for the western, Hollywood has increasingly turned to outer space as the new setting for many feature films. The parallel between the old west and outer space is closer than one might suspect. Television’s Star Trek series introduces each episode with a promo that declares space as “the final frontier”. The Star Wars film series co-opts several conventions of the western, including the black versus white garb of the adversaries, the carrying of laser weapons in low-slung holsters, and shootouts between the heroes and villains. The cinematic version of The Right Stuff pits a cowboy test pilot against the Mercury astronauts for the audience’s affections. The transition from the old west to the new frontier is
firmly underway, and because space is what its name implies, the possibility for the revival of the pioneer spirit seems much greater with this scene than in a typical urban environment (Rushing, 1986, p. 267).

The proliferation of outer space films began in the mid 1970s with Star Wars, which shattered all box office records at the time of its release. Two sequels quickly followed, as well as numerous knockoffs produced by other studios trying to cash in on the sudden science fiction craze. This trend continues to the present, with films like Independence Day, Armageddon, and The Terminator series all enjoying great box office success.

Among the most successful of these outer space films is the Alien series—a collection of four films spanning 18 years that skillfully combine the science fiction genre with the element of suspense borrowed from horror films like Psycho and Jaws. The films, especially the first, became known for both landmark special effects and for launching the career of actress Sigourney Weaver, who plays Ripley in all four films.

The first picture, simply entitled Alien, was a low budget thriller directed by Ridley Scott (best known for his 1984 commercial for Apple computers aired during the Super Bowl in 1984), was released in 1979. In the original movie, Ellen Ripley was a crewmember on a spaceship that investigates a distress signal from a remote planet. Three of the crew are exploring what looks to be the shell of some vast creature when suddenly a bizarre egg opens and a small creature attaches itself to the crewman's helmet. After a brief coma, the crewman seems fine—until the first full-fledged version of the monster bursts out of his chest while the entire crew is sharing a meal. This graphic scene became embedded in the minds of movie audiences, with some viewers actually getting physically ill and many others sprinting toward the exits. One by one the monster eliminates crewmembers, leaving Ripley alone to battle the alien. The film ends with Ripley in an escape shuttle, only to find the alien is still with her. In a last burst of will and energy, she blasts the creature into outer space (Thomson, 1997, p. 56).

The most obvious utopian element in Alien is its casting of a female character in the role of the individualistic hero, a role conventionally written for and played by a male. In fact, the original part of Ripley was written specifically for a man, but Scott saw the opportunity to break traditional Hollywood stereotypes and place a woman in the part of an action hero. Studio executives went along primarily because Weaver agreed to take the part for a paltry $33,000, a miniscule salary by Hollywood standards (Newton, 1990, p. 82). Alien's producer Gale Anne Hurd now regards the movie as a feminist document: "We didn't get people, even rednecks, leaving the theater saying, 'That was stupid—no woman could do
that'. You don’t have to be a liberal or an ERA supporter to root for Ripley. She is a film hero who stands on her own” (Rushing, 1991, p. 476).

*Alien* not only breaks with the convention of having a male hero, it breaks with the conventions of female heroism and independence as well. Ripley is skilled; she makes hard, unsentimental decisions; she is a firm but humane leader; she has the hero’s traditional thrilling resources in the face of the monster. Her quest as hero, moreover, is not diluted by the introduction of a love plot, although “getting the man too” has been a standard qualification in women’s fiction and films (Newton, 1990, p. 84).

Indeed, the film can be seen as almost post feminist in its image of relations between the men and women who serve on the spaceship. There are strong and weak men and women among the crew, but the woman’s right to assume authority is not even an issue. Authority and power are ceded to persons irrespective of sex, instead it is dictated solely in regard to their position and function. The way the film takes for granted Ripley’s assumption of command, her right to order and even shove the men around, registers strongly as the absence of any sexual stereotype (Newton, 1990, p. 77).

Ripley returned to the screen in 1986 in the sequel *Aliens*. Directed by James Cameron (*Titanic* and *The Terminator*), the story picks up as if it left the night before. Ripley awakens on a space station and tells her story, but no one believes her until communication from a colony set up on the alien’s planet have ceased. A search-and-destroy mission is ordered, and Ripley, who is teamed with a space age version of the Marines, goes back to expunge her nightmares. The military expedition has lengthy scenes of warfare in the colony’s labyrinthine interiors (Thomson, 1997, p. 56).

Again the film projects a woman as an action hero who can do anything a man can do. In the final scenes of *Aliens*, when Ripley takes up a machine gun and blasts her way into the monster’s nest to rescue a captive, she would make Rambo proud. Weaver has even jokingly referred to her role as Ripley as “Rambolina”, in reference to Stallone’s highly armed action hero. By this time, the audience has been prepared for Ripley’s role as hero, so that when she does arm herself and “fight like a man”, it seems very natural (Rushing, 1991, p. 488). Both *Alien* films proved to be major hits with movie audiences, and Ripley soon became one of Hollywood’s more recognizable film characters.

The third installment of the science fiction series came in 1992 with *Alien3*. In this film, Ripley crash lands on a planet that serves as an intergalactic prison. Unknown to her, Ripley has inadvertently brought an alien with her, and she must join forces with the all male prison population in order to battle the
creature. Weaver took a much larger role behind the scenes of this film, becoming the executive producer. She also commanded an $11 million salary along with a percentage of the film's profits, a far cry from her salary in the original picture (Thomson, 1997, p. 58). In this picture, Ripley shows the same bravery and resources in her fight with the alien that she displayed in the earlier films. She also takes on a more masculine appearance due to a much publicized scene in which she literally shaves her head in front of the camera. The film ends with a shock, in which Ripley sacrifices her own life in order to destroy the alien. Any further sequels seemed doubtful with this surprise climax.

Miraculously, Ripley found her way to the screen one more time in 1997 with the film Alien Resurrection. In this picture, Ripley is recreated through genetic engineering, and thus is able to do battle with the alien creatures one more time. While Weaver is still the star of the picture, she is paired with a robot played by the youthful Winona Ryder. This appears to be an attempt by the producers to ensure that the film still resonates with younger audiences.

Much like The Dead Pool with Dirty Harry, Alien Resurrection appears to be the swan song for Ellen Ripley. While the film did generate a profit, it was not nearly as successful as the previous Alien pictures. At 49, Weaver has made her mark in other dramatic films and no longer has the desire to play an action hero chasing aliens across space. Nonetheless, Ripley remains an important figure among movie characters; for both the longevity the character has had and for its ability to breakdown sexual barriers in the action film genre.

The next chapter will highlight the methodology that will be applied in this study. The methodology will encompass two main areas—audience identification and gratification as well as the application of myth analysis. In addition, the chapter will explore past studies of myth in popular films and demonstrate how this study will attempt to take the process of myth analysis beyond its current use.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodology that will be applied in this study will involve a two step process. The first step will be the application of Fiske and Hartley's theory of the functional tradition. This theory contends that audiences are drawn to visual media like films and television primarily for needs gratification. The second step will involve the use of myth analysis. By using recurring fictional characters from popular films, this study will attempt to show how these figures personify the myths stated by Reich. As audiences return to these characters in their series of motion pictures, the values these characters represent become reinforced within the viewer.

According to Payne, a richer understanding of the rhetoric of culture is needed to analyze the potential functions of media texts. This goal requires:

1) A treatment of rhetoric and its functions that considers how texts engage the identification and participation of audiences who then embrace and enact particular patterns of choice and action found in the text.

2) An understanding of symbolism and narrative form that analyzes the psychological and sociological activities of audiences who engage in a text.

3) A cultural perspective on the functions and uses of narratives that represent contemporary folklore (Payne, 1989, p. 25).

In order to gain a better understanding of the cultural rhetoric Payne refers to, critics need to examine both the narratives mass audiences turn to and the vehicles in which they are presented. The notion of films as rhetoric is not new and several models of criticism have been used, although no single pattern has emerged. Whatever the model, critics trace the impact of film to the audience's identification and participation in the psychological process occurring within, and in relation to, the main characters.
The common assumption in communication scholarship is the notion that the telling and retelling of traditional stories celebrate the cultural past, and that folkloric narratives instill and preserve social mores and codes of behavior. Such is the standard account of the rhetorical functions of traditional stories. Less commonly recognized is the possibility that these functions are now performed in the electronic age by narratives of film or television, contemporary stories that are now becoming traditional cultural lore (Payne, 1989, p. 25).

Scholars like Fiske and Hartley, along with many others, argue that these electronic narratives serve as a form of needs gratification in the viewing audience. Among these proponents are Defleur and Ball-Rokeach, who also describe the media as a source of need fulfillment in their integrated theory of mass media effects. They claim that the idea of needs becomes the basis for understanding media as a whole. The integrated theory of mass media effects places audience needs under the following categories:

1) The need to understand one's social world.
2) The need to act meaningful and effectively in that world.
3) The need for fantasy—an escape from daily problems and tensions. (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1975, p. 73).

Defleur and Ball-Rokeach go on to say that need fulfillment impacts audience members both as individuals and as a group. In their dependency theory, these critics claim that everyone in modern urban industrialized western society is psychologically dependent to a great extent on the mass media for information which enables them to enter into full participation in society (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 73).

Thus movies can serve as a kind of collective unconsciousness—inspiring, creating tensions, and almost causing a standardization of fantasy. For example, movies can create the idea of the perfect male or female, or perhaps provide an agenda for the ideal lifestyle, all of which is unwittingly ingested by the audience (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 100). Viewed in this light, the movie going experience becomes a ritual of reinforcement, functioning as a handbook for the mass audience. Audiences are drawn by the promise of delight, but in the process, receive instruction as well (Rollin, 1983, p. 33).

Why do films have this capacity to reach and influence the viewer on such an emotional level? One theory is that movies offer the similar experience that dreams have for the audience. It was for this reason that the famed social worker Jane Addams called movie theaters the “dream palace” in recognition of the
role movies have for the urban working class. The movies operate as dreams in several ways. First, through
fantasy they can fulfill dreams in the audience. They can also act in a deeper psychological sense to
symbolize people's hidden fears and desires, and thus act as a form of conscious dreaming. Finally, movies
act as a source for people's real dreams, especially where there is strong identification with a movie star, a
familiar character, or a specific incident (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 100).

It is quite common for the dreamer, be it male or female, to imagine himself/herself in the place of the
hero in a particular film. Sometimes the story of the film is re-enacted in the mind of the dreamer, without
personal modifications. In other cases, the dreamer uses the situations in the film merely as a starting point
from which he/she creates an entirely new fantasy molded to the individual's own tastes and experiences.
The latter type of dream is obviously more subjective and is liable to play a more significant part in the

The ability to tap into dreams and fantasies of mass audiences can be viewed as the primary function of
film. As McLuhan states, "The business of the writer or filmmaker is to transfer the reader or viewer from
one world, their own, to another, created by typography and film" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 285). The object of
the filmmaker becomes one of persuading the viewer to cross the distance that separates the viewer from
the screen, and to imaginatively enter the space of the screen world to experience the events that occur
within that world. This vicarious involvement affects the viewer both physically and emotionally. For
example, an unidentified man carrying a knife stalks an unsuspecting woman through jagged patterns of
shadow and light in the deserted city streets. The viewer experiences fear for the fate of the endangered
woman; his/her heart rate increases, his/her palms may begin to sweat, his/her overall condition becomes
one of fear (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 91). All of these reactions occur in spite of the fact that the viewer
faces no real harm, nor for that matter, does the actress on the screen—it is all part of the story.

This intense vicarious involvement in the flow of events is brought about by two principal factors. The
first is displacement of attention, which allows the viewer to consciously ignore technique and style, while
the narrative events become uppermost in his/her mind. The second is identification with the stars, the
characters, the story types, and the situation (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 91). Audience identification can
manifest itself in two forms. With similarity identification, the viewer identifies with those characters most
like his/herself. Wishful identification occurs with those characters whom the viewer longs to be like
Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 92). In addition, different audience members may experience identification on a variety of levels, and can focus or intensify certain elements of the experience (Payne, 1989, p. 37).

Wolfenstein and Leites also claim that films act as a representation of the audience's fantasy. In their book, *Movies: A Psychological Study* (1950), the authors examine movie plots and then attempt to determine what fantasies these plots gratify. Wolfenstein and Leites theorize that art, especially a mass art such as film, serves as a substitute for daydreams. They found this holds true primarily in American culture, where daydreaming itself is frowned upon as impractical. American audiences, under pressure exerted by the common sense ethic, find imaginative release in a novel, radio show, television program, or film (Bywater and Sobchak, 1989, p. 125).

Wolfenstein and Leites argue that a medium like film acts as an acceptable replacement for typical daydreams. In addition, they propose certain themes within movies have gained universal acceptance with audiences. They believe that these themes have, in some manner, tapped a reservoir of common experience (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989, p. 125).

All of these theories point to the movies as a source of needs gratification for audience members, both individually and collectively. According to psychologist J. P. Mayer, movies will continue to be a major influence on society:

I know of hardly any other device or cultural institution of the present day that plays so important a part in the mental processes governing the masses as the cinema. People go there not simply to spend their leisure; they obviously go there because they receive something that supplements their life of concrete reality. They go there to satisfy their fantasy—a satisfaction which is an essential part of the life of the individual. (Mayer, 1972, p. 296)

The element of fantasy is critical here, for it provides a natural link between movies and myth, which critics conventionally regard and describe as fantastic. Movies invite their audiences to inhabit, for a brief two hours, "the dream time", a cinematic experience in which larger-than-life non human or superhuman beings perform feats and have experiences outside the realm of possibility in everyday life. Movies create the settings, characters, and in the audience, states of mind that belong to another realm (Drummond, 1996, p. 12). Fantasy is a key factor for most viewers. If the film narrative is effective, the viewer is transported from their world into the make believe world of the motion picture.
This leads to the second step in the methodology for this study which is the use of myth analysis. Campbell describes myth as an essential part of any civilization:

No human society has yet been found in which mythological motifs have not been rehearsed in liturgies; interpreted by seers, poets, theologians, or philosophers; presented in art, magnified in song and ecstatically experienced in life empowering visions. Humans apparently cannot maintain themselves in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth. In fact, the fullness of life would seem to stand in a direct ration to the depth and range, not in rational thought, but in reverence to local mythology. (Campbell, 1997, p. 10)

As earlier stated, myth encompasses much of American history and plays an important role in defining both the individual and the world around them. American heroes and villains like Thomas Jefferson, Bonnie and Clyde, Mae West, and Mickey Mantle all hold a place in society as cultural myths. Likewise, modern celebrities as varied as Michael Jordan, Madonna, and Hunter Thompson capture the public’s imagination with feats that are sometimes real and often times invented. In either case, these celebrities take on a mythic dimension in those circles who accept and find fulfillment in their stories.

The problem with such heroes is they suffer the same human failings as the rest of mankind. When real life heroes fail to live up to public expectation, society often turns to imaginary heroes. As critics have pointed out, the central rhetorical symbol in a myth is generally the cultural hero (Rushing, 1985, p. 192). To fulfill their function, myths must be both accessible and compelling. It is the technology involved in the production and distribution of popular culture as much as its forms and contents that makes its myths and heroes so available and so capable of involving the mass audience (Rollin, 1983, p. 36). When the myth is distributed through a vehicle such as film, mass audiences are almost assured provided the myth resonates with members of society. To enhance their acceptance, myths are often presented in stories that cluster around similar groups of motifs, characters, and actions (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989, p. 127).

As earlier stated, Larson defines myth as a fantasy form of deep and enduring values that most Americans hold (Larson, 1995, p. 249). Not only do people understand their own actions in terms of narrative structure, they find purpose and guidance for their lives in accord with the stories in which they live. Every culture, then, has its supply of myths which defines its identity and dictates its moral vision (Rushing, 1986, p. 265).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Humans’ capacity to create myth seemingly has a power which no technical, political, or economic system can provide. The myth has a unifying force—it transcends the rational processes of techniques or economics. It uses or contributes to all the intellectual processes. And the more irresistible the rational processes of civilization become, the greater the need for mythical creation. In today’s society, the myth-making power is predominantly performed in visual media like movies or television (Mayer, 1972, p. xlix).

Popular films have gained increased attention from communication scholars using myth as a form of analysis. The majority of these studies have involved the application of myth analysis to a single film. For example, in his study of the movie JFK, Medhurst argues that the biblical figure Adam serves as the primary myth the film reinforces:

*JFK* utilizes the Adamic myth as the super-structure upon which the narrative elements are arrayed. Such myths, both biblical and extra-biblical, have long been used by rhetorical analysts to explicate the persuasive power of cinematic and television narratives. The myth of the original Adam is the story of the human race’s fall from paradise. Created innocent, Adam falls as a result of a conspiracy between Eve and the Serpent. Adam’s fall has dire consequences for all his posterity who dwell in darkness until a second Adam arrives to bring light and life. In the second Adam humankind is restored to its original state of innocence spiritual rebirth. The narrative strategy of *JFK* follows this mythic pattern. (Medhurst, 1993, p. 130)

In her mythic analysis of the film *Chariots Of Fire*, Solomon points to the myth of the American dream, originally proposed by Fisher (1973), as the link between the film’s two main characters. The myth of the American dream is divided into two distinct categories; the moralistic side, which incorporates the values related to charity, tolerance, and equality; and the materialistic side, which represents the values reflecting work, achievement, success, and competition. Each side has values as well as dangers when presented as a solitary cultural idea. Together they form a myth that provides a richness and complexity to American life (Solomon, 1983, p. 275).

Solomon argues that the two sides of this myth are played out in *Chariots Of Fire* by its main characters, two track athletes who are pitted against each other at an Olympic competition in the early 1900s. She claims that the film leaves the audience to choose which side of the myth they hold closest: “Because of its rhetorical strategies reinforced by its historical basis, *Chariots Of Fire* offers a uniquely
satisfying symbolic experience for the American viewer who identifies with the conflict in values it
describes and reinforces which ever portion of the myth he/she ascribes to” (Solomon, 1983, p. 275). Not
surprisingly, the runner who personifies the moralistic side of the myth is ultimately victorious.

A much more controversial study involving myth in popular film was offered by Caputi in her analysis
of the movie Jaws. She argues that the film presents an anti-feminist point of view by promoting the
patriarchal myth—male dominance over women. Caputi views the film as a symbolic battle of the sexes,
with the shark representing womanhood while the three main characters—Sheriff Brody, biologist Matt

This study was widely disputed in academic circles as a forced myth analysis where no such myth
existed. Such criticism seems to have merit given that the shark is referred to as “he” throughout the entire
film. In addition, the shark attacks both men and women without discrimination. In spite of its controversy,
Caputi’s study remains an interesting example of myth analysis and serves as a microcosm of how
audience members can receive mixed messages from a given film.

The richness and diversity of these studies point to the significance of myth analysis in films and other
popular culture. While these works act as a springboard for this examination of recurring film characters as
cultural myth, it is hoped that this study can take the process of myth analysis a step further. All of the
studies previously mentioned concentrate on a single film in their myth analysis. Without question, a
solitary film can reinforce a myth in a given audience. However, it is the contention of this study that myth
identification is greatly increased when presented through a recurring character who is viewed in a number
of films over an extended period of time. As audiences return to known characters and familiar genres, this
study will attempt to prove that the myths become solidified within the culture.

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of humankind
have flourished. They have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the
activities of the human mind and body (Campbell, 1949, p. 3). Popular culture heroes are the gestalts of the
popular mind, symbolic figures whose totality is greater than the sum of their parts. Though they are often
death dealers themselves who are defined and deified amidst death, they are ultimately life affirming. Life
is what they are out to preserve, even at the risk of their own lives. And their victories over death, either
through their survival or their transfiguration, are people’s imitations of immortality (Rollin, 1983, p. 44).
In the next chapter, this study will attempt to show how three recurring characters from popular film personify the myths defined by Reich. The study will try to answer some of the reasons why audiences are drawn to such film characters and also attempt to explain how these figures have become an influential force in American culture.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the study will implement the two step methodology outlined in chapter three. The first step will be the application of Fiske and Hartley’s theory of the functional tradition. This theory will be used to examine some of the reasons why audiences are drawn to visual media like films. The second step will involve the use of myth analysis. By using three recurring characters from popular films—James Bond, Dirty Harry, and Ellen Ripley—the study will attempt to show how the myths proposed by Reich are personified on-screen. As audiences continue to return to these characters for need fulfillment, the myths become reinforced within the culture.

The Functional Tradition

In their theory of the functional tradition, Fiske and Hartley attempt to clarify the relationship between the visual media message, the everyday reality of the audience, and the functions performed by the visual media for that audience (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 71). In their book, Reading T.V., Fiske and Hartley apply the functional tradition solely to the medium of television. However, it is the contention of this study that the theory can be equally applied to the medium of film, with the effects of the theory even intensified because the movie going experience is an interactive, especially when the film is viewed in a darkened theater.

The theory of the functional tradition states that a visual medium like film or television affects the viewer in three distinct phases—individualism, abstraction, and functionalism. This study will break down the theory step-by-step in order to demonstrate the role films play for a viewing audience, and explain why audiences are drawn to a medium like film. Each phase encompasses audience involvement and interaction on a conscious level. While the audience member may view the program or movie as mere entertainment, Fiske and Hartley argue that the medium affects the individual viewer on a deeper level.
Individualism

The first phase of Fiske and Hartley’s theory of the functional tradition is the concept of individualism. Individualism equates itself to the standard model of face-to-face communication. It presupposes a one-to-one relationship between the mass communicator and the individual viewer. In addition, the source serves as a needs-gratification medium. The individual has certain psychological needs which he/she brings to the source and the mass communicator attempts to gratify them (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 71).

It is easy to see the one-to-one relationship Fiske and Hartley refer to when one envisions the typical movie going experience. As a person enters the theater, he/she observes the environment and the other people who make up the audience. If they are attending the movie with another person or as a member of a group, normal forms of daily conversation occur until the film starts. If alone, the viewer most likely picks up on the conversations of others in the theater. Once the lights dim and the picture begins, a transformation occurs. The surrounding environment is blocked out as the viewer focuses on the narrative elements of the story. Film critic Jerome Charyn describes the transforming nature of film:

If I read The Sound And The Fury or Middlemarch, I’m filled with the aromas of the books, with past readings and relationships with the characters, with a whole continent of language and scenes. However, I can enter and leave at my own will. But if I’m watching Casablanca on the big screen, I’ll let my eye slip past the phony details and drift into that dream of Humphrey Bogart and Rick’s Café Américain. It exists outside any law of physics, like the eternal dream of Hollywood itself, a little dopey, but with a power we can’t resist. (Charyn, 1989, p. 15).

For Charyn and many others, movies act as a type of fantasy or escape. They fulfill the need to be, at least temporarily, transported to another world. Fiske and Hartley argue that visual media gratifies a number of psychological needs for the viewer. They point to a study conducted by Katz et. al. that determines five areas of needs that mass media fulfills—cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension needs.

1) Cognitive Needs- this is need to acquire information, knowledge, and understanding (Katz et. al., 1973, p. 164). Movies can often be used as a source of knowledge and information. For example, most people do
not have the luxury of taking a trip to Australia. However, when viewing a movie filmed in that setting like *Crocodile Dundee*, the audience is exposed to a variety of information about the country including facts about indigenous people, the vast wildlife, and cultural distinctions. The information is passed on not through personal experience, but merely for the price of a movie ticket. Nor is it usually actively sought out by the viewer, but rather a by-product of the viewer's quest for entertainment.

2) Affective Needs- this is the need for emotional and aesthetic experience (Katz et. al., 1973, p. 164). In terms of sophistication, visual splendor, technology, and lavish production values, Hollywood's films cannot be matched. A new elegance has returned to the cinema with recently built complexes that offer cappuccino bars, pizza parlors, lobby game rooms, and spacious theaters boasting high tech sound systems and comfortable seating (Davis, 1997, p. 217). In their effort to ensure a market niche for the entertainment dollar, theaters offer an aesthetically pleasing environment that hasn't been known since World War II.

In addition, audiences can literally choose whatever emotional theme they long to experience in their given choice of a movie. Love stories, horror films, action pictures, mystery and suspense, family pictures, and comedies all offer audiences a reasonable assurance of whatever emotional experience they long for. Although the theater environment creates a more interactive experience, the proliferation of videos and cable channels makes the selection process all the more accessible.

3) Personal Integrative Needs- this encompasses the need for stability, status, and assurance (Katz et. al., 1973, p. 164). Needs like stability and assurance can often be achieved through the movies by the tendency for films to follow well known themes and formulas. This allows for easy identification and comprehension for the audience. This generic approach to film making places high value on popularity and repetition rather then on novelty and invention (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989, p. 90).

The audience's need for familiarity and convention can be seen involving films featuring John Wayne. A "John Wayne picture" has immediate meaning for most audience members. It would be hard to conceive of Wayne dancing with Ginger Rogers, not so much because he couldn't have done it, but because it wouldn't fit the persona Wayne and his producers had evolved over the years. On those few occasions when Wayne did appear out of character, the films were not great successes. Audiences didn't buy such novelty. They wanted a known quantity, the star image they had come to expect (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989, p. 103).
The audience comes to a film with an explicit set of assumptions. These predispositions are significant, for they clearly color the movie's message. Ease of comprehension helps the viewer to assume the role of the characters and to identify with them quickly and effectively. To help satisfy the need for stability and assurance, movies have traditionally depended on appeals to the primary emotions and sentiments (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 90). By touching on basic themes that are well established, audience members are assured that all is right with their world. Common movie themes like good defeating evil, true love prevailing, and rags-to-riches stories offer audiences a sense of assurance that is not so easily obtained in modern society.

4) Social Integrative Needs- this is the need for strengthening contacts with family, friends, and people in general (Katz et al., 1973, p. 164). Movies themes have long been known for their focus on the family unit. This trend continues today with films like *The Step Mom* and *Three Men And A Baby*. An offshoot of the family unity theme is the proliferation of pictures involving groups of close knit friends who serve as a surrogate family. This is due in large part to the phenomenal success of television shows like *Seinfeld* and *Friends*. In spite of the different packaging, the theme remains the same—a small group of people bannering together for love and support, regardless of their individual idiosyncrasies.

The movie going experience lends itself to the fulfillment of social needs because it is primarily a social activity. The movies are predominantly a group activity, with one study indicating that nearly 90% of movie audiences attend a film with at least one other person (Opinion Research Corporation, 1957). This group activity differentiates from other mass media experiences. For example, people do watch television in groups, but the sense of occasion is lacking. There is something inherently special about going to the movies with friends (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 84).

5) Tension Release Needs- this is the need for escape and diversion (Katz et al., 1973, p. 164). This is perhaps what movies are best recognized for in terms of their role in society. Movies become fantasy trips for audiences—a simple and inexpensive way to escape from everyday tension and routine. In an earlier quote, Hankins declared that society would never want superheroes living among them. This is probably true. But they would all love to be the superhero, even if it were only for one day.

It would be easy to dismiss the need for movies and the illusions they create as repressed adolescent fantasies. However, no one in society is immune to such fantasies. Virtually everyone has, at one time or...
another, wished they were as debonair as James Bond, as tough as Dirty Harry, or as desirable as the actress in *Pretty Woman*. Everyone has their own version of Walter Mitty residing in them, and the movies with their dynamic characters and infinite possibilities offer a forum that allows these fantasies to formulate, nurture, and develop. They offer escape, but they also provide a world in which to escape to. This is the true power of movies.

**Abstraction**

The second phase of the theory of the functional tradition is abstraction. Abstraction assumes that an individual’s psychological needs are much the same no matter what society or culture he/she belongs to. While Fiske and Hartley acknowledge that culture can be an influence, they contend that there are basic psychological needs, like the ones outlined by Katz et. al., that supersede cultural influence. This approach tends to disregard the historical processes which have produced such formative developments as the division of labor, class oppositions, regional cultures, economic differentials, and the various subcultures in favor of general psychological needs (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 71-72).

Scholars specializing in intercultural communication would dispute the premise of abstraction. However, there are two points which support Fiske and Hartley’s argument. First would be the list of psychological needs outlined by Katz et. al. These needs could be argued as being universal, thus having the capacity to cross cultural boundaries. In addition, one must consider that virtually all commercial films are produced by Hollywood or sold to the same studios for distribution. This creates a dominant presence of American culture in both the films being made and the advertising campaigns that accompany them.

The result of this industry dominance is that the culture projected in most movies is predominantly American. The sheer size and enormous popularity of the American movie industry gives it a decided advantage when it competes in the world market. Jowett makes the following observation:

> Popular American films operate as dramas of reassurance. The beliefs, attitudes, and values presented in Hollywood films tend to resonate with the dominant beliefs, attitudes, and values of American society. In other words, the dominant ideology of a society tends to be reinforced by the ideology presented in its films. (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 109).
Adler and Rodman describe this phenomenon as the transmission of culture. This is the media function of carrying customs, norms, values, and practices from one generation to the next, or from members of a society to newcomers. Culture increases social cohesion by giving people a society to identify with. The primary dysfunction of this same transmission of culture is a reduction in the number of subcultures or alternative cultures and the encouragement of a mass society (Adler and Rodman, 1994, p. 549).

The transmission of culture can be viewed in many of the film industry's most enduring institutions. For example, most American audiences consider vintage Walt Disney films to be wholesome family entertainment. However, some critics interpret the same films as rigid ideological statements that praise an unrealistic image of the United States. They claim that Disney shows an artificial, antiseptic WASP community that is devoid of social problems (DeFleur and Dennis, 1994, p. 158). While both points of view have merit, the image created by Disney reaches a much larger audience through the sheer pervasiveness of their films. This creates a dominance of a single culture, regardless if the image portrayed is accurate or not.

Functionalism

The third phase of Fiske and Hartley's theory is the concept of functionalism. Functionalism takes the approach that visual media is used by its viewers to satisfy their psychological needs in a conscious and active way. Functional analysis concentrates on the relations between the different parts in a system, in order to discover how they work and the functions they perform (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 72). The most recognized research that has developed from the concept of functionalism is the uses and gratification theory. Its basic ideas are as follows:

1) Consumers of mass communication do not passively wait for messages to be presented to them by the media.

2) Members of audiences are active in that they make their own decisions in selecting and attending to specific forms of content from the available media.

3) Those choices are made on the basis of individual differences in interests, needs, values, and motives that have been shaped by the individual's socialization within a web of relationships and category memberships.
4) Psychological factors predispose the person to select specific forms of media content to obtain diversion, entertainment, and respite; or to solve problems of daily life in particular ways.

5) Members of the audience will actively select and use specific forms of media content to fulfill their needs and to provide gratification of their interests and motives (DeFleur and Dennis, 1994, p. 559).

The uses and gratification theory points to a goal-orientated form of behavior. It indicates that audiences do not simply wait placidly to receive whatever content happens to come their way. Instead, many audiences seek content from media that they anticipate will provide them with information that they need, like, and use. Thus, one person with a particular set of needs and interests, might seek satisfaction through exposure to sports, popular music, and detective dramas. Another, with a different psychological make-up, might prefer wildlife programs, symphonic music, and literary classics (DeFleur and Dennis, 1994, p. 558).

One can see how popular films can play a role in regards to use and gratification. Movies offer a diverse choice as to what type of experience a viewer is seeking. A love story promises romance and passion; an action film offers excitement and suspense; a comedy provides humor and joy. Films offer a full range of emotions that can be achieved through a minimal investment of time and capital.

In their theory of the functional tradition, Fiske and Hartley offer explanations for the reasons audiences are drawn to a medium like film. As audiences search for need fulfillment in mass media, movies offer an excursion into a world far different than what is experienced in everyday life. This study will now focus on three recurring characters from popular film and attempt to demonstrate how these figures perpetuate specific cultural myths.

Mob At The Gates

The first myth that will be explored is Reich’s notion of the Mob At The Gates. This mythic story is about tyranny and barbarism that lurk in the world. America is the beacon light of virtue in the world of darkness. Democracy serves as the model for other peoples’ aspirations, the hope of the world’s poor and oppressed. These liberties are fragile; such openness renders free society vulnerable to exploitation of infection from beyond (Reich, 1987, p. 8).

This myth creates an “us versus them” mentality. The mob may be drug traffickers, illegal aliens, or something more abstract: the sinister Nazis, environmental polluters, populations of Third World countries.
who are jealous of the United States, foreign producers who can provide goods at prices much lower than American countries, secular humanists, minorities, and a host of other “mobs” (Larson, 1995, p. 241). In addition, the same mobs are portrayed in fictional worlds: the unknown threat of extraterrestrials in The X Files, the greed mongers in Tom Wolfe’s Bonfire Of The Vanities, fear of hostile Indians and renegade outlaws in a host of Hollywood westerns. The message is that same, the perceived threat merely changes form.

Reich cites several historical events of central importance to the United States that have rested on the Mob At The Gates myth. One example is Franklin Roosevelt’s “rotten apple” metaphor—several rotten apples could ruin the whole barrel of nations. Reich also argues that the post World War II domino theory, in which nation after nation falls to communism, was an appeal to this same myth. Similar to this is John F. Kennedy’s image of America holding back the communist threat by a “finger in the dike”. The underlying lesson in all of these appeals is that democratic societies must maintain vigilance, lest dark forces will overrun them (Larson, 1995, p. 241).

The parable that Reich spins is the idea that democracy serves as a model for the world. Its strength lies in its freedom, but there also lies its weakness. Democracy is vulnerable to those who seek to destroy it, or in some other way, subvert it. The question becomes how does a free society protect itself without losing the civil liberties that serve as its foundation?

The answer lies in this study’s first movie hero to be examined—a watchdog who is capable and daring enough to protect the free world. Perhaps nobody has more experience in such matters as James Bond. One could just as easily label Reich’s myth as “Saving The Free World”, and Bond does this with regularity in virtually every one of his films.

In the film Goldeneye, Bond quips to his comrade in arms, agent 006, before they are about to do battle with foreign smugglers, “Well, are you ready to save the world?” This is done tongue-in-cheek, in typical nonchalant Bond fashion, but the implication is clear. The two secret agents are the unspoken “line in the sand”. Their job is to secure democracy at any cost, even at the risk of losing their lives. Humor is used to deflect the seriousness of the situation. There’s is a job few, if any, could accomplish.

The cost of such daring comes high. Few people remember that Bond was married once, and his wife was killed minutes after their wedding. In On Her Majesty’s Secret Service, Mrs. Bond is murdered as an
act of revenge against Bond for thwarting another villain's attempt at world domination. Her death scene is one of the few moments that Bond actually appears emotionally vulnerable on-screen.

It may seem difficult for some Americans to imagine a British secret agent as the savior of democracy, but Bond is not limited by geographical boundaries. His appeal is universal, many of the elements in a Bond movie are given generic titles not defined by names on a map. In his book, *American Dreamtime*, Drummond argues that consumerism is the true entity Bond represents:

James Bond is an agent, not for the hopelessly outmoded Imperial Britain, but for the new global empire of consumer capitalism. His most important assignment is to spread the word, or rather the images, of that empire and in the process to assess its attractions for individuals the world over. The Bond movies are distillations of a new world of consumption; they package and sell scenes of unattainable luxury filled with beautiful, impeccably tailored and coifed people. (Drummond, 1996, p. 130).

The argument Drummond presents has merit when one closely examines the latest Bond film. In *Tomorrow Never Dies*, BMW cars and motorcycles, Omega watches, Smirnoff vodka, Heineken beer, Emerson computers, and dozens of other products are carefully framed and even given endorsement by Bond himself throughout the movie. The framing of these items is not coincidental. Rather, it is a calculated attempt by the producers to give movie audiences a dose of advertising intermixed with their entertainment. While still a worthy addition to the Bond series, *Tomorrow Never Dies* has the feel of a theatrical movie being presented on television, with ready made commercials spliced in between scenes of fast paced action and sultry seduction.

If such commercialism seems to debunk Reich's myth of the Mob At The Gates, consider the importance of capitalism to democratic society. The lynchpin of free society is the free market, with all its glories and pitfalls. As Drummond states, "Movies and money are inseparable because movies are a principal cultural production of American society, and American society runs on money (Drummond, 1996, p. 19).

If Bond represents the side of democracy and freedom, the villains he battles with personify the opposite. Rarely are the villains in Bond movies given real origins or political histories (the one notable exception is *From Russia With Love*, which was filmed in 1963, at the height of the Cold War). Instead, the
typical Bond villain either has a maniacal personal agenda (*Dr. No, Goldfinger, The Man With The Golden Gun*), or he is associated with an evil fictitious organization like SPECTRE or SMERSH (*Thunderball, You Only Live Twice, On Her Majesty's Secret Service*).

In spite of the careful packaging, Bond villains do mirror real life antagonists that either have been, or are perceived to be, threats to democracy. Goldfinger, with his heavy German accent and uniformed entourage, is the embodiment of Nazi Germany. The evil Dr. No is a psuedo-oriental who plans to rule the world. In *You Only Live Twice*, Bond must battle with an army of faceless Ninja warriors who have implied ties with communist China. And in *Goldeneye*, agent 006 turns out to be a double agent who has carefully disguised his Eastern European accent and loyalties, a more than passing nod to the former Soviet Union.

In all these cases, the villain's conspiracy constitutes a threat to the peace and security of the free world, usually represented by Britain or the United States, either singularly or in alliance. In frustrating the villain's conspiracy, Bond effects an ideologically loaded imaginary resolution of the real historical contradictions of the period. In this resolution, all the values associated with Bond and, by extension, the West—notably freedom, individualism, and civil liberties—gain ascendancy over those associated with the villain and, thereby, communist Russia, China, and Nazi Germany, such as totalitarianism and bureaucratic rigidity (Bennett and Wollacott, 1987, p. 25).

This representation of democracy is not a new concept, and it has been personified in both real life heroes and their fictional counterparts. Davy Crockett and his stand at the Alamo, Ike's stalwart leadership in World War II, and Kennedy's showdown with Krushchev in the Cuban missile crisis are all examples of historical figures who have stood as watchdogs for democracy. While serving this role, the ideology these figures personify is also promoted. This holds true for fictional heroes as well. Characters from popular culture like Indiana Jones, *Miami Vice's* Crockett and Tubbs, and yes, James Bond, become the vehicle in which myths like the Mob At The Gates are trumpeted.

The burden real life heroes must endure is society's need to find their human frailties. While Kennedy is heralded for his role in the Cuban missile crisis, he is equally noted for the rumors of his widespread philandering. A forefather like Thomas Jefferson holds a special place in American history, but his alleged dalliance with a mistress slave draws more public interest.
A character like Bond suffers no such scrutiny, even when his actions on screen can be somewhat disturbing. In *From Russia With Love*, he repeatedly slaps a woman who is in love with him on the suspicion that she is a double agent (the suspicion turns out to be wrong). In *For Your Eyes Only*, Bond pushes a car over a cliff while the driver is trapped inside after the car teeters on the edge for several precarious minutes. And in every Bond movie he seduces the women—all the women—regardless if they are on the side of good or evil. But perhaps it is in these shortcomings that Bond best perpetuates the myth. He is not tied down by the normal societal conventions. In Bond's world, the means do justify the end. Any excessive behavior can be excused due to the importance of his mission—the safety and security of the free world.

While the values Bond stands for are clear, the real question lies in his impact on movies audiences. Do James Bond movies influence viewers to accept myths like the Mob At The Gates? Many critics argue that movies are capable of acting as creators of ideas and attitudes, especially where viewers have gaps in their experience of these issues (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 93). These changes are not dramatic, but occur incrementally over an extended period of time. For example, a single Bond movie may not have any significant impact on a viewer’s attitudes and beliefs. However, if the same viewer has seen six Bond movies, certain patterns of value reinforcement can occur. This phenomenon is described in the theory of the accumulation of minimal effects, which manifests itself in the following manner:

1) The mass media begin to focus their attention on and transmit messages about a specific topic—some problem, situation, or issue.

2) Over an extended period of time, the mass media continues to promote this message in a relatively consistent and persistent way, and their presentations corroborate each other.

3) Individual members of the public increasingly become aware of these messages and, on a person-by-person basis, a growing comprehension of the interpretations of the topic presented by the media.

4) Increasing comprehension of the messages regarding the topic supplied by the media begins to form or modify the meanings, beliefs, and attitudes that serve as guides to behavior for members of the audience.
Thus, minor individual-by-individual changes accumulate, and new beliefs and attitudes slowly
emerge to provide significant changes in norms of appropriate behavior related to the topic (DeFleur
and Dennis, 1994, p. 579).

If the condition necessary for the accumulation theory are present, the mass media can have a powerful
effect on the population. For example, many weeks before U.S. marines were sent to Somalia, television
and other media repeatedly presented disturbing pictures of starving children and adults. Each of the media
conveyed the same message, and none presented an alternative point of view. When a message is presented
repeatedly in this way, with corroboration among the media, it can have a powerful cumulative influence
on the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of the audience (Dennis and DeFleur, 1994, p. 573). Thus, Americans
were shocked when the Marine presence in Somalia was treated with hostility that resulted in the death of
one American soldier and a public displaying of the body.

Under the guise of the accumulative theory, one can visualize how a myth like the Mob At The Gates
could be incorporated into American culture over an extended period of time through a vehicle like film.
The myth has an historical base, with both real and fictional models. The myth is used as a focal point for
conflict between Bond and the villains he fights. Then the process is repeated in a number of films that
extend over a long period of time. It would be difficult to imagine that at least some Bond fans would not
be influenced by the perpetuation of this myth.

This is not to say the average movie goer attends a Bond film to receive an annual dose of myth
reinforcement. Rather, the values and messages derived from the film are by-products of need fulfillment.
The myth becomes reinforced while the viewer gains need gratification from a particular movie.

What makes a vehicle like the Bond movies such an effective myth making tool is the appealing
qualities of the films and its main character. A popular hero like Bond, with an origin based in fiction, has
shown a capacity to break free from the original textual conditions of his existence. Bond functions as an
established point of cultural reference that is capable of producing meanings, even for those who are not
directly familiar with the original texts from which they made their first appearance. Despite his fictional
nature, a character like Bond is treated institutionally as if he were a real person (Bennett and Wollacott,

While Bond has endured for over three decades, the basic formula used in his movies has remained
unchanged. Many have tried to explain this hero's longevity. Perhaps it can be best summarized by Hugh Gaitskell, a longtime friend of Fleming, who once told the author "the combination of sex, violence alcohol, good food, and nice clothes is, to one who lives such a circumscribed life as I do, irresistible" (Bennett and Wollacott, 1987, p. 15). As long as Bond continues to strike a chord in movie audiences, his survival seems imminent. And the myths that he personifies, such as the Mob At The Gates, should continue also.

Rot At The Top

The second myth proposed by Reich that will be analyzed for this study is labeled Rot At The Top. This myth describes the malevolence of powerful elites, be they wealthy aristocrats, rapacious business leaders, or imperious government officials. The American parable differs subtly but profoundly from a superficially similar European mythology: the struggle is only occasionally and incidentally a matter of money or class. There are no workers pitted against capitalists at the heart of this American story. It is, rather, a tale of corruption, decadence, and irresponsibility among the powerful, of conspiracy against the broader public (Reich, 1987, p. 11).

At their worst, suspicions about Rot At The Top have expressed themselves in conspiracy theories. America has harbored a long and infamous line of rabble-rousers, from the pre-Civil War Know Nothings and anti-Masonic movements, through the populist agitators of the Twentieth century like the Ku Klux Klan, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and Lyndon LaRouche. They have formulated against bankers, Catholics, big corporations, Blacks, Jews, foreigners, either or both of the major political parties, and other unnamed interests. In this version of the story, the Rot At The Top is in conspiracy with the Mob At The Gates to keep the common man down and allow evil forces to overrun free society (Reich, 1987, p. 12).

This myth is continually exemplified in the Dirty Harry film series, where the hero is at constant odds with his superiors. The municipal powers that Harry serves are portrayed in two distinct fashions—incompetence and corruption. Harry must filter through layers of bureaucracy and deception—usually by force—so he can get the job done. Harry is continually caught in the red tape of police procedures, and his victories are only achieved when he resorts to a vigilante form of action (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 95).
If Bond represents a universal hero, then Dirty Harry is the quintessential American counterpart. He is cool in crisis, hot in his anger at the vicious criminals he pursues, and has utter contempt for the bureaucrats that frequently muddle his pursuit. Clearly a working-class guy, there is an edge of class resentment in the rage Harry directs at his desk bound superiors. They are primarily interested in self-preservation, while preventing him from doing his duty (Schickel, 1996, p. 257).

As a typical American hero, Harry’s solution to most problems is to cut through the red tape and find resolution in direct confrontation. Larson points to this prevailing attitude as the fundamental American value of practicality:

The practicality value entails solution-orientated thinking as opposed to ideological orientated thinking. A key question often asked in any piece of legislation is “Will it work?”. This value extends to other parts of life as well. Americans want to know whether a microwave oven is energy efficient, practical, or handy. They want to know whether schooling will lead to a job. In other words, Americans value what is quick, workable, and effective. (Larson, 1995, p. 252)

With the presence of Rot At The Top, the hero must eliminate the problem in quick and direct fashion. Dirty Harry does this in the typical manner Larson describes.

The attitudes and values so prevalent in the Dirty Harry series began to formulate several years before the debut film. Eastwood’s four films with director Donald Siegel between 1968-1971 have a defensive, reclamatory spirit, as if grabbing back the standards and traditions the white patriarchy perceived it had lost due to feminism, the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam protest, the Sixties youth culture, the sexual revolution, the civil libertarian decisions of the Supreme Court, and the permissive philosophy in general (Bingham, 1994, p. 181). This attitude culminated with the release of Dirty Harry in 1971.

In Dirty Harry, the myth of Rot At The Top is quickly exposed in the incompetence of government officials. The movie is not complex structurally. It simply recounts a duel to the death between a psychopathic serial killer, who calls himself Scorpio and chooses his victims at random, and the professionally disaffected yet increasingly obsessive Harry Callahan. Caught between them are the police and municipal hierarchies, who are inclined to pay Scorpio the ransom he demands to cease his depredations. The mayor and police chief ignore Harry’s instincts, which tell him that this is a criminal
who cannot be bought off (Schickel, 1996, p. 260). Harry is eventually proven right, but only after he ignores his superior’s orders and kills Scorpio in a bloody confrontation at the end of the film.

The institutions of law and order clearly come under attack in the movie’s rhetoric. In contrast to Harry’s forthrightness and determination, the movie portrays a generalized weakness and softness that increases the higher the official is positioned within the bureaucracy. The mayor, the judges, the district attorney, the law professor, and even the police chief are all placed in various ways as being complicit with the killer. They are unable to see their obligation to the community that Harry views himself to be serving (Smith, 1993, p. 92).

The audience is left with two distinct pictures of police officers—a gutsy hero who takes action to eliminate the criminal, and a group of self-serving bureaucrats who are too insulated from daily police work to trust their instincts and solve the case. Film scholar Eric Patterson argues that crime is a pretext, not a text, throughout the Dirty Harry series:

The real target is the power structure in which the Eastwood character is enmeshed. The mayor and police commissioner who are concerned primarily with protecting and perpetuating their own power, and they perceive Harry and others like him simply as means to an end. If the films endorse certain reactionary policies, they also embody an element of protest against exploitation. (Schickel, 1996, p. 274)

The myth of Rot At The Top takes an even darker image in the first sequel Magnum Force. In this film, Harry has repeated confrontations with his lieutenant (played with great malice by Hal Holbrook) in his quest to stop a group of vigilantes from killing high profile criminals. The vigilantes turn out to be a quartet of motorcycle cops, who are led by none other than Harry’s lieutenant. In Magnum Force, the real criminals are the bureaucrats themselves, who feel they are above the law of the land. Harry exposes the vigilante group and eliminates all its members, including his hostile lieutenant. Magnum Force personifies the myth of Rot At The Top in its ugliest form.

In this and all the Dirty Harry films, Harry is viewed with contempt by public officials as an outlaw cop. He is continually told that his methods cross the line of acceptability. Yet Harry continues to prove that his methods are the only way to eliminate vigilante cops, deranged killers, and political terrorists. He does not deny nor apologize for fracturing a few rules. In Harry’s mind, suspect police methods are the
lesser of the evils. Since films like *Magnum Force* place criminals and corruption in such a harsh light, much of Harry’s hard core audience walks away with the same opinion.

In the third film of the series, *The Enforcer*, Harry must deal with the pitfalls of affirmative action. He is paired with an inexperienced woman partner, who is promoted as part of a reelection plan by a cynical mayor. The film does not attack affirmative action directly, but instead shows how the system can be manipulated by corrupt officials—another example of Rot At The Top. The plot takes a twist when the mayor himself is kidnapped by political terrorists. Harry and his new partner rescue the mayor, but the female detective loses her life in the process.

*The Enforcer* exemplifies the myth of Rot At The Top in a couple of different ways. It first shows how corrupt officials can manipulate legislation like affirmative action for their own gain. In addition, it demonstrates that it is the front line soldier who must bail these same officials out of trouble when they are faced with serious harm. The audience sees the detective sacrifice her life for the mayor and are moved by her courage. And yet, after witnessing the mayor’s involvement in various conspiracies, they recognize that the life lost was far more valuable than the one saved. The mayor will inevitably revert back to mistrust and corruption in the future—that is his nature.

In *Sudden Impact*, a small town police chief (played by character actor Pat Hingle) takes on the role of corrupt city official. However, his involvement is somewhat tempered by the fact he is protecting his son, an innocent bystander who witnessed a brutal sexual assault. The police chief interferes with Harry’s investigation, resorting to the usual bureaucratic tactics and territorial disputes. These actions are explained away at the end of the film, and the audience walks away with a certain amount of empathy for the police chief in the conclusion.

In the film series final chapter, *The Dead Pool*, Harry becomes a local celebrity hero for his efforts in the arrest and conviction of a well established crime boss. His unorthodox methods, once so heavily criticized, are now lauded by the public and Harry is stopped on the street for autographs and accolades. This infuriates the now imprisoned crime boss, who places a large contract on Harry’s head. Now the police brass who Harry has battled with for so many years must protect him, his celebrity status has made him invaluable in terms of public relations. Naturally, police protection becomes a hindrance to Harry, who is investigating a string of killings by an obsessive movie fan.
The irony of *The Dead Pool* is the way in which it mirrors the transformation of the Dirty Harry series in terms of public acceptance. In 1971, *Dirty Harry* was heavily criticized for its police brutality and anti-Constitutional arguments. Few view the film series this way today. Lines from Dirty Harry are quoted by politicians, and the character is often used as a metaphor for a tough stance on crime by civic leaders. This is not to say the public turns a blind eye to police infractions. The verdict in the O. J. Simpson trial is testament to the public's view on illegal police tactics, be they real or imagined. And yet, one can see the need for a police officer like Harry. If a loved one were facing eminent danger by an amoral criminal, a cop like Harry would stop at nothing to save the endangered person. In a world that seems increasingly dangerous and out of control, police tactics such as Harry's don't seem quite so threatening.

This transformation that the Dirty Harry character has enjoyed makes the mythic story of Rot At The Top seem all the more credible. In addition, Harry has qualities that audiences do admire and could possibly emulate. This does not mean movie goers will all run out and buy .44 magnums, but certain character traits that Harry possesses could be useful in everyday life—determination, strength, fearlessness in confrontation—could be equally valuable in the boardroom as they are on the police beat.

The reinforcement of such behavior can manifest itself in a given audience, especially when viewed repeatedly in mass media. Social scientists label this the modeling theory, and it proceeds in the following stages:

1) An individual encounters a form of action portrayed by a person (model) in a media presentation.
2) The individual identifies with the model. They believe that he/she is like, or wants to be like, the model.
3) The individual remembers and reproduces the actions of the model in a later situation.
4) Performing the reproduced activity results in some reward or positive reinforcement for the individual.
5) The positive reinforcement increases the probability that the individual will use the reproduced activity again as the means of responding to a similar situation (DeFleur and Dennis, 1994, p. 585).

One can see how this behavior modification could manifest itself when reinforced by a popular movie character. The audience member is obviously drawn to the character, they've even paid to see a particular performance. The seek out a specific type of performance as a means of needs gratification. In addition, the movie character has the luxury that any action or behavior will be successful on the screen, regardless of
whether this is true in real life. In fact, Eastwood himself argues that Harry is not a very realistic character, but he still conveys certain attitudes and values that audiences can identify with:

Harry is a fantasy character. Nobody does what Harry does. He cuts right down through the bull, tells his boss to shove it, and does all the things people would like to do in real life but can’t. Harry isn’t saying that the community as a whole has crapped out on him, just the political elements of the city. (Smith, 1993, p. 92)

Part of the attitude Harry conveys is disgust and frustration with the political aspects of daily life, and this too gets passed on to audiences. Not only does the viewer see the myth of Rot At The Top unfold on the screen, he/she has real life incidents to draw similar conclusions from like Watergate, Middle Eastern arms sales, and city corruption that magnifies an inherent distrust political and civic leaders. Rot At The Top becomes common experience. Dirty Harry merely reaffirms what audiences know to be true.

The Triumphant Individual

The third myth that will be examined for this study is Reich’s parable of the Triumphant Individual. This is the story of the self-made man or woman who bucks the odds, spurns the naysayers, and shows what can be done with enough drive and guts (Reich, 1987, p. 9). Usually the individual is a loner, sometimes even a maverick, who is willing to challenge the establishment (Larson, 1995, p. 242). He/she is plain speaking, self-reliant, and uncompromising in his/her ideals. He/she gets the job done (Reich, 1987, p. 9).

Larson describes a parallel myth that operates in conjunction with the story of the Triumphant Individual. He labels this the Value Of A Challenge, which is described as a rite of passage that underscores several cultural values. First, the myth suggests that there is something good about suffering; it implies nothing good was ever accomplished without pain. Second, the myth suggests that suffering begets maturity, humility, and wisdom—a person learns and grows as they meet the challenges and surmount them. Finally, the myth suggests that all great leaders have become great because they were tested and found equal to the challenge. Thus, defeats and failures can be explained away as tests that prepare one for the future (Larson, 1995, p. 236).
The film character that best personifies the myth of the Triumphant Individual is Ellen Ripley, the heroine of the *Alien* film series. On a textual level, Ripley’s “triumphs” are obtained in her battles with the alien creatures on the movie screen. On an intellectual level, this study will argue that Ripley’s true triumph comes in her ability to break through traditional Hollywood stereotypes and assert herself as a female action hero with mass appeal.

Fisher states that people envision some myths as revelatory insofar as they visualize the repressed as a precursor to social change. Seen in this way, such myths are rhetorical, not in that they advance the interests of a particular social group, but in that they advocate a view that simultaneously subverts the dominant cultural ideology and affirms a new image (Fisher, 1973, p. 13).

Ripley follows this same mold, but as Fisher suggests, they myth is presented in a new form—the triumphant female action hero. Breaking traditional Hollywood stereotypes is a difficult assignment. In the 1930s and 1940s, female stars were the true box office champions, consistently outdrawing their male counterparts. This box office clout also assured a variety of meaningful movie roles for actresses to choose from. However, since the 1950s, the number of compelling female roles has dwindled, a trend that continues today. Breaking gender stereotypes becomes problematic with a limited selection of meaningful movie roles. Many parts written for women are strictly sexual in nature, especially those that fall into the action genre.

Feminist critics claim that the role of women in the bulk of Hollywood films present a very unsatisfactory image. The feminist perspective argues that women characters in movies are not a realistic depiction, but instead, a projection of male fantasies—stereotypes of what men want to believe about women. A typical female character in a modern Hollywood film is typed as either a demure virgin or passionate but evil prostitute. The plot dynamics of American genre films revolve around male heroes as the active agents. Women play passive roles as maidens in distress, comforting mothers, objects of sexual desire, or obstacles to the male’s success (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989, p. 183).

Just as cultural myths become reinforced with audience members through media content, stereotypes can be incorporated in the same manner. Lippmann describes this phenomenon in his stereotype theory, which reinforces patterns of attitudes and behaviors in the following manner:
1) In entertainment context and in other messages, the media repeatedly present portrayals of different categories of people, such as the elderly, women, and various ethnic groups.

2) These portrayals tend to be consistently negative, showing specific groups of people as having more undesirable attributes and fewer positive characteristics.

3) Such portrayals are similar among the various media—providing corroboration.

4) These portrayals provide constructions of meaning for members of the audience, particularly for those who have limited contact with the actual people of the relative category.

5) Members of the audience incorporate those meanings into their memories as relatively inflexible stereotypic interpretations that they use when thinking about or responding to any individual of a portrayed category, regardless of his/her actual personal characteristics (DeFleur and Dennis, 1994, p. 599).

Ripley breaks through the traditional Hollywood stereotypes by asserting herself as an action hero that is both believable and captivating for movie audiences. Rushing argues that this transition is more acceptable for audiences because all the *Alien* offerings use the futuristic setting of outer space as a backdrop. She points to the fact that deep seated attitudes and beliefs are displayed not as they are, but how they should be:

The evolution of the frontier must be understood as a cultural variant of a larger evolution of the archetypes inherent in the myth. For example, the latest scenic transition into space has produced, at least in some cases, a new kind of hero. As the concept of frontier shifts from finite land to infinite space, the action turns from conquest to coexistence, from exploitation to conservation. (Rushing, 1991, p. 469).

In the debut film *Alien*, Ripley serves as second-in-command of an exploratory space ship owned by a mining company. Their mission is not the typical chartering of new territories displayed in other science fiction films. Instead, their mission is one of capitalism, and the ship often has the feel of a factory filled with blue collar workers. One of the early scenes shows crew members arguing about their rate of pay. Because of its commercial nature, the crew has little in the way of weapons to use for protection.

Ripley displays her leadership qualities early in the film. When a crew member is attacked by an unknown life form while exploring a planet surface, Ripley is the one questions the wisdom of bringing the
injured worker aboard and points to company regulations that mandates quarantining the victim. Her requests are ignored by the science officer, whose actions allow the alien to escape into the living quarters of the spaceship and places the entire crew in mortal danger.

The creature begins terrorizing the ship, eliminating crew members one-by-one. The film ultimately projects Ripley alone as its surviving hero, her authority now definitely seen by the viewer as grounded in intelligence and strength of character rather than any intrinsic power hunger. When the alien kills Dallas, the captain of the ship and the implied leader, one registers definite subliminal surprise in realizing the woman will be (and has been all along) the strong center of the film. Ripley is the ego through which the story will be resolved and audience identification made (Kavanaugh, 1990, p. 75).

Not only does Ripley wind up as the lone survivor, her character has a sense of emotional solitude as well, much in the manner of Reich’s suggestion that the Triumphant Individual is primarily a loner. Ripley shows little emotional bonding with the other crew members, not even Lambert, the only other woman. In fact, Lambert serves as a kind of direct opposite to Ripley. She is passive and easily given to hysterics. Her function, for the most part, is to define the qualities that Ripley is not—emotional, feminine, unheroic. As the Triumphant Individual, Ripley is not allowed to achieve resolution until she has been separated from an oppositional and potentially forceful collective (Newton, 1990, p. 86). She is victorious in the end, but the only comrade who shares in her victory is the ship’s pet cat. Weaver describes the emotional detachment of her character:

At a certain point you have to take one the emotions of someone who knows there is no time left, that everything could blow up in her face at any moment. Ripley cannot afford to have any reaction. She just has to keep going. She has to put blinders on because she cannot afford to think of what may happen or she just might snap. (Thomson, 1997, p. 56).

In the film’s climax, Ripley proves ready to go one-on-one with the alien in a scene that reconstructs the classic American cultural image of the western gunfight. In the western of the future, the sheriff has been replaced by a woman, but certain humanist touches still remain. She is a tough gal, as opposed to a tough guy, but she still possesses the characteristic of a hero with a heart. In the aftermath, Gary Cooper goes home to his little boy, Weaver retires with her pet cat (Kavanaugh, 1991, p. 80).
In the sequel *Aliens*, Ripley becomes even more entrenched as a legitimate action hero with the capacity to draw movie audiences. This film takes a more militaristic approach—*Aliens* has the feel of a space age *Rambo*. Ripley is teamed with a group of intergalactic soldiers who must return to the alien's planet and wipe out the creature's nesting area. Ripley is fully initiated into the military culture by a corporal who teaches her how to operate the high tech weaponry. When he balks at instructing her on a grenade launcher, she urges him on by reminding him, "You started this". From this point forward, Ripley is a convert (Rushing, 1991, p. 487).

In the heat of battle, Ripley proves herself as a worthy combatant who is capable of performing the same duties as any of the male soldiers. This includes the daring rescue of a child trapped in the alien's dwelling. Ripley enters the situation as any movie action hero would, toting a large machine gun and blasting everything in sight. She again proves herself to be the Triumphant Individual, needing little or no help from the other soldiers.

*Alien3* has a confining feel to it, as the setting is an intergalactic prison where Ripley crash lands, inadvertently bringing an alien creature with her. The prison's population is all male who have adopted a monk-like existence and philosophy, and Ripley is viewed as an intruder, primarily because of her gender. In *Alien3* (just as she does in Hollywood), Ripley must overcome the reservations of males and prove herself as dynamic leader who is more experienced in battles with extraterrestrials. In the end, Ripley makes the ultimate sacrifice—she gives up her own life in order to destroy the alien and save the remaining prisoners.

This would seemingly be the end of the series. However, Hollywood was not so quick to give up a major box office draw like Ripley, now firmly entrenched with movie audiences. Ripley returns to the screen one more time in *Alien Resurrection*. Ripley is brought back to life through genetic engineering. She is cloned from a sample of her DNA in order to help another space ship deal with the same aliens who have escaped captivity and assumed their annihilating ways.

Much like a grizzled war veteran, Ripley is harder in *Alien Resurrection*. She seems more weary in this picture. She is still keenly aware of how dangerous the aliens can be, but she appears almost bemused at the fear and disbelief of this new space crew who has never encountered a creature such as this. The audience is reminded that she has already lost her life once in her combat with the aliens, and surely her
ideals have been battered. Now she has to deal with another profound threat in an age of cloning and androids, the threat that she is not quite herself. This results in a film hero who is a good deal darker than the young Ripley (Rayner, 1997, p. 58).

The myth of the Triumphant Individual that Ripley personifies is reinforced in each of the *Alien* films. She continually proves that she is capable leader and an ultimate survivor. In the pattern that Reich suggests, she bucks the odds, spurns the naysayers, and shows what can be accomplished with enough drive and guts. She also personifies the parallel myth of Larson’s Value Of A Challenge. In each confrontation with the alien, Ripley becomes stronger and more assertive. Her strength of character becomes more defined as she faces each new challenge.

Ripley is also triumphant in her quest to assert herself as a credible movie action hero. She defeats the odds of the movie industry, who are slow to adopt any changes in the creative process. She has demonstrated remarkable staying power, with the ability to resonate with a large segment of movie audiences.

One wonders why Hollywood does not try to create more characters like her. As this study has previously demonstrated, most creative decisions in the film industry are driven by money. The *Alien* films have demonstrated repeated success at the box office. It is puzzling that the industry does not create more characters like her, just as they have spun off numerous male film heroes in a variety of movie genres that have been successful box office draws. It seems unfortunate that the successes of the *Alien* series have not paved the way more films that feature women in the role of a conventional movie hero.

In the final chapter, this study will examine the implications of film characters impact on movie audiences. It will also look at some of the trends developing in the movie industry and make some suggestions for possible future studies in regard to communication and popular culture.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

In the final chapter, the conclusions and implications learned from this study will be explored in regards to the relationship between fictional characters of film and the audiences who follow them. This chapter will also examine some of the current trends developing in the film industry and the likely effect this will have on film content. Finally, this chapter will show there is a lack of noteworthy studies of film analysis over the last fifteen years and suggest some possible future studies that would further explore the link between communication and popular culture.

Conclusion

Where a group of people share a common culture, they are likely to have certain daydreams in common which are in part the products of popular myths, stories, plays, and films. These corresponding daydreams are imperfectly formed and only partially conscious in most people. Forums like the vehicles of popular culture, among other cultural institutions, help to give these daydreams a more definite shape (Solomon, 1983, p. 280).

The question of whether or not the mass media are, in fact, capable of molding the minds of the audience is an extremely complex one, and the answer is subject to a wide variety of qualifications. “Some people are influenced by some media, at some time” is a commonly held belief by scholars; but exactly how this influence takes place is still open to conjecture (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 74).

This study has attempted to define the role that a visual medium like film plays in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of a given audience. As earlier demonstrated, movies have a capacity to reach an audience that is inherently different than other forms of mass media. Rushing compares this to Aristotle’s notion of the untrained thinker; she argues that films make a connection to audiences in mythic form that cannot be achieved through the classroom, a news report, or other forms of presentation (Rushing, 1985, p.188).
Audiences attend a motion picture for a variety of reasons, but as this study has revealed, these reasons are all based on the concept of needs-gratification. As they turn to the medium of film, various fictional characters become models of value reinforcement. This is usually accomplished through the personification of myth, which is continually played out on screen through the narrative elements of the story. As audiences return to recurring characters with established histories, the mythic patterns are repeated. The extended exposure of these myths causes them to be incorporated into the psyche of the audience.

It is important to note that the film characters analyzed in this study are not presenting new stories or myths to the viewing audience. Scholars like Reich have pointed out that the myths he proposes have been repeated throughout history—both in real and fictional examples. Instead of creating new cultural values, film characters like James Bond, Dirty Harry, and Ellen Ripley give focus and credence to existing norms and values that are already a part of American society. A film hero like Ripley may provide a new vehicle for the presentation of a myth, but the underlying story is still the same.

It is also worth noting that the appeal of specific characters, like the ones used in this study, creates a further perpetuation of the myths being presented. As characters like James Bond, Dirty Harry, and Ellen Ripley grow in popularity, so too do the mythic stories they exemplify.

Clearly, movies continue play an important role in the leisure pattern of society. Whatever specific approach is used to examine the psychological reasons for continued attendance, it is obvious that movies serve some basic need for those who attend. This study has attempted to outline some of those needs, but by no means is this list all inclusive. The quest for closer identification with a star or story, the desire for social contact, the need for diversion, or even the sheer wish to get out of the cold or heat are all valid reasons for going to the movies. But surely it is also more than that, for movies strike a deeper note is people’s psyches. They continue to provide vivid images and to fuel dreams. The movies are an enigmatic and social entity whose force is often ignored by those concerned with social change. As this study has tried to illustrate, the movies are much more than they seem (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 101).

Implications

This study has attempted to show at least one of the major roles movies play within society—the perpetuation of cultural myths through the persona of three recurring film characters. In addition,
the study has illustrated the creative process of the film industry in a desire to demonstrate the precarious position movies hold with regards to their duel purpose of mass art and consumer product. The financial aspect of the film industry continues to play an increased role in what type of films are being made.

The primary reason for choosing recurring fictional characters for this study is their long term appeal for audience members and for their ability to repeat mythic patterns over an extended period of time. This study has argued the contention that a mythic story is more likely to be accepted by a viewing audience when displayed in this repeated fashion.

As demonstrated in chapters one and two, the film industry uses these same recurring characters for totally different motives. The characters have shown their market worth at the box office and Hollywood studios return to the same characters and story lines in attempt to duplicate past box office successes. A twist on this scenario is on the increase in the remake of many classic films in any further attempt to duplicate past successes.

Remakes of the movies Psycho and Death Takes A Holiday are just two examples of classic films that have been remade over the past year in the hope of achieving a new hit film. This cloning process threatens to stifle movie creativity even further in an industry that is slow to try anything new or unproven. A recent CNN report spoke of a number of other remakes in the works that include several classic Disney pictures and a number of Katherine Hepburn/ Spencer Tracy films.

This trend is troubling for the large portion of movie audiences who view film as a form of art. Purists argue that a remake of Hitchcock’s Psycho is tantamount to repainting the Mona Lisa. No matter how skillfully the remake is done, it can never duplicate the shock of certain plot twists that originated from the film’s creator.

The larger question scholars must address in terms of film analysis used in studies like this is can the myth making power of movies lose their effectiveness when the creative process is stifled? It seems reasonable to assume that audiences will turn to other forms of diversion and entertainment if movies become too processed and predictable. Only time will tell.

Future Studies

The underlying purpose of this myth analysis of fictional characters in popular film is the hope that it
lends a greater insight to society as a whole. One of the best ways to learn more about a society of people is to study the books they read, the films they watch, the television programs they turn to, and the music they listen to. Popular culture can act as a mirror of society, lending greater insight to the inner workings of a collective group. It is the hope that, in some small way, this study lends itself to this goal of a greater understanding.

As the research for this study unfolded, there appeared to be a lack of significant film studies by communication scholars over the past fifteen years. There have been a few notable exceptions, like Medhurst’s analysis of *JFK*, but such studies are few in number over recent history. Much of the research applied in this study was done in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While the work is still valid, it points to a growing need for future works that address popular film.

The reason for the lack of recent film studies appears to be, at least in part, attributed to the increased attention on television as the primary media shaper and reflector in society. There is no denying that television plays an important role within peoples' lives. However, movies continue to be popular form of entertainment in society and a medium that television often mirrors in its programming. To place more importance on one instead of the other seems to be a disservice in regards to film’s importance.

Ironically, television has actually increased the interest in classic films by keeping alive older movies and parading them repeatedly for a new generation of audiences. For example, a fifteen-year old movie buff has had the opportunity to see a movie like *Casablanca* or *It’s A Wonderful Life* far more times than the generation that it was created for. Unfortunately, this renewed interest in classic films has taken the form of studies of the film itself, and not necessarily paying attention to them as a social and cultural influence (Jowett and Linton, 1980, p. 74).

In contrast to this trend, studies of myth analysis seem to be on the increase within the communication discipline. Scholars have focused increased attention on the mythic stories which make up America’s social fabric. There appears to be a greater consensus as to the importance of myth in terms of values and identification for various cultures. The outlook for future studies of myth analysis looks very promising.

Some possible future studies that address the role of movies in society could include certain film stars as vehicles of myth. Actors like John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Sharon Stone, and Sylvester Stallone have a
mythic dimension that they bring to the screen regardless of the part they are playing. This mythic quality stays with them even though the characters they portray change.

Another suggestion would be a mythic analysis of certain film genres. Film genres are increasingly promoted within the industry in an attempt to define and solidify segments of the general movie audience. Genres like westerns, horror films, and science fiction each promote various mythic stories that are unique to their category.

A final suggestion would be a study movie villains and an analysis of the mythic stories that they perpetuate. The movie villain is almost always a direct contrast to the film’s hero, and a comparison of the values each promotes would offer an interesting perspective.


VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jeffrey Lawrence

Local Address:
1375 Park Lane #46
Bullhead City, Arizona 86442

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, Communication Studies, 1995
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Thesis Title: Celluloid Heroes: A Study Of Fictional Characters In Popular Film As Vehicles For Cultural Myth

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Richard Jensen, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Gage Chapel, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Larry Mullen, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Felicia Campbell, Ph. D.