

# "It's aimed at kids - the kid in everybody": George Lucas, *Star Wars* and Children's Entertainment

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When *Star Wars* was released in May 1977, *Time* magazine hailed it as "The Year's Best Movie" and characterised the special quality of the film with the statement: "It's aimed at kids - the kid in everybody" (Anon., 1977). Many film scholars, highly critical of the aesthetic and ideological preoccupations of *Star Wars* and of contemporary Hollywood cinema in general, have elaborated on the second part in *Time* magazine's formula. They have argued that *Star Wars* is indeed aimed at "the kid in everybody", that is it invites adult spectators to regress to an earlier phase in their social and psychic development and to indulge in infantile fantasies of omnipotence and oedipal strife as well as nostalgically returning to an earlier period in history (the 1950s) when they were kids and the world around them could be imagined as a better place. For these scholars, much of post-1977 Hollywood cinema is characterised by such infantilisation, regression and nostalgia (see, for example, Wood, 1985). I will return to this ideological critique at the end of this essay. For now, however, I want to address a different set of questions about production and marketing strategies as well as actual audiences: What about the first part of *Time* magazine's formula? Was *Star Wars* aimed at children? If it was, how did it try to appeal to them, and did it succeed? I am going to address these questions first of all by looking forward from 1977 to the status *Star Wars* has achieved in the popular culture of the late 1990s. I will then look backward from 1977 to the long period of gestation of the *Star Wars* project and its gradual transformation into a children's film; that is a film primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, addressed to children. Finally, I am going to return to the year 1977 and examine the initial reception of *Star Wars* as an adventure for the whole family and as a model for Hollywood's future.

## "Let The Wookiee Win": Living In The Late 1990s *Star Wars* Universe

When the *Star Wars* prequel *Star Wars: Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace* was released in May 1999, *Variety* declared it to be "the most widely anticipated and heavily hyped film of modern times" and argued that "those most looking forward (to it) ... are mostly people - now in their 30s - who were kids when episodes four through six were released". While thus acknowledging that the original trilogy had most powerfully affected children, the *Variety* reviewer expressed considerable disappointment that the new instalment was not aimed primarily at the adult fans those children had become, but "directly at a new crop of children, who are familiar with the originals via video or the recent 'Special Edition' hardtop reissues". This focus on children accounted for the weakness in story construction and characterisation the reviewer detected in *The Phantom Menace* and for its excessive cast of extraterrestrial creatures and its "pretty standard-issue tyke hero", the 9-year-old Anakin Skywalker. Highly critical of the film, the reviewer nevertheless predicted that it would become "one of the biggest" hits of all time and also acknowledged the genius of the man behind the saga: "Lucas may again assert his status as the shrewdest marketer among filmmakers, if he can capture the

new generation while still taking the old-time fans along for the ride" (McCarthy, 1999: 53-54).

Indeed, in September, *Variety* predicted that *The Phantom Menace* might gross about \$500 million in foreign markets, thus becoming the fourth highest grossing film in foreign markets in history, after *Titanic* (1997, \$1,233 million), *Jurassic Park* (1992, \$563 million) and *Independence Day* (1995, \$503 million) (Groves, 1999). That same month, the film's domestic box office take was reported to be \$422 million, making it the third highest domestic grosser in history (after *Titanic*, \$600 million, and the original *Star Wars*, \$461 million in various releases), and its broadcast fee was projected to be \$80 million (Dempsey, 1999). Eventually, *The Phantom Menace* grossed \$920 million worldwide (\$430 million domestically and \$490 million abroad), which was twice as much as the box office take of its nearest competitors in 1999, *The Matrix* and *The Sixth Sense* (Anon., 2000). Together with the several billion dollars generated through promotional tie-ins and merchandising as well as TV, video and DVD sales, the box office returns would seem to vindicate Lucas' decision again to make what is first and foremost a children's film. In fact, in response to early criticism from fans and reviewers who had seen test screenings, Lucas right from the start had been upfront about the very nature of *The Phantom Menace* and of the *Star Wars* saga as a whole. In the week before the film's release, for example, the *New York Post* reported:

Lucas... shot down complaints that (*The Phantom Menace*)... is too much of a kiddie flick, with goofy, computer-generated characters and prolonged, video-game-like battles. "I don't think it's any more kid-friendly than any of the other *Star Wars* films", he said. "*Star Wars* is basically a serial for children - that's what it's always been" (Hoffmann, 1999: 7).

A few months after the release of *The Phantom Menace*, I began an undergraduate course on Spielberg and Lucas with the question: What role has the *Star Wars* phenomenon played in your life? The response of my (mainly British) students, most of whom had not even been born when the first *Star Wars* film was released, astonished me. Whether they had spent their childhood in Britain, South Africa, Arab countries or the States, they had all been aware of *Star Wars*. They had seen the films, often in the wrong order, on video (regular or pirate) or TV or at the cinema during one of numerous re-releases; and, more importantly, they had listened to the soundtrack, read the books, played with the toys, dressed up as the characters, acted out scenarios from the films and invented new ones. Even the few students who did not like *Star Wars* said that their childhood had been completely overshadowed by it, that the saga's characters, stories and catch phrases had been a primary reference point for their peer group and also within their families. For better or for worse, my students reported that in effect they had all been inhabiting the *Star Wars* universe when they were kids, and to a large extent they were still living in it today. Somewhat paradoxically, having grown up, many now felt, much like *Variety*, that *The Phantom Menace* was too childish, yet this did not take anything away from the overall impact of the saga.

This anecdotal evidence about the centrality of *Star Wars* for childhood in the 1970s and 1980s, is supported by all kinds of statistical evidence of the presence of *Star Wars* products in the contemporary cultural marketplace - the continued success of the films on TV and in various video, DVD and cinema re-releases, the dozens of *Star Wars* novels and related books which have been published since the 1970s, and the sale of many billions of dollars worth of products based on, or tied in with, the films. For example, by the late 1980s *Star Wars* related toys had grossed an estimated \$2 billion, and had helped to reshape the toy

industry by moving fantasy action figures to its very centre (Cross, 1997: Ch.7). *Star Wars* has also been ranked very high in polls of all-time favourite films. As early as 1978, for example, *Star Wars* came second after *Gone With the Wind* in a Minneapolis student poll (Anon., 1978), and in June 2001 it was at number seven in the Internet Moviedatabase's "Top 250 movies as voted by our users".

All of this evidence points towards the conclusion that, at least in the Western world, since the 1970s several generations of children have grown up with *Star Wars*, and they have maintained their attachment to the *Star Wars* universe into adulthood, passing their fascination onto their own children. Surveys taken during the highly successful theatrical release of the special edition of *Star Wars* in February 1997 indicated that a third of the audience were families, many of them no doubt parents revisiting their own childhood experiences and sharing them with their children (Puig, 1997: 13). Indeed, my students had moving stories to tell about the ways in which the experience of *Star Wars* was complexly interwoven with familial relationships - from the girls who unsuccessfully fought with their older brothers for the choice parts in *Star Wars* playacting (everyone wanted to be Han or Darth Vader, no-one wanted to be the wookiee) to the boys who established a secret code with their fathers, commenting on their mothers' interference with a resigned "Let the wookiee win" (because they get very angry and dangerous when you don't).

So how did *Star Wars* achieve such a dominant position in children's lives? And was this George Lucas' original intention?

### **From Action-Adventure to Children's Film: The Evolution of *Star Wars***

When George Lucas first began to publicise the production of *Star Wars* in the trade and general press, the film was variously described as an "outer space action adventure", a "sci-fi pic", a "space fantasy", "a space opera in the tradition of Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers", or "2001 meets James Bond" (see, for example, Sturhahn, 1974: 32, Farber, 1974: 44, Anon., 1975, Anon., 1976). That this was not exactly going to be a film suitable for children, is indicated by comments such as the following: "(The film) deals with sci-fi on a sociological level, how technology affects humans" (Anon., 1973: 46). In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* in June 1976, Lucas stated that the soon-to-be-completed film was "aimed primarily at 14- and 15-year-olds", and interviewer Charles Champlin added that it would be "a high-energy, Boy's Own adventure" (Champlin, 1976: 1). Reinforcing this emphasis on male teenagers, the production notes for *Star Wars* quoted the preface Arthur Conan Doyle wrote for his novel *The Lost World*:

"I have wrought my simple plan

If I give one hour of joy

To the boy who's half a man,

Or the man who's half a boy." (quoted in Champlin, 1976: 42)

The market research programme for the film which was initiated in the summer of 1976 soon confirmed that, judging by people's responses to its title and a brief description of the film, *Star Wars* was most likely to appeal "primarily (to) young male moviegoers, ages 25 and under", while its emphasis on technology and battle provoked a negative reaction from

females and older people. So as to counteract such resistance, the advertising campaign which was developed from this research aimed to highlight the film's human characters and its mythical dimension in addition to its action and special effects. The advertising was to be placed in media (such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television) which would "impact primarily against 12 to 24 year old moviegoers and, secondarily, against moviegoers ages 25 to 35" (Earnest, 1985: 7-13). Thus, in 1976, market researchers failed to consider *Star Wars'* potential appeal to the sub-teen audience, and Lucas himself, who gradually realised that he was in fact making a children's movie, was reluctant to foreground this fact in the initial publicity for the film. Where did the market researchers' blindspot and Lucas' reluctance stem from?

Until the 1960s, Hollywood had considered its audience to be potentially everyone, although it was well known that the most regular moviegoers were teenagers and young adults under 30 (who bought up to three quarters of all tickets). Rather than concentrating exclusively on this core audience, Hollywood studios focussed most of their energies on producing inclusive films, which aimed to offer something for everybody without offending anyone. The industry's self-regulation through the Production Code tried to ensure that every film was suitable for even the youngest members of the audience. Indeed, an audience survey for the film industry's trade organisation, the Motion Picture Association of America, conducted in 1957 showed that 31% of all tickets were bought by children aged 14 and younger; the market share of children under 10 was an astonishing 16%; thus almost every sixth ticket was bought for a young child (Opinion Research Corporation, 1957).

However, throughout the 1960s, and in particular after 1967, Hollywood increasingly focussed on the teenage and young adult audience, especially males. In 1966 the Production Code was effectively suspended (the Production Code Administration's rulings became merely advisory instead of being binding as they had been before), and in 1968 the Code was replaced altogether by a ratings system designed to warn parents about films which were unsuitable for their children, and thus effectively removing children from the audience of a significant part of Hollywood's output (see, for example, Valenti, 1992). In the wake of the critical and commercial impact of films such as *Bonnie & Clyde* in 1967 and 1968, the industry's output began to include a large number of aesthetically innovative and thematically challenging films which often included graphic depictions of sexual and violent acts (cp. Krämer, 1999: 96-97). Taking their cue from exploitation specialists AIP, the Hollywood studios increasingly based their operations on the so-called "Peter Pan Syndrome", which a 1968 article outlined as follows:

a) a younger child will watch anything an older child will watch; b) an older child will not watch anything a younger child will watch; c) a girl will watch anything a boy will watch; d) a boy will not watch anything a girl will watch; therefore e) to catch your greatest audience you zero in on the 19-year old male (Bean and Austen, 1968: 21-2, quoted in Doherty, 1988: 157).

Obviously, this doctrine worked against the production of children's films, by assuming that films addressed to children were putting off the movies' core audience and were unnecessary anyway (because younger children would want to see the films of their older siblings), and also by prioritising the assumed taste of teenage males for sex and violence (which did, of course, work to exclude younger siblings from many films, which received an R or an X rating for sex, violence or bad language).

Hollywood's focus on the young male audience did not go unchallenged. Articles in the trade and general press of the early 1970s demanded that Hollywood pay more attention to the female audience (Krämer, 1999: 96-97). A similar campaign focussed on the importance of the child audience. In January 1972, for example, Jerry Lewis stated in a *Variety* article entitled "Children, Too Have Film Rights" that "(o)ne of the largest segments of the motion picture audience is ignored", if it wasn't actively prevented from moviegoing through frequent X and R ratings. Lewis pointed out that today's children were also important as tomorrow's teenage and adult audience, and that their movie-going habit had to be developed early so as to be carried over into later life. He called for more G rated films to be specifically addressed to children (Lewis, 1972: 32). In a 1974 poll, over half of the respondents said that filmic sex and violence kept them away from movie theatres, and 76% said that not enough family pictures were being produced (Anon., 1974).

In 1975, *Variety* pointed out that in recent years "the entertainment industry has relied more and more on bud and sis to talk dad into a few bucks extra", and that the present generation of children had "more to spend on its own amusement" than any previous generation. With other sectors of the entertainment industry, especially the music business, addressing ever younger customers, *Variety* asked: "can the PG pic be far behind?" (Harwood, 1975) The latest cinema audience research conducted in the same year confirmed the importance of the interaction between children and adults by concluding that "(p)arents with children under 13 attend more often than parents with children aged 13-17" (Murphy, 1975: 3). Similarly a survey of female heads of households found that women living with children were more likely to go to the cinema at least once a month than those without children; only 22% of women in households without children went at least once a month; for women whose youngest child was between 6 and 17 the proportion was 41%, and if the youngest child was under 6, the proportion was still as high as 30%. According to this research, then, a large proportion of regular moviegoers were family groups rather than singles or couples (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1975).

It is in the context of such research and debates concerning Hollywood's relationship with the child audience that George Lucas developed *Star Wars*. Following the commercial failure of his first feature film in 1971, the bleak, detached and highly stylised Science Fiction film *THX 1138* (which also contained a fair amount of nudity and violence), Lucas decided that he would next try a more optimistic and emotionally engaging project, either a nostalgic autobiographical picture about his youth in small-town America or a new version of *Flash Gordon*, a Sci-Fi adventure serial which he had liked as a child. The autobiographical project was realised first as *American Graffiti*, a film for teenagers and for adults looking back on their teenage years, which upon its release in August 1973 would become one of the most profitable films of all time. Before *American Graffiti* was released, however, Lucas returned to his Sci-Fi adventure which in the meantime had lost its connection with *Flash Gordon* (the rights of which he had considered to be too expensive) and turned it into an original story, based on his extensive research into myth, fairytales and classic adventure stories. Lucas' story treatment was rejected by Universal, yet he was able to make a deal with Fox in 1973 (cp. Baxter, 1999, Jenkins, 1997, and Pollock, 1990).

From the earliest outlines, Lucas' story combined the depiction of space battles and galactic civil war with strong religious and metaphysical elements, and it heavily featured teenage characters as well as father figures (see Bouzereau, 1997). While Lucas had always seen his story as fantasy and fairytale rather than straightforward Science Fiction, the famous tagline "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...", which so evocatively echoed the classic

fairytale opening "Once upon a time...", did not appear until the fourth draft of the screenplay in January 1976. Another important element which clearly signalled *Star Wars'* status as a children's story was the two robots that first appeared in a draft outline of 1974, and then gradually moved to the very centre of the story. Inspired by Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), Lucas wanted to tell his epic story from the point of view of two marginal and lowly characters: "I was looking for the lowest person on the pecking order" (Bouzereau, 1997: 9). This description fits the social status of children as much as it fits that of robot servants, and tiny R2D2 clearly serves as a stand-in for a young child, albeit a very precocious one, while C3PO may be seen either as a bickering older sibling or even as a fussy yet caring mother figure. Friends and colleagues advised Lucas not to focus the first fifteen minutes of the film so exclusively on the robots, and instead to open with his male protagonist Luke Skywalker. Lucas did in fact rewrite the script along these lines, but in the end he felt that the robots provided the best entry point for the audience into the world of the film (Bouzereau, 1997: 24). This would appear to be a crucial decision; in the final film, the space battles and galactic intrigues are mediated by the robot duo, who act much like a team of slapstick clowns or cartoon characters, thus inviting especially very young viewers to enter into the film's adventure.

Another important storytelling device, which Lucas developed gradually, was the foregrounding of Princess Leia. A comparatively minor character in the early outlines and drafts, she becomes quite central in later screenplay versions and serves as an important point of identification especially for young female viewers. She is the only character mentioned in the film's opening scroll and is thus introduced as a central figure in the war against the Evil Empire: "Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy." Apart from the robots, Leia is also the first central character to appear on the screen. Lucas commented later: "I felt that I needed to have a woman in the script. The interesting thing is she does get in jeopardy, but she is very capable of taking care of herself;... I wanted a woman to be at the center of the story.... She is a leader" (Bouzereau, 1997: 14).

As to the male protagonists of his story, Lucas' early outlines and drafts were focussed on Jedi knights and their sons; in later scripts, the central male character, Luke Skywalker, became progressively younger and also turned into an orphaned boy living and working on a farm with his aunt and uncle, wishing to escape from this dreary life and to embark on space adventures like his dead father. This transformation brought Luke much closer to the children in the audience, and also to many poor orphaned fairytale heroes. Lucas' notes indicate that he saw him "as an ugly duckling, sort of like Cinderella; he is made fun of and wants to become a starpilot, but when he is confronted with reality, he still thinks like a farm boy. He is honest, simple, and good-hearted" (Bouzereau, 1997: 23).

From this account of the development of the *Star Wars* project it is clear that Lucas gradually reshaped his space adventure into a fairytale about youthful and childlike characters, making sure that the opening sequence helped to ease children, girls as well as boys, into the strange and violent world of the film. This focus on the child audience eventually became so obvious that Lucas was asked by the studio not to use subtitles for some of the alien languages spoken in the film: "(T)he studio said to me, 'What about the children who can't read the subtitles?' I said, 'It will encourage them to learn how to read or it will bond them with their parents as they are reading the subtitles to them'" (Bouzereau, 1997: 49). Here, Lucas acknowledged the importance of the interaction between parents and children in the audience, putting the parents in the role of the storyteller of old. And he did so right from the start of the film with

the long opening scroll which contained important information that young children would certainly want to know about.

Thus, by 1976, Lucas clearly saw *Star Wars* as a children's film, yet he didn't say so in public. It was only in the spring of 1977, shortly before the film's release, that Lucas finally admitted publicly that his main target audience was in fact children, both young teenagers and sub-teens. In the cover story of the April 1977 issue of *American Film*, for example, Lucas is quoted as saying: "I decided I wanted to make a children's movie, to go the Disney route"; because he had realised that "a whole generation was growing up without fairytales" (Zito, 1977: 9, 13). While Disney's animated features had a special status as commercially successful quality products, on the whole the field of children's films was considered to be neither respectable nor economically viable. *American Film* commented: "George Lucas has gone out on a limb.... He has spent \$8 million in a genre where movies are usually done as cheaply as possible, resulting in shoddiness." (Zito, 1977, 13) This kind of comment helps to explain why Lucas and distributor Twentieth Century Fox were so reluctant to label *Star Wars* as a children's film - the label was feared to disqualify the film in the minds of most cinemagoers. Nevertheless, after the film's release, *Time* magazine and much of the rest of the press immediately, and unapologetically, emphasised its tremendous appeal to children as well as its nostalgic address of adults.

### **"I believe, I believe": The Initial Reception of Star Wars**

*Variety's* summary statement in its review of *Star Wars* read: "Outstanding adventure-fantasy. All-age appeal". This emphatically included children, yet the reviewer felt it necessary to counteract established prejudices: "Make no mistake - this is by no means a 'children's film' with all the derogatory overtones that go with that description." Instead, *Star Wars* was "a superior example" of Hollywood's unique "movie magic", which had previously been best exemplified by "the genius of Walt Disney", who had, of course, made films for children (Murphy, 1977: 123-125). Vincent Canby was more willing in the *New York Times* directly to address the film's special appeal to children: "*Star Wars* is good enough to convince the most skeptical 8-year-old sci-fi buff, who is the toughest critic" (Canby, 1977:1). And the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* emphatically embraced the film's intimate links to classic children's fiction:

"I believe, I believe" may be the only proper response to *Star Wars*. "I believe in Tinkerbell and flying nuns, prissy robots and talking lions, munchkins and King Arthur's Court." George Lucas is Peter Pan and we're wide-eyed children he sweeps off into Never-Never Land (Cuskelly, 197: B1 47).

The film's few detractors also acknowledged its powerful hold on children. Molly Haskell, for example, wrote in *Village Voice*:

(*Star Wars* caters) to a "family market" defined by its pre-pubescent age level, somewhere between 10 and 14. Adults who have been complaining... that there are no movies to which they can take their children now are having their prayers answered. Why movies should be required to perform this cultural babysitting service I don't know, but far be it from me to ban the magical formula that can keep the American family together and young forever! (Haskell, 1977: 40-41)

However, the most important recognition of the film's powerful hold on children was the merchandising craze which developed a few weeks into the film's release, when its huge success had been assured. In June 1977, the *Hollywood Reporter* announced deals being made between Lucas and various manufacturers, including toy companies such as Kenner, to launch *Star Wars* product lines which would generate "possibly the largest (merchandising income) ever for any motion picture", thus beating the previous market leader in this field, Disney (Barrow, 1977: 1, 9). Of course, the film also broke all existing box office records, earning \$165 million in rentals (and close to twice that amount at the box office) during its 1977 release and its first re-release in 1978, leaving the previous record holder *Jaws* (with rentals of \$121 million) far behind (Steinberg, 1980: 4).

For the *Chicago Sun-Times* it was immediately clear that *Star Wars* heralded a new era; it was "(t)he first movie of the 1980s", a decade which, the writer expected, would see Hollywood's return to the production of family fare (Simon, 1977). Indeed, in an October 1977 article highlighting the importance of films for child development, a psychologist held up *Star Wars* to the entertainment industry as "an example of entertainment with a high absorption value for children", especially for those under the age of 12 (Gallick, 1977: L10). And at the beginning of the following year, a headline in the *New York Times* proclaimed: "Family Movies Making a Comeback." Movie theatres both on Broadway and in the suburbs were switching from sex and violence to family fare. A film executive was reported to have said that "he foresaw 'more and more' general and family films, mainly because of the stunning box-office success of such films as *Star Wars*" (Klemesrud, 1978: C10).

Arguably, this is precisely what has happened. In retrospect, we can see that the positive reception of the film by the press and its unprecedented success with audiences, including many present and future filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg and James Cameron, made *Star Wars* a turning point in American film history by moving family films, addressed to children and their parents as well as to the core cinema audience of teenagers and young adults, back to the centre of the American and global entertainment industry. From the *Superman* series (starting in 1978) and the *Star Wars* sequels (1980 and 1983) to the *Indiana Jones* films (starting in 1981) and *E.T.* (1982), from the *Ghostbusters* movies (1984 and 1989) and the *Back to the Future* series (starting in 1985) to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) and the *Batman* series (starting in 1989), from the *Home Alone* films (1989, 1992, and, much less successfully, 1997) to the *Jurassic Park* films (1993, 1997 and 2001) and *The Lion King* (1994), from the *Toy Story* films (1995 and 1999), with their extensive *Star Wars* references, and the blatant *Star Wars* pastiche *Independence Day* (1996) to the 'special edition' re-releases of the original *Star Wars* films (1997) and the prequel *The Phantom Menace* (1999) - most of Hollywood's superhits since 1977 are basically, like *Star Wars*, children's films; more precisely, they are children's films for the whole family and for teenagers, too. These box office hits also tend to be the films that sell best on video, draw the biggest television audiences, and have the most successful merchandise. In other words, these films are the cornerstones of today's media empires (including, most notably, AOL Time Warner, Disney, News Corp./Fox, Vivendi/Universal, Viacom/Paramount and Sony/Columbia) and touchstones for today's consumers of popular culture.

Obviously, the success of *Star Wars* did not create this state of affairs, but it definitely helped it along. Ironically, in its original conception *Star Wars* was, as we have seen, far removed from the disreputable category of the children's film, and it was only by following the logic of his own material, and by being open to the surrounding debate about the need for family entertainment in Hollywood, that Lucas was able to create his most influential movie. To

return to *Time* magazine's formula, we can say that *Star Wars* and much of subsequent popular entertainment is indeed aimed at the kid in everybody *and* at actual kids, targeting children as an important, even primary audience segment. Does this mean that adult audiences are being "infantilized"?

Elsewhere I have engaged with this critique of contemporary Hollywood by suggesting that most of Hollywood's biggest hits since the 1970s are best understood as "family-adventure movies"; that is films which are addressed to children and their parents as well as teenagers and young adults, revolve around the spectacular adventures of familial groups (very few of which are traditional families), and portray both childhood and family life in far from idealised terms - loss, loneliness and longing, lies, betrayal and misunderstanding, latent aggression, guilt and a crushing sense of responsibility (Krämer, 1998). We can easily see how this last point applies to the *Star Wars* saga: Teenage hero Luke Skywalker has lost (or so it seems) both his parents, and then loses his aunt and uncle, who have taken care of him, but have also severely restricted his life; their death does in fact free him to become who he wants to be, and since it follows a fight Luke has had with his uncle, it could be seen as a form of wish-fulfilment. Luke's aunt and uncle have lied to him about his father as do his mentors, and father-substitutes, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda. Luke initially mistakes his strong feelings for Leia for romantic love, not knowing that she is his sister; and when he eventually learns the truth about his family, he is warned that he might be as morally weak and corruptible as his father, the evil Darth Vader, while at the same time feeling responsible for Vader's redemption as well as for the fate of the known universe, certainly not an easy burden to carry. Luke's father fights and injures him seriously on two occasions, and, what is perhaps worse, he does his best to corrupt him. In the end, of course, Vader is redeemed, yet he dies in the process as did Obi-Wan and Yoda, adding to the long list of people Luke has lost in his life (although some of them continue to be present to him as spirits). If it is argued that the *Star Wars* saga addresses "the kid" in adult spectators and takes them back to their childhood, then it also has to be acknowledged that, much like the fairytales Bruno Bettelheim analyses in his classic 1975 study *The Uses of Enchantment*, the films confront spectators with a very challenging vision of childhood, family life and the difficult process of growing up, which is, however, in the end always completed successfully (as it also is in fairytales). Playing on the paradoxical title of another archetypal contemporary Hollywood blockbuster, one might therefore say that *Star Wars* and many of the big hits made in its wake invite spectators to regress to maturity.

## **Acknowledgement**

Research for this essay in American archives was made possible by a Small Research Grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board.

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