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ROGER B. ROLLIN

Beowulf to Batman: The Epic Hero and Pop Culture

... the student's unmediated responses are to his comic books and television programs, while his response to *Macbeth* has every conceivable kind of inhibition attached to it.
—Northrop Frye, "Reflections in a Mirror"

MANY A TEACHER OF ENGLISH views with trepidation the prospect of introducing members of the present student generation to the study of *Beowulf*, *The Faerie Queene*, or *Paradise Lost*. The poems themselves have always posed enough scholarly and critical problems to make teaching them a problem, but nowadays the students themselves seem to make that pedagogy still more difficult. Many of them, more than is sometimes realized, are deeply concerned about the race problem in America or are involved in it, have fought in Viet Nam or fought going there, have demonstrated against the brutality of police or of college administrators, have been actively engaged in politics or social work, have complained about their education's lack of

relevance, or have tried to do something about it. For such students the great old poems of the Anglo-Saxon *scop*, of Spenser, and of Milton may well seem not merely remote, but irrelevant. Even the best among them, those who despite their other real concerns can still be responsive to esthetic or scholarly appeals, may feel that reading the great English epics is reading only for art's or history's sake. Encountering Spenser's proud claim in his letter to Raleigh that "The generall end thereof of [*The Faerie Queene*] is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline . . .," they may at worst scorn or at best savor what seems to be the poet's quaintly Elizabethan squareness.

Yet these same serious students, when they temporarily put aside their socio-political and academic cares, will watch television programs like *Mission Impossible* or *Star Trek*, will follow in-

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stallments of *Steve Canyon* or *Batman* in the comics, or will read Ian Fleming or attend "James Bond" films, all of which—as this paper will contend—have a "generall end" similar to Spenser's: "to fashion a gentleman or noble person" for the age. The students themselves, however (and not a few of their teachers), think of such extra-curricular, extra-political activities as "escape."

But what is "escape"? If it means a temporary psychological and intellectual disengagement from the tensions and problems of "real" life, the type of entertainment referred to above will not serve. For "pop romance" (a term that will be used throughout this paper to designate television programs, films, and comic strips in the adventure category) is typically replete with tensions and problems, and those not usually very far removed from present reality. A few years ago it might have been argued that the frequent threats and acts of violence to be found in pop romance made the genre escapist by virtue of sheer hyperbole, but our growing awareness of how violent our reality actually is weakens that case.

It might better be argued that the "escapism" of pop romance resides paradoxically in the security it generates: we know, deep down in our hearts, that Batman will not be turned into a human shish kabob by "The Joker," that Steve Canyon will in the end foil the attempt of the Chinese Reds to defoliate Central Park. If this argument has some validity, it follows that the "escapism" provided by pop romance involves not only emotional catharsis, the purgation of pity and fear, but also what might be called "value satisfaction," that confirmation or reaffirmation of our value system which results from our seeing this value system threatened, but ultimately tri-

umphant. For at least one of the things that happens when a hero like Batman or Steve Canyon wins out in the end—and not the least important thing—is that we experience *at some level* the defeat of Evil (as we imagine it) by the Good (as we have learned it). Even though we consciously are aware that such victories do not always occur in reality, there is a part of us which very much wants them to occur. We are of course unwilling to have such victories take place too easily, as the epic poets well realized, for an easy victory not only lacks dramatic force but paradoxically cheapens the value system the victory is to affirm by making it almost irrelevant.

"Escapism" then, connoting a retreat to a state of mindlessness or euphoria, may well be the wrong term to use to justify or to attack anyone's involvement in pop romance. Though adventure films, television programs and comic strips (*Cahiers du Cinema* and Roy Lichtenstein notwithstanding) may be only pseudo-art or semi-art, they need not be more "escapist" than "true" art. Or, as W. R. Robinson claims in his defense of films, "escape" (into the higher reality of moral truth) can be seen as a function of all forms of art:

The most persistent and unjust criticism leveled at the movies has been that they are *sui generis* "escapist." But this critical term, the nastiest epithet conceivable within a very narrow-minded aesthetic of truth which sprung up alongside realism, absurdly distorts our sense of what art is or should be. It implies that only an art as grim and dour as the realist thought life to be under the aegis of materialism can qualify as serious aesthetic achievement. . . . Yet even in the dour-est realistic view truth is a human triumph; through it man transcends suffering and determinism. Nikolai Berdyaev saw this clearly when he argued that all

art is a victory over heaviness. It is always escape.¹

Even popular art forms, Robinson continues, "are a part of man's intellectual armament in this war to liberate himself from heaviness . . .," for "by incarnating the Good, a spiritual entity, in a concrete form, art frees it to be" (pp. 118-19).

That even pop romance is concerned with moral truth—by "incarnating the Good" in its hero figures—is easily shown. The more primitive films, television programs, and comics—those produced mainly for children—explicitly purport to be morality tales: The Lone Ranger is identified as a "champion of justice,"² for example, and Batman is plainly if infelicitously described as "fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrong-doer."³

In more sophisticated pop romance the same process is handled more subtly and may even result in the establishment of fairly complex levels of meaning. Steve Canyon, for example, is clearly an incarnation of moral Good but he is also the means by which Milton Caniff, his creator, idealizes and glorifies the military, devalues civilians and civilian life, advances a Dullesian posture on international affairs, and in general espouses a conservative socio-political philosophy. Though Caniff is hardly less didactic than Spenser or Milton, and the thrust of his didacticism is such that he too invariably alienates some readers, he, like these poets, makes complete rejection of his "art" almost impossible by incorpo-

rating his specific socio-political views within the general framework of the Judeo-Christian value system. Left with a choice between desiring a victory for militantly militarist Steve Canyon (and Western Civilization) and a victory for The Other Side, only the most resolute radical has a real alternative.

There is still another level at which pop romance, both primitive and sophisticated, incarnates the Good. This is the level where personal ethics and ego meet to define individual spiritual and material aspirations. We tend to admire and identify with Batman, for example, not only because he is clean, upright, reverent, etc., an adult Boy Scout, square but undeniably *good*—all the things we should be—but also because he is handsome, athletic, intelligent, and rich—all the things we would like to be. He is the fulfillment of our fantasies as well as of our moral sense. And though Freudian psychology may lead us to expect that the former function is more crucial, this does not seem to be the case: a hero figure may be ugly or poor (and some are) but he can still be acceptable; if he should fail to honor his father and mother or if he should covet his neighbor's wife he will not be. Whatever different values may be stressed in various heroes of pop romance (and there is some variation), they tend to have the basic values of our culture in common. Thus their repeated triumphs, whether we are fully conscious of it or not, can help to reinforce our confidence in our value system and to encourage our conformity to it.

Clearly, his readers' conformity to the values he anatomized in *The Faerie Queene* was one of the main effects Spenser hoped to achieve through his art. But if the Instruction that effects moral conformity was his main purpose, Spenser, like all makers of fiction, also

¹W. R. Robinson, "The Movies Too, Will Make You Free," *Man and the Movies*, ed. W. R. Robinson (Baton Rouge, La., 1967), pp. 117-18.

²Quoted in Jim Harmon, *The Great Radio Heroes* (Garden City, N. Y., 1967), p. 203.

³Quoted in Jules Feiffer, *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (New York, 1965), p. 26.

recognized that "the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for the profit of the ensample"; therefore, as he explained to Raleigh, instead of having "good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large," he wrote an epic poem, in which the Instruction was "most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction. . . ." It is of course far more likely that Delight rather than Instruction is the main conscious intent of most of the creators of pop romance. It is Delight that brings in the dollars. But to succeed in delighting a whole culture or even a sizeable portion of it is neither automatic nor easy. The chances for such success for example are diminished considerably if the Delight comes at the expense of the culture's value system. Thus neither epic poets nor the creators of pop culture are true cultural revolutionaries. (Even devout Royalists could accept *Paradise Lost*.) Whether Delight or Instruction then is uppermost in the mind of the creator of the fiction, if the fiction is successful the results will likely be the same: the culture will find reiterated in that fiction most of the values it passed on to the creator in the first place. It is almost inevitable therefore that pop romance, for example, instruct in spite of itself.

Milton Caniff has said: "The American hero lives in all of us . . . and if we are not all heroes, we are all hero ridden. Descendants of a legend, we persist in identifying with it."⁴ To summarize the argument of this paper, if today's students can be made conscious of this truth about themselves by having their

attention called to their involvement in pop romance, and if, by analyzing the nature and functions of the hero in pop romance and epic poems, they can begin to perceive significant esthetic and intellectual parallels between the popular and the classic, then their heightened awareness of the unity and the relevance of all art will help to make their study of literature easier, more enjoyable, and more pointed. To some extent Marshall McLuhan has made even the ordinary student more receptive to such an approach than he might have been a few years ago, and Northrop Frye of course has done even more for the well-read student. And Frye, in addition, is helpful in providing some guidelines by which such an approach can to an extent be systematized.

1.

In *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N. J., 1957), Frye classifies five types of fictive hero, each type being determined "by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (p. 33). (Frye's fourth type, the hero "superior neither to other men nor to his environment" (p. 34) and his fifth type, the hero who is "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves" (p. 34), do not concern us here, though they would if the limits of this essay extended beyond the literary epic and the pop romance.)

Type I. "If superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a *myth* in the common sense of a story about a god." (p. 33). Frye adds that "Such stories have an important place in literature, but are as a rule found outside the normal literary categories," but as we shall see, *Paradise Lost* is a noteworthy

⁴Quoted in David Manning White and Robert Abel, "Comic Strips and American Culture," *The Funnies: An American Idiom*, eds. David Manning White and Robert Abel (New York, 1963), p. 33.

exception to this rule, as is, less obviously, *The Faerie Queene*. The pop hero who best illustrates Type I is Superman, who to all intent and purposes is absolute in his power, his glory, and his goodness. Superman, like other such mythic figures, is not only perfect, but is capable of donning imperfection—of voluntarily assuming a human role, in the playing of which he suffers what Jules Feiffer has called his “discreet martyrdom.”⁵

Type II. “If superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of *romance*, whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended . . .” (p. 33). The fact that these laws frequently seem to be suspended by the hero himself gives the Type II figure a semi-divine aura even though he is of earthly mold. Though limited, he is still overwhelmingly powerful and overwhelmingly virtuous. He is, however, capable of error (though seldom of crime or serious sin) and ultimately he is vulnerable. In pop romance Batman is a familiar example of this type.

Type III. “If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours but . . . is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature” (pp. 33–34). Although a number of pop heroes are of this type, Steve Canyon is fairly representative. He is a leader, an Air Force lieutenant colonel, passionate about the U. S. Air Force, the U. S., and —occasionally—a female (in that order), but what he does is sometimes criticized (most often by ignorant or malicious

civilians) and the jet planes he flies are subject to the laws of physics. He is vulnerable, not only physically but also intellectually and psychologically, and he is capable of, though not prone to, error.

The Type I hero is what we would all like to be (“faster than a speeding bullet,” having “X-ray vision,” capable of flying), but outside of our dreams of wish fulfillment, we recognize that we could not possibly be him. The Type II hero, being more human than superhuman, is a more attainable ideal, but again our conscious selves will acknowledge that we can never have all the powers and virtues he possesses nor have them to the degree that he does. The Type III hero is also greater in the sum total of his powers and virtues than we could be, but because he shares with the rest of humanity certain limitations upon his embodiment and exercise of these powers and virtues, some of them are at least theoretically within our reach and in a few we could even exceed him: we could conceivably fly airplanes as well as Lt. Col. Canyon; we might even become generals.

All of these heroes are larger than life; some are merely larger than others. But what the hero is and does in terms of objective reality are less important than what he represents to our inner reality. The local man who saves a child from drowning is of less enduring interest to us than our fictive or historical heroes: the former wants symbolism, and unless local mythopoeia provides him with it, we tend to displace him in our consciousness with the more value-charged heroes we seem to need. The heroes of the great English epics represent attempts by poets of genius to fulfill that need for their own times. In our time, supposedly the age of the “anti-hero,” the writers of pop romance knowingly or unknowing-

⁵Feiffer, p. 19.

ly fulfill the same need. Thus, what Northrop Frye claims about popular literature in general is particularly true of pop romance: it is "literature which affords an almost unobstructed view of archetypes" (p. 116).

Specific illustrations of how the analogies between epic and pop heroes can be used to provide one kind of approach to *Beowulf*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Paradise Lost* comprise the next three sections of this paper. The focus will be on the hero figures and the value systems in which they are involved rather than upon structure or imagery or the like. Nor will any attempt be made to justify on esthetic grounds the examples of pop romance considered. Whether primitive or slick, they seldom even approach the threshold of what is generally regarded as "art"—although they do qualify if we accept Norman Holland's definition of art as that which exists for our pleasure, requires us to suspend disbelief in order to experience that pleasure, and gives us that pleasure by "managing" or "controlling" our fantasies and feelings.⁶ But whether they are regarded as "art" or not, pop romances can shed light on art and on our responses to it, as both Holland and Frye have suggested.⁷ The same conclusion is arrived at by a student of the comic strip phenomenon, Kenneth E. Eble, even though he rejects the comics as an art form:

The comics fail badly as art despite their pretension to seriousness—or perhaps because of it. They have about the same relation to serious art that a tract like *Pierce Pennilesse* has to *Paradise Lost*. . . . As objects of serious study, they rank considerably higher. They will offer much information to future historians as

to how we lived, how we acted, and, in a large sense, how we (the thickening mass) responded. . . . As factors in shaping a nation's emotional and intellectual responses, they deserve much more study than they have yet received.⁸

2

In his consideration of "The Primitive Heroic Ideal," E. Talbot Donaldson says: "put most simply, the heroic ideal was excellence. The hero-kings strove to do better than anyone else the things that an essentially migratory life demanded. . . ."⁹ Fighting was of course the primary activity, as it is so often in pop romance, and it is on those few violent hours in *Beowulf's* life when he wins his three great victories that the Anglo-Saxon *scop* concentrates rather than upon his youth or years of kingship. Violence, it might be added, is also a preoccupation of Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, and it gets its due in *Paradise Lost* as well, in spite of Milton's intention to frame a "higher Argument" (IX, 42). Pop romance is frequently attacked for its own preoccupation with violence, but its critics do not always recognize that violence is seldom gratuitous; as in epic poems it is usually if not always effectively moralized: the resounding "Pow!" as Batman's fist connects with the Joker's jaw signals not only retribution but the re-establishment of moral order.

The plot of the first section of *Beowulf*—the bringing of order to the chaos that is Heorot through the deeds of the stranger-hero, and thus bringing stability and security to a community near collapse—has been utilized so often as to seem formula by now. The Western, of course, employs it over and over again.

⁶Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York, 1968), pp. 74-75.

⁷Holland, pp. xiii-xiv; Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 104, 116-17.

⁸"Our Serious Comics," *The Funnies*, p. 109.

⁹In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, gen. ed. M. H. Abrams, rev. ed. (New York, 1968), I, 3.

In a popular television series of a few years back, *Have Gun, Will Travel*, this formula shaped almost every episode. The hero, a gun-fighter-knight-errant (appropriately named Paladin), continually rode out to rid a variety of communities of a variety of Grendels. A typical episode begins in San Francisco, where Paladin lives like royalty, surrounded by retainers male and female. When the call comes, however, he abandons his sybaritic life without hesitation and exchanges his foppish apparel for a basic black Western outfit symbolic of his deadly role. Although he usually rides alone, he is often joined by a decent citizen or two who serve as his temporary retainers. Upon these retainers and the community he succors Paladin bestows something of the courtesy that Beowulf shows to Hrothgar and the Geats. The rewards Paladin receives for his victories are, like Beowulf's, commensurate with the grave risks he takes, but he too is capable of exercising his talents for violence on the strength of a friendship or a principle, receiving for his victories only renewed fame.

The series which fixed the stranger-saviour most firmly in the imagination of mid-twentieth century America was of course *The Lone Ranger*. Conceived for juveniles, this series was so well received that it has appeared in all of the popular media. It is possible that the messianic overtones of the formula which *The Lone Ranger* so obviously played upon were partly responsible for its wide appeal: in times of crisis we look for a deliverer, a Beowulf or a Lone Ranger. The vague origins and the sudden departures of such heroes also serve to enhance their legends. These legends in time take on almost religious status, becoming myths which provide the communities not only with models for con-

duct but with the kind of heightened shared experiences which inspire and unify their members.

The final sequence of *Beowulf*, the hero's fight with the dragon, embodies still another formulaic plot, that of the resident-hero who champions the community in its struggle for self-preservation. This hero may or may not be the titular leader of the community, but he is always the *present* exemplification of the primitive kingly ideal (Hrothgar's heroism was in the past). "Dodge City," the archetypal community of the television Western, *Gunsmoke*, has a mayor, but it is the city's marshal, Matt Dillon, who guarantees its stability and security. "Gotham" not only has a mayor, but a police commissioner, a police chief, and squads of officers, but it is Batman who defeats the city's dragons. The ineffectuality of the forces of law and order and of the law itself seems almost a basic assumption both of epics and of pop romance.

The law frequently appears to be too complex or too cumbersome to deal with crises, so the hero, whether he is a real or titular king, becomes a law unto himself. Ian Fleming's "James Bond," a true primitive hero updated to espionage agent, is "licensed to kill." He is above the law not only of his own community but of the international community as well. So too are the agents featured in the television series, *Mission Impossible*. Unlike the individualistic Bond they operate in concert (the committee-as-hero?) and their numbers include the mandatory black man (a modern Tonto?) and the mandatory beautiful woman (a modern Britomart?). In their adventures these organization-man-heroes so frequently and blithely violate not only laws but human rights that they are warned before every mission that, if cap-

tured, they will be disavowed by the very national community which sends them forth. The legal and moral assumptions behind their activities are seldom questioned because these heroes, like Beowulf, are understood to be "on God's side," i.e., the community's. (It is only in the "low mimetic" and "ironic" modes that the question of whether God is on our side or on that of the big battalions can be entertained.)

The hero's antagonists, on the other hand, are depicted as being unresponsive to the community and the community's values, even if they happen to be residents. The antagonist may represent an alien community or only the community of the self, but the fact that he acts as a law unto himself is *not* glossed over. The *Beowulf*-poet stresses this: Grendel is of the exiled race of Cain, he inhabits that no-man's land where the influence of the community ends and what is in effect the jungle begins, and from that dark region he peers at the community and envies its happiness. Though he comes within the pale of the community by gaining control of Heorot, if only during the night, his natural element, his means of doing so puts him beyond the pale. The rules therefore need not apply to him: the only good renegade is a dead renegade.

Primitive heroes do not, however, have *carte blanche*. Although the community may be quite willing to waive *all* of its laws to ensure the defeat of its enemy, the hero cannot, for otherwise he loses face and his force as the repository of the community's values (which supposedly he is struggling to preserve). For heroes there seems to be a law of diminishing legal returns. He can violate some laws—against illegal search and seizure, for example—but he cannot violate others, particularly the unwrit-

ten laws of the community: killing the villain can eliminate the expense and delay in the community's vengeance entailed by the observation of due process, but the execution must take the form of a sword point or a bullet in the villain's chest, not in his back. It is to such a "code of the West" that Beowulf conforms when he undertakes to battle Grendel with his bare hands and Grendel's dam with a sword (a compensation for the disadvantage of fighting under water). This form of chivalry only allows for "equalizers"—in the "shootdown" it must be .38 against .38. Of course this code is binding upon heroes only; it is one of the crosses they bear but without which they might be difficult to distinguish from their codeless antagonists, the merely instinctual Grendels and cattle-rustlers.

In spite of the fact that the community itself is usually inferior in the quality of its collective life to the life of the hero, it is still in some sense above him. Its survival is the *summum bonum*, and the issue of community survival is one which can conveniently be invoked in any crisis in order to justify its actions, even the sacrifice of its best, the hero himself. For the community in both epic and pop romance is not only a social unit but a quasi-religious one. It is that which nurtures, controls, and protects the non-heroes who comprise it: the community giveth and the community taketh away. Its wars are holy wars and its champions, as noted above, become quasi-religious figures. Thus the Unferths or the cowardly shopkeepers whose action or inaction undermines the hero (and thus the community) come close to being not only traitors but apostates.

Invariably this community religion becomes cosmic: in Hrothgar's view Beowulf has been divinely sent to deliver his

people from a monster who is "at war with God" (although he appears to give real trouble only to the Geats). And Beowulf himself feels that he is under God's protection. His status as a messiah-figure receives the heaviest stress in the poem's climactic sequence, the fight with the dragon. This "worm" that flies by night, that is associated with fire, that lives somewhere below, shares at least in the archetype of Satan, whom Milton (in the "Nativity Ode") called "the old dragon underground." Beowulf's determination to save his people single-handedly, his going-forth with a band of twelve, one of whom initiated the chain of events which will lead to his death, and the *scop's* final description of him—"of world-kings the mildest of men and the gentlest"—all suggest an imitation of Christ. The image of the hero as gentle man which seems almost an afterthought in *Beowulf* is close to the formula in pop romance. "Clark Kent" is always "the mild-mannered reporter," and Steve Canyon's pipe-smoking is an obvious clue to his character. The image thrives too in the Western, the classic example being the mild hero (played by Gary Cooper) of the film, *High Noon*.

Heroes cannot, however, remain lambs: crises call for lions. And whether they take place in epics or in pop romance, crises usually require violent solutions. Violence indeed seems to be the reality of their worlds and it is in violent situations that the heroes are defined. Superman is somehow more "real" than the mousey "Clark Kent," Batman more "real" than the do-gooder "Bruce Wayne." Indeed, in this "civilian" alter ego, each of these heroes is suspected of being, like the youthful Beowulf, "slack, a young man unbold."

Beowulf must, in spite of his divine aura, be classified as a Type II hero. He

is "of mankind . . . the strongest of might," a prestigious swimmer, a supreme fighter, yet if you cut him, he bleeds. He belongs to the company of Batman and Paladin. One significant difference, however, between *Beowulf* and romance, pop or otherwise (and to some extent between *Beowulf* and *The Faerie Queene*), is the distinction between mortality and vulnerability. Spenser's heroes, like Batman and Paladin, are always being threatened with death but never die (or even age), whereas Beowulf not only ages but dies. And, unlike these other heroes he is intensely aware of fate and almost preoccupied with death. Transiency is his reality and this gives his story an additional dimension. The world of *The Faerie Queene* and, frequently, of the American Western, is largely static, a version of pastoral. "The Wild West," which existed for only a heartbeat in history, in fiction seems to exist out of time. Marshall Dillon's Dodge City resembles the town on Keats' Grecian urn, fixed forever. (This is very much the case with Spenser's "Faerie Lond" and Batman's "Gotham" as well.) Though populated, these places do not change nor does their populace. Only their heroes seem quite alive—and their villains also, who come and go and occasionally die. This tendency moves a romance-epic like *The Faerie Queene* and pop romance toward comedy while *Beowulf* approaches tragedy. And even though *Paradise Lost* involves tragic action in its story of Satan, the to-be-continued story of Adam and Eve takes the shape of elevated tragi-comedy, and the poem as a whole, with its promise of good coming out of evil, takes on the form of a history-play which is also a divine comedy.

3

In spite of the New Morality, the New

Theology, and all of the other forces which are said to be radically altering American society, it is possible to question whether real changes have taken place on all of the levels at which that society responds to art. If, for example, a social scientist were to perform a study to determine which are the twelve moral virtues of most importance to Americans, is it necessarily the case that he would come up with a list that would differ significantly from that of Edmund Spenser? The answer would seem to be "No," if one can trust the impressions one receives from editorials and letters-to-the-editor, from high-circulation magazines ranging from *Life* and the *Reader's Digest* to *Playboy*, from pulpits and from the soap boxes of television news and documentaries. Additional evidence to validate this hypothesis can be extracted from an examination of the heroes of pop romance, in whom the virtues treated by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, for example, live still.

While the main task of these heroes is to insure that Justice is done (American justice, community justice), in the process of doing so they, like Sir Calidore, exhibit Courtesy (in the narrow sense of chivalric manners and in the broad sense of integrity); they exemplify Friendship's highest ideal, *agape*, by being willing to lay down their lives for their friends; and finally, although some might deviate slightly from Temperance conceived of in terms of wine and women (though even this is not usual), the life of moderation is generally their way of life. Even the virtues of Chastity and Holiness, whose very naming can elicit smiles from the God-Is-Dead, Sexual Freedom generation, seem deeply rooted in the consciousness of even the young. Holiness may perhaps be redefined in terms of Zen or drug-expanded awareness

or Peace Corps-type service, and Chastity in terms of "I-Thou" relationships for sexual partners, but the spirit of the ideal still moves among us.

In pop romance, it is true, Holiness is something of a negative virtue. Men of the cloth and other pious folk are treated deferentially by a Superman, a Batman, or a Steve Canyon, but these heroes do not themselves espouse patently ecclesiastical causes. Churches remain sacred places and church-goers are often depicted as that segment of the populace which requires and merits secular as well as divine protection. Villains in pop romance, on the other hand, not infrequently appear as false religious figures (heirs of Archimago and Duessa), whether they be the phoney parsons of Westerns, the leaders of obscure and evil cults in modern adventures, or atheistic Communists of the type that Steve Canyon battles. Thus, although the heroes of pop romance appear to be essentially secular figures—and their creators take pains to avoid obvious religious controversy—they are in fact modern exemplars of Holiness, in the broad sense of having respect for religion, of being virtuous, and of being "on God's side." While they are not Christian militants, for the Word they spread is not the Gospel but "Justice" or "America," many pop heroes are not very far removed from the Puritan heroes of the seventeenth century. They are by implication and by default Protestants—there are rarely any Catholics, Jews, Muslims, or atheists in the foxholes of the fictive war against evil. And in his dogged and irresistible militancy on behalf of his cause, each pop hero resembles a one-man New Model Army.

Although their Chastity, like their Holiness, is more often implicit than explicit, the majority of the heroes of pop romance are still in the Spenserian tradi-

tion. Some viewers of *Gunsmoke* have long suspected that Miss Kitty, proprietress of the Dodge City saloon that Matt Dillon frequents, is no better than she should be, but the sexual overtones of their relationship remain muted. It is a standing joke among cinema buffs that the "Code of the West" permits the cowboy to kiss only his horse, but even today, in an era of attempts at making "realistic" Westerns, the hero is seldom permitted to be a rake. A really strong interest in sex is, in Westerns as in *The Faerie Queene*, usually reserved for villains.

Spenser's heroes are attractive to women, good and bad, and are sometimes attracted to women as other than objects of chivalric fulfillment. They are not professional virgins, even Britomart, but sex without full ecclesiastical and social sanctions is denied them. This is likewise the case with many of the heroes of pop romance; here as in most pastorals, sex is often portrayed as an intrusive force, leading the hero to unaccustomed excess and interfering with his performance of his duties. The male hero's dilemma is perfectly symbolized in the plight of Superman, who is forever having to rescue Lois Lane and forever rejecting her advances, but who, as "Clark Kent," degrades himself by making advances which she always spurns. Spenser's creation of the magnificent Bower of Bliss and his ruthless destruction of it show hardly more rigor than the tendency of the creators of pop romance to condemn their heroes to a largely sexless and even loveless existence. An exception to this tendency is to be found in recent "swinging" versions of the espionage-romance genre. Spy-heroes like James Bond and "Napoleon Solo," title-figure of the television series, *The Man from UNCLE*, who, as noted above, are already to a

great extent outside both the law and the culture, apparently have licenses to fornicate as well as to kill. They are hedonist-heroes of the New Morality. Yet their popularity, enormous for a year or two, already seems on the wane, which may indicate that Spenser's ideal of Chastity is still operative beneath the surface of our supposedly liberated culture.

Spenser's very idealism makes the classification of his hero-types difficult. The deliberately non-realistic world he creates complicates the establishment of correspondences with our own world by which the hero is partially defined. The world of *The Faerie Queene*, being itself supernatural, is sometimes superior to the heroes and sometimes not. Since this world does not operate according to natural law in the first place, it seemingly cannot accommodate the Type III hero at all. Furthermore, Spenser's heroes themselves, informed as they are by so many levels of allegorical meaning but so little characterization, cannot readily be distinguished from each other. "Ordinary" human characters (like Colin Cloute perhaps), who might establish some kind of norm by which the heroes might be measured are relatively few and far between. "Faerye Land" seems to be populated mainly by heroes and villains. The majority of the former are clearly Type II heroes; in a few cases, however, there is another possibility.

As Spenser's letter to Raleigh explains, Prince Arthur is "perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised." Such perfection, summarized in the supreme virtue of Magnanimity, makes him "superior in *kind*" to even the other great heroes in the poem, and he is also superior to them in that he possesses a shield whose powers go beyond even the supernatural. This being the case, he is also superior to his "en-

vironment," the supernatural land of Faerie. Spenser does not call him a god, for this would compromise the Christian level of his allegory, but he gives the impression of being one. He is the deliverer, one who comes in glory, and will come again. Thus, along with his beloved, "That greatest glorious queene," Gloriana, the descendent of "either spright/Or angell" (II.10.1xxi), Arthur can be considered a Type I hero.

Two other possibilities for this classification present themselves. Although Talus, the "yron man" of Book V, is Artegall's squire, like God he is "Immoveable, resistlesse, without end," and, like Christ he "thresht out falshood, and did truth unfould" (V.1.xii). In his inhumanity—or more precisely, his a-humanity—he foreshadows Superman, whose human traits really emerge only when he is "Clark Kent." In Talus and in Superman the *deus ex machina* has become "the machine god," but in the case of the latter a poetic fantasy has been replaced by a technical fantasy; Superman, the man of tomorrow, "is the promise that each and every world problem will be solved by the technical trick."¹⁰

The mechanical savagery of Talus in some respects has its counterpart in the "natural" savagery of Calepine's rescuer (Book VI). Although he is, like Talus, a minor character, the "salvage man" is very close at least to being a Type I hero for he is quintessentially good, invincible, and rendered invulnerable through "magicke leare" (VI.4.iv). A Superman *sans* cape and leotards, he is also a "Clark Kent," capable of being "enmoved" to feel compassion. Without losing his god-like powers or his identity he can exhibit "milde humanity and perfect gentle mynd" (VI.5.xxix). His case

is an example of how in its smallest as well as its largest developments Spenser's poem moves toward unity and identity whereas Superman's illustrates what seems to be the schizoid tendency of twentieth-century imaginings.

Although a Redcrosse or a Britomart is so far above us that we may be lulled into thinking of them as gods, if we remain responsive to Spenser's descriptions and his narrative it is evident that they are Type II heroes. Like Batman they are vulnerable and capable of error, though Batman's errors tend to be tactical, theirs human or moral; they can be overpowered by human, natural, or supernatural forces (technological forces in the case of Batman). Their human weaknesses get them into difficulties from which neither their physical nor their moral strength can extricate them. Unlike Adam they are not "sufficient": all Type II and Type III heroes are in fact fallen men. Being fallen and thus incomplete they frequently need assistance. Indeed assistants are a fixture of Type II heroes: as Redcrosse has his Una, Britomart her Glaucé, and Artegall his Talus, so Batman has his Robin. Assistants come in handy for purposes of plot: they can be separated from the hero and become involved in sub-plots of their own, from which they may need to be rescued by the hero; or the separation, which weakens the hero, can create a crisis in his own plot from which the assistant can extricate him. An assistant can serve as confidant or as foil to the hero. As foils they are both like the hero and unlike him—Una's Revealed Truth complements the Holiness of Redcrosse as Robin's boyish exuberance complements Batman's mature energy. In general assistants are inferior both physically and mentally to the Type II hero, but together, as a "dynamic duo," they ap-

¹⁰Heinz Politzer, "From Little Nemo to Li'l Abner," *The Funnies*, p. 51.

proach the perfection of the Type I hero. Nonetheless, they still lack his invulnerability.

In a sense it is mankind's very vulnerability as well as his virtues and powers that is as much a major theme of *The Faerie Queene* as it is of *Beowulf*. And it is in *Paradise Lost* that this theme receives its most explicit and fullest treatment.

4

The charge that *Paradise Lost* is merely a monument to dead ideas, re-issued from time to time by scholars, is today not infrequently heard from students. And while the Milton instructor can attempt to maintain his pedagogical leverage by replying that *Paradise Lost* is not a poem which the reader judges but which judges the reader, this sort of *ad hominem* argument is not likely to sway students who are as seriously concerned about relevance as they are about esthetics. Nor are the arguments of scholars like Douglas Bush, in which the historical importance of Christianity is used to justify Milton's ways to his readers, likely to convince students who see past Christianity as a largely malign force and better forgotten and present Christianity as largely irrelevant.

Although it has tried to avoid entering into the great debate about literature and relevance, this paper has argued that the long term appeal of works of art and the shorter but more widespread appeal of works of demi- or pseudo-art of popular culture suggest that both have *some* kind of relevance for those who respond to them, and it may be the *same* kind of relevance. That relevance is not narrowly temporal, not necessarily political or social or economic, but rather moral (or perhaps "pscho-moral")—having to do with deep-seated values of our culture.

That *Paradise Lost* can be shown to have this kind of relevance—to issues like Freedom and Authority which consciously preoccupy students, and to assumptions about such issues which they unconsciously receive from pop culture—can not only help to satisfy their real doubts about the expense of their time and spirit in reading the poem, but can render them more responsive to its esthetic power. For example, it can be suggested that the kind of Instruction and Delight they can receive from Milton's epic bears marked resemblances to the Instruction they unconsciously absorb and the Delight they consciously derive from that contemporary attempt at a pop television epic, *Star Trek*.

The fact that *Star Trek* involves space travel via physics rather than metaphysics gives the program a certain technological relevance, but this seems to interest most students less than the use of space travel as metaphor. That metaphor is suggested by the pronouncement which opens every program: "Space, the final frontier." A frontier, of course, archetypally demands a quest: "These are the voyages of the star-ship, 'Enterprise,' its five-year mission—to explore strange new worlds . . . to boldly go where no man has ever gone before." These new worlds are as full of wonder to the space explorers as the newly-created Earth and its cosmos are to Milton's Adam. Like him they have some knowledge, much of it stored in computers, but there is still a great deal that they do not know or understand. Their quest is for knowledge for its own sake rather than for power, as Adam's should be. They too have only one over-arching prohibition, but theirs has to do not with a Tree of Knowledge, for they are free to pluck knowledge where they can; rather they are forbidden to use their

knowledge and the power it gives them to upset the “natural” order of things, the patterns of development of these strange new worlds and their cultures. Upon this “sole command” hangs the plot of many of the hour-long episodes (as does the plot of *Paradise Lost*). Milton is more daring than the writers of *Star Trek* (and has been condemned for it), for he confronts the question of the prohibition squarely and attempts to resolve it. In some episodes of *Star Trek* the one prohibition of the space voyagers is in fact violated, but this is either glossed over or vaguely justified by talk of Justice or Freedom. Such justification of means by ends is, as we have seen, characteristic of pop romance—and despite its pretensions to epic status, *Star Trek* is episodic rather than organic, and prosaic rather than poetic, all in all merely above-average pop romance.

From its opening scene, which each week shows “The Enterprise” boring majestically through space toward the viewer and then away—a cinemagraphic version of Milton’s grand descriptions of dazzling flights through vast perspectives—to the program’s denouement, in which the voyagers, reunited after the physical, psychological or intellectual separation brought about by that week’s crisis, again are ready to face together the new worlds which lie “all before them,” the analogues between *Star Trek* and *Paradise Lost* are many. But this paper’s limitations require that our focus be concentrated upon the hero figures.

Obviously Milton’s God and His Son are not only Type I heroes but classic definitions of the archetype itself. Divine, invincible, invulnerable, they are the embodiments of all positive absolutes. The question of Milton’s Arianism need not detain us here, for insofar as we are concerned with making discriminations

among dramatic figures, whatever distinction exists between Milton’s God and his Christ is without a difference. Milton is no polytheist. Nor are the creators of *Star Trek*: in one episode, the commander of the space ship, faced with a “convert or die” dictum from a cosmic pagan “god,” coolly replies that he and his crew are content with one god. But such specifically religious allusions are as rare in *Star Trek* as they are in other pop romances. Of more importance in the series is the role of its god-surrogate, “Star Fleet Command.”

“Star Fleet Command” is the pan-galactic supreme authority under which the voyagers of “The Enterprise” operate. Though by implication it is not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent, for it is composed presumably of humans or humanoids, “Star Fleet Command” affects the image of, and has at least some of the qualities of, the Type I hero. Like Milton’s God it communicates with those who serve it without being physically present, yet its “spiritual” presence is continually felt. Allusions are frequently made to it, to the great chain of cosmic being which it heads and by which the voyagers are circumscribed, to the mission on which it has sent them, and to its great prohibition. The marvellous “world” the voyagers inhabit, the space ship, is a mechanical Garden of Eden, the creation of “Star Fleet Command,” and evidence of the latter’s usual superiority to the cosmic environment. It supplies all of the voyagers’ needs and wants, and requires of them work that is mainly supervisory—tending computers rather than shrubbery. Given “Star Fleet Command’s” power, glory and begninity, it is understandable that the voyagers respond to it as pre-lapsarian Adam and Eve do to God.

One important difference between

Milton's characters and the space heroes is that the latter—in terms of the fiction in which they operate—seem really to be “sufficient”: like Adam and Eve they have free choice, but they do not fall. They are (or are made to appear) “obedient.” This obedience often goes unquestioned by the same students who complain of the unquestioning obedience required of Adam and Eve by Milton's God. Since “Star Fleet Command” is a collective authority composed of mortals it may be more acceptable to collectivist students familiar with bureaucracies than the monarch-deity of *Paradise Lost*, yet the functions and effects of the two authority-figures are very much the same.

If the terms by which Type II heroes are classified by Frye can be interpreted to include anthropomorphic as well as strictly human figures, the unfallen angels of *Paradise Lost* can be accommodated in this category. Such a classification must, however, remain somewhat tentative due to the ambiguities in the Christian tradition of angels and to Milton's artistically ambiguous handling of that tradition. Satan calls the angels “gods” and so does Milton as narrator, but the equivocation of the former, which implies that “god” equals “God,” is vigorously rejected by the latter. Angels look like men or can at least assume human form, but whether they can be annihilated or not is a question left unanswered by the poem—though it seems reasonable (despite Belial) that since God is omnipotent and to annihilate them would not involve Him in self-contradiction, angels are vulnerable. And although they are excellence itself on their own level of being, it is certain that even the good angels are not perfect. They are not omnipotent: even Michael can only wound Satan and

the forces he leads cannot win the war in heaven unassisted. They can be humiliated psychologically and physically. They are not omniscient: Gabriel, Uriel and Abdiel all are duped by Satan. Finally, they are not omnipresent: they seemingly can suspend the laws of motion, but not of space. Like the fallen angels their individualization by Milton is effected through portraying them with human frailties: Uriel is gullible (Book III), Gabriel and his crew hot-tempered (Book IV), and Raphael somewhat prudish (Book VIII). Yet student-Satanists, who are likely to be repelled by the good angels, tend to respond with affection to their Type II analog in *Star Trek*, “Mr. Spock.”

Like the visitant angels of Milton's Garden, Mr. Spock is an outsider who is nonetheless intimately involved in the fate of the Earthlings aboard “The Enterprise.” He is a native of the planet Vulcan, and although this makes him still a citizen of Earth's galaxy as the angels are citizens of Milton's Ptolemaic universe, he is, like them, “different.” Milton's angels look like both Adam and Eve, except they have wings; Spock looks like the Earthlings, except that he has exceptionally long, pointed ears. (These and his sharp features give his face a Satanic cast, a fact which in one episode became a source of some comic relief.) But what mainly serves to set Spock apart is that this Vulcan (supposedly) is a creature of almost pure Reason. Thus constituted he enjoys the cerebral kind of superiority over the other voyagers that the angels, possessing vast intuitive knowledge, enjoy over Adam and Eve. Spock is so rational that he usually functions like a non-human, superbly controlled, thinking machine. On occasion he succumbs momentarily to the human emotion of love—a “weakness” apparently attribu-

table to the fact that his mother was an Earthling—but only love in its highest form, Friendship. He is a reluctant Neo-Platonist. Given these qualities it is appropriate that he serves as Science Officer of “The Enterprise.” With a touch of either irony or inconsistency, Spock’s foil is another scientist, the ship’s Medical Officer, “Dr. McCoy,” whose characteristic emotionality provides a sharp contrast to Spock’s impassivity.

Spock’s metabolism is also different from that of humans, and the moments in various episodes when references are made to his green blood or to his patently symbolic lack of a heart call to mind Raphael’s disquisition on the dietary and digestive habits of angels in Book V. Even Spock’s Vulcanian sex life sets him apart from humans, for it seems strictly instinctual, or even mechanical, as ambiguous as the “Union of Pure with Pure” that Raphael perfunctorily alludes to (VIII, 627). Also like Raphael, Spock serves as a kind of guardian angel to the crew of “The Enterprise.” He is sometimes the only source of the information or insight which will enable the voyagers to understand what is happening to them or which will allow them to resolve a critical problem. He possesses unusual physical powers as well, and although not invulnerable, he has amazing capacities of endurance and recuperation. All of these positive features would appear to be offset, however, by the image Spock projects: his appearance is forbidding, his manner precise to the point of stiffness and austere to the point of arrogance. And yet according to television reports, which also can be borne out by informal samplings of student opinion, Mr. Spock is the most popular character of *Star Trek*, more popular even than its nominal hero (to be discussed below).

It seems ironic that a hero who rep-

resents Pure Reason should evoke so positive a response from the turned-on generation. Yet even Neo-Romantics seek security, and Spock’s presence, like that of Milton’s angels, is a constant and frequently explicit reminder to his companions and to his audience of the essential rationality of the cosmos. Like the comforting Raphael, he is physical and intellectual proof that order is real and ultimately dominant. And although even Spock cannot achieve within himself the degree of order that is present in nature, he possesses it to an extent to which we can only aspire, and frequently do. Thus, like all Type II heroes, he is a repository of our values, in this case especially that value which seems to be of paramount importance to today’s students—“keeping one’s cool.”

Much closer to us in the way that Milton’s Adam is closer to us is the chief Type III hero of *Star Trek*, “Captain James Kirk,” commander of “The Enterprise.” Kirk is a post-lapsarian Adam, flawed and recognizably human, but still as markedly superior to the other humans of the space ship community as Milton’s Adam is to his Eve. As Captain he is legally superior to Mr. Spock, his Executive Officer, but he projects another kind of superiority as well: he seems more “complete”—which may be a way of saying that he seems more like us. Few readers of *Paradise Lost* would deny that in Adam Milton has created a character who is more interesting, more believable, and more sympathetic than his good angels. The writers of *Star Trek* seem to have made such an attempt with Captain Kirk who, though he lacks Spock’s superb mind, has what Spock lacks—human feelings, imagination, and a responsiveness to those fields of force which are produced by imagination’s fusing of reason and emotion, ethics

and metaphysics. Because logic is not life such qualities do make Kirk a better captain than Spock. Many of the predicaments in which the voyagers find themselves cannot be resolved by mere logic or the accumulation of more data.

Kirk has hunches and he will take a gamble when the odds are against him; Spock is always pragmatic. Kirk can opt for Humanity or Freedom or for just the satisfaction of his curiosity; Spock always opts for Security. Kirk is an idealist, Spock a philosophical materialist. And Kirk is almost always right. That he is occasionally wrong, always vulnerable, quite capable of being misled or confused or physically bested, confirms him as a Type III hero. Spock is sometimes "wrong," but never illogical; the virtual stasis of his character gives him still another affinity with Milton's good angels. Like Adam, however, Kirk develops—if the term "development" can be stretched to cover changes of mind and heart within single episodes (development over the course of the series is less evident in him). Why then Kirk has proved less popular than Spock during the three years the program has run is as difficult to determine as why Milton's Satan has been more "popular" than his Adam. It may be that aspiration (which is our primary orientation to Type II heroes) is more satisfying than identification (which is more possible with Type III heroes).

Although Captain Kirk has authority over the several hundred persons who make up the crew of "The Enterprise" and Milton's Adam over only one, both the space ship and the Garden are communities. Both are organized along apparently rigid hierarchical lines, but in both cases this technically strict relationship is extensively modified by the hu-

man element, and especially love. The relationship of Adam and Eve has its sexual side of course, but Milton makes it clear that their wedded love includes *agape* as well as *eros*. The sexual side of community life aboard the space ship surfaces only occasionally; much more emphasis is laid upon the love which welds Kirk and his subordinates into a band of brothers. It is both as fellow officers and as loving friends that, in spite of his rank, they freely advise him and even chide or correct him. And when crisis comes they are as willing to lay down their lives for him as he for them. (It occasionally becomes as cloying as the mutual admiration society of Adam and Eve.) Nonetheless the "Link of Nature" which binds the latter together binds the space voyagers as well (and more firmly than the Link of Authority); it makes both their quests the quest of a community.

The chief ethical principle of both communities (after Obedience) is that of Temperance or Moderation, "The rule of not too much" (XI.531); it is what Adam and Eve come to learn and the voyagers are continually re-learning. For excess is the community's enemy within, whether it be the excessive pride of Eve, the excessive love of Adam, the excessive rationality of Mr. Spock, or the excessive emotionality of Dr. McCoy. Captain Kirk, despite his vagaries, is the exemplar of the *via media*, as Adam is in the process of becoming towards the end of *Paradise Lost*. The threats to both communities from without also involve some form of excess, whether it be the *hybris* of Satan or of some galactic dictator. Obedience will of course limit excess for this is a function of hierarchical systems ideally, but it can only be cured by Moderation, which involves a judicious perception of one's limitations

in relation to the natural or legitimate forces which control him and his environment. Thus the undergraduate who writhes at Adam's exclamation, "Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best" (XII.561) and who accepts unquestioningly the obedience of the crew to Kirk or of Kirk to "Star Fleet Command" courts inconsistency. That undergraduate might reply that the space voyagers at least are not required to love "Star Fleet Command" and to worship it, but the fact is that the faith the voyagers have in their supreme authority approaches the religious. This sense of the religious is intensified by the paramilitary nature of the relationship; the community of "The Enterprise," with its ranks and rituals, is as soldierly a community as Milton's Heaven or its parody, Hell.

The grand paradox of *Paradise Lost*—"That all this good of evil shall produce,/ And evil turn to good" (XII.470-471), is also an implicit theme of *Star Trek*. A brief account of one episode, rather poorly conceived and executed, but significant for the purposes of this essay, will illustrate. Captain Kirk leads a small scouting party down to an unknown planet of Edenic aspect, with "Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gums and Balm," with "Lawns, or level Downs," and "umbrageous Grotts and Caves" (IV.248-257). Its parallels with the mythic Garden are remarked upon, and to insure that the point gets across, a young man and young woman in the party begin to let *amour* interfere with their scientific duties. But the idyll does not last long: one man is killed by a dart-hurling flower, another by an explosive rock, and a third by a literal bolt from the blue. The inhabitants of the planet, who have had nothing to do with these deaths, turn out to be a small tribe of gentle people who know nothing

of violence or death. They know nothing of sex either (the writer of the episode apparently choosing to follow Gregory Nicene rather than Milton). They are also ageless: in this Arcadia, true to the pastoral tradition, spring is eternal and nothing changes.

This Eden's presiding deity (who may be a computer) is a jealous god and he orders the Edenites to kill the strangers; but the former, being amateur Cains, are no match for the post-lapsarian voyagers. Meanwhile, the "god," it is learned, is not "sufficient": it needs sources of energy outside itself and begins to draw "The Enterprise" out of orbit. When Kirk decides that this "god" must be destroyed Mr. Spock objects that to do so will alter the cultural pattern of the Edenites and thus violate the one prohibition of "Star Fleet Command." But there is the space ship to save, and as the passionate Dr. McCoy also points out, the Edenites are mere slaves of their "god," knowing no growth or progress. Spock, more ironically than Michael to Adam, reminds him of the unhappy history of man which is sometimes called "progress," but Kirk nonetheless decides to play Satan to this bad "god." He succeeds, and saves both his community and that of the Edenites, whose first fruits of freedom seem to be intimations of sexuality: fade-out with a teenage Adam and Eve smirking at each other.

This episode, like most of those of *Star Trek*, can be viewed as a rather crude morality play, updated with a new metaphor and given a thin veneer of mainly technological sophistication. Artistically marginal, as doctrine this and other episodes might well have won even John Milton's approval: in their destruction of false gods the crew of "The Enterprise" performs a Messianic office. New Adams, they recapitulate

the “plain heroic magnitude” of Samson and of Christ.

5

There can be little doubt, among scholars at least, that Milton, Spenser, and the *scop* of *Beowulf* believed that their epics were relevant to their times, and in the case of Milton certainly, Spenser probably, and the Anglo-Saxon poet possibly, relevant for all time. While the intentions and assumptions of the creators of pop romance may be less evident, there can be little doubt that a part of the vast popularity their efforts enjoy must be due to the special kinds of relevancy which they have for their audiences. If the present generation

of students is to be introduced to *Beowulf*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Paradise Lost* mainly because of their esthetic and historical importance, that introduction—this paper has argued—may be facilitated and perhaps even enriched if these students can be brought to recognize that our western values have persisted remarkably down through the ages to even the present time through a variety of literary forms and through diverse media; that on this level alone the great English epics can speak to them and to their condition; and that they can speak in language and in modes to which the popular forms so familiar to them sometimes aspire, but seldom achieve.