

MOYERS: *Joseph Campbell once said all the great myths, the ancient great stories, have to be regenerated in every generation. He said that's what you are doing with Star Wars. You are taking these old stories and putting them into the most modern of idioms, the cinema. Are you conscious of doing that? Or are you just setting out to make a good action-movie adventure?*

LUCAS: With *Star Wars* I consciously set about to re-create myths and the classic mythological motifs. I wanted to use those motifs to deal with issues that exist today. The more research I did, the more I realized that the issues are the same ones that existed 3,000 years ago. That we haven't come very far emotionally.

MOYERS: *The mesmerizing figure in The Phantom Menace to me is Darth Maul. When I saw him, I thought of Lucifer in Paradise Lost or the devil in Dante's Inferno. He's the Evil Other—but with powerful human traits.*

LUCAS: Yes, I was trying to find somebody who could compete with Darth Vader, who is now one of the most famous evil characters. So we went back into representations of evil. Not only the Christian, but also Hindu and other religious icons, as well as the monsters in Greek mythology.

MOYERS: *What did you find in all these representations?*

LUCAS: A lot of evil characters have horns. [Laughs.]

MOYERS: *And does your use of red suggest the flames of hell?*

LUCAS: Yes. It's a motif that I've been using with the Emperor and the Emperor's minions. I mean, red is an aggressive color. Evil is aggressive.

MOYERS: *Is Darth Maul just a composite of what you found in your research, or are we seeing something from your own imagination and experience?*

LUCAS: If you're trying to build an icon of evil, you have to go down into the subconscious of the hu-

man race over a period of time and pull out the images that equate to the emotion you are trying to project.

MOYERS: *What emotion do you feel when you look at Darth Maul?*

LUCAS: Fear. You wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley. But he's not repulsive. He's something you should be afraid of, without [his] being a monster whose intestines have been ripped out and thrown all over the screen.

MOYERS: *Is the emotion you wanted from him different from the emotion you wanted from Darth Vader?*

LUCAS: It's essentially the same, just in a different kind of way. Darth Vader was half machine, half man, and that's where he

lost a lot of his humanity. He has mechanical legs. He has mechanical arms. He's hooked up to a breathing machine. This one is all human. I wanted him to be an alien, but I wanted him to be human enough that we could identify with him.

MOYERS: *He's us?*

LUCAS: Yes, he's the evil within us.

MOYERS: *Do you know yet what, in a future episode, is going to transform Anakin Skywalker to the dark side?*

LUCAS: Yes, I know what that is. The groundwork has been laid in this episode. The film is ultimately about the dark side and the light side, and those sides are designed around compassion and greed. The issue of greed, of getting things and owning things and having things and not being able to let go of things, is the opposite of compassion—of not thinking of yourself all the time. These are the two sides—the good force and the bad force. They're the simplest parts of a complex cosmic construction.

MOYERS: *I think it's going to be very hard for the audience to accept that this innocent boy, Anakin Skywalker, can ever be capable of the things that we*

OF MYTH AND MEN

**A conversation between
Bill Moyers and George
Lucas on the meaning of
the Force and the true
theology of *Star Wars***

know happen later on. I think about Hitler and wonder what he looked like at nine years old.

LUCAS: There are a lot of people like that. And that's what I wonder. What is it in the human brain that gives us the capacity to be as evil as human beings have been in the past and are right now?

MOYERS: You've been probing that for a while now. Have you come to any conclusion?

LUCAS: I haven't. I think it comes out of a rationale of doing certain things and denying to yourself that you're actually doing them. If people were really to sit down and honestly look at themselves and the consequences of their actions, they would try to live their lives a lot differently. One of the main themes in *The Phantom Menace* is of organisms having to realize they must live for their mutual advantage.

MOYERS: Have you made peace with the fact that people read into your movies what you didn't necessarily invest there?

LUCAS: Yes, I find it amusing. I also find it very interesting, especially in terms of the academic world, that they will take a work and dissect it in so many different ways. Some of the ways are very profound, and some are very accurate. A lot of it, though, is just the person using their imagination to put things in there that really weren't there, which I don't mind either. I mean, one of the things I like about *Star Wars* is that it stimulates the imagination, and that's why I don't have any qualms about the toys or about any of the things that are going on around *Star Wars*, because it does allow young people to use their imagination and think outside the box.

MOYERS: What do you make of the fact that so many people have interpreted your work as being profoundly religious?

LUCAS: I don't see *Star Wars* as profoundly religious. I see *Star Wars* as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them down into a more modern and easily accessible construct—that there is a greater mystery out there. I remember when I was 10 years old, I asked my mother, "If there's only one God, why are there so many religions?" I've been pondering

that question ever since, and the conclusion I've come to is that all the religions are true.

MOYERS: Is one religion as good as another?

LUCAS: I would say so. Religion is basically a container for faith. And faith in our culture, our world and on a larger issue, the mystical level—which is God, what one might describe as a supernatural, or the things that we can't explain—is a very important part of what allows us to remain stable, remain balanced.



ICON OF EVIL: Darth Maul's satanic image is familiar, his power frightening to those in galaxies far or near

MOYERS: One explanation for the popularity of *Star Wars* when it appeared is that by the end of the 1970s, the hunger for spiritual experience was no longer being satisfied sufficiently by the traditional vessels of faith.

LUCAS: I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people—more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system. I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery. Not having enough interest in the mysteries of life to ask the question, "Is there a God or is there not a God?"—that is for me the worst thing that can happen. I think you should have an opinion about that. Or you should be saying, "I'm looking. I'm

very curious about this, and I am going to continue to look until I can find an answer, and if I can't find an answer, then I'll die trying." I think it's important to have a belief system and to have faith.

MOYERS: Do you have an opinion, or are you looking?

LUCAS: I think there is a God. No question. What that God is or what we know about that God, I'm not sure. The one thing I know about life and about the human race is that we've always tried to construct some kind of context for the unknown. Even the cavemen thought they had it figured out. I would say that cavemen understood on a scale of about 1. Now we've made it up to about 5. The only thing that most people don't realize is the scale goes to 1 million.

MOYERS: The central ethic of our culture has been the Bible. Like your stories, it's about the fall, wandering, redemption, return. But the Bible no longer occupies that central place in our culture today. Young people in particular are turning to movies for their inspiration, not to organized religion.

LUCAS: Well, I hope that doesn't end up being the course this whole thing takes, because I think there's definitely a place for organized religion. I would hate to find ourselves in a completely secular world where entertainment was passing for some kind of religious experience.

MOYERS: You said you put the Force into *Star Wars* because you wanted us to think on these things. Some people have traced the notion of the Force to Eastern views of God—particularly Buddhist—as a vast reservoir of energy that is the ground of all of our being. Was that conscious?

LUCAS: I guess it's more specific in Buddhism, but it is a notion that's been around before that. When I wrote the first *Star Wars*, I had to come up with a whole cosmology: What do people believe in? I had to do something that was relevant, something that imitated a belief system that has been around for thousands of years, and that most people on the planet, one way or another, have some kind of connection to. I didn't want to invent a religion. I wanted to try to explain in a different way the religions that have already existed. I wanted to express it all.

MOYERS: *You're creating a new myth?*

LUCAS: I'm telling an old myth in a new way. Each society takes that myth and retells it in a different way, which relates to the particular environment they live in. The motif is the same. It's just that it gets localized. As it turns out, I'm localizing it for the planet. I guess I'm localizing it for the end of the millennium more than I am for any particular place.

MOYERS: *What lessons do you think people around the world are taking away from Star Wars?*

LUCAS: *Star Wars* is made up of many themes. It's not just one little simple parable. One is our relationship to machines, which are fearful, but also benign. Then there is the lesson of friendship and symbiotic relationships, of your obligations to your fellowman, to other people that are around you. This is a world where evil has run amuck. But you have control over your destiny, you have many paths to walk down, and you can choose which destiny is going to be yours.

MOYERS: *I'm not a psychologist, I'm just a journalist, but it does seem to me there's something autobiographical with Luke Skywalker and his father—something of George Lucas in there.*

LUCAS: Oh, yes. There is, definitely. You write from your own emotions. And obviously there are two sides to the redeemer motif in the *Star Wars* films. Ultimately Vader is redeemed by his children and especially by having children. Because that's what life is all about—procreating and raising children, and it should bring out the best of you.

MOYERS: *So while Star Wars is about cosmic, galactic epic struggles, it's at heart about a family?*

LUCAS: And a hero. Most myths center on a hero, and it's about how you conduct yourself as you go through the hero's journey, which in all classical myth takes the form of a voyage of transformation by trials and revelations. You must let go of your past and must embrace your future and figure out what path you're going to go down.

MOYERS: *Is it fair to say, in effect, that Star Wars is your own spiritual quest?*

LUCAS: I'd say part of what I do when I write is ponder a lot of these issues. I

have ever since I can remember. And obviously some of the conclusions I've come to I use in the films.

MOYERS: *The psychologist Jonathan Young says that whether we say, "I'm trusting my inner voice," or use more traditional language—"I'm trusting the Holy Spirit," as we do in the Christian tradition—somehow we're acknowledging that we're not alone in the universe. Is this what Ben Kenobi urges upon Luke Skywalker when he says, "Trust your feelings"?*

what I've been trying to do in the films. What eventual manifestation that takes place in terms of how they describe their God, what form their faith takes, is not the point of the movie.

MOYERS: *And stories are the way to ask these questions?*

LUCAS: When the film came out, almost every single religion took *Star Wars* and used it as an example of their religion; they were able to relate it to stories in the Bible, in the Koran and in the Torah.



THE FORCE WITHIN: More than action heroes, Jedi like Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi are spiritual guides

MOYERS: *Some critics scoff at this whole notion of a deeper layer of meaning to what they call strictly kid stuff. I come down on the side that kid stuff is the stuff dreams are made of.*

LUCAS: Yes. It's much harder to write for kids than it is to write for adults. On one level, they will accept—they don't have constraints, and they're not locked into a particular dogma. On the other side, if something doesn't make sense to them, they're much more critical of it.

MOYERS: *So when you write, do you see your audience, and is that audience a 13-year-old boy?*

LUCAS: I make these films for myself more than I make them for anybody else. I'm lucky that the things that I believe in and the things that I enjoy and the things that entertain me entertain a large population. Sometimes they don't. I've made a bunch of movies that nobody has liked. So that doesn't always hold true. But I don't really make my films for an audience

per se. I'm hoping that a 12-year-old boy or girl will enjoy it. But I'm not dumbing it down. I think I'm making it with enough credibility so that anybody can watch it.

MOYERS: *It's certainly true that Star Wars was seen by a lot of adults, yours truly included. Even if I hadn't wanted to pay attention, I realized that I had to take it seriously because my kids were taking it seriously. And now my grandkids take it seriously.*

LUCAS: Well, it's because I try to make it believable in its own fantastic way. And I am dealing with core issues that were valid 3,000 years ago and are still valid today, even though they're not in fashion.

MOYERS: *Why are they out of fashion?*

LUCAS: Because the world we live in is more complex. I think that a lot of those moralities have been degraded to the point that they don't exist anymore. But the emotional and psychological part of those issues are still there in most people's minds.

MOYERS: *What do you mean by the "emotional" side?*

LUCAS: The importance of, say, friendship and loyalty. Most people look at that and say, "How corny." But the issues of friendship and loyalty are very, very important to the way we live, and somebody has got to tell young people that these are very important values. Young people are still learning. They're still picking up ideas. They are still using these ideas to shape the way they're going to conduct their lives.

MOYERS: *How do you explain the power of film to move us?*

LUCAS: It takes all the aspects of other art forms—painting, music, literature, theater—and puts them into one art form. It's a combination of all these, and it works on all the senses. For that reason it's a very alluring, kind of dreamlike experience. You sit in a dark room and have this other world come at you in a very realistic way.

MOYERS: *Wendy Doniger, who is a scholar of mythology at the University of Chicago, says that myths are important because they remind us that our lives are real and our lives are not real.*

We have these bodies, which we can touch, but we also have within us this omnipotent magical world of thought.

LUCAS: Myths tell us these old stories in a way that doesn't threaten us. They're in an imaginary land where you can be safe. But they deal with real truths that need to be told. Sometimes the truths are so painful that stories are the only way you can get through to them psychologically.

MOYERS: *Ultimately, isn't Star Wars about transformation?*

LUCAS: It will be about how young Anakin Skywalker became evil and then was redeemed by his son. But it's also about the transformation of how his son came to find the call and then ultimately realize what it was. Because Luke works

intuitively through most of the original trilogy until he gets to the very end. And it's only in the last act—when he throws his sword down and says, "I'm not going to fight this"—that he makes a more conscious, rational decision. And he does it at the risk of his life because the Emperor is going to kill him. It's only that way that he is able to redeem his father. It's not as apparent in the earlier movies, but when you see the next trilogy, then you see the issue is, How do we get Darth Vader back? How do we get him back to that little boy that he was in the first



KEEPING THE FAITH: Lucas and Moyers, at Skywalker Ranch, weigh the power of old stories in a new form

movie, that good person who loved and was generous and kind? Who had a good heart.

MOYERS: *In authentic religion, doesn't it take Kierkegaard's leap of faith?*

LUCAS: Yes, yes. Definitely. You'll notice Luke uses that quite a bit through the film—not to rely on pure logic, not to rely on the computers, but to rely on faith. That is what that "Use the Force" is, a leap of faith. There are mysteries and powers larger than we are, and you have to trust your feelings in order to access them.

MOYERS: *When Darth Vader tempts Luke to come over to the Empire side, offering him all that the Empire has to*

offer, I am taken back to the story of Satan taking Christ to the mountain and offering him the kingdoms of the world, if only he will turn away from his mission. Was that conscious in your mind?

LUCAS: Yes. That story also has been re-told. Buddha was tempted in the same way. It's all through mythology. The gods are constantly tempting. Everybody and everything. So the idea of temptation is one of the things we struggle against, and the temptation obviously is the temptation to go to the dark side. One of the themes throughout the

films is that the Sith lords, when they started out thousands of years ago, embraced the dark side. They were greedy and self-centered and they all wanted to take over, so they killed each other. Eventually, there was only one left, and that one took on an apprentice. And for thousands of years, the master would teach the apprentice, the master would die, the apprentice would then teach another apprentice, become the master, and so on. But there could never be any more than two of them, because if there were, they would try to get rid of the leader, which is exactly what Vader was trying to do, and that's exactly what the Emperor was trying to do. The Emperor was trying to get rid of Vader, and Vader was trying to get rid of the Emperor. And that is the antithesis of a symbiotic relationship, in which if you do that, you become cancer, and you eventually kill the host, and everything dies.

MOYERS: *I hear many young people today talk about a world that's empty of heroism, where there are no more noble things to do.*

LUCAS: Heroes come in all sizes, and you don't have to be a giant hero. You can be a very small hero. It's just as important to understand that accepting self-responsibility for the things you do, having good manners, caring about other people—these are heroic acts. Everybody has the choice of being a hero or not being a hero every day of their lives. You don't have to get into a giant laser-sword fight and blow up three spaceships to become a hero. ■

Bill Moyers' upcoming PBS specials will include Free Speech for Sale on June 8 and Fooling with Words in the fall