

hundred nuclear reactors), small-scale hydroelectricity, and other features of the "soft energy path," the Lovinses estimate that nuclear power could be phased out within the decade—by free market forces alone.

The authors propose a variety of reforms to cure various "market imperfections" and smooth out the soft path. Most would warm the heart of any libertarian: deregulate energy prices, end price and production subsidies, repeal zoning barriers to wind and solar energy, make utility commissions allow cogenerators to sell their surplus electricity, etc. The authors are scornful of government anti-solar propaganda, such as the claim, found in federal publications until recently, that "passive solar" techniques could not be used to heat existing structures; "some fifty thousand householders who didn't know that were meanwhile building passive solar greenhouses onto their homes, in which they now bask in February munching fresh tomatoes and reflecting

on the infirmities of government." A few "reforms," however, miss the point. "Why should a landlord retrofit a building whose tenants pay the utilities, or a cab company fix an inefficient taxi whose driver buys the gasoline?" The Lovinses suggest that some government intervention may be necessary in such cases. But market forces would suffice here as well as if tenants and drivers were free to go elsewhere. The best thing to do for the tenant is not to modify rent control laws (as the authors suggest) but to abolish them and all the other government depredations that restrict the supply of housing and permit landlords to get rich renting energy sieves. Such lapses are minor, and anyway the authors by their own admission are interested in "technical fixes" rather than the tithe of the tithe of free market rectitude. But there are several places where their arguments could have been improved by a dose of 190-proof libertarianism.

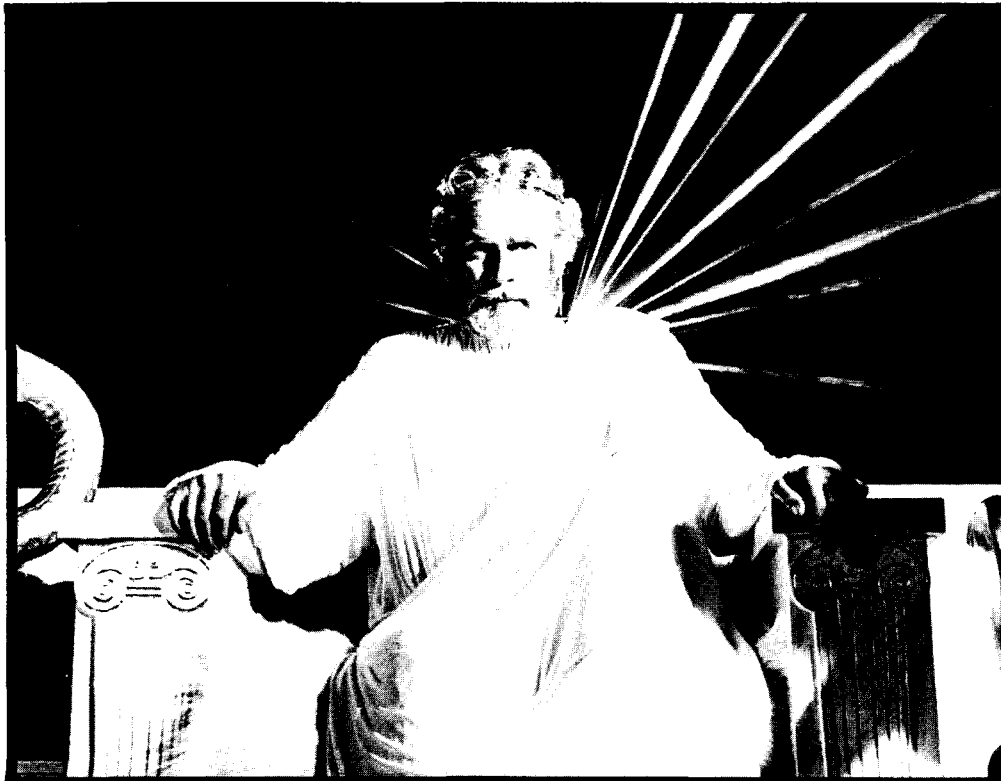
One such place is the chapter on nuclear disarmament. The

authors score the nuclear powers for piously denouncing proliferation even as they add to their own nuclear stockpiles, and propose the usual disarmament initiatives (mutual force reductions, test bans, etc.). But for "the key missing ingredient... promoting a psychological climate of denuclearization," the best they can do is suggest that leaders of the nuclear powers "frequently, publicly, prominently, and sincerely... regret their possession of bombs, emphasize the insecurity that bombs bring, and pray for their speedy elimination." Technical fixes are all very well, but we need more than prayer wheels, even wind-powered ones. What we need is a *non-interventionist foreign policy*, one which does not depend on nuclear sabre-rattling to counter foreign "threats." The authors deplore "NATO's continued emphasis on forward nuclear deployment," but fail to realize that, as Earl Ravenal pointed out in the April 1981 *LR*, this is implicit in the very concept of regional defense. It is also worth

pointing out, as the Center for Defense Information recently did, that military reactors produce most of this country's nuclear waste. As long as U.S. policy rests on the nuclear ships and subs of the "blue-water Navy," it can hardly be otherwise.

Nuclear power and nuclear weapons are branches of a tree with a single root: government intervention, at home and abroad. Our current rulers claim to oppose government intervention but subsidize the breeder reactor (and promote nuclear power in their official statements) and arm to the teeth to defend the American Empire. "To abandon nuclear power and its ancillary technologies," declare the authors, "does not require any government to embrace anti-nuclear sentiment or rhetoric. It can love nuclear power—provided it loves the market more." But how much longer must we wait?

Bill Birmingham is a contributing editor of *LR*.

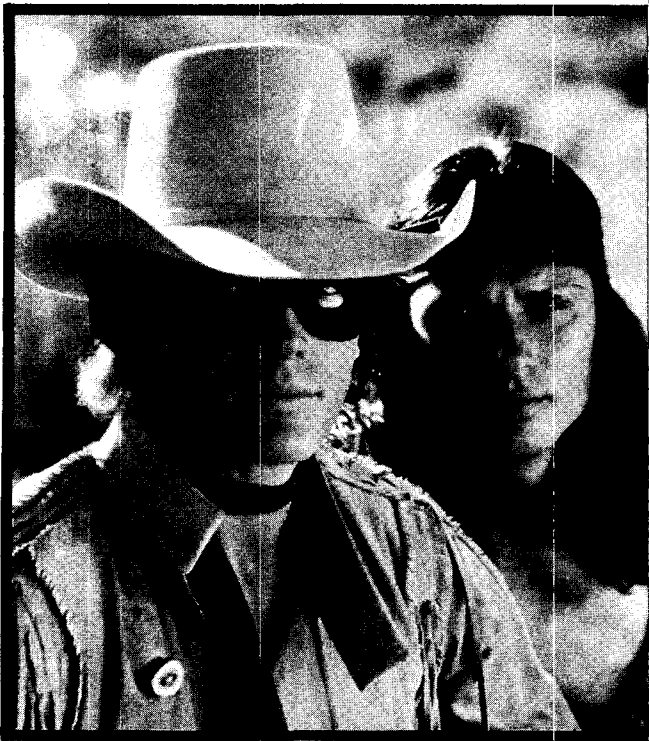


Zeus (Laurence Olivier) "sitting on his throne radiating light and giving off overwhelmingly illogical explanations of his pettiness" in the *Clash of the Titans*.

On View Brainstorms

DAVID BRUDNOY

IT MUST HAVE SEEMED A swell idea, the day somebody decided to remake *King Kong*; even sweller when, buoyed by its enthusiasm for the maker of *The Deer Hunter*, United Artists decided to write a blank check for Michael Cimino to do as he wished and spend what he wanted for *Heaven's Gate*; not to mention the giddy whoosh that came over the wizards who sat down one day and concocted a live-action *Popeye* starring a burnt-out case from television. How Lord Grade must have trembled with anticipation imagining the revenue that would roll in from a zillion-dollar extravaganza called *Raise the Titanic*, and think of the merriment in corporate suites all over Hollywood when the accountants began computing



The masked man (Klinton Spilsbury) and his faithful companion Tonto (Michael Horse) in *The Legend of the Lone Ranger*.

the likely windfall to come from a feature-length movie of *Star Trek*, with most of the original TV cast members resurrected for the ride. All of these ideas were theoretically nifty, *brainstorms*, surefire bonanzas; that they all turned to dross, well, them's the breaks. Big budget and lean, remakes and originals, star-studded and star-making — think of Otto Preminger scouring the land for his Joan of Arc and coming up with Jean Seberg! — the pitfalls are everywhere; the trail of disasters, as long as the yellow brick road of *The Wiz*. Herewith, the latest crop of brainstorms that ought to have been lobotomized.

Clash of the Titans

When better Olympuses are made, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer probably won't make them, not if *Clash of the Titans* is any indication. Not that the venerable Ray Harryhausen can be faulted for his fine special effects: his Pegasus with white wings flapping; his Medusa whose stare can kill a man, even when her head is not so delicately removed from her body; his Bubo the mechanical owl, a comical cousin to R2-D2; his sightless Stygian witches and ravenous sea-beasts; the works. As a marvel

of the art of integrating live action with miniaturized things, *Clash* delivers what it promises. It is its gods and mere mortals who ruin this tale of Perseus and Andromeda as lovers and as playthings of the divinities. It is ineptitude in those who should be convincing as the focus of romance, and archness, enough to construct the Coliseum, in the demeanor of the veterans who fret and fuss on Olympus, that set our teeth on edge. It is, to be blunt, atrocious acting and a script that makes you want to hide under the seat that put this *Clash of the Titans* in the category of all-time cinema catastrophes.

The story. Zeus (Laurence Olivier) and Thetis (Maggie Smith) are at it again, squabbling over their favorites on earth. Hera (Claire Bloom) is more or less accustomed to Zeus's shenanigans but Aphrodite (Ursula Andress) is looking super and wouldn't really object to a little mischief. In fact, the immortals, being eternal, and thus, presumably, eternally prone to boredom, never tire of this sort of thing. Which gives us one of Zeus's favorites among the mortals, dashing young Perseus (Harry Hamlin), whom Zeus bestows with gifts, among them the helmet to permit the lad to become invisible. As such, he travels to the boudoir of An-

dromeda (Judi Bowker) and falls instantly into love, whence flows the conflict, since to get the girl, the boy has to lift the curse inflicted by Calibos, which means combatting the kraken (one of those dreadful items from the sea) with a more powerful force. The three blind witches suggest the head of Medusa and away we go.

You may have guessed already how it all turns out. But to get to the happy ending we must endure two hours of bombast from the gods and scurrying around by poor lovesick Perseus. Lord Olivier is found now and again sitting on his throne radiating light and giving off overwhelmingly illogical explanations of his pettiness. This is burdensome enough. But even the full complexity of intra-Olympian rivalry is as nothing in its deadening effect on the audience compared to the awkwardness of the earthlings. Harry Hamlin is a fleshy, quite voluptuous fellow who, when dressed in twentieth-century clothes for *Movie*, *Movie* and allowed to be awkwardly engaging, succeeded quite nicely. Here he has been obliged to embody High Seriousness and to undergo many torments; he accomplishes the former by knitting his brow and the latter by writhing and permitting a bit of grime to soil his minitoga. As Perseus, in short, Mr. Hamlin is to be seen and not heard, though we hear all too much of him, the worst of it when he is engaged in making nice to Miss Bowker, an Andromeda fit for a Shaun Cassidy. Harry Hamlin and Judi Bowker set off no sparks; they barely suggest a flickering candle of affection, so impossibly unglamorous is she — she's flawless but has none of the sexiness that Mr. Hamlin's real-life lady friend, the mature Miss Andress, has in abundance — and so resolutely heroic and self-righteous is he. The youthful leads are exquisite but empty, the immortals are all strut and no conviction, and save for Burgess Meredith, as Perseus's pixieish buddy Ammon, there is not a significant performance in the film

that isn't either wisp-thin or congealed.

Clash of the Titans will delight children, at least those who aren't jaded owing to the excellent special effects of the *Star Wars* movies, but its effect on adults can only be profoundly depressing. We watch a galaxy of well-known performers and two attractive newcomers taking second place to Ray Harryhausen's delicious tricks. Here, surely, is a film that could as well — better, actually — have been assigned to Ralph Bakshi to do with cartoons and some discrete rotoscoping. *Clash of the Titans* emerges as a tussle of midgets.

The Legend of the Lone Ranger

Any saga of this title that takes more than an hour to get the hero into his mask is in trouble. When, in the mask, he looks as if he's headed for a western-garb disco on the Upper East Side, it's in very serious trouble indeed. Lord Grade is back at it, "presenting" again, but to pin the blame closer to home, know that Walter Coblentz produced and William A. Fraker directed it, Jason Robards popped into it for ten minutes to lend it some class as President Ulysses S. Grant, and two exceptionally green actors named Klinton Spilsbury and Michael Horse were discovered somewhere to do the honors as John Reid, a.k.a. the Lone Ranger, and his faithful Indian companion, Tonto. Mr. Horse has been employed no doubt in order to recompense the entire Indian population of these United States for decades of "ugh, kemosabe" Tontos, and if he sounds as if he had just taken a first in Classics at Oxford, never mind; *all* the Indians speak absolutely splendid English, each is more saintly than the next, and Mr. Horse can surely donate a portion of his earnings from this one to some worthy Indian cause before setting off on his inevitable career as a model for *Gentlemen's Quarterly*.

Mr. Spilsbury is saddled not only with a name that, at least

insofar as he will be known in films forevermore because of this western dud, is too appropriate by half, he also evidently has a voice that is so at odds with his appearance that much of his dialogue required dubbing by somebody else. He is surely the most debonair and attractive Lone Ranger ever brought to life on a screen of any size, so attractive, in fact, and so much Nature's imp in his moments of frolic with Tonto, that inappropriate thoughts about these two rush to mind. *The Legend of the Lone Ranger* brings closer to the surface than its makers must have wanted a certain speculation about just what the masked man and his buddy are up to when they're not rescuing President Grant.

As a spoof it would be, or at least could very possibly be, a hoot. All those snickering jokes we as smart-ass kids used to make about Batman and Robin and the Lone Ranger and Tonto: why not? But this is *not* intended as a put-on; it is an awesomely reverential movie, with a rhymed narration, no less, to keep us ever mindful of the thrill we are experiencing in seeing a classic tale brought to us anew. Much attention has been paid to establishing Reid's motivations for going into his mask, and for those who've forgotten how and why the Indian and his kemosabe (trusted friend) fell in with each other, we are handed the information in a nice, albeit gory, prologue set in 1854 when our heroes were boys. Moreover, the look of the picture is right: New Mexico, Utah, and Nevada landscape passes quite well for Hollywood's Texas. And we have a nicely nasty villain, one Cavendish, a disgraced Union officer, who kidnaps President Grant in order to get the United States to cede him the West for his own country. Also in its favor are the dramatic rescue scenes, one of Tonto by the masked man, the other of Grant by our dynamic duo. Perhaps if the movie were in Urdu or Farsi or Finnish, some language none of us knows, and subtitled, it might have

worked. Maybe the languidness of Mr. Spilsbury wouldn't then have been quite so obvious. I don't know what could have saved *Legend* other than different stars, faster pacing, less explanatory material, and a new script.

Probably nothing could rescue a movie from catastrophe when those who construct it find not one but two people who look like gigolos and can't act and then entrust them with the task of embodying two of the most revered heroes in American popular fiction. It is rather as if a new adventure of Sherlock Holmes were to be filmed, in all seriousness, starring Christopher Atkins (*The Blue Lagoon*) as Holmes and David Bowie as Watson. Are American audiences so starved for beauty on the screen that Hollywood thinks we'll take just *anybody* as any character whatsoever?

Just a Gigolo

Speaking of David Bowie, who *can* act and has acted very well in films and as the title character in *The Elephant Man* on Broadway, somebody had another brainstorm that wasn't so hot after all, and Bowie found himself caught in the crossfire. If *Cabaret* didn't exhaust your appetite for the 1920's German decadence and here come the Nazis routine, most likely nothing ever will. Certainly not *Just a Gigolo*, of which it can be said that everything, *everything*, from the opening credits to the last idiotic vignette, is abominable. How, you ask, can the opening credits be abominable? Let me tell you. When we are run through the list of stars (of whom I'll have more to say shortly) and are then stopped in our tracks by "And with pride, Marlene Dietrich," isn't enough said to prove the point? With *whose* pride? Director-actor David Hemmings's? If so, isn't he also proud to have Bowie star, and Kim Novak, still scrumptious, co-star, and Curt Jurgens do his Curt Jurgens number, and Maria Schell all dumpling-

ditsy as Bowie's mom? If he's proud because he got Dietrich back into films after 18 years, doesn't he owe her a role that isn't a towering embarrassment? Or if Marlene Dietrich is the one who is "with pride," of what is she proud? That she woodenly plays the Baroness Von Semering, doyenne of the gigolos, and sings a song which is also the title of the movie, though she's not a gigolo and the words she sings, off-key, of course, should be sung by one who is? Or is she proud that she... but there is no point in further speculation about the opening credits; they are only, for starters, what Mr. Hemmings has done badly in his capacity as director.

Bowie plays Paul, who is thought to have been killed in the war. When he returns, alive and well, everybody, especially his mother, regards him as somehow a bad boy for having lived. Paul falls into menial jobs and is a target for recruitment by Captain Kraft (Hemmings), a Nazi, but instead of going that route he becomes just a gigolo — ah ha — after having bedded Helga (Kim Novak) in a cemetery when her husband's funeral is interrupted by street fighting, and after having lost his Cilly (Sydney Rome), a lower class girl who goes to Hollywood and becomes a star. I won't tell you who is killed at the end and turned, perversely, into a Nazi martyr, but your guess will probably be right.

Everything fizzles in this bit of nonsense. All the actors, supposedly playing Germans, speak in different accents. Hemmings and Bowie are very British, the Germans very German, Novak sounds as if she had been taking voice lessons from Barbara Walters but then tried to forget what she learned, and Miss Rome sounds as if she had done five seasons of summer stock in Detroit, which she very well may have. Dubbing here and there, unsynchronized and quite obviously so, merely adds to the surrealist feeling the movie gives off. Once in a while a little joke relieves the deathly pall that hangs over this like a vul-

ture in Death Valley, though sometimes the jokes are quite unintentional, as when Jurgens, as a Prince, says to Captain Kraft, the Nazi: "By the way, a friend of yours from Munich is in the next room. Maybe you would like to talk to him." My hopes soared. Will Gregory Peck (later to be credited at the end as having appeared "with pride") come upon us as Adolf Hitler? My hopes were dashed as, throughout the movie, every actor overdid his or her part, not, as in Miss Novak's parodic appearance in *The Mirror Crack'd* last year, for a touch of camp, but because they — Novak, Jurgens, Dietrich, all of them — either thought that what they were doing was acting or because David Hemmings is hopeless as a director. Only Bowie survives, relatively unscathed by the idiocy of *Just a Gigolo*. Oh, he has as many stupid things to say as the rest, but he has a nicely glazed look about him, as if he were quite energetically willing himself into a different time and place as he went through his paces for Mr. Hemmings. Bowie has just the right sheen as the would-be decadent Prussian young man, willing to be, as he says, "a gigolo but not a whore"; and since Hemmings decided that Dietrich, who can no longer sing, or talk-sing, should do the singing, or talk-singing, and that Bowie, who can sing brilliantly, shouldn't, probably Bowie decided that if that's the way it was going to be, he would just take the money and run.

Which (though from, not to *Just a Gigolo*) is what I would do, knowing now what I didn't know at the time I subjected myself to this particular brainstorm turned comatose.

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Vladimir Nabokov

The National Letters

On literary nationalism

JEFF RIGGENBACH

"NATIONALISM," SAID ALBERT Einstein, "is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind." "All nationalism," said Rudolf Rocker, "is reactionary in its nature.... In this

respect, so-called 'cultural nationalism' does not differ at all from political nationalism, for whose political purposes as a rule it serves as a fig leaf." "The spirit of nationalism," said Thorstein Veblen, "has never ceased to bend human institutions to the service of dissension and distress."

I beg to differ; or, at least, to redefine. "Nationalism" is ordinarily taken to mean a fierce devotion to the political and economic system and other social institutions of some par-

ticular nation, often coupled with a desire that the favored nation should conquer all other nations militarily, and always coupled with a degree of indifference or even hostility to the political and economic systems and other social institutions of other nations. But it is surely unnecessary to hate and fear other nations just because one loves one's own. And it is equally unnecessary to desire the forcible conversion of other peoples to one's own way of life, just because one's own

way of life suits one to a tee. Nor is it necessary to cultivate ignorance of other countries or to affect indifference to them, just because one chooses to boost one's own.

Yet if one does tirelessly revel in one's own national culture, if one does tirelessly promote it as a wholly unique thing of great and irreplaceable worth—what is one but a nationalist, even if one also revels in other national cultures? Is there no such thing as a cosmopolitan nationalism? Is it impossible that a partisan of American literature should also know and appreciate English, Russian, and German literature, or that such a partisan should insist that every national literature be judged on its own terms and not be faulted for failing to resemble one of the others?

This kind of cosmopolitan nationalism has, in fact, been present in the American literary world since the beginning. Ralph Waldo Emerson called in 1834 for a distinctively American literature to replace the feeble imitations of English literature then being produced by American writers; but he also knew and esteemed the national literatures of England and Germany; in fact, he has often been accused by his detractors of being little more than a popularizer of Carlyle and Kant. Nearly a century after Emerson, H. L. Mencken rose to national prominence as a literary critic by calling for a national literature which would be unmistakably American in character, but which would also live up to the high standard of artistic excellence which Mencken believed was routinely lived up to by European writers. And just the other day Tom Wolfe told the *Saturday Review* that "in the arts and in all matters that relate to the intellectual, we still have a colonial complex. It's always better if it comes from France or someplace similar. It's really very funny. V.F. Calverton coined the term 'colonial complex' way back in the Twenties, saying 'now it's all over, we've found our own.' Except it's utterly not true." (SR, April 1981)