

S A G A
J O U R N A L

Volume 1

Issue 4

April 2005

SAGA JOURNAL

An academic Star Wars fan journal

The Saga Journal is a monthly on-line academic review dedicated to the in-depth study of the *Star Wars* saga as presented in George Lucas's six-film series. Our goal is to deliver one of the best collections of scholarly essays on the subject that the internet has to offer.

Here at the Saga Journal, we believe *Star Wars* is more than just an enjoyable space opera set in a galaxy far, far away. We recognize it as a modern myth, a cultural phenomenon all its own. We want to encourage the literary exploration of all aspects of the story as presented in the Prequel and Original Trilogy films.

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Princess Leia and the Woman Warrior

by lazypadawan

One of the rarest but also one of the most fascinating archetypes in literature is the fabled woman warrior. The reason why it is intriguing and rare is because women are traditionally life-givers and nurturers. Fighting and violence are antithetical to this role.

Nevertheless, the woman warrior arises from time to time. Greek mythology gave birth to the famed Amazon warriors. Ancient Hawaii had the sister of the goddess Pele, Hiiaka, who fought demons with “a bamboo knife in one hand and a lightning skirt in another.”¹ Celtic lore had the warrior queen Medb.²

History had a few real-life women warriors. Boadicea (also known as Boudicca or Boudicca) led the ancient Celtic Iceni tribe in a violent two-year uprising against the Romans.³ There is of course the very famous Joan (Jeanne) of Arc, the young teenage girl who went from being an illiterate peasant to leading armies against the English and their Burgundian allies.⁴

Modern popular culture had comic book heroines like Wonder Woman (herself an Amazon) and JRR Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* series featured a woman warrior, Eowyn. 1990s television brought about *Xena: The Warrior Princess* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. But the character who popularized the woman warrior in modern cinema was Princess Leia Organa. In many ways, Leia follows this old archetype and in other ways, she is different. “(The princess in peril) is the one we have seen time and time again in fairy tales and legends of knights in shining armor with their damsels in distress; this is Leia’s starting point. This is the one we thought she was until she opened her mouth.”⁵ As Carrie Fisher has put it, Leia isn’t so much a damsel in distress as she is a distressing damsel.

Most woman warriors arise out of necessity, since it has generally not been a traditional role for women. Usually, women have been pressed into warrior or defender roles if there is a shortage of men or there is no strong male leader. Amazon society was a matriarchy, ruled by two queens.⁶ The women rarely associated with men, except to produce more Amazon offspring.⁷ Boys born to the Amazons were killed, crippled in some way and kept as slaves, kept and raised for mating purposes, or given to a neighboring tribe.⁸ Boadicea’s husband, the King of the Iceni, died in 60 AD. The Romans publicly beat Boadicea and raped her daughters during a dispute over distribution of the king’s lands after his death.⁹ Joan of Arc would never have donned armor had the voices of Saint Catherine, Saint Michael, and Saint Margaret not asked her to do so.¹⁰ France at that time had a dauphin meant for the throne, but the English and the Burgundians controlled a significant amount of territory, including its capital Paris. Resistance to the occupation was weak and disorganized.¹¹

There are plenty of men present in the *Star Wars* galaxy, but before the Battle of Yavin the rebellion against the Empire was small, outmatched in resources and firepower. Leia grew up on a pacifist planet. (“Alderaan is peaceful. We have no weapons.”) According to the radio version of *A New Hope* and other background sources, she did covert missions for the Alliance, using her status as an Imperial senator as cover. *A New Hope* however, shows her clearly at home with using a blaster when necessary. *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* show her as a full-time fighter since she no longer has a home planet or a position with the dissolved Senate. She emerges as a leading figure within the (mostly male) Alliance, which is itself led by a woman, Mon Mothma. Her mother Padmé also came from a pacifist planet, vowing not to take any actions that would lead to war, until realizing it was going to take a lot more than talk to save her world. It is noteworthy that while Queen Amidala had the protection of two male Jedi Knights, sought help from the heavily male Senate, and had mostly men serving her, none

of them besides young Anakin Skywalker had the power to defeat the Trade Federation. It was mostly because of her ability to form an alliance with the Gungans and her plan to capture the Viceroy that the Naboo were victorious.

What made women warriors heroic was the nobility of their cause, which drew others – especially men – to follow them. Boadicea and Joan wanted to free their people, just as Padmé and Leia wanted to free theirs, although Boadicea was also driven by revenge and Joan was driven by her faith as well as her patriotism. Before fighting their last desperate battle against the Romans, Boadicea “and her daughters drove round in her chariot to all her tribes before the battle, exhorting them to be brave. She cried that she was descended from mighty men but she was fighting as an ordinary person for her lost freedom, her bruised body and outraged daughters. Perhaps as a taunt to the men in her ranks, it is said that she asked them to consider: ‘Win the battle or perish: that is what I, a woman will do; you men can live on in slavery if that’s what you want.’”¹²

Joan wrote in a defiant letter to the English on May 5, 1429: “You, men of England, who have no right to this Kingdom of France, the King of Heaven orders and notifies you through me, Joan the Maiden, to leave your fortresses and go back to your own country; or I will produce a clash of arms to be eternally remembered. And this is the third and last time I have written to you; I shall not write anything further.”¹³

Leia never had to give a grandiose speech to her fellow Rebels, but Leia had a way of rallying others to her cause. Luke joins the Alliance as a pilot, and eventually, even a rogue mercenary like Han Solo finds himself a general by the time it’s all over. Lando joins not only in Han’s rescue, but also in the attack on the second Death Star. It’s also through Leia that the Ewoks, who helped turned the tide of the Battle of Endor, became allies.

Women warriors are often noted for their cunning and ruthlessness in battle. Medb of Connacht was considered “wild and willful” and “slaughtered many heroes.”¹⁴ Boadicea’s two-year fight against the Romans included sacking and razing cities (modern Colchester, London, and St. Albans), and even going as far as killing women and children.¹⁵ Roman historians put the number killed during the uprising at about 70,000.¹⁶

The Amazons’ own bravery and ferocity made them legendary. Myth tells of how they cut off a breast in order to make fighting, particularly with a bow or javelin, easier.¹⁷ They fought on horseback and also used swords and double axes.¹⁸ Homer in *The Iliad* wrote about the Amazons going to Troy in aid of King Priam during the Trojan War, and in another instance, the Amazons invaded Attica and fought in Athens to reclaim their abducted queen.¹⁹

Leia is never afraid of challenging her enemies or throwing herself into the thick of things, and it has been frequently noted by fans that she’s probably the best shot of any of the main characters. When Imperials capture her ship at the beginning of *A New Hope*, she isn’t captured without a fight and she’s not afraid to argue with Darth Vader. After Luke frees her from her cell aboard the Death Star, Leia immediately takes charge of her own rescue. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, she is clearly in command, giving orders and staying almost until Hoth base is captured. Han practically has to drag her out of the command center. Later on, she attempts to save Han at Cloud City and in *Return of the Jedi*, she takes an active part in his rescue. Jabba the Hutt learns the hard way not to underestimate the strength or righteous anger of the princess. She then takes part in a dangerous mission on Endor. She’s the first to pursue fleeing scouts on speeder bikes, barely waiting long enough for Luke to join her. After she is shot

outside of the Imperial bunker, she is prepared to go down fighting, even in the face of impossible odds. However, Leia never would resort to Boadicea's brutality, especially not against civilians.

Because for a long time they bucked tradition, woman warriors are frequently killed or vanquished by their enemies. "It would appear that all through literature that a strong woman must be tragic or evil or sexual, as Ishtar, Aphrodite, Lilith, and all of the other seductresses, good hearted (and bad hearted) hookers, femme fatales, and sensual heroines."²⁰ This is true in real life as in legend, myth, and literature. The ninth labor Hercules had to perform was securing the Girdle (belt) of Hippolyta, the Amazon queen. Hippolyta was killed in the process.²¹ The Athenian hero Theseus abducted Hippolyta's sister Antiope (in other versions he abducts Hippolyta) and married her; the Amazons went to war to get her back. But at Athens they were defeated and Antiope was killed.²² After the Iceni were defeated, Boadicea is said to have poisoned herself to avoid capture, but other sources say she died of disease in her cell.²³ She is allegedly buried beneath Platform 9 at the King's Cross station in London.²⁴ Joan of Arc was defeated in battle, left to her fate by the people she supported, sold to the English, accused of heresy, and burned at the stake.²⁵

But even though she is put through her own share of perils and trials, Leia doesn't die a horrible death at the hands of her enemies and she never compromises her ideals. As *Star Wars: The New Myth* says of Padmé, "The *Star Wars* universe allows her heroic spirit to thrive by accepting her for herself, not her gender."²⁶

Leia is not a tragic figure who must suffer a terrible fate for defying the conventions of her time and place. She is never "punished" in the story for simply being a woman fighter.

Her role is also more integrated than what has been found in tradition. This might have to do with the real life changes in sex roles over the past 50 years in Western culture. "Between 1965 and 1975 about ten million women entered the workforce (compared to only seven million men), and by 1975 nearly half of all American women held jobs outside the home. Leia...was a most appropriate heroine for her time."²⁷ Because *Star Wars* is a product of the late 20th-early 21st century, it features women with "a more developed animus" or male spirit.²⁸ Joan of Arc famously dressed in men's clothing, but it was done more to protect her modesty among men by playing down her femininity rather than to make a statement against gender roles.²⁹ Leia takes part in missions, works the command center, gives pep talks to her troops, and can turn any situation into an impromptu diplomatic mission. She is just as comfortable in a uniform as she is in a dress, and is just as comfortable as a symbol of the Alliance as she is an active participant in it.

Unlike most women warriors who are singularly devoted to their tasks, Leia and her latter-day progeny must balance other concerns. As the book *Star Wars: The New Myth* puts it, "the female must become the warrior, yet remain a mother figure, be a comforter and an aggressor, and utilize them concurrently in her exploits."³⁰ In *A New Hope*, no sooner does Leia help blast her way out of the Death Star than she is comforting Luke, almost in a motherly way, when he mourns Ben Kenobi's death. She becomes the comforter again just before Luke goes off to attack the Death Star. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Leia and her companions fight their way out of Cloud City, she rescues Luke, then she leaves the *Falcon's* cockpit to go comfort him. *Return of the Jedi* shows her again as a battle-hardened warrior, but she is still there for Luke in the moments before he leaves to confront Darth Vader and is there for Han when he is brought out of carbon freeze. Some of the other women warriors of the 1970s and 1980s also had familial concerns. Ellen Ripley briefly flirts with a familial arrangement in *Aliens* with young Newt and Sarah Connor of the first two *Terminator* films raises a son.

Unlike the grieving widow Boadicea or the modest Joan of Arc, Leia allows romance into her life. Initially she does so reluctantly, because like her forebears she puts the job at hand first. But as a modern heroine, she is permitted to explore other aspects of her life, including romantic love. Other modern heroines like Xena, Wonder Woman, and Buffy have had their love affairs. Leia is fortunate in that she is able to integrate her love for Han into her life instead of having her romance endlessly interfere with her mission and vice versa, which seems to be a recurring theme for other modern women warriors. Many latter day heroines are faced with fears of commitment, falling for the wrong man, and finding difficulty balancing personal desires with “career.” This perhaps reflects real-life contemporary concerns among young women.

A fascinating and unique aspect of Leia’s character as a warrior is that she combines what was best about this archetype in the past with a modern understanding of women’s roles in society. Yet unlike her modern or ancient sisters, Leia is allowed to find personal fulfillment and indeed live happily ever after.

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Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know: The Case for Anakin Skywalker as a Byronic Hero

by Reihla

*“Twere long to tell, and sad to trace,
Each step from splendor to disgrace;
Enough—no foreign foe could quell
Thy soul, till from itself it fell;
Yes! Self-abasement paved the way
To villain-bonds and despot sway.”¹*

Few other topics in *Star Wars* culture spark as much debate as the role of Anakin Skywalker in the saga.

As an innocent, idealistic child, Anakin overcame slavery to play a key role in saving the planet Naboo from the Trade Federation. From there he grew to become a moodier, but still heroic, young Jedi apprentice. Despite a rebellious and impulsive nature, Anakin embraces his Jedi goals with fervor and becomes a larger-than-life hero during the Clone Wars. Nevertheless, Anakin remains a slave of his own human nature, and ultimately makes choices that result in his tragic fall from grace.

Anakin’s life story conjures up a complex range of emotions and sentiments. He was at different times loved and reviled, leaving some to label him as either hero or villain. I believe neither label is a good fit. True heroes are role models. They give us examples to follow. True to Byron’s determination not to write role models, Anakin serves as more of a warning than an example. Very real and human flaws plague him. He makes mistakes that cost him dearly. In that regard he is someone we can identify with. He shows us the darker side of human nature and gives us a reason to avoid those aspects of our own nature.

In this paper I hope to explore each of the characteristics of the Byronic hero and show how Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader measures up, both as an individual and as an ideal. Almost every definition of the Byronic hero contains some version of the following criteria:

- Is supernaturally gifted, possesses great talent and great ego
- Is an exile, isolated from society
- Is rebellious, defies authority
- Lacks respect for rank and privilege
- Dislikes society, government or social institutions
- Is highly passionate and moody
- Hides something from the past
- Is ultimately self-destructive

Let’s begin our comparison with Anakin Skywalker as he is when we first meet him in *The Phantom Menace*. As a boy Anakin is definitely a child of nature in terms of his personality. Peter Thorslev, a Byronic scholar, describes such a child as “naïve, unsophisticated, impulsive, aggressive.”² In addition, Anakin is supernaturally gifted. We are told that at the tender age of nine he flies podracers – something normal humans do not possess the skills to do. When we do actually see him fly, we are told that his abilities leave even the Jedi in awe. He is also a gifted mechanic, as he tells Padmé Naberrie, “I can fix anything!”³ We see the skill demonstrated in the protocol droid he has built, as well as in the pod he manages to finish in time for the Boonta Eve race.

In addition to his extraordinary abilities, we see in Anakin an especially positive outlook. He is fond of using his gifts to help others. Early in the story we are told he is “engaged in building a protocol droid to help his mom.”⁴ Then, when Qui-Gon Jinn and his company are stranded, needing parts for their ship, he insists, “We have to help them.” In the novelization, we even see him giving credits to an old pallie vendor in Mos Espa so she can buy a cooling unit to help her tolerate the desert heat.⁵ It is precisely this desire to help others that most clearly displays Anakin’s passionate nature at this point in his life. From his words and deeds, we see that he knows slavery is a bad thing, that people have a responsibility to help each other, and that cheating is wrong.

In terms of being exiled, not only is Anakin a slave, thus isolated from free society, he is also relegated to the Outer Rim world of Tatooine, a planet very much cut off from the goings on in the heart of the galaxy. Though he doesn’t express an open dislike for the galactic government, he most likely shares his mother’s views that the Republic and its laws might as well not exist for all the good they do those who live in the Outer Rim.

A rebellious nature and disrespect for authority is something we don’t see at this point in Anakin’s life. He works hard for his master, Watto, accepting his lot as a slave with stoicism beyond his years. Likewise he shows great respect for his mother. Although he loves podracing, when his mother asks him to stop he promises that he will.

One of the first hints of approaching darkness in Anakin’s character is seen when he becomes unreasonably angry at the thought that he might never see Padmé again once she leaves Tatooine. With very little provocation, he jumps into a fight with a young Rodian boy. “Anakin was hitting him as hard and fast as he could, not thinking about anything but how angry he was, not even aware that the source of his anger had nothing to do with his victim and everything to do with losing Padmé.”⁶ In addition to anger, we see fear. Though the young Anakin convinces himself he isn’t afraid of anything, there is one thing that gives him pause, “He might not ever be afraid for himself, but he was sometimes very afraid for his mother.”⁷

It is in *Attack of the Clones* that we begin to see more of the darker Byronic characteristics emerge in Anakin. As a young Jedi Padawan, it is his quest for knighthood that gives Anakin a tie to Byron’s first heroic character, Childe Harold. The term “childe” was used to designate an eldest son and it was a title that son often kept until he achieved knighthood.⁸ Both Anakin and Harold were cynical, suffering and guilt-ridden. Yet a contrast is found in that Harold seemed to begin with these miens and lose them over time, whereas Anakin began without them only to take them on as time went by.

As a young Jedi Anakin remains supernaturally gifted, displaying an affinity for the Force that more seasoned Knights envy. Unfortunately, along with his skill comes a generous measure of pride and a great ego. He tells Padmé that although Obi-Wan is a great mentor, “in some ways – in a lot of ways – I’m ahead of him.” He takes his confidence a bit further, allowing us to see his rebelliousness and growing disrespect for his master. In Padmé’s apartment he readily challenges Obi-Wan’s authority by announcing they will seek the identity of Padmé’s would-be assassin. Then later, in the garage of the homestead on Tatooine, he insists Obi-Wan is “just jealous of me...he knows that I’m already more powerful than he is.”⁹

Even so, this pride is not necessarily a bad thing. Thorslev also writes “there is always something of rebellious individualism, of pride, of *hubris*, about heroes.”¹⁰ Anakin certainly doesn’t lack for pride in his abilities, and he makes that clear when his master tells him, “If you’d spend as much time working

on your lightsaber skills as you do on your wit, young Padawan, you would rival Master Yoda!” to which Anakin replies, “I thought I already did.”¹¹

Though little is said in Romantic era literature about physical appearance as a trait of the Byronic hero, it is worthy of note that the tendency was to make them dashing, brave, and handsome. One particularly beautiful description of the Byronic hero says he “has the appearance, the air of the fallen angel.”¹² Indeed, Anakin Skywalker is physically attractive. One other item of his appearance stands out possibly more than his good looks to point him toward the Byronic. As Atara Stein points out “the contemporary Byronic hero is almost always dressed in black.”¹³ Once Anakin becomes a Jedi we never see him again without his trademark black overtunic or cloak.

One of the hallmarks of a Byronic hero – the tendency towards self-destructive acts – is only hinted at in this second installment in the *Star Wars* saga. The first time we see it is during the speeder chase through Coruscant. Obi-Wan chastises his Padawan for his recklessness, commenting that Anakin almost got them killed. Anakin is unconcerned and immediately proceeds to jump out of the speeder, falling hundreds of stories through the Coruscant traffic lanes until he manages to latch on to a passing vehicle. The same recklessness, with little thought for the preservation of his own life and limb, is evident at the end of Episode II when he ignores his master’s warning and rushes in to confront Count Dooku on his own. He pays a hefty price in this instance with the loss of his arm.

At this stage, the young Jedi Anakin’s dislike of government isn’t readily apparent. He defends both Senator Amidala and Supreme Chancellor Palpatine to his master. It isn’t until his conversation with Padmé at the picnic on Naboo that we truly begin to see his disillusionment with the Republic and its leadership. Initially he is teasing Padmé, but she stumbles on the truth when she asks him, “You really don’t like politicians, do you?” and Anakin replies, “I like two or three.”

Their conversation continues and Anakin admits that he doesn’t think the galactic system of government works. Though he insists he was teasing when he alluded to a dictatorship, there is an undercurrent in the air that lets us know he wasn’t being as flippant as he would like Padmé to believe. Despite this growing cynicism towards the Republic Anakin continues to do his duty. Stein describes the behavior as Byronic when she says “He may well have a callous contempt for the people he serves, but he serves them, nonetheless.”¹⁴

That isn’t to say his disillusionment doesn’t have an effect because clearly it does. In Anakin’s case his feelings are tied directly to the creation of his own moral code. First, with his open disregard of the Jedi mandate in Padmé’s apartment, then later when he disregards orders so that he can go and rescue his mother, and finally when he loses control and kills the Tusken on Tatooine. None of these things is usual Jedi behavior, but it is likely that Anakin’s negative feelings towards the system contribute to his repeated violation of the Jedi tenets he was raised to obey.

Byronic heroes are said to have highly passionate natures. Nothing better illustrates Anakin’s own passionate nature than his love for Padmé Amidala. It is very much a force beyond his control. In *Attack of the Clones* Anakin insists, “You’re asking me to be rational. That is something I know I cannot do.”¹⁵ Though the canon universe never states it outright, we are led to believe that Anakin loves Padmé so much he would have resigned the Jedi Order just to be with her. Nevertheless, Padmé is adamant that they must set aside their love so they can both fulfill their obligations to the systems they serve. She tells Anakin, “We live in a real world. Come back to it.” In that sense, Anakin and Padmé are very much like another traditional Byronic hero and his lady love. As Atara Stein describes Emily Bronte’s Heathcliff

and Catherine – “They are larger than life; their love cannot endure in a real world where...social considerations of necessity must preempt romantic love.”¹⁶

In Byron’s works we see passions of this sort as typical. The Venetian in *The Giaour*, Conrad in *The Corsaire*, and Lara in the work of the same name are all typical Byronic heroes in that they are passionate and steadfast in their love of one woman. In these cases, as in Anakin’s, passionate feelings ultimately lead to the keeping of secrets. Although marriage and attachment are forbidden to the Jedi, Anakin manages to convince Padmé that their love must survive. The two finally marry in a secret ceremony on Naboo. Of course, Anakin does not disclose this new bond to his master or to the Jedi Order. With that deliberate act of subterfuge, Anakin solidifies his journey into darkness and deception.

The Giaour offers us another similarity to Anakin. Byron himself describes the Venetian as seeking revenge for the death of his lover, a female slave.¹⁷ When Anakin’s mother is killed by a band of Tusken raiders, he exacts vengeance by killing the entire Tusken village. Words penned by Byron could just as easily be used to describe his actions: “And I, alas! Too late to save! Yet all I then could give, I gave, ‘twas some relief, our foe a grave. His death sits lightly; but her fate has made me – what thou well may’st hate.”¹⁸ In the end both Anakin and the Venetian achieve their goal – atonement for a wrongful death – but both are forever changed by the act. In Anakin’s case such a massacre is clearly not heroic. Even so, we can sympathize with such dark desire for retribution. It is our sympathy which disguises the horror of the act itself and leaves us believing Anakin is still worthy of the hero moniker.

Though little is known at this point of Episode III, there is one aspect revealed by the movie trailer that bears inclusion here. Faust, a romantic precursor to the Byronic Hero, represented the thirst for infinite knowledge. It is commonly known that Anakin felt responsible for his mother’s death. He believes he should have been there to prevent it and even goes so far as to tell Padmé that someday he will find the means to “stop people from dying.” In the recently released theatrical trailer we see Anakin questioning Palpatine about the secret to sustaining life in the face of death, surely representative of a quest for knowledge of the infinite. Palpatine tells him he cannot learn this secret from a Jedi and we, the audience, are given our first real glimpse into Anakin’s darker future.

Once Anakin surrenders to darkness and becomes Darth Vader, some argue that he becomes a true villain. I find that label difficult to accept because his motives are seldom, if ever, self-serving. Alexander Walsh describes well why one might believe Vader doesn’t fall into the traditional villain category: “[h]e acts with deep feeling, and his intentions are ‘good,’ though fierce and mistaken.”¹⁹ Although we find fault with Vader’s methods we still find ourselves being convinced that he believes he is doing the right thing.

As a Dark Lord of the Sith, Vader is fearsome and solitary. His presence inspires fear in the men around him. Lucas describes it thus, “The cloud of evil which clung tight about this particular one was intense enough to cause hardened Imperial troops to back away.”²⁰

Anne Radcliffe, an author thought to have influenced Byron, describes a character very similar to Vader in *The Italian*. “Among his associates no one loved him, many disliked him, and more feared him. His figure was striking, but not so from grace; it was tall, and though extremely thin, his limbs were large and uncouth, and as he stalked along, wrapped in the black garments of his order, there was something terrible in its air; something almost superhuman...His was not the melancholy of a sensible and wounded heart, but apparently that of a gloomy and ferocious disposition.”²¹

Vader is at once repulsive and attractive. Along with his dark cruelty he carries equal parts of power and mystery. *The Giaour* is likewise described in terms that are both lovely and dark: “His floating robe around him folding...with dread beheld, with gloom beholding.” And later in the same stanza, “If ever evil angel bore, the form of mortal, such he wore: By all my hope of sins forgiven, such looks are not of earth or heaven.”²² Once again, we see the trademark black garments. In fact, black is so much a part of Vader’s appearance that one could almost say he becomes the color itself.

In addition to a powerful physical presence, we are shown that Vader has retained both Anakin’s supernatural powers and his ego. In a moment of rare introspection we are privy to Vader’s thoughts, “while he would have preferred the company of equals, he had to admit reluctantly that at this point, he *had* no equals.”²³ Alongside the obvious arrogance it is surprising to see a hint of loneliness in that statement. It gives us a rare glimpse into the isolation Vader experiences by virtue of his position and his power. It makes us almost sympathetic to him.

Along with his emotional isolation, it is easiest to show Darth Vader’s exile in a physical sense – his suit makes normal interaction with people around him impossible. Though he is surrounded by his officers at all times, he is very much set apart from them in terms of normal human interaction. In fact, in the novelization of *Return of the Jedi* Vader’s own thoughts about his mask are very telling. He mentally describes it as “his voice, and his breath, and his invisibility – his shield against all human contact.”²⁴

Although Vader serves the Empire, we are given the impression that he does so because it is the will of his master. His disdain for Imperial officers is clearly demonstrated when he tells them that their ultimate weapon is “still insignificant when set against the Force.”²⁵ When General Tagge argues against that viewpoint, Vader thinks nothing of giving the man a small taste of Sith power by using the Force to constrict his windpipe. While that may not display an actual dislike for the Empire, it definitely indicates defiance, rebelliousness and a lack of respect for others who serve it. The fact that Tagge is a General doesn’t faze Vader in the slightest, especially when he feels called upon to defend his own beliefs.

It is this very defense of himself and his values that show Vader as equally passionate as Anakin. We shouldn’t be surprised, however, that Darth Vader gives off a more dispassionate air.

Though he appears to have more success than Anakin at actually controlling his passions... In the realest sense, Vader is the dark byproduct of Anakin Skywalker’s passionate nature.

Oddly enough, despite his obvious power over officers of the Empire, Vader prefers not to take on the leadership role. Manfred, one of Byron’s heroes, also eschews the leadership role for himself. He seems to feel as if it is almost beneath him. “I could not tame my nature down; for he must serve who fain would sway; and soothe, and sue, and watch all the time, and pry into all place, and be a living Lie, who would become a mighty thing among the mean – and such the mass are; I disdained to mingle with a herd, though to be a leader – and of wolves. The lion is alone, and so am I.”²⁶ We are never quite certain why Vader has never sought a more powerful position within the Empire, but this theory – that he prefers to remain solitary and unaccountable to that system – probably works as well as any.

In Atara Stein’s work the Byronic hero is described as “an agent of oppressive...authority, who yet draws the admiration of his audience due to his awesome abilities. He then becomes transformed into an agent of revolt against the institutions that created or employed him.”²⁷ We see that twice in Anakin’s life, both in his time as a Jedi Padawan – when he turns to the Dark Side and takes part in the destruction

of the Jedi Order – and again as Darth Vader – when, in one final impulsive act, he saves his son by destroying the very master he left the Jedi to serve.

It is this final valiant gesture of self-destruction and sacrifice that succeeds in destroying Darth Vader forever, thus returning Anakin Skywalker to the status of hero. It is a victory made tragic when we realize that he has returned to humanity only to die of his injuries moments later. One of the most touching scenes in the original trilogy takes place once Vader has cast aside his dark master and asks Luke to help him remove his mask. Knowing that his death is certain, he seeks that last moment of human contact, that last exchange of words and glances with his son.

Although tragic, we seem to realize that Vader could have come to no other end. Stein describes this Byronic phenomenon by pointing out that such heroes are destined to remain isolated from society: “he cannot be reintegrated into society, even if he has benefited that society with his heroic actions; he must be rehumanized, then exiled or destroyed.”²⁸ In that sense, Anakin Skywalker comes full circle. In my mind, it is the entirety of the journey – from innocent child to evil Sith Lord to rehumanized champion – which solidifies Anakin Skywalker as a Byronic hero.

Note: the author reserves the right to add additional content to this paper at some future time pending the release of Episode III: The Revenge of the Sith.

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Recommendation

Investigating Inspiration

Website: *Star Wars* Origins

URL: www.jitterbug.com/origins

Owner: Kristen Brennan

Reviewed by ami-padme.

How did George Lucas create *Star Wars*?

The question is curious: on the one hand, breaking down his creative process into explainable pieces seems almost impossible – on the other hand, most *Star Wars* fans can easily run through a list of obvious influences on the saga. Joseph Campbell. *Flash Gordon*. *Lord of the Rings*. Akira Kurosawa.

That nexus – between unknowable thought processes, individual creativity, and literary inspiration – is the focus of the website *Star Wars* Origins (www.jitterbug.com/origins). Created and maintained by Kristen Brennan, it provides an in-depth look at the various influences George Lucas drew upon in creating the *Star Wars* story.

Starting with the *Flash Gordon* serials Lucas loved, *Star Wars* Origins presents detailed looks at each saga source. The site goes beyond explaining how Lucas used the material in his writing, beyond the “subtle lessons” from it that *Star Wars* incorporates, and provides a study of the background to these materials – how they came to be, and how they influenced popular culture, entertainment, and modern mythology. Each page also features comparison pictures to provide visual support. Look at the original Cloud City from the *Gordon* series, see the evil robots from the film *Metropolis* (that led to the much more benign C-3PO), and see how the holographic communications from the movie *Forbidden Planet* resemble Princess Leia’s plea to Obi-Wan in *A New Hope*. Several pages include tables for quick and easy comparisons, such as how *Star Wars* fulfills the Campbellian ideal of storytelling or how Lucas followed Frank Herbert’s footsteps as laid down in the science-fiction classic, *Dune*.

Having compiled all of this information, Ms. Brennan then delineates the lessons in writing and storytelling she’s learned from her research into Lucas’ work, such as checking one’s ego before putting pen to paper, remembering that entertaining the audience is at least 90 percent of the writer’s job, and being unafraid to borrow from great works of the past.

The website offers an enjoyable way to explore the saga – its layout is easy to navigate, the pictures are used to good effect, and Ms. Brennan writing is informative and personable. I recommend it to *Star Wars* fans looking to dig a little deeper into its origins. It’s a good read for fans of the saga, of Lucas, and of science-fiction/fantasy/mythology in general.

Discovering *Star Wars*

dark_heavens

The first thing I remember about *Star Wars* is it being shown on television a lot – this would have been when I was young, maybe 11 or so. My sister and brother showed a lot of interest in the films and would always watch them when they came on, so that started getting me interested. Then I remember seeing the actual movies themselves lying around the house, probably in my dad's room. I learned that my dad was a massive *Star Wars* fan and had been since the movies came out, so that piqued my interest a little more. I remember watching the movies here and there on TV, but I actually got into them when I saw them on tape. *Empire Strikes Back* was my favorite of the films from the first time I saw it; I liked that it was dark and that it didn't end on a happy note. I also loved Luke Skywalker – he was, and still is, my favorite character. When the Original Trilogy was re-released in theaters it made a strong impression on me. Everyone in my family was excited about it so, of course, that got me excited too. I saw *A New Hope* in a stadium theater and it was awesome. There were so many people there and they were so into the movie. So you could say that even though I was always aware of the saga, that was when I officially discovered *Star Wars*.

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Saga Journal
Volume 1, Issue 4, April 2005
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