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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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The Perils of Padmé: The Short Life and Fast Times of a Tragic Heroine

by lazypadawan

For years fans have wondered who was the mysterious, unnamed mother of Luke and Leia. The only hint of who she had been was Leia's vague impressions expressed in *Return of the Jedi*: kind, very beautiful, but sad.

Finally with the release of *The Phantom Menace*, we were introduced to her: Queen Amidala of the Naboo, otherwise known as Padmé Amidala Naberrie. The young girl-woman in *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones* was in many ways in the mold of her future daughter: smart, wise, resourceful, brave, and if need be, good in a fight. But with *Revenge of the Sith*, she joins a sisterhood of memorable women who suffer tragedy.

Padmé shares common traits with many traditional tragic heroines but in some ways she is unique. Traditionally, a tragic heroine suffers because of her own tragic flaw and/or the flaws of someone else, even her society or culture. Aristotle referred to this flaw as "harmatia," the accurate definition of which is closer to "mistake," "error," or "failing" than an innate flaw. Aristotle believed the flaw must result from something that is a central part of one's virtue, which goes wrong due to a misunderstanding or lack of knowledge.¹ Antigone suffers because of her devotion to divine law, which demands she bury her brother, bringing her into conflict with the inhumane decree of King Creon, who forbade burial.² Ophelia suffers because of Hamlet's inner conflict. Juliet's death is brought about not only because of her love for Romeo but also because of the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets.

If Padmé had personal flaws according to Aristotle's definition, some may argue they would be her naivete, her innocence, her trust in the Republic as it was rotting away from within, her trust in Palpatine, and even her love for Anakin. Padmé tends to put a lot of faith in the innate good of others; Obi-Wan notes in the young readers' version of the *Revenge of the Sith* novelization that Padmé "always believes the best of everyone, until she's forced to see the worst. Such faith should be a strength, not a weakness."³ She suffers because of that faith in her leaders, the Republic, and in Anakin, because they all fail her. In fact, Padmé embodies the Republic's ideals and virtues: democracy, restraint over tyranny, and working for the good of others. Padmé is also associated with youth and beauty as well as wisdom. She comes from a world teeming with life and as the female lead of the prequel trilogy, as well as the mother of the heroes of the classic trilogy, she embodies the feminine, the anima.

At the beginning of the saga, the Republic was in its golden age. Padmé's homeworld of Naboo was an opulent and verdant world with stunning architecture and natural wonders. Its people were dressed nearly as elaborately as its ruler. Even the sleek spacecraft reflected a great appreciation for beauty. Women are seen everywhere in the prequels, in all stations of life; pilots, Jedi, Senators, handmaidens, bodyguards, and mothers. But the galaxy was changing and the young queen was caught in the middle of that change. She is brought in as a pawn in a political game that she understands too late. She is also introduced to the boy destined to change her life forever.

For most of the prequel trilogy, Padmé has been in constant danger and in need of protection. *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack Of The Clones* have a pattern. 1. Padmé is rescued, 2. Padmé is placed under protection, and 3. Padmé willingly leaves that protection to take action herself. She spends a great deal of time courting her fate despite the efforts of others to protect her. In *The Phantom Menace*, she is rescued from the Trade Federation and is able to remain on Coruscant where she is safe. Yet she chooses

to return to Naboo to engage the Trade Federation in battle and re-take her planet. In *Attack of the Clones*, she is rescued after two attempts on her life and is put into Anakin's protection. Yet she chooses to first go to Tatooine with Anakin then she convinces him to go with her to Geonosis to save Obi-Wan, where once again she is forced to fight for her life. She narrowly avoids being killed by beasts, survives a battle that kills several Jedi, and then avoids serious injury after falling out of a ship. She gives several references to dying in the films. In *The Phantom Menace*, she mentions twice that her people on Naboo were dying. In *Attack of the Clones*, she mentions death four times during her love pledge to Anakin: "I'm not afraid to die...I've been dying a little bit each day since you came back into my life...our lives are about to be destroyed anyway...before we die I want you to know."

At the same time, the feminine energy, the anima, is slowly being destroyed. In *Attack of the Clones*, Zam Wessel, Cordé the handmaiden, and most importantly, Anakin's mother Shmi, die violently. In *Revenge of the Sith*, the final phase of destruction takes place. We see the betrayal and murder of two female Jedi: Stass Allie and Aayla Secura. Aayla in particular is murdered in an especially gruesome way, shot repeatedly in close range by several clonetroopers. Ironically she was on Felucia, a world teeming with life and giant blooming flowers. It climaxes with Padmé's death after performing the ultimate feminine act, giving birth. She dies far from her fertile living world where she'd planned to have her child(ren), in a cold environment deep in space, and attended to by droids that cannot understand what is wrong with her.

Unlike the pattern with previous two prequels, Padmé does not need rescuing from external threats in *Revenge of the Sith*. Dooku is dead and the Trade Federation seems to have forgotten about her. The irony is the external dangers from which Anakin seeks to protect her from throughout the prequel trilogy do not bring about her end. It's not the Trade Federation or hired assassins but her own shattered soul. However, like the other films, she chooses to leave her haven, this time on Coruscant, to take charge when things are dire. When Captain Typho volunteers to go with her, she refuses, saying the matter is personal and that she is no longer in danger. Finally, she could no longer avoid her destiny.

Some fans complained that Padmé was marginalized in *Revenge of the Sith*, but her isolation makes sense in the context of the story. Here she was at the height of her feminine power, pregnant and able to share a form of subconscious bond on occasion with Anakin. Yet the Empire-to-be has no place for her. She is trapped and alone.

Padmé's death recalls traditional tragic heroines such as Isolde, who dies of a broken heart after her love Tristan dies. In Arthurian legend, Elaine The Lady of Shallot dies of love for Lancelot.⁴ In fact, dying of a broken heart is part of many legends, folk tales, and ghost stories. Others see parallels with Othello's Desdemona, who like Padmé is strangled by a husband who believes she has betrayed by him. Others view Padmé as being similar to Ophelia, who commits suicide after Hamlet rejects her. Because Ophelia and Desdemona are commonly viewed as passive victims, and Padmé had been a proactive character, some felt her death did not befit her character.

There is a literal way of looking at Padmé's death and a symbolic way. Padmé was as much a symbiont with her time and place as she was with Anakin. When the Republic era passes, she passes. In a cut scene from *Attack of the Clones*, the lesson in Padmé's story about the refugees she tried to help as a child was that those who cannot adapt die. She cannot adapt to this new galaxy. Moreover, she refuses to adapt. She tells Anakin he is going down a path she cannot follow. She bitterly utters, "So this is how liberty dies, with thunderous applause," after Palpatine

Padmé was as much a symbiont with her time and place as she was with Anakin. When the Republic era passes, she passes.

crowns himself Emperor before a cheering Senate. When Vader in a rage cuts off her breathing, it symbolizes that the Empire, as personified by Anakin, is killing her. She suffers not only the death throes of the Republic and its ideals, she also suffers with the physical and spiritual pain Anakin endures in his transformation into the Darth Vader we know from the classic trilogy. The film intercuts between Vader's agony on the operating table and Padmé's dying moments as she gives birth. When Vader's transformation is complete, she dies.

With Padmé gone, the aesthetics of the *Star Wars* universe changes: we see the utilitarian set of the Star Destroyer, the beauty of the earlier ships gone. The beautiful, colorful, and elegant costumes have been replaced by simpler and more drab garments in shades of gray. Even the last time we see Naboo in the prequels, all of the citizens are dressed in funereal black. We see a glimpse of the Empire's new order, a Star Destroyer crew made up entirely of men. Instead of the natural beauty of a planet, we witness the skeletal beginnings of the Death Star.

Yet in the end, unlike most other tragic heroines, Padmé wins. Those who dismiss Padmé as weak should consider this alternative view of Desdemona: "Desdemona's goodness furthermore is not simply passive or weak but an act of will...her refusal to blame Othello for his terrible treatment of her...must not be viewed as simply subservience but as a self-willed refusal to accept a bad opinion of the husband she has chosen...she stands by her love for him as something sacred, with a martyr-like determination: she tells Emilia, 'his unkindness may defeat my life/But never taint my love.'"⁵ Padmé, through her own will, refuses to believe Anakin is unredeemable. Ultimately Padmé is right about Anakin; there was still good in him and he could be turned back to the light. Her children bring down the Empire and restore the old values of the Republic. Padmé's life may have been short but she was never truly a victim.

Endnotes:

¹ Struck, Peter T. "Oedipus as the Ideal Tragic Hero," <http://www.classics.upenn.edu/myth/tragedy/oedhero.php>, 2000.

² Answers.com, "Daughter of Oedipus."

³ Wrede, Patricia C. *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, Scholastic, 2005, page 153.

⁴ womenmyth.com, "Women of Arthurian Mythology."

⁵ Lewis, Liz, "Shakespeare's Women: Shakespeare's Treatment of Women in the Tragedies of Hamlet, Othello, and Antony and Cleopatra," http://www.english-literature.org/essays/shakespeare_women.html.

Perinatal Imagery in the *Star Wars* Trilogy

by Ron Newbold

ABSTRACT: Stanislav Grof's four perinatal matrices provide a useful guide to why certain types of imagery appear in the *Star Wars* trilogy and to the dynamics of the struggle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. The human struggle to be born imprints experiences upon the neonate so strongly that they influence the nature of postnatal imagination and behavior. That primal struggle tends to be constantly relived throughout our lives. So when films such as *Star Wars* project imagery evocative of that struggle, they mirror and evoke memories powerfully present in the unconscious. The opportunity to vicariously relive those experiences is part of the attraction of the trilogy, contributing to its unparalleled worldwide appeal.

*"...a return to the womb. And we can take the analogy further: The walls of the room begin to close in on its inhabitants just before their final release through a small door – rather like the contractions that push a baby out into the world. So on the one hand the experience is that of being consumed by the Death Star; on the other, this is an ordeal of initiation and rebirth."*¹

– Mary Henderson, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*

*"Star Wars gives birth to a sense of human complicity, as it involves us in a worthy struggle."*²

– J. P. Telotte, *"The Dark Side of the Force"*

*"One would be naïve indeed to believe that so great a cataclysm (birth) would not leave its mark. Its traces are everywhere; on the skin...in all our human folly, in our madness, in our tortures, our prisons, in legends, epics, and our myths."*³

-- Frederick Leboyer, *Birth without Violence*

Pervasive Perinatal Elements and *Star Wars*'s Popularity

The powerful appeal of the *Star Wars* trilogy has been explained in various ways, from the technical and special effects wizardry that eroticises speed and produces spectacular scenes to the extensive use of universal mythic themes and archetypes that resonate in the consciousness of the viewer. George Lucas's own comments make it clear that the fit between the trajectory of the trilogy's narrative and Joseph Campbell's monomyth of the hero⁴ is no accident.

However, creators work at an unconscious level too. And it is important to note that the Campbell monomyth is, according to the evidence described below, itself shaped by perinatal experiences normally beyond conscious recall, that is, by experiences the fetus had in the womb, during birth, and immediately after birth. It then follows that the extent to which these unconscious powerful forces are tapped can not only determine the content of the narrative, but the appeal it has for an audience.

Any film, any narrative, cannot avoid using some perinatal imagery, for reasons which should also become clear soon. Dreams, like creative works, are products of the unconscious, and a study of 590 dreams showed sixty percent of them contained such birth-related imagery. Indeed, several writers have noted the blatant perinatal imagery of some scenes in the *Star Wars* trilogy, but without apparently appreciating what was involved. Neither were they aware of how those elements relate to certain kindred material, in particular to the Oedipal struggle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. In this article I will seek to redress this lack by presenting the pervasively perinatal elements of the *Star Wars* tapestry along with an understanding – based on the extensive research of Stanislav Grof into the perinatal unconscious – of the significance of that perinatal weave.

Grof's Birth Stages: Shaping Behavior for Life

Nearly two decades ago it could be written that "a vast body of psychological material on birth feelings has accumulated in the past two decades."⁵ Of course, the evidence is even more compelling today. Deep regression of subjects by means of primal therapy, LSD, immersion tanks, holotropic breathing, and hypnosis has exposed fetal and neonatal experiences to verbalized recall. The conclusion: Not only is the fetus extremely sensitive to stimuli, but its experiences just before, during, and after birth embed themselves so deeply in the unconscious that they shape behavior and thought for life as the individual tries to bring some congruence between his or her unconscious preoccupations and the external world.

Birth, in particular, is an experience too overwhelming to be assimilated and defended against by immature nervous systems or digested by the unconscious. It has to be controlled by being projected into the imagination or dream life, or by being acted out in some way. Utilizing an extraordinary mass of clinical data from his research, Stanislav Grof devised a four-stage scheme of perinatal experience that provides matrices for arranging and interpreting fantasy and behavior.⁶ Furthermore – and this is germane to a major point of this article – if an individual was particularly impressed and imprinted by one or two of these perinatal matrices, or stages, his or her postnatal thought, artistic expression, and behavior tend to reflect this.

Grof's stages, in brief, are as follows: Stage 1, the matrix of security and union, relates to the primal union with the mother – an intrauterine stage of symbiosis when, ideally, security and satisfaction of all needs are enjoyed and where inner and outer are not differentiated. Stage 2, persecution and pressure, corresponds to the onset of labor, when chemical changes and muscular contractions start to occur and the fetus feels the effect of an alarmingly changed and pressurized environment as the cervix remains closed. Incipient uterine contractions may be experienced as an attack, for example, by a huge octopus. Stage 3, struggle and sensation, relates to the opening of the cervix and propulsion along the birth canal when a struggle for survival amidst enormous pressures ensues. Immense energy is absorbed and released; there are feelings of suffocation and of powerful currents streaming through the body. Stage 4, triumph and survival, corresponds to exit from the birth canal, decompression, relief, relaxation, and physical separation from the mother.

Let us now look at how these elements express themselves in the *Star Wars* trilogy.

Stage 1 in *Star Wars*: Harsh, Barren, and Promising

Imagery in the trilogy evocative of Stage 1 is not plentiful. If one sees Luke as treading the path of the "hero with a thousand faces," he must start from a state of comparatively blissful and primal innocence, such as life on his uncle's farm on Tatooine. The surrounding landscape has a certain rugged beauty and majesty and permits a degree of agriculture and self-sufficiency.

But it is also dry, harsh, and barren...not the bounteous paradise typical of Stage 1 imagery. Luke is aware enough of the predatory Sandpeople and the persecutory forces of the Empire to feel less than entirely secure. His emotional needs are not satisfied. Frustrated with the drudgery of farm life, he longs to join his peers at the space academy and become a fighter pilot. He feels trapped and confined, and he chafes at the authority of Uncle Owen, who does not want him to follow his father's footsteps. Luke by no means sees the world as idyllic, nor as transcending good and evil. Scenes of natural or palatial beauty, such as the Endor forest, do occur spasmodically throughout the trilogy, but they tend not to be concordant with security and bliss – the frozen wastes of the icy planet Hoth spring to mind.

However, in learning of the Force from Obi-Wan Kenobi, Luke is given an intimation of something that mystically unifies the cosmos and transcends time and space, a unified field that permits telepathy,

telekinesis, hypnosis, and identification with interstellar space. It registers the annihilation of the planet Alderaan, so that Obi-Wan can sense millions of souls perishing – “a great disturbance in the Force.” Giving way to intuition and the Force, as Luke does in the attack on the Death Star in *Star Wars* (henceforth SW, the first story in the trilogy) is precisely the confident and serene surrender to a benevolent, protective guidance (“it will be with you always”) that marks the attitude of this stage. The Universe is a mystery to be experienced rather than a riddle to be solved. So although Stage 1 imagery of bounteous security is not abundant, the abstract notion of “the Force” is a salient Stage 1 characteristic.

Stage 2 in the Trilogy: Predicaments Aplenty!

Stage 2 imagery, on the other hand, is plentiful. The imagery of this of Grof’s stages revolves around a sense of entrapment, of being subject to inexplicable and unjustified threat, a sense of being unable to escape from perpetual suffering, endless terror, or unavoidable doom, of being a victim. It generates visions of imprisonment, torture, mutilation, inquisition, malevolent plotters, black magicians, demonic forces, the fall of angels, dehumanized and grotesque automata and robots, labyrinths, dangerous caves, swamps, darkness and ominous colors, bleak, arid landscapes, descent to the underworld, being sucked into an abyss, attacks from terrifying monsters, and so on. The corresponding theme of descent to the underworld – of shifting from a sense of cosmic unity to the torments of hell – reflect the onset of labor during birth.

Life experiences and feelings reminiscent of this stage are helplessness, loneliness, claustrophobia, alienation, rejection, abandonment, falls from grace, depression, paranoia, oppressive family atmosphere, sense of meaninglessness, futility, and despair, situations threatening survival and bodily integrity such as warfare, injury, accidents, incorporation, and near-drowning. The angst of existentialism (cf. Sartre’s *No Exit*) and the nightmarish, bizarre, and morbid features of the work of Zola, Doestoevsky, Poe, Hieronymous Bosch, Goya, Dali, and Petronius indicate the legacy of this stage of perinatal experience.⁷

The aridness of Luke’s Tatooine environment, the attack upon him by the Sandpeople who ride mammoth-like steeds, the threat of the Jawas to R2-D2, C-3PO losing an arm, Luke’s frustration at life on the farms (he ends one domestic scene in the farmhouse with the words, “I am going nowhere”) are Stage 2 elements in the earliest part of SW. Then, after the destruction of the farmstead and the murder of Luke’s uncle and aunt by imperial troops, Stage 2 imagery intensifies: There is the “descent” to the nightmarish, hostile underworld of the Mos Eisley cantina, populated by a wide range of grotesque creatures, one of whom has an arm cut off by Obi-Wan’s lightsaber.

But even before this are Stage 2 scenes on the imperial command ship: Vader tortures a rebel officer, interrogates, confines, and agrees to the torture of Leia, and generally radiates malevolence as he expresses confidence that fear will hold the empire together. Leia’s sense of despair at her imprisonment is conveyed by the hologram message, “Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi,” which R2-D2 plays for Luke and Obi-Wan.

The incorporative, engulfing aspect of Stage 2 imagery is illustrated first when the Death Star’s tractor beam sucks in the *Millennium Falcon* and then when Luke, Han, Leia, and Chewbacca, pursued through the labyrinth, dive down into the garbage pit and stand knee-deep in liquid and solid garbage, threatened with mastication and digestion. Luke is pulled under by a largely unseen, slimy monster that wraps around him and, when Luke momentarily surfaces, pulls him under again. This “Belly of the Whale” motif takes on an even more blatant uterine aspect when the walls close in and threaten to crush the quartet.

The themes of (actual or attempted) swallowing, incorporation, engulfment, mutilation, dismemberment – the oppressive atmosphere redolent of what the fetus experiences during the contraction phase in a closed uterus – is much more pervasive in *The Empire Strikes Back* (henceforth ESB, the second movie in the trilogy).⁸ Luke, while patrolling on the ice planet Hoth, is seized by an abominable snowman, is hung up in a cave for future consumption, cuts off the monster's arm, and is put inside a dead wampa by Han, who cuts its belly open to provide shelter for Luke. Having escaped from Hoth, Han's spaceship, the *Millennium Falcon*, with Han, Leia, Chewbacca, and C-3PO aboard, flies into a cavity in the ground which coincides with the mouth of a monster, down whose gullet the craft flies before settling in its stomach. In typical perinatal style, the trapped characters manage to fly out through its mouth in the nick of time before teeth can enclose and trap them.

Luke meanwhile crashes on Dagobah and his craft sinks into an eerie, swampy, underworld place that gives Luke the creeps (“something out of a dream...I feel cold, like death”), where R2-D2 is swallowed by a monster lurking under the water and is then spat out. Reptilian creatures and an apparition of a subsequently decapitated Vader add to the horror. Onboard the imperial command ship, C-3PO is comprehensively fragmented and sent to a junk pile, an enduring fear for this droid. As if in recognition of the salience of the fragmentation theme, Vader, in announcing a reward for the capture of the *Millennium Falcon* and its inmates, declares that there is to be “no disintegrations.”

On Bespin, “the pattern of capture, rescue, and escape becomes relentless and oppressive, until finally rescue and escape become impossible.”⁹ Han is put into a torture chamber by Vader, screams are heard, and then he is lowered into a pit and prepared for a living death, frozen in carbonite and destined for Jabba the Hutt. The infernal environment for all this is suitably red, black, and sulfurous. Red, black, and sulfurous fumes are the backdrop for the duel between Vader and Luke in the bowels of Bespin, full of pits, tunnels, voids, and grills, where Luke has his right hand cut off and falls into an abyss and down a chute. To the extent that Leia is a mother figure, her separation from Luke for much of ESB amounts to an abandonment.

The opening scenes of *The Return of the Jedi* (henceforth ROJ, the final story in the trilogy) – in the infernal, nightmarish underworld of Jabba, a den of black and red horror with a tooth-like entrance door – are perhaps the clearest expression in the trilogy of visions of Tartarus. There are a collection of repulsive monsters, notably the wide-mouthed Jabba, who eats a small creature alive, and the large-toothed Rancor, who devours two associates of Jabba before having its voracious jaws pried apart and then being killed by Luke. Han still frozen in carbonite, a sinister-looking bounty hunter, a disintegrated droid and a tortured droid, and the threat of a similar fate for C-3PO are additional elements in the theme.

The incorporative theme as well is continued when Jabba calls the thawed-out Han “Bantha-fodder.” The threats to bodily integrity and the terrors of incorporation are magnified by the fate that is promised our heroes once they are fed to the Sarlacc, a man-eating pit in the desert, where they will encounter “a new definition of pain and suffering” as they are digested over a thousand years. This toothed orifice in the desert is fed at least five of Jabba's crew (on one occasion swallowed with an audible gulp) when a fight started by Luke breaks out. The incorporative grisliness of the vagina-dentata-like orifice is reinforced by a tentacle it sends forth to wrap around Lando before he is freed from it by Han.

In these ways, for sustained horror, the Jabba segment is perhaps unequaled in the trilogy, as it recaptures the most nightmarish elements of the second perinatal stage. Jabba – a vile fiend surrounded by demonic creatures and without even the stature of a tyrant – with gleeful, mocking sadism dispenses capricious, random suffering that seems to have no purpose¹⁰ apart from inculcating pervasive terror and

reducing to dehumanised monsters anyone not yet at that level. Keeping with this element, elsewhere throughout the trilogy the Empire exerts its pervasive terrorizing power through robotic stormtroopers, who are the servant automata of a dehumanizing technology.

In another scene expressing Stage 2 imagery, Han, Luke, and Chewbacca are slung on a spit in preparation for roasting and consumption by the Ewoks. This occurs in another of those red and black, suggestive-of-the-infernal environments common in ESB and ROJ and indicative of the hellish second matrix. And as the story unfolds in ROJ, the Stage 2 theme of the fallen angel is kept before us. Nonetheless, the frequency and intensity of that stage's horrid imagery declines for the remainder of ROJ as the narrative moves more into Stage 3 and 4 imagery, i.e., engagement/struggle and, eventually, triumph. In these scenes the hellish red and black colors are offset with blue in creating the backdrop. These colors dominate when Vader and Luke meet the emperor on the Death Star and then do battle with each other. Significantly, indicating a movement out of Stage 2 helplessness, this time it is Vader's hand that is cut off. As for the emperor, he is hurled down a deep chute of the reactor core and consumed by fire.¹¹

Finally, Stage 3...At Least There's Hope!

Despite the abundance of Stage 2 plot developments, as described above – and despite what one might think considering these seemingly impossible situations – Stage 2 experience in the trilogy is not marked by the sense of futility that it usually engenders. That this is so may be due to the equally abundant Stage 3 imagery.

This imagery revolves around titanic battles, volcanic ecstasy, oscillation between intense pain and pleasure, massive explosions, launching missiles and spaceships, flash discharges and high-voltage currents, powerful currents streaming through the body, diabolic war machines, cataclysms, massacres, orgies, carnivals, sensual dancing, crusades, conquests, destruction of cities and civilizations. Postnatal life experiences that relieve the third perinatal stage include struggles, fights, choking, suffocation, strangulation, adventurous activities such as participation in battles and revolutions, court power struggles, infliction of pain, dangerous driving and flying, betrayal and intergenerational conflict, amusement park rides, wild parties, seduction, rape, willingness to endure great hardships to secure victory, and enormous discharges of destructive impulses and energies.

Though gruesome like Stage 2, Stage 3 is the stage of purgatory rather than hell. Although some of the elements are not easily distinguishable from Stage 2 (death, or the threat of death, looms large in both), here there is engagement and fighting back, rather than helpless suffering from persecution. Suffering in Stage 3 has a clear and definite purpose. The sensuous, volcanic nature of the output of Rubens and Van Gogh, the intense upward striving of Gothic architecture and El Greco's paintings, the exploits of Don Juan and the basic themes of Wagner operas are illustrative of how such imagery appears in creative work.

The most important themes of the trilogy fit fairly obviously into this stage. There is a heroic struggle of good versus galactic tyranny and evil taking place in space, on the ground, and within structures; rebel characters and pilots are involved in frequent chase and battle scenes; and characters are portrayed who have some emotional life. These characters stand starkly in contrast to the dehumanised, faceless, sterile, Fascist, regimented, droid-like, mechanical forces of the octopoid empire (Vader is described by Yoda as "more a machine now than a man"), who enforce martial law and maintain roadblocks at colonial outposts such as Mos Eisley and who devise two Death Stars.

To support the violent upheaval of Stage 3, there are numerous fiery explosions¹², including that of a whole planet, Alderaan, which Tarkin sadistically forces Leia to watch. Fiery explosions also take place in the battle for the rebels' generator on Hoth near the beginning of ESB.¹³ Vader strangles several subordinates in the course of events and himself breathes in a labored, constricted way with the aid of a respirator. The *Millennium Falcon* can accelerate to light speed via its hyperdrive, and in ESB it and its pursuers have to negotiate a dangerous meteor field. The attacking missions that lead to the destruction of the Death Stars withstand ferocious pursuit and resistance from defending spacecraft and steer at high speed through a long and dangerous channel. The thrills and spills of the speeder-bikes through the forest of Endor are further obvious examples of this stage's imagery.

The oscillation between pain and pleasure, also characteristic of Stage 3, is conveyed not only by the varying fortunes of the protagonists but also in the struggle within the Force between its light and dark sides. This is expressed, for example, by the temptations offered to Luke's self-control, especially that of giving in to hate and being consumed by it when he is being zapped by the emperor's bolts of electricity. If applied to others and not the self, the power to control leads to the dark side, as Yoda warned. Likewise, Luke struggles between two poles over whether he must kill or redeem his father ("there is still good in him"). A struggle goes on within Vader, too, notably in the final scene on the Death Star when he turns on the emperor and finally redeems himself.

Individual combats include Han and Greedo at Mos Eisley, Obi-Wan and Vader on the Death Star in SW, Luke and Vader in their spacecraft in the attack on the Death Star in SW, Luke and Vader in ESB and in ROJ, Luke and the Rancor. Vader's betrayal of Lando on Bespin, who is then forced to betray Han, and Tarkin's betrayal of Leia when she supplies some information on the rebels and then has her home planet blown up, also fit this stage.

The dyadic interlock of the third perinatal stage, when mother and child cause so much pain to each other and are bound together in a situation both have to face, leads to situations in postnatal life where, figuratively and literally, blood spilt on both sides can mix and fuse, so that the partners of dyads are bound to each other in unsuspecting ways. They are motivated by the same forces. Examples of bound dyads are sadists and masochists, prisoners and guards, policemen and criminals, ultrarightists and ultraleftists, revolutionaries and tyrants.

The nature and danger (for Luke) of this dyad is brought out by the additional internecine fact that tyrant and rebel are father and son, by the way this is brought home to Luke by his seeing his own features appear in the mask of the decapitated Vader under the tree on Dagobah, and by the emperor's recognition that the rebel could, if turned, become an effective co-tyrant, channeling his destructive impulses into oppression.

Grof has found that many subjects who could recover Stage 3 experience, especially the final phases of the birth journey, easily identified with famous tyrants such as Nero, Genghis Khan, Hitler, Stalin. This gave them an insight into the mentality of the tyrant and its kinship with that of a child struggling in the birth canal and responding with fury to the infliction of suffocation, pain, and anxiety, and how they might (strive to) become tyrannical if the appropriate level of the unconscious were sufficiently stimulated by the circumstances of their lives.¹⁴

Among the characteristics of tyrants uncovered by Grof's work were extreme loneliness and paranoia. The loneliness of Vader and the emperor is strongly implicit in their portrayal in the films. It is impossible to imagine either of them in a domestic or convivial situation, chatting and relaxing with relatives and friends. That Vader is the favorite character with many children may have something to do

with their greater proximity to being in the birth canal.¹⁵ It may be a response to the invitation to be the rebel part of the revolutionary-tyrant dyad (preferring Vader to Luke is a rebellious perversity common in children), but it may also be an empathetic response to two other characteristics of dictators, a feeling of inferiority, and a hunger for recognition and respect.

Luke becomes more like Vader when he acquires a bionic hand. Unlike many revolutionaries, Luke manages to resist the sadomasochistic, other-destructive and simultaneously self-destructive position this would entail. Still, the issue and the temptation to betray all is clearly presented. On Vader's part, he actually switches to the role of rebel and betrayer to the emperor. In ESB he apparently determines to save Luke's life and offers him the chance to rule the empire with him ("We will rule the galaxy together as father and son") if he will join the dark side of the Force and help him overthrow the emperor, which Vader himself, in fact, does at the end of the trilogy.

Stage 4: Deliverance and Triumph

According to Grof, imagery associated with Stage 4 involves expansiveness, expansions of space, visions of gigantic marble halls, radiant light and beautiful colors, entry into heaven or the Elysian fields, the final overthrow of a tyrant, triumphal scenes and processions, victory over monsters, majestic

The mood of [Stage 4] is one of liberation, salvation, redemption, love, forgiveness, humility, a sense of having been unburdened and purged, exhilaration, and warmth and desire to serve humanity.

mountains and starry skies. Relevant postnatal life experiences include fortuitous escape from or termination of dangerous situations, survival of an accident or natural disaster, the end of a long and exhausting war, and the overcoming of severe obstacles by active effort to achieve signal success. The mood of this stage is one of liberation, salvation, redemption, love, forgiveness, humility, a sense of having been unburdened and purged, exhilaration,

and warmth and desire to serve humanity. The sense of cosmic unity here has much in common with Stage 1 but is experienced in the aftermath of a life-altering struggle and a sense of rebirth. Hercules completing his labors, St. George returning from slaying the dragon, Theseus the Minotaur, and Perseus the Gorgon, are illustrative.

In the *Star Wars* trilogy, the starlit panoramas of much of the action in space obviously fall into this category, as do the numerous escapes from tight corners by our heroes, though celebrations of escapes are mostly fairly muted. The cloud city of Bespin has some of the relevant characteristics – graceful, lofty, light-filled chambers. The triumphal scene in the great hall, with its huge vertical beams of light, when Luke and Han are given medals by Leia at the end of SW, the street celebrations near the end of ROJ in the 1997 Director's Cut version and the rejoicing in the Ewoks' settlement clearly qualify.

The redemptive theme that runs through the second half of the trilogy (this includes Lando making up for his "betrayal") and blends with resistance to the emperor and the dark side of the Force reaches its climax when Vader casts down the emperor and finally responds to the good that is in him. Luke has successfully emerged from the struggle to learn to use the Force constructively for a greater good, in contrast to Vader's customary destructive use of it. The ultimate reconciliation of Luke and Vader is pivotal to the success of the whole rebellion.

As Han realizes he is free to develop his relationship with Leia, and the spirits of Obi-Wan, Yoda, and Vader stand side by side, exalted and smiling upon Luke and perhaps representing healing of cleavages in his psyche, the mood is indeed one of "liberation, salvation, redemption, love, forgiveness, humility." The most appropriate word is, perhaps, deliverance. The qualities required for successful resistance to

tyranny – such as strength, courage, and commitment – are the very qualities that can serve a tyrant well. And not the least of Luke’s triumphs is, for now at least, successful resistance to the temptation that many revolutionaries succumb to, becoming tyrants themselves.

The war and revolution themes of Stages 2 and 3, experienced from the perspectives of victim/vanquished or oppressor/victim, need a Stage 4 resolution that restrains the triumphal mood which can, unless great care is taken, slide back into Stage 3 oppression by the victors. The trilogy ends with no suggestion that this is about to occur.¹⁶ Luke had resisted the Satanic temptations of Vader and the emperor.

The Struggle to Be Reborn

In conclusion, Grof’s thesis that much human fantasy and behavior can be explained by perinatal imprinting is clinically evident and has been fruitfully employed by many in attempts to understand human behavior, notable among whom are astronomer Carl Sagan, philosopher of religion Huston Smith, and mythologist Joseph Campbell.¹⁷ “Current transpersonal research shows surprising similarities between birth, death, shamanic initiation, the mythological hero’s journey, certain aspects of schizophrenia, and psychedelic experiences.”¹⁸

While the physical struggle to be born is a symbiotic conflict between mother and child, the emotional and spiritual struggle to mature is often played out as a conflict between father and child that leads to a different kind of deliverance. Indeed, as in virtually all other stories in this genre, real mothers are wholly absent from the *Star Wars* story. When material from the perinatal level of the unconscious emerges into consciousness, the individual can begin “the hero’s journey.” And in the course of it, he or she becomes intensely preoccupied with death and a dramatic struggle to be born (reborn) and to free the self from whatever it is that confines it – which at its base is the post-traumatic baggage we all carry from our childhoods and especially that first, biological, birth.

Some USA viewers of the *Star Wars* films have enjoyed a perceived analogy with America’s War of Independence to explain the phenomenal grasp the *Star Wars* saga has upon the consciousness of so many. But in actuality the *Star Wars* trilogy owes much of its cross-cultural appeal to the way that its overall theme, its individual scenes, and the pace and manner of its projection recapitulates the experience of our births, in general, and in particular the way it validates the struggle we all experience in our lives as a result of that early imprint.

Notes and Works Cited:

¹ Mary Henderson, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (New York: Bantam, 1997), p. 53, speaking of the garbage masher in the belly of the Death Star in “Star Wars” (henceforth SW, and referring to the first part of the trilogy) that threatens to masticate and digest Luke, Han, Leia, and Chewbacca.

² J. P. Telotte, “The Dark Side of the Force: *Star Wars* and the Science Fiction Tradition.” *Extrapolation* 24, pp. 216-226, Fall 1983, p. 226.

³ Frederick Leboyer, *Birth without Violence: The Book That Revolutionized the Way We Bring Our Children into the World*. (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 9.

⁴ Joseph Campbell's monomyth of the hero is presented in his classic work, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1990, reprint, Princeton University Press). He describes a universally depicted mythic cycle which begins with the hero (representing the average person) leaving the sameness of everyday reality to be drawn into an adventurous encounter with dark forces (representing the average person's call to encounter her or his inner darkness on the path of self-realization), to do righteous and eventually victorious battle with these forces, in the process to become transformed, and then to return again to the everyday world, a renewed person with a "torch" to bring to the world.

⁵ Loyd DeMause, "The Fetal Origins of History." *Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology*, 4, pp. 1-92, 1981, p. 8. Cf. Christina and Stanislav Grof, *The Stormy Search for the Self* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1990), p. 145: "Recent research has repeatedly confirmed and further developed the original ideas of Freud's disciple Otto Rank about the permanent role that the birth trauma and even perinatal influences play in human life. These findings have inspired an entire new field: prenatal and perinatal psychology." The likelihood of perinatal imprinting and the undoubted ability of some people to recall fetal experience even without the aid of special techniques is discussed by R. D. Laing, *The Voice of Experience* (London: Penguin, 1982). Laing refers to the work of Otto Rank, Arthur Janov, Francis Mott, M. Peerbolte, Frank Lake, Stanislav Grof, Donald Winnicott, and Frederick Leboyer.

⁶ Stanislav Grof, *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (New York: Viking, 1975); Stanislav Grof, "Perinatal Roots of Wars, Totalitarianism, and Revolutions: Observations from LSD Research," *Journal of Psychohistory* 4(3) Winter 1997, pp. 269-308; Stanislav Grof, *Beyond the Brain* (New York: State University Press, 1985).

⁷ On Petronius, see Ron F. Newbold, "Feelings of Entrapment, Persecution, and Depression in the Satyricon: A Perinatal Explanation," *Classicum* 16(1) April 1990, pp. 14-15. See too, idem, "Perinatal Imagery in Claudian," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 73(1) Spring 199, pp. 7-15.

⁸ For the darkness of this film, see especially A. Gordon, "The Empire Strikes Back: Monsters from the Id," *SFS* 7 November 1980, pp. 313-318.

⁹ Mary Henderson, 1997, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁰ Aside from punishing the disobedient dancing girl, Oola, and settling a score with Han.

¹¹ It is of interest that fire and falling can be symbols of the birth process. See Grof, 1977, op. cit., p. 303.

¹² "The Death Star goes up in an orgasmic explosion of fireworks." A. Gordon, "Star Wars: A Myth for our Time," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 6(4) Fall 1978, pp. 314-326, at p. 324.

¹³ The alternation between ice/cold and fire in this part of the film is typical of the sensory oscillation that can characterize Stage 3 experience.

¹⁴ The insight that tyrants could lead pitiable lives and that they were as much victims as aggressors has a long history. Plato, for one, made such observations. As Henderson (1997, op. cit., p. 156) points out, tyrants are often those who used strength and fury to master what they saw as evil but then are mastered by those qualities to become evil themselves.

¹⁵ For children's identification with Vader, see L. Scicaj, "Bettelheim, Castaneda, and Zen: The Powers Behind the Force in *Star Wars*," *Extrapolation* 22(3), 1981, pp. 213-230, at p. 215.

¹⁶ But David Ansen is right to ask, "What kind of government do the Rebels stand for anyway?" in "How the Force Conquers All," *Newsweek* 101(23), June 6, 1983, pp. 44-45, at p. 45. And the Nazi-style triumphal gathering at the end of SW may be a flirting with the possibility of future tyranny.

¹⁷ See Henderson (1997, op. cit.) in particular on Campbell's monomyth of the hero. For religion in the trilogy, see P. Vardy, "The Theology of *Star Wars*," *The Month* 20(1), January 1987, pp. 14-18; R. Short, "Closer Still to

Christ: The *Star Wars* Saga,” or “The Gospel According to Saint Lucas,” *The Gospel from Outer Space* (London: Collins, 1983), pp. 45-96.

¹⁸ T. Roberts, “Brainstorm: A Psychological Odyssey,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 26, 1986, pp. 126-136, with many references. The quotation comes from page 131.

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Recommendation

Behind the Scenes

Title: The Making of *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*

Author: J.W. Rinzler

ISBN: 0-091-89737-8

Publisher: Random House

Copyright: 2005



Reviewed by Sarah the Nerd.

Chances are, if you're a *Star Wars* fan you've already heard of or own this book – my own copy was bought from Tesco's, after all. It does exactly what it says on the tin: talks about the film *Revenge of the Sith* and how it was made. Chances also are that you'll find this book a good read, because it's packed with information and there's something for everyone – costumes, vehicles, quotes and lots of pretty pictures.

First and foremost are all the tidbits about character and plot – for example, a 10-year-old Han Solo was originally going to appear on Kashyyyk, and Count Dooku was supposed to be behind Shmi's death; there's still concept art and script drafts left over from these ideas as well. If you like studying the evolution of the story and character motivations, this book will probably be a great help to you. There's definitely a lot about Anakin written in there for a start, and seeing as *Revenge of the Sith* is his story, that can only be a good thing. For example, from page 167: "A new theme illustrates how Anakin relies heavily on droids and computers to target the enemy (the opposite of his son, Luke, who will use the Force)." If you want to read about the characters from the point of view of the people who created them, this is probably a good place to start.

Also featured is concept art – this book would probably be worth buying for the concept art alone, if not for the fact that *The Art of Revenge of the Sith* was released by the same author at the same time – and details about deleted scenes. Hopefully some of them will be seen on the DVD, but for others this might be the only official source that mentions them.

Then of course there's the documentary aspect, like "The Beginning" on *The Phantom Menace* DVD, you're taken behind the scenes. There's lots of information on the technical part of it all, as you'd expect from a book like this – how it was filmed with the greenscreen, how the lightsabre duels are done (not that everyone doesn't know that by now), ILM's work, and much more. And Steven Spielberg comes to visit again. Admittedly, not everyone will find backstage on a *Star Wars* film interesting, but a great many will. There are stills to look at, as well, from both the movie and from behind the camera.

Aside from anything else, this book really makes you appreciate the amount of work that goes into making a film – especially when that film is one of the most anticipated blockbusters of all time. The technology of it all is one thing, and then there's the story, and this book understands them both. You might well feel quite disappointed by the end of it, knowing that there'll never be a film quite like *Star Wars* again.

Discovering *Star Wars*

Susan R.

I discovered *Star Wars* in 1980, at the age of 14, while babysitting for a family lucky enough to actually own a VCR. I remember opening a generic case, hand-labeled *Star Wars: A New Hope*, to find a plain black tape inside. Even with all the negatives – poor tape quality, the kids running around, phone call interruptions – I was hooked.

Up to that point I had no interest in science fiction at all. *Star Wars* changed that. The very next day I went to the theater to see the newly released *The Empire Strikes Back* and left hopelessly in love with Luke Skywalker.

Waiting 3 years for *Return of the Jedi* seemed endless; I confess to filling my time with *Star Trek* reruns (which were new to me, but filled my sci-fi craving and made the time pass quicker). The premier of *Jedi* found me waiting in line with a whole host of kindred spirits. For the first time I was surrounded by people who loved *Star Wars* as much as I did. My new friends and I met many times at the theater that summer, holding unofficial competitions about who could see the movie most. It was an experience I'll never forget.

Since then I've found other friends to share my interest in *Star Wars*. Experiencing the release of the Prequel Trilogy in their company has been even more fun than getting in on the tail end of the Original Trilogy experience.

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