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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 Empire Strikes Back. Monsters From the Id

by Andrew Gordon

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I have argued that the fundamental appeal of *Star Wars* lies in its deliberately old-fashioned plot, which borrows elements from many genres of American popular fantasy and is unified by the structure of “the monomyth.” *Star Wars* recounts the standard adventures of a mythic hero in terms comprehensible to a contemporary, mass American audience. It is fine popular art, all flashy surface, a blend of stunning, fast-moving visuals and pounding music whose impact is intended to be primarily visceral. In addition, a mythic framework unifies the action, and those deeper levels are there if one cares to look at them.

Empire, the continuation of Lucas’ epic saga, reiterates Campbell’s mythic round of Departure, Initiation, and Return. The hero, Luke Skywalker, symbolically dies and is reborn on the ice planet of Hoth, then wanders lost in the dark wood of the swamp planet of Dagobah until he is enlightened by the Jedi master, Yoda, who teaches the inscrutable ways of “the Force” (a kind of Zen filtered through the pop psychology of Est). In the climax, Luke is wounded in an apocalyptic battle with archvillain Darth Vader on the Cloud City of Bespin. All three environments are beautifully realized, with a scrupulous attention to color and detail. The Cloud City, with its graceful, lofty chambers flooded with sunshine and shades of roses, its art deco glass – as well as its dark and menacing inner rooms – rivals the Emerald City of Oz.

In *Empire*, however, Lucas and co-scriptwriters Leigh Brackett and Larry Kasdan have deepened and darkened the vision of *Star Wars*. As Lucas says, *Empire* is like the second act of a three-act play. As with most second acts, it deals with the problems of the characters...they grow and evolve, and things don’t go very well for them. The story doesn’t really end; it doesn’t have a super-climax. Another difference is in the attitude of the films. In the first one the mood is joyous and triumphant, exciting and funny, all at the same time. The second one is exciting and funny too, but it’s also sad; it’s more of a tragedy than a triumph.

Empire is a rousing adventure story which is also genuinely disturbing. The heroes are in retreat from beginning to end: they accomplish only minor victories and suffer major defeats, reversing the pattern of the previous film. At the end of *Star Wars*, Luke believes himself to be following in the path of his deceased father, a noble Jedi knight. Ben Kenobi has passed on to Luke the totem of manhood, Luke’s father’s lightsaber, and Luke has proved himself worthy by defeating Vader and destroying the Death Star. But at the end of *Empire* Luke’s identity and manhood have been shaken by the loss of his lightsaber and his right hand to Vader and by his discovery that the villain is his long-lost father.

What makes *Empire* disturbing is not only the mutilation (a symbolic castration) of the hero, but the fact that the concealed Oedipal meanings of the myth are made manifest. We realize now that Luke has been battling all along to kill his own father. The deliberate suggestion of “Death Father” in the name “Darth Vader” becomes transparently clear. The struggle to find his identity inevitably involves a mythic hero in patricide. Luke is the prophesied hero who will kill the King, a sort of clean-cut, corn-fed, adolescent Oedipus feared by both Vader and The Emperor.

Gary Kurtz, producer of the series, says of *Empire*, “It’s a story of him [Luke] growing up further...Luke’s confrontation with Darth Vader is probably the most important element. *Empire* is a

rites of passage film”² All myth and fairy tales involve rites of passage, and so does *Star Wars*. The difference is that *Empire* stresses the price of independence from the parents, the pain caused by the necessary death of the old self in the course of initiation.

In *Empire*, the young hero’s secure identity is turned topsy-turvy. This upheaval is suggested by numerous episodes in which Luke is literally upside down. First, near the beginning of the film, he is hung by his heels in a frozen cave by a snow monster; second, Yoda instructs Luke to use the Force by having him balance on his hands while levitating objects (Luke keeps losing his balance and toppling over); and finally, near the end of the film, after his defeat by Vader, he is once again upside down, hanging on for his life from the bottom of Cloud City.

Darth Vader, as Gerald Clarke notes, “is far more menacing in *Empire* than he was in *Star Wars*...With Vader dominating, perhaps even more than Lucas intended, *The Empire* finishes on a less satisfying and more ambiguous note.”³ Vader is by now clearly Satanic: once noble but fallen from grace, a betrayer of his former master, a villain who wants to rule the universe and who tempts the hero with promises of infinite power. He strides through the action like a source of demonic energy, as unstoppable as the id. The climactic battle between Luke and Vader is more protracted and brutal than anything in *Star Wars*. It begins in the hellish, fiery-red carbon-freezing chamber, and leads ever downward, deeper and darker into the bowels of Cloud City, until it reaches the pitch of Gothic nightmare.

In the SF film *Forbidden Planet* (1956), it is revealed that the invisible creature killing off the Earth colonists on the planet Altair IV is actually a creation of the mind of the mysterious Dr. Morbius. Morbius has stumbled upon the superscience of the Krel (a dead race which once inhabited the planet), thereby increasing the power of his own mind, but also unwittingly unleashing a destructive “Monster from the Id.” The mental science of the Krel is equivalent to what Lucas calls “the Force,” a power which can be used for either good or evil. Darth Vader, the representative of the dark side of the Force, is Luke’s father, but on another level he also represents Luke’s own potential for evil, his own “Monster from the Id.”

Empire suggests this intimate connection between Luke and Vader. First, Yoda tells Ben that Luke has “much anger in him, like his father.” Later, Yoda asks Luke to abandon his weapons and enter a cave which is strong with the dark side of the Force. Luke asks him, “What’s in there?” Yoda replies, “Only what you take with you.” But Luke disregards the advice and enters the cave armed with his lightsaber. There he encounters and decapitates a vision of Darth Vader, only to see Vader’s helmet dissolve to reveal – Luke’s face. What Luke battles in the cave, then, is his own hatred and violence (which cannot be defeated with more hatred), his Darth Vader, his dark side – in other words, himself. He is not only Luke’s father, but also what Luke could become if he gave in to the temptation of the dark side of the Force.

Irvin Kershner, director of *Empire*, said that in preparing for the film he read everything he could about fairy tales, beginning with “Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment*.”⁴ Bettelheim claims that fairy tales are a voyage into the unconscious. The monster in such tales represents “the monster a child knows best and is more concerned with: the monster he feels or fears himself to be, and which also sometimes persecutes him.” Fairy tales “give these anxieties form and body and also show ways to overcome these monsters.”⁵ The victory in fairy tales is “not over others but over oneself and over villainy (mainly one’s own, which is projected as the hero’s antagonist).”⁶ What such stories demonstrate is “the ego’s conquering the dark forces of the id.”⁷ In *Empire* the dark side predominates; having unleashed those forces, Lucas has not yet shown how they may be successfully controlled. That

task is left for the conclusion of the trilogy, *Return of the Jedi*. Our unease over the ambiguous conclusion of *Empire* is tempered only by the awareness that fairy tales must have happy endings.

One way in which *Empire* deflects our anxiety over the fate of Luke is by further developing the character of Han Solo and plunging him into more peril. The film is structured by parallel action: while Luke, accompanied by R2D2, undergoes his initiation on Dagobah, Solo, Leia, Chewbacca, and C3PO flee from the *Empire's* ships through an asteroid belt. The two plot lines converge in the climax on Cloud City.

Thus *Empire* is an epic with not one but two heroes, who are, in a sense, brother figures. Bettelheim mentions a series of fairy tales which feature the motif of two brothers who undergo separate adventures. The brothers usually stand for “incompatible aspects” of the human personality: “the striving for independence and self-assertion, and the opposite tendency, to remain safely home, tied to the parents.”⁸ Thus Solo acts out Luke’s antisocial desires for total independence. Solo is always torn between being for himself and being for the group. At the end of *Star Wars*, he seems about to leave with his reward money; instead, he returns to rescue Luke. At the beginning of *Empire*, Solo is once again about to leave to pay off his debt to Jabba; once more, he sticks around to rescue Luke and later Leia.

Similarly, while Luke appears asexual, and seems to regard Leia as a mother figure, Solo woos her passionately. (One notices in *Empire* the red lights flashing in the background whenever Solo and Leia confront each other.)

Throughout *Empire*, Solo suffers on Luke’s behalf. First, he risks his life when he rescues Luke on the ice planet. Next, he performs the job that Luke should be doing by protecting Leia in the escape from the Imperial assault. While Luke gets safely away to Dagobah, Solo is pursued by Imperial ships. Finally, Solo is tortured and subjected to a kind of living death in the carbon-freezing chamber. He is used by Vader as bait to entrap Luke; Vader even puts Solo into hibernation merely to test the process intended to be used on Luke. As a brother hero, Solo expresses some of Luke’s repressed tendencies and suffers the punishment for these tendencies.

Empire, like all myths or fairy tales, deals with primal anxieties. In their parallel adventures, Luke and Solo are both faced with a basic, fairy-tale danger: the fear of being eaten alive. First, Luke is hung like a side of beef in a frozen-food locker by the ice creature, who one presumes is saving him as a snack. Next, Solo slits the belly of a dead beast of burden and shoves Luke inside to preserve him from the cold. (This is perhaps not so much being eaten as returning to the womb; right after this episode, Luke is healed by submersion in a bath resembling amniotic fluid.) Later, R2D2, who as Luke’s faithful companion is an extension of Luke, is swallowed and comically spit out by a swamp creature; evidently the serpent finds him unpalatable. Meanwhile, Solo and his group take refuge by flying the Millennium Falcon into a cave on an asteroid. But the cave proves to be alive, and they escape at the last moment from the rapidly closing jaws and monstrous teeth of a gigantic space slug. Finally, the chamber in which Vader meditates on board his ship resembles an enormous jaw with clenching metal teeth. Both Ben and Yoda warn Luke that the dark side can “consume” you if you are not careful.

Empire also plays on an anxiety related to the fear of being eaten: the fear of being dismembered. C3PO is dismantled into a heap of junk metal by Stormtroopers and only partially reassembled by Chewbacca. Luke decapitates his hallucination in the cave, and, in the climax of the film, loses his right hand to Vader’s lightsaber. However, in each case the fear of dismemberment is allayed: both R2D2 and C3PO lost parts in the first film and had them replaced, and the plight of the disassembled C3PO in *Empire*

starts out pathetic but turns comic. Luke at the end becomes part machine, outfitted with a bionic hand indistinguishable from the original.

Aside from the fears of being eaten or mutilated, *Empire* also exploits the fear of suffocation. Darth Vader still suffers from what sounds like a severe case of asthma. As in *Star Wars*, the punishment he usually inflicts is strangulation. And even Chewbacca tries to strangle Lando Calrissian after Lando has betrayed them.

Last of all, the film plays on the fear of falling. Luke crashlands twice, and later he overcomes Vader's Faustian temptation by plunging into an abyss, an endless fall which he miraculously survives.

It is possible that all these seemingly disparate fears – of being swallowed or dismembered, of suffocating or falling – are related on a deeper level to a more primal anxiety. *Empire* is a rite of passage film, and initiation rituals are intended to serve as a passage to manhood by symbolically tempting and defying castration (that is the purpose of the circumcision rites of primitive tribes).⁹ According to standard psychoanalytic theory, “anxiety over being eaten...may be a disguise for castration anxiety.”¹⁰ And “sometimes a manifest fear of suffocation covers a repressed idea of castration.”¹¹ Furthermore, falling from a high place, connoting the danger of being killed, certainly represents punishment, probably most often punishment for wishes of killing; however, the sensation of falling itself simultaneously represents the sensations of sexual excitement which, having been blocked in their natural course, have acquired a painful and frightening character.¹²

[G]iven the overt Oedipal conflict in *Empire*...it is not surprising that there should be a multiplication of frightening episodes intended to arouse and allay fears of emasculation.

In other words, given the overt Oedipal conflict in *Empire*, which climaxes with the hero's being mutilated when he attempts to kill his own father, it is not surprising that there should be a multiplication of frightening episodes intended to arouse and allay fears of emasculation. No wonder Han Solo's ship repeatedly fails to go into warp drive at crucial moments; it suffers a kind of mechanical impotence.

Another possible psychological explanation for the arousal of primal anxieties in the film is that they represent the fear of being abandoned by the mother, which may coexist with castration anxiety. There is nothing startling about such an interpretation. As *Empire* director Irvin Kershner says, “I feel that a film for children has to have certain qualities that children fear – like the fear of abandonment, the fear of being totally alone, the fear that maybe your parents aren't your parents. All kinds of basic fears: that's the root stock that feeds all fairy tales.”¹³ Throughout most of the film, Luke is abandoned by Leia, who has served as a mother figure to him. She is away being romanced by another man. Significantly, when he is hanging on in despair to the bottom of Cloud City after he has been wounded by Vader, he cries out for help to Ben and Leia, his substitute parents. Although the *Millennium Falcon* has already left without him, Leia telepathically hears Luke's cry and forces Lando to return and rescue him.

If we look further at the psychological meaning behind the various perils encountered in the movie, we find that “the longing to be rejoined with an object to which one had yielded one's omnipotence...is unconsciously thought of as a kind of being eaten by a larger, more powerful object; it depends on individual circumstances whether this idea is met with positive longing or with anxiety.”¹⁴ That is, the

fear of being eaten alive can be connected to the longing to return to the womb, as in the episode where Luke is stuffed into the belly of a beast.

Bettelheim points out that fairy tales serve as psychological reassurance for their hearer. Because a child fears many of his own fantasies, “learning that others have the same or similar fantasies makes us feel that we are a part of humanity, and allays our fear that having such destructive ideas has put us beyond the common pale.”¹⁵ The comforting appeal of fairy tales is amplified by the widescreen, shared experience of a film like *Star Wars*. “Attendance at *Star Wars* is largely a group phenomenon; few care to see it alone.” *Star Wars* producer Gary Kurtz says, “Our plots might play well on TV but you just can’t give a TV audience that ‘theatre experience’; the group environment and the widescreen and soundtrack effects. That’s one of the reasons that people went to see *Star Wars* so many times. They wanted that experience. One seven year old wrote me saying he liked ‘living with these people in the theatre for two hours.’ He wanted to do it over and over again. You can’t do that on television.”¹⁶

Just as children love to hear their favorite fairy tales recited over and over again, so audiences both young and old returned repeatedly to *Star Wars* for the reassurance of group indulgence in shared, widescreen fantasy.

Empire, like *Star Wars*, deals with the primal anxieties raised by standard mythic and fairy-tale material. Both films overcome anxiety to some extent by distancing the fantasied in a world long ago and far away, by using prototypical characters, by comic relief, and by offering the implicit fairy-tale reassurance that everything will come right in the end. Nevertheless, *Empire* is by no means as reassuring a spectacle as *Star Wars*, because it brings those anxieties nearer to the surface (where they may become too close for comfort) without satisfactorily resolving them. For that reason, although it is in many ways a more accomplished film, it was not as beloved by audiences as was *Star Wars*.

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Costumes in the *Star Wars* Saga

by Sarah

The costumes of *Star Wars* are an often overlooked but vital part of the saga. Recently an entire exhibition dedicated to them sprung up – Dressing a Galaxy.¹ The costumes (and their designer, Trisha Biggar) have received much praise, and for good reason.

Costumes can be (and are) used to add something to the characters. Colour plays a big part, and so does style. One costume can tell us about a character's "age, gender role, profession, social class [and] personality."² *Star Wars* demonstrates this brilliantly.

Padmé Amidala's costumes are generally the first ones you notice – they were hugely elaborate and utterly gorgeous. Her costumes as Queen were designed to be eye-catching, and they are also colourful, in royal colours: reds and purples and blacks. There often appears to be more of the costume than there is of her, and that was probably the desired effect – Padmé is trapped in her role as Queen. Her costumes as a handmaiden are much less complex; she's not so weighed down by duty. Her handmaiden outfit on Tatooine, where she first meets her future husband, is blue and grey – cool colours, in contrast to the bright ones worn by the Queen. In fact, there aren't many bright colours on Tatooine, most people, including Shmi, are wearing grey, simple outfits. As we've been told, it isn't a bright spot in the galaxy.

Padmé's battle costume at the end of the movie is also fairly simple (but still true to her planet's culture), as she has left the Senate in all its glamour to fight for her planet. She has made a conscious decision to not be weighed down. And, when the battle is won, her white costume at the end of *The Phantom Menace* gives her an "angel-like" appearance – fitting in with Anakin's first words to her: "Are you an angel?"

In *Attack of the Clones*, Padmé's costumes are, by comparison, slightly simpler and less regal. "Overall," says Natalie Portman, "what was different about the costumes in Episode II from those in Episode I was they were made to make me look more like a woman."³ Her black outfit worn in the fireplace scene is interesting – she is telling Anakin he can't have her, but her costume seems to be saying the exact opposite. The colours of her costumes have also changed slightly: not much red or purple, instead blues and yellows, and white for her battle scene.

And by *Revenge of the Sith* the colours have muted: it's mostly blues and blacks. Her costumes also serve as disguises to hide her pregnancy: "In Episode I, she was the Queen, and she was wearing disguises. I once said she should be able to slip out of the back of the costume, and you'd never know she was gone. Ironically, in this one, she's back to wearing disguises. As well as now hiding this marriage to a Jedi, which is not allowed, she has to hide the fact that she's going to have babies. All of the costumes had to disguise these facts."⁴

The last costume Padmé wears while still alive is her sleeveless tan outfit. It looks a little like her battle outfit in *Attack of the Clones*, except it's not white – white is the colour of innocence, and her association with Anakin has taken away her innocence. In fact, after the battle of Geonosis is over, she doesn't wear white at all. Even the wedding dress isn't quite white⁵ – falling in love with Anakin has sealed her fate. Only at the very end of *Revenge of the Sith*, when she is dying, is she back in white; Anakin has gone from her, and she has refused his offer of power.

The last costume we actually see Padmé wearing – the dress she has been put in for the funeral – is a blue dress almost certainly supposed to bring to mind water and the ocean. “I think they call this the ‘End Dress’,” Natalie Portman said. “It’s really really beautiful. I think Trisha wanted to get an ocean sense. Someone said to me that it was very ‘Ophelia.’ With the flowers and the hair, it does look like I’m drowning.”⁶ Anakin dies in fire and Padmé dies in water. In Chinese Taoist thought the element of water overcomes fire⁷, just as Padmé’s children will eventually “overcome” (from a certain point of view) Darth Vader.

By the third act of *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin looks much like Darth Vader – who always wore black – in everything apart from the mask.

Anakin’s costume is fairly simple compared to those designed for Padmé – colour-wise, he starts off as a young boy wearing grey and by *Attack of the Clones* he is wearing black, in contrast to Obi-Wan, who wears light colours all the way through. An early sign of the tension between them, perhaps – the outfits the characters have chosen to wear don’t match, so perhaps their personalities don’t quite match, either. In *Revenge of the Sith* Anakin’s costume has again changed slightly. “We changed his colors, and we darkened them all down, hinting at what he’s going to become. Although he was quite dark brown before,

there were some lighter aspects. This time, we’ve really taken shades of dark brown to give him a dark outline even though he’s still a Jedi.”⁸ By the third act of *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin looks much like Darth Vader – who always wore black – in everything apart from the mask.

Qui-Gon’s costume is also fairly dark – his cloak is about the same colour as Anakin’s. A hint that he would have been a better master for Anakin? Possibly. It could also represent that he is out of step with the Jedi Council, and most of the other Jedi; the others, including Obi-Wan and Mace Windu, mostly have light brown cloaks.

Obi-Wan is one of the few characters who wears more or less the same sort of outfit all through the saga. It seems appropriate, considering that in every movie he is firmly on the side of the good.

Yoda’s costume stays pretty much the same throughout the prequel trilogy, but during his duel with Darth Sidious in Episode III he loses his white Jedi cloak. Very possibly, the cloak symbolises his authority as head of the Jedi Council, which he now has lost. And come *The Empire Strikes Back*, he’s no longer in Jedi clothes.

The Jedi, and therefore their costumes, were influenced by the Samurai. They all seem to wear roughly the same thing, with the same colours – or the main Jedi characters do, at least. Some of the extras wear different things. Aayla Secura’s Jedi costume shows off her stomach, for example, and Jocasta Nu’s has patterns on it.

Jumping forward (or back?) a few years, we have Luke’s costumes. Again, colour is important: he begins with a white costume in *A New Hope*, goes on to a grey one in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and finishes off with a black one. Luke’s costume at the beginning of *Return of the Jedi* was specifically designed to bring to mind Darth Vader, but personally, I’ve always thought it looked a bit like the Emperor’s costume, particularly with the hood covering the head. Either way, it’s supposed to represent that Luke is nearing the edge.

Luke is still wearing his black costume at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, but by then it's fallen open to reveal some grey. Luke has been through a great deal, and will never go back to being how he was in *A New Hope*, but he's still remained who he used to be. A subtle touch, but a good one.

Palpatine is another one whose character journey is shown through his costume: through virtually all of *The Phantom Menace*, he's wearing a dark blue colour – blue is the colour associated with Naboo, but we never see Palpatine wear light colours. In *Attack of the Clones* he mostly wears black and dark colours, matching up with Anakin's dark brown Jedi costume. In *Revenge of the Sith* he's still wearing black, but wearing red as well, especially in the fighting scenes; he's more aggressive in his plans now. (Red is generally the colour of aggression in *Star Wars*, hence why all the Sith have red lightsabres.) In all three of those movies, we also see him in his black cloak – in that, his eyes are covered and we can barely see his face. It's a costume designed for stealth. Appropriate considering Palpatine worked in the shadows, kept himself hidden from suspicion, and didn't reveal his plans until it was too late. And as Emperor, he is always in his black cloak – he's pure evil by this point.

Every costume in *Star Wars* has something to say – whether it's something about the character or about the planet they hail from. Leia's white dress represents purity⁹, and the costumes of the various Queens tell us plenty about culture on Naboo. This goes for extras as well as main characters; a great many of the people walking about in the background have their own costume, and therefore their own planet, environment, and social class. The costumes may go fairly unnoticed, what with so many other things going on, but they help make the *Star Wars* galaxy a more real one, and a place populated with real people and societies.

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Discovering *Star Wars*

JediSherra

In 1977 I was a single mom. After becoming seriously disillusioned with the films in theaters at that time I'd just about lost hope that my daughter would ever enjoy the kind of Saturdays at the matinee I took for granted growing up. Then I saw a news report on TV that celebrated the new movie, *Star Wars*, as a return to family films. I was skeptical, but I took my six year old daughter to see it anyway. We were not disappointed!

C3PO was so funny! I remember my daughter and I laughing at the banter between him and R2D2. I thought Han Solo was just about the most handsome rogue I'd ever seen and Princess Leia had exactly the kind of spirit I wanted for myself. Mostly, though, I remember the scene where Luke stares across the desert at the two setting suns. It was a scene that spoke much to me about the promise of the future – and at that point in my life I definitely needed more hope.

I loved *Star Wars* after that, both for the movie it was and for the symbol of renewal that it became for me. Though she wasn't as much a fan as I, my daughter and I went to see each new movie together. In fact, that Saturday in 1977 began a tradition for us. We still make a point of taking the time to go see new movies together even though she is now grown and married, with kids of her own.

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www.sagajournal.com
editorialteam@sagajournal.com