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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 Heart of the Matter: Padmé, Luke and the Role of Compassion in *Star Wars* by ami-padme

If *Star Wars* can be called a story of redemption – for the galaxy and Republic at large, for the Jedi Order, and for the character of Anakin Skywalker specifically, then the factors that lead to redemption, forgiveness, and rebirth form a crucial part of the story told in the six-film saga.

It can be argued that while redemption of people is a personal act of inner conversion, there are always outside influences that help that change along, specifically people within the convert's inner circle who not only see more to them than the rest of the world, but who have the ability to make that person see this in themselves. While there are numerous people who care for Anakin and have a stake in what could be broadly called the status of his soul, there are two characters in *Star Wars* who clearly have the biggest impact on his redemption: his wife Padmé, and his son Luke. Not coincidentally, these two characters show some of the great capacity for compassion, forgiveness, and understanding of any characters in the movies. They also are, respectively, great champions of the democracy of the old Galactic Republic and the spiritual force for good of the Jedi Order, and play roles (both through Anakin and as individuals) in each organization's eventual rebirth. While Luke may seem most obviously connected with his father – similar looks, both are Jedi, Luke's story revolves around the way he chooses to deal with his father – Luke may also be understood as an avatar of his mother's, carrying Padmé's compassion through to a new generation and continuing her quests to restore the galaxy and her husband/family.

Compassion is broadly defined as “a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.”¹ In the thesaurus, “intolerance” and “ill will” are listed as the word's antonyms.² It is easy to see how this applies to both Padmé and Luke with regard to how they approach Anakin.

Padmé consistently acts with compassion to Anakin, even from the time that he is a young boy. She goes out of her way to comfort and console him after he leaves Tatooine and his mother behind, speaking with him when he's left alone on the transport ship. That she manages to put aside her own considerable worries to speak with Anakin about his is notable. Later when Anakin comes to tell her goodbye – again, with Padmé facing her own troubles and preparing to speak on behalf of her people before the Senate – she takes the time to receive him and to explain that “her heart goes with [him].” Anakin, who has a boyish crush on her from the moment they meet clearly appreciates and places great emphasis on Padmé's gestures of caring and friendship as he grows into adulthood.

In *Attack of the Clones*, Padmé's compassion is a key component of the romance between her and a non-grown Anakin Skywalker. She listens empathetically as Anakin vents his frustrations about the Jedi Order and his Master Obi-Wan to her, easily eliciting further comments from Anakin and helping him to see his situation in a more productive light. When his mother dies later on in the film, it is Padmé who hears Anakin's confession of what he did to the Tusken village, and it is she who accepts and sympathizes with what has happened, and offers Anakin a literal shoulder to cry on. That she chooses that approach instead of a more judgmental, condemning one has garnered some criticism in certain quarters, but seems to be in-line with her position vis-a-vis Anakin generally. What Anakin seems to need at that point is not a scolding or punishment (as one would assume Obi-Wan would respond with) nor manipulative encouragement (as Palpatine gives him in *Revenge of the Sith* when he attempts to

make this kind of retaliation seem normal and expected). What he needs, and what Padmé provides, is almost literally, “deep sympathy...for another who is stricken by misfortune.” This help, in the place of potential rejection or manipulation, helps Anakin move past the point of his mother’s death and his reaction to it, and trust himself enough to function normally for the rest of the movie. In *Revenge of the Sith*, Padmé shows great concern for Anakin’s well-being and state of mind throughout movie, trying to reassure him about her safety and about her pregnancy, though Anakin’s fears (and other issues with the Jedi and the Republic) overwhelm him regardless. Most importantly, at the end of the film, when Anakin has completely lost himself in the Dark Side, she still tries desperately to bring him back to his sense, by reassuring him that his love is all she needs, and that she continues to love him and only wants him to come back from his self-destructive path. Her first words later are concern for him, and her dying words are a desperate attempt to get Obi-Wan to see that Anakin is still able to be saved. Though she does not accept Anakin’s choices, and recognizes them as horrifyingly wrong, she still lets her love for him guide her actions.

Aside from her direct dealings with Anakin, Padmé is also shown to be a compassionate person in general. During the occupation of her planet in *The Phantom Menace* she is deeply concerned for the potential suffering of her people during her time off-planet. She decides to leave the safety of Coruscant and return to Naboo in part so that her “fate would be no different than that of [her] people.” In a deleted scene from *Attack of the Clones*, Padmé speaks to Anakin about work she had done with Galactic refugees. In a somewhat metaphorical sense, Padmé also is wounded as the Republic is destroyed from within – she is clearly concerned and dismayed over the state of the Galactic government in Episodes I and II, and is devastated by the creation of the Empire in Episode III. Joseph Campbell and others have famously pointed out that the literal meaning of the word compassion is “to suffer with.”³ For Padmé, this clearly does not only apply to Anakin.

It is also worth noting that in the prequels, Anakin gives his own definition of the word “compassion” in the movie, *Attack of the Clones*: “Compassion, which I would define as unconditional love, is central to a Jedi’s life.” This is said in an important scene in Anakin and Padmé’s courtship, and comes to describe a large part of their dynamic and its importance to him. Wikipedia.com states that “[u]nconditional love is a concept that means showing love towards someone regardless of his or her actions... It is a concept comparable to true love, a term...more frequently used to describe love between lovers.”⁴ Though Anakin’s fear for Padmé (and for himself and their child) combines with other factors to cause Anakin’s downfall, his wife’s compassion is one of the foundation blocks for his redemption.

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That redemption, of course, comes through Padmé and Anakin’s son, Luke. He does not find out for two full movies that Darth Vader is Anakin Skywalker, and only has *Return of the Jedi* to truly deal with this revelation. His approach echoes his mother’s in the earlier trilogy – while in no way accepting his father’s wrong actions, Luke hope to bring his father back to Light without fighting him. This decision seems to fly in the face of logic, not least because Luke has never known his father as anything other than an “evil” man, unlike his mother, who knew Anakin as a child and later as a husband. Luke not only knew just Vader, but had been lied to for the majority of the time he knew him to believe that Vader has murdered the father he idolized in absentia. Despite that, at the first opportunity to give his thoughts on how to proceed, Luke tells Obi-Wan that he does not believe he can kill Vader, causing Obi-Wan to lament him as a lost, last hope. He tells Leia that he feels he can save Vader, rather than running

away from him or attempting to defeat him, and stands by that conviction in the face of Leia's stunned disbelief. He then tries repeatedly to get through to his father despite the complex and difficult circumstances on the Death Star with Emperor Palpatine. Luke final act in the throne room is to once again refuse to fight or kill his father, and to defy the Emperor by focusing on the good man and Jedi his father once was. As George Lucas once explained to *Rolling Stone*, "Darth Vader has compassion for his children, and that's ultimately what children are for."⁵ In Episode VI, Palpatine once again tries to manipulate a situation where Anakin is set to receive some badly needed empathy – he tells Vader very confidently that Luke's "compassion for [Vader] will be his undoing," and spends the majority of the throne room scenes trying to convince Luke that Vader is beyond redemption and cannot be reached even by the love of his son, and that Luke must give in to his uncompassionate feelings of anger and betrayal he holds toward his father in order to defeat and kill him. Luke's belief in his father, which eventually carries the day on a personal and galactic level, shows that he has the same compassion as his mother.

Compassion, and all it entails – forgiveness, acceptance, unconditional love – holds a special place in the *Star Wars* story, and with special characters in Padmé and Luke representing it through two generations of the saga. In the end, it is this characteristic that makes the biggest difference.

Works Cited and Notes:

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Recommendation

Where Academia and Fandom Meet

Title: Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed
Produced by: Prometheus Entertainment
Air Date: May 28, 2007
Length: 2 Hours



Reviewed by Matril.

For fans who appreciate an academic, in–depth exploration of the themes and literary resonances of Star Wars, this television special is an excellent resource. Such explorations have certainly been done before, and this special does not, perhaps, explore a vast amount of new ground, but there is something new and refreshing about the manner in which these explorations are presented. First, all six films are referenced, presenting the saga as a complete tale with sophisticated story arcs and recurring motifs and archetypes. Secondly, it makes full use of the visual and audio aspects of television. Clips from the films themselves, of course, are presented frequently throughout the special, often with split–scenes that illustrate motifs that appear throughout the saga. The makers of the special are clearly aware that Star Wars is a cinematic and visual tale at its heart, and make full use of this aspect. The special also draws its material from interviews with a variety of speakers, including professors of religion, fine arts or classics; filmmakers; authors; and even a few politicians.

The special is divided into chapters with titles such as “Wizards and Mentors” and “Man versus Machine.” Most of the chapters are concerned with one or more of the archetypes that appear in the Star Wars saga – the hero, the wise guide, the hero’s companion – and examine, in the traditional mythic–archetype/Campbellian manner, the ways that they compare to figures of legend, myth, religion or literature. References are made to everything from Greek mythology to Shakespeare to the Wizard of Oz to Frankenstein. Often illustrations or artwork accompany these references, adding a nice visual element to the discussion. One of the later chapters, “The death of liberty,” delves into historical references rather than literary, comparing Palpatine to real–life tyrants such as Hitler and Stalin. The final chapter, “Redemption and Resurrection,” returns to a fully mythic–archetype exploration of the son’s reconciliation with the father and the return of life and hope to the universe.

Overall the special has an intelligent and optimistic feel to it, celebrating the saga’s message and conjecturing that it will continue to hold meaning far into the future. It’s almost like taking a college course on the saga as taught by enthusiastic, scholarly–minded fans.

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