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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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You'll Never Get Out of Bedford Falls: The Inescapable Family in American Science-Fiction and Fantasy Films

by Andrew Gordon

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What do *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), the *Star Wars* trilogy (1977-83), and the *Back to the Future* trilogy (1985-90) have in common? The overt message of all these American fantasy or science-fiction films could be stitched on a sampler. It is, as Dorothy learns in *Oz*, "There's no place like home." You may bitterly resent or hate your hometown, your home, or even your family, and yearn desperately to escape, but you never will – you keep returning. Even though you may not realize it, and no matter how bleak things may appear, home is where the heart is. You can never leave the bosom of your family; you carry it with you wherever you go, even if you go deep into fantasyland, rocket through the galaxy, or travel through time.

Dorothy imagines she has been transported from Kansas to Oz, but she travels there in her family home, and she never really leaves its confines. The people she knew in Kansas reappear, slightly disguised, in her Oz dream. And try as he might, George Bailey never escapes the boundaries of his hometown of Bedford Falls, either. Like Dorothy and George, Luke Skywalker dreams of getting away from the family farm and having adventures in faraway places. Although Luke traverses his entire galaxy, he never really leaves home either, because whatever planet he's on, he keeps bumping into his sister Princess Leia and his father Darth Vader. Marty McFly goes forward in time from 1985 to 2015 and backward to 1955 and 1885, but he too never leaves his hometown of Hill Valley or his family, in the form of his parents, his wife and children, or his remote ancestors. These fantasies are compromise formations: the protagonists escape their families, but paradoxically they never really escape them.

Three of the heroes are teenagers – Dorothy is twelve or thirteen, Luke about seventeen as his story begins, and Marty the same – and their adventures are adolescent rites of passage, filled with emotional and physical turmoil. Says a critic, "Dorothy's 'trip' is a marvelous metaphor for the psychological journey every adolescent must make...when the enormous thrust of physical, intellectual and sexual growth literally propels the youngster out of the family nest" (Greenberg 14). All of the heroes must be yanked away from their homes and families against their will, through violence: by a tornado, by invading Stormtroopers, or by "Libyan terrorists." These devices are just a pretext, a projection of their inner restlessness. The heroes turn quickly from ordinary kids into fugitives, rebels, outcasts on the run. All three nearly die and all three become murderers: Dorothy kills two Wicked Witches, Luke kills thousands of Imperial troops, and even Marty inadvertently causes his father's death when he changes history. These films reaffirm the ambivalence of the adolescent, who is torn between childhood and adulthood, between needing the parents and hating them, between clinging to home and desiring to destroy it or escape from it. To grow up means breaking away, to separate from the safe family nest and establish a life of one's own; this can rarely be accomplished without both inner and outer conflict. Even George Bailey, the sole adult protagonist of the four, behaves like an adolescent in his exaggerated dreams, his melodramatic stance toward himself and his family, and his abrupt mood swings. One critic

notes that George's "dreams seemed prompted by boys' books" and that "George Bailey was Tom Sawyer grown up" (Ray 193-94).

The restlessness of the heroes is evident early in each film. Dorothy begins on the run after a violent altercation with Miss Gulch. Soon she runs away from home, and she never really stops running until the end. In his first scene as an adult, George buys a suitcase and gets ready to leave town. Just as Dorothy chases after Toto, so Luke is drawn away from home by chasing after R2D2: the little dog and the little robot can be seen as extensions of the protagonist's restless spirit (Greenberg 18). And Marty in his opening scene is late for school and on the run.

The popularity of these fantasies with audiences of all ages suggests that the particular conflict they embody is embedded deep in the American character – that there is something fundamentally adolescent about most American adults. Perhaps it stems from our immigrant uprooting, from our revolutionary origins, or from our pioneer restlessness, but Americans are ambivalent about home and family. We seem compelled to loudly reassert the value of hearth and home, as if we constantly needed to persuade ourselves of their worth. Erik Erikson writes, "the call of the frontier, the temptation to move on, forced those who stayed on to become defensively sedentary, and defensively proud" (Childhood and Society 187).

In all the movies under discussion, there is a scene in which the hero returns to find his or her family home changed dramatically for the worse: Dorothy's home is empty; George's home has been vacant and crumbling for decades and his children were never born; Luke's home has been burned down and his aunt and uncle killed; and Marty's home is a construction site – it has not yet been built. Behind the fear of the destruction of the home lies the wish for the burdensome family to disappear, a fantasy reenacted most recently in American movies in the enormously popular *Home Alone* (1990).

All four heroes are also endowed with magical helpers to guide them or magical powers to protect them in their quest to return home: Dorothy has the Good Witch and the ruby slippers; George has Clarence the guardian angel; Luke has Obi-Wan and the power of the Force; and Marty has Dr. Brown, some 1985 technology transported to 1955, and a time machine.

Dorothy is an orphan – we never find out what happened to her parents – living on a farm in Kansas, the epitome of the quotidian, with her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry. Besides her dog Toto, her family also includes three hired hands who are like older brothers to whom she turns for advice. "The farm is a matriarchy, Em obviously rules the roost" (Greenberg 18). The period is the Depression, and it's not easy scraping out a living. Em is so preoccupied with her own troubles that she doesn't have time to listen to Dorothy's.

Dorothy has already lost her parents and now feels abandoned once again. She resents her aunt for not paying attention to her and for not being able to protect her and Toto from Miss Gulch. Nevertheless, two scenes that we see, but Dorothy doesn't, tell us that she is truly loved: when Em tells off Miss Gulch and when the distraught Em cries out for the missing girl as the twister approaches. Feeling rejected, Dorothy concocts a compensatory fantasy, a utopian place "over the rainbow," a candyland "where troubles melt like lemon drops." As Professor Marvel tells her after she runs away, "They don't understand you at home...they don't appreciate you...you want to see other lands – big cities, big mountains, big oceans!"

But even as she runs away, she carries in her basket a picture of her aunt. Frightened by Professor Marvel into believing that she has given Auntie Em a heart attack, Dorothy runs back home, and for the rest of the movie she is trying to return to her family. She goes back, only to find the house empty and a

storm raging (a Depression nightmare, repeated in the 1940 film *The Grapes of Wrath* – dust storms and foreclosures were actually forcing farmers off their land).

Dorothy's ambivalence about leaving is expressed in her Oz dream, in which her mode of transportation is her own home. When she arrives in Oz, she utters the immortal line, "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore!" Ironically, she still is in Kansas: since she's in her own bed, dreaming, she has never left it. Oz is simply a Kansas of the mind, her own private Kansas. Her Oz dream, like all dreams, is completely self-centered; everything in Oz revolves around Dorothy, who becomes a heroine and world savior. This is a Kansas more to her liking, where she can make almost everyone serve her and worship her and she overcomes all Wicked Witches. She brings with her not only her house, but also her family: Toto, and the three workmen transformed into her companions the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. Even Miss Gulch reappears as the Wicked Witch and the Professor as the Wizard. The only significant omissions are the characters toward whom she feels most conflicted, her aunt and uncle (her aunt is glimpsed only briefly in a crystal ball). The mixture of resentment, guilt, and dependence she feels towards them is too powerful to be represented directly but is the real subject of her dream. In Oz, she can kill witches and remain guilt-free: she wasn't in control of the house and she aimed the water at the scarecrow, not the witch. The deaths were both accidents, not her fault. Similarly, her injury – the blow on the head that nearly kills her – enables Dorothy to escape mentally, at the same time that it punishes her family and punishes Dorothy for her evil wishes toward them. Her Oz dream is a compromise, fulfilling the paradoxical desire to leave home without ever really leaving.

Just as Dorothy never leaves Kansas, so George Bailey never leaves the confines of Bedford Falls. George's story is complicated by the fact that he is not only a child who wants to escape, like Dorothy, but grows up to become a reluctant, fraudulent patriarch like the Wizard, forced to rule over a kingdom he doesn't really want. He is the most deeply divided, neurotic protagonist of this group of fantasy films.

George is torn all his life between his altruistic, self-sacrificing side, which keeps him at home, and his extravagant dreams of glory, which make him yearn for travel to faraway lands. In the opening sequence, George is presented as a young saint who first saves his younger brother Harry's life by jumping into an icy lake, sacrificing the hearing in one ear in the process, and then saves the career of a drunken pharmacist and the life of the person the pharmacist might have poisoned with the wrong prescription. But at the same time George wishes to become a millionaire and subscribes to the National Geographic magazine, dreaming of exotic places.

When George grows up, every time he is about to leave, circumstances conspire to keep him home. As elder son, George is fated to replace his father, a man he always admired but never wished to be. He inherits his father's Building and Loan company, a precarious little institution always on the verge of financial collapse, and struggles to keep it afloat during the Depression and WW II. When George proposes to Mary, his hometown sweetheart, his inner conflict surfaces dramatically: first he rages furiously against marriage as another trap to keep him in that small town, but then he eagerly embraces her. They marry and raise four kids. George is never happy at being stuck in "crummy" little Bedford Falls, at having to forego his dreams of world travel, college, fame as an architect, and wealth. Enviously, he watches his friend Sam Wainwright leave town to become a millionaire businessman and his brother Harry leave to attend college and become a successful research chemist and a war hero.

When his dotty Uncle Billy loses \$8,000 from the Bailey Building and Loan receipts, George faces bankruptcy, scandal, and prison on Christmas Eve. His lifelong self-sacrifice for family and town seem to have led him only to ruin. George's underlying resentment of them surfaces and he rages at his family and goes berserk, deciding to kill himself for the insurance money. Suicide will be his ultimate self-

sacrifice, his escape from an impossible situation, and his revenge on his family and community for having denied him his dreams of glory.

Like Dorothy, George runs away from home and then is saved by a dream that scares him enough to make him want to embrace the fate and the family that he had rejected. George's dream is provided by Clarence, his guardian angel, who grants George's wish by showing him what life would be like if he had never existed. George is turned into a man with no identity and Bedford Falls is transformed into Pottersville, a sleazy, miserable town controlled by the greedy old financier Mr. Potter, George's archenemy. The staid Main Street is now a red-light district selling hard liquor and prostitution. Everyone is worse off. George's brother is dead, his Uncle Billy in an insane asylum, his mother a mean, bitter widow, his wife a spinster librarian, his children never born, and his home (like Dorothy's after she runs away) abandoned and empty. George turns out to have been the linchpin, the guardian on whom the entire community depended; remove the beloved patriarch and family values collapse, giving way to Potter's values of every man for himself. According to the moral logic of the film, without a benign father figure in charge, society degenerates into sin, greed, loneliness, cruelty, violence, anarchy, and death. Although his Pottersville dream is a nightmare, it is, like Dorothy's Oz dream, entirely egocentric. "George, the vision showed, was not merely a hero; he was the center of the world on whom everything depended" (Ray 200). Dorothy, George, Luke, and Marty: all four are world saviors.

Like Scrooge, George is terrified into virtue by a Christmas Eve nightmare. He returns to Bedford Falls for a last-minute, fairy-tale reprieve, a total wish fulfillment: in the spirit of Christmas, everyone in town chips in to bail out George Bailey. Even his war hero brother – whom he had killed off in his dream – returns to celebrate Saint George as the real town hero. *It's a Wonderful Life* ends, like *Wizard of Oz*, with the protagonist reunited with his family in a warm tableau. The fabulous quest ends with the hero never having left town, because, after all, "There's no place like home."

Like Dorothy and George, Luke Skywalker wants to leave his stifling home to fulfill dreams of glory in faraway places. Luke complains bitterly to C-3PO, "I'll never get out of here...Not unless you can alter time, speed up the harvest, or teleport me off this rock...If there's a bright center to the universe, this is the planet it's farthest from." Dorothy's Auntie Em keeps her down on the farm in Kansas; Luke's Uncle Owen keeps him down on the farm on Tatooine. And like George, Luke watches his friends go off to college (in this case, to the Space Academy) or to war while he remains behind. His Aunt Beru says, "Owen, we can't keep him here forever. Most of his friends are gone. It means so much to him." Like Dorothy and George, Luke secretly wishes to be rid of his family: in all three films, the protagonist returns to find his home empty, the family vanished or dead.

The obvious parallels between *Star Wars* and *The Wizard of Oz* have frequently been noted: in both there is the orphan hero who is raised on a farm by an aunt and uncle and yearns to escape to adventure. Obi-Wan Kenobi resembles the Wizard; the loyal, plucky little robot R2D2 is Toto; C3PO is the Tin Man; and Chewbacca is the Cowardly Lion. Darth Vader replaces the Wicked Witch: this is a patriarchy rather than a matriarchy.

Star Wars, like *Wizard* and *Wonderful Life*, is an oedipal drama. In all three, a parent figure is split into diametrically opposed good and bad sides: Auntie Em vs. Miss Gulch (a.k.a. the Wicked Witch); George's father vs. Mr. Potter; and Anakin Skywalker versus Darth Vader. *Star Wars*, however, is both more mythic and more melodramatic than the earlier two films, which resemble fairy tales. Thus Lucas's saga foregrounds the oedipal conflict by having the hero battle his own father and is closer to the complexity of real life, since the father is simultaneously both good and evil, both Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader.

Again, the conclusion of *Star Wars*, in *Return of the Jedi*, resembles the loving family reunion at the conclusion of *Wizard and Wonderful Life*. Although Luke has left his home, like Dorothy and George he is surrounded in the end by his extended family and community: sister Leia and prospective brother-in-law Han Solo, loyal helpers Lando, Chewbacca, the two robots, and the Ewok tribe. Even Luke's three dead father figures – Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda, and Anakin Skywalker – are resurrected as ghosts to attend the reunion. Although the *Star Wars* trilogy expands the myth to a cosmic scale, it is really similar to the small-town adventure of *Wizard and Wonderful Life*: the quest of a hero who loses and then recovers his family.

Finally, the *Back to the Future* trilogy, another oedipal tale of a hero who runs away from home but never really leaves his family, is deeply influenced by these earlier classic film fantasies. Marty McFly flees in time rather than in space, but he is constantly attempting to reshape his family closer to his heart's desire.

Like Dorothy, George, and Luke, Marty both loves and hates his family. In his case, he resents them for being losers and for apparently dooming him to repeating their pattern of failure. "No McFly ever amounted to anything in the history of Hill Valley," Mr. Strickland tells Marty. Marty's Wizard or Obi-Wan who rescues him from his fate and enables him to escape into adventure is the inventor Dr. Brown.

Marty's voyage from Hill Valley 1985 to Hill Valley 1955 is the equivalent of Dorothy's trip to Oz. (Is it merely accidental that the first thing Marty bumps into when he lands in the past is a scarecrow?) Like Dorothy and George, as soon as he arrives Marty only wishes to get back home from this strange place. But Marty's trip back in time is a wish-fulfillment dream that allows him to reverse the flow of the generations and to become the parents to his own parents, even helping to give birth to himself.

Both the *Star Wars* and the *Back to the Future* trilogies are eclectic, postmodern, generically self-conscious films which incorporate allusions to many previous films. In particular, *Back to the Future 2* includes one sequence which is an extended homage to *It's a Wonderful Life*. Marty returns to an altered 1985 in which his archenemy Biff Tannen has gotten hold of a 2015 sports almanac and become the richest man in Hill Valley. Hill Valley has been transformed into an infernal "Pottersville," complete with sleaze, gambling, corruption, economic decline, violent crime, and toxic waste, so that the town now resembles many declining American cities of the 1980s. In Pottersville, George found his home vacant; Marty finds his occupied by a black family (a concession to white middle-class racial fears of the 1980s). George goes to the cemetery in Pottersville and discovers the grave of his brother; Marty discovers the grave of his father.

Star Wars foregrounds the oedipal conflict which is implicit in *Wizard and Wonderful Life*; *Back to the Future* adds to that conflict an explicit sexuality. In *Back to the Future 2*, the "Pottersville" sequence is turned into a blatantly oedipal nightmare: Biff has not only taken over the town but killed Marty's father and married Marty's mother. The entire family is in thrall to Biff, especially Marty's alcoholic mother, who has had breast implants to please him. Marty is forced yet one more time to rescue his family; when he confronts Biff, he finds him naked in a Jacuzzi with two prostitutes. Director Robert Zemeckis' homage to director Frank Capra's *Wonderful Life* points up the difference between the relative innocence of Hollywood fantasy in the 40s as compared to the graphic 1980s.

All the films under discussion end with family reunions, and their endings may provide a gauge to their respective decades. In *Wizard*, it is enough for the family to stay together; perhaps that is all that could

reasonably be expected during the Depression, although there is in the film no mention of current events to disturb the fantasy.

In *It's a Wonderful Life*, however, family life is profoundly affected by the cycles of twentieth-century American history: we follow the Baileys over a quarter of a century, from 1919 to 1945, from the end of WW I to the end of WW II. The return of George from his attempted suicide is reinforced by the return of Harry from the war; peace in the microcosm of the family corresponds to peace in the macrocosm of the world. The family reunion also coincides with the coming of Christmas and Clarence's earning his wings as an angel – there are religious as well as historical overtones here that are absent in *Wizard*, a suggestion that God is intervening on behalf of Americans. If God is on our side, that explains not only the delivery of George Bailey from disaster but, by extension, the delivery of America from the trials of the Depression and WW II.

The family reunion in *Jedi* also has political and religious overtones appropriate to the decade in which it appeared. Once again, the reunion coincides with the celebration of the end of a war, except that now the family microcosm corresponds to the galactic macrocosm. The religious overtones consist of the power of the Force and the ectoplasmic revival of Luke's three father figures. John Hellmann suggests that Lucas was constructing a myth to help effect a healing after the trauma of Vietnam; it is a way of allowing America to win instead of lose and of restoring God (the Force) to our side. Thus the furry little Ewoks, guerillas fighting in the jungle, using primitive weapons to conquer the technologically superior Imperial invaders, correspond to the Vietcong, except that in this fantasy the Americans are the good guys, allied with the winning V.C., adopted into their tribe or family. Significantly, this is the only one of the films mentioned in which the family reunion takes place outdoors; it suggests as well the ecological concerns and nature romanticism of the late 60s and 70s.

The first *Back to the Future* ends like the other three films, with a family reunion, except that through his intervention in family history, Marty has transformed them from lower middle-class losers to upscale yuppies. *Back to the Future 3*, however, ends with the creation of two new families. Marty will marry Jennifer, remain in Hill Valley, and probably become a successful musician. Doc Brown, however, has married Clara, a woman from 1885, had two sons, Jules and Verne, and built a new time machine in the form of a flying train (nineteenth-century technology married to the twenty-first century). Now his family will range back and forth through time. Marty's story overcomes through fantasy the 1980s fear of the loss of upward mobility in a period when the middle-class family was losing ground after twenty-five years of almost unbroken economic improvement. But Dr. Brown's story deals more with 1980s fears about the increasing fragmentation of the family due to modern technology; it suggests the wish for a new form of American family togetherness, a postmodern family not splintered but united by technology, manipulating and transforming reality together.

Dorothy traveled to Oz in a flying house; Dr. Brown travels through time in a flying locomotive which is also his family home. Dorothy brings only her dog; Dr. Brown brings his dog and his entire family. You can't get away from them, anyway, so why not turn fantasy into a family vacation? (The Disney Company has made a fortune by providing just that.) We all want to escape into adventure sometimes, but we also yearn for the security of family and the comforts of home: through a fantastic compromise, Dr. Brown gets both at the same time.

It is as though the characters in these films were under a magic spell, and to pass beyond the borders of the hometown or to step outside the family were taboo. These films give us the appearance of a fantastic journey, only to return us to the place where we began and to affirm the conservative message that home is the best of all possible places in the universe for you. What such films are really saying is not

“There’s no place like home” but “There’s no place but home” – because the bonds of family are omnipresent and inescapable. One of the functions of American fantasy, then, is apparently to provide a home away from home.

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Dark Father: Masculinity and the Violent Cycle of Father-Son Abuse

by Matril

“If you wanted a subtitle for these movies, it could be ‘Fathers and Sons’.”
– Ian McDiarmid

Father and son relationships, both real and metaphorical, abound in the *Star Wars* trilogy. The most prominent of these in the original trilogy is, of course, between Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker. It is a disturbing and at once compelling relationship, fraught with violence and abuse. Set in the fantastic world of a galaxy far, far away, it bears a certain surrealistic quality. Certainly few abusive fathers in our real world have gone so far as to fight a son in armed combat and brutally sever his hand. However, a study of Vader’s behavior toward Luke during their confrontation on Bespin reveals that he is not so different from real, ordinary fathers in our world. The abuse, in either circumstance, can be traced to a struggle to attain an elusive ideal of masculinity. This ideal has always been that unattainable goal which motivates and tortures men from childhood onward and is inevitably passed along to their sons unless the cycle can be broken.

What is masculinity? The answer varies from culture to culture, from young boys to old men, and even from one individual male to another. In Frank Pittman’s *Man Enough*, he describes how he asked his workout buddies how they would define masculinity. Each one offered a different meaning. “‘Masculinity is weighing about 235, benching maybe 475, and being able to go anywhere on the field you want to go...’ ‘It’s not size, it’s aggressiveness.’ ‘...Masculinity is being big...Because girls want guys that are big...’ ‘...doing what you got to do without whining about it.’ (7-8)” There are several broad points, however, that nearly all notions of masculinity in our culture share. It is something that should be attained at all costs, but something that can very easily be lost. It is often associated with how a man relates to other men, or to women. It is determined by a man’s level of physical or sexual prowess, while an emotional man is considered decidedly un-masculine.

With such a myriad series of definitions, it is no wonder that masculinity proves to be so elusive. This might raise the question – particularly from women – of why men continue bothering to seek it. The answer would probably vary just as widely as the definitions of masculinity. But it is fairly clear that a man’s desire to achieve a given level of masculinity, through whatever various means, is closely associated with his relationship or lack of relationship with his father. Pittman points out, “When fathers are gone for whatever reason, little boys don’t get to learn from watching real men leading a real life with real women” (11). They are then forced to seek out models of masculinity from their peers and from figures in popular culture, which inevitably leads to a confused and exaggerated notion of manhood. “Boys without models are likely to overdo the masculinity, like a masculine impersonator” (12).

Unfortunately, even when fathers are present in their sons’ lives, they can still have a detrimental effect upon their sons’ idea of masculinity. A common result of masculine-driven fathering is performance-based self-esteem. In his book on covert male depression, Terrence Real explains, “Performance-based self-esteem augments an insufficient, internal sense of worth by the measuring of one’s accomplishments against those of others and coming out on top” (182). A father who offers love and respect for his son only after he has achieved something will lead the son to feel he is only worthwhile if he wins the big game, beats another boy in a fight, or, as he grows older, makes the most money or

marries the prettiest wife. The son cannot achieve an absolute sense of self-worth; his esteem changes depending on whether he feels he has failed or succeeded.

Real points out, “Psychoanalysts and developmental psychologists have been clear that the capacity to esteem the self arises from a history of unconditional regard from one’s caregivers” (182). When parents fail to offer this regard, the results can be severe and even tragic. Consider the phrase “be a man!” which so many fathers use to chide their sons. From a literal standpoint the command is rather ludicrous – genetically speaking, it is impossible for the son to not be a man. What the father truly means, however, is that the son must achieve masculinity, by some performance or another, or else he is in danger of losing his manhood – and by corollary, his father’s esteem. Sons may resent their fathers for this treatment, and yet spend their entire lives continuing to seek that esteem. A man can despise his father while simultaneously believing that he is the sole person who can bestow or take away his title of masculinity.

The struggle for a masculinity of sorts is evident in Vader’s treatment of his son on Bespin. A detailed analysis of how he has become so obsessive would fill an entire separate paper, but by briefly looking at the prequel trilogy, we are made aware of the conditions that have brought Anakin Skywalker to this point. He is literally fatherless, and throughout his childhood and adolescence he is constantly seeking surrogate fathers, from Qui-Gon to Obi-Wan to, ominously, the duplicitous Palpatine. “While he is not, we must assume, Anakin’s natural father in this film, he’s certainly a father figure for him” (McDiarmid). It is no wonder that Vader has arrived at such a confused and destructive notion of masculinity. It will play out most horribly as he meets his own son for the first time.

Vader lures Luke into an intentionally frightening environment, the city’s hellish freezing chamber, and appears in a startling manner that is clearly meant to intimidate his son. Such scare tactics are common for a father with the misdirected idea of “making a man” out of him. Pittman describes one such father “who saw happiness as a sign of weakness...He brutalized [his son] in an effort to turn him into a contending brute: he emotionally attack-trained his son” (69). It is not simple hatred that motivates this father-son behavior. Trapped somewhere inside Vader’s brutality, his softer feelings for his son are evident. He praises Luke. “The Force is with you, young Skywalker.” But he must dampen the praise with, “you are not a Jedi yet.” To simply offer unconditional approval of Luke would, in Vader’s mind, encourage him to be satisfied with his skills, to give up the quest for masculinity. So he gives two insults for every word of praise. “You have learned much, young one,” he acknowledges, but then, after dropping him into the freezing pit, “All too easy. Perhaps you are not as strong as the Emperor thought.” And even when Luke performs the difficult feat of leaping out of the pit and escaping the carbon freeze Vader had planned for him, his father’s “Impressive. Most impressive,” carries an edge of sarcasm. It is all a part of the emotional attack-training.

Vader may believe that he is doing his son a great favor, but his motives are truly selfish. When Luke succeeds in pushing Vader off the platform, his father seems to decide to change the rules of the game they are playing. The danger of being defeated by Luke has evidently shaken him; his confused sense of masculinity compels him to win at all costs. So he plays dirty, using the Force to throw heavy machinery at his son even as they continue dueling with lightsabers. Pittman described this warped version of masculinity as “the contender” and warns, “Fathers who compete hard with their kids are monstrous. The father, for a throw-away victory, is sacrificing the very heart of his child’s sense of being good enough. He may believe he is making his son tough...but he is only making the child desperate and mean like himself. Fathers must let their sons (and daughters) have their victories” (55).

Yet even as Vader achieves the meager satisfaction of gaining the upper hand, he is filled with a violent disgust of his son's weakness. He compares Luke to Obi-Wan, whose passive lowering of his weapon during the duel on the Death Star represents the polar opposite of Vader's notion of masculinity. It is likely that he is also seeing his former self in his son. This projection of himself would explain much of Vader's behavior toward Luke. Real explains, "Projective identification [is] the process...wherein a person injects into another the disowned aspects of his own personality. When my father took a strap to me he beat into me his unacknowledged misery" (206). The parallels between young Anakin and Luke, both in their situations and their moral struggles, are obvious. Whether Vader overtly or only subconsciously recognizes those parallels, it is clear that his violence toward Luke is in large part derived from a vicious repudiation of his old self.

The truly tragic aspect of father-son abuse is that it is perpetuated from one generation to another. "Carried shame and carried feelings...are the means by which the wound, the legacy of pain, is passed from father to son, mother to son, across generations" (Real 206). Luke does not even know Vader is his father during the bulk of their confrontation, but he has already identified him as the one who will determine his masculinity. It matters little that he hates him; indeed, that is quite typical for the more dysfunctional father-son relationships. He responds to Vader's taunts and attacks just like a resentful son who accepts and strives for his father's version of masculinity no matter how much he despises him. He shows bravado. "You'll find I'm full of surprises," he brags, and fights recklessly. He responds to Vader's taunt not to let himself "be destroyed" by obeying, though he believes he is being willfully defiant, by fending off another attack. Vader says repeatedly, "Join me," and though Luke overtly refuses, the hatred and violence in his refusal is a covert acceptance of the sort of masculinity that Vader is offering. Real speaks of the awful transference that occurs during abuse. "In this tragic moment, the very forces that betray the boy, forces he most often finds abhorrent, come to live inside him" (207). Luke, as he was warned in the cave on Dagobah, is in danger of becoming his father.

As the duel becomes increasingly one-sided, culminating in the severing of Luke's hand, Vader's tone shifts from that of a contender to what Pittman calls "a controller," yet another guise of distorted masculinity. He explains, "the need to control may appear selfish and intrusive to the objects of it, but the men who are doing the controlling see themselves as fixing things, correcting them, or getting them back on track. A man would feel irresponsible and ashamed of himself if he let things go out of control when he had the chance to make them 'right'" (82). This serves as a remarkably accurate portrait of the man who once said, "I'm good at fixing things...Why couldn't I save [my mother]? I know I could have...I should be [all-powerful]. Someday I will be." Such notions, taken to the extreme, have led Vader to this confrontation with his son. "I will complete your training," he declares confidently. "With our combined strength we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy...Join me, and we can rule the galaxy as father and son." Ruling the galaxy – the ultimate form of control.

But it is at this point, at last, that Luke begins to envision another form of being a man that does not involve destructive masculinity. Unlike Vader, who insists that his way of life is "the only way," Luke is able to release the aggression and resentment that has proved so damaging during this first confrontation, and literally releases his hold on the structure that is holding him up. He escapes Vader and his dark vision of manhood. When they meet again, he will not be so susceptible to that vision. Standing on the verge of achieving the Sith's violent version of masculinity, urged on by the Emperor's "Take your father's place at my side!" Luke definitively throws away his weapon and all destructive notions of manhood with it.

So there is hope even when faced with the destructive cycle of father-son abuse. It need not be perpetuated; both fathers and sons can be healed. It is not an easy process, nor is it one without pain. In

Star Wars, this is symbolized as Luke must watch his father die just when he is truly beginning to know and understand him. However, that knowledge will give him the strength to pass on a better legacy to future generations, not one of resentment and violence, but of the quiet strength and courage of true manhood.

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Recommendation

Symphonic Saga

Website: Galactic Symphony
URL: <http://gs.michaelhopcroft.com>
Owner: Michael Hopcroft



Reviewed by Lady Aeryn.

Over the years George Lucas has reiterated that he considers the story in the *Star Wars* saga a symphony of recurring themes, with many story threads and motifs echoing one another throughout all the films.

The Galactic Symphony website (<http://gs.michaelhopcroft.com>) is an in-progress attempt to comprehensively catalog and analyze as many of those motifs as possible, no matter how large or small. Though many sections of the site are still under construction and due for release in this coming year, the two centerpiece sections, “Archive” and “Analysis,” are both up and running with a great deal of content.

The largest running section on the site is the “Archive,” a massive collection of side-by-side comparisons of certain shots throughout the movies, which serve to illustrate either an echoing story motif (such as *The Phantom Menace*, *Revenge of the Sith*, and *Return of the Jedi* all including funerals in their ending sequences) or a simple recurring visual shot (Artoo being sucked up into a shaft or vessel). Each comparison makes note of where the shot/scene falls in its respective movie, which characters are involved, and frequently includes descriptive/analytical commentary from the person who submitted the comparison. The comparisons are navigated via a single scroll box on the side of the page, which can be sorted chronologically either by the film order or the date the comparisons were added to the site. This section alone offers almost 1,200 comparisons, which – since they are all listed together in the same scroll box – can take some time to scroll through.

The Analysis section is almost completely identical in its layout – side-by-side picture comparisons with occasional commentary. I admit to wondering just what the difference was between it and the Archive section that warranted them being listed as separate sections (it’s certainly not to take the strain off the size of the already massive Archive section; the Analysis section only has about 20 entries, compared to the more than 1,100 of the Archive), but the information in both sections is no less interesting for it.

The site is interactive, and one can submit their own comparisons (as well as post comments on entries) after a quick registration on the site, or through a suggestion thread on the site’s message board.

The site does feature a number of ads in its layout, but their placement makes it easy to look past them. The site’s pages, especially in the Archive/Analysis sections, seem to load slowly in some browsers (at least on this reviewer’s humble laptop) including Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox, though slightly less so in Firefox, which the site is apparently designed for viewing in. But the site’s massive collection of information usually makes the minor inconvenience worth it – many of the motifs listed I had not yet noticed before (and now that I’ve seen them almost can’t believe I missed them), leaving me even more in awe of the complexity and intricacies of the saga. There are more comparisons listed here than any one person, no matter how observant, could hope to have spotted on their own. As

such this site proves very enlightening, and more than proves the *Star Wars* saga is the symphony its creator sought it to be.

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