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“A Great Disturbance in the Force”: Thematic Dissonance between the Two Star Wars  
Trilogies

Lauren Baiers

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In Fulfillment of the Lee Honors College Thesis Requirement

In 1977, filmmaker George Lucas released what would become one of the most popular and beloved films of all time, *Star Wars*, a movie that was followed by five more live-action films, one animated film, several television series, many video games, and hundreds of books. They have inspired countless people to make films and study mythology. The films gave the world such iconic characters as Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Han Solo, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, R2-D2, and Yoda, and introduced us to the concepts of the Force and its users, the Jedi.

Lucas originally wrote a long story, which he likened to an opera, that he intended to tell in three movies. He wrote and directed the first film himself. Rather than directing and writing the sequels, he handed the story treatment over to Lawrence Kasdan and Leigh Brackett, who wrote the screenplay; Lucas then hired Irvin Kershner to direct. After Lucas released his second *Star Wars* movie, which was officially dubbed *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*, he re-titled the first film *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*. He completed his trilogy with *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*, hiring Richard Marquand to direct and keeping Kasdan as the screenwriter. Lucas followed his first three wildly successful *Star Wars* movies by updating them, calling them “Special Editions,” and in the process denying the validity of the original versions that debuted in theatres in 1977, 1980, and 1983. He claims now that the Special Editions are his original visions and the only official versions of those films (*Empire of Dreams*).

Though *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* was the first *Star Wars* movie ever made, Lucas later gave it the subtitle “Episode IV.” He did this to give audiences the impression that they were seeing a small part of a greater story. It was also Lucas’

throwback to the matinee serials of the 1930s, in which audiences would see a piece of a story every week before a movie and sometimes would see only the later episodes of the serial. After he finished Episode VI, Lucas had no intention of creating the first three episodes. However, in the 1990s, he continued his foray into the Star Wars universe by announcing his decision to make Episodes I, II, and III. In these, he would tell the story of the fall of both the Republic and the Jedi Order and elucidate the early days of many of the characters of the existing Star Wars films, thus completing his epic saga.

All fans, scholars, and critics have their favorite films. Some support all of the films equally, some embrace the special editions, and others deny the existence of any movies other than the original versions of the first three films released. No matter what critics and fans say, all of the live-action movies are Star Wars movies: they follow the same mythology and bear the words “Star Wars” in their titles.

However, the themes of the two trilogies of the Star Wars saga conflict. The prequel trilogy undermines the concerns of the original Star Wars trilogy by subverting the themes of free will and the importance of having good character, faith, and humanity that the original trilogy celebrates. The prequel Star Wars movies fail to be as effective as the earlier, original Star Wars films by advocating the themes of predestination and cynicism and subverting the entire way of life of a specific group of people, the Jedi.

One of the causes of inconsistencies is the change of crew. Some people involved with the filming of the original trilogy did not return to work on any more installments, such as Irvin Kershner, who decided to direct only one film. Lawrence Kasdan, who wrote the screenplays for *Empire* and *Jedi*, decided not to write the screenplays for any further Star Wars movies, preferring to write and direct the scripts for his own movies.

Some of the original crew members were not hired back: Lucas did not rehire sword fight choreographer Peter Diamond to work on the prequels. Others, such as Leigh Brackett, who worked on the script for *The Empire Strikes Back*, died. Also, sixteen years passed between the making of the two trilogies. Lucas may very well have had different ideas about the nature of Star Wars and wanted to make changes to his universe. Nevertheless, movies that have different directors and screenwriters still can and do fit together in many cases. The majority, if not all, of television shows have different directors and screenwriters for each episode, yet each episode feels like a part of the same continuous series because the central creators and writers look over the screenplays and directing of each episode to keep the continuity.

In this essay, I refer to the six films using the following interchangeable titles:

Episode I	The Phantom Menace	Phantom
Episode II	Attack of the Clones	Clones
Episode III	Revenge of the Sith	Sith
Episode IV	Star Wars	Wars
Episode V	The Empire Strikes Back	Empire
Episode VI	Return of the Jedi	Jedi

Collectively, Episodes I, II, and III comprise the prequel trilogy, or PT, and Episodes IV, V, and VI make up the original trilogy, or OT. At least three separate versions of the original trilogy exist: the original versions from 1977, 1980, and 1983; the special editions that were theatrically released in 1997; and the special editions released on DVD in 2004. For this essay, I use the original versions because the special editions contain various changes to lines of dialogue, scenes, characters, and special effects that I feel detract from the Star Wars experience. This is the reason that I will refer to Episode IV as *Star Wars* and not use its subtitle *A New Hope*, for the theatrical version from 1977 did

not carry the subtitle, and neither does the theatrical version from the second disc of the 2006 DVD.

Hundreds of books and websites exist that give more information about the Star Wars universe that never appears in any film. While one can find much information in these books and online sites that answer some plot and character questions, Lucas considers none of these sources valid; I will agree with his position and will not consider them in this essay except as endnotes. I will also refrain from delving into the themes of the computer-animated movie *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, the hand-drawn series *Star Wars: Clone Wars*, and the computer-animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, as this essay focuses on the themes of the six live-action films.

### **“Adventure, Excitement, a Jedi Craves Not These Things”: The Secularization of the Jedi Order**

The portrayal of the Jedi is one of largest differences in theme and characterization between the two trilogies. Called a religion by several characters, the way of the Jedi in the original trilogy is the way of peace and simplicity. The Jedi of both trilogies dress simply and ascetically in cream-colored or black tunics and brown or black robes. Only the Jedi can harness a mystical energy known as the Force, which is described as “an energy field created by all living things [that] surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together” in *Star Wars*, the first Star Wars film that Lucas made. Through the Force, the Jedi can summon objects and banish them, attain heightened reflexes, and trick the weak-minded into saying or doing what the Jedi want. Some see apparitions of dead friends or visions of the future, though these premonitions can always

change, as the future is “always in motion,” according to one Jedi master in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

However, the Jedi and the Force are more than just magic and superpowers. The Force is an entire way of life, and the characters who adhere to it and the way of the Jedi have a different mindset than the majority of non-Jedi. According to the original films, the way of the Jedi emphasizes knowledge, patience, and peace. They seek to defend themselves rather than attack others. Jedi respect all forms of life. Peace of mind comes from the eradication of anger and hatred and the embrace of love and caring.

In the original trilogy, the Jedi are “all but extinct,” according to the words of one of the two living Jedi masters, Obi-Wan Kenobi, in *Star Wars*. The other master is Yoda, a two-foot-tall green creature who lives on the swamp planet Dagobah. The only other person dealing with the Jedi way of life is protagonist Luke Skywalker, who becomes a Jedi during the course of the OT films. We learn early on that the Empire, a totalitarian government that rules the galaxy, eradicated the Jedi years earlier, assisted by a fallen Jedi who is now called Darth Vader. The original trilogy depicts Obi-Wan and Yoda as leading secluded lifestyles on the outskirts of society and government; they are more in tune with nature than the majority of characters we see and have more to say about spirituality than others do. The seclusion partially comes from the desire to remain hidden from the Empire, which still wishes to eradicate the last remnants of the Jedi, though some, like Tarkin in *Wars*, believe that Vader is the only person left in the galaxy who follows the ways of the Force. Hiding themselves away is insurance for the future: the two Jedi stay hidden so that one day a youth—Luke Skywalker, the protagonist of the original trilogy—may come to them to learn about the Jedi ways and conquer their

freedom-crushing enemies: Darth Vader and the Emperor, the leaders of the Galactic Empire and tyrants of the galaxy.

Nevertheless, denying the groupthink of society and technology also appears to be part of the Jedi way of life. Yoda goes to Dagobah, a swampy planet completely devoid of any “cities or technology,” as Luke notes on his way there in *Empire*. Yoda could have chosen any planet, but he chooses to make his new home on one that has no interference from people or technology. Also, Obi-Wan has gained a reputation on his world, the desert planet of Tatooine, of being, according to Luke’s uncle Owen, “a wizard” and “a crazy old man.” Obi-Wan does not seem to mind the stigma of being a strange “wizard.” As a Jedi, he would have long since learned to disregard anything hurtful that others say about him. He has pushed away society (and it appears by the “name-calling” that society has pushed him away too), partially so that the Empire will not find and kill him and partially to gain wisdom through the isolation of being a hermit.

The Hermit (see Figure 1 for the Rider-Waite image) is card number nine in the Major Arcana of the Tarot, a deck of seventy-eight cards that originally was used to help people chart spiritual growth, see their relationships to God and others, and understand themselves. Though these days the Tarot is primarily used for fortune-telling and has gained a reputation as being a tool of the occult, the Tarot still represents the archetypes that we see in mythology. Drawing the Hermit indicates that the time has come for a person to cast off the world for awhile and seek answers and wisdom. Tarot expert James Rioux of the American Tarot Association writes, “The next step is to eliminate outer turmoil, through isolation and withdrawal from the world. This is the path of the Hermit. . . . For true wisdom to emerge, there can be no distractions.” The Hermit chooses

isolation and seeks divine guidance to learn more about the world, herself/himself, and her/his place in the grand scheme of things. She/he returns with wisdom, wishing to help others know themselves better while not overtly giving the answers. Rioux writes, “A teacher may tell the student how he found wisdom, but the student must go and find it for himself.” Yoda and Obi-Wan fit this archetype very well; it is their entire way of life. In addition, Yoda does not tell Luke about the turmoil in his soul: he gives Luke tests so that Luke may make sense of things for himself. These are the ideas that the Jedi find important in the original films: coming to terms with the darkness in one’s character and overcoming spiritual obstacles in order to better understand the self, the world, and one’s place in it.

The Force and the Jedi Order have become alarmingly secularized in the prequels, veering away from isolation and hermitism and towards the hubbub at the center of Republic life. Instead of living on the outskirts of society and providing guidance and wisdom for the non-Jedi who seek it and for the non-Jedi who seek to become Jedi, the Jedi in the PT have a highly developed system that expects all members to abide by specific regulations and not deviate from them. The Jedi temple on the planet Coruscant, the Republic’s capital, is not a place where they can come specifically to meditate or completely cast aside the outside world to look within themselves, but just a central building where the Jedi meet to discuss the secular issues of the Republic.

The Jedi in the prequels expect their members to adhere strictly to a code that the films themselves never disclose.<sup>1</sup> We receive vague hints about its contents throughout the PT. Anakin Skywalker tells a senator in *Attack of the Clones* that Jedi are forbidden to marry. When Jedi master Qui-Gon Jinn attempts to take on Anakin as an apprentice in

*The Phantom Menace* while Obi-Wan is still his apprentice, Mace Windu says, “The code forbids it [having two apprentices at a time].” The Jedi nearly forbid anyone to train Anakin at all, declaring that he is too old to begin training (he is nine years old), though the Jedi never say what the cutoff age is for training. In an earlier scene, Obi-Wan declares that his master “would be on the council” if only he followed the code. Qui-Gon’s reply is beautiful: “You still have much to learn, my young apprentice.” Here, the Jedi master’s sentiments perfectly fit into what the Force and the Jedi are in the original trilogy. While Obi-Wan surprisingly wants to stick with what the council says and does, Qui-Gon understands that the Force cannot be defined so strictly. There is more to being a Jedi than adhering to specific guidelines and following the status quo. Qui-Gon dies at the end of *Phantom*, but had he lived, he might have spent some time in Episodes II and III elaborating on the areas that the Jedi have wrong and explaining why he does not adhere to the mysterious code.

The Jedi in the OT are spiritual monks. Yoda tells Luke in Episode V, “A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind. . . . Adventure, [scoffs], excitement, [scoffs], a Jedi craves not these things.” Clearly, a Jedi should meditate and get in touch with nature rather than rush headlong into a fight. However, the Jedi of the originals also are less strict about various components of the Jedi lifestyle. No rules state whether or not a Jedi can marry. Obi-Wan and Yoda mention neither a code nor a council. They resort to violence only when necessary. Obi-Wan does not pull out his lightsaber when he sees that one of the bar patrons is harassing Luke in *Star Wars*. First, Obi-Wan tries to quell the fight by offering to buy the man a drink. When the man pushes Luke around, Obi-Wan pulls out his lightsaber and cuts off the man’s arm, ending

the fight quickly. He seeks a peaceful solution first, but when he cannot avoid a fight, he begins and ends it quickly.

The same ultimately cannot be said of the Jedi of the prequel movies. The PT has turned the Jedi into a literal police force of peace, and thus the prequel Jedi fail to be the spiritual gurus that they are depicted as in the originals. Rather than finding truth through meditation, experience, and self-reflection, they act as an organization within the Republic, which hires the Jedi for various jobs. In fact, the Jedi in the prequels seem to exist for the Republic to hire as bodyguards, soldiers, spies, and negotiators, turning the Jedi into an organization that contradicts the Jedi's purpose in the OT. Tony M. Vinci writes about the Jedi of the prequel trilogy in his essay "The Fall of the Rebellion," "...[The Jedi] are working to solve purely secular issues that seem to be outside the Jedi's area of concern" (19). Indeed, people who are tuned in to nature and the human soul would have little use for negotiating tax and border disputes for groups of people whom they do not know. A Jedi might not even see the point in having borders at all and insist that all land belongs to all people.

Obi-Wan calls the Jedi "guardians of peace and justice" in *Star Wars*. At first glance, the prequel movies follow this principle. Mace Windu, one of the leading members of the Jedi Council, calls the Jedi "Keepers of the peace, not soldiers" in the prequel *Attack of the Clones*. In that film, we see some of the jobs that the Jedi undertake or that the Republic assigns them. We see the Jedi as investigators of conspiracies, negotiators of tax and border disputes, bodyguards, and soldiers in the army. We never see them as spiritual consultants, psychologists, and judges. When Obi-Wan calls them "guardians of peace and justice" in *Star Wars*, we think of monk-like figures who are

very attuned to human nature, the world, and their own spirituality. However, viewers never see the prequel Jedi doing anything more spiritual than occasional meditation which yields no answers to questions. Logically, an actual police force or intelligence agency would be the best choice for investigating a conspiracy instead of monks who follow their own spiritual paths. However, there is no evidence that the Republic even has a police force.

Though Windu tells the chancellor in *Attack* that the Jedi are not soldiers, he has contradicted himself by the end of the movie. In the final scenes, several of the Jedi have suddenly become generals over the Clone troopers, who form an army that no one even knew existed several days before. By Episode III, more of these “guardians of peace and justice” have ascended the ranks of the military, where they actively engage in combat on various planets. According to the philosophy set down in the original trilogy, the Jedi would look for other solutions. Obi-Wan tells Han in *Star Wars*, as the Millennium Falcon is being pulled towards the Death Star, “You can’t win. But there are alternatives to fighting.” Obi-Wan allows the group to escape by clandestinely sneaking around the Death Star, finding the controls that keep the tractor beam up, and shutting them down. Once again, he displays his preference to find nonviolent solutions when peaceful ones exist.

Critics and fans may point out that Princess Leia calls Obi-Wan a General in *Star Wars* in the holographic message and thus make the argument that the Jedi were always meant to take part in warfare. Leia begins her message by stating, “General Kenobi, years ago you served my father in the Clone Wars.” Viewers have no idea what kind of a general Obi-Wan was. One of the definitions that *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*

gives for general is “Holding a superior rank or taking precedence over those similarly titled.” Since we are dealing with the politics of a galaxy far, far away, the title of “General” may have this application—a person of superior rank to the other Jedi. Obi-Wan may have led a division of soldiers and Jedi who searched out methods of attaining victory by peaceful means. He may have led peaceful resistance movements, published writings about the futility of wars, and met with leaders on both sides to negotiate terms, treaties, and surrenders. In addition, audiences in the 1970s and 80s did not know exactly what the Clone Wars were; they may have contained actual fighting, or they may have been something like the Cold War, in which violent action was threatened, governments funded certain groups that fought against each other (i.e. the Vietnam War), and countries tried to inhibit the progress of another, but no fighting occurred on the scale of either of the World Wars. Thus, the original trilogy leaves open the possibility that Obi-Wan and the Jedi did not actively fight in traditional violent wars.

The prequel trilogy dispels any doubt that the Clone Wars are anything other than traditional warfare, as do the numerous, though non-canonical, series about the Clone Wars. In the prequels, all Jedi become leading members of the war movement. Not one of them ever speaks out against the war or talks of finding non-violent solutions. So many Jedi are killed in the war that Anakin, recently knighted as a Jedi, is given a seat on the council not because of his maturity, as he still has a great degree of disrespect for everyone and complains about almost everything that happens, but because the Jedi need Knights to fill the seats of deceased Jedi who were killed in battle.

Obi-Wan’s statement that the Jedi are guardians of peace, truth, and justice does not mean that they force others to be peaceful or that they kill others to uphold their own

morals. His statement means that the Jedi are the ones who highly value and foster peace and justice. This group consists of people who advocate peace and justice above everything else, rather than actually going to war to force justice on others. One of the most important pieces of advice that Yoda gives to Luke in *Empire* is “A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense. Never to attack.” To engage in violent action without a very good cause, such as self-defense, is a direct violation of the Jedi way of life.

In the OT film *Return of the Jedi*, Luke becomes a Jedi when he casts down his weapon and refuses to fight when nonviolence works. Though he is in a position to kill one of the people responsible for tyranny in the galaxy, Vader, to kill Vader would be to destroy Luke’s soul and make him a member of the Dark Side, and Luke chooses the nonviolent route. In doing so, he overcomes his spiritual demons and understands himself better, as the Hermit should. (I will discuss this subject more fully in a later section.) On the other hand, in the prequels, the Jedi fight. A Jedi from the OT era would look for a peaceful solution to the war, not help the war along by fighting in it. Yoda never tells Luke to kill Vader in *Jedi*, only to confront him. In the same way, the PT Jedi might have meditated on possible peaceful solutions rather than throw themselves into battles and military matters. Windu calls the Jedi keepers of the peace, but they are not. They do not rally against the very idea of war and look for better solutions but instead support the war and fight. The Jedi of the prequels do not abide by Yoda’s advice to Luke in *Empire* about using the Force for self-defense. When the Jedi partake in battles in the prequels, they are not defending themselves: they deliberately travel to other planets to make war, not peace. If a conflict like a war arises that is so huge that free people call upon the Jedi to help, or that the Jedi feel that they must help,

then it would not be out of the realm of possibility for certain Jedi to step in and help to stop the fighting. Instead, the stories of the prequels continually put the Jedi in situations in which they not only fight and kill, but also instigate the fighting.

By making the Jedi, spirituals gurus in the originals, into soldiers, negotiators, and bodyguards for hire, the prequels show that the Jedi are little more than a police force with superpowers. The PT Jedi fail to exhibit the same concern over personality, character, and ties to the spiritual world that the Jedi do in the originals. These characteristics are such an important part of the Jedi way of life that to suddenly change it and make it the opposite in the prequels feels like a betrayal; it also exhibits poor storytelling. Their entire perspective and purpose in life have changed, including their views about whether or not a person can change the course of his or her life.

### **“It Is Your Destiny”—Or Is It?: Free Will, Destiny, and the Measure of Spirituality**

The issue of free will versus predestination is one that concerns not only the characters of the Star Wars movies but also real people. We debate whether or not we have control over our destiny, or we wonder whether a supreme being has planned our lives and we can do nothing to change them. Thus, whenever we see debates about whether or not human beings have free will, we can identify with these arguments.

The view that the Jedi have on the matter changes completely between the trilogies. While the OT Jedi advocate choice and free will, the Jedi in the prequels lean far more towards predestination. The prequel Jedi believe in predestination so much that they rely on prophecies and non-human sources for truth more than they rely on themselves, which may lead audiences to question the abilities of the Jedi. In the prequel

*The Phantom Menace*, while on the desert planet Tatooine, Jedi master Qui-Gon Jinn meets a young slave boy, Anakin Skywalker, who will later become both Darth Vader and the father of Luke. Qui-Gon senses that Anakin is strong in the Force. In the original trilogy, feeling a person's strength in the Force is enough to know that the person is a Jedi or has the potential to be one. However, instead of sensing how powerful Anakin is in the Force, Qui-Gon in *Phantom* must take a sample of the boy's blood, send it to Obi-Wan for processing, and have a computer tell him exactly how strong in the Force this boy is.

In the Death Star attack run in the original *Star Wars* movie, Luke at first relies on his ship's targeting computer to help him fire the shots that will lead to the destruction of the Death Star, the Empire's large space station that can destroy entire planets and which now seeks to destroy the Rebellion's moon base. Luke then hears the spectral Obi-Wan's voice say, "Use the Force, Luke. Let go. Trust me." Following the recently departed Jedi's advice, Luke turns off his computer, preferring to trust in the Force to aid him in blowing up the Death Star. He succeeds. At the time of the attack, Luke has just begun his Jedi training. The most he has done is repel laser bolts from a remote droid while wearing a helmet that renders him unable to see, yet he still has the ability to destroy the space station by relying on the Force. Contrast this to another pilot who relies only on his targeting computer and misses the target that would have destroyed the station.

A Jedi should not have to rely on a machine to tell him how Force-sensitive a person is. The Jedi in the original trilogy can sense Force adeptness, but the PT Jedi appear to lack this ability, needing machines to tell them exactly how powerful in the Force someone is. This reliance on machines counters the views that the Jedi have in the

original trilogy: in the originals, the Jedi value spirituality and advocate trusting in oneself rather than trusting in machines, which lack brains and souls. In *Star Wars*, Luke turns off his computer and lets the Force guide him in destroying the Death Star. In the very same scene, Darth Vader, who also flies a ship in order to destroy the rebels who seek to destroy his station, does not need a machine or midi-chlorian reader to tell him that the rebel pilot, Luke, flying in front of him is Force-adept. Vader can feel it. Sensing the Force in Luke eventually leads Vader to discover that Luke is his son. By *Jedi*, Luke has gained enough Force sensitivity that he can feel that Vader knows where he is and gives himself up so that the rebels are not discovered. Luke also realizes that some goodness remains in his father and sets out to convert his father back to the light from evil.

However, even when the Jedi use machines to assess Force potential, what the machines actually measure goes unexplained. Obi-Wan tells Qui-Gon that Anakin has a midi-chlorian count of over 20,000, which goes off the charts. He adds, “Even Master Yoda doesn’t have a midi-chlorian count that high.” While the characters talk more about midi-chlorians later in the film, no Jedi ever explains exactly what a person’s midi-chlorian count means. No other character in any Star Wars movie has ever been assigned a midi-chlorian count, so we have no idea how Anakin measures up to other Jedi, other than that he has a higher count than Yoda. Lucas never tells us how having a higher midi-chlorian count makes a person a better Jedi, a more spiritual Jedi, or a smarter Jedi. As well, because no person other than Anakin has been given a number, we have no idea how many midi-chlorians the average Jedi has. An average count of five hundred would be quite different from an average count of ten thousand. We also never find out whether

everyone has some midi-chlorians or the Jedi are the only ones to possess them. What can a Jedi with a count of 20,000 do that a Jedi with a count of 15,000 cannot do? Why is it so important to have a higher count? The audience has these questions, but the screenplay never answers them.<sup>2</sup> The Jedi have assigned a number to Anakin, but the audience has no reference point for what the count of 20,000 midi-chlorians means and cannot make sense of why the Jedi are so impressed with his high count. The audience is impressed because the Jedi suggest that the audience should be, not because viewers see anything that leaves an impression.

The existence of the midi-chlorians directly contradicts what Obi-Wan tells us about the Force in the original trilogy and alters the very nature of the Force. Yoda describes the Force in the OT film *The Empire Strikes Back* as a field that all living beings create. He says, “Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us.” The Force in the original trilogy is created by all living beings—humans, animals, plants, etc. However, in the prequels, the Force is boiled down to creatures that live in a person’s cells, as Qui-Gon describes the midi-chlorians to young Anakin in *Phantom*: “Midi-chlorians are a microscopic life-form [*sic*] that resides within all living cells. . . . Without the midi-chlorians, life could not exist, and we would have no knowledge of the Force. They continually speak to us, telling us the will of the Force.” In the prequels, the Force no longer flows through people, follows their commands, and stands as an ally, but has a will of its own, makes plans, and can induce a virgin, Shmi Skywalker, to give birth.

The prequels have steered the concept and role of the Force away from being an ally to being a controller. In the process, he has also changed the deciding factor of who

become Jedi from the will to learn to genetics and predestination. The Jedi in the PT label Anakin as “The Chosen One,” the person who will bring balance to the Force, which means eradicating the Sith<sup>3</sup>, not because he knows the stakes and volunteers himself, but because destiny, the Force, and the midi-chlorians mark him as the one who will make things right. The characters even allude to a prophecy made long ago that told of the coming of a person who would bring balance to the Force. The full contents of this prophecy and who made it are never disclosed in any of the prequel films, nor does a prophecy exist at all in the original trilogy. The Force in the prequels, rather than being what Obi-Wan described to Luke in *Star Wars* as an “energy field created by all living things,” has a will of its own and predetermines events. It can even create life forms. Qui-Gon explains to the Jedi Council in *Phantom* that Anakin was born of a virgin<sup>4</sup>: “It is possible [Anakin] was conceived by the midi-chlorians.” The Force has a will, rather than being “an ally” as Yoda describes it in *Empire*.

Viewers who watch the saga in chronological order, Episodes I through VI, will notice that the prophecy and Anakin’s being “The Chosen One” disappear. This disappearance indicates that Lucas never thought of predetermination when writing the story for the original trilogy. He first intended for Luke to succeed in Episodes IV, V, and VI because Luke wants to succeed. By contrast, Anakin has become passive in his own life. He is not “The One Who Chooses” but rather “The Chosen One.” Forces outside of his control choose him for a specific destiny; he has no say in the matter. Also of note is that all mention of midi-chlorians disappears after Episode I.

Qui-Gon allows Anakin to choose whether or not to become a Jedi because Anakin is old enough to voice his opinions. Qui-Gon even tells Anakin’s mother Shmi,

“Had he been born in the Republic, we would have identified him early.” While Anakin has a choice, it is a very uninformed one. At age nine, he lives as a slave, which likely means that he is uneducated about most matters, including what happens on other planets. He thinks that the Jedi have come to free him, though clearly they have not. Even when the PT Jedi discover that slavery exists in the galaxy, they never make any comment on it during Senate meetings, in the temple, or among themselves as conversation. Even though Tatooine is outside the jurisdiction of the Republic, one would assume that the Jedi, as guardians of peace, truth and justice, would want to seek out areas where the people are downtrodden and try to help them. However, freeing slaves is far from a Jedi’s mind. Anakin thinks the opposite, so he probably is not very informed about what the Jedi really do. Thus, Anakin’s decision is based on a dream and little information, some of which is bound to be false, and he has to make his choice on the spur of the moment. However, all of his choice and free will disappear when he becomes a Jedi apprentice in *Attack of the Clones*. There, the Jedi give him no say about what he does and instruct him to do nothing without first consulting either his master (Obi-Wan) or the Jedi Council. After his first choice to become a Jedi, which Qui-Gon gives Anakin only because Qui-Gon believes that Anakin is predestined for greatness, Anakin loses the ability to make his own choices in life as the Jedi Council strips away his ability to decide what he does.

Anakin’s case is the exact opposite of his son Luke’s in the original trilogy. Obi-Wan asks Luke to join the cause and travel to Alderaan to help the Rebellion. Luke refuses because he has commitments to help his aunt and uncle on their farm. This archetype is what Joseph Campbell called the “refusal of the call to adventure” (59).

When a hero is called to an adventure, he/she may refuse the call because of selfish or selfless reasons. Here, Luke would like to go to fight the Empire, but his aunt and uncle expect him to work on the farm for another year; he honors that commitment by refusing to go to Alderaan with Obi-Wan. The Jedi master wants Luke to go, but he does not force him; Obi-Wan says, "You must do what you feel is right, of course." However, Campbell also argues that a hero usually must answer the call in some way; otherwise, there would be no story to tell. Campbell writes, "One is harassed, both day and night, by the divine being that is the image of the living self..." (60). This call beckons Luke when he arrives back home and discovers that the Empire has killed his aunt and uncle and burned the farm. With no more commitments to tie him to the land or even to the planet, Luke accepts the call and heads out, now eager to learn about the Force from Obi-Wan and become a Jedi Knight. He has a cause and makes a choice to join that cause. He seeks out Yoda in Episode V, rather than waiting for the master to come to him, in order to further his Jedi training. Also, Luke remains determined to rescue Han and Leia in *Empire*, despite the attempts of Obi-Wan and Yoda to dissuade him, saying that he is not ready and does not yet have the confidence in both himself and the Force to carry out his mission successfully. Obi-Wan says, "If you choose to face Vader, you will do it alone." However, Luke fully understands that he has control over what he does, if not over the outcomes, and makes his own choices based on what he thinks is right and decides to live with whatever the consequences are. No chimes of "destiny" or "The Chosen One" ever ring for Luke. He is "The One Who Chooses."

Though critics might point out that Luke is strong in the Force because his father, Darth Vader, is and thus that his Jedi abilities fall under the jurisdiction of predestination,

Luke still makes the decision to serve good rather than evil. Near the end of Episode V, after a duel which ends with Luke and Vader overlooking a chasm, Vader makes the famous revelation: "I am your father." Luke has been beaten in combat both physically (Vader cuts off his right hand) and psychologically (Luke learns that one of the most evil men in the galaxy is his father). Vader asks Luke to join him in ruling the galaxy; however, Luke chooses to fall to his death (though he is saved by the friends he set out to save) rather than help the cause of evil. The second case comes in *Jedi*, in which the Emperor and Vader make the same offer. Luke is twice confronted with the choice to convert to the side of evil and join his father, and both times he resists, though in both cases it would be easier for him succumb to evil. Though his genetics might predispose him to have Force power, his choices on what to do with that power carry more weight than merely having that power.

The ones who speak of destiny are Darth Vader and the Emperor Palpatine, both of whom champion the Dark Side of the Force, the side of evil. Vader insists that it is Luke's destiny to join the Empire in Episode V, sentiments that the Emperor echoes in Episode VI. John Lyden writes about this subject in his essay "Apocalyptic Determinism and Star Wars": "Darth Vader, on the other hand, tries to convince Luke that he has no free will, as it is 'useless to resist' the Dark side for it is 'his destiny' to join it. Those who follow the Dark Side, which operates on the basis of coercion, will not admit that individuals have free will in regards to it, while those who follow the Good Side insist there is always freedom and indeterminacy" (47). The Emperor and Vader do not want Luke to believe that he has free will; they want Luke to do what they want him to do and try to hammer into him the idea that he cannot avoid joining them.

When the Jedi in the prequel films speak of “The Chosen One” and “the will of the Force,” they speak of predestination, the very same viewpoint that the Emperor and Vader, agents of evil, advocate in the original trilogy. It is quite disturbing to see the Jedi, guardians of peace, speak of predestination. It puts them on the same wavelength as the villains of the original trilogy. In the originals, Luke never follows his “destiny.” He decides for himself what he thinks is right and lives with the consequences. Some of his choices make matters worse, such as when he tries to rescue his friends despite lacking the proper training to do so<sup>5</sup>. Luke learns from the experience, and in the next movie is able to properly rescue his friends from another foe. The choices Luke makes ultimately lead to his triumph and success. His triumphs tell audience members that they too can succeed if they have the will. The Jedi of the prequels try to quell free will. Without choice and free will, a person’s entire character and life can suffer, leading to the failure to believe in one’s cause.

### **“I Find Your Lack of Faith Disturbing”: Faith vs. Cynicism**

The Star Wars movies are heavily influenced by mythology, particularly by the archetypes and mythos set down by Joseph Campbell. He writes, “It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back” (11). In addition, *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* defines “myth” as “a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.” Myth is the realm of the spirit, where good generally triumphs over evil and great heroes battle demons.

Heroes have faith in their causes, and that faith helps them to succeed. Though not all characters follow the Jedi way of life (and some people in the original trilogy, like mercenary Han Solo, do not even believe that the Force is real), the majority of them have faith in their cause. When they lose faith, their cause suffers.

A certain amount of cynicism has snuck into Episodes I, II, and III, cynicism that undermines and defies the faith in the Force seen in the original trilogy. During one of the training sessions with Jedi master Yoda on the swamp planet of Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke sees his X-wing ship, the only method of transportation he has off the planet, sink partially into the swamp. Luke says that he will never get the ship out; Yoda stands shaking his head, insisting that Luke has not yet truly learned anything about the nature of the Force and its ability to do incredible things. Luke has lifted rocks with his mind, but thinks that he cannot lift the ship because the ship is much bigger and thus “totally different.” Yoda replies, “No, no different. Only different in your mind....Try not. Do or do not. There is no try.” Luke attempts to lift out his ship, but visibly falters; his face shows that he lacks the full belief in what he wants to do. Yoda tells him that the Force is everywhere, that “life creates it [and] makes it grow,” and that it is a powerful ally if one accepts it and trusts in it. Instead of trying again after these words of encouragement, Luke dubs the venture “impossible” and walks away.

Finished with trying to convince Luke with words, Yoda closes his eyes, raises his hand, and through sheer willpower and belief in the Force, raises the X-wing out of the swamp. Luke stands in amazement as his ship floats towards him, pushed only by the power of Yoda’s mind. Even the droid, R2-D2, who lacks a human brain, is dazzled by the display. When it lands safely, Luke puts his hand on the ship to assure himself that it

is really there, then runs to his master and says, “I don’t believe it!” Yoda polishes off this learning experience by saying, “That is why you fail.”

Luke’s failure to trust in the Force is completely believable at this point in his life. Prior to his journey to Dagobah, he has met only one Jedi (Obi-Wan), has lived an unfulfilling life on a farm for nineteen years (under the jurisdiction of the Empire), and has only begun to come into his own. Luke fails because he does not yet believe in his ability to make miraculous things occur. His disbelief also reflects the current state of mind of the audience. Viewers have not seen anything like what Yoda has done before. Now we and Luke believe in the raw power that can be obtained by belief and trust in oneself. From that point on, Luke has more belief in his abilities. He can summon objects at will and plant suggestions in the minds of others.

However, failure of belief does not sound convincing when coming from the mouth of a seasoned Jedi master. In a scene about halfway through the prequel *Attack of the Clones*, Yoda and Mace Windu see a transmission from Obi-Wan, who is investigating a possible conspiracy against the Republic and the Jedi; he tells the other two Jedi that a clone army is being created in secret for the Republic and that the army was originally authorized by a Jedi who died ten years earlier. Windu is baffled and insists that the Jedi Council never authorized the creation of an army. When the transmission is over, Yoda and Windu discuss how such a thing could have happened without any of the Jedi sensing it. Yoda says, “Blind we are if the creation of this clone army we could not see.” Windu sighs and replies, “I think it is time we informed the Senate that our ability to use the Force has diminished.”

This comment sounds very jarring coming from a Jedi master who is one of the most powerful and esteemed Jedi in the galaxy. Yoda, the head of the Jedi Council, gives Windu none of the admonishments that he gives Luke in *Empire*. Instead, he seems to agree with Windu. The only comment he has on the subject is “If informed the Senate is [about our Force use diminishing], multiply our adversaries will.” Rather than challenging Windu on the latter’s lack of faith and pointing out that Windu’s ability to use the Force is diminishing because he believes it is, Yoda’s primary concern is to keep other authorities from noticing that the Jedi supposedly can no longer use the Force as they once could. In this prequel, Yoda displays none of the faith in the Force that he imparted to Luke in *Empire*. As Yoda has lived for almost nine hundred years by this point in the story (he tells Luke that he is at least nine hundred years old in *Jedi*), it is certain that Yoda has long since overcome any misgivings or crises of faith concerning his spirituality and belief both in the Force and in the Jedi way of life. He lacks the unflinching belief in his lifestyle that he demonstrated to Luke in Episode V, and thus the audience holds the PT Yoda in less esteem than the OT Yoda.

Windu’s comment also alludes to the Jedi belief that their grasp of the Force has been slipping for quite some time, evidence of which is never given prior to this scene in *Attack*. Windu does not wonder, “Is our ability to use the Force diminishing?” Instead, he fully believes that, after this one incident, the Jedi can no longer harness the power of the Force as they once could; in addition, he implies with the words “I think it is time...” that the Jedi already know of their weakness and have been trying to keep the Senate from discovering it. The Yoda from *The Empire Strikes Back* would have scoffed at this idea. He would have admonished Windu for his lack of confidence and given him the

same lesson that he, Yoda, gives Luke: if one believes in something, then the thing is so, and if one does not, then that thing can never be. Yoda believes that he can lift a ship out of a swamp with his mind, and so he can do it. Luke lacks belief that he can raise his ship and thus fails. If Windu is cynical about his Force abilities, then his Force usage will suffer. Yoda would address this concern in the OT but does not in the PT; instead, he says that no one should know of the weakness that no one has proved exists.

In the prequels, Yoda also fails to follow his own advice and beliefs that he imparts to Luke in *Empire* and *Jedi*. On Dagobah in *Empire*, Luke asks Yoda whether the Dark Side of the Force is stronger than the Good Side. Yoda replies, speaking ever more softly, “No, no, no. Quicker, easier, more seductive.” Luke then asks his master how he will recognize the good and evil in people. Yoda quickly responds, “You will know when you are calm, at peace, passive.” Christopher Brown writes in his essay “A Wretched Hive of Scum and Villainy” that he interprets Yoda’s comments about the Good and Dark Sides as doubtful: “Although Yoda answers Luke’s question in the negative, his delivery suggests that Yoda is not certain, but at most only wistfully hopeful, that good will overcome evil in the end” (69). However, I disagree with his interpretation. I believe that Yoda’s quick response is true and that the softening tone is meant to encourage Luke. If Yoda were to show any hesitation, Luke might doubt that what Yoda tells him is true. Luke might then come away with the impression that evil is stronger than good and succumb to the Dark Side, thinking that the Dark Side is stronger and will give him more power to accomplish his goals. Yoda’s fast, reassuring statement is meant to strengthen Luke with the truth, not cover up any doubt, and assures Luke that yes, without question, good is stronger than evil in the end. Yoda then explains that Luke

must clear his mind and become calm if he hopes to be able to detect the good and bad in people.

The ability of the Jedi to detect the evil in the Force seems to have vanished entirely in the prequels. Indeed, if the Jedi had been able to sense evil, the entire plot of the PT would fall apart. Often, several Jedi are in a room with Palpatine, who turns out to be the Sith lord who will ultimately destroy the Jedi in Episode III; he will also become the Emperor in charge of the Empire in the OT. While the Jedi of the prequels are certain that at least one Sith currently lives, they cannot detect that the Sith they seek stands two feet away from them. Yoda says in *Phantom*, “Hard to see the Dark Side is,” and “The Dark Side clouds everything” in *Clones*. Perhaps if Yoda were thirty in the PT and sixty in the OT (as *Phantom* takes place thirty-two years before *Star Wars*), the audience would understand the clear difference in thinking. Half a lifetime is certainly enough to change a person’s point of view on a subject. However, Yoda proclaims himself to be at least nine hundred years old in Episode VI (“When nine hundred years old you reach, look as good you will not”). Humans can certainly change their thinking in their later years. I believe that the difference here is Yoda’s extreme age: he defines his life in terms of hundreds of years rather than decades. Though no human living is anywhere near nine hundred years old, living that long would almost certainly allow a person to attain great wisdom that could not be easily changed in a couple of decades. The only time that a Jedi feels the presence of a Sith comes at the end of *Attack*, when Yoda says to fallen Jedi Count Dooku, “The Dark Side I sense in you.” He can sense the evil in Dooku while in the same room, yet lacks the ability to detect Palpatine’s evil whenever Yoda and Palpatine are near each other. Since both Dooku and Palpatine are

Sith, this difference in Yoda's being able or not being able to sense the Dark Side in them probably has less to do with Yoda's Force power than it does with the inconsistencies in regards to Yoda's powers. If Yoda were able to sense the Dark Side in Palpatine, which we know from *Empire* that he can do easily, then the Jedi would have exposed this Sith lord, the Jedi would not have been overthrown and killed, and the rest of the events in the prequels, and even the events in the original trilogy, would not have happened.

Even when evidence stares them in the face, the Jedi are cynical about the possible return of their enemies, the Sith. After Qui-Gon has a run-in with a Sith in *Phantom* and the two briefly fight, the Jedi goes to Coruscant and tells the Jedi Council about his attack: "He was trained in the Jedi arts. My only conclusion is that it was a Sith lord." The Jedi reply with "Impossible" and "I do not believe the Sith could have returned without us knowing." The Sith have been gone for a millennium at this point in the movie. In the next movie, *Attack*, a senator voices her feelings that Dooku was behind the assassination attempt on her life. The Jedi dismiss her claim; one Jedi says that Dooku is "a political idealist, not a murderer," and Windu adds, "Count Dooku was once a Jedi. He couldn't assassinate anyone. It's not in his character." They will not even consider the possibility that a Jedi, even a fallen one, could murder anyone. The Jedi pay dearly for their folly when they discover that Dooku actually is behind the assassination attempt and that he is following orders from a Sith lord, who turns out to be Palpatine. Palpatine then gains control of the Republic and eradicates the Jedi order in *Revenge of the Sith* by killing off all of the Jedi save for Obi-Wan and Yoda, who go into hiding.

If the Jedi would have had more open-minded thinking and belief in their abilities to sense the Dark Side in the galaxy and had not been so quick to jump to false, cynical

conclusions, they might have been able to sense who the Sith were and eradicate them before the Sith destroyed the Jedi Order and replaced the Galactic Republic with the tyrannical Galactic Empire. In addition, if the Jedi believe that their grasp of the Force is slipping, then they might also lack the will to regain their “lost” abilities. While the OT Jedi exhibit faith in their abilities that allows them to succeed in their endeavors, the PT Jedi maintain the opposite position, doubting their abilities and destroying themselves and their entire way of life in the process. Instead of convincing viewers that anyone can succeed if s/he thinks that s/he can succeed, the Jedi of the prequels do the opposite. They have done what Yoda warned against in *Empire*: they lack belief and fail.

#### **“Your Weapons—You Will Not Need Them”: The Functions of Sword Fighting**

Though the Jedi primarily believe in peace, sometimes they must fight to protect themselves. The Jedi fight exclusively with lightsabers, a weapon unique to Force-users; the Jedi and the Sith are the only groups in the galaxy that wield them. The only time a non-Jedi uses a lightsaber in the entire saga comes at the beginning of the OT film *The Empire Strikes Back*. When Luke and his friend, smuggler and rebel Han Solo, are caught in a deadly cold snowstorm, Han uses Luke’s saber to slice open the belly of a beast; he puts Luke inside it to keep him warm during the cold, snowy night. Described by Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars* as “An elegant weapon for a more civilized age,” the lightsaber is a sword-like weapon with a blade made not of metal, but of a type of bright plasma energy. When not ignited, the blade disappears, and the saber appears as a metal hilt. When ignited, the blade can deflect bolts from blasters and can cut through any

substance except another lightsaber. The blades are colored blue or green (and in one case, purple) for the Jedi and red for the Sith.

Perhaps the most important cause of the difference in the fencing style in the two trilogies was the decision by Lucas to hire a different fencing choreographer. Peter Diamond had choreographed the fights in the original trilogy, while Nick Gillard worked on the duels in the prequels. Diamond utilized a samurai style, while Gillard leaned toward acrobatic fencing. Both are Asian styles, for Lucas desired an Asian look rather than an American one for the films, possibly because of his fascination with Japanese period piece films. Another contributor to the differences is the actors. Of the three combatants in the original trilogy, one is Luke, who is just learning about the Jedi way of life and would not be expected to have great sword fighting prowess. As well, the actor playing him, Mark Hamill, lacked proficiency in fencing before shooting the films, so Diamond was limited in what choreography he could give Hamill. Another combatant is Obi-Wan, portrayed by Alec Guinness, who, like Hamill, was also not a professional fencer. The third is Darth Vader. Bob Anderson, sword master and choreographer, stepped in for David Prowse for the fight scenes to play Darth Vader. Though Anderson had great sword fighting abilities, he also had very limited vision from wearing the Vader helmet. Though these three men had limitations, they all were able to perform the choreography well (*Empire of Dreams*).

Lucas wanted to give the prequel Jedi a different dueling style in order to show Jedi in their prime. To him, this meant faster, longer, more acrobatic fight scenes which do not quite follow the rules of fencing. But the problems with the prequel duels go further than just the choreography—the emotional core present in the fights in the

originals is all but missing in the prequels. A sword fight could very easily contain fast, acrobatic choreography *and* appeal to the emotions—the two are not automatically mutually exclusive. However, in the prequels, Lucas shows his preference to display what the Jedi can do with their reflexes and agility rather than develop character and show the characters' personality flaws in the fight scenes. A prime example of this tactic comes in Episode I in a duel between Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and Darth Maul. The moves are fast, the participants engage in acrobatics, and Maul has a double-bladed lightsaber, which the audience had not seen in any previous Star Wars film. However, whoever wins and loses the duel is irrelevant to the story. The Dark Side will not triumph over the galaxy if Maul wins, and Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan will not have eradicated the Sith if they win. As well, the combatants have no real history with one another. Without this emotional resonance, the fights fail to leave a real impression on the audience past “Wow, that move was cool.”

The sword fights have real significance in the original trilogy. The films could not lose them and still have the same story: the duels in the originals develop characters and dramatize internal tensions. They never exist solely for the sake of having a sword fight or providing excitement for the audience. They contain temptation, manipulation, sacrifice, and moral dilemmas; thus, they mean much more than the physical actions of parries, blocks, and severed limbs. The duels make sense within the context of the story, highlighting the themes of faith and free will, while following the rules of fencing. On the other hand, the duels in the prequels are largely overdone and have little or no story significance, relying too much on fancy moves and not enough on developing character and representing the reality of sword fighting.

Martial artist and fencer Nick Jamilla writes in *Sword Fighting in the Star Wars Universe* that a sword master reaches his peak in his forties or fifties. He writes of actor Liam Neeson, who portrayed Qui-Gon Jinn in the prequels and was forty-six years old at the time of filming, “Neeson is at the perfect age for the real swordsman at his peak. Well beyond the energetic and often reckless drive of a young swordsman, Neeson captures a moment in life when wisdom and the body’s health and fullness are at their peak” (199). The films show Jedi, mostly young people, performing complicated choreography that “imitate[s] the acrobatic style of Beijing comic opera” rather than traditional fencing choreography and consequently is more of “quick, swirling acrobatics than it is real martial technique” (204). The fights could still be technically impressive, but in this case, any emotional core is gone, giving the appearance that spectacle has more importance than why the duel is being fought in the first place.

Many critics and fans of the Star Wars series deride the duel between an older Obi-Wan and Vader in *Star Wars* because it lacks the flash and energy of the fights in the prequels. However, Jamilla writes that the sword fight between Vader and Obi-Wan in *Wars* shows two masters who have complete control over the basics of fencing. According to Jamilla, “The most sophisticated technique is the basic technique that was taught to the student on the first day of practice” (237). Though Obi-Wan and Vader have an unenergetic duel, devoid of fancy flourishes and flips, their fight does not contain terrible choreography. Jamilla writes, “For the swordsman, the lack of dynamic movement illustrates their [*sic*] mastery of swordsmanship” (236). The fight also demonstrates Jamilla’s comments about masters reaching their peak in their fifties, as Obi-Wan and Vader are around that age or a bit older. The fight ends when Obi-Wan,

whose lightsaber is locked with Vader's, looks across the room and sees his new apprentice Luke watching. Obi-Wan looks back at Vader, raises his arms and saber above his head, and closes his eyes; Vader slashes through Obi-Wan, who disappears, leaving only his cloak and saber behind. Obi-Wan has died, but in doing so has become, in his own words earlier in the duel, "more powerful than you [Vader] can possibly imagine." His death has freed him from his body so that he may talk to Luke whenever he pleases, rather than only when the two are physically in the same place. The death also has an important effect on Luke: "In Obi-Wan's death, the forces of goodness gain the final convert to their side. Luke understands that greatness is not found only in victory, but in disciplined sacrifice as well" (Jamilla 238). The outcome of the Obi-Wan/Vader duel has made Luke more determined than ever to become a Jedi and help topple the Empire.

Part of the problem the Star Wars duels and viewers' perceptions of them is that movie-goers have become so accustomed to fencing choreography that they have no idea what real sword fighting looks like. Viewers can examine the 1954 Akira Kurosawa film *Seven Samurai* to see a master at work. Early in the film, there is a scene in which one of the titular seven, the master swordsman Kyuzo, fights a nameless samurai who does not believe that Kyuzo is a better swordsman and demands that they fight with real swords. This duel lasts no more than two seconds: the nameless samurai runs at Kyuzo to slice him. Kyuzo calmly pivots his body and slashes the samurai, killing him. This fight is so short because Kyuzo is a master swordsman; he can anticipate his opponent's moves and maneuver himself so that he needs only one move to take him down. As well, he knows that if he misses his mark, he will give his opponent the opening needed to kill him.

Duels to the death cannot last long, as each combatant cares only about finding the vulnerable point on her or his opponents and stabbing them there, as Sifu Kisu, martial arts expert, says on one of the commentary tracks of the television show *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. He says, “A real sword fight lasts less than 1.7 seconds. It’s not a pretty thing, a sword fight. A sword fight is all about finding the vital point on your opponent and poking him.” While none of the duels in the original trilogy lasts 1.7 seconds, none of them, save for one, is a duel to the death. The fight in *Star Wars* is to the death, and it is Obi-Wan’s point to die. He only wants to put off the moment until it has the greatest impact—after he has informed Vader that death will make him more powerful and when Luke is watching. The other two fights between Luke and Vader in Episodes V and VI are about Vader trying to convert Luke to the Dark Side and Luke trying to bring out the Good Side in his father. The fight scenes build character. On the other hand, nearly all of the prequel fights are to the death or are intended to be to the death, yet they last longer than they need to. The Jedi are supposed to be the greatest sword masters in the galaxy, have heightened reflexes, and can see things just before they happen; their duels should be over almost before they begin. Yet, because the duels take so long to wrap up, the Jedi demonstrate a lack of mastery. The desire for a filmmaker to want a long duel is understandable—generally speaking, audiences anticipate and enjoy fight scenes, and the longer such a scene progresses, the greater the suspense and tension. Nevertheless, a long duel must have a reason for stretching as long as it does, and if two masters face each other and take six minutes of screen time to fight each other, which happens in the *Sith* duel between Obi-Wan and Anakin, then the audience may even question the abilities of the combatants.

The prequel *Revenge of the Sith* does feature a sword fight in which three of the combatants are killed in one or two strokes. In a scene about two-thirds of the way through the movie, Mace Windu and three other Jedi arrive at soon-to-be-emperor Palpatine's office to arrest him. The Jedi declare Palpatine under arrest for crimes against the Republic, and Palpatine resists by pulling a lightsaber out of his sleeve. He dispatches three of the Jedi immediately and then turns his attention to Windu. Critics and fans have derided this moment, proclaiming that the Jedi are taken down too easily. While the speed at which Palpatine kills them is not consistent with how long the Jedi last in other saber duels in the saga, it completely falls in line with how long duels between true masters last. However, this scene fails to have the same emotional resonance as the Obi-Wan versus Vader fight in Episode IV because the Jedi whom Palpatine kills in *Sith* are minor characters whose names the audience does not know. They have no real history with their killer; therefore, their deaths mean nothing to the audience. Obi-Wan's death resonates with Luke and the audience because the combatants have a history together, Obi-Wan is a major sympathetic character, and Luke is now left on his own with no master to guide him until he meets Yoda years later in *Empire*.

Yoda's training of Luke in Episode V includes no fencing; there are more important aspects of being a Jedi. There is physical training: Yoda rests in a bag on Luke's back while Luke climbs trees and runs through the swampy water. All the while, Yoda lectures Luke on the importance of not falling to the Dark Side. While discipline of the body is important, what Yoda says to Luke has more importance. Yoda stresses the value of patience, self-discipline, trusting in oneself, and completing what one starts. There is no evidence that Yoda even owns a lightsaber in the original trilogy.

After a chase scene in the prequel *Clones* when Anakin loses his lightsaber, Obi-Wan catches up with him, gives him back the saber, and says, “Next time, try not to lose it. This weapon is your life.” Something about that line nags at us: something is not quite right with it. The Jedi use lightsabers, and other characters identify the Jedi with these weapons—one would expect to see a Jedi carrying one. However, this line of Obi-Wan’s heavily implies that Anakin would be nothing without his weapon, a sentiment that is negated by Yoda’s instruction of Luke on Dagobah in *Empire*.

One of Luke’s many tests of character comes during a scene in *Empire* when Yoda tells Luke to enter a cave that is “strong in the Dark Side of the Force.” When Luke asks Yoda what is in the cave, Yoda responds, “Only what you take with you. Your weapons—you will not need them.” Instead of telling Luke that he must carry the saber and that he would be nothing without it, Yoda wants Luke to leave it behind, a sentiment that directly contradicts Obi-Wan’s admonishment to Anakin about losing his lightsaber in *Attack*. Nevertheless, Luke thinks he knows better than Yoda about what awaits him and brings along his saber and blaster. The very act of bringing his weapons into the cave sets up what he will encounter there. Had he not brought in weapons of combat, he would not have faced combat; some other enemy would have manifested itself. Luke climbs in and sees a vision of Darth Vader. The two briefly engage in saber combat before Luke chops off Vader’s head. The face part of the mask then explodes, revealing Luke’s own face underneath. The lesson becomes clear to a bewildered Luke: his greatest enemy is not Vader, but himself. If he continues to use violence, he will become, as Yoda says, “an agent of evil,” which is what Luke does not wish to become. Also, the

scene serves as foreshadowing—Luke sees his face because the man behind the real Vader mask turns out to be his father.

While Luke does encounter sword fighting in the cave, learning how to fight is not the lesson. The fight is a dramatization of the turmoil in his soul. Lucas himself points out in the commentary track on the *Empire* DVD that Luke sets up his ordeal: “If you think badly about things, you’re going to have to suffer the consequences. [Luke] takes his sword in with him, which means he is going to have combat. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t. He is creating this situation in his mind. . . . He has the capacity to become Darth Vader simply by using hate and fear as opposed to using compassion and caring.” This experience is about learning to control the urge to use violence when the same goal could be accomplished by love or understanding. Luke needs to learn that he creates much of the trouble in his life, such as when he flies from Dagobah to Bespin against the advice of his mentors to save his friends, despite knowing that his training is far from complete. Though a sword fight is prevalent in this scene, the main purpose for this scene is to probe of the dark corners of one’s soul, not to learn to sword fight. Through the duel, Luke’s flaws of rushing headlong into battle and using rage instead of understanding have come to light for him and the audience.

The prequel trilogy offers little to none of the character development that the audience sees in the originals, even when the opportunity is perfect. Near the end of the PT movie *Attack of the Clones*, Yoda squares off in a duel with Count Dooku, a Sith lord, after the latter has defeated Obi-Wan and Anakin in combat. Dooku attempts to quickly get rid of Yoda by throwing chunks of the roof at him; Yoda easily pushes them away. Dooku then shoots lightning at Yoda, who intercepts it with his hand and dissipates it.

Yoda's intercepting the lightning is a brilliant moment: it demonstrates how Yoda uses the Force to defend himself. Instead of generating lightning himself, he merely deflects it, and in doing so, actually beats Dooku in that part of the fight. Yoda uses the Force "for knowledge and defense," as he tells Luke in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and emerges victorious, cementing his point by saying, "Much to learn you still have." There is no way that Dooku can beat Yoda with lightning. Eager to beat the old green Jedi, Dooku says one of the most baffling lines in the Star Wars saga: "It is obvious that this contest cannot be decided by our knowledge of the Force, but by our skills with a lightsaber." The line is so awkward because it suggests that a Jedi is only as good as his or her abilities in saber combat, whereas Obi-Wan's and Yoda's lessons in the OT suggest that a strong spirit and character are the most important aspects of being a Jedi. The line reminds us of Obi-Wan's line "This weapon is your life" earlier in the movie, which also suggests that a Jedi is nothing without a lightsaber. Yoda then pulls out a lightsaber and engages in combat with Dooku, utilizing various flips and jumps as he fights. In the end, Yoda loses the fight and Dooku escapes. The moment for the aged Yoda to shine ends without the audience's having seen anything that indicates what a great master Yoda is. We see the same acrobatic swordplay that most of the other Jedi practice and no character development of either participant. The fight here excites the audience but fails to deliver an emotional climax.

If the values of the original trilogy were maintained in the prequels, Yoda should have shown his true mastery of the Force by refusing to fight with a lightsaber and battling Dooku some other way. Yoda could summon some kind of Force power that viewers have not seen yet and have not even considered possible but which fits what the

Jedi can do. In *Empire*, when Luke first sees the very short, green, apparently insane creature who turns out to be Yoda (who in reality is putting up a front of insanity to test Luke), Luke says, “I’m looking for a great warrior.” Yoda responds in a half-maniacal tone, “Oh! Great warrior! Hmm. Wars not make one great!” The fight against Dooku in *Attack* should have demonstrated how Yoda is a “great warrior”; Yoda’s line also echoes the idea expressed in an earlier section that the Jedi should not fight in wars. The bit with the lightning lives up to the moniker of “great warrior.” The sword fight does not. As Roger Ebert said to Richard Roeper in their review of *Attack of the Clones* on *At the Movies*, Yoda’s fighting with a lightsaber is “totally out of character for him. If you’re Yoda and you have the Force, you don’t need no laser-saber [lightsaber]. You just go like this [waves hand]. You’re Yoda! Nobody can stop you!” Yoda could very well use the Force to make his aged body do whatever he wants, but Yoda should not need a lightsaber or fancy moves to show how adept in the Force he is. He should do something more unexpected, something that demonstrate his faith in the Force, his character, and his free will to do something other than pull out a lightsaber when beckoned into a duel.

The final duel between Luke and Vader in *Jedi* demonstrates all that is lacking in the Yoda/Dooku fight in *Attack*. The *Jedi* fight causes Luke to finally overcome his inner demons and become a true Jedi. In the scene, the Emperor tries to force Luke into combat by appealing to anger and insists that using anger and hate will make him stronger. Eventually Luke does engage in combat with Vader. After the two fight for a short time, the Emperor brings up his point that aggression will help Luke beat Vader. Luke remembers that he should not use anger and hatred, for that is the way of the Sith; the way of the Jedi is that of calmness, focus, compassion, and understanding, and he

wants to stop fighting. In an earlier scene, Luke claims that he can feel that Vader still has the capacity to cast aside his evil and redeem himself. Vader does not agree; it is “too late” for him to change and he thinks that he has “no conflict.” While Luke believes that his father could redeem himself and cast off the shroud of the Dark Side, Vader remains cynical about whether or not he still has any goodness at all inside him.

Vader finally provokes Luke to seriously fight when he threatens to convert Luke’s sister, Leia, to the Dark Side. Luke springs out and starts slashing at Vader. There is no fancy choreography here: Luke simply attacks Vader furiously until finally Vader falls to the floor and Luke cuts off Vader’s right hand. At that moment, the Emperor comes down, praises Luke’s fighting, and implores him to “take your father’s place at my side.” Luke then looks at his robotic hand, which is covered in a black glove, and looks at Vader—the latter’s hand is also robotic. He nods once, remembering his experience in the cave on Dagobah in Episode V. The fight awakens him to his use of anger and hatred. He is in a position to kill Vader, whom he knows is his father, and cripple the Empire. However, he also knows that killing out of hatred would only damage his character, the very thing that his vision and his mentors warned him against. The easy choice for him would be to do as the Emperor bids and kill Vader. Instead, in a bold move, he casts down his sword and simultaneously casts away his anger. He then proudly proclaims, “I am a Jedi, like my father before me.” He has passed the test without killing anyone. He has faced Vader and his inner turmoil at the same time and come out the victor. Rather than hearken to the call of destiny that the Emperor has offered him, Luke chooses of his own free will to take the path of the Good Side and achieves enlightenment and self-actualization.

The sword fights in the prequels have no moments to equal this one. Not even duels in which main or supporting characters are killed have much emotional resonance, as these duels display difficult choreography instead of dramatizing the characters' inner conflicts and histories. The duels of the OT display the combatants' strengths and weaknesses and expound the themes of choice, faith, and one's humanity. However, the prequel fights do none of these, showing fighting but no spirit. While the PT ones may pack excitement to some moviegoers, their duels sorely lack the emotional dynamics and themes of the originals.

#### **“Unexpected This Is”: Final Thoughts/Conclusion**

Russian film director Andrey Tarkovsky writes in his book *Sculpting in Time*, “A director is not entitled to try to please anyone. . . . If you try to please audiences, uncritically accepting their tastes, it can only mean that you have no respect for them: that you simply want to collect their money” (172, 174). George Lucas certainly has the right to make his movies however he pleases. He has the right to write the story he wants, develop the characters the way he wants, direct the movies in his own style, and expound the themes that he thinks are important. Artists can certainly listen to their audiences and use the feedback to make a better work of art. However, an artist who constantly listens to his/her audience risks ceasing to be a true artist and becoming a sort of mercenary artist whom the people of the popular culture can manipulate into doing whatever they want at any given moment. Thus, artists must do what they want of their own free will and not let others control them.

Overall, Lucas had much more input in the prequels than he did in the originals. Whereas he directed only one of the original films, he directed all three of the prequels; as well, he wrote the screenplays for the prequels. Though he had more control over them, the movies do not exclusively belong to him, the cast, and the crew. The films belong to every person who sees the films. Many movie-goers see movies, like them, and eagerly await the next movies, hoping to receive the same kinds of feelings that the first movies give. If Lucas had merely wanted to write the stories for his own enjoyment, then he would have written them and kept them in a drawer, never to show to anyone. When he makes and releases the movies, he is saying that he wants viewers to watch them and like them. He states in the documentary *Empire of Dreams*, “I think that if I can get a room full of people and they enjoy [these movies], then I’ve done whatever I’ve hoped to do.” Lucas desires not only personal satisfaction but the approval of others.

Nevertheless, many fans who love the original trilogy feel let down by what Lucas does in the prequels. They feel disappointed when they see that the prequels bear only a passing resemblance to the originals, particularly in regards to the themes. The original trilogy celebrates humanity. It applauds the free will we have to decide our own paths through life. The movies also advocate the idea that believing that one can do something largely contributes to success. The prequels, on the other hand, suppress the importance of free will, character, and spirituality and put in their place the importance of predestination, following the status quo, and obeying an established doctrine rather than following one’s own beliefs. The fights in the originals carry dramatic weight: they dramatize the inner conflicts between and within characters and express the main themes of free will and spiritual belief. The advanced, flashy choreography of the PT duels

completely lacks these dynamics, existing only to generate suspense. The Jedi change from being gurus who live on the outskirts of society and whom many non-Jedi, such as mercenary Han Solo from the original trilogy, do not believe ever even existed in the original trilogy to being a very high-profile law-enforcement organization that works for the main government in the prequels.

When movie-goers see a movie with the words “Star Wars” in the title, they expect certain conventions that they see in the originals and are disappointed when these conventions do not manifest themselves. It can be upsetting when the creator of a beloved set of films decides to completely change and subvert the themes. And it is not as if Lucas and his crew made the movies and then never had a chance to watch them again—the films are available in physical media for anyone to see anytime. If the makers were confused about any element, they could look at one of films for information, much like the writers who write down their characters’ appearances in a special notebook that they can consult to ensure that the protagonist’s hair does not change from black to red without any explanation.

These six films are all Star Wars movies that depict stories that happened a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, but what the prequels mean differs vastly from what the originals stand for and mean. While Lucas may have changed his mind about what stories he wanted to tell and themes he wanted to expound in the years between the trilogies, he displays a lack of storytelling ability when he cannot make his two trilogies mesh, even though the movies were made just sixteen years apart. Viewers may think that Lucas cannot tell a story properly or elaborate on themes; thus, movie-goers who adore the original trilogy’s storytelling and themes may avoid all of Lucas’s future work.

Though Lucas is an artist and does not have to do what his fans want him to do, if Lucas is unable to connect the movies in his own series properly, audiences may ignore him and his future works altogether and even cast a dark light on the original, beloved films that he made first.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Internet site [www.atreligion.about.com](http://www.atreligion.about.com) states Jedi Code as: “There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no death, there is the Force.” It mentions nothing about marriage, apprenticeship, or age limits.

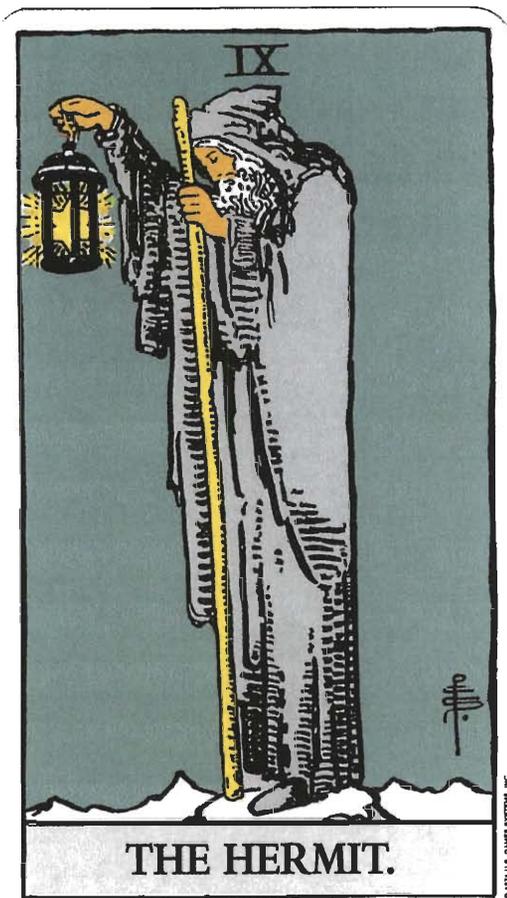
<sup>2</sup> Various Star Wars websites give precise midi-chlorian counts of certain Jedi and non-Jedi characters from the two trilogies. Lucas considers none of the material legitimate. In addition, none of the sites indicates neither what the numbers mean nor in what ways a Jedi with a count of 17,500 is more powerful than a Jedi with a count of 12,000.

<sup>3</sup> Though Episode III is titled *Revenge of the Sith*, the audience is never given a clear indication of who exactly the Sith are or what they want revenge for. We are told that the Sith use the Dark Side of the Force, use fear and aggression, and limit their numbers to two at a time. The Jedi and the Sith are enemies, and the existence of the Sith indicate an imbalance in the Force.

<sup>4</sup> It is very possible that Lucas makes a parallel to Jesus Christ, the savior of the world according to the Christian faith. Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.

<sup>5</sup> This action of Luke’s falls into the realm of another Tarot card, the Tower, which represents a person’s destruction by his or her own means. He fails to rescue his friends because he has inadequately set himself up to do so.

Figure 1- The Hermit (from the Rider-Waite Tarot deck)



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