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Reconstructing the Death Star: Myth and Memory in the Star Wars Franchise

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ABSTRACT

Mythic narratives exert a powerful influence over societies, and few mythic narratives carry as much weight in modern culture as the *Star Wars* franchise. Disney's 2012 purchase of Lucasfilm opened the door for new films in the franchise. 2016's *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story,* the second of these films, takes place in the fictional hours and minutes leading up to the events portrayed in 1977's *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*. Changes to the fundamental myths underpinning the *Star Wars* narrative and the unique connection between these film have created important implications for the public memory of the original film. I examine these changes using Campbell's hero's journey and Lawrence and Jewett's American monomyth. In this thesis I argue that *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* was likely conceived as a means of updating the public memory of the original 1977 film. Disney's choice to maintain the original film as the canonical basis for their ongoing storytelling makes updating the public memory of the 1977 film essential given distinct differences between the rhetorical contexts of 1977 and 2016. Additionally, Disney's decisions have significant ramifications for the passionate fans of the franchise.

Reconstructing the Death Star: Myth and Memory in the Star Wars Franchise

A Thesis

Presented to

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Master of Arts

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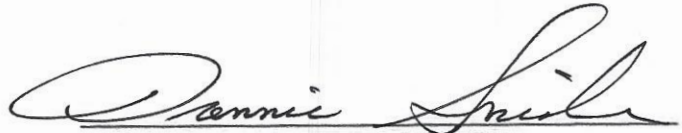
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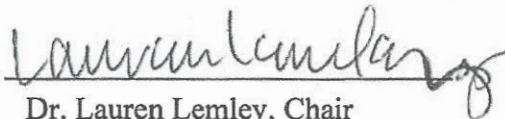
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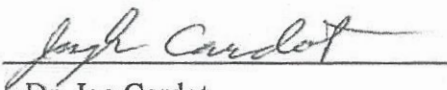
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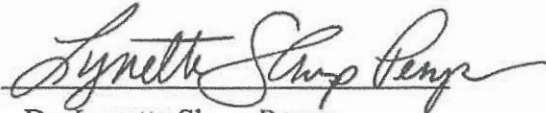
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To the family, friends, and mentors who motivated me to continue my academic journey at a time when I thought it was over. More specifically, to my parents, who've walked with me through every step of that journey. And last but by no means least, to my professors, who've made that journey possible and propelled me onward towards the next step.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.   INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> I also find it very interesting, especially in terms of the academic world, that they will take a work and dissect it in so many different ways. Some of the ways are very profound, and some are very accurate. A lot of it, though, is just the person using their imagination to put things in there that really weren't there, which I don't mind either.[1]

> – George Lucas

The word myth conjures up images of ancient heroes such as Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Hercules, or Thor. However, myth is not confined to the pages of ancient tomes gathering dust on forgotten library shelves or to crude etchings that decorate pieces of earthenware scattered about rotting crypts. The towering figures of ancient myth have been remembered for hundreds or thousands of years because of the timeless way in which their stories speak to the fundamental nature of humanity. Humanity remembers these stories, telling and retelling them to this day. Sometimes when a myth has lived in the memories of a generation, a time comes for that myth to be transformed so that it can be remembered anew. This thesis examines the myth George Lucas originally created in *Star Wars* (1977), but also examines the way in rhetors associated with new Lucasfilm parent company Disney transform the public memory of that myth in 2016's *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

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1. Bill Moyers and George Lucas, "The Mythology 'Star Wars' with George Lucas," *Moyers & Company*, July 31, 2015, http://billmoyers.com/content/mythology-of-star-wars-george-lucas/.

My thesis breaks new ground by combining the areas of public memory with myth scholarship. Though both public memory and myth have proven applicable to science-fiction film artifacts, I combine these areas of scholarship in order to address the unique rhetorical situation of these two films. As I will discuss, mythic narratives exert a powerful influence over the values and beliefs of the societies that tell them. *Star Wars* serves as a prime example of one such myth. Rarely does a film such as *Rogue One* come along with such important implications for one of a culture's most fundamental myths. Because of the time gap between these two artifacts, public memory is uniquely applicable to this rhetorical situation. Additionally, I will discuss the importance of these artifacts specifically to the passionate fans comprising the *Star Wars* fandom for whom these texts serve an even more foundational role. Chapter I provides an overview of the *Star Wars* franchise, a description of the rhetorical situation surrounding the films, and literature reviews regarding the importance of canon in science-fiction fandoms and the scholarship of myth that serves as the foundation of my analysis. Let me begin with a brief description of the history of the *Star Wars* franchise.

The *Star Wars* Franchise

The *Star Wars* phenomenon launched in 1977 with the release of George Lucas's *Star Wars*, later retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*, hereon referred to as ANH. The film tells the story of a teenage farm boy named Luke who learns to use the supernatural power called the Force and becomes swept up in a conflict between the freedom-seeking Rebel Alliance and the tyrannical Empire's Death Star planet-killing superweapon. The next two films, episodes five (1980) and six (1983), brought a conclusion to Luke Skywalker's journey to become a Jedi Knight and confront his evil

father, Darth Vader. Eventually Lucas created three prequel films released in 1999, 2002, and 2005 that told the story of Luke's father Anakin's young life and his transformation into Vader. Disney purchased Lucasfilm from George Lucas in 2012 and announced a new trilogy of films beginning with *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) as well additional "*Star Wars* Story" films that would not be numbered main entries in the saga but would touch on specific characters or events secondary to the ongoing story of the numbered films. The first of the *Star Wars* Story films, 2016's *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (R1), explores the story behind the creation of the Death Star, the Rebel assault on the facility containing its blueprint plans, and the transmission of those plans to Rebel leader Princess Leia. Given that the original film started with Princess Leia attempting to escape Darth Vader with those plans in hand, R1 takes audience members full circle to the beginning of the franchise. The *Star Wars* saga continues to expand as of the writing of this thesis, with the recent release of *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* in December of 2017 and the upcoming release of *Solo: A Star Wars Story* in May of 2018. With this overview of the *Star Wars* timeline established, I will next explore the rhetorical situation of the *Star Wars* franchise as a whole.

Rhetorical Situation

This section discusses the rhetorical situation of the *Star Wars* franchise, beginning with its context in academia and popular culture. I will then discuss key rhetors in the *Star Wars* franchise. I will provide further analysis of the rhetorical situation pertaining to the audience of ANH and R1 before each film's respective analysis in Chapter II and Chapter IV.

Academic Context of the *Star Wars* Franchise

The *Star Wars* series of films has inspired academic work in a variety of disciplines. Though my thesis will focus primarily on the original *Star Wars* film and the more recent R1, the significance of the series is revealed through the diversity of fields of study that have examined its many films. Author Leah Deyneka states that Lucas was inspired by the work of Joseph Campbell and argues that each of the films in the original trilogy follows a stage of the hero's journey.[2] Literature and film scholar Andrew Gordon argued for the cultural significance of the original Star Wars film in its day, stating in a 1978 article that "in an era in which Americans have lost heroes in whom to believe, Lucas has created a myth for our times, fashioned out of bits and pieces of twentieth-century American popular mythology."[3] Religious pedagogy scholar Christian Feichtinger identifies elements of what he calls "space Buddhism" in the *Star Wars* films such as the connection between spirituality and combat made by Jedi characters such as Obi-Wan Kenobi.[4] Psychologists Pamela Bettis and Brandon Sternod argue that, in contrast to the simpler portrayal of male roles in the original trilogy, the prequel film character Anakin Skywalker "exemplifies the characteristics typically associated with the contemporary boy crisis: the lack of a strong male role model in his life, his propensity to use violence as a way to solve problems, and his academic and behavioral failures."[5] Information technology scholars Adi Bunyamin Zamzamin, Dahlan Ghani, Amir Aarieff,

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2. Leah Deyneka, "May the Myth Be With You, Always," in *Myth, Media, & Culture in Star Wars*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), 31-2.

3. Andrew Gordon, "A Myth for Our Time," *Literature Film Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1978): 315.

4. Christian Feichtinger, "Space Buddhism," *Contemporary Buddhism* 15, no.1 (2014): 31-32.

5. Pamela Bettis and Brandon Sternod, "Trouble With Boys," *Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009): 27, doi:10.3386/ w17541.

Amir Hussin, and Mohd Zaky Khairuddin cite Darth Vader's cybernetic limbs as an

example of a fictional film serving to inspire real science and design.[6] *Star Wars* has

powerfully shaped academia, but this influence pales in comparison to the impact of *Star

Wars* in popular culture.

Cultural Context of the *Star Wars* Franchise

     Popular culture. In addition to its importance to the academic world, *Star Wars*

is widely recognized as an incredibly significant part of popular culture, both in the

United States and around the world. *The Hollywood Reporter*'s Graeme McMillan

argues that while *Star Wars* "borrows – if not outright steals" from other films such as

The Hidden Fortress, *Metropolis*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the unique blend of

influences "touched a nerve in a way that the individual elements had never managed on

their own, with the result being a significant shift in the medium going forward."[7] In a

2014 interview with Charlie Rose, *Star Wars* creator George Lucas explained that part of

the series' appeal is the universality of its themes saying that

> everything was so taken and put into a form that was so easy for everybody
> to accept so it didn't fall into a contemporary mode where you could argue
> about it. It went everywhere in the world, because they could say 'oh, the
> things I believe in are the same as that.'[8]

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6. A.B. Zamzamin, D. Ghani, A.A. Amir Hussin, and M.Z. Khairuddin, "Technological Advancement," *Annales: Series Historia et Sociologia* 27, no. 1 (2017), 1-10, doi:10.19233/ASHS.2017.01.

7. Graeme McMillan, "Why 'Star Wars' is One of the Most Important Works of Art in Cinema History," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 28, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/star-wars-is-one-important-works-art-cinema-950830.

8. Charlie Rose and George Lucas, "George Lucas," *Charlie Rose,* August 29, 2016, https://charlierose.com/videos/23471.

Financial value. Beyond its artistic and thematic appeal as cinema, the *Star Wars* franchise is also highly valued in financial terms. Disney purchased Lucasfilm Ltd. (which included the rights to *Star Wars*) in 2012 from sole shareholder George Lucas for $4.05 billion.[9] *Variety* film reporter David McNary reported in January of 2017 that *Rogue One* surpassed one billion dollars in the worldwide box office.[10] Star Wars is not just a titan at the box office. The franchise also includes an incredible amount of merchandising. Chris Taylor states that clothing, accessories, toys, and other forms of Star Wars merchandise have generated roughly forty billion dollars of revenue.[11]

Expanded Universe content. In the thirty-five years following the release of the original Star Wars film and leading up to the Lucasfilm purchase by Disney, an "expanded universe" or "EU," of books, comic books, videogames, and other forms of storytelling arose that expanded the narrative the Star Wars franchise, and while Lucas was never beholden to these stories and made it clear that only films and TV shows he worked on were official canon, Lucasfilm worked to build a consistent canon of history and characters among these various forms of media.[12] Few, if any, other franchises live up to the complexity and extent of the Star Wars universe. Fan website starwarsbooks.net lists the hundreds of books and comic books that constitute the Star

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9. "Disney to Acquire Lucasfilm Ltd," *The Walt Disney Company,* October 30, 2012, https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/disney-to-acquire-lucasfilm-ltd/.

10. David McNary, "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story Hits $1 billon," *Variety,* January 22, 2017, http://variety.com/2017/film/news/rogue-one-a-star-wars-story-worldwide-box-office-1201966453/.

11. Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xv.

12. "The Legendary Star Wars Expanded Universe Turns a New Page," *starwars.com,* April 25, 2014, http://www.starwars.com/news/the-legendary-star-wars-expanded-universe-turns-a-new-page.

Wars EU, with stories ranging across the in-universe timeline from one-hundred and fifty

years after the events portrayed in the original film to thousands of years of in-universe

history.[13] The responsibility for this immense cultural impact lies largely with *Star Wars*

creator George Lucas.

Rhetors

George Lucas. Though not his first film, Modesto, California, native filmmaker

George Lucas's first hit was 1973's *American Graffiti,* a film in large part based on his

teenage years in his home town.[14] An Oscar nomination for the film allowed Lucas to

convince Fox to fund an ambitious new science-fiction project, and rather than

negotiating a higher director's fee, Lucas shrewdly convinced Fox to instead give him

merchandising and sequel rights to the new Star Wars property.[15] In crafting this new

story, Lucas intentionally used myth in order to reach a broad audience and speak to

fundamental human issues. He noted this during an interview with Charlie Rose saying,

> with Star Wars I consciously set about to re-create myths and the classic
> mythological motifs. I wanted to use those motifs to deal with issues that
> exist today. The more research I did, the more I realized that the issues are
> the same ones that existed 3,000 years ago. That we haven't come very far
> emotionally.[16]

Building on the success of the first film, Lucas went on to create five more live-action

Star Wars films as well as countless other books, animated features, and video games

13. "Star Wars Legends Timeline," *swbooks.net*, accessed October 9, 2017, http://www.swbooks.net/timeline/legends.htm.

14. Jim Windolf, "Star Wars: The Last Battle," *Vanity Fair*, February 19, 2014, https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2005/02/star-wars-george-lucas-story.

15. Scott Beggs, "How Star Wars Began: As an Indie Film No Studio Wanted to Make," *Vanity Fair,* December 18, 2015, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/12/star-wars-george-lucas-independent-film.

16. Moyers and Lucas, "The Mythology 'Star Wars' with George Lucas."

through his own company Lucasfilm. In 2012, Lucas retired and decided to sell

Lucasfilm to Disney.[17] Though Lucas was originally slated to "serve as a creative

consultant," his relationship with Disney has been rocky.[18] At one point, he compared

selling the Star Wars franchise to Disney to selling his "children" to "white slavers."[19]

He later walked back the comment, though he still cited creative differences to help

explain his waning creative influence over the saga.[20] Since then, Lucas appears to have

settled more comfortably into his relationship with Disney, appearing at Disney's

Celebration Orlando during a panel after introducing the current Lucasfilm president.[21] I

will discuss her role with Disney and in the *Star Wars* franchise next.

Kathleen Kennedy. Kathleen Kennedy, described by *Vanity Fair's* Sarah Ellison

as "the most powerful woman in Hollywood,"[22] was hand-picked by Lucas to serve as the

president of Lucasfilm in the months leading up to the four-billion-dollar sale of

Lucasfilm to Disney.[23] Kennedy currently holds creative control over the Star Wars

franchise, as evident in her recent firing of the directors of the upcoming Han Solo

17. Matt Krantz, Mike Snider, Marco Della Cava, and Bryan Alexander, "Disney Buys Lucasfilm for $4 Billion," *USA Today*, October 30, 2012, https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/ business/2012/10/30/disney-star-wars-lucasfilm/1669739/.

18. Krantz, Snider, Della Cava, and Alexander, "Disney Buys Lucasfilm for $4 Billion."

19. Rose and Lucas, "George Lucas."

20. James Rainey, "George Lucas Backpedals on 'Star Wars' 'White Slavers' Remark," *Variety*, December 31, 2015, http://variety.com/2015/film/news/george-lucas-rolls-back-complaints-that-star-wars-successors-are-white-slavers-1201670406/.

21. "SWCO 2017: 11 Highlights From the Powerful '40 Years of Star Wars' Panel," *starwars.com,* April 13, 2017, http://www.starwars.com/news/swco-2017-11-highlights-from-the-powerful-40-years-of-star-wars-panel.

22. Sarah Ellison, "Meet the Most Powerful Woman in Hollywood," *Vanity Fair,* February 8, 2016, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/02/kathleen-kennedy-hollywood-producer.

23. Ellison, "Meet the Most Powerful Woman in Hollywood."

spinoff film.[24] Kennedy has commented that Lucas occasionally offers input about

certain details of the Star Wars franchise but she describes this as a "whisper in my ear

every now and then," indicating that Lucas exercises almost no creative authority over

the franchise.[25] Early in her time at Lucasfilm, Kennedy made a decision which critically

influenced the future of the Star Wars franchise, and one of great concern to long-time

fans. Envisioning a "unified narrative" rather than the "unwieldy" universe of existing

games, novels, and other "extended universe" materials Kennedy, who credits Lucas for

the idea, made the decision to "reset" the in-universe canon and form the Lucasfilm

"Story Group" to manage a new canon.[26] In addition to creating new story ideas, this

group serves as the "guardian" of the Star Wars timeline and ensures that all new content

fits within the canonical universe.[27] Kennedy, however, is not the only person

responsible for the content of the new Star Wars films. Film directors are crucial to the

stories of their films, and *Rogue One's* director is no different.

Gareth Edwards. Director Gareth Edwards also possessed a great degree of

control over the story and content of *Rogue One*. Edwards' career in the film industry

initially began in visual effects, but he later became well known after directing the indie

24. Brett Lang, "'Star Wars' Han Solo Spinoff: Lord & Miller Fired After Clashing with Kathleen Kennedy (EXCLUSIVE)," *Variety,* June 20, 2017, http://variety.com/2017/film/news/star-wars-han-solo-kathleen-kennedy-director-fired-1202473919/.

25. Anthony Breznican, "George Lucas Still Offers the *Star Wars* Films Suggestions on the Jedi," *EW,* August 14, 2017, http://ew.com/movies/2017/08/14/george-lucas-star-wars-films-jedi-suggestions/.

26. Oliver Franklin-Wallis, "Kathleen Kennedy Made Your Favorite Childhood Films. Now She's Reinventing Star Wars," *Wired,* December 12, 2016, http://www.wired.co.uk/article/tastemakers-kathleen-kennedy-star-wars.

27. Franklin-Wallis, "Kathleen Kennedy Made Your Favorite Childhood Films."

film *Monster.*[28] Initially, *Rogue One* writer Gary Whitta and Edwards were prepared to

end *Rogue One's* story with heroes Jyn and Cassian escaping, fearing that an ending in

which all the main characters sacrifice themselves would be "too dark" for the Disney

brand.[29] Edwards felt that the darker ending was critical, however, and approached

Kathleen Kennedy. He recounts her response to him as "you can do anything you

want!"[30] Despite the freedom he was given, Edwards felt a strong burden to pay homage

to George Lucas and the original Star Wars films. After Lucas viewed and commented

positively on *Rogue One*, Edwards said "I can honestly say that I can die happy now."[31]

Despite Edwards' reverence, Lucas did not exert much influence on *Rogue One*.

Edwards described Lucas's input on the set of *Rogue One* as little more than

encouragement and jokes. These rhetors each played a key role in the success of the *Star

Wars* franchise; however, franchises cannot survive without the support of fans.

Fandom and Canon

Key to this specific rhetorical situation is the issue of canon. As I previously

mentioned, Kathleen Kennedy created the Lucasfilm Story Group to serve as new

managers of the *Star Wars* canon. Additionally, she made the decision to change the

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28. "Gareth Edwards," *Empire Online,* accessed October 9, 2017, https://www.empireonline.com/people/gareth-edwards/.

29. Anthony Breznican, "*Rogue One* Alternate Ending Revealed," *Entertainment Magazine,* March 20, 2017, http://ew.com/movies/2017/03/20/rogue-one-alternate-ending-revealed/.

30. Tim Robey, "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story's Gareth Edwards: 'The whole thing was one big love letter to Carrie Fisher,'" *The Telegraph*, March 31, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/rogue-one-star-wars-storys-gareth-edwards-whole-thing-one-big/

31. Michael Cavna, "George Lucas Says He Loves 'Rogue One.' Is His Relationship with Disney's Star Wars Less Awkward Now?," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2016/12/09/george-lucas-seems-to-like-rogue-one-is-his-relationship-with-star-wars-less-awkward-now/?utm_term=.3ff9e020e85f.

canonical status of hundreds of artifacts, a decision I will discuss in greater detail in

Chapter III. Doing so has important implications for passionate *Star Wars* fans;

therefore, in this section I will discuss the impact of canon on science-fiction fandoms.

Passionate Fandoms

Science fiction and fantasy franchises can inspire fandoms with passion bordering

on religious zeal. Religion scholar Michael Jindra examines the Star Trek fandom and

argues that while the fandom

> does not seem to fit the more restrictive, substantive definition of religion
> that posits belief in a deity or in the supernatural. It does, however, have
> some commonalties with broader definitions of religion that come under the
> rubric "quasi-religions," such as Alcoholics Anonymous and New Age
> groups.[32]

Religion scholar Britt Istoft points to the online fandom surrounding the *Avatar* film in

which many fans develop new identities, practice environmental lifestyles based on the

film, and express a near-religious veneration for the fictional goddess Eywa.[33] Film,

television, and media scholar Denzell Richards argues that in the case of changes made to

special effects in modern re-releases of TV series such as the original *Star Trek*,

producers must take steps such as praising the contributions of the creators of the original

effects, considering the "authorial intent" of those creators, and demonstrating the "fan-

culture capital" of "franchise knowledge" in order to "rhetorically justify" the

authenticity of the new effects to fans of the franchise.[34]

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32. Michael Jindra, "Star Trek Fandom as Religious Phenomenon," *Sociology of Religion* 55, no. 1 (1994): 27-51, doi:10.2307/3712174.

33. Britt Istoft, "*Avatar* Fandom as Nature-Religious Expression?," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, & Culture* 4, no. 4 (2010): 394-413, doi:10.1558/jsmc.v4i4.394.

34. Denzell Richards, "Old SF, New FX: Exploring the Reception of Replacement Special Effects for Older Episodes of Doctor Who and Star Trek," *Critical Studies in Television* 8, no. 3 (2013): 54-5.

Canonicity

  Importance to fans. Canonicity is an important issue to members of science-fiction fandoms. Philosophy scholar Roy T. Cook describes the fictional "universe" of *Star Wars* as what he calls an "MSCF," a "massive serialized collaborate fiction," and defines canonicity as a set of practices that divide such fictions into installments that constitute the canonical, or "real," story and installments that do not.[35] Religion scholar John C. Lyden draws parallels between Star Wars fandom and religion and likens the original Star Wars films to "the scriptures which the faithful seek to safeguard," referencing a project in which fans participated in a crowdsourced shot-by-shot recreation of the original Star Wars film.[36] Fans sometimes consider canon to be determined by the individual credited with authorship of a particular work, as is the case with Gene Rodenberry and the original Star Trek series.[37] As I will discuss next, this relationship between author and fandom can be a complex one as canon is negotiated.

  Negotiation of canonicity. Canonicity in franchises like Star Wars is negotiated between creators and fans. Creators play an important role in managing canon. Cook states that canonicity is "sensitive to medium" and indicates that in the *Star Wars* universe, "(live action) films are privileged over the novels and comics," and that political and commercial forces also influence the negotiation of canonicity.[38] This gives a filmmaker like George Lucas a great deal of authority over what is and is not

  35. Roy T. Cook, "Canonicity and Normativity in Massive, Serialized, Collaborative Fiction," *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 71, no. 3 (2013): 271-3.

  36. John C. Lyden, "Whose Film is it, Anyway? Canonicity and Authority in Star Wars Fandom," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 3 (2012): 777.

  37. Richards, "Old SF, New FX," 52.

  38. Cook, "Canonicity and Normativity," 271-3.

considered canon in the minds of many fans. Cook cites the example of Aayla Secura, a character who was not considered canon because she only appeared in comic books until Lucas later worked her into one of the films.[39] Though a creator's control over canon is respected, at times it may also be questioned. Film scholar Derek Johnson highlights the controversy surrounding George Lucas' changes made to the original trilogy in his 1997 special editions and interviews author Will Booker who argues that Lucas's changes to the films can create "a strange feeling that you, the fan, and the fan community in general would actually make a better curator of the myth."[40] Creators must be careful not to risk alienating fans. Author Melissa Gray writes of the inclusion of *Supernatural* "fan" character Becky who unflatteringly represented the "extreme" elements of fandom and caused some fans of the show to feel embarrassment.[41] Gray argues that "fans know that there are Beckys out there, but that the Beckys are greatly outnumbered by fans who understand the concepts of personal space and discretion."[42] The relationship between canon-making creators and fans seems best served when a creator allows fans to express their own ideas of canon. As Lyden states, while *Star Wars* creator George Lucas "defends the films as his own products and hence implies his right to revise them as he sees fit, he has not attempted to squash the right of fans to create their own films."[43] Kennedy's empowerment under the new ownership at Disney and her creation of the

39. Cook, "Canonicity and Normativity," 273.

40. Derek Johnson, "Star Wars Fans, DVD, and Cultural Ownership: An Interview with Will Brooker," *Velvet Light Trap* 56 (2005): 1-5.

41. Melissa Gray, "From Canon to Fanon and Back Again: The Epic Journey of "Supernatural" and its Fans," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 4 (2010), 17, doi:0.3983/twc.2010.0146.

42. Gray, "From Canon to Fanon and Back Again," 17.

43. Lyden, "Whose Film is it, Anyway?," 780.

Lucasfilm Story Group have led to a disruption of the previous relationship that existed

between the Star Wars creators and fans of the franchise. I will discuss this further in my

analysis, but in order to continue this proposal I must examine the theories which I will

apply. To that end, I will begin with an examination of myth.

Theoretical Framework

Myth

In this section I introduce the first major area of communication theory I will

apply to my analysis: myth. I will begin by defining myth, examining the history of

mythic scholarship, and exploring the functions and contexts within which myth operates.

After those contextualizing sections, I will delve more specifically into the two forms of

myth I will apply in my thesis: Campbell's hero's journey and Lawrence and Jewett's

American monomyth.

Defining myth. Myth is an ancient, fundamental form of communication that

serves as an alternative mode of reasoning to logic and rationality. Several

communication scholars have defined myth and discussed its nature. Literature scholar

Gregory L. Lucente argues that the word "myth" has traditionally meant "falsehood," but

in the context of American or European criticism it instead refers to a basic or

fundamental plot.[44] Marek Oziewicz argues that the colloquial use of the word myth to

refer to a falsehood is a result of "mauling that the term underwent since the

Enlightenment" and points out that in pre-modern times "mythos," which referred to

foundations and origins of human thought and life, was thought to be of equal importance

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44. Gregory L. Lucente, "The Creation of Myth's Rhetoric: Views of the Mythic Sign," *Comparative Literature Studies* 18, no. 1 (1981): 50.

to "logos," which referred to more rational, everyday forms of thought.[45] Valerie V.

Peterson describes myth as "an alternative to ideology, a mode of signification, a system

of communication, and a rhetorical form with historical limits, conditions of use, and

social relevance."[46] Larry A. Williamson further defines myth with emphasis on its

influential power, calling it "seductive" and a "rhetorical narcotic" that "embodies,

perhaps more than any other type of discourse, the power of narrative rationality over

logic."[47] Scholars have been defining, as well as studying, myth since the earliest days of

communication scholarship.

      History of mythic scholarship. Scholars have long studied myth from a variety

of perspectives. Lucente traces the study of myth back to Plato, who, he states, was

concerned that myths be accurately represented and not fall prey to "the untrustworthy

nature of poetic inspiration."[48] Lucente later points to the work of eighteenth-century

scholar Giambattista Vico, who treated the study of myth as a "New Science" and

understood myth as a "core of metaphorical meaning" that accompanied language as it

developed.[49] Oziewicz attributes myth's temporary loss of prevalence in culture to

scientific advances made in the Enlightenment era, but argues that twentieth-century

scholars, including Mircea Eliade, Carl Gustav Jung, Northrop Frye, and Joseph

Campbell, approached myth from a variety of research perspectives and reawakened

45. Marek Oziewicz, "Joseph Campbell's 'New Mythology' and the Rise of Mythopoeic Fantasy," *The AnaChronisT* 13 (2007-2008): 115-6.

46. Valerie V. Peterson, "Mythic Rhetoric: Love, Power, and Companionate Marriage in Puccini's Turandot," *Ohio Communication Journal* 52 (2014): 21, doi:10.1386/eme.13.1.3_1.

47. Larry A. Williamson, "Bush's Mythic America: A Critique of the Rhetoric of War," *Southern Communication Journal* 75, no. 3 (2010): 215, doi:10.1080/10417940902807091.

48. Lucente, "The Creation of Myth's Rhetoric," 51.

49. Lucente, "The Creation of Myth's Rhetoric," 52-3.

interest in this area of study.[50] Peterson argues for Kenneth Burke's contribution to the

field of myth, stating that he identifies it as "the source of zeal for human effort."[51] The

study of myth continues to this day, examined in everything from politics to film. This is

unsurprising given the powerful influence of myths on the thoughts and daily lives of

those who hear them.

       Functions of myth. Given its ability to affect how people reason, it is no surprise

that myth is a powerful influence on the most foundational ideas of communities and

cultures. Communication scholars Leroy G. Dorsey and Rachel M. Harlow state that

myths help communities explain the development of "fundamental concepts such as

identity, morality, religion, and law."[52] More than just explaining how concepts develop,

myth itself plays a critical role in forming concepts themselves. Williamson argues that

myth's rhetorical power "animates ideals and values, rendering them as historic

antecedents, and in the process creating cultural truths."[53] Joseph Campbell, famous for

his impact on the study of myth, also points to the fundamental nature of myths. For

example, he divides mythic narratives into a basic three-part structure of departure,

initiation, and return, outlining this as the basic pattern for myths of heroic resurrected

gods that are told all around the world.[54] Campbell argues that such myths help people to

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50. Oziewicz, "Joseph Campbell's 'New Mythology,'" 115-8.

51. Peterson, "Mythic Rhetoric," 22.

52. Leroy G. Dorsey and Rachel M. Harlow, "We Want Americans Pure and Simple," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2003): 62, doi:10.1353/rap.2003.0027.

53. Williamson, "Bush's Mythic America," 217.

54. Edward W. Hudlin, "The Mythology of Oz: An Interpretation," *Papers on Language & Literature* 25, no. 4 (1989): 444, doi:10.2307/ 4611799.

understand "how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances."[55] As a result of

their global yet fundamental nature, myths appear in extremely diverse contexts.

      Contexts of myth. Myths serve their guiding function in a variety of contexts.

For example, myths frequently define cultural norms. Giacomo Puccini's opera Turandot

tells a mythic story with romantic themes. Peterson points to this myth as an illustration

that while most everyday romances do not involve royalty, beheadings, and riddles, these

story elements in the 1998 PBS production point to "metaphorical guidelines of courtship

by which audiences of this version of Turandot may proceed."[56] Myths can also be

constructed to justify political action. Williamson points to a "mythic America" created

by the Bush administration's rhetoric in the period of 2003 to 2006 and argues that this

myth "sustained a narrow cultural and political piety" that aided in characterizing

criticisms of war as opposition to a heroic, mythic past.[57] It is often necessary to resolve

societal tensions for political action to be taken, and myth is sometimes a means of that

reconciliation. Rhetoric and political culture scholar Michael J. Steudeman states that, in

order to aid with the passing of education legislation, Lyndon B. Johnson "invoked his

personal experience as an educator" to align with myths about ideal teaching that could

reconcile "tensions between egalitarian and individualistic components of the American

Dream by valorizing educators."[58] Myth may also be used to counter a social movement.

Solomon points to Phyllis Schlafly's use of the "romantic quest" myth to dramatize the

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55. Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 39.

56. Peterson, "Mythic Rhetoric," 33.

57. Williamson, "Bush's Mythic America," 228.

58. Michael J. Steudeman, "'The Guardian Genius of Democracy': The Myth of the Heroic Teacher in Lyndon B. Johnson's Education Policy Rhetoric, 1964–1966," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 17, no. 3 (2014): 480-1, doi:10.14321/rhetpublaffa.17.3.0477.

life of an ERA opponent and combat the STOP ERA movement.[59] Dorsey and Harlow

argue that Theodore Roosevelt utilized a version of the frontier myth to frame the

immigrant as "the archetypal hero in American history," and to argue that immigrants

become truly American "by facing the unknown and renouncing their old ways and old

lives."[60] Literary scholar Michael Schneider points to elements of Campbell's

monomyth, a narrative pattern that appears in the myths of both ancient and modern

cultures around the world, in the novel *The Red Badge of Courage.* This tale of a young

soldier's departure from home and experiences in the Civil War in which Stephen Crane

uses imagery such as dragon slaying suggesting a "quest-romance" as the symbolic

underpinning of the work.[61] Monomyth may also be used as a form of critique,

particularly when the traditional pattern of myth is deconstructed or transformed in some

way. For example, popular culture scholar Neil Gerlach argues that in the *Omen* film

series the central character forms a kind of inverted monomythic hero who dominates

within power structures rather than challenging them.[62] Whether constructing or

deconstructing myth for rhetorical purposes, the mythic critic may approach a variety of

artifacts. Some artifacts, however, lend themselves quite naturally to mythic criticism.

Applicability of myth to film. Though applicable to many types of artifacts,

mythic criticism is specifically useful for examining films. Given the guiding function

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59. Martha Solomon, "The 'Positive Woman's' Journey: A Mythic Analysis of the Rhetoric of STOP ERA," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65, no. 3 (1979): 262-3, doi: 10.1080/00335637909383478.

60. Dorsey and Harlow, "We Want Americans Pure and Simple," 74.

61. Michael Schneider, "Monomyth Structure in 'The Red Badge of Courage,'" *American Literary Realism* 20, no. 1 (1987): 46.

62. Neil Gerlach, "The Anti-Christ as Anti-Monomyth: The Omen Films as Social Critique," *Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 5 (2011): 1041, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00886.x/full.

that myths serve in society, Campbell argues that "myths must be kept alive," and

identifies artists as those with the capability of doing so.[63] Though Campbell speaks of

artists in a general sense, I do not believe it is a stretch of his meaning to infer that

filmmakers would fit into this same category. To that end, it is logical for critics and

scholars of myth to examine films, especially those with science-fiction or fantasy

elements that clearly allude to the mythic function of the arts. For example,

communication scholar Michaela D. E. Meyer analyzes the mythic content of the film

Spider-Man, concluding that the film's Green Goblin character fills the mythic role of a

"shadow figure," which is portrayed to the audience through mask and mirror symbols.[64]

Media and culture scholar Wilson Koh analyzes the same film, finding that its nostalgic

"appeals to simplicity and sincerity allow the superhero movie to better articulate Joseph

Campbell's monomyth of the male hero's journey."[65] Popular culture scholar Donald

Palumbo identifies Campbell's monomyth as the basis for the plots of numerous works of

science-fiction, including *Star Wars*.[66] In another work, Palumbo identifies elements of

Campbell's monomyth in *Star Trek* (2009), with Kirk and Spock together sharing the

heroic role and Spock Prime serving the role of the monomythic "wizard," or mentor,

who provides the hero with assistance for his journey.[67] With myth's importance,

63. Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 107.

64. Michaela D. E. Meyer, "Utilizing Mythic Criticism in Contemporary Narrative Culture: Examining the 'Present-Absence' of Shadow Archetypes in Spider-Man," *Communication Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2003): 526, doi:10.1080/01463370309370171.

65. Wilson Koh, "Everything Old is Good Again: Myth and Nostalgia in *Spider-Man*," *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (2009): 741, doi:10.1080/10304310903154651.

66. Donald E. Palumbo, "The Monomyth in Alfred Bester's '*The Stars My Destination*,'" *Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 2 (2004): 333, doi:10.1111/j.0022-3840.2004.00116.x.

67. Donald E. Palumbo, "The Monomyth in Star Trek (2009): Kirk & Spock Together Again for the First Time," *Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 1 (2013): 148-9, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00813.x.

functions, prevalence, and presence in films well established, I will now examine one specific myth that is most applicable to the *Star Wars* franchise: the hero's journey.

The Hero's Journey

Central to the tale of the monomyth, the hero's journey is the fundamental story of a hero's growth, adventure, and victory over evil posited by Campbell to be one of the most foundational myths in all of human narrative. He describes the characters in these stories as "the world's symbolic carriers of the destiny of Everyman."[68] The hero's journey consists of the separation stage, also called the departure stage, in which the hero "ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder," the initiation stage in which "fabulous forces are encountered and a decisive victory won," and the final return stage in which "the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons upon his fellow man."[70]

Examples of the hero's journey. Schneider provides a clear example of this pattern in his analysis of *The Red Badge of Courage*, in which the central protagonist leaves his home and mother, experiences combat, then returns home.[71] This fundamental narrative is also very prevalent in the science-fiction movies of the last fifty years. Donald Palumbo identifies examples, including "*The Time Machine* (1960), *2001: A Space Odyssey, Dune, Back to the Future, The Terminator, The Last Starfighter, Time after Time, Logan's Run, Escape from New York, Dreamscape, Tron, Total Recall, The Matrix*," and films in the *Star Trek* series, all of which, he argues, follow the same basic

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68. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 28. Campbell typically refers to the heroes in these myths as male. I will do so as well when discussing his articulation of myth. Issues of gender and myth will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis.

70. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 23.

71. Schneider, "Monomyth Structure in 'The Red Badge of Courage,'" 46

format Campbell describes. Campbell traces more details in the pattern of the hero's

journey; therefore, the next sections will describe the components of each stage of this

mythic quest.

Departure. Campbell entitles the sections of the departure "The Call to

Adventure," "Refusal of the Call," "Supernatural Aid," "The Crossing of the First

Threshold," and "The Belly of the Whale."[72] Hudlin states that the departure is primarily

concerned with the "crossing of the threshold between two worlds: the ordinary world

and the magical world of adventure."[73] Of the call to adventure, Campbell states that the

center of gravity of the hero's spirit has been transferred to a world beyond his home to

some sort of distant land of great deeds, supernatural forces, hazards, and delights.[74] This

call is usually precipitated by some sort of herald, a character who brings a message to

the central hero and gives him the initial motivation for his journey. Despite the lure of

the greater world, some heroes may engage in refusal of the call, weighed down by the

mundanities of everyday life, work, or culture. Though he cites examples of heroes

forever bound in this manner, Campbell also asserts that some predicament or

providential event may bring about a release from this stagnation. The hero then

customarily encounters supernatural aid, typically in the form of an elder figure who

provides the hero with an amulet or ward of some kind. Such guardians sometimes

choose to appear only after the hero has begun to courageously pursue his journey. Next

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72. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 28.

73. Hudlin, "The Mythology of Oz," 444.

74. Campbell provides clear descriptions of each of the elements of myth. In this and the coming sections, I will summarize these concepts in my own words, but am drawing upon Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. I will continue to identify references to other works.

the hero must cross the first threshold. Campbell argues that, while most people are content to remain in their sphere, the hero must venture beyond familiar safety into the unknowns and dangers of a larger world. Guardians may stand at this threshold into a larger world, and Campbell points to examples such as the Greek god Pan or a water-ogre from Russian folklore who fulfill this role by protecting boundaries such as rivers and forests. Once passing this threshold, Campbell asserts that it may seem as if the hero is destroyed, especially once the hero finds himself in the belly of the whale. Rather than being destroyed in this crucible, however, the hero emerges in rebirth, leaving behind elements of his old identity to become new. These five steps mark the departure. Once the hero has taken them, the initiation stage begins, followed by the return stage. These three elements together constitute the hero's journey aspect of Campbell's monomyth.

Though many elements of the hero's journey described here are applicable the *Star Wars* franchise, other scholars have identified forms of the monomyth that are distinctly American, in contrast to Campbell's myth which is found in cultural narratives throughout the world. Given the *Star Wars* franchise's place in American culture and Lucas's influence as a filmmaker, I will next discuss the American monomyth.

The American Monomyth

Campbell posits the universality of myth but also allows for the influence of culture on the way myths are told. Myth scholars Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence argue that, while some scholars have concluded that America is a "postmythical culture" with no further need of mythic stories, the fact that Americans accept heroic stories such as *The Bionic Woman* or *The Lone Ranger* points less to the

rejection of myth in American culture and more to the creation of "a distinctively

American monomyth."[75] They summarize the American monomyth thusly:

> A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil: normal
> institutions fail to contend with this threat: a selfless superhero emerges to
> renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task: aided by fate, his
> decisive victory restores the community to its paradisal condition; the
> superhero then recedes into obscurity.[76]

This section examines key elements of the American monomyth as identified by the

numerous scholars who have examined this myth in its many iterations.

Hero. First, like Campbell's hero's journey, the American monomyth also

emphasizes the role of the central hero. However, in contrast to Campbell's hero who

crosses from the mundane world into the world of adventure, the American monomythic

hero often serves as a guardian for a threshold, holding back wild forces to protect the

boundaries of peaceful, civilized life. Jewett and Lawrence identify Buffalo Bill as an

example of "the emergence of a monomythic hero-type, standing with a firearm between

threatening savages and innocent damsels."[77] Rather than going on a quest in which the

hero achieves maturity and brings insight and wisdom back to the people he left, religion

scholar William R. Millar argues that the hero of the American monomyth instead serves

as a guardian of the status quo, preserving the order of society against the evil forces

outside of it.[78] Rushing states that such a hero fights battles on behalf of their community

without truly being part of the community, embracing both individualism and community

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75. Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence, *The American Monomyth* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977), xx.

76. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, xx.

77. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 84.

78. William R. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth or, The Lone Ranger Rides Again," *American Baptist Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1983): 40.

"while keeping them distinctly apart."[79] Communication scholar Lynne M. Sallot points

to this individualism in the figure of Ronald Reagan who, she argues, made complex

problems seem simple because of the image he cultivated of a self-reliant frontiersman.[80]

Building the work of Jewett and Lawrence, Cindy Koenig points to the rise of the

superhero in the American monomyth.[81] She identifies traits of a monomythic superhero

such as being an idealistic loner, having pure motivations, being recognizable by uniform

and demeanor, having a redemptive task, possessing extraordinary powers, renouncing

sexual fulfillment for the sake of the mission, being skilled at warfare and at nonviolent

forms of manipulation, embodying the virtues of both civilization and savagery, and

possessing both primitive and technological skills.[82] Millar points to the Lone Ranger as

an American monomyth and emphasizes many of the same features: an iconic white

costume, the use of violence to achieve a redemptive purpose, and the extraordinary

ability of marksmanship that allows him to disarm his opponents with bullets rather than

killing them, allowing them to be turned over to the authorities.[83]

Though American monomyth heroes are frequently embodied by noble cowboy

legends or clean-cut comic book superheroes of popular culture, grittier iterations of the

American monomyth exist as well. David L. Sutton and J. Emmett Winn examine the

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79. Janice Hocker Rushing, "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3, no. 3 (1986): 278-9, doi:10.1080/15295038609366655.

80. Lynne M. Sallot, "The Man on a White Horse: The Presidency, Persuasion and Myth," *Florida Communication Journal* 18, no. 1 (1990): 4.

81. Cindy Koenig, "The Story of the Green Berets: An Account of the American Monomyth," *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association* 23 (2003): 63.

82. Koenig, "The Story of the Green Berets," 64.

83. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 36.

American monomyth in heroic 1980s films about the issue of POW/MIA troops following the Vietnam War.[84] They point to several characteristics generally shared by the central protagonists in this genre that mark them as heroes of American monomyth. The heroes in this genre, though aided at times by women or people of color, are white males, have previous military training indicating that they have passed the sorts of tests and rituals typical to a mythic hero, are willing to sacrifice their lives, show complete self-control and mastery of the body, and, lastly, reject American women in what Sutton and Winn identify as a critique of the rise of feminism in America.[85] This critique of American women seems to be an extension of the idea of sexual renunciation identified by Jewett and Lawrence, who describe "the myth of cool zeal" embodied in westerns or in shows like *Star Trek* which feature heroes who are "selfless, sexually unattached, and committed to justice though not to restraints of due process."[86] In stark contrast, the Lone Ranger's desire to preserve the lives of his enemies so they can face justice, the monomythic heroes of these Vietnam War films achieve their purpose through the slaughter of their enemies.[87] This leads naturally into one of the next key elements of the American monomyth: the prevalence of violence.

 Violence. As some of the elements of the American monomythic hero described above suggest, Jewett and Lawrence also identify violence as a central theme of the American monomyth. Though they point to examples such as "Six Million Dollar Man"

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84. David J. Sutton and J. Emmett Winn, "'Do We Get to Win This Time?': POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24, no. 1 (2001): 28, doi: 10.1111/j.1537-4726.2001.2401_25.x.

85. Sutton and Winn, "POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," 28.

86. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 44.

87. Sutton and Winn, "POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," 29.

Steve Austin, who defeats evil in relatively harmless ways such as comically kicking a villain into some water, they also argue that violence of a more severe nature is a prevalent theme in the American monomyth.[88] They point to the theme of violence as a means of retribution in the film *Death Wish*, in which the central hero avenges the murder of his wife and the rape of his daughter-in-law by taking up an old western revolver and gunning down muggers in the streets of New York City, in the process igniting a sensation that earns him the sympathy of the public and even the city's police, who are appreciative of the reduction in crime rather than appalled at the vigilante who kills on their watch.[89] The same theme of violent disregard for the law is found in *The Path to 9/11* in which, Poindexter argues, virtue is equated with effectively fighting terrorism rather than respecting the niceties of the international law, due process, or cultural sensitivity.[90] American monomythic violence is frequently brutal. Such brutality is found again in the 1980's films discussed by Sutton and Winn, who identify the theme of a final confrontation scene in these films: "pyrotechnic wonders" in which the hero becomes "an ab-solute engine of death," shooting, choking, stabbing, and blowing up the Vietnamese captors of American POW/MIAs.[91] Such violence is extreme but justified by another of the key elements of the American monomyth: the failure of normal institutions to deal with threats.

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88. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, xvii.

89. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 41-2.

90. Mark Poindexter, "ABC's *The Path to 9/11*, Terror-Management Theory, and the American Monomyth," *Film & History* no. 2 (2008): 61, doi:10.1353/flm.0.0062.

91. Sutton and Winn, "POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," 29.

Failure of institutions. As Jewett and Lawrence explain, the hero of the

American monomyth must arise when the normal institutions of society fail to contend

with a threat. Millar argues that the Lone Ranger only appears once the institutions

typical of a western town have proven unable to ward off the bandits who plague them.[92]

Sutton and Winn contend that in *Missing in Action*, the American government is

portrayed as the ineffective institution. While POW/MIAs suffer in torture and captivity,

the government officials responsible for securing their release sit in air-conditioned

offices debating the issue.[93] Poindexter asserts that *The Path to 9/11* portrays U.S.

Ambassador Barbara Bodine as one such hindrance to the central character of John

O'Neill, whose investigations into a terrorist attack are slowed by her intellectualism and

insistence on cultural sensitivity.[94] This is one among many instances Poindexter

identifies in the film of government officials using political, intellectual, or bureaucratic

considerations to limit investigating terrorism, paving the way for the protagonists to step

into the role of defiant American hero. A similar theme runs through *Jaws*, with the

town's officials falsifying information about shark attacks to maintain their town's status

and revenue as a tourist spot.[95] The inability of institutions to handle threats is made

particularly egregious by the idyllic nature of the societies they fail to protect.

Paradise. As already discussed, the American monomythic hero stands on the

threshold between destructive forces and the order of society. Jewett and Lawrence point

to the interplanetary peace threatened by *Star Trek*'s Klingons, the peaceful town of

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92. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 35-6.

93. Sutton and Winn, "POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," 27.

94. Poindexter, "ABC's *The Path to 9/11*," 60.

95. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 151.

Amity Island menaced by the shark in *Jaws,* and the communities threatened by the enemies of Spiderman, Superman, and the Lone Ranger as examples of "paradise under siege," stating that "when evil is ascendant, Eden becomes a wilderness in which only a superhero can redeem the captives."[96] Koenig argues that John F. Kennedy cast Vietnam and Southeast Asia as an Edenic community in need for redemption from the menace of communism.[97] Tuscon and Honolulu serve this role somewhat selectively in the film *Death Wish* as the film portrays them as idyllic locations free from the horrific crimes that plague the hero, despite Jewett and Lawrence's observation that the actual crime rates in these places do not differ significantly from the cities of Chicago and New York, which the film portrays as bleak and crime-infested.[98] The paradise of the American monomyth stands in contrast to the source of the hero's problems: the frontier.

Frontier. Also common to the American monomyth is the concept of the frontier. Communication scholar Janice Hocker Rushing asserts that America has, since its inception, "drawn upon the frontier for its mythic identity," and identifies an ongoing American fascination with "new and unknown places."[99] Historian Mark Crolund Anderson defines the frontier myth as "America's secular creation myth" and points to this myth's function in justifying conflict:

> Thus, the United States, aided, abetted, urged, and purged by the frontier myth, has at different times declared open season on other nations, including American Indians, Mexico, Spain, Japan, Vietnam, Iraq, and so on. The framing has worked like this: savage Others (usually of color) are identified as having attacked the United States without provocation; the United States responds rightly and necessarily with extreme violence in response. In this

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96. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 174.

97. Koenig, "The Story of the Green Berets," 65.

98. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 47.

99. Rushing, "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier,'" 265.

way, core American culture, soaked in blood, has regenerated itself with near generational regularity since the early days of the Republic.[100]

This frontier myth has evolved along with America's technological achievements. Culture scholar Gregory M. Pfitzer argues that as Americans began to develop air and space travel, a ready-made western mythology was waiting, having been "anticipated by dime novelists, some of whom found it easy to transform western cowboys into space cowboys."[101] This same type transformation of frontier myth has occurred in other contexts. Sutton and Winn argue that the Asian characters in POW/MIA films of the 1980's play the role of "savage enemy" while the protagonists of these films serve to restore to veterans of the unpopular Vietnam War "the status of American mythological frontier hero."[102] Rushing argues that while the "Wild West" no longer constitutes a frontier in American culture, science-fiction films such as *Bladerunner* advance this theme by creating new frontiers based upon space and technology.[103] Millar identifies space as a new frontier in the *Star Wars* franchise.[104] Communication scholar Hillary A. Jones likewise argues that the television series *Firefly* represents frontier myth in a science-fiction setting by retaining the key elements of an ever-expanding, savage

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100. Mark Crolund Anderson, "The U.S. Frontier Myth, American Identity and 9/11," *Journal of Psychohistory* 38, no. 4 (2011): 314-5.

101. Gregory M. Pfitzer, "The Only Good Alien is a Dead Alien: Science Fiction and the Metaphysics of Indian-Hating on the High Frontier," *Journal of American Culture* 18 (1995): 51-2, doi:10.1111/j.1542-734X.1995.1801_51.x.

102. Sutton and Winn, "POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," 29.

103. Rushing, "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier,'" 265-74.

104. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 36.

frontier that must be tamed by sacrificial heroes who continually push the frontier boundary forward.[105]

Evil. American monomyths are populated with forces of evil to oppose the hero in his or her journey. In such narratives, evil is not merely an abstract concept, but is rather incarnate in the villain or villains of the story. As previous sections describe, many of the western-themed frontier myths cast Native Americans in the role of frontier savage, but beyond serving as a general threat to paradise, the American monomyth is also filled with villains who more abstractly oppose the ideals or objectives of the monomythic hero. For example, Jones states that *Firefly*'s Reavers, mindlessly violent hordes of deranged humans who dwell on the periphery of civilized space, should not be equated with racist portrayals of Native Americans in western myths but rather should be read as the metaphorical embodiment of chaos.[106] Communists play this role in 1980s POW/MIA films, their evil made obvious by their cruel treatment of their American prisoners.[107] Jewett and Lawrence quote *Star Trek* scriptwriter David Gerrold who describes the role that Klingons play as an evil force in the mythic universe of the original *Star Trek* television series. Gerrold describes their savage nature in great detail but calls them "more symbolic than individual," as they threaten the peaceful goals of Captain Kirk and the crew of *Enterprise*.[108]

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105. Hillary A. Jones, "'Them as Feel the Need to Be Free': Reworking the Frontier Myth," *Southern Communication Journal* 76, no. 3 (2011): 231, doi:10.1080/1041794x.2010.507109.

106. Jones, "'Them as Feel the Need to Be Free'," 238.

107. Sutton and Winn, "POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," 26.

108. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 5.

The same symbolic role mythic villains play extends beyond groups of villains into specific, individual characters who represent evil and oppose the mythic hero. The terrorist leaders portrayed in ABC's *The Path to 9/11* exemplify this. Mark Poindexter establishes the two-part film special as mythic in nature and argues that specific terrorist leaders such as Osama Bin Laden portrayed in the film are "a person, a body, a face, not an abstraction."[109] Jewett and Lawrence argue that *Jaws* is an "extremely skillful embodiment of the American monomyth" in which the titular shark serves as the evil which threatens the town's denizens who are too focused on entertainment and summer festivals to be cognizant of the danger.[110] In this way the shark serves as the perfect antagonist for protagonist Brody, whose responsibility as the chief of police is to safeguard the town's citizens and guests.[111]

Conclusion

Given the clarity of George Lucas' statements regarding his intentional use of myth in creating the *Star Wars* franchise, Chapter II will address how *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* constructs myth. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell provides a clear outline for the type of heroic journey myth present in ANH.[112] The first section of analysis in Chapter II will focus on the ways in which the journey of Luke Skywalker, the central hero of ANH, conforms to the departure stage of Campbell's hero's journey to determine the ways in which Lucas sought to construct Luke as a mythic hero and ANH as a classic monomyth. I will then apply the American monomyth

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109. Poindexter, "ABC's *The Path to 9/11*," 63.

110. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 151.

111. Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 151.

112. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

to ANH, examining the ways in which Luke and other elements of the film's characters, setting, and story elements conform to the mythic themes identified by Jewett and Lawrence including the role of the hero, violence, institutional failure, paradise, frontier, and evil.

Chapter III will include an overview of the public memory of the *Star Wars* franchise. Though ANH and R1 are positioned right next to one another in terms of narrative timeline, the films are separated by nearly forty years of real-world history. Chapter III will be descriptive rather than analytical, providing a broad overview of the public memory of *Star Wars* franchise as it was carried by the films, novels, games, television series, and fan culture in the intervening years between ANH's 1977 release and the release of R1 in 2016.

Chapter IV will again apply Campbell's hero's journey as well as Jewett and Lawrence's American monomyth to R1. Before the analytical sections of the chapter, I will provide additional literature review that emphasizes the problematic aspects of the American monomythic themes identified in ANH in Chapter II as well as literature related to public memory. My analysis will describe how R1 director Gareth Edwards uses elements of myth to evoke the public memory of ANH but then reverses, expands upon, contradicts, or otherwise transforms each of those themes in R1, consequentially changing the public memory of ANH.

Chapter V will provide an overview of my thesis, with emphasis given to discussion of my analysis from Chapter IV. I will conclude with some suggestions for future research into myth, memory, and the *Star Wars* franchise.

CHAPTER II

MYTH IN *STAR WARS: EPISODE IV – A NEW HOPE*

In this section I will discuss how George Lucas created myth in *A New Hope*

(ANH). First, I will discuss the audience of ANH, followed by a brief synopsis of the

plot. I will then describe my methodology, before engaging in an analysis of ANH

according to both Campbell's monomyth and the American monomyth. First, it is

imperative to understand the circumstances surrounding the creation and release of ANH.

Audience of *A New Hope*

A 1977 film, *Star Wars* was born on the heels of a tumultuous time in American

culture. History scholars Rebecca Roiphe and Doni Gewirtzman write that the 1970's

was a time when the "shared sense of national purpose" that had developed as a

consequence of World War II broke apart as Americans developed "a deep cynicism

about national institutions" and began "a celebration of self-discovery."[1] Political scholar

John Dombrink describes "the time of Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War" as an era of

political "hyper-partisanship" in American culture.[2] American studies scholar Christian

Long analyzes narratives that look back on the 1970's and finds that the energy crisis of

the decade presented a challenge to a culture that was considering "the wisdom of casting

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1. Rebecca Roiphe and Doni Gewirtzman, "Behind *The Nylon Curtain*: Social Cohesion, Law, and the Disaggregation of American Culture," *Touro Law Review* 32, no. 1 (2016): 64.

2. John Dombrink, "After the Culture War? Shifts and Continuities in American Conservatism," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 42, no. 3 (2012): 302, doi:10.3138/cras.42.3.003.

its lot with suburbanization."[3] Roiphe and Gewirtzman note that the 1970's inherited

some of the traits of the decade before, namely "sexual liberation, middle-class

narcissism, and an array of lifestyle fads."[4] George Lucas was inspired to address this era

with a myth, stating in an interview with Charlie Rose that

> I think I can have things to say that I can actually influence kids, you know, adolescents, 12-year olds and, you know, that are trying to make their way into the bigger world and that's basically what mythology was, was to say . . . this is what we believe in; these are our rules; these are--this is what we are as a society. And we don't do that. The last time we were doing that was westerns. And of course, this was in the '70s and the westerns sort of fizzled out in the '50s. So it was like we didn't have any national mythology. So I said, I'm going to try this and see if it works.[5]

Lucas had long admired Joseph Campbell's work, first studying it around the same time

he worked on his early drafts of ANH.[6] Though Lucas and Campbell only developed a

personal friendship sometime after Lucas finished making the three films of the original

Star Wars trilogy, Campbell's work inspired Lucas throughout the entire process of

crafting the *Star Wars* myth.[7] Lucas was beyond successful in his plan to create a

national mythology, launching a myth-based film franchise that has been massively

influential in the academic world and in popular culture both in the United States and

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3. Christian Long, "Running Out of Gas: The Energy Crisis in 1970s Suburban Narratives," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 41, no. 3 (2011): 344, doi:10.3138/cras.41.3.342.

4. Roiphe and Gewirtzman, "Behind *The Nylon Curtain*," 67.

5. Charlie Rose and George Lucas, "George Lucas," *Charlie Rose,* August 29, 2016, https://charlierose.com/videos/23471.

6. Lucas Seastrom, "Mythic Discovery Within the Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Joseph Campbell Meets George Lucas – Part I," *starwars.com*, October 22, 2015, http://www.starwars.com/news/mythic-discovery-within-the-inner-reaches-of-outer-space-joseph-campbell-meets-george-lucas-part-I, 4.

7. Seastrom, "Mythic Discovery Within," 7.

around the world. *A New Hope* found an audience in uncertain times. With Lucas's purpose in mind, I will now provide a synopsis of ANH.

Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope

Star Wars (1977), also later known as *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*, is the fourth installment (though the first chronologically to be released) in the *Star Wars* franchise of films. A heroic science fiction space opera, the film follows the adventures of aspiring Jedi Knight Luke Skywalker, Rebel Alliance leader Princess Leia, and roguish smuggler Han Solo in a struggle against the evil Galactic Empire. As the film begins, Princess Leia is desperately trying to evade Darth Vader's pursuit in order to share the plans of the Death Star, an Imperial superweapon capable of destroying planets, with the Rebel leaders. Captured, the princess hides the plans in with her droid servants, along with a desperate plea that is answered by a young farm boy, Luke Skywalker, and his mystical Jedi mentor Obi-Wan Kenobi. Enlisting the services of the mercenary but ultimately heroic Han Solo, Luke and Obi-Wan travel to the Death Star and rescue the princess. Though Obi-Wan is killed, his spirit is able to guide Luke through the supernatural power of the Force, helping him to reach the Rebels and launch an attack that destroys the Death Star and kills Grand Moff Tarkin, the station's sadistic commander. Darth Vader is sent reeling into the depths of space, and Luke and Han are rewarded for their bravery. This film led to two sequels which together with the original form a trilogy, as well as a trilogy of prequels, an innumerable number of novelizations, computer games, animated stories, and other forms of storytelling and merchandising. Most recently, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) began a new trilogy set in the years following the original trilogy, while *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) takes a step

back to shed light on the events in the *Star Wars* universe that led to the story told in original film.

Methodology

Given George Lucas' familiarity with Campbell and his statements regarding the intentional use of myth in creating the *Star Wars* franchise, this chapter of my thesis will answer the question: How does *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* construct myth according to both Campbell's hero's journey and the American monomyth? In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell provides a clear outline for the type of heroic journey myth present in ANH.[8] The first section of analysis in this chapter will focus on the ways in which the journey of Luke Skywalker, the central hero of ANH, conforms to Campbell's hero's journey, particularly the stage of departure. As Palumbo explains, the original three films of the *Star Wars* trilogy align with the overall plot structure of Campbell's hero's journey.[9] Given that ANH is the first entry in this trilogy, I will examine Luke's journey relative to the elements of the departure to determine the ways in which Lucas sought to construct Luke as a monomythic hero and ANH as the first entry in a monomythic trilogy. Campbell, however, was not the only influence on George Lucas' mythic creation. Lucas was also inspired by the fading popularity of westerns to create an American myth that would rekindle the audience's imagination and sense heroism in a society that he believed was losing that ideal.

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8. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Third Edition. Novato, CA. New World Library: 2008).

9. Donald E. Palumbo, "The Monomyth in Star Trek (2009): Kirk & Spock Together Again for the First Time," *Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 1 (2013): 148-9, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00813.x.

Immediately following my analysis of ANH according to Campbell's monomyth, I will apply the American monomyth to ANH, examining the ways in which the film's character, setting, and story elements conform to the mythic themes identified by Jewett and Lawrence, including violence, institutional failure, paradise, frontier, and evil. Rather than examining Luke through the lens of the hero in the American monomyth, however, I will rely on the preceding analysis regarding Luke's fulfillment of the role of Campbell's monomythic hero in the hero's journey. Though elements of the American monomythic hero are certainly present in ANH, as discussed in the previous section, Luke's journey more closely parallels the myth outlined by Campbell. ANH was released in 1977, during the same era when many examples of the American monomyth identified in the previous chapter were prevalent in the public consciousness, so it is reasonable to observe these elements as they appear in ANH. Despite this, though, Lucas was familiar with Campbell's work and explicitly drew upon it to craft ANH as a hero's journey, so I argue that it is logical to treat Luke as Lucas' portrayal of Campbell's hero's journey, rather than as a distinctly American monomythic hero. While many elements of the American monomyth such as the themes of violence and frontier apply to Luke, I will address such themes as they pertain to him in the sections individually dedicated to those themes in lieu of a dedicated analysis of Luke as an American monomythic hero.

Analysis

I'll begin my analysis by applying Campbell's monomyth to ANH. Campbell divides the hero's journey into three sections: departure, initiation, and return. The first of these corresponds most closely to the plot of ANH, thus the first section of analysis will focus on the departure. After that I will apply the American monomyth to ANH.

The Hero's Journey: Departure

My first research question asks how ANH constructs myth. The following section analyzes how Lucas constructed ANH in alignment with the departure stage of Campbell's hero's journey. I will discuss elements of ANH that correspond to each of the five specific stages of the departure, beginning with the call to adventure.

The call to adventure. ANH's opening frames include a brief line of blue text that immediately evokes a mythic setting: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ."[10] After this, a prologue written in plain, yellow text establishes the setting of a civil war against an evil empire, rebel spies, and a princess in danger. Lucas designs these elements to set the stage for a mythic tale. Though he does not immediately introduce Luke and his adventure, Lucas primes the audience for an adventure in a mythic setting. It is then that he sets about establishing an elaborate call to action, complete with a secret message from a rebel princess hidden in a droid that is subsequently stranded in a desert, kidnapped by scavengers, and sold to the hero's uncle as second-hand merchandise. R2-D2 serves as the mechanical hero, bringing to Luke the princess' desperate plea, even if he is not the intended audience for that plea.

Almost immediately as Lucas introduces him, it is clear that Luke Skywalker longs for an adventure greater than his current life. Living with his Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen, Luke helps tend the remote "moisture farm" they operate on the desolate desert world of Tatooine. When forced to do his chores, Luke complains, "it's just unfair.

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10. All subsequent references to this film come from the following DVD recording, a special rerelease of the film as it appeared in 1977 without visual additions made by George Lucas to subsequent releases of the film: *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope Bonus Disc,* directed by George Lucas (1977; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD.

Biggs is right, I'm never gonna get out of here." Unlike Biggs, who left to join the

Imperial Academy as a means of getting off planet, Luke is trapped by the perpetual need

to help his uncle with the next harvest. He is excited at the mention of anything

happening in the outside world or anything related to his father, who he has been told was

once a great pilot. His excitement, however, is always diminished by his sense of being

trapped in the farmer's life. Aunt Beru tells Owen, "he has too much of his father in

him," and seems to understand that Luke wants more than a farmer's life. Lucas

reinforces this as Luke gazes out into the binary sunset of his home planet. The score

swells, adding to the sense that Luke is dreaming about a distant life. Lucas makes it

clear that some sort of change in circumstances, like a call to adventure, will be needed to

free him from his mundane life and give him the adventure he longs for. When Luke's

uncle purchases new droids from Jawas, native nomadic technology scavengers, Luke's

cleaning of R2-D2 reveals a message concealed by Princess Leia for an Obi-Wan Kenobi.

R2-D2 escapes in the night in hopes of finding Obi-Wan, prompting Luke to seek him

out. This constitutes the first time Luke heeds the call to adventure. It is a basic first

step, motivated primarily by the simple need to retrieve the errant droid, and to a lesser

extent some curiosity about the Princess and the old hermit who he knows as "Ben"

Kenobi. After Obi-Wan saves him from an ambush by the native "Sand People," Luke

accompanies Obi-Wan to his hut wherein Obi-Wan tells Luke that he knew Luke's father

as a fellow Jedi Knight, a spiritual guardian who can call upon the supernatural power of

the Force, as well as a great pilot and a good friend. This clearly serves to hint to Luke

that he, too, could live the heroic kind of life his father lived, rather than the mundane

kind of life his uncle is living. When R2-D2 finally plays the entirety of Princess Leia's

message, Obi-Wan invites Luke to learn the ways of the Force and join him on the errand

to deliver the droid and the critical information it contains back to Leia in the rebellion's

"most desperate hour." This leads to the next stage of Campbell's hero's journey: the

refusal of the call.

Refusal of the call. Luke is excited by Obi-Wan's invitation, but he almost

immediately refuses it for practical reasons. Perhaps with Owen's description of Obi-

Wan as a "wizard" and a "crazy old man" ringing in his mind, Luke tells Obi-Wan that he

has to get home because he is already in trouble for being gone all morning while looking

for the missing droid. Additionally, Luke tells Obi-Wan that he "has work to do." He at

first tries to justify his decision as one not made out of ambivalence towards the Rebel

Alliance: "It's not that I like the Empire. I hate it, but there's nothing I can do about it

right now." He then articulates what seems like another practical concern about traveling

to Alderaan: "It's such a long way from here." This last statement in particular seems to

resonate on a metaphorical level. It is not just that Alderaan is far away from Tatooine.

As the movie shows later, a brief journey on a freighter can accomplish the task. It is

also that the life of adventure that Luke's father lived is so far away in terms of its

difference from the simple life that Luke lives with his aunt and uncle. Luke ends the

conversation by offering to take Obi-Wan to a town where he can get transportation, but

makes no greater commitment.

It is only once they come upon the remains of a slaughtered group of Jawas that

things change for Luke. It seems that the Imperials wiped out these particular Jawas

because of their connection to the missing droid with the secret plans. This leads Luke to

conclude that his aunt and uncle would be in danger because of their connection to the

Jawas. Returning to the homestead, Luke finds the skeletal remains of his aunt and uncle.

It is only then, once all possibility of remaining in his present circumstances is shattered,

that Luke is able to overcome the gravitational pull of his mundane life. When he makes

this change of mind, however, the change is immediate. He returns to Obi-Wan and

declares his interest in everything Obi-Wan has to offer: "I want to come with you to

Alderaan. There's nothing here for me now. I want to learn the ways of the Force and

become a Jedi like my father."

      Supernatural aid. Supernatural aid is an extremely prevalent theme in ANH,

perhaps the most prevalent theme of the hero's journey present in the film. Lucas

embodies this concept of supernatural aid most significantly in the character of Obi-Wan

Kenobi. Obi-Wan's first act of supernatural aid is in warding off the savage Sand People,

also known as Tusken Raiders, who stop Luke's quest for the missing droid by knocking

him unconscious and looting his vehicle and effects. Obi-Wan waves his arms wildly

and emits a horrific sound, presumably that of some kind of fearsome desert predator,

driving the Sand People away and saving Luke from their predations. They travel

together to Obi-Wan's desert dwelling, where he begins teaching Luke about Luke's

father and about the Force. Obi-Wan then provides Luke with the amulet or ward. In

this case it is a lightsaber, once belonging to Luke's father. Obi-Wan tells Luke that his

father wanted Luke to have it when he was old enough. The lightsaber is of course a

deadly weapon for those proficient in its use, but it is also "the weapon of a Jedi Knight,"

carrying symbolic associations about the owner's membership in a spiritual order. Obi-

Wan tells Luke that Luke's uncle would have preferred that he not have the lightsaber

because it would tempt Luke to go on some sort of "idealistic crusade." The weapon is

more than just a tool. It is a connection to both to Luke's adventurous father and Luke's spiritual journey.

Obi-Wan also fulfills the role of supernatural aid by teaching Luke about the Force. He tells Luke that the Force is an "energy field" created by living things that gives Jedi their power. Later, he instructs Luke in calling on the Force to defend himself. He makes Luke do an exercise where he must use the lightsaber to deflect stinging laser bolts from a hovering training droid. Luke has little success in the task until Obi-Wan puts a helmet on Luke's head with a blast shield that covers his eyes and tells him to rely on the Force and to trust his feelings rather than what his senses tell him. He tells Luke "your eyes can deceive you; don't trust them. Stretch out with your feelings." Luke then blocks a short sequence of attacks while blindfolded. When Luke says he could see the training droid in the force, Obi-Wan says "that's good! You've taken you first step into a much larger world."

Lucas has Obi-Wan provide supernatural aid again in facilitating the heroes' escape from the Death Star and continuing to guide Luke from beyond the grave. Specifically, Obi-Wan uses his Jedi abilities to infiltrate the base, shutting down the tractor beam that holds the heroes' ship hostage. Then, when the heroes need to get back to their guarded ship, Obi-Wan engages in a duel with Darth Vader, distracting the guards and allowing the heroes to escape. Obi-Wan allows himself to be defeated by Darth Vader, telling his opponent, "if you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine." This is apparently true, because Obi-Wan's voice shouts in Luke's mind, telling him to run away rather than stay and fight to avenge his mentor's death. During the final battle of the film, Obi-Wan's voice speaks into Luke's mind and

gives him encouragement to rely on the Force. In the climactic moment of the film, Luke relies on Obi-Wan's advice, shutting off his computer and instead calling upon the Force to make the critical shot that destroys the Death Star and ends the menace.

The crossing of the first threshold. The crossing of the first threshold takes place once the hero has received supernatural aid. In the case of ANH, however, Obi-Wan accompanies Luke for a large portion of his journey, rather than sending him away. Thus, Lucas introduces this element of the hero's journey while Obi-Wan still accompanies Luke. After his parents are killed and he has accepted Obi-Wan's offer to train him as a Jedi, the pair must arrange for travel off of Tatooine. They go to Mos Eisley, a "wretched hive of scum and villainy." This port town is occupied by both dangerous criminals and Imperial Stormtroopers looking for the droid with the stolen plans. These forces represent the guardian of the threshold. In particular, the pilot cantina is filled with dozens of exotic aliens who drink, smoke, laugh coarsely, and occasionally provoke fights with one another. This is a hub between Luke's isolated desert life and the galaxy at large. Criminals even harass Luke. One criminal boasts, "we're wanted men. I have the death sentence on 12 systems," in an apparent attempt to intimidate Luke. The conflict provoked by this alien eventually leads Obi-Wan to sever the arm of one of the provocateurs with his lightsaber. Luke and Obi-Wan secure passage with freighter pilots Han and Chewbacca, but not before the Imperials sniff them out and launch an assault on Han's Millennium Falcon in the docking bay. Han has to outrun Imperial vessels as well. Luke's passage from his mundane life into the larger galaxy is full of danger. Luke's training begins after they make the jump to lightspeed, but it is not long before Luke encounters the next stage of his journey.

The belly of the whale. Lucas' Death Star fits the characteristics of the belly of the whale perfectly. Though Han thinks it is a moon, Obi-Wan asserts that it is a space station. Han almost does not believe it, but eventually the station's tractor beam locks onto the ship, and the station figuratively swallows them up. The station is enormous, swallowing the Millennium Falcon with room to spare in one of what seems to be numerous hangar bays. The Death Star is an endless maze of corridors, elevators, control rooms, and even enormous empty shafts. Though not a literal beast, it is not difficult to imagine these halls as the interior of a mechanical beast. Imperial officers and Stormtroopers as well as various types of Imperial droids add to the menace of the place as well, going about their business with clipped military precision.

In a more specific sense, the Death Star's trash compactor serves as the belly of the whale, complete with an actual water beast to fulfill this mythic role. To escape the cell block, Luke, Han, Leia, and Chewbacca jump down a garbage chute into an enormous trash compactor. The compactor is occupied by a dianoga, a stalk-eyed monster that pulls Luke under water with an enormous tentacle. Though the moment itself does not seem to accompany any sort of spiritual epiphany, it is Luke's closest brush with death in the film. The creature only relents when the compactor begins to operate, nearly smashing the heroes.

The heroes make their escape from the Death Star thanks to Obi-Wan's handiwork with the tractor beam and his sacrificial death at the hands of Darth Vader. In considering the Death Star as the belly of the whale, Luke's subsequent slaying of this "whale" is proof of his new identity as a Jedi-in-training. The farm boy has been left

behind, and what has emerged is a rebel hero with a spiritual connection to the fundamental energy of life.

Hero's journey summary. My first research question asked how Lucas established myth in ANH. As this analysis shows, Lucas fully developed the first stage of Campbell's monomyth, the departure, in ANH. Luke serves as the monomythic hero. The narrative concludes with him having reached a spiritual connection with the Force, ready for further stages of his adventure. The presence of Campbell's monomyth in this film created a monomythic foundation for the films and media that followed. Given the cultural significance of *Star Wars*, it is clear that Lucas accomplished his goal of creating a monomythic narrative that would resonate with a generation of moviegoers. Campbell argues that the monomyth is a universally resonant narrative. Perhaps monomythic themes are at least partially responsible for the franchise's lasting success. Despite the universality of Campbell's monomyth, there are also elements of a more culturally specific form of myth found in ANH. Therefore, I will next discuss elements of the American monomyth present in ANH.

The American Monomyth

Though Luke's journey in ANH does correspond closely with Campbell's stages of departure, it isn't the only kind myth evident in ANH. In particular, American monomythic themes of violence, the failure of institutions, paradise, frontier, and evil are also particularly evident in the film. This section discusses the presence of those themes, beginning with violence.

Violence. Violence permeates ANH, a characteristic that Lucas establishes almost immediately. In the very first scene of the film, aside from the opening text crawl,

Lucas shows a space battle between Darth Vader's ship and his prey: Princess Leia's

diplomatic vessel. The following scene portrays a boarding party of Imperial

Stormtroopers who charge the ship and slay the rebel soldiers defending it. This scene is

marked by loud, rapid exchanges of blaster fire and great clouds of smoke erupting from

impact points.[11] Immediately, Lucas establishes that the *Star Wars* universe is a violent

one. Violence is also present throughout the sections of the film that take place on

Luke's home planet of Tatooine. As I mentioned in the previous section, at one point in

the film, Stormtroopers slaughter a group of Jawas to track down information about the

missing plans. They stage this to look like an attack by the Sand People to deflect

attention from themselves, but it is worth noting that the government of the galaxy, the

Empire, is willing to slaughter native residents of a world simply because they had the

misfortune of getting involved in a situation they did not understand. Similarly, the

Stormtroopers slaughter Luke's aunt and uncle. In one of the most graphic scenes of the

film, Luke finds across their bloody, smoldering corpses laying outside their destroyed

home. Likewise, the Sand People of Tatooine represent a violent element of that world's

various denizens. I will discuss their role as "frontier savages" later, but in terms of

violence, it is important to note that they use deception and ambush tactics to waylay

Luke, who seems to have done nothing to provoke them. They render him unconscious,

presumably with a "gaffi stick," a hybrid of a spear and a mace. Likewise, the

inhabitations of the local cantina demonstrate the violent nature of the *Star Wars*

universe. Two of them aggressively harass Luke, resulting in Obi-Wan pulling out his

lightsaber and dismembering a thug's arm. Han also has a violent encounter in the bar, in

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11. "Blaster" is the in-universe term for "laser gun."

his case with bounty hunter named Greedo. Greedo was sent to collect on a debt Han

owed, apparently to a crime lord, for a lost shipment and threatens to kill Han and take

his ship, but Han slyly pulls his gun under the table and shoots Greedo at point blank

range. To further emphasize the casual nature of violence in this setting, Han tosses the

barkeeper some money, says "sorry about the mess," and saunters out.

Violence is entangled with heroism in ANH. As Luke grows in his heroic

journey, so does his capacity for violence. Luke carries what appears to be some sort of

hunting rifle during his time on Tatooine, but he never has the opportunity to use it. In

the depths of the Death Star, however, Luke proves to be a crack shot. As a result of their

off-screen ambush of a crew sent to search the captured Millennium Falcon, Han and

Luke have Stormtrooper armor that allows them to infiltrate Princess Leia's cell block

where she is scheduled to be "terminated." When the officer in charge of the block does

not fall for their disguise, Chewbacca, an enormous ape-like creature who speaks to Han

in grunts and growls, gives up his disguise as a prisoner and picks up an Imperial to hurl

him across the room. In the ensuing battle, Han, Luke, and Chewbacca wipe out the

guards in a barrage of blaster fire, also taking out devices that appear to be cameras,

sensors, or alarms of some kind. A concerned officer signals down to the cell block, but

when Han's poor attempt at persuading him not to investigate goes awry, Han responds

impatiently by blasting the microphone. This draws another horde of Stormtroopers, and

the heroes (including the now free Leia) renew their slaughter of the station's troops.

Lucas also illustrates how success in violent endeavors is celebrated. The

Millennium Falcon must destroy several Imperial starfighters to escape from the Death

Star. Luke and Han man the turrets, celebrating with shouts of joy each time they destroy

a fighter. After destroying the Death Star, Luke and Han are honored with medals. Of course, it is natural for characters to be elated at preserving their own lives, but it is also worth noting that there is no time spent reflecting on either rebel or Imperial lives lost in the attack on the Death Star. Every incidental character present on the Death Star was presumably killed in the attack, but concern for this is absent from the narrative. Killing Imperials is something to celebrate, not contemplate, and certainly not regret.

Violence also operates in unrealistic ways in ANH. There is an interesting contrast in how often the heroes can be shot at without even being singed, while consistently hitting Stormtroopers with the same weapons. This principle even applies when heroes take reckless action. At one point, Han comically charges several Stormtroopers while screaming like a madman. As he rounds a corner he finds several troopers waiting for him, and his wild battle cry turns into one of surprise and fear. Even in this moment of exposure, none of the Imperials manage to land a hit on him. The same applies to Luke. Distraught at Obi-Wan's death, Luke stands in the hangar bay at the base of the Millennium Falcon amidst a hail of blaster fire and manages to shoot several Stormtroopers while never taking a hit himself. Of course, Luke's supernatural connection to the Force is likely responsible for his apparent fortune, but this further emphasizes that violence operates under different, supernatural rules in ANH. Violence is far from the only element of the American monomyth present in ANH. The film also portrays the failure of institutions.

Obi-Wan seems to be one of the few voices who opposes the prevailing violence. When the tractor beam captures the Millennium Falcon and carries the ship forcibly into the hangar bay, Han is prepared to go down fighting. It is Obi-Wan who calls for

restraint. He tells Han, "you can't win, but there are alternatives to hiding." This prompts Han to choose to conceal everyone in smuggling compartments rather than trying to fight a losing battle head-on. When he undertakes his mission to disable the Death Star's tractor beam, he uses stealth and deceptive Force abilities to evade the Stormtroopers rather than slaughtering them. On Tatooine, he uses sound to frighten the Sand People rather than engaging them in battle. He also sacrifices himself in the duel with Darth Vader rather than seeking to outfight his long-time enemy. This allows -him to transcend physical form and continue guiding Luke, but as a spiritual entity. It is worth noting, however, that Obi-Wan is willing to participate in violence when he determines that it is appropriate. In the bar, he uses his lightsaber to sever an alien's arm, but this is done to save Luke. Obi-Wan teaches Luke that a Jedi uses the Force "for knowledge and defense," rather than for aggressive action. In this way, he serves as one of the few voices in the film advocating for a less violent approach, creating a connection between the idea of passivity and the Light Side of the Force that Jedi aspire to serve.

The failure of institutions. Lucas clearly argues that institutions are unable to maintain order and peace in society throughout ANH. The opening crawl explicitly mentions the galaxy's government, the Galactic Empire, as evil. Furthermore, the film takes place against the backdrop of a civil war, as Leia and the rebellion fight to restore peace and freedom. Fans familiar with the other films in the franchise are aware that the Empire formed because the charismatic leader of what is referred to in this film as the Old Republic seized power. This is only hinted at in ANH, but it is clear that this film marks the loss of the freedoms and protections American audiences would associate with representative government. Leia tells Vader that the Senate will be outraged at his attack

on her vessel, but he treats this as a hollow threat. He even orders his officers to send a distress call so that it will appear that the vessel had simply been destroyed. This Senate seems to have been one of the last vestiges of representative government in the galaxy, but Lucas makes it clear that whatever authority this body holds is at the whim of the Emperor and is of no concern to his agents. During the film, Grand Moff Tarkin, the ranking Imperial officer on the Death Star, announces that the emperor has disbanded the Imperial Senate and instituted the direct rule of Imperial governors over their planets, proclaiming that "the last remnants of the Old Republic have been swept away."

Rather than ruling through representation and peace, the Emperor chooses instead to rule through military might and fear. This mentality is evident in the Empire's readiness to torture its prisoners. Onboard the Death Star, Vader brings a hovering droid into Leia's cell with the apparent purpose of torturing Leia. Though the torture itself is not shown, it is strongly implied by the droid's appearance. It is covered in sharp instruments and carries a syringe that seems to be intended to inject Leia with something that will facilitate her compliance. It seems that the Empire was prepared for this type of scenario given the planning and resources that would be necessary for the construction of a specialized droid. The door slams shut before we see anything happen to Leia, and the guard strolls back down the hall as if this is business as usual. I already discussed the casual manner in which Stormtroopers slaughter the residents of Tatooine, but the failure of this form of governance is perhaps most evident in the destruction of Alderaan. I can think of no greater failure or corruption of a government than for it to have endorsed the wholesale slaughter of its own citizens. Lucas positions these actions to legitimize the existence of the rebellion that so disrupts the Empire's tyrannical plans.

Incompetence also plagues the institutions in ANH. It is Imperial gunners who allow the droids to escape with the Death Star plans in the first place, leading to the subsequent search and slaughters on Tatooine. Stormtroopers fail to detect the presence of the hidden heroes on the Millennium Falcon, and then repeatedly prove unable to apprehend or even shoot them as they rampage through the halls of the Death Star. During Tarkin's briefing, the Imperia officers bicker with one another and posture rather than collaborating with one another to defeat the rebels. General Dodonna, the rebel leader who briefs the pilots for their Death Star attack, points out the arrogance of the Empire's battle station design. Dodonna points to the apparent hubris in the Imperial defense strategy, saying, "the Empire doesn't consider a small, one-man fighter to be a threat. Otherwise, they'd have a tighter defense." The Death Star was not designed to repel the only type of attack small enough to pose a threat to it. This same hubris leads to Tarkin's own demise. When one of his underlings warns that there is in fact a danger posed by the rebel attack, he refuses to evacuate "in our moment of triumph? I think you overestimate their chances."

Institutional failure is not confined to the Empire. I argue that, through no intention of her own, Princess Leia herself represents an institutional failure. Her capture and inability to escape Darth Vader's pursuit ultimately result in the destruction of her own planet. It is not clear exactly what her responsibilities as a princess are, but Lucas provides hints that Leia is in some way responsible for the wellbeing of her people. By the end of the film, she is a princess without a planet. She maintains her title only because of the respect that the rebels feel for her.

Additionally, the rebel attack on the Death Star is not successful through any conventional means. This is most evident in Red Leader's failed attempt to launch a proton torpedo into the exhaust port. Using his targeting computer and what would be reasonable to assume is his additional experience as a fighter pilot, Red Leader fails to achieve what a farm boy who has presumably never flown a fighter before is able to achieve. Though it is perhaps a stretch to refer to the rebellion as an "institution," they fit the role to the extent that they rely on their military capabilities to achieve their aims. It is only through the supernatural power of the Force that Luke is able to achieve a rebel victory. Though societies in the American monomyth may be plagued by institutional failure, another element of the American monomyth that appears prevalently in ANH is a threat to paradise.

Paradise. Lucas uses the film's opening crawl to establish that the galaxy is clearly not a paradise. The galaxy is experiencing "a period of civil war," not of peace and prosperity. In ANH, the paradise threatened by evil forces is represented by an idealized past. Leia's mission is not to institute freedom, but rather to "save her people and *restore* freedom to the galaxy" (emphasis mine). The idealized past shows up again in Obi-Wan's conversation with Luke. He tells Luke that the lightsaber is a "more elegant weapon from a more civilized age" and that the Jedi Knights were once guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic "before the dark times, before the empire." Alderaan also represents a threatened paradise which falls, and the threat of the Death Star is clearly a menace to any other planet seeking peace or resisting tyranny.

The rebellion also represents a threatened paradise, to an extent. This is especially apparent in the portrayal of the rebel base on Yavin IV. A lush, forested moon

dotted by ancient ruins, this rebel base represents one of the first places where the heroes

find respite. The forest teems with life; the sounds of birds and insects can be heard.

Given the harsh environment of Tatooine and the cold, mechanical hallways of the Death

Star, Yavin IV is the first remotely hospitable location seen in the film. True to the

pattern of American monomyth, this paradise is immediately menaced by the Death Star.

Leia herself remains on the base during the attack, also prompting the audience to think

of the planet as the Princess' kingdom or castle and creating additional tension because of

the added concern for her safety. In addition to being a dwelling place for the heroes,

Lucas also positions the base to represent something ideological. It is the last bastion of

the revolutionary movement working to defeat the tyranny of the Empire. Paradise is

protected, and at the end of the film Leia gives medals to Luke and Han in a ceremony

honoring them. In a temple-like setting in a great hall on Yavin IV, the rebel soldiers

stand in ranks to honor the heroes who have preserved their paradise.

Frontier. Lucas establishes the planet Tatooine as a frontier setting rather early

in the film. The desert terrain reinforces this idea, and the skeletal remains of an

enormous beast the droids pass during their journey communicate that it is a dangerous,

unforgiving environment. C-3PO's long hike through the desert establishes that Tatooine

is a largely uninhabited wasteland. The droids are both eventually picked up by Jawas,

scavengers who hide in the canyons and rove the dunes in enormous treaded vehicles

looking for scrap and droids to resell. The Jawas establish Tatooine as a lawless, wild

place where even native dwellers must adopt a nomadic, scavenging existence to survive.

Luke's family homestead is clearly a frontier home. The main above-ground

building is an adobe-style hovel designed to resist the hot suns. The only presence of

green is found in a below-ground courtyard which seems to have been dug to allow plants to grow in an area that will receive less sun. The landscape is dotted with "moisture vaporators," machines designed to gather the moisture of the desert. Gathering this moisture constitutes the family business, a farm operation Owen struggles to maintain. He has to negotiate with the Jawas to get the droids he needs to maintain the vaporators and is almost sold a defective droid. Maintaining the farm is a constant struggle for Owen, causing him to rely on Luke to stay and help with additional harvests rather than pursuing his dreams of leaving Tatooine for a life of adventure. Living as a moisture farmer is clearly a demanding life carried out beyond the boundaries of civilization.

The Sand People play the role of frontier savage in ANH. They sneak about in the desert in camouflaged robes that completely obscure their bodies from the dry desert air. They appear to be primitive, speaking to one another in grunts and howling madly in the heat of battle. They also clearly fit the archetype of the savage in their assault on Luke. They madly wave their crooked gaffi sticks and seem to prefer bludgeoning their enemies despite the rifles they carry. They knock Luke unconscious off-screen and start rummaging through his speeder. Obi-Wan uses a trick of sound to scare them away, an action that indicates they are primitive and easily startled rather than able to discern his trick. Despite the ease with which they are startled, they also appear to be saavy in the ways of desert life. They use giant beasts of burden to transport themselves, hiding their numbers by riding in single file.

Luke's mindset is a clear indication of the frontier setting. He cannot go look for R2-D2 when the droid disappears because it is too dangerous to go out at night with the Sand People around. He clearly has to be saavy as well, knowing when danger is present

and not venturing from home without his rifle and binoculars. He also has a landspeeder for transportation, a hovering craft that he uses to drive himself and passengers around the desert. These elements evoke the image of a cowboy with his horse and gun traveling the desolate plains of the American west.

The Mos Eisley cantina is another clear example of the frontier setting. I have already described it in some level of detail, but it is simply worth noting the extent to which this locale matches a frontier saloon with its colorful patrons, rampant vice, wild music, and frequent bar brawls. Indeed, Mos Eisley itself plays the role of frontier town. It serves as a hub where natives such as the Jawas can intermingle with the traders and pilots from distant worlds and the Imperial Stormtroopers, who appear to be the only form of government or law enforcement present.

Evil. Lucas most iconically represents evil in the figure of Darth Vader. Lucas first shows him boarding the rebel ship, where his first move is to examine the corpses of the rebels his troops have killed. An imposing figure, Vader dresses from head to toe in black armor. He also wears a black cloak and a vaguely skeletal helmet that communicate his evil nature. Not just evil, Vader is also unnatural, with control panels and buttons on his belt and chest that, along with his hollow voice, suggest that he at least partly mechanical. In his next scene, he demonstrates unnatural strength holding the captain of the ship by the throat and lifting him off of the ground. Lucas strategically stages a shot that lingers significantly on the swinging legs and boots of the man suspended in Vader's grip to make this effect clear. Vader mocks his victim, unsatisfied with the captain's assurances that the ship is on a diplomatic mission, shouting, "if this is a consular ship, then where is the ambassador?" He then strangles the captain to death

and throws his corpse against the bulkhead. Vader is clearly willing to lie to achieve his

objectives. He tells one of his officers to send a distress signal from the ship he boarded

and then to lie to the Imperial Senate and say that everyone on the ship was killed. More

than just an imposing figure, Vader represents a supernatural form of evil that opposes

the benevolent supernatural power of Obi-Wan Kenobi. Obi-Wan reveals to Luke that

Darth Vader betrayed and murdered his father. He says that Vader was once his

apprentice, but that he was seduced by the Dark Side of the Force and hunted down all of

the Jedi, the servants of the Light Side. Fans of the series will note that Obi-Wan is not

completely honest with Luke in this description of Vader, as Vader is later revealed to be

Luke's father in *The Empire Strikes Back*. In fact, three films in the Star Wars universe

that came out post-ANH tell the story of Vader's descent into darkness. This information

is absent from ANH, however, leaving Vader as a figure with a mysterious past aside

from his connection to Obi-Wan and his supposed role as the slayer of Luke's heroic

father. Lucas reinforces Vader's position as a spiritual form of evil during his meeting

with Grand Moff Tarkin and the other Imperial admirals. He warns another Imperial

officer, Admiral Motti, not to be too proud of the "technological terror" of the Death Star,

asserting that "the ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the

force." When Motti scoffs, Vader raises a hand towards him, and Motti begins to choke,

his breathing apparently constricted through the power of the Dark Side of the Force.

Even Tarkin, who is perhaps the most enthralled with the Empire's technological

capacity for destruction, describes Vader as "all that's left of (the Jedi) religion," yet

Vader is not a true adherent to the Jedi way but rather a dark, corrupted remnant of their

true beliefs. Vader's capacity for evil is perhaps most clear in his use of a torture droid

on Princess Leia and in his willingness to slay Obi-Wan, despite Obi-Wan's adoption of a non-aggressive stance.

The callous Imperial military commander Grand Moff Tarkin also serves as a clear embodiment of evil. He is willing to destroy Princess Leia's planet as a means of gaining her compliance. He describes the destruction of Alderaan as a "ceremony" and speaks to the princess callously about signing her death warrant. He tells Leia that she is the one who has forced him to attack her planet. He is completely immune to her plea that Alderaan has no weapons, preferring to force her to divulge the location of a rebel base. Even when she complies, he carries through on his threat anyway as a means of demonstrating the Death Star's capabilities. Tarkin also seems proud of the Emperor's announcement of the abolishment of the senate, and he seems eager to use the Death Star to rule through fear. In another example of his cruelty, Tarkin and Vader plot to use a tracking device onboard the Millennium Falcon to trace the ship back to the rebel base. He is willing to sacrifice lives to authenticate this deception, allowing the Millennium Falcon to destroy several fighters, thereby killing Imperial pilots, so that it their escape would seem legitimate.

I have also introduced the Empire's Stormtroopers as a faceless form of evil. They are willing to kill harmless Jawas as a part of their search for the droid with the secret plans, staging it as a Sand People attack to allay suspicion. Luke realizes they would have traced the droids to his home, and he finds that the Stormtroopers have brutally murdered his aunt and uncle in a similar fashion. A similar example of the faceless, unforgiving menace of the Empire is the helmeted officers who carry out the firing sequence that destroys Alderaan.

Conclusion

My analysis of ANH reveals the clear presence of the themes of violence, institutional failure, paradise, frontier, and evil from the American monomyth. Lucas clearly constructed an American myth in ANH in addition to constructing a departure tale in accordance with Campbell's hero's journey. Now that I have firmly established ANH as a monomyth, the stage is set for an analysis of these themes in R1. First, however, I will use Chapter III to discuss the public memory of the *Star Wars* franchise in preparation for a discussion of public memory in R1.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF THE *STAR WARS* FRANCHISE

What began in 1977 as a single film by an ambitious young director grew over

decades into one of, if not the, most recognizable franchises in popular culture history.

This chapter provides a brief overview of *Star Wars* franchise history, touching on the

films, novels, games, television shows, and fan culture that grew from the seed of the

original film.[1] Canon, defined simply, consists of the narratives or content within a

fictional universe that are considered to be 'real' parts of that universe's story.[2] Given

the near-religions devotion of many fans of fictional universes such as *Star Wars*,

canonicity is an important issue in that it dictates which materials are considered real

parts of the ongoing story. Canon is a key element of the public memory of a franchise,

as fans use it to determine which new books, games, films, or television series are a part

of the ongoing narrative and which are not. Changes to canon also change the public

memory of the franchise by altering whether or not a given story is real. In this chapter I

discuss the history of the *Star Wars* franchise, giving particular emphasis to issues of

canonicity as a means of depicting the evolution of the public memory of the franchise in

the intervening 39 years between *A New Hope* (ANH) and *Rogue One* (R1).

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1. While I will use sources to support specific details about the franchise, my writing in this chapter is also informed by my lifelong experience as a *Star Wars* fan, experience which would be difficult if not impossible to entirely separate from my research on the franchise.

2. Roy T. Cook, "Canonicity and Normativity in Massive, Serialized, Collaborative Fiction," *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 71, no. 3 (2013): 271-3.

The Original Trilogy

The wild success of ANH gave George Lucas the ability to develop a sequel.

Wanting to finance the film himself rather than going to an established studio, Lucas

initially borrowed funds to make the film happen before eventually having to strike a deal

with Fox to cover the $33 million cost of the film.[3] The risk paid off, however, and *The*

Empire Strikes Back (1980) succeeded both financially, by earning over $300 million

worldwide, and narratively, by expanding the *Star Wars* universe and introducing a

family conflict to the plot.[4] Lucas chose not to direct the film due to the stresses of

directing ANH, but still provided the story for the film as well as plenty of oversight,

particularly in the area of special effects.[5] Between this success and Darth Vader's

shocking claim to be Luke Skywalker's father, a concluding entry in what would become

the original trilogy seemed inevitable. *Return of the Jedi* (1983), was written by *The*

Empire Strikes Back veteran Lawrance Kasdan and Lucas, and directed by Richard

Marquand. This entry marked the completion of Luke Skywalker's heroic journey to

defeat the evil Empire and avoid the temptations of the Dark Side of the Force to which

his father succumbed, while also tying up loose threads left by the previous film.[6] *Return*

of the Jedi rounded out the original trilogy of *Star Wars* films, but it was not to be the

final entry in the saga.

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3. Ian Nathan, "Tales from the Dark Side: The Making of The Empire Strikes Back," *Empire,* April 30, 2014, https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/star-wars-making-empire-strikes-back/, para. 17.

4. Nathan, "Tales from the Dark Side," para. 18.

5. Nathan, "Tales from the Dark Side," para. 16.

6. "Star Wars Episode VI – Return of the Jedi," *IMDB*, accessed February 21, 2018, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086190/.

The Prequels

For years following 1983's *Return of the Jedi*, Lucas insisted that the *Star Wars* trilogy was the second half of a six-part narrative, tantalizing fans with the idea that Lucas would one day return to complete the saga.[7] In 1993, Lucas announced that he would do just that with 1999's *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace*. Lucas served as writer, director, and executive producer, providing an ambitious vision for the revival of the *Star Wars* franchise.[8] The film traveled back to younger years for series characters such as Yoda, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and a young Anakin Skywalker, yet to fall to the dark side of the Force and become Darth Vader. The film also portrayed the Republic, foreshadowing the representative galactic government's subsequent transformation into the tyrannical Empire. 2002's *Star Wars: Episode II - The Attack of the Clones* continued the saga, this time sowing the seeds of both Anakin's eventual downfall and portraying the beginning of the war that eventually precipitated the Republic's descent into tyranny. Lucas here fulfilled a similar role--producing, directing, and co-writing the film with Jonathan Hales.[9] The *Star Wars* saga was presumed complete with the 2005 release of *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith*. Again written, directed, and produced by George Lucas, *Revenge of the Sith* completed the story of Anakin's betrayal of the Jedi and fall to the Dark Side in parallel with the revelation of Chancellor Palpatine's identity as a Sith, a Dark Side antithesis of the Light Side's Jedi,

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7. David Kamp, "The Force is Back," *Vanity Fair*, February, 1999, https://www.vanityfair.com/news/1999/02/star-wars, para. 2.

8. "Star Wars Episode I – The Phantom Menace," *IMDB,* accessed February 21, 2018, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120915/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_st_sm.

9. "Star Wars Episode II – Attack of the Clones," *IMDB,* accessed February 21, 2018, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0121765/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers.

and his complete seizure of power and subsequent founding of the Empire.[10] The film

ends with Luke and Leia's birth. Leia is adopted as an infant by a senator from Alderaan

and Luke by his aunt and uncle on Tatooine. Though the film's themes and story are

dark, it ultimately ends with a note of hope, as Obi-Wan Kenobi conceals Darth Vader's

children with adoptive families who will raise them outside of their father's dark shadow

to become the princess and the Jedi Knight who will challenge their father and the evil

Empire as princess and Jedi Knight in the original trilogy. Together with the original

trilogy, these films form the basis of canon for the *Star Wars* universe.

EU Novels

Novels play an important role in the history of the franchise, often serving as the

main source of new *Star Wars* stories in-between film releases. Initial novels made small

additions to the *Star Wars* story, but it wasn't until 1991 that novels began to develop

into a cohesive expansion of *Star Wars* canon with the so-called Expanded Universe.

Later the Lucasfilm Story Group under the new ownership of Disney re-classified the

Expanded Universe as non-canon "Legends" material, choosing to use the six main films

of the *Star Wars* franchise as source material for a new canon. The first novel set in the

Star Wars universe was a November 1976 adaptation of the film, predating the 1977

release of the original film and becoming the first time *Star Wars* entered the public

consciousness.[11] There were a handful of tie-in novels and a role-playing game published

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10. "Star Wars Episode III – Revenge of the Sith," *IMDB,* accessed February 21, 2018, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0121766/?ref_=tt_urv.

11. Andrew Liptak, "Building a Galaxy Far, Far Away: The Story of the Star Wars Expanded Universe, Episode I," *B&N Sci-Fi & Fantasy Blog,* December 14, 2015, https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/sci-fi-fantasy/building-a-galaxy-far-far-away-the-story-of-the-star-wars-expanded-universe-part-1/ para. 7.

in the following years, but it was 1991 that saw the launch of an "enormous Expanded

Universe publishing experiment" designed to more fully explore stories set in the same

setting as the *Star Wars* films but at different points in that universe's timeline.[12]

Publisher Del Rey Books envisioned these stories as parts of a comprehensive canon that

would begin with the films as source material and then advance the story of the *Star Wars*

universe.[13] First among the novels in this new Expanded Universe (EU) canon was *Heir*

to the Empire, the opening entry in a three-part trilogy set several years after the events of

Return of the Jedi.[14] The book introduced new villains for the heroes of the original

trilogy to confront, many of whom would continue to appear in later novels in the EU.

Another example of this expanding canon is the nineteen-novel New Jedi Order series,

which tells the grim story of a war that pits Han and Leia's adult children against a brutal

new nemesis.[15] Books in the Darth Bane Trilogy tell stories set more than a millennia

before the events of the original trilogy, and other novels are set even farther in the *Star*

Wars universe's distant past.[16] In addition to advancing the story or providing historical

context, several novels also illuminate events that take place behind the scenes of the

events portrayed in the films. For example, *Darth Plagueis* tells the tragedy of a wise

Sith who gained incredible power over life and death only to lose it at the hands of his

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12. Andrew Liptak, "Star Wars Reading List: Where to Start After You Finish the Movies," *The Verge,* May 4, 2017, https://www.theverge.com/2017/5/4/15299448/star-wars-novels-recommendations para. 5.

13. Andrew Liptak, "Building a Galaxy Far, Far Away," para 12.

14. Liptak, "Star Wars Reading List," para. 6.

15. Nancy Basile, "Star Wars Legends: 15 Non-Canon Stories We Miss," *CBR*, November 18, 2016, https://www.cbr.com/star-wars-legends-15-non-canon-stories-we-miss/ para. 19-21.

16. Drew Karpyshyn, *Star Wars: Darth Bane: Rule of Two* (New York: Del Rey Books: 2008).

apprentice, the man who goes on to become Emperor Palpatine.[17] Ultimately the EU

novels numbered into the hundreds, telling stories involving hundreds of characters as a

part of a comprehensive and consistent canon.

However, Disney made major changes to *Star Wars* canon after the purchase of

Lucasfilm in 2012 and the subsequent formation of the Lucasfilm Story Group.[18] *Star*

Wars films retained their status as canon, but Disney reclassified the EU stories found in

novels, games, and other media as "Legends" material. Whereas the films in the prequel

and original trilogies were once accompanied by Expanded Universe material that

harmonized and elaborated on the narratives of the films, Disney decided to use those

films as the basis for a new canon consisting of new films, novels, games, and other

media. Legends stories may contain elements such as characters or locations that appear

in the new canon and may even avoid contradicting with new material, but the stories

themselves are not considered canon. Of course, Legends stories and stories in the new

canon do frequently contradict. Many Legends characters are notably absent in the new

canon, and likewise stories from the new canon introduce significant characters who

never appeared in Legends. Ultimately, developing a new canon gave maximum

flexibility to creators involved in the creation of a new sequel trilogy of films that began

in 2015 with *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*. In addition to novels,

Lucasfilm used other forms of licensed media to expand the *Star Wars* canon.

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17. Basile, "Star Wars Legends," para. 29.

18. Bryan Hood, "Why Disney Blew Up More Than 30 Years of Star Wars Canon," December 15, 2015, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-15/why-disney-blew-up-more-than-30-years-of-star-wars-canon para. 6.

Computer and Video Games

Star Wars' history in computer and video games began with early adaptations of

arcade games based on the films in the original trilogy. "Star Wars" and "Return of the

Jedi," both released for play on home computers in 1988, used primitive graphics to

recreate iconic battles from each of those films.[19] Later games consisted of entries in

various genres including flight simulators, racing games, shooters, strategy games, and

role-playing games. These games expanded on the EU canon, and are thus now

considered Legends material. One notable example of this, "Shadows of the Empire,"

was set between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, filling in plot details

such as how Luke obtained his green lightsaber and what was happening to Han Solo and

Princess Leia in-between the films.[20] "Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic" and its

sequel, "The Sith Lords," both told stories set before the original films by thousands of

years, whereas games in the "Jedi Knight" series were set in the years following ANH.[21]

"Jedi Knight II: Mysteries of the Sith" even utilized characters established in EU

novels.[22] Of particular relevance to issues of canon raised by R1 is the EU game "Dark

Forces." Stylistically based on first-person shooters like "Doom" that took PC gaming by

storm in the early 1990s, players take on the role of Kyle Katarn, a rebel-sympathizing

mercenary tasked with gunning his way through a series of dangerous missions against

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19. Chris Thurston, "The Complete History of Star Wars on PC," *PC Gamer*, November 17, 2015, https://www.pcgamer.com/the-complete-history-of-star-wars-on-pc/ para. 3-4

20. Thurston, "The Complete History," para. 12.

21. Thurston, "The Complete History," para. 2-5.

22. "STAR WARS[TM] Jedi Knight – Mysteries of the Sith[TM]" *Steam*, accessed February 27, 2018, http://store.steampowered.com/app/32390/STAR_WARS_Jedi_Knight__Mysteries_of_the_Sith/.

secret Imperial weapons projects.[23] The first of these missions sees Kyle breaking into an

Imperial base on a planet called Danuta and stealing the plans for the Empire's Death

Star superweapon. This version of events directly conflicts with the one portrayed in R1,

where Jyn and a team of rebels steal the plans from an Imperial archival facility on the

planet Scarif. "Dark Forces" spun off into the previously-mentioned "Jedi Knight"

series, which narrated Kyle's transformation from jaded mercenary into spiritual Jedi

mentor. Because of Disney's new canon, games such as these, like the novels, have been

relegated to the Legends canon. Though Disney has allowed characters and concepts

from Legends to be integrated into the new canon, Dave Filoni, showrunner for the

Disney canon show *Star Wars: Rebels* has explicitly stated that Kyle Katarn would not be

one of the characters to make this transition.[24] There are slight similarities between the

characters and events of "Dark Forces" and R1. For example, the name of R1's main

protagonist Jyn Erso greatly resembles the name of Kyle Katarn's companion Jan Ors,

and Kyle's role as a mercenary who undertakes challenging covert missions for the rebels

greatly resembles R1's Cassian Andor's role as a rebel spy. The aesthetic and firepower

of the film's Deathtroopers also greatly resemble the Dark Troopers that serve as one of

the primary antagonists in "Dark Forces."[25] Regardless of these references, "Dark

Forces" and any other game that presents a contradiction to Disney's new canon is now

considered Legends material.

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23. Alex Leadbeater, "Rogue One's Biggest Victim is Kyle Katarn," *Kotaku UK,* December 16, 2016, http://www.kotaku.co.uk/2016/12/16/rogue-ones-biggest-victim-is-kyle-katarn, para. 3.

24. Leadbeater, "Rogue One's Biggest Victim," para. 12.

25. Chris Thursten, "Four Ways that Rogue One Pays Homage to Star Wars PC Games," *PC Gamer*, December 21, 2016, https://www.pcgamer.com/four-ways-that-rogue-one-plays-homage-to-star-wars-pc-games/ para. 4-6.

Television Series

An animated television series running from 2008-14, *The Clone Wars*, was one of the few elements of the franchise aside from the original trilogy and prequel films to survive into the new canon.[26] In fact, *The Clone Wars* even retroactively canonized certain characters, organizations, vehicles, and story elements by borrowing them from the EU, though the series also made changes to other portions of established EU lore.[27] *The Clone Wars* is accompanied in canonical lore with *Rebels*, a series set in the years leading up to the original film. Though it featured its own cast of characters, *Rebel*'s four seasons also featured cameos from series characters such as Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, Yoda, and others.[28] It also featured characters like Grand Admiral Thrawn from the Legends canon, and the character of Saw Guerrera who later appeared in R1. These two shows marked the transitional era between the EU canon created in the 1990s and the new canon created after Disney's 2012 purchase of Lucasfilm and 2014 creation of the Lucasfilm Story Group. Though the importance of media in carrying forth the *Star Wars* franchise in the years between major film releases cannot be underestimated, this media only found a market because of the passionate involvement of the *Star Wars* fan base.

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26. Hood, "Why Disney Blew Up," para. 6.

27. James Whitbrook and Katherine Trendacosta, "Everything *Star Wars* Has Reintroduced from the Old Expanded Universe," *Gizmodo,* February 10, 2018, https://io9.gizmodo.com/everything-star-wars-has-reintroduced-from-the-old-expa-1792224856, para. 4.

28. Germain Lussier, "*Star Wars: Rebels*' Dave Filoni on Its Final Season and His Future Role in a Galaxy Far, Far Away," *Gizmodo*, October 27, 2017, https://io9.gizmodo.com/star-wars-rebels-dave-filoni-on-its-final-season-and-h-1819877875, para. 2.

Fan Culture

Over the years *Star Wars* has inspired an incredibly passionate fan culture. Steve Sansweet, a former Lucasfilm employee, holds record-breaking collection of over 400,000 items of *Star Wars* merchandise and runs a nonprofit called Rancho Obi-Wan that offers tours of the collection.[29] *Star Wars* costume enthusiasts have organized groups such as the 501st Legion, a group that uses costuming as a platform for charity work.[30] There's even a real-world religion based on the principles of the fictional Jedi. The "Temple of the Jedi Order" is a legally recognized religion with the stated purpose of "coming together in a community to promote goodwill, understanding, compassion and serenity."[31] Though not all fans of *Star Wars* are devoted to the franchise in a religious sense, the fan community does gather for conventions. Lucasfilm held the twelfth "*Star Wars* Celebration" convention in Orlando, Florida in 2017.[32] The event drew in over 70,000 fans who came to commemorate the forty years of *Star Wars*.[33] Though not every fan is dedicated to *Star Wars* to the point that they become a convention-goer, costumer, lifelong collector, or religious adherent, these examples point to the passionate culture of the *Star Wars* fandom.

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29. Veronica Rocha, "Owner of World's Largest Private 'Star Wars' Collection Seeks Return of Stolen Items," *LA Times*, June 6, 2017, http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-star-wars-memorabilia-stolen-20170606-story.html.

30. "Our Mission," *501st Legion*, accessed February 27, 2018, https://www.501st.com/mission.php.

31. "Temple of the Jedi Order (TotJO) FAQ," *Temple of the Jedi Order,* accessed February 28, 2018, https://www.templeofthejediorder.org/faq#WhatisJediism, para. 5.

32. "Fan FAQ," *Star Wars Celebration,* accessed Februrary 28, 2018, http://www.starwarscelebration.com/Show-Info/Info-for-the-Fans/Fan-FAQ/.

33. "Thank You All for an Amazing *Star Wars* Celebration," *starwars.com*, April 17, 2017, http://www.starwars.com/news/thank-you-for-an-amazing-star-wars-celebration, para. 1-2.

The New Canon

Since converting the EU to Legends and thereby resetting the canon in 2012, Disney has released new media to accompany the six full-length *Star Wars* films and two animated television series that form the basis of the new canon.[34] These include new video games such as *Battlefront*, novels for young readers and adults, and comic books. Perhaps most significantly, the new canon made room for *Star Wars – Episode VII: The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, the first new full-length live action films to be released since the final prequel film in 2005.

Conclusion

It is additional films, novels, games, television series, and fan culture that carried the public memory of *Star Wars* in the intervening years between ANH and R1, the film that brought the series full circle. Despite a long-standing and consistent canon established in both EU novels and games, Disney disrupted franchise canon by declaring EU stories Legends and reestablishing a new canon based again on the films. Though disruptive to canon, this decision paved the way for new stories to be told, including one of the main subjects of this thesis: *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.*

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34. Dave Gonzales, "The Current, Canonical Star Wars Timeline," *Geek,* December 28, 2016, https://www.geek.com/culture/the-current-canonical-star-wars-timeline-1683840/, para. 1-2.

CHAPTER IV

MYTH AND MEMORY IN *ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY*

With the background information from Chapter III in mind, this chapter will turn

to discuss the context of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (R1) and analyze the film's use

of myth. In the next sections I will provide a description of *R1*'s rhetorical context, a

synopsis of the film's plot, and then an examination of literature related both to public

memory and to challenges posed by the American monomyth. I will then describe my

methodology and research questions before providing an analysis of R1 as it relates to

changing the public memory of the myths established in ANH, the foundational text of

the *Star Wars* franchise. First, I examine the audience of R1.

Rhetorical Situation of *Rogue One*

In contrast to the original *Star Wars* trilogy, *Rogue One: A Star Wars

Story* (2016) was produced and released within a very different media and cultural

context. Increasing postmodernism and influence of the 9/11 terrorist attacks

contributed to an American audience with expectations of darker themes,

especially for a film in a genre already known for exploring social issues. To that

end I use this section to explore the postmodern, post-9/11 rhetorical situation of

R1.

Postmodernism

One trend that has changed in the years since the original *Star Wars* film is the

rise of postmodernism. Religion scholar Graham Ward argues that postmodernism of a

type did exist in the 1980s and 1990s, but that America's cultural situation by 2012 included trends such as "postsecularity, post-materiality, austerity, and neo-liberal economics" that are indicative of an accentuated form of postmodernism.[1] While the rise of postmodernism presented a philosophical challenge to American culture in the twentieth century, world events presented a different set of challenges for American culture in the early years of the new millennium.

September 11's Influence

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks initiated a darker era in American media. Language and communication scholar Roya Jabarouti states that no event has ever been as widely broadcasted and argues that the events of that day marked "a new era in the American cultural history."[2] Similarly, communication scholar Lynn Spiegel states that coverage of the terrorist attacks disrupted regular television schedules and "contributed to a sense of estrangement" from everyday life.[3] James Castonguay points out that the increasing popularity and accessibility of online media during the war on terror that followed 9/11 increased the availability of violent images such as the torture and murder of journalist Daniel Pearl.[4] Technological capabilities, such as drone strikes implemented in secret operations by the CIA, raised new moral issues about the use of

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1. Graham Ward, "Theology and Postmodernism: Is it All Over?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2 (2012): 467, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfr099.

2. Roya Jabarouti, "From a Post-Traumatic Culture Toward the Cultural Trauma of Post-9/11," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 157, doi:10.7575/aiac.alls.v.5n.1p.157.

3. Lynn Spiegel, "Entertainment Wars: Television and Culture After 9/11," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2004): 236-7, doi:10.1353/aq.2004.0026.

4 James Castonguay, "Conglomeration, New Media, and the Cultural Production of the 'War on Terror,'" *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 4 (2004): 106.

technology in armed conflicts.[5] Literature likewise reflects themes that correspond with this estrangement.

Young adult literature has also taken a darker turn in recent years. Rocío Davis argues that dystopian young adult fiction "can be read as a response to today's mass media culture's often pessimistic and/or catastrophic vision of the world" and blends traditional narratives about young adult development with anxieties about conflict between the individual and society.[6] English scholar Melissa Ames states that while dystopian young adult novels are not new in the post-9/11 era, they have more recently gained noteworthy "abundance and popularity."[7] Although such novels do encourage young adults to enact positive social change, it is worth noting that they exist, in part, because of the necessity of warning young adults about real world issues such as "the dangers of rhetorical manipulation and ideological rule."[8] Literature certainly changed in the post-9/11 era; however, film undoubtedly ranks among the types of media that experienced this change most significantly.

Film, in particular, reflects darker themes in the post 9/11 world. Jones and Smith argue for the rise of "Dark Americana," arguing that post 9/11 films reflect themes of "moral ambiguity and emotional complexity," often presenting flawed characters

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5. Milena Sterio, "The United States' Use of Drones in the War on Terror: The (Il)legality of Targeted Killings Under International Law," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 45 (2012): 214.

6. Rocîo Davis, "Writing the Erasure of Emotions in Dystopian Young Adult Fiction: Reading Lois Lowry's The Giver and Lauren Oliver's Delirium," *Narrative Works* 4, no. 2 (2014): 1.

7. Melissa Ames, "Engaging "Apolitical" Adolescents: Analyzing the Popularity and Educational Potential of Dystopian Literature Post-9/11," *High School Journal* 97, no. 1 (2013): 3.

8. Davis, "Writing the Erasure of Emotions," 19.

"trapped in social systems, hierarchies, or incompetent bureaucracies where doing the right thing is neither easy nor obvious."[9] Film scholar Margarita Carretero-González discusses the ways the film *V for Vendetta* explores themes of violence and terrorism, and while she concludes that the film does not condone terrorism, she argues that it does ask the audience to "understand the reasons why, on some occasions, some people may resort to abhorrent violence before easily labelling them and making every effort to distance our selves from theirs."[10] Jones and Smith point to similar themes, stating that a distinctly post-9/11 category emerged to deal with themes such as "the politics of counterinsurgency, national security and home grown terrorism, and the ubiquitous threat of polymorphous violence."[11] They go on to catalog films and television series of the 2000s that feature themes related to counter-insurgency and warfare in the Middle East such as suicide attacks, torture, bomb defusals, sniper combat, and even the rape of civilians by American soldiers. Cinema scholar Karen Randall also points to the effects of 9/11 on films, arguing that *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) takes on a "9/11 aesthetic" characterized by urban destruction that is common to superhero and disaster films.[12] Film scholar Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla argues that directors such as Steven Spielberg and M. Night Shyamalan created drama films in the post-9/11 era that more closely resembled films from the documentary genre due to the manner in which they

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9. David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith, "The Rise of Dark Americana: Depicting the 'War on Terror' On-Screen," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 39 (2015): 3, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2015.1084802.

10. Margarita Carretero-González, "Sympathy for the Devil: The Hero is a Terrorist in *V for Vendetta*," *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries* 63 (2011): 209.

11 Jones and Smith, "The Rise of Dark Americana," 8.

12. Karen Randall, "'It Was Like a Movie' Take 2: *Age of Ultron* and a 9/11 Aesthetic," *Cinema Journal* 1 (2016): 137, doi:10.1353/cj.2016.0051.

realistically address societal issues such as dehumanization, fear, and lack of communication.[13] Similarly, society's anxieties or concerns are often reflected in horror films; thus women's studies scholar Jody Keisner examines postmodern elements found in recent horror films, concluding that complex contradictions are created "between good and evil, female and male, and pleasure and pain," and arguing that these contradictions force viewers to question what is real.[14]

All of these forces have exposed audiences to narratives with darker themes about violence, conflict, social anxieties, fear, and destruction. Audiences therefore have acclimated to such themes, and have adjusted their expectations for storytelling. For a film to be successful, it must naturally meet at least some level of audience expectations about the realism of its content and themes. R1 entered theaters to play for such an audience, bringing the narrative of 1977's ANH full circle in a very different context for audience members with very different expectations.

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story Synopsis

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story tells the tale of the rebel mission that led to the initial capture of the Death Star plans and their subsequent delivery to Princess Leia.[15] Though released nearly forty years later, *Rogue One* brings the characters of Darth Vader, Grand Moff Tarkin, and Princess Leia back to the screen, accompanied by a new

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13. Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla, "Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic: The Popular Genres of Action and Fantasy in the Wake of the 9/11 Attacks," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 38, no. 1 (2010): 20, doi:10.1080/01956050903449640.

14. Jody Keisner, "*Do You Want to Watch?* A Study of the Visual Rhetoric of the Postmodern Horror Film," *Women's Studies* 37 (2008): 426, doi:10.1080/0049787080205019.

15. All references to elements of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* come from: *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, directed by Gareth Edwards (2016; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment Inc., 2017), DVD.

cast of leading heroes and villains. The film begins as Jyn Erso, a young child, flees from the forces of Director Orson Krennic, a ruthless Imperial project leader come to press Jyn's brilliant father, Galen, into scientific service on the development of a new superweapon. With her mother slain by Krennic and separated from Galen, who reluctantly collaborates with the Imperials while secretly working to sabotage their project, Jyn grows up fighting alongside the extremist rebel leader Saw Gerrera until she is eventually abandoned by him in battle, captured, and imprisoned.

When the rumor about a new Imperial superweapon begins to spread because of the defection of Imperial pilot Bodhi Rook, the leaders of the Rebel Alliance learn of Jyn's connection to Galen and Saw and send the calculating intelligence officer Cassian Andor and his reprogrammed Imperial strategic analysis droid K-2SO to use Jyn to expose her father so that he can be assassinated, preventing work on the Death Star project from reaching completion. Joined by spiritual warrior Chirrut Imwe, gruff fighter Baze Malbus, and conscientious but nervous turncoat Bodhi Rook, Jyn reconnects with Saw Gerrera, who gives her a secret message from her father. Jyn uses the information from the message to seek out her father, but comes into conflict with Cassian when she realizes he has been sent to eliminate her father and stop his work. Ultimately Jyn persuades Cassian to spare Galen, but his change of heart comes too late. A rebel bombing strike kills Galen.

When the team returns to the rebel base, the Rebel Alliance leadership proves too fractured and risk-averse to act on the critical information Jyn received from Galen in his dying moments. Despite a lack of authorization by the rebels, Jyn's desire to act on her father's final wish inspires her to continue the fight. Jyn, Cassian, K-2, and their

companions manage to inspire a group of daring rebel outsiders to launch an unauthorized raid on an Imperial data facility on the planet Scarif for the purpose of stealing the plans to the Death Star and transmitting them to the rebel forces. When the Rebel Alliance leaders realize what is happening, the heroism of Jyn and her allies galvanizes the remaining rebels, inspiring Alliance generals to commit their troops and ships to the desperate assault.

Though the film's central heroes and numerous rebel soldiers must sacrifice themselves to complete their mission, they successfully transmit their plans to into Princess Leia's waiting hands. Director Krennic is killed in the assault, leaving his deadly creation in the hands of the ambitious and tyrannical Tarkin. Princess Leia flees with the data, closely pursued by Darth Vader, bringing *Rogue One*'s story to a close just moments before the opening scenes of *Star Wars: A New Hope*. While the films of the new trilogy begun in 2015's *The Force Awakens* tell stories in the future of the *Star Wars* universe, *Rogue One* takes audience members full-circle to the opening moments of the film that launched the *Star Wars* phenomenon. It is this unique relationship between these two films that gives *R1* additional significance in regards to the next topic I will discuss: public memory.

Public Memory

Because of R1's unique narrative connection to a film released nearly forty years previous, one might naturally assume that the new film could have an effect on how audiences perceive the original. Public memory is the area of communication theory that allows for the exploration of such issues. In this section I will begin with an exploration of how public memory is defined in recent scholarship. I will then examine the historical

roots of public memory scholarship before examining public memory contexts and its

applicability to film. A final paragraph in this section will discuss the unique relationship

between public memory, myth, and canon.

Memory Scholarship

To define memory is to undertake a challenging task. Psychologists Henry L.

Roediger, III and James V. Wertsch point to the diverse fields of study which have

examined memory, including "history, literature, philosophy, psychology and education"

as well as politics, law, architecture, sociology, media studies, communication, and

more.[16] Memory has always been a part of the field of rhetoric in the west, holding a

place as one of its "five ancient canons."[17] Speech and theater scholar Nathan Stormer

describes the "recursivity" of memory as a force that "circumscribes the scope and reach

of address."[18] In other words, humans undergo a constant process of remembering and

forgetting that determines the capacity of rhetoric to communicate effectively to them.

Memory is a complicated process that can interfere with knowledge. Business scholar

Ellie J. Kyung and marketing scholar Manoj Thomas conducted an experiment designed

to test the way attempting to remember a product's price affects the accuracy of the

knowledge of that price and found that participants who explicitly attempted to recall the

price of an item were 9% less accurate than participants who simply made a comparison

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16. Henry L Roediger III and James V. Wertsch, "Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 14-5.

17. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian Ott, *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 1.

18. Nathan Stormer, "Recursivity: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and *Mnesis*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 1 (2013): 28, doi:10.1080/00335630.2012.71490.

without an attempt at explicit recall.[19] Social researcher Ross Poole distinguishes

between cognitive memory, which serves "to make available to us knowledge that we

have acquired in the past," and conative memory, which "reminds us of responsibilities. .

. and commitments that we have made, of that we ought to have done and did not, and. . .

actions that we have to do even though they conflict with our current desires and

projects."[20] Roediger and Wertsch state that the term "memory" is "almost always most

useful when accompanied by a modifier," and to that end I move on to the examination of

a more specific kind of memory.[21]

      Defining public memory. Public memory, also sometimes called collective

memory, is more than just the study of how the past is remembered. Communication

scholar Barbie Zelizer describes it as "a graphing of the past as used for present aims."[22]

These uses shape the identity of those involved in the remembrance. Communication

scholars Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott argue that "public memory is

theorized in most scholarship as narrating a common identity, a construction that

forwards an at least momentarily definitive articulation of the group."[23] Such group

identities exist in the fandoms discussed above, and in the definitive articulation that a

film creates. American studies scholar Matthew Dennis describes public memory in

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19. Ellie J. Kyung and Thomas Manoj, "When Remembering Disrupts Knowing: Blocking Implicit Price Memory," *Journal of Marketing Research* 53, no. 6 (2016): 942, doi:10.1509/jmr.14.0335.

20. Ross Poole, "Memory, Responsibility, & Identity," *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 263.

21. Roediger III and Wertsch, "Creating a New Discipline," 9.

22. Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 217, doi:10.1080/15295039509366932.

23. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, *Places of Public Memory,* 7.

terms of "popular historical consciousness—the past that ordinary people carry around with them in their heads."[24]

History of public memory scholarship. Public memory also has roots in ancient rhetoric. Communication scholar Kendall R. Phillips notes that that many of Plato's dialogues express a concern for "misremembering," a concern driven "not so much by a pure concern for the epistemological or phenomenological foundations of memory as it is by a broader concern for our capacity for false beliefs."[25] Likewise, rhetorician Thomas S. Frentz states that Plato was angered by the Greek approach to memory, particularly the manner by which Homeric myths were passed down, and therefore took it upon himself to create a new dialectic style of speaking grounded in questions rather than in uninterrupted speech.[26] Phillips states that Aristotle considered memory to be "an emotional state, and in this regard is not strictly under the rational control of the person remembering."[27] Rhetorician James J. Murphy points to several examples of Aristotle's "theory of memory" designed to help speakers make their ideas memorable and understandable to audiences.[28] Phillips concludes that there are different levels of public memory, one "through which individuals articulate their own images of the past into a

24. Matthew Dennis, "Reflections on a Bicentennial: The War of 1812 in American Public Memory," *Early American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2014): 273, doi:10.1353/eam.2014.0007.

25. Kendall R. Phillips, "The Failure of Memory: Reflections on Rhetoric and Public Remembrance," *Western Journal of Communication* 74, no. 2 (2010): 210, doi:10.1080/10570311003680600.

26. Thomas S. Frentz, "Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric in Plato's 'Phaedrus,'" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2006): 247-8, doi:10.1080/02773940500511546.

27. Phillips, "The Failure of Memory," 214.

28. James J. Murphy, "The Metarhetoric of Aristotle, with Some Examples from His 'On Memory and Recollection,'" *Rhetoric Review* 21, no. 3 (2002): 219, doi:10.1207/S15327981RR2103_1.

wider communal network"[29] and another in which public remembrance perpetuates "cultural forms of memory and establishing frameworks for an official relation to the past."[30] Classics scholar Christoph Pieper points to the example of ancient Roman Consul Cicero who engaged in "a programme of self-fashioning" designed to influence the way his leadership was perceived in posterity.[31] The intentional fashioning of a legacy, however, is not the only purpose of public memory.

Rhetorical functions of public memory. Public memory serves a variety of rhetorical functions and is therefore applicable when studying a diverse array of artifacts. Dennis concludes that in the years following the War of 1812, the American public transformed "the war into a Second War of Independence through the medium of public memory," and while this inspired some national unity, it also became a justification for "self-righteous, hubristic, and militarist expansionism, sometimes justified by an inflated sense of victimhood."[32] Public memory also includes analogies to the past. Communication scholar Jeremy Cox points to the manner in which "the people of Texas turned to a shared understanding of an ancient past so as to make sense of an otherwise devastating present and point toward future action" in the wake of the infamous siege at the Alamo by comparing the fallen Texan soldiers to the Spartan warriors at the battle of

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29. Phillips, "The Failure of Memory," 219.

30. Phillips, "The Failure of Memory," 220.

31. Christoph Pieper, "Memoria Saeptus: Cicero and the Mastery of Memory in His (Post-) Consular Speeches," *Symbolae Osloenses* 88, no. 1 (2014): 58, doi:10.1080/00397679.2014.964473.

32. Dennis, "Reflections on a Bicentennial," 300.

Thermopylae.[33] At times the public memory of a historical figure may be called into question. Communication scholar Kirt H. Wilson argues that public memory of Abraham Lincoln as "the Great Emancipator" is complicated by "the fact that he persistently deferred his own leadership and authority," and describes Lincoln as "mediator of emancipation, not its great champion or its opponent."[34] Popular culture scholar Oren Meyers concludes that nostalgic advertising "shapes perceptions of the collective past through the "positioning of products as constructive realms of memory" to create "an emotional and immediate connection to an assumed better past" in the minds of consumers.[35]

Public memory in film. More specifically, public memory can be profoundly influenced by films. Cultural studies and communication scholar Marita Sturcken states that "the relationship of mass culture to memory has often addressed concerns about how popular culture and mass media can co-opt memories and reconfigure histories in the name of entertainment."[36] Communication scholar John W. Jordan argues many commentators reviewed *United 93* favorably because it gave audiences the opportunity to "witness the tragedy in the relative safety of a movie theater" and could provide "a sense

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33. Jeremy Cox, "'They Died the Spartan's Death': Thermopylae, the Alamo, and the Mirrors of Classical Analogy,'" *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 19, no. 3 (2016): 277-8, doi:10.1080/15362426.2016.1231638.

34. Kirt H. Wilson, "Debating the Great Emancipator: Abraham Lincoln and Our Public Memory," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 13, no. 3 (2010): 475, doi:10.1353/rap.2010.0185.

35. Oren Meyers, "The Engine's in the Front, But its Heart's in the Same Place: Advertising, Nostalgia, and the Construction of Commodities as Realms of Memory," *Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 4 (2009): 751-2, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5931.2009.00705.x/abstract.

36. Marita Sturken, "Memory, Consumerism and Media: Reflections on the Emergence of the Field," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 75, doi:10.1177/1750698007083890.

of optimism otherwise missing from the public memory of 9/11."[37] Fictional films may

also influence the public memory of historical figures. The public memory of the biblical

Mary Magdalene is "disrupted" by author Dan Brown's portrayal of her in his book *The*

DaVinci Code (and also in the film of the same name) by what feminist scholar Tammie

M. Kennedy calls "uncritical use" of information interpretations found in certain

historical sources.[38] Even fictional films with no apparent historical basis may influence

public memory. Media scholar and rhetorician Phil Chidester states that films in the

Planet of the Apes series serve as "both repositories of and catalysts for the generation

and persistence of distinct public memories—recollections that retain a distinctly visual

character through their association with the films as visual texts."[39] Chidester argues

that, though evidence suggests that the original theme of *The Planet of the Apes* (1968)

was the importance of preserving the environment, "initial viewers made a quick

connection between the events depicted on screen and the moments of actual political

unrest and racial upheaval that plagued the U.S."[40] He also points out that "this more

simplistic contemporary reading" is reinforced by 2011's *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*

which simultaneously provides a backstory for and visually references the original 1968

film.[41]

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37. John W. Jordan, "Transcending Hollywood: The Referendum on United 93 as Cinematic Memorial," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 2 (2008): 210, doi:10.1080/15295030802032267.

38. Tammie M. Kennedy, "Mary Magdalene and the Politics of Public Memory: Interrogating The Da Vinci Code," *Feminist Formations* 24, no. 2 (2012): 127-8, doi:10.1353/ff.2012.0014.

39. Phil Chidester, "The Simian That Screamed 'No!': Rise of the Planet of the Apes and the Speculative as Public Memory," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2015): 4, doi:10.1080/15551393.2015.1026597.

40. Chidester, "The Simian That Screamed 'No!,'" 7.

41. Chidester, "The Simian That Screamed 'No!,'" 7.

Public Memory, Myth, and Fandom

Public memory is critical to canon and fandom in science fiction franchises. As I have established, myths in science fiction serve as the basis for powerful, universal forms of storytelling. Myth-enriched science fiction films, such as the *Star Wars* franchise, form the canonical basis for fandoms, serving as the foundational texts for a fan's understanding of a fictional reality in much the same way a religious text serves to shape an adherent's view of spiritual reality. In this process, public memory is created. Members of fandoms interact with one another and with the canonical texts, sustaining a collective public memory of the franchise. Because of these relationships, changing the myths also changes the canon, and changes to the canon change the way that a franchise's public memory is remembered by the fandom. When an alteration is made to the canon, such as the addition of a new film to a franchise, there are important ramifications for the text's fandom and the public memory of the franchise as a whole. It is important to consider the significance of the public memory of such franchises as well as the significance of public memory to culture as a whole. Campbell argues that myths serve as guides for living in a given society or culture; thus, when political, spiritual, or even popular culture myths are challenged, so are the everyday thoughts, actions, and lives of the people who are guided by those myths.[42] Changes in myth become changes in public memory, and those changes have the power to alter the course of society.

Transforming Myth

After publishing their 1977 book that identified the American monomyth, Lawrence and Jewett continued their examination of the American monomyth in

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42. Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1993).

American popular culture. In 2002, they published another book, this time giving greater emphasis to the problematic nature of the American monomyth.[43] Before discussing those problems, however, it is important to note that, despite their critiques, they do defend Campbell's monomyth, which they refer to as the "classical monomyth," arguing that it is not prone to some of the problems found in the American monomyth. For example, they praise the classical monomyth as more promising for the future of a community because the monomythic hero returns from his or her journey more mature and ready to reintegrate into the community rather than disappearing at the end of the story as so frequently happens in the American monomyth.[44] They also point to the monomyth as valid for grappling with concerns such the presence of evil or the need to live harmoniously with the natural environment, contending that it is distorted portrayals of these themes in the American monomyth rather than the themes themselves from the classical monomyth that are problematic. With that in mind, the next section will address the issues Lawrence and Jewett identify with the American monomyth.

Problematic Aspects of the American Monomyth

Turning to the problems of the American monomyth, Lawrence and Jewett argue that, based on prevalent film and television examples such as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *The Matrix,* and the *Left Behind* series, although elements of Campbell's monomyth may be less present in elements of popular culture, Americans have continued to maintain a "mythical consciousness" into the new millennium.[45] They point to the American

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43. John S. Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2002).

44. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero,* 358-9.

45. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 6.

monomyth as a persistent derivative of Judeo-Christian narratives of redemption though

contemporary examples such as *The Matrix*'s Neo who carries out his redemptive work

using guns and explosives rather than through messages of redemption and peace.[46]

Citing the continued "emotional power of monomythic narratives," they also argue for

the persistence of the American monomyth as they identify it as problematic in several

ways.[47] They point to international issues such as war, terrorism, epidemics,

environmental issues, and poverty, along with domestic issues such as drug abuse, law

enforcement issues, and economic disparities as daily struggles that were daily challenges

to society at the time of their 2002 writing. Ultimately, they conclude that, though issues

with entertainment may not seem urgent in comparison to world issues, "effective

policies require consensus and a solid institutional framework that operates according to

publicly accepted laws" and therefore "we cannot afford to wring our hands, waiting" for

a monomythic superhero to come along and fix society's problems.[48] Thus, I now turn to

an overview of needed changes to themes from the American monomyth to set the stage

for my examination of how such changes play out in R1.

  Representation of the hero. The American monomyth is problematic in its

failure to present diverse heroes. Lawrence and Jewett argue that, despite advancements

made by women and people of color toward the end of the twentieth century, powerful

white male figures continue to predominate in monomythic narratives.[49] Millar

highlights the inadequate portrayal of women in monomythic narratives, citing the

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46. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 6-7

47. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 8.

48. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 14

49. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 8

example of a woman who takes command of a town in the face of gang violence in a

Lone Ranger narrative only to have it be later revealed that her efforts are only

succeeding due to the Lone Ranger's secret efforts shielding her from true danger. Millar

similarly critiques *Superman II* for its portrayal of Lois Lane's inability to remain sane in

the face of knowledge of Superman's true identity as Clark Kent, knowledge which is

removed with a super-powered kiss.[50] Opt and Richards argue that studies in myth have

tended to ignore "women's journeys to become heroes," and cite literature that points to

the frequent portrayal of women as either lesser supporting characters or as sexualized

action heroes, noting a lack of emphasis on contexts such as home and family which may

constitute alternative settings for a woman's heroic acts.[51] The lack of diversity in

American monomythic heroes is also evident when applied to the theme of violence.

Portrayals of violence. The American monomyth is also problematic because it

so frequently shows violence as a means of redemption, rather than representing its

destructive nature. Heroes of the American monomyth solve problems through violence,

often in complete disregard of the law. As Millar points out, "the superhero works

outside the law. He wears his own six gun at his waist. Or with his fist, he socks and

bams and bashes evil into submission."[52] In reality, violence may in fact be a negative

consequence of embracing monomythic narratives, rather than an act of redemption.

Koenig points to "irrational destruction, slaughtered civilians," and an eradication of

50. William R. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," or, The Lone Ranger Rides Again," *American Baptist Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1983): 40-1.

51. Susan K. Opt and Sharlene T. Richards, "Overcoming Infertility as a Hero's Quest: The Paradoxical Implications," *Carolinas Communication Annual* 22 (2016): 3-4, doi:10.108000335638209383588.

52. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 39.

hope for redemption as consequences of America's monomythically-influenced public policy during the Vietnam War.[53] Not only is violence a potential consequence of monomythic narratives; violence may also be justified retroactively by monomythic narratives. Sutton and Winn argue that in 1980s films about the Vietnam War

> the filmic hero unleashes an incredible violence upon his savage enemy. His excessive destructiveness is acceptable because of his honorable purpose. The slaughter of Asians in an act of "redemption."[54]

Yet the encouragement of violence in American monomyths is no surprise, considering how frequently they portray the institutions of civilized society as unable to deal with threats.

The failure of democratic institutions. Lawrence and Jewett point to the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, known for its racist portrayal of black Americans as a scapegoat for the nation's problems, for its pessimistic portrayal of America as a "spectator democracy" in which citizens passively observe the failures of their government to address national issues while dramatic actions such as those taken by the KKK become necessary and justifiable crusades to restore society to democratic order.[55] Though one would hope that films justifying the KKK are no longer viewed with credibility, films such as *Independence Day* (1996) engage in a similar process of depicting government institutions as helpless in the face of threats. In the film, the President of the United States "abandons his constitutional role as Commander in Chief"

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53. Cindy Koenig, "The Story of the Green Berets: An Account of the American Monomyth," *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association* 23 (2003): 74-6.

54. David J. Sutton and J. Emmett Winn, "'Do We Get to Win This Time?': POW/MIA Rescue Films and the American Monomyth," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24, no. 1 (2001): 29, doi: 10.1111/j.1537-4726.2001.2401_25.x.

55. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 29.

in favor of the role of a superheroic pilot. He personally joins the attack against the alien mothership as a symbol of "the normal agencies of a democratic government become invisible."[56] Similarly, Poindexter argues that *The Path to 9/11* identifies heroes who defy the law and democratic values as those who are able to save civilization.[57] Millar argues that the American monomyth encourages a passive stance that "tells us to wait around for someone else to do something about" societal problems, rather than engaging democratically in society.[58] Koenig points to the same trend in the wake of the Vietnam War, arguing that the skill with which John F. Kennedy "bound Vietnam to America's symbolic story" was likely a reason for the sense of disillusionment Americans felt after failing to reach a clear resolution to that mythic narrative.[59]

With the disillusionment that results from the failure of the American monomyth to deliver redemption in the same way it does in fiction, Lawrence and Jewett praise narratives that uphold the value of realistic struggles for democracy. They examine the 1989 film *Glory*, arguing that its portrayal of the 54th Regiment of the Massachusetts Infantry, a volunteer group of black Civil War soldiers led by abolitionist Robert Gould Shaw, represents a realistic struggle for a democratic cause: equality between black and white soldiers.[60] They contend that the film's realistic portrayals of combat helped spark popular interest in the roles African-Americans have played in America's military

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56. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 30.

57. Poindexter, "ABC's *The Path to 9/11*," Terror-Management Theory, and the American Monomyth," *Film & History* no. 2 (2008): 58.

58. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 38-9.

59. Koenig, "The Story of the Green Berets," 74.

60. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero,* 352.

history, a worthy exercise for a democratic society interested in the contributions of all its members.

Problematic paradise. The paradises so frequently presented in American monomyths dangerously misrepresent the realities of American life. Lawrence and Jewett again describe the Eden-like quality of communities portrayed in the American monomyth, such as the peaceful homestead Luke Skywalker farms with his aunt and uncle in ANH, the peaceful kingdom into which Simba is born in *The Lion King*, or the cheerful banter and calm of the bridges of the starships *Enterprise* and *Voyager* in the *Star Trek* franchise.[61] They identify these communities as well-organized and inhabited by cooperative, homogenous, people who are disinclined to evil, with the only overt failing of the community typically being an inability to stave off the inevitable interference of evil-doers from outside the community.[62] They then point to the obvious inconsistencies between this pastoral view of a small American community and the realities of life in the American heartland, wherein "frequent crop failures, depressions, fluctuations in the population, and conflicts over school, church, and civic administration have been endemic to Main Street, U.S.A."[63] Citing counter-examples in the novels of Jane Smiley and Sinclair Lewis, Lawrence and Jewett argue that pressures toward social and moral conformity caused unhappiness in early twentieth-century America, in which unpleasant realities such as murder, incest, suicide, and adultery were common

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61. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 22.
62. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 22.
63. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 23.

"undercurrents of small-town life."[64] Antiseptic portrayals are not the only issue with

monomythic paradise.

Beyond failing to portray the reality of American communities, Millar argues that

monomythic paradises uphold stagnation rather than growth. He contends that, while

dragon slayers of ancient myth would return from their journey with more maturity,

heroes of the American monomyth instead focus on maintaining the status quo of "those

good old days when America was great."[65] Lawrence and Jewett call for a view of the

American monomyth that emphasizes the real experiences at the roots of paradisal

portrayals of America but avoids the "selective or partial" interpretations of myth that

lead to nostalgic yearning for an unreal past.[66]

Problems with the frontier myth. The frontier setting is a frequent theme of the

American monomyth, and the dangers of that setting often provide the motivation for the

monomythic hero to emerge in vigilante-style defense of community against the forces of

lawlessness and savagery. Unfortunately, in reality, the lines between vigilante hero and

marauding villain are rarely so clear. While portrayals of vigilantes in the Wild West on

television and film offer "impartial outsiders whose zeal for the right and sympathy for

the underdog would triumph over evil" as redemptive heroes, the real lives of vigilantes

in the historical West render these portrayals problematic.[67] Lawrence and Jewett explain

that figures such as Wild Bill Hickock, both a desperado who ambushed and dueled

opponents and a sheriff who frequently served as a U.S. marshal, blur the lines between

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64. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 23.

65. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 40.

66. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 23.

67. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 30.

law enforcement and vigilante justice.[68] In contrast to the moral ambiguity inherent in

the issue of vigilante justice, the novel *The Virginian* by Owen Wistor presents the issue

as benign. While the story's love interest, Molly, is initially horrified to find her students

reenacting the titular Virginian's hanging of local gang members, she later proclaims that

it is wrong for the gang leader himself to have avoided sharing the fate of his

accomplices.[69] The hero eventually confronts the gang leader in a duel, despite his

Molly's protestations. However, when the villain is slain, the pair are wed and live out

idyllic lives.[70] The film's slayings are justified as citizens "taking back the inherent

powers of government that they have given to the courts."[71] Likewise, frontier themes, in

addition to incorporating violence, justify the mistreatment and misrepresentation of

culture groups. Jones points to such portrayals of Native Americans in traditional

westerns, which perpetuated the racist stereotype of that people group as "savages."[72]

As a result of these themes, there is a need for stories that portray the frontier

theme with greater nuance in the American monomyth. One such correction can be seen

in the way *Firefly* handles the frontier myth theme of the lone vigilante such as The

Virginian or The Lone Ranger who departs from the community after restoring order,

rather than living as a part of that community. Lawrence and Jewett argue that "the

monomythic convention of allowing the redeemer to disappear from the redeemed

community" fosters hostility towards political leaders who achieve heroic status and then

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68. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 31.

69. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 32.

70. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 34.

71. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 32.

72. Hillary A. Jones, "'Them as Feel the Need to Be Free': Reworking the Frontier Myth," *Southern Communication Journal* 76, no. 3 (2011): 238, doi:10.1080/1041794x.2010.507109.

remain in the public eye rather than disappearing metaphorically into the sunset.[73] Jones

presents an alternative vision to this in her analysis of *Firefly*, pointing to the show's

portrayal of communal leadership that is dependent upon freedom and the sharing of

expertise rather than the redemptive efforts of a single individual.[74] Jones points to the

balanced, liminal existence that the main characters of *Firefly* achieve between the

lawless savagery of the Reavers and the oppressive order of the civilized Alliance,

presenting a more nuanced message that one need not fully "relinquish community in

order to be free."[75] Likewise, she argues that *Firefly* avoids perpetuating the frontier

portrayal of savages by creating a symbolic portrayal of savagery and chaos in the

Reavers rather than connecting them to any particular people group.[76] Just as American

monomyths of the past have perpetuated overly simplistic views of those labeled as

savages, the same hold true of those labeled as evil.

 Oversimplification of evil. The American monomyth perpetuates a tendency to

create overly simplistic assessments of evildoers. Lawrence and Jewett cite George W.

Bush's rhetoric following the attacks of September 11, 2001, as dualistic in its portrayal

of a struggle between good and evil. Likewise, they point to John McCain's exhortation

of the nation's military leaders to prepare for conflict with America's enemies in the

weeks following the attacks as a comforting use of myth that reassures listeners that the

government will respond to the threat while simultaneously holding the potential to draw

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73. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 359.

74. Jones, "Them as Feel the Need to be Free," 239.

75. Jones, "Them as Feel the Need to be Free," 242.

76. Jones, "Them as Feel the Need to be Free," 238.

Americans into "spiraling conflicts" in an overly simplistic quest to eradicate evil.[77]

Millar describes the way in which the American monomyth stereotypes evil-doers as

those who are "dark, misshapen, talk funny, and laugh in sinister ways," and proposes the

simple solution: "wipe out the bad guys."[78] Dealing with a similar topic, Poindexter

argues that ABC's *The Path to 9/11* likewise treats the terrorists as diabolical villains

with odd body characteristics, neglecting to explore the context or motivations for their

acts of violence.[79]

There is clearly a need for messages that avoid the temptation to oversimplify

evil. Lawrence and Jewett praise George W. Bush's condemnation of religious and

ethnic stereotyping of Muslims and Arabs following 9/11 as a courageous stance against

an anti-democratic practice and uphold the need for messages of "democratic hope" to

counter the divisiveness of mythic rhetoric.[80] They argue for the importance of the

concern about human evil, but suggest that it is when "materials overplay the role of

conspiracy in accounting for evil, overlooking the propensities for evil within each

member of the chosen community" that the American monomyth fails to account for the

true potential source of evil.[81] This theme, along with the other themes discussed in the

previous paragraphs, warrants a call for change.

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77. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 16.

78. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 38.

79. Poindexter, "ABC's *The Path to 9/11*," 63.

80. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 16.

81. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 16.

Call for Change

As the scholarship I cited in this section demonstrates, scholars have been highlighting the problematic nature of the American monomyth for decades. More than just complaining about the symptoms, however, scholars have also prescribed solutions to these issues. In the concluding lines of the introduction to their 2002 book, Lawrence and Jewett call readers to a new examination of America's national mythos, claiming that "it was never more timely to project our fantasies onto a mirror that renders them with less distortion."[82] They later claim that "the tempering of the American monomyth will be easier if we can escape the provincialism to which we are prone and begin to look into the mirror others can hold up for us."[83] Following a similar line of thought, Millar argues that in a pluralistic society there is a need for collaboration and cooperation with those who could be seen as "opponents of our quest," praising those who engage in the re-writing of fundamental myths with the goal of granting those who consume myth a broader perspective.[84]

The previous sections have discussed literature that points to more nuanced or positive portrayals of the American monomythic themes. Ultimately, Lawrence and Jewett conclude that "the monomyth will have to be temperately reshaped by those who have enjoyed and fully understood its appeals."[85] This reshaping is key to understanding the role of myth in R1. The next section will discuss my methodology for examining such transformations of the American monomyth that serve to inclusively expand,

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82. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 17.

83. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero,* 360.

84. Millar, "Ronald Reagan and an American Monomyth," 41-2.

85. Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero,* 361.

correctively revise, and update the American monomyth in the face of societal changes affecting the twenty-first century.

Methodology

In this chapter thus far I have discussed the audience of R1, summarized the film's plot, discussed literature pertaining to public memory, and highlighted both the problematic nature of and the need for changes to the American monomyth. In this section of analysis, I will synthesize these elements to answer the following research questions: How does *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* transform the myth created in *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*? And what ramifications do these changes have for the public memory of the franchise, especially given the impact of public memory on the *Star Wars* franchise and fandom? To answer these questions, I will follow a similar format to that of Chapter II. I will begin with an overview of R1's treatment of Campbell's monomyth as it pertains to the central character of Jyn. I will discuss the implications of that portrayal for the public memory of ANH. Following that, I will discuss in sequence each American monomythic theme that I identified in ANH in Chapter II as it appears in R1. Under each section, I will discuss how R1 links to that theme in the public memory of ANH before analyzing how R1 sets about transforming, expanding, or otherwise changing the public memory of that theme.

Analysis

As the literature in the previous section discussed, public memory deals with how rhetors in the present talk about the past in order to achieve their present rhetorical aims. In this section I will discuss how R1 director Gareth Edwards uses R1 to connect to and

then transform the public memory of ANH by updating it to more closely reflect the sensibilities of a modern post-9/11 audience.

First, it is important to understand how Edwards connects to the memory of ANH in R1. Though I will provide further examples during my analysis, I will begin by discussing some of the general ways in which Edwards makes connections between R1 and ANH. Edwards connects to ANH in many overt ways. He includes painstakingly designed costumes, weapons, vehicles, and locations that refer to ANH. The opening title card that shares text with ANH creates another clear connection between the films. In addition to visual elements, Edwards includes characters from ANH. C-3PO and R2-D2 make a cameo appearance, the former lamenting his ignorance about the mission to Scarif in a clear reference to the comedic role the droids play in ANH. Princess Leia makes a cameo appearance as well, her face as it appeared in 1977 digitally superimposed over another actress. In an even more extreme demonstration of this technology, Edwards digitally recreated Tarkin, despite the actor who portrayed him being deceased.

Edwards also uses subtle references to evoke the memory of ANH. In reference to a line appearing in multiple *Star Wars* films, including ANH, K-2SO exclaims "I have a bad feeling about (this)" only to be cut off by Cassian and Jyn who tell him to be quiet. Though a light moment and played for laughs, Edwards is making subtle reference to the more serious tone of R1 by prohibiting K-2SO from completing the typically played-for-laughs pronouncement of dread. In another subtle reference, Edwards briefly explains the history behind Luke's pilot call sign: Red 5. Another character flies under the designation but is killed during the battle, vacating the call sign for Luke.

Edwards' most direct connection to the public memory of ANH is the near overlap between the two films in terms of narrative. Edwards uses the final moments of R1 to show Princess Leia's ship launch from the docking bay of the rebel carrier. Darth Vader looms over the recently-vacated dock, indicating his impending pursuit. In particular, Edwards precisely recreates a shot of Rebel soldiers preparing to defend the airlock just as they did in ANH. The last shot of the film shows Princess Leia receiving the plans to the Death Star. In response to a soldier who asks her what has been sent on the data card, she replies "hope," a clear allusion to the title of ANH: *A New Hope*. This line closes the film, leaving the story just moments before the pursuit that opens ANH.

By so clearly evoking the memory of ANH, Edwards serves a vital function in relation to the fandom. As Chapters I and III established, passionate fans of science-fiction franchises regard canonicity as a central issue. Given that Disney implemented a major disruption to canon, it was important for new *Star Wars* films such as R1 to feel authentic to fans. Edwards' homages created strong links between R1 and the most foundational text in *Star Wars* lore: Lucas's original 1977 film. While a financial analysis of the film falls somewhat outside the scope of this thesis, R1's positive reception would support a claim that Edwards was successful in establishing his film as an authentic part of *Star Wars* canon.

The Hero's Journey: Departure

Just like Lucas in ANH, Edwards constructs a mythic narrative in R1 that corresponds to Campbell's journey. This section of analysis focuses on the five stages of the departure with the goal of explaining how Edwards, while utilizing intriguing of

reversals of monomythic themes to introduce darker narrative elements, uses the hero's

journey to create myth in R1 as Lucas structured ANH.

Whereas Lucas spends the entire length of ANH guiding Luke through the stages

of the departure and completes Luke's journey with two additional films, R1 contains the

entirety of Jyn's journey, describing her journey all the way from early childhood to

death. Though Edwards constructs a hero's journey on a very different scale, elements of

the departure discussed in Chapter II are still applicable to Jyn's journey. In the

following sections I will discuss, in turn, each stage of the departure.

The call to adventure. R1 opens with the same blue introductory font and the

words "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ." just as ANH did, but in contrast, it

forgoes a prologue, establishing immediately that there is a difference in tone between the

two films. Unlike Luke, who receives a call to action on the cusp of maturity, Jyn's life

of danger and adventure begins when she is very young. Jyn's call to adventure is forced

upon her, to an extent, by her parents' absence. She sees her mother killed and her father

taken away for forced service to the Empire and is adopted into a dangerous life by Rebel

extremist Saw Gerrera. After seeing her depart as a child with Saw, Jyn next appears as a

young woman in an Imperial labor camp, sharing a cell with a noisy, snoring alien. It is

clear from her circumstances that she has already lived a life with at least the degree of

adventure necessary to land her in prison, so it is unclear whether her call to action takes

place with the trauma of her childhood, or when she is forcefully removed from prison by

Rebel agents.

Edwards constructs Jyn's early life and call to action in many ways as a reverse

image of Luke. Jyn begins life with her parents only to have them taken away by the

Empire, whereas Luke grows up with absent parents only to lose his aunt and uncle to the Empire. Both grow up on isolated farmsteads, but Jyn's is lush and green whereas Luke's is a desert. Luke grows up in a mundane life and dreams of exciting adventures with the Rebellion, whereas Jyn is thrown headfirst into danger at the hands of Saw's extremist rebel group and learns to keep her head down rather than looking for trouble. In creating Jyn as a reverse image of Luke, Edwards clearly evokes the public memory of ANH while simultaneously putting a new spin on it. He follows the pattern of the hero's journey, but does so in a way that puts a new spin on Lucas' myth.

Refusal of the call. Refusal seems to be a part of Jyn's very character. She initially lacks any sort of Rebel ideals. Her life is a result of being forced to grow up on the run with a violent resistance leader, rather than an ideological choice or a personal quest for heroism. Unlike Luke, who dreams of a life of adventure and resists Obi-Wan's offer for adventure out of a sense of obligation to his uncle, the viewer gets the sense that Jyn has already lived a life of sufficient danger and would prefer not to be involved with the Alliance or with Saw's group. Though Rebel soldiers break her out of a prison transport, she fights against them, knocking out several soldiers before being subdued by K-2SO. It takes a violent body slam from the droid to subdue her. This is the complete opposite of Luke, who became involved with the Rebel Alliance eagerly in ANH.

When Alliance general Draven first meets Jyn, he goes through a laundry list of her Imperial sentences, including "possession of unsanctioned weapons, forgery of Imperial documents, aggravated assault, escape from custody, resisting arrest." It appears that Jyn has lived her entire life with a rebellious attitude, whether that be against the Rebel Alliance or the Empire. This is perhaps unsurprising. As I mentioned in the

previous section, Jyn was forced into a life of adventure, rather than craving one like

Luke. Again, Edwards implements a theme from the hero's journey, but does so in a way

that mirrors rather than copies Lucas' myth in ANH.

Supernatural aid. In ANH, Lucas provides Luke with a spiritual mentor in the

form of Obi-Wan Kenobi and a worldly companion in smuggler Han Solo. Conversely,

Edwards provides Jyn a worldly, warlike mentor in the figure of Saw Gerrera and a true

spiritual companion in the form of Chirrut Imwe. Luke relied on Obi-Wan for spiritual

guidance and training to use the Force, but benefitted from the skeptical and grounded

perspective Han offered on their shared situations. Saw's mentorship of Jyn consisted of

harsh lessons in the realities of rebel life, but Chirrut provided Jyn with spiritual guidance

during their brief friendship. By reversing the roles of mentor and companion, Edwards

simultaneously references ANH while creating a new variation on ANH's mythic pattern.

Saw's mentorship. On face value, Jyn's "Obi-Wan" would seem to be Saw

Gerrera, though he turns out to be a shadowy reflection of the mentor archetype. At first

glance, Saw's role in Jyn's life seems benevolent. He takes responsibility of Jyn from the

moment he finds her huddling in a hiding place in a cave. He says, "my child, come,"

referring to her in familiar terms that would seem to offer hope to her after the loss of her

parents. Though Edwards first positions Saw as Jyn's rescuer, Jyn's relationship with

Saw fractures off-screen, sometime between the time he rescues her and the time she

ends up in prison. Saw's treatment of Jyn during her time growing up under his care

seems to have been in many ways opposite of the spiritual guidance and kindly

mentorship Obi-Wan provides Luke. Whereas Luke gained a spiritual connection to the

Force and training as a Jedi from Obi-Wan, Jyn learned from Saw how to fight, steal, and

kill as she was essentially forced to live as a child soldier. Saw eventually abandoned Jyn, giving her weapons and telling her to hide in a bunker. Though Saw later protests that he did this to protect her from people who were suspicious of her parentage, it is clear that Jyn perceived this as an act of abandonment rather than one of love. Given the excessive caution and suspicion Saw demonstrates by the time Jyn becomes reacquainted with him, one could easily guess that Saw's abandonment of Jyn was as much a result of his mounting paranoia as it was concern for her safety.

   Saw's symbolic appearance. Saw's twisted mentorship is represented in his appearance. Edwards lingers on a shot of Saw's mismatched robotic legs, apparently a result of a life spent in guerilla warfare. Saw's arms and torso are likewise encased in robotic armor, and his chest has a mask and hose connected to what seems to be some sort of oxygen supply that has been integrated into his armor. This calls to mind the artificial limbs and breathing equipment used by Darth Vader, a consequence of the grave injuries inflicted upon him by Obi-Wan after Vader's betrayal. Fans of the series will recognize that mechanical body parts serve as a symbol for moral or spiritual corruption. The prequel films show Anakin Skywalker, the man who becomes Darth Vader, losing a natural arm and replacing it with an artificial one around the time he takes the first steps that place him on a path that eventually leads to his conversion to the Dark Side. His duel with Obi-Wan and subsequent encasement in black armor mark the final step of his transformation to Darth Vader. Likewise, Luke loses an arm in a duel with his father, Darth Vader. Though he does not turn to the Dark Side like his father did, his cybernetic arm is used as a symbol of the danger of that path in a critical moment in the final film of the original trilogy. Saw possesses neither the purity of a natural body that represents the

peaceful path of the Light Side, nor is he clad in the sleek black armor of Darth Vader that represents the mechanical, oppressive order of the Dark Side. His mechanical parts are mismatched in color and shape, showing him to be a chaotic figure rather than a purely good or purely evil one. This perfectly corresponds to the training he gave Jyn. Neither belonging clearly or fully to the Dark Side or the Light Side, Saw acquainted Jyn with the grim realities of life in the galaxy, teaching her violence, survival, Rebellion, and mistrust.

Saw's death. Whereas Obi-Wan sacrificed himself for the purpose of buying Luke time to escape the Death Star and was still able to guide Luke from beyond the grave, Saw Gerrera's death seems to serve no purpose by comparison. When the Death Star's attack on Jedha City sends shockwaves across the planet toward Saw's base, Saw refuses to leave with Jyn and Cassian. He simply tells Jyn, "I will run no longer." He implores her to "save the Rebellion, save the dream" as his final words of guidance, but this seems as much a request as it does a word of guidance. Saw remains to die despite the offer of escape, making it difficult to determine what purpose his death served. Though their relationship was tumultuous towards the end, Saw did raise Jyn. Choosing to die rather than to try to reconnect with her seems like it could potentially cause Jyn more emotional distress. With his senseless death, Saw again serves as a twisted form of the benevolent supernatural mentor Obi-Wan was for Luke.

Chirrut's spiritual guidance. In contrast to Saw's mentorship in the ways of warfare and survival, Chirrut Imwe serves as a spiritual companion to Jyn. Just as Han served as a companion to Luke on the Death Star and a contrast to Obi-Wan by providing Luke with a more jaded assessment of the universe, Chirrut serves as a companion to Jyn

in her journey, one who provides spiritual guidance in contrast to the harsh knowledge of warfare imparted by Saw. Though not a Jedi himself, Chirrut follows the Force. He and his companion, Baze Malbus, were once "Guardians of the Whills," protectors tasked with guarding the Jedi temple on Jedha that the Imperials now strip of sacred Jedi kyber crystals. The temple's crystals once powered Jedi lightsabers, but the Empire needs them to construct the Death Star's laser superweapon. Chirrut first appears on the street of Jedha City, calling out to Jyn and asking her if she will trade her kyber crystal necklace for a glimpse into her future. Though blind, Chirrut knows that Jyn is carrying the kyber necklace given to her by her mother. Cassian quickly pulls Jyn away, but as she goes Chirrut tells her that "the strongest stars have hearts of kyber." Though vague, Chirrut's friendly nature makes this statement come across as a word of encouragement.

Chirrut's intervention. When Jyn, Cassian, and K-2SO are about to be captured, Chirrut intervenes. He stands up to a Stormtrooper saying, "let them pass in peace." He proclaims, "the Force is with me, and I am with the Force, and I fear nothing, for all this is as the Force wills it." Despite blindness, Chirrut demonstrates supernatural senses that allow him to fight off the Stormtroopers. Listening closely to their movements, and perhaps aided by the Force, Chirrut is able to evade the Stormtroopers' attacks in a flurry of martial arts. He uses a walking stick as a weapon against them, tripping them and cracking their armor. Chirrut maneuvers the troops expertly around him, grappling and dodging so that the blaster bolts they fire at him inevitably strike fellow troops. Showing a rather grim sense of humor, Chirruts strikes a Stormtrooper in the foot with his cane and says "Oh, is your foot alright." In this scene Chirrut fulfills the same role for Jyn that Obi-Wan did for Luke. Jedha City serves as a threshold for Jyn, just as Mos Eisley did

for Luke. Luke needed Obi-Wan's protection from the ruffians in the bar just as Jyn

needed protection from the Stormtroopers.

  Chirrut's spiritual connection. Chirrut's powers and connection to the Force are

somewhat vague, but he does seem to possess genuine spiritual abilities that he uses to

guide Jyn. Obi-Wan had the ability to use the Force to influence minds, create distracting

or frightening sound effects, and speak from beyond the grave. Chirrut does not display

any of those abilities, but he is aware of the presence of objects or people and is able to

fight in a way that a blind person typically could not, dodging with incredible skill in

combat, and praying for the Force to meet his needs, which it often does. Chirrut also

possesses a sense of the motivations of people around him, a skill which he uses to guide

Jyn's interactions with Cassian. Chirrut senses when Cassian intends to kill Jyn's father,

which allows Jyn to intervene. He also uses this same sense in choosing to follow Jyn on

her mission, telling his companion Baze that "her path is clear." Jyn is inspired by

Chirrut's faith in the Force. She says, "may the Force be with us" when her strike team

embarks on their rogue mission, and she later holds her kyber necklace in a moment of

silent prayer when waiting to hear if her team's shuttle codes will allow them to pass

down to Scarif's surface. Though Baze no longer trusts the Force because of the

devastation of the temple, he remains loyal to Chirrut. When giving his final farewell to

Jyn, Baze calls her "little sister," language that suggests that he respects her the same way

he respects another member of his and Chirrut's fallen religious order.

  Edwards clearly evokes the hero's journey by including the theme of supernatural

aid, but he alters the theme by placing the role of supernatural guidance on the

companion figure of Chirrut rather than on a mentor. Extending the reversal even more,

Edwards gives Jyn a mentor who teaches her the harsh realities of the universe. Han

played the role of spiritual skeptic for Luke in ANH, but Han was more akin to a

companion for Luke than a mentor. Edwards connects with the public memory of ANH,

but puts a twist on the myth by recasting the role of supernatural aid onto one of Jyn's

companions rather than a wizened mentor.

      The crossing of the first threshold. Like Mos Eisley for Luke in ANH, Jedha

City serves as the threshold for Jyn in R1. Rather than the encounters with the rowdy,

colorful bar patrons that Luke experiences, Jyn finds herself in the middle of an attack on

Imperial forces by Saw's guerilla fighters. This takes place after she first encounters

Chirrut, following the sequence of Campbell's monomyth, as the crossing of the first

threshold takes place after supernatural aid. Like Obi-Wan accompanied Luke, Chirrut

will also be with Jyn through a significant portion of her journey. Jedha City is also the

first time that Edwards places Jyn in direct conflict with the Empire. Though her past is

obviously littered with encounters with the Empire, this is the first time that the viewer

witnesses her take action against them. It is in this battle that Jyn first comes to rely on

Cassian, K-2SO, Chirrut, and Baze, as all protect her at one time or another from dangers

imposed by Saw's guerillas and the Imperials. Though Jedha City represents an

important turning point in Jyn's journey, it does not come close to representing the first

time she came into contact with the Empire.

      Jedha City primarily represents the threshold to a larger world in that it, like Mos

Eisley, is a clear place of intersection between the Empire and the everyday citizens who

live under its rule. It is also clearly a place where the criminal element thrives. In a clear

callback to ANH, the same bar patrons who harass Luke bump into Jyn on the street.

This is an astronomical coincidence, given that those two lowlifes encounter both the person responsible for stealing the Death Star plans, Jyn, and the person responsible for destroying the Death Star, Luke, despite Luke and Jyn never meeting one another. Edwards is clearly creating some level of identification between Luke and Jyn, while also using these bar patrons to connect Jedha City with Mos Eisley. The presence of these criminals creates the distinct impression that Jedha City is the same sort of hub between local and galactic life as Mos Eisley.

There are similarities between Luke and Jyn as it pertains to crossing the first threshold, but as Edwards has done with each of the previous themes, there is an element of reversal. Whereas Mos Eisley represented Luke's first direct encounter with the forces of the Empire, Jyn comes to Jedha City with plenty of previous experience with the Empire, having been held in an Imperial prison. Luke also leaves Mos Eisley in the Millenium Falcon with the Empire in hot pursuit. Contrastingly, Jyn leaves Jedha City as a prisoner of Saw's guerilla group.

The belly of the whale. Saw's palace serves as a form of the belly of the whale. A dark, ancient fortress of prison cells and shadowed halls, Jyn and her companions are confined and surrounded by Saw's guerilla troops, who either give them menacing looks or entertain themselves with loud gambling. This also marks an important transition for Jyn, especially in helping motivate her towards taking action against the Empire. It is here that she expresses her ambivalence about the Empire to Saw. He asks her if she can stand to see the Imperial flag reign across the galaxy, and she replies that "it's not a problem if you don't look up." It is then that Saw shows her a message from her father. Galen, speaking to Saw in the message, tells Saw to pass along to Jyn that his love for her

has never faded, and that he only cooperated on the Death Star project in order place a weakness in it. The message concludes by asking Saw to go to Scarif and retrieve the plans to the Death Star, a task which Saw passes on to Jyn. Though Jyn, unlike Luke, will not undertake a path to become a spiritual warrior herself, the message does represent a similar turning point in Jyn's journey. Rather than being initiated into a Jedi quest, Edwards initiates Jyn into a search for her father. She spends the remainder of the film, and her life, pursuing her father and acting on his dying wish.

Here Edwards plays with the monomythic theme by having the Death Star obliterate Saw's fortress. Given that the Death Star served as the belly of the whale in Luke's journey, it is ironic that his whale destroys Jyn's whale, so to speak. Whereas Luke and his companions entered the belly of the whale and freed Princess Leia, it is Jyn and her companions who must be freed in R1. This rescue comes from within in the form of Cassian's lockpicking skills. On the Death Star, Luke rescued a princess who had sent a holographic message. Conversely, Jyn comes to Saw's fortress to see a holographic message and leaves to rescue her father. Edwards follows the monomythic theme of the belly of the whale, but he again reverses the theme.

In each section above, I highlighted the presence of a theme from the departure, the first of the three major stages of Campbell's hero's journey, in R1. As Lucas used the hero's journey as the pattern for ANH, so Edwards used the same pattern in R1. By doing so, Edwards creates a clear connection between the two films, establishing R1 as a myth just like ANH and clearly evoking the memory of the original film. On the other hand, Edwards constructs each step of Jyn's journey as a type of reverse mirror image of Luke's journey in ANH. This has a dual effect. While R1 clearly pays homage to the

mythic pattern Lucas followed in ANH, R1's reversal of so many themes simultaneously allowed Edwards to construct a heroic journey with a completely different tone and narrative. This dual effect both establishes R1 as an integrated part of the *Star Wars* myth while also making room for a thematically darker story that reflects R1's twenty-first century context. Edwards successfully crafted a story with the mythic quality that makes R1 feel like a *Star Wars* film but also told a story that would resonate with a postmodern, post-9/11 audience, successfully updating the public memory of the franchise by using the mythic building blocks of the original film to speak to a more contemporary audience. I will next move into my analysis of each of the themes from the American monomyth found in R1 with the goal of discussing how exactly Edwards added darker themes to R1. I will analyze how the film expands upon and transforms each theme as a means of further influencing the public memory of the franchise.

The American Monomyth in R1

Perhaps Edwards' biggest changes to the *Star Wars* myth are found in his treatment of themes from the American monomyth. As Chapter II discussed, Lucas clearly wove many elements of the American monomyth into the mythic fabric of ANH. Though his goal was clearly to inspire, a goal which he seems to have more than exceeded, there are problematic elements of the American monomyth that limit its benefit to society. As the literature in this chapter demonstrates, scholars have called for stories that make changes to this myth to address issues such as lack a of representation of heroic women or minorities, excessive violence portrayed as a means of redemption, messages about democracy that encourage citizens to spectate rather than participate, uncomplicated images of paradise that ignore real-world conditions, frontier themes of

justice that flout the law and stereotype savages, and oversimplified portrayals of evil.

Edwards uses R1 as an opportunity to connect with the public memory of ANH by

clearly including each of the American monomythic themes Lucas originally used, but he

also takes advantage of the opportunity to elaborate upon or transform these themes in

ways that address their problematic nature and thereby update the public memory of

ANH to better reflect the expectations of a postmodern, post-9/11 audience.

Violence. Edwards retains much of the heroic action movie flavor that

characterized ANH in R1 with laser guns, spaceship battles, and supernatural warriors

engaged in martial arts combat. Cassian, Jyn, K-2SO, Chirrut, and Baze all regularly use

blasters to shoot Stormtroopers throughout the film. The assault on the Imperial archive

on Scarif and a space battle above the planet occupy the better part of the last half of the

film. There is a clear stylistic connection between the two films. Both contain scenes of

characters infiltrating Imperial facilities to fight Stormtroopers, and both feature climactic

space battles. While maintaining this similarity to ANH, however, Edwards adopts a

grittier, more realistic portrayal of violence and war than Lucas did that makes it clear

that violence is not always the tool of redemption that the typical American monomythic

narrative suggests it to be. Unlike ANH, R1 portrays terrorist attacks, air strikes, and

danger to civilians, tapping in to themes from the post-9/11 era and changing the public

memory of ANH by associating such actions with the Rebel Alliance. Edwards also uses

some of its primary characters to portray various aspects of the American monomythic

theme of violence. First I will discuss K-2SO.

K-2SO. While C-3PO and R2-D2 provide lighthearted moments of comic relief

with their melodramatic worrying and tart attitude respectively, Edwards uses K-2SO to

provide R1 with a darker form of comic relief. A reprogrammed Imperial strategic

analysis droid, K-2SO is able to fight very capably but does so with a casual attitude that

matches his dry personality. During the battle in Jedha City, a Stormtrooper throws a

grenade at K-2SO and his companions. The droid catches the live grenade and holds it

for a moment, prompting worried expressions from Jyn and Cassian who happen to be

standing close by. Without even looking, K-2SO tosses the grenade over his back just in

time for it to detonate amidst an approaching squad of Stormtroopers. It would be

possible to look at K-2SO as a cold killing machine simply engaging in combat, but K-

2SO possesses a distinctly sarcastic personality that tinges his actions with dark humor.

Because he is a reprogrammed Imperial droid, he uses his appearance to attempt to

convince Stormtroopers that Cassian and Jyn are his prisoners so they can pass. When

Cassian begins to speak, K-2SO gives him a backhand slap and tells him, "there's a fresh

one if you mouth off again." Though the droid later apologizes, he seems to relish the

chance to playact as the captor. When the skittish Rook, who has defected from the

Empire because of his conscience but feels uncertain about becoming a Rebel, uses a

shuttle's mounted weapons to kill a squad of Stormtroopers, K-2SO comments, "well

done! you're a Rebel now!" Rook had already committed the traitorous acts of carrying

Galen's message to Saw, but K-2SO's statement shows that the droid believes that killing

is what defines someone's true status. Edwards uses K-2SO's violence for comedic

effect, something not found in my analysis of ANH. Though ANH contains moments

both humorous and action-oriented, the two rarely combine. Edwards' casual and

humorous treatment of violence with K-2SO certainly represents a new elaboration on the

theme when contrasted with ANH, but this change also reflects the attitudes of R1's audience who are more accustomed to the portrayal of violence.

Cassian. Edwards emphasizes the tragic consequences of violence with Cassian, a rebel spy who is willing to use lies, murder, and assassination to achieve his goals, but who does so with guilt and regret. Audiences first meet Cassian in a desperate rendezvous with an informant, seeking information about Rook, the Imperial defector. When the informant is hesitant to speak to him, Cassian manhandles the injured man and pressures him for more information. When Stormtroopers stumble across the conversation, Cassian shoots them at point blank range and looks for a way to climb out of the corridor they are trapped in. When the informant says he will never be able to climb out because of his injured arm, Cassian says "calm down, calm down, it will be alright" then shoots him in the back. Cassian looks remorseful, but quickly refocuses on survival and climbs away. Cassian shows the same willingness to kill for his cause when Saw's guerilla troops attack the convoy in Jedha City. When one of the insurgents pulls out a grenade to throw toward Stormtroopers who are clustered around Jyn, Cassian kills the man with a well-placed shot to prevent his attack. It is unclear whether Cassian feels remorse for this action, though it stands to reason that he would regret having to kill a member of the group he was sent to contact.

Cassian's willingness to kill is tested when he is ordered to kill Galen. After developing a connection with Jyn, and perhaps being inspired by Galen's willingness to offer himself up as the traitor to Krennic to exonerate the other members of the engineering team, Cassian relents. Despite this, a rebel bombing strike still kills Galen. When Jyn finds out that Cassian was sent to kill her father, the ensuing argument

provides insight into Cassian's motivations. She expresses her anger to him, but he

simply replies "you're in shock, and looking for a place to put it. I've seen it before,"

emphasizing his experience with violence. Jyn continues to protest but Cassian replies

again, this time with greater intensity, saying "I had orders. Orders that I disobeyed. You

wouldn't understand that." Jyn says he may as well be a Stormtrooper, but he replies that

not everyone has the luxury of

> deciding when and where we want to care about something. Suddenly the
> Rebellion is real for you. Some of us live it. I've been in this fight since I
> was six years old. You're not the only one who lost everything. Some of
> us just decided to do something about it.

Cassian makes it clear that he has suffered just like Jyn. Though Edwards does not

provide any further elaboration on the events to which Cassian is referring, it clear that

Cassian's participation in the Rebel Alliance and his willingness to commit violence for

them is the result of a lifetime of struggle.

Ultimately, Cassian chooses to embark on a violent mission because he is

convinced that it is the right thing to do. It is Cassian and a group of his fellow rebels

who support Jyn in her rogue mission to Scarif. He speaks for the group of rebels, telling

Jyn,

> we've all done terrible things on behalf of the Rebellion. Spies, saboteurs,
> assassins. Everything I did, I did for the Rebellion. And every time I
> walked away from something I wanted to forget, I told myself it was for a
> cause that I believed in. A cause that was worth it. Without that, we're lost.
> Everything we've done would have been for nothing. I couldn't face myself
> if I gave up now. None of us could.

Cassian regrets the life of violence that the Rebellion caused him to live, but his

commitment to the Rebellion remains firm. Cassian seems to join Jyn in her mission to

atone for the violent actions he regrets, needing to see the Rebellion overcome the Death

Star lest his dark deeds be in vain. Edwards uses Cassian to explore the theme of

violence in R1 in a more nuanced way than Lucas did in ANH. Though ANH showed

rebels engaged in conflict, it rarely did so with the perspective of the soldier or spy in

mind, preferring instead to show idealistic heroes like Luke or characters like Han who

are motivated by profit but turn out to be noble. While ANH portrays the victory over the

Death Star as one achieved through heroism, Edwards alters the memory of that victory

through the character of Cassian. Cassian's critical role in securing the Death Star plans

is a reminder that great victories are sometimes purchased at a moral cost. While Rebels

may be noble idealists, they may also be remorseful killers with blood on their hands.

Edwards changes the public memory of the victory over the Death Star. While it was

achieved in part through idealistic effort, the victory was also a result of moral

compromise.

Targets and types of violence. Edwards expands upon the theme of violence in

R1 by showing different types of violence and different targets of violence. In general,

the violence ANH's characters commit is against faceless Stormtroopers, rather than

against allied informants or guerilla fighters committed to the same cause. Lucas

certainly never places characters in ANH in the position of contemplating the

assassination of an ally's family member. Even though Cassian refrains from killing

Galen, Galen still dies in what amounts to a friendly fire incident caused by

indiscriminate Rebel Alliance targeting. In the guerilla attack on Jedha City, a young girl

is caught up in the middle of the battle. Lasers streak around the child, who screams in

terror. Jyn swoops in and grabs the child just in time to save her from an explosion.

Violence against civilians and children is a common theme in post-9/11 films and is often

a natural consequence of battles between insurgents and governments. The scene in which Saw uses the creature Bor Gullet to sift through Rook's mind and determine the authenticity of his story is a clear example of torture. Though the manner in which the creature inflicts pain is abstract, Rook is clearly frightened by the creature as it wraps its slimy tentacles around him, as well as by Saw's description of the mind-scrambling effect of the creature's work. Already skittish, Rook spends much of the rest of the film seemingly mentally shaken as a result of his experience.

Though characters in ANH commit acts of violence towards one another and towards innocent people, heroic characters do not torture other heroes. While Saw hardly rises to the role of hero, he is an opponent of the evil Empire and is therefore expected to have some minimum level of virtue. Especially given Rook's heroic self-sacrifice later in the film, Saw's torture of the conscientious and violence-averse pilot comes across as a grave moral failing on the part of someone who should respect Rook's moral stance against the Empire rather than reward him for it with torture. By introducing torture and violence between allies and by showing danger to innocents as a result not just of the Empire's evil but also as a consequence of the actions of those who oppose the Empire, Edwards uses R1 to add a layer of moral complexity to the public memory of the violence and conflict in ANH.

Sacrifice. Violence in R1 perhaps most strongly modifies the public memory of ANH with Edwards' grim portrayal of sacrificial death. Whereas Han, Leia, Luke, and Chewbacca all escape from the Death Star relatively unscathed, all of R1's main cast of heroes sacrifice themselves in the battle on Scarif. K-2SO is the first main character to die, killed by a hail of blaster fire by Stormtroopers while he ensures Jyn and Cassian

remain locked in the data vault. Chirrut is the next to die, crossing a field of fire to throw the master switch needed to transmit to the Rebel fleet. Rook dies next, victim of a grenade that destroys his shuttle. He dies while maintaining communication with the Rebel fleet, an essential step in the eventual transmission of the plans. After Chirrut's friend and fellow former Guardian of the Whills Baze realizes that the shuttle, and therefore any means of escape is gone, he mounts a last stand against Krennic's Deathtroopers, killing the last of them on the beach before being killed in an explosion. Though Baze had previously expressed doubts about Chirrut's continued faith after the fall of their order, he began to pray just as Chirrut did, evidently inspired by his companion's faith and sacrifice. Jyn and Cassian are the last to die, surviving after transmitting the plans just long enough to evacuate to the beach. As they watch the shockwave caused by the Death Star laser Tarkin fired to destroy the archive travel towards them, Cassian tells Jyn that her father would be proud of her. They hold each other tightly as the blast washes over them in a great burst of light.

R1 alters the public memory of ANH by pointing out that the path to victory over the Death Star was one paved in heroic sacrifice. Though Lucas does not avoid showing the sacrifice of Rebel pilots in the attack on the Death Star, overall ANH spares its main heroes aside from Obi-Wan, who even manages to retain some semblance of supernatural life. While most of the small fighter squadron in ANH's attack on the Death Star die, basically everyone involved in the Rebel attack on Scarif is killed when Darth Vader's fleet arrives. The only exception is Leia's small transport which naturally escapes so that it can be tracked down in the opening moments of ANH. Vader is merciless and excessive in his violence against the Rebels, a theme which will be discussed more

thoroughly along with the theme of evil. R1 presents a grim twist on the public memory of ANH. The critical victory over the Death Star came not just at cost of a handful of unknown pilots and soldiers, but at the cost of heroic characters who each had his or her own story.

While stylistically evoking ANH with laser battles, space combat, and supernatural feats, Edwards addresses the problem of redemptive violence in the American monomyth by rendering the theme in more complexity. While the character of K2-SO does not serve to critically reflect on violence, his casual attitude towards it clearly meshes with a 2016 audience's expectations regarding the theme. On the other hand, Cassian's regrets about violence, the targeting of children and friendly characters, the portrayal of particularly troubling forms of violence, and the grim portrayal of heroic sacrifice all serve to render the theme of violence in more realism. This serves to update the public memory of the original film, creating a complex backdrop of violence against which ANH now stands. Violence is hardly the only theme Edwards addressed, however, so next I will discuss the failure of institutions.

The failure of institutions. Edwards evokes the failure of institutions theme from the American monomyth in R1 just as Lucas did in ANH, complicating the public memory of the theme from the original film by spreading the theme to the Rebels in addition to the failing Imperials. Beyond simply adding complexity, Edwards also addresses the problem of spectator democracy with everyday heroes who step up to fight against evil.

Rebel failures. Lucas clearly portrayed the failure of the Empire as an institution in ANH, but Edwards alters the public memory of this theme by also showing failure on

the part of the Rebel Alliance. While the Rebel Alliance ostensibly has noble goals, its methods are called into suspicion in R1 in a way that they were not in ANH. In Jyn's first meeting with the Rebels, Mon Mothma offers her a fresh start, but it is immediately apparent that General Draven and Cassian have ulterior motives and plan to use Jyn as a means of assassinating her father. Additionally, the Rebellion lacks trust in its agents. As soon as Cassian and the team crash on Eadu, the Alliance loses communication with them. Rather than looking to reestablish contact, Draven immediately orders a bombing strike against the facility to kill Galen. This trigger-happy response comes mere seconds after a loss of communication with Cassian, and ultimately results in Galen's death. Even when K-2SO re-establishes contact with the rebel bombing squad and requests, for Jyn's sake, that the bombers disengaged, the Rebels are unable to call off the strike because the squadron of bombers is "already engaged." Given that the fighter craft in R1 are engaged with communication devices, the reason for this response seems to be a blunder.

Though the Rebel Alliance presented in ANH is unified in their resolve to destroy the Death Star, in R1 Edwards presents a fractured Alliance Council that is on the verge of disbanding. After receiving reports of the Death Star's power, the Rebel leaders call a meeting to discuss how to proceed. The Alliance Councilors bicker openly with one another, divided about what to do. Some advocate for disbanding the Alliance, others suggest that unilateral actions, such as those taken by Draven, are a sign that there is no true cooperation between members of the Alliance. Edwards moves the camera quickly from Councilor to Councilor, emphasizing the fractured nature of the group. It falls upon the largely disillusioned Jyn to speak up, reminding them that conceding to the Empire will "condemn the galaxy to an eternity of submission." When one of the most doubtful

Councilors tells Jyn that she is asking them to act on hope alone, Jyn replies with words

that Cassian first spoke to her: "rebellions are built on hope." Even with this reminder of

the inherently risky nature of Rebellion, the Council is still unable to unite and make the

only decision that could lead to the possible survival of the Rebellion. Between uniting

with a small chance of victory or disbanding with zero chance of victory, the Rebel

Alliance leaders chose to disband, demonstrating their complete failure as an institution.

  Democratic renewal. Jyn's message does not rally Alliance leadership, but she

does inspire Cassian and a few daring Rebel soldiers to launch an unauthorized attack. It

is only when her strike team begins its assault that Admiral Raddus, commander of a

large Rebel fleet, and several of the other Rebel leaders cast their lot with the assault on

Scarif, providing the space support necessary for the plans to be transmitted. Here

Edwards delivers one of R1's clearest messages: it is the bold actions of hopeful

individuals that create change, not the actions of institutions. Though ANH established

the Empire as an evil institution, the solution in that film appeared to be an alternative

institution with superior ideals: the Rebel Alliance. R1 twists the American monomythic

theme of the failure of institutions by demonstrating that even well-intentioned and

idealistic institutions fail. Jyn's willingness to take action stands in stark contrast to the

problem of a spectator democracy wherein citizens are encouraged by American

monomyths to do nothing and wait for institutions or mighty heroes to solve society's

problems. Though Jyn is a capable fighter, she is not heir to a Jedi legacy, a powerful

political leader, or even a particularly clever spy. She is not even an official member of

the Rebel Alliance, yet she steps up in the face of their failure to inspire the people

around her to do what needs to be done. The flawed, everyday people who join her serve

as evidence that she has inspired participation rather than stepping into the role of a solitary hero who saves the day because nobody else is willing or able. Chirrut and Baze are members of a fallen religious order. K-2SO is a reprogrammed droid with a propensity for sarcasm and violent behavior. Cassian and the rebel soldiers he speaks for are flawed people who have given their souls to the cause. This is not a group of Lone Rangers or Supermen stepping in to save the day, but members of the lowest elements of a society uniting to do what must be done for the good of all. It seems reasonable to suggest that Jyn's bold actions create a renewal of purpose responsible for the unified Rebel Alliance in ANH.

Imperial self-destruction. Though the Empire was marked by petty bickering and arrogance in ANH, the Empire in R1 is prone to in-fighting that is downright self-destructive. The first hints of this theme appear with Krennic and Tarkin, who spar verbally with one another throughout the film. Tarkin clearly mistrusts Krennic but is driven by his desire to take command of Krennic's Death Star project. Krennic is overly defensive and reactionary with Tarkin, unable to handle any of Tarkin's criticism about his handling of project security. Whereas the in-fighting in ANH fails to rise above the level of petty posturing, and conflict between Krennic and Tarkin is much more forceful. Though their conflict is initially veiled in verbal tactics like false praise and empty apologies, the two spar with increasingly open hostility throughout the film. When Tarkin announces that he will be taking command of the station, Krennic bursts out in anger, shouting "we stand here amidst MY achievement! Not yours!" Eventually Tarkin uses the security breaches as an excuse and fires the Death Star at Krennic himself,

turning the creation on one of its creators as a final step in Tarkin's process of securing total control over the station.

In another example of self-destructive institutional failure, the Empire is all too willing to kill its most brilliant minds for the purposes of security. When Krennic traces the security breach to Galen's facility on Eadu, he assembles the facility staff and informs them that there has been a leak. Asking the traitor to step forward and receiving no response, he threatens the entire team. When Galen confesses, Krennic still kills Galen's entire scientific staff, the engineering team who created the Death Star. Krennic's excessive act eliminates several doubtlessly brilliant minds from the Empire's service, all because of Krennic's short-term desperation to plug the security leak. The same could be said of Tarkin's firing of the Death Star at the facility on Scarif. The Death Star plans had already been transmitted, therefore the damage was done. The archive contained information for many other Imperial projects, as well as numerous Imperial staff and Krennic himself. The eagerness of Imperial officers to brutally suppress any hint of trouble results in massive collateral damage.

An intriguing reversal, Edwards uses the story of Galen's sabotage to contradict the image of Imperial incompetence Lucas created in ANH. In ANH, the Death Star simply has a critical flaw that can be exploited by a precisely-aimed torpedo. In R1, Edwards changes this oversight into an intentional design flaw placed in the station because of Galen's subterfuge against Krennic. Galen would have preferred a quiet life with his family, but Krennic relentlessly pursued him and deprived him of his family. As a result, the flaw in the Death Star is partly Krennic's fault. Krennic arrogantly assumed that Galen was a beaten man, an emotional guise which Galen adopted to deceive

Krennic. Thus it is Krennic's failure to realize that killing Galen's wife and taking him

away from his child could motivate him to such an elaborate act of vengeance.

Furthermore, it is also Krennic's failure as an Imperial Director to notice the flaw in the

project which he oversaw. R1 provides context for ANH that changes the public memory

of the original film by transforming the critical flaw in the Death Star from an

unintentional Imperial oversight into a problem caused by the violent and arrogant

methods employed by the Empire's officers. The memory of the Empire is specifically

altered as its loss of the Death Star is now the result of Imperial cruelty rather than mere

Imperial incompetence.

Though Lucas established well the Empire's incompetence and the pettiness of its

officers in ANH, Edwards expands upon the theme in R1. Rather than propping up the

Rebel Alliance as a legitimate institutional alternative to the failing Empire, Edwards

shows that the Alliance, too, is prone to failure with its inability to unite in its time of

greatest need. Conversely, Edwards alters the theme of the institutional failure of the

Empire by showing that the flaw in the Death Star was a result of the Empire's evil and

cruelty rather than its incompetence. This represents a major expansion of the American

monomythic theme of the failure of institutions, but Edwards correctively addresses the

problem of the spectator democracy by showing that it was the sacrificial actions of a

heartbroken scientist, his rebellious daughter, and a ragtag group of soldiers and spies

rather than a superhero or prodigy that led to the defeat of evil.

Paradise. Though not the most prevalent theme, Edwards does comment on

ANH's American monomythic theme of paradise in R1. He establishes connections to

the theme of paradise from ANH by hinting at the lost paradise of the Old Republic,

portraying the Ersos' farm life as similar to Luke's farm life, and again portraying Yavin

IV as the verdant home of the idealistic Rebel Alliance. In contrast to ANH, however,

Edwards alters the theme of paradise by demonstrating that evil can also offer a chance at

life in paradise, by showing the fractured nature of the Rebel Alliance on Yavin IV, and

by giving R1's heroes grim deaths rather than the fanfare the heroes receive in ANH.

     Evoking the Old Republic. First, Edwards references the lost paradise of the Old

Republic, which Obi-Wan described in ANH, by making subtle references to the Jedi.

The first hint at a connection is in Jyn's mother Lyra's robes. Though Lyra does not

seem to use the Force, and ability which would have likely changed the fatal

confrontation between her and Krennic, she does give Jyn a kyber crystal. Kyber

crystals, the audience learns, are what power Jedi lightsabers, as well as the Death Star

laser weapon. As Obi-Wan Kenobi explained in ANH, the Jedi and their lightsabers were

representatives of "a more civilized time." The planet Jedha also symbolizes the loss of

paradise through the absence of the Jedi, with a massive toppled statue of a Jedi lying in

ruins and the temple on Jedha being deprived of the kyber crystals that represent the

supernatural power of the Jedi and their lightsabers. These elements, along with Lyra's

appearance and her gift to Jyn, clearly connect R1 to the public memory of ANH through

the Jedi.

     Paradise and evil. Paradise is also represented in the Ersos' exile life, though

Edwards contrasts this with another sort of paradise. The Ersos' farm life seems simple,

and there is clearly a harmony and love between them that is shattered by Krennic's

arrival. As Jyn's dream sequence shows, however, there was apparently a time when

Galen and Lyra lived comfortably as citizens of the Empire rather than as the

conscientious exiles withdrawn to simple farm life. In Jyn's recollective dream, Galen clearly wears an Imperial uniform and Lyra some sort of ornate Imperial fashion, and they're talking cordially with Krennic in what seems to be a well-furnished metropolitan apartment. Edwards is clearly contrasting the two lifestyles, expanding the theme to show that evil, as well as good, can offer a form of paradise. Paradise in the American monomyth is typically the idealized realm of the peaceful community that the hero rises to protect; however, such portrayals often overlook real life issues that plague those communities. To alter this problematic theme, Edwards shows that in addition to the ease with which paradise can be irreparably shattered by the acts of a villain like Krennic, evil can also offer luxury and a peaceful existence.

   Paradise in jeopardy on Yavin IV. The base planet of the Rebel Alliance, Yavin IV appears in R1 as it did in ANH. Again it is a beautiful and lush world dominated by ancient ziggurats and dark forests. Edwards uses shots that resemble ANH to help audiences understand that this is the same setting. The shot of a soldier standing on a tower and monitoring the departure of Cassian's shuttle is a nearly exact recreation of a shot in which a similar soldier on a similar tower monitors the departure of the fighters who attack the Death Star in ANH. The Rebel Alliance found on Yavin IV is less unified, however. Unlike the Yavin IV of ANH, however, R1's Yavin IV is not the home to a group of idealistic freedom fighters who are unified in dedication to their cause. Here Edwards again addresses the problematic theme of paradise by portraying a community with flaws rather than a perfectly ordered society. This also changes the public memory of the Alliance in ANH, which is now tarnished with the understanding

that the idealistic group of freedom fighters Luke finds on Yavin IV is the last remnant of a fractured community.

Though the heroes of ANH get to return from the battle against the Death Star to celebrate in a triumphant ceremony, the heroes of R1 instead all meet their fate. Though they initially hope to retrieve the data from Scarif and leave, as their mission wears on it becomes clear that Jyn, Cassian, and their companions will not live to see the restoration of paradise. ANH, following Campbell's monomyth, saw its central hero return from battle to celebration and a better world. But in American monomyths, the hero rarely enjoys or becomes a part of the paradise he preserves. Edwards takes this one step farther in R1. The heroes do not get to participate in the paradise they fight to preserve for others. Neither do they live to see the restoration of that paradise for others. Worse, they die without any assurance that the plans they steal will even be used against the Death Star successfully. Rather than sharing in paradise, they must be content in sacrificing themselves to preserve the mere opportunity of saving paradise for others. Edwards infuses R1 with a grim realism, altering the public memory of ANH by showing that not every hero receives a reward for his or her efforts. For every hero who is honored in ANH, another hero died forgotten in the sands of a devastated world in R1.

In R1 Edwards re-examines the theme of paradise Lucas implemented in ANH. Though Edwards evokes this theme with the Ersos' simple farm life and imagery from the Old Republic, he also transforms the public memory of the paradise theme by showing that the Empire is capable of offering an evil form of paradise and that the seemingly unified paradise presented by the Rebel Alliance on Yavin IV is sullied by bickering. These transformed elements correctively address the underrepresentation of

societal problems that plagues the American monomythic theme of paradise, updating the theme to reflect modern audience expectations of realism.

Frontier. Though Edwards does not dwell on the frontier theme as Lucas did in ANH, Edwards does clearly establish and then go on to modify the theme to address problematic elements of the American monomyth. I break this theme down into several elements frontier imagery, frontier setting, and frontier savagery, and frontier vigilantism. I will first analyze frontier imagery.

Frontier imagery. Edwards establishes R1's frontier setting early in the film by using key symbolic imagery. Though the Ersos live on a lush world, their farmstead is populated with the same kind of moisture vaporator units Luke's family used. Given that Luke's family used them to gather moisture on a desert world, it is unclear what purpose they serve in R1 other than to create a visual connection to ANH. Additionally, Edwards focuses a shot on a glass of blue milk sitting on the Ersos' table as they hurry around packing their belongings. Though the item seems like an insignificant prop on its own, blue milk was a beverage Luke's family shared around the table. Though Edwards does not spend a lot of time establishing the frontier theme as a part of Jyn's young life, he uses these key pieces of imagery to forge a connection to that theme as it was portrayed in ANH.

Frontier setting. Just as Mos Eisley served as a frontier city in ANH, Jedha City fulfills this role in R1. Occupied by the Empire just like Mos Eisley, Jedha City is swarming with Stormtroopers and Imperial vehicles. The dense streets are packed with aliens and humans alike, all engaged in various occupations. As I mentioned previously, the same two patrons of the Mos Eisley bar who harass Luke bump into Jyn as she and

Cassian make their way through the streets of Jedha CIty. One of the thugs even says,

"hey, you just watch yourself," a snippet of a line he also delivers in ANH. By

referencing these two thugs, Edwards is clearly going to some effort to call upon the

memory of the frontier theme as Lucas constructed it in ANH.   Given that the

implausible coincidence serves no discernable plot purpose, it seems evident that the

reference is present as memory work on Edwards' part. To further emphasize the point,

Jedha City is patrolled by Stormtroopers looking for a missing pilot, just as the

Stormtroopers in Mos Eisley searched for the missing droids. This parallel plot element

emphasizes that the events of R1 and ANH are a part of the same overall sequence.

Frontier savagery. Saw's guerilla troops play the role of frontier savage, though

Edwards expands upon this theme from ANH. In ANH, Lucas used the Sand People to

fulfill the role of savage with their indecipherable roars, violence, looting, and nomadic

desert-dwelling ways. As scholars have pointed out, the American monomythic frontier

theme of the savage tends to rely on stereotypes of indigenous peoples. By casting Saw's

guerilla fighters as the savages in R1, Edwards transforms this theme. The insurgents are

all covered from head to toe in mismatched robes and armor, calling to mind the manner

in which the Sand People are outfitted. They seem to inhabit remote areas in the

wilderness reminiscent of the isolated canyon where the Sand People attacked Luke. The

leader of the group speaks in a harsh-sounding alien language, but the words are subtitled

and Rook understands them in stark contrast to the Sand People's unintelligible grunts.

The insurgents behave in a manner that is indicative of the role of savage. They are

unwilling to engage Rook in conversation when he says he has an urgent message for

Saw. Instead of addressing his concerns, they put a bag over his head and drag him

away. By transferring the role of savage from a group defined by their culture to a group defined by their ideology and behavior, Edwards averts the problematic version of the frontier theme that appears in ANH.

   Frontier vigilantism. Unlike the vigilantes of the American monomyth who take the law into their own hands as vigilantes, or the heroes of ANH who mow down Stormtroopers without question, the heroes of R1 often engage in acts of violence, but do so with clear signs of regret. Edwards alters the public memory of ANH by casting doubt on the moral certainty of those dedicated to the Rebel cause. I have already explained Cassian's struggle, but he stands here as the prime example of someone who kills because he is ordered to and regrets doing so. Cassian's decision not to simply follow orders and shoot Galen is tempered by his friendship with Jyn. In the relatively morally simple conflict Lucas constructs in ANH, it seems unlikely that any of the film's Rebel characters would relent if given the opportunity to take an Imperial life. Luke destroys the Death Star, killing all aboard. This action results from an obvious desire for self-preservation and is in the best interest of the galaxy, but Luke's destructive act is accompanied by great fanfare rather than remorse for the lives lost on the Death Star. In contrast, Rook seems hesitant and shaken after shooting Stormtroopers, Jyn resents being raised in the violent life of a guerilla fighter, and Chirrut and Baze seem to fight only out of a sense of loss over their religious order. Galen lived with immense feelings of regret about playing servant to the Empire, but he did so to achieve the higher purpose of sabotaging the weapon. Each of them engages in violent or unlawful acts, but none of them do so without some form of contemplation or remorse. Though heroes in R1 defy

the galaxy's Imperial government, Edwards makes it clear that they do so with

reservations, rather than with the moral certitude of vigilante heroes.

The frontier theme is prevalent in R1 just as it is in ANH. Edwards evokes the

frontier theme with specific imagery and settings, but he also transforms and addresses

problematic aspects of the theme by replacing the Sand People with Saw's soldiers and

by shattering the moral certainty of the vigilante-like violence that pervades ANH.

Evil. Edwards alters the public memory of ANH by presenting another side to the

Empire in R1, blurring the parallel between ideological and moral lines Lucas draws in

ANH. In addition to that, Edwards also expands upon the theme of evil by emphasizing

it in the character of Darth Vader and the imposing presence of the Death Star. I divide

this theme into the elements of Imperial good, Rebel evil, Death Star emphasis, and

Vader emphasis. I will first address the theme of Imperial good.

Imperial good. Galen serves as R1's example of an Imperial officer who does not

coincide with the ideological and moral divisions presented in ANH. Though Galen is

clearly associated with the Empire and works on a project that ultimately results in the

death of countless people, he does so because of coercion and with the noble ultimate

purpose of sabotaging the project. While a flashback scene discussed earlier points to a

previous cordial association with Krennic and an apparently comfortable lifestyle in the

Empire, R1 makes it clear that Galen had a change of heart and decided to act for the

greater good. Likewise, Rook defects at great personal risk to himself to deliver Galen's

message. Both Galen and Rook take these risks willingly, and ultimately pay with their

lives for their moral decisions. Nowhere in ANH does an Imperial character appear to

have a concern for the greater good. Perhaps the most generous act by an Imperial in the

film is carried out by an officer who warns Tarkin about the small threat posed by the Rebel attack on the Death Star, and even that could be dismissed as an act of self-preservation by an officer hoping to save his own skin in the process of saving Tarkin. Edwards deconstructs the simplistic "Imperial equals bad" formula established by Lucas in ANH. Edwards modifies the public memory of ANH by averting the oversimplification of evil prevalent in American monomyths, giving moral ambiguity to the Empire in R1.

  Rebel evil. In addition to demonstrating that Imperials are not always bad, Edwards makes it clear in R1 that Rebels are not always good. Saw is paranoid and unbalanced, and the Rebel Alliance proper is unwilling to work with him openly because of his extreme tactics. This extremism is perhaps most evident in Saw's violent torture of Rook using Bor Gullet. Likewise, it is a group of Saw's soldiers who commit an attack in Jedha City that clearly endangers civilians such as the child who Jyn saves. Though Saw seems to hold to the noble goal of overthrowing the Empire, his methods, morals, and mental stability are all suspect. Saw's behavior demonstrates that just as not all Imperials are bad, not all Rebels are truly good. The same holds true for Alliance leaders like General Draven who deceives Jyn about the nature of her mission and orders Cassian to assassinate Jyn's father despite Jyn's good faith participation in the mission as a means of contacting her father. By altering the categories of Imperial and Rebel to reflect more realistic moral ambiguity, Edwards updates the public memory of ANH to better reflect the sensibilities of a modern audience who is accustomed to such themes. In addition to the questioning of established moral categories that is inherent in postmodern thought, American entertainment has also turned to stories in which typically heroic characters,

such as American soldiers, may in fact be the ones committing atrocious acts or

employing morally questionable forms of warfare such as torture or assassination.

Edwards constructs a story in R1 that, because of its connections to ANH, helps the

original film to more closely reflect a modern audience's expectations.

  Death Star emphasis. In addition to blurring the factional lines separating good

and evil, Edwards intensifies the theme of evil. For example, he takes steps to amplify

the threat of the Death Star. In a shot that shows the installation of the laser dish into the

station, Edwards begins by focusing on a massive Imperial Star Destroyer, the same class

of ship that pursued Princess Leia in the beginning of ANH. Panning away from the ship,

it is shown to be miniscule in comparison to the Death Star. More Star Destroyers appear

in frame around the perimeter of the station, dwarfed in scale. The Death Star appears to

be thousands of times larger than one of the vessels. The only ships shown in

comparison to the Death Star in ANH are the small fighters the rebels use and the

Millenium Falcon. These smaller vessels are miniscule by comparison to the Star

Destroyers, so the Death Star never gets such an extreme comparison in ANH. Edwards

seems to be emphasizing the Death Star's size as a means of enhancing the intimidating

nature of the station beyond what was done in ANH. Likewise, Edwards demonstrates

the destructive nature of the Death Star. In ANH, the weapon only fires once: when

destroying Alderaan. In R1, the Death Star is fired twice at low power. Rather than

presenting the instantaneous explosion of the planet Alderaan, which takes place so

quickly as to almost render the destruction abstract, the low power firings of the Death

Star on Jedha and Scarif give the audience an opportunity to spend more time observing

the weapon's destructive power. The blast on Jedha warps the ground into a title wave

that washes over the landscape and swallows Saw's base, and the blast on Scarif creates a mushroom cloud-like shockwave that travels across the landscape and eventually swallows Jyn and Cassian. These elaborations on the Death Star's size and destructive power modify the public memory of ANH by enhancing the station's image as a threat. When R1's audiences watch ANH, they will do so as greater witnesses to the Death Star's power, and will therefore understand the station to be a greater threat.

 Vader emphasis. Edwards also elaborates upon the central figure evil figure of ANH: Darth Vader. Though Vader is less central to R1's plot, Edwards includes him and builds him up to be a greater threat. Edwards first gives the audience a glimpse of Vader floating upright but fully immersed in a chemical bath, presumably with some sort of medical or preservative purpose. Through a haze of smoke as the container drains, a viewer can briefly discern Vader's burn-scarred skin and missing arms, details not rendered in ANH. The next shot shows Krennic waiting to speak with Vader, who is then shown in shadowy profile against a bright light. Vader's profile alone is enough to make his shadow recognizable to audiences. Visually, this entrance somewhat mimics Vader's entrance in ANH, in which he also first appears surrounded in the smoke resulting from the Imperial attack on Leia's ship. Vader's shadow looms over Krennic, showing that despite Krennic's apparent evil and ambition, Vader is an even greater and more primal form of evil. Vader's voice still holds its hollow, mechanical sound, and he still maintains his cruel mockery, this time offering Krennic a false apology for keeping him waiting. Krennic's voice even catches in his throat as Vader takes a step closer to him. When Krennic presses his point too far, Vader becomes offended and uses his dark

powers to choke Krennic, coldly warning him to be careful not to "choke" on his aspirations.

While Edwards uses these scenes call upon Vader's iconic public memory, it is in Vader's slaughter of rebel troops that Edwards emphasizes Vader's evil in a way that Lucas did not in ANH. Boarding the last Rebel carrier, Darth Vader's mechanical breath is heard coming from the end of an unlit hallway. His red lightsaber ignites, rendering his armored form a dark silhouette. Rebel soldiers desperately try to kill him, but he demonstrates the full powers of a Sith Lord, deflecting all of their shots with his lightsaber, cutting men down with slashes, pulling the weapons supernaturally from their grips, levitating one man up against the ceiling and viciously slashing his torso, and impaling one rebel soldier against a door with his lightsaber. Throughout this scene of carnage, the hallways are lit only by the red glow of Vader's lightsaber and punctuated bursts of blaster fire. Though Lucas portrayed Vader's swordsmanship in his fight with Obi-Wan in ANH, the original film's duel lacked anything approaching the intensity of Vader's savagery in R1. Whether the slower pace of Vader's lightsaber scene in ANH was due to limitations in costuming, physical capabilities of the actors, differences in graphics technology, or simply differences in audience expectations regarding violence, R1 significantly modifies the public memory of Darth Vader by transforming him from an imposing but awkward swordsman into a truly terrifying killing machine. Viewers who watch ANH after watching R1 will be hard pressed to avoid recalling Vader's violent display of power, rendering him even more intimidating than he was in the original film. Edwards evokes Vader's memory, but then elaborates on it. In the process, Edwards alters the public memory of the original film. The literature I discuss in this

chapter points to the greater prevalence of violence. In the post-9/11 era, audiences are accustomed to stronger portrayals of violence. Watching Vader use his lightsaber against Obi-Wan in ANH would hardly inspire fear in today's media environment. Though Vader's original portrayal may have once been capable of inducing fear, it seems less likely that an audience today would find him menacing. By ramping up the violence and cloaking the character in darkness, Edwards restores to Vader some of the fear he once earned from audiences.

Conclusion

In summary, I began this chapter with an overview of the audience and context of R1. I discussed the film's plot, offered a literature review that explained the concept of public memory, and elaborated upon the American monomyth by highlighting its problematic aspects. I asked how R1 transformed the myth created in ANH, and what those transformations mean for the public memory of the *Star Wars* franchise.

In R1, Edwards made clear use of Campbell's hero's journey, just as Lucas did in ANH. This helped establish R1 as a mythic narrative, creating a key similarity between the film and its predecessor, ANH. Though Edwards followed the pattern of the departure, he applied an inversion to each step as it pertained to Jyn in contrast to Luke. Jyn experienced a forced call to action at a young age, whereas Luke eagerly accepted adventure. Jyn refused the Rebel Alliance only to join out of obligation to her father, whereas Luke responded eagerly once freed of his obligation to family. Unlike Luke's benevolent mentor, Obi-Wan, and his worldly and roguish friend, Han, Jyn received an education on the harsh realities of the universe from her mentor, Saw, only to find supernatural guidance in her companion, Chirrut. Jyn entered the crossing of the first

threshold in Jedha City, well-acquainted with the Empire, whereas Luke directly encountered the Empire for the first time in Mos Eisley. Luke entered the belly of the whale on the Death Star to save Princess Leia, whereas Jyn and her companions had to free themselves from Saw's fortress. Edwards' clear use of the hero's journey in R1 creates a similarity with ANH, but Edward's reversal of each mythic theme as it pertains to Jyn rather than Luke also created room for storytelling with a jaded heroine and darker themes, updating the public memory of the franchise to reflect a postmodern, post-9/11 audience's expectations.

Edwards also transformed the public memory of ANH by evoking but then altering elements of the American monomyth found in both films. Edwards connected with the theme of violence from ANH by retaining *Star Wars'* stylized portrayals of action and combat, but expanded upon the theme, portraying both casually and remorsefully violent characters, showing more intense forms of violence such as violence towards children and torture, and placing greater emphasis on heroes as the victims of violence in their sacrificial deaths. Edwards continued to demonstrate the failure of the Empire as an institution, but expanded upon the theme and addressed the problem of the spectator democracy in the American monomyth by demonstrating that the Rebel Alliance also failed until brave individuals stepped up with renewed commitment to protecting their society. Edwards also expanded the theme of paradise by presenting a form of paradise offered by evil rather than good and a less idealized portrayal of the Rebel Alliance. He transformed the frontier theme by redefining savagery as a function of ideological difference and behavior rather than cultural difference. Finally, Edwards gave much-needed nuance to the previously firm distinction between the good Rebels and

the evil Imperials, while also intensifying the evil threats presented both by the Empire's superweapon: the Death Star, and its most terrifying agent: Darth Vader.

Edwards' alterations of these themes serve to address the problematic nature of the American monomyth as it appears in ANH. For Kathleen Kennedy, Edwards, and Disney, R1 served the purpose of updating the public memory of the foundational myth of the *Star Wars* franchise. When Disney made a $4.05 billion investment in the purchase of Lucasfilm, the goal was undoubtedly to maintain the popularity, cultural relevance, and profitability of the *Star Wars* property. Given the differences between the 1977 audience of ANH and the postmodern, post-9/11 audience of R1 in 2016, I argue that R1 was likely conceived with the purpose of updating the public memory and therefore the viability of the original film. Because Disney continues to use ANH as one of the foundational texts in its new canon, it is essential for that text to remain coherent and relevant for modern audiences. Remaining relevant post-9/11 requires a willingness to explore themes such as torture, violence towards civilians, morally ambiguous protagonists, flawed societal institutions, collaborators, defectors, and truly terrifying forms of evil. Without discarding or replacing ANH, Edwards successfully crafted a story in R1 that retains the mythic quality of the original film but also explores modern, nuanced, and less problematic articulations of American monomythic themes. He then drops audiences into the opening moments of ANH with a new understanding of the *Star Wars* myth, successfully updating the public memory of the original film and renewing the *Star Wars* myth for Disney's ongoing exploration of the *Star Wars* universe.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I will provide an overview of each of the previous

chapters of this thesis. First, I will take a look at Chapter I's overview of the *Star Wars*

franchise and examination of canon and fandom. Then I will review Chapter II's analysis

of myth construction in *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (ANH), touch upon the

public memory of the *Star Wars* franchise covered in Chapter III, and then re-examine

Chapter IV's discussion of the transformation of myth in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

(R1) before drawing some final conclusions. For now, I will commence with an

overview of Chapter I.

Franchise Overview

In Chapter I, I discussed the rhetorical situation surrounding *Rogue One: A Star*

Wars Story, *A New Hope*, and the of the *Star Wars* franchise as a whole. ANH was

released in 1977 with sporadic film releases through the years leading up to 2016's R1.

The franchise continues to grow, though its other films are beyond the scope of my

thesis. *Star Wars* is an important franchise in both academic and popular culture

contexts. The *Star Wars* series has inspired work in fields ranging from mythology, to

religion, technology, and design. Likewise, Lucas borrowed from a range of cinematic

influences in writing ANH, but as a result he produced a narrative that was readily

acceptable to a mass audience. Beyond standing as a juggernaut at the box office, *Star*

Wars has also inspired merchandising and multimedia, making it immensely financially

significant. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Disney was willing to invest

$4.05 billion in acquiring Lucasfilm and the rights to *Star Wars*.

Several key rhetors have influenced the *Star Wars* franchise. George Lucas

stands first and foremost as a key rhetor, responsible for creating the original film and

involved in episodes I-VI of the franchise in a variety of creative roles including writer,

director, and producer. Following the transfer of ownership to Disney, Lucas's friend

and fellow filmmaker, Kathleen Kennedy, took charge of Lucasfilm and created the

Lucasfilm Story Group to manage the overall direction and canon of the franchise under

Disney.   Kennedy is responsible for selecting Gareth Edwards to be the director of R1.

Edwards was beholden to Kennedy's wishes during production of the film, but he is

largely responsible for creative choices such as the film's dark ending in which all of the

heroes sacrifice themselves, a direction only possible because of Kennedy's flexibility.

Canon and Myth

Chapter I also established the importance of canon for fans of science-fiction and

fantasy franchises. Fictional universes have the ability to inspire enthusiasm that borders

on religious zeal, and as a result fans approach canonical installments in these franchises

as religious texts. Creators, or rhetors, play a critical role in negotiating canon with fans,

who may question a rhetor's choices if they feel alienated.

In Chapter I, I also provided a literature review of myth. Scholars have long

studied myth in a variety of contexts and from a variety of perspectives, but most salient

to this thesis is scholarship that points to the guiding function of myth. Myths serve as

foundational ideas for communities and cultures and help people understand how to go

about living a human life. Joseph Campbell in particular emphasized this view of myth

and argued for the existence of a monomyth, a fundamental myth found in one form or another in cultures throughout the history of human civilization. Scholars have identified a specific element of Campbell's myth, the hero's journey, throughout science-fiction and fantasy films of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Likewise, Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence argue that a distinctly American version of the monomyth, the American monomyth, has been present in America's culture since the earliest cowboy stories. The American monomyth features rugged or powerful vigilante heroes, portrayals of violence as a tool of redemption, the failure of institutions to protect citizens, paradises under threat from outside forces, frontier vigilantism and savagery, and figures of evil who stand in opposition to the hero.

Myth Construction in *A New Hope*

In Chapter II, I began with an analysis of ANH's audience. A sense of national unity and shared purpose that developed during World War II began to fall apart in the decades that followed due to public disillusionment with issues like Richard Nixon's public shame and the divisive Vietnam War. George Lucas was aware of this disillusionment and set out to craft a new myth that would inspire young people. In this chapter, I asked how ANH constructed myth according to both Campbell's hero's journey and Lawrence and Jewett's American monomyth.

My analysis of the departure stage of Campbell's hero's journey found that Luke went through each of the five steps. Luke's call to adventure came in the form of a plea for help from Princess Leia and an appeal from Obi-Wan to learn the ways of the Force and accompany him on an adventure to help Leia and the Rebel Alliance. Though Luke wished to join Obi-Wan, he engaged in refusal of the call due to his responsibilities to his

uncle and the farm. Deprived of that burden with the cruel murder of his aunt and uncle,

Luke accepted Obi-Wan's supernatural guidance, accompanying Obi-Wan on his quest

and learning about the Force. Luke crossed the first threshold in Mos Eisley, a town

serving as the border between backwater Tatooine's inhabitants and the inhabitants of the

galaxy. Finally, entering the belly of the mechanical whale known as the Death Star,

Luke faced death at the hands of a horrible monster dwelling in the bowels of the

station's garbage facilities but managed to escape, going on to save the Rebel Alliance by

destroying the Death Star. By walking Luke through each stage of the departure, Lucas

clearly established ANH as a myth in accordance with the monomythic hero's journey.

In addition to the hero's journey, I also explored how Lucas established themes

from the American monomyth in ANH. Violence permeates ANH with its space battles

and action scenes. The film's heroes are masters of violence and generally escape

unscathed from conflict. Lucas also establishes the failure of institutions with the corrupt

Empire's bickering officials, incompetent design, and its callous destruction of Alderaan.

There are some minor aspects of the Rebel Alliance that represent institutional failure,

but the Empire is much more obviously at fault. Lucas establishes a lost paradise through

Obi-Wan's narration about the Old Republic and the Jedi Knights. The Rebel Alliance

and its base on the lush world of Yavin IV also represent a type of paradise as the last

bastion of hope for a free galaxy. The frontier theme is evident in Lucas's portrayal of

Luke's family homestead and the savage desert-dwelling Sand People. Lucas crafted an

iconic representation of evil in Darth Vader, a menacing figure in appearance, physical

strength, supernatural power, and authority. Likewise, the arrogant and callous Grand

Moff Tarkin embodies evil through his casual destruction of the planet Alderaan and his

satisfaction at the Empire's increasing ability to rule through authoritarianism and fear. Therefore, I concluded that Lucas clearly established a myth in ANH in accordance with both Campbell's hero's journey and Lawrence and Jewett's American monomyth.

Public Memory of *Star Wars* from 1977-2016

Chapter III provided a brief overview of the public memory of the *Star Wars* franchise as it evolved over the period between 1977's release of ANH and 2016's release of R1. Lucas crafted two sequels to ANH in 1980 and 1983, rounding out a trilogy of films and Luke Skywalker's journey. In 1999, 2002, and 2005, Lucas released the prequel trilogy of films that told the tale of Luke's father Anakin's upbringing and fall to the Dark Side. In 1991, publisher Del Rey began a comprehensive, canonical expansion of the *Star Wars* narrative in novel form. This established the Expanded Universe, or EU. Computer and video games also told stories in the EU. *Dark Forces* is of particular note because it told the story of the theft of the Death Star plans in a completely different version of events than R1 portrays. With the purchase of Lucasfilm and the establishment of the Lucasfilm Story Group, Disney decided to reset the *Star Wars* canon using the six original films and the animated series *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels* as a starting point. The Lucasfilm Story Group developed the Legends label and applied that to all EU material, making it no longer canon. In addition to questions of canon, I also discussed the passionate fan culture surrounding *Star Wars*, which includes charitable costuming organizations, ravenous collectors, thousands of convention goers, and even a real-world religion.

Mythic Reconstruction in *Rogue One*

In Chapter IV, I analyzed the audience of R1. With the rise of postmodern thought and turbulent world events such as 9/11, audiences in the twenty-first century have witnessed a rise in violent images and dark themes in everything from the news media to films to young adult literature. This shift in tone set the stage for R1's darker themes. I also provided a plot synopsis of R1 and reviewed the scholarship on public memory. Though scholars have studied memory itself from diverse perspectives, public memory specifically refers to the way a rhetor talks about the past in order to accomplish present rhetorical goals. Public memory is applicable to an array of artifacts but is specifically prevalent in film.

I then provided a literature review of myth that specifically emphasized the problematic aspects of the American monomyth. First, I discussed how the American monomyth has traditionally failed to represent women or people of color as heroes. Additionally, the American monomyth frequently portrays violence and slaughter as a redemptive act rather than an inherently destructive one. Likewise, the theme of institutional failure encourages audiences to rely on mythic heroes to step in and save the day rather than participating democratically in solving societal ills. American monomythic portrayals of paradise tend to ignore societal problems and prefer stagnation rather than growth. The frontier theme also fails in that it tends to glorify vigilante justice and rely on stereotypical portrayals of people groups to serve as a story's savages. Finally, the American monomyth tends to oversimplify evil by creating clear distinctions between good and evil and ignoring the real motivations for good and evil acts. Jewett

and Lawrence called for a change to these themes, which my analysis reveals Edwards implemented in R1.

In my analysis of R1, I set out to answer the following questions: How does R1 transform the myth created in ANH? And what ramifications do those changes have for the *Star Wars* franchise and fandom? To evoke the public memory of R1, Edwards made key visual and narrative choices. Elements of R1's design, cameo appearances by ANH characters, references in the film's dialogue, and the nearly overlapping timelines of the two films all create a clear link between the 2016 and 1977 films. Edwards also clearly established each of the stages of the departure in R1, though he reversed them and in the process created a distinctly different narrative and tone for Jyn's journey than Lucas established in ANH with Luke. This is evident in Jyn's aversion to the Rebellion, her desire to avoid adventure, her twisted mentor Saw, and supernatural companion Chirrut, her experience with the Empire, and her role as rescued rather than rescuer in the belly of the whale. Edwards establishes R1 as a myth in the hero's journey just like ANH, but his reversal of story elements allows for darker themes in Jyn's journey. This changed the public memory of ANH but simultaneously allowed Edwards to construct a film that would be acceptable to the passionate *Star Wars* fandom as part of Disney's new canon.

It is in his portrayal of American monomythic themes in R1 that Edwards makes his most significant alterations to the public memory of the original film by addressing the problematic aspects of American monomythic themes in ANH. Edwards retained the stylized violence of ANH but expanded upon the theme by showing that civilians and heroes can be the victims of violence as well as evildoers. This is particularly evident in the sacrificial death of every one of R1's central protagonists. Likewise, he establishes

that characters like Cassian kill out of loyalty to a cause but feel great remorse at having

to do so. Edwards also shows the defector Rook as the victim of torture at the hands of

Saw's creature Bor Gullet, despite Rook and Saw's shared objectives, further

emphasizing the horrific nature of violence rather than its redemptive power. Edwards

evokes the theme of institutional failure, but applies it even-handedly to both the Empire

and the Rebel Alliance. Though the Rebel Alliance nowhere approaches the mass

destruction and cruelty of the Empire, Rebel leaders do condone killing sympathetic

allies, order secret assassinations, and ultimately fail to unite for their essential purpose in

their moment of greatest need. Edwards correctively addresses the problem of the

spectator democracy, however, by showing that it is Jyn and her fellow soldiers who are

willing to step up and sacrifice themselves to redeem society rather than waiting for a

mythical hero to do it for them. The theme of paradise is evident in R1, particularly in

the pastoral farm life of the Ersos. In contrast, however, Edwards shows the Ersos also

living comfortably in collaboration with the Empire before their self-imposed exile.

Yavin IV represents a paradise in R1 just as it did in ANH, but this time it plays host to a

fractured and disillusioned Alliance rather than a united group of idealists. The frontier

theme appears as well, though Edwards expands upon it by casting Saw's guerillas in the

role of savage rather than ANH's Sand People. Likewise, Edwards contradicts the moral

certitude of the American monomythic vigilante with heroes who regret their violent lives

spent in opposition to the government. Edwards transforms the theme of evil by

deconstruction the delineation between good rebels and bad Imperials established in

ANH with sympathetic Imperials, such as Galen and Rook, and villainous Rebels, such as

Saw and Draven. Edwards also expands upon evil, however, by placing emphasis on the

destructive power of the Empire's most fearsome weapon: the Death Star, and its most fearsome agent: Darth Vader.

Evoking each theme so clearly but then applying a transformative twist, Edwards uses R1 to address problematic elements of the American monomyth from ANH and, therefore, transforms the public memory of the original film. Likewise, Edwards' dark themes reflect the postmodern, post-9/11 expectations of audience members. Because of the powerful links between the two films narratively, thematically, and visually, the postmodern themes in R1 also become postmodern elements of ANH, updating the film's image for a modern audience.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I argue that Edwards successfully uses R1 to change the public memory audiences hold regarding ANH. Given that Kathleen Kennedy and the Lucasfilm Story Group have retained 1977's ANH as the foundational text for the new Disney-approved canon of *Star Wars* films and multimedia, Edwards' choices in R1 serve the essential function of updating that foundational text in a manner that renders it more believable for a contemporary audience. Likewise, Edwards' clear connections to the public memory served to craft a narrative that pays homage to ANH visually and narratively while thematically reflecting the franchise's mythic roots. Given the near-religious zeal with which fans of science-fiction franchises approach foundational texts, it is clear that while R1 needed to reflect contemporary themes, it also needed to give appropriate recognition to the franchise's roots. Edwards accomplished these seemingly disparate objectives simultaneously by following Campbell's monomythic hero's journey with Jyn but reversing each element of her path in relation to Luke, and by clearly

evoking elements of the American monomyth used by Lucas in ANH but addressing the problematic aspects of those themes by transforming or expanding upon them. R1 stands as a both a proud pillar of the *Star Wars* myth and a mirror which reflects on that myth from a contemporary perspective.

Since beginning of this thesis, the *Star Wars* franchise has continued to expand with the release of *Star Wars – Episode VII: The Last Jedi* in December of 2017 and the upcoming release of *Solo: A Star Wars Story* in May of 2018. Fan reaction to *The Last Jedi*, as well as my own personal experience with the film, suggest that the film took a disruptive approach to the *Star Wars* myth. The film represents the first entry of writer and director Rian Johnson in the *Star Wars* franchise, but Disney has announced plans for him to craft his own new trilogy of *Star Wars* films sometime after J.J. Abrams' completion of the upcoming *Star Wars – Episode IX*. Both projects remain untitled as of this date. With Rian Johnson's importance to the future of the franchise, as well as the disruptive nature of the film, *The Last Jedi* merits examination by scholars concerned with both the *Star Wars* myth and the future of the franchise. Likewise, *Solo* will be the second "*Star Wars* Story" film (with R1 being the first). Given how much public memory work and transformation of myth Edwards implemented in R1, director Ron Howard's *Solo* will merit similar exploration, especially given that it is centered on a staple character from ANH. In particular, I am curious as to how *Solo* will portray Han Solo, given that the character of Han is demonstrative of many American monomythic themes. Violence, a vigilante attitude towards the law, and a desire to flee from community rather than integrate with it are all American monomythic elements of his character as in existing canon, and I hypothesize that Howard will address some, if not

all, of those themes in his upcoming film. *Star Wars* is one of the most prominent examples of myth in American culture, and as long as it maintains this prominence it will be worthy of the attention of myth scholars.

In summary, my thesis set out to explore the transformations of the myth and public memory of the *Star Wars* franchise implemented by director Gareth Edwards in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. My analysis of Lucas's 1977 film *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* revealed the presence of elements of both Joseph Campbell's monomythic hero's journey and themes from the American monomyth identified by Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence. Rather than simply replicating these themes in R1, Edwards clearly evoked each myth and therefore the public memory of the franchise, but simultaneously altered both memory and myth with reversals, transformations, and expansions of monomythic themes. Edwards updated the public memory of ANH, which is significant given that the 1977 film serves as the foundational text for Disney's new canon and ongoing entries in the *Star Wars* franchise. These updates are critical, given the differences between ANH's 1977 audience and the postmodern, post-9/11 2016 audience of R1. In addition to satisfying modern audience expectations, Edwards' connections to the myth and memory of the original film served as homages to ANH, a critical step in ensuring the interest of passionate, zealous *Star Wars* fans who are concerned with their canonical texts. By building a bridge from the franchise's past to its present, Edwards, Kennedy, and Disney have established a path for *Star Wars*' future.

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147

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