

Jeff LeJeune  
English 595  
Dr. Porter  
26 November 2007  
Seminar Paper

### Fall from the Sky: A Spiritual and Psychoanalytic View of Anakin's Turn to the Darkside

In 2005 Patricia C. Wrede received permission to write and release a children's novel based on the third installment of the most popular American stories of all time, George Lucas's *Star Wars*. Wrede's adaptation of Lucas's *Revenge of the Sith* is true to the film, the often identical dialogue providing the most visible evidence. Lucas's vision in writing the story was to chronicle "the rise, fall and redemption of Darth Vader" (Edwards 44). Vader is born Anakin Skywalker, a boy conceived without a father and raised as a slave. When he is discovered by a Jedi master, a test is run on him, revealing his extraordinary potential in the Jedi arts. He is assumed to be the chosen one from a very early age, the one that will bring balance to the Force, a prophecy that will aggrandize his arrogance and sense of entitlement as he grows. As his character develops over the course of the first two episodes, it becomes clear that Anakin's training in the Jedi arts by his master, Obi-Wan Kenobi, is not having a cumulative effect. The boy is gifted beyond any trainee in the history of the Jedi, but his attachment to his mother whom he has left behind as a child and his general distortions of reality warp his thinking. He is arrogant and impatient in his training. The audience witnesses this young boy transform from someone eager to practice the ways of the Jedi to one who looks for every opportunity to manipulate and circumvent them.

This defiant streak eventually consumes him in Lucas's third episode of the series, *Revenge of the Sith*. Palpatine, the Chancellor of the Republic who secretly doubles as the dark Sith Lord Sidious, is the enemy voice inside Anakin's head, flattering the young boy and testing his trust of the Jedi order. Further confusing Anakin is his love for Padme, whom he has secretly married and conceived a child with. Palpatine's sinister schemes in making Anakin distrust the Jedi take a tragic turn when he convinces the young warrior that the Jedi are against him since they do not allow marriage in the first place and would not be in favor of saving his wife Padme from future death. Anakin, unable to let go of his emotional attachment to Padme and consumed with the pursuit to save her, turns to the dark side and pledges his allegiance to Palpatine, the Sith Lord.

One of the realistic aspects of this tragic story is that Darth Vader is not just a robotic monster dressed in black. As Lucas says, in "the first film, people didn't even know whether there was a person there. They thought he was a monster or some kind of a robot" (qtd. in Edwards 44). It is in the second and third films (which are the fifth and sixth episodes in the story, following the aforementioned rise and fall of Anakin Skywalker) that the audience discovers that there is a man inside the suit. The audience also finds out that "Vader's done a lot of horrible things in his life that he isn't particularly proud of" (Lucas qtd. in Edwards 44). The man inside the black suit did have a heart once and that heart is embodied in Anakin, whom the audience sees develop in the prequel, falling to his demise in the third episode, *Revenge of the Sith*.

Foreshadowing of Anakin's ruin occurs early in the novel when the young warrior is pitted against Count Dooku, a former Jedi who, unbeknownst to Anakin, is also the apprentice of Palpatine. During a pause in the fierce light-saber fight, Anakin says to Dooku, "My powers have doubled since we last met," and the count responds, "Good, ...twice the pride, double the fall" (Wrede 20). Anakin fails to realize that his taunts are veils for anger. Not only does this anger fuel the darkside and therefore Dooku, but it also is one more step toward Anakin's eventual turn. He is arrogant in the face of a very powerful Sith here, and his eventual victory over Dooku does little to humble him.

Palpatine, fully aware of the Force as a Sith Lord himself, uses Anakin's rage to tempt him once Anakin has Dooku on his knees. He entices Anakin to kill the count, and the young warrior reluctantly does it, immediately feeling guilty. Here, Palpatine must be cunning if he is to keep the young warrior on his hook. First, he reminds Anakin of he and Dooku's history, saying, "It's only natural. He cut off your arm, and you wanted revenge" (Wrede 24). Palpatine is using the "eye-for-an-eye" approach to justice to soothe Anakin's guilt. John Bevere, in his book entitled *The Bait of Satan*, calls "bitterness...a root. If roots are nursed...they increase in depth and strength...[and] the offense will continue to grow" (139). Anakin's succumbing to his anger and desire for revenge does not suddenly take shape here in this scene; it has taken root earlier in the story and gotten stronger over time, culminating in his killing of Dooku. Palpatine, the Satan-figure, is simply preying on the flaw already there, a helping hand in the "harvest of anger" (Bevere 139).

Palpatine does not stop here in his attack on the young man's conscience. After assuring Anakin that it is acceptable to exact revenge on someone, he says that it is "natural." This attack on the young boy's identity is magnified when Palpatine reminds him that this isn't the first time he has done something like this. Anakin cannot help but remember his slaughter of the sand people after they killed his mother. Clearly, Anakin is unaware of the battle going on inside him. If one views Palpatine's voice as that inside Anakin which wants to destroy him, then what John Eldredge says makes sense, that the battle is not between us and an outside entity as much as it is between us and "a traitor within who wars against our true heart" (223). Eldridge calls this enemy side of us "the false self", the "flesh [that] is a weasel, a poser, a selfish pig" (224, 222). Palpatine's tactics here are brilliantly sinister, for in reminding Anakin that he has committed a similar slaughter before, he weakens the boy's resolve in fighting the good fight, hoping that the young boy's "battle feels lost before it even begins" (Eldridge 224).

In this one brief but telling exchange, Anakin allows Palpatine to do three things: 1) soothe his healthy guilt and make it a non-issue; 2) make his anger understandable given the fact that Dooku has severed his arm in a previous fight; and 3) attack his identity by making the young boy think that this is who he is, that it will be impossible to ever remove this anger. Bevere says that in giving in to bitterness, as Anakin does in his murder of Dooku, individuals "fall into a trap and are held prisoner to do the devil's will." Even more alarming, he says, is that they are unaware of that captivity (7). Anakin's understanding of the Force and his commitment to the Jedi cannot move forward with this dark lord twisting his mind,

and without even knowing it he has become a captive of Palpatine, an apprentice to the very Sith Lord he has been searching for to destroy.

Palpatine does not, however, just assuage Anakin's guilt. Even as far back as the storyline in *The Phantom Menace*, the first installment of Lucas's story, Palpatine flatters Anakin, telling him that he sees the young warrior becoming the greatest of all the Jedi. This courtship intensifies in *Revenge of the Sith* as Palpatine works to ensure the permanent capture of his prize apprentice. The chancellor reveals to Anakin his suspicions of the Jedi and appoints the young man "to be the eyes, ears, and voice of the Republic, ...[his] personal representative on the Jedi Council" (Wrede 64). Usually the Council appoints its own members, a fact Anakin is well aware of, but Palpatine woos him by saying the Jedi will need him more than he knows. Anakin has wanted to be a Jedi master for years, an honor never given to one as young as he, an honor Palpatine knows the Council will balk at.

Otto F. Kernberg would call Anakin's condition "narcissistic." He would also call Palpatine the voice that fuels it. The narcissistic personality is "excessive self-centeredness, overdependency on admiration from others, prominence of fantasies of success and grandiosity, avoidance of realities that are contrary to [the] inflated image of [the self], and bouts of insecurity disrupting [the] sense of...specialness" (505). Kernberg expands this definition when addressing the pathology of the relationship with others, asserting that the narcissist shows greediness and exploitative behavior and lives in a destructive mindset of entitlement (505). Palpatine's assumption that the Jedi will question his appointment of Anakin holds true when Jedi Master Yoda says, "Allow this appointment lightly, the Council

does not” (Wrede 66). Yoda calls the move by Palpatine “disturbing,” and though Anakin understands, he must contain his rage when Jedi Mace Windu informs him that they will not grant him the rank of Master even though he is now on the Council. “How can you do this?” Anakin asks them, “I’m more powerful than any of you! How can I be on the Council and not be a Master?” (Wrede 66). Here, Anakin’s narcissism and Palpatine’s hypnotizing words collide, exploding in a reaction not fit for any Jedi, much less for a young warrior. Palpatine has known Anakin’s self-centeredness and hunger for power all along, and he knows that a refusal of Anakin by the Council is just one more step in convincing the young man of a lie—that the Jedi are holding back everything to which Anakin is entitled.

After the Council meeting, Obi-Wan tells Anakin that he is “in a delicate situation.” Anakin interprets this as “divided loyalties” (Wrede 69), and perhaps for the first time the reader begins to grasp what it is the Chancellor is trying to do. Yes, it is clear that he is warping Anakin’s mind, but until now the issue of how the entire context, including the role of the Jedi, would play out was unclear. Obi-Wan informs Anakin that “the Council wants [him] to report on all the Chancellor’s dealings” (Wrede 71). The young warrior, stuck in the middle between the Chancellor and the Council, feels like he must choose, a predicament that frustrates him with his need to control. He describes Obi-Wan’s request as spying and treasonous, “something against the Jedi Code...[and] the Republic” (Wrede 72). Bevere asserts that pride “keeps you from dealing with truth. It distorts your vision...[and] causes you to view yourself as a victim” (8), and certainly we see here that Anakin has been clouded by the dark side. He does not even recognize that this assignment from the Jedi is identical to

the one Palpatine gave him before. The Chancellor has also asked Anakin to “spy”, but he shrewdly couples his request with the appointment of the young man on the prestigious Jedi Council. Anakin’s thirst for power and desire to be a Jedi Master blinds him to the motives behind each request; he views Palpatine’s as normal and the next logical step on his journey to greatness, the Jedi’s as treasonous and “out of place” (Wrede 72).

Now that Anakin is firmly entrenched in the mindset of victimhood, he is vulnerable to Palpatine’s next strategic move. The evil lord, we assume, has sensed that the Jedi have asked Anakin to report back to them on all of the Chancellor’s dealings. When Palpatine indicates that he suspects that the Jedi have asked him to spy on him, Anakin is in shock that he knows, admitting to the Chancellor his confusion. Palpatine is all too ready to prey on the young man’s troubles:

“Remember back to your early teachings, Anakin...All those who gain power are afraid to lose it...Even the Jedi.”

“The Jedi use their power for good!”...

“Good is a point of view, Anakin. And the Jedi point of view is not the only valid one...The Dark Lords of the Sith believe in security and justice also, yet they are considered—”

“—evil.” ...

“Evil...from a Jedi’s point of view. Yet the Sith and Jedi are similar in almost every way, including their quest for greater power....The fear of losing power is a weakness of both the Jedi and the Sith.” (Wrede 83-84)

It is truly chilling to examine the patience of Palpatine. His awareness of Anakin's wound and his move to cripple his strength is executed with "stunning accuracy," as Eldredge terms it (141). Palpatine knows that Anakin is divided between loyalties. He knows he has pledged himself to the Jedi code. He knows it will be virtually impossible to convince the young boy directly that the Jedi are bad. His strategy becomes the next best thing: to establish that the Sith and Jedi are equal. That good and evil are not absolutes, but "points of view." The Chancellor here is one of Bevere's "wolves [that] will tell people what they *want* to hear, not what they *need* to hear" (18). The doctrine of the Jedi has always frustrated Anakin, and now that he has a trusted voice tickling his ears with the things he's always wanted to hear, it automatically sounds right to him.

Though his change of subject shortly thereafter relieves Anakin's stress, Palpatine is merely moving on to the next front of attack. The evil lord, because he is trained in the ways of the Force, knows of Anakin's marriage to Padme and his fears of losing her. He tells Anakin the story of Darth Plagueis the Wise, a Sith Lord who became so powerful that he learned how to create life, a product of his discovery being the ability to keep the ones he cared about from dying. Anakin's interest is piqued, and Palpatine cunningly pulls the two issues in the young man's life together when he says, "It's not a story the Jedi would tell you" (Wrede 86). Palpatine has already succeeded in planting the equality of the Sith and Jedi in Anakin's head; now he has established Anakin's love for Padme—not the Code the young warrior has learned—as the determining factor in his choice. He is counting on Anakin

seeing the Jedi as secretive and grudging with the ways of the Force, the side unwilling to share with him an avenue to save the one he loves—a love he assumes is good.

The true nature of Anakin's love for Padme perhaps is not even love at all. It is addiction. Robert Moore calls this aspect of a man "the Shadow Lover," asserting that for "the Addict, the world presents itself as tantalizing fragments of a lost whole. Caught in the foreground, he can't see the underlying background...[nor] find the Oneness that would bring him calm and stability" (135). For a Jedi like Anakin, this "Oneness" is the personal balance in the Force he is trained to exercise. He is, however, "caught in the fires of love, roasting in the agony and the ecstasy of [his] own longings...[and] is unable to disincarnate, to step back, to act" (133).

Anakin's emotional paralysis is certainly accelerating his fall, but his devotion to the Jedi, in particular his master Obi-Wan holds him back. In a scene where we see the good in Anakin, the side that recognizes his flaws, he confesses to Obi-Wan, "I've disappointed you. I have been arrogant. I have not been very appreciative of your training. I apologize. ... But your friendship means everything to me" (Wrede 90). It is a very emotional scene because the reader is reminded of the good-hearted, caring little boy who was discovered in *The Phantom Menace*. It is emotional for Obi-Wan too; all of his "love for this difficult, talented, headstrong apprentice rushed forward" (Wrede 90). After he leaves Anakin behind to embark on his assignment to find General Grievous, he feels uneasy, "as if he'd said goodbye to his best friend and former apprentice for the last time" (Wrede 91). Indeed, it is the end of

their relationship as we've known it; the next time they meet will be against each other in the final, epic battle scene in which Anakin nearly dies.

This momentary flash of goodness, however, is short lived. When Jedi Master Mace Windu goes to the Chancellor's chamber to arrest him for not ending the war after General Grievous's death, the two engage in battle. Just before Anakin arrives on the scene—after Master Windu has already instructed him to stay at the Jedi Temple—Palpatine feigns defeat and allows Windu to stand over him with the light saber. What Anakin sees is the trap Palpatine has counted on: a Jedi appearing to be attempting an assassination attempt. But since Anakin already knows that Palpatine is the Sith Lord for whom they've been searching, the young warrior does not immediately defend him. But when Windu says, "He is too dangerous to be kept alive," Anakin instantly recalls Palpatine saying the very same thing about Count Dooku after Anakin killed him. The shattered young Jedi thinks, "If Jedi Master and Sith Lord made the same argument, [are] they really so different?" (Wrede 120).

Palpatine's previous attempt at equating the Sith and Jedi has succeeded, and now the only control factor is Anakin's love for Padme. When Windu raises his arm to levy the killing blow, Anakin deflects it, leaving Windu open to Palpatine's bolts of lightning. Responsible for this Jedi Master's death, Anakin cries, "What have I done?", but the damage has been done. Kneeling, he gives up, tossing the confusion and inner turmoil aside and pledging his allegiance to the Sith. "I will do whatever you ask," he says. "Just help me save Padme's life" (Wrede 121).

Of course, in the end, Padme does die, ironically at the hands of Anakin—now turned Darth Vader—and his anger. Anakin’s creator, George Lucas, describes his tragic hero as “a good boy who was loving and had exceptional powers, but how that eventually corrupted him and how he confused possessive love with compassionate love...His undoing is that he loveth too much” (Edwards 46). The fall of Anakin Skywalker is not only a modern myth, but also a parable whose themes transcend time. As Obi-Wan says just before their epic clash, Anakin has let the dark side twist his point of view until he becomes the very thing he swore to destroy. Bonnie E. Litowitz asserts that “unconscious fantasies may be viewed as motivated by needs, longings, and other motivational systems, such as seeking attachment, safety, or security” (205). Indeed, Anakin’s “motivational system” is his love for Padme, his decisions becoming ever-contingent on her. Once Palpatine equates the Sith and the Jedi, Anakin’s “unconscious fantasy” convincing him that the Jedi are against him prevails. Completely disconnected from reality, Anakin turns inward, blindly following his passions, destroying everything he once loved.

Works Cited

- Bevere, John. *The Bait of Satan*. Florida: Charisma House, 2004.
- Edwards, Gavin. "The Cult of Darth Vader." *Rolling Stone*. 2 June 2005: 42-46.
- Eldredge, John. *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001.
- Kernberg, Otto F. "The Almost Untreatable Narcissistic Patient." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. Ed. Steven T. Levy. 55.2 (2007): 503-39.
- Litowitz, Bonnie E. "Unconscious Fantasy: A Once and Future Concept." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. Ed. Steven T. Levy. 55.1 (2007): 200-28.
- Moore, Robert and Douglass Gillette. *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1990.
- Wrede, Patricia C. *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. Scholastic Inc., Lucasfilm Ltd, United States: 2005.