

Brock Allan

Prof. Fogli

HumCore H1CS

6/5/23

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith - The Fall of Liberty, A Political Warning and Worldbuilding Ideology in Modern Governance

Abstract

This paper explores the political and worldbuilding aspects of Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith and how the film serves as a political message and warning about the fall of democracy in modern-day governments. Drawing on the inspiration of real-world events, this paper examines George Lucas's intention behind the creation of the Star Wars saga and its relevance in teaching political lessons to newer generations. The paper also delves into the concept of liberty and its deterioration in the film's universe, drawing parallels with real-world governments such as Rome and the United States. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of worldbuilding in Star Wars and its role in shaping humanistic ideologies, through visual analysis of key scenes, dialogue, imagery, edits, and narration. The paper concludes by emphasizing the film's impact on viewers' understanding of governance and the importance of preserving liberty in society.

Introduction

Star Wars Episode 3 Revenge of the Sith is a future in which the liberty of our modern day governments falls. The downfall of the Republic closely mirrors that of our governments of modern day in class distinctions, political unrest, and unchecked power relations. The film illustrates that one does not create a tyrannical government, but it is given to them by the people who give away their freedom. The Republic is destroyed and rebuilt into the Galactic empire, destroying a world of liberty and replacing it with a world without it. This movie was created from inspiration of modern day events by George Lucas and serves as a warning of what may occur if we leave the government to its own devices. Not only does this movie create a world with governmental systems similar to ours, but it creates a sense of dread for the uselessness of said government. This gives viewers something to sympathize with in the real world, and fosters a community of fans who have had their worlds directly changed by this movie. I intend to visually analyze this movie, including dialogue, imagery, edits, and narration, to prove that not only is this movie a political message, but also a message specifically pertaining to liberty and the fall of democracy in modern day governments. To achieve this goal I will separate the analysis into multiple parts, starting with the inspiration of George Lucas, completing an analysis of multiple scenes, comparing the themes present with governments of modern day, and finishing with why star wars is important from a humanities worldbuilding perspective.

George Lucas and Star Wars as a Movie of Political Literary Merit

Revenge of the Sith is a movie created during a time of political and historical context, being released in 2005 following 9/11, the cold war, vietnam, and other real world events, which gives its themes a unique historical perspective. George Lucas, the creator and founder of star wars, took inspiration from various wars and political events when creating each star wars movie

as a means of teaching the newer generations of children. The literary merit of star wars is explained by Judith Briggs as “Films provide narratives and visual metaphors that function as tools for our imagination and learning. As such, films can be invaluable teaching tools” (Briggs 44). Christopher Klein discusses that during an interview with Boston Globe George stated, “I love history, so while the psychological basis of ‘Star Wars’ is mythological, the political and social bases are historical,” thus the events that occur in each star wars movie all closely resemble historical events in real life (Klein). For example, the empire is seen as a representation of Nazi Germany during WW2 and Emperor Palpatine is a wizard representation of Richard Nixon who was able to take over a government by acting nice and manipulating and corrupting. “According to J.W. Rinzler’s *The Making of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, when asked if Emperor Palpatine was a Jedi during a 1981 story conference, Lucas responded, No, he was a politician. Richard M. Nixon was his name. He subverted the senate and finally took over and became an imperial guy and he was really evil. But he pretended to be a really nice guy” (Klein). This gives us insight into types of events that influenced star wars, with each being political in nature. George himself providing the notion that certain characters are literal representations of real life people, but also the actions they take also closely resemble those of the latter, proves the fact that star wars does indeed have a political message, but the exact message needs to be found by analyzing the movie’s political scenes. Other examples that also prove that star wars has a political message include the empire being similar in visual representation to that of nazi germany, which is a similarity in both Klein and Briggs argument, “the Imperial officers’ uniforms and even Darth Vader’s helmet resemble those worn by German Army members in World War II” (Klein). Finding all these relations between political events in real life and those that occur in *Revenge of the Sith* and other star wars films proves that this film is political, and thus has a political message to teach its viewers, which I plan to analyze and determine in the following sections.

How Liberty dies as a view of worldbuilding

In Star Wars, Liberty is a corroded former shell of what we take liberty to be in the real world, corrupting a free world into no longer knowing what it means to be free. Liberty is defined as the state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one's way of life, behavior, or political views, this is not the case in the republic. The republic in its initial state is a government that is supposed to stand for freedom, but through corruption, greed, and bureaucratic red tape, is a shell of what it's supposed to stand for, it is a glistening egg with a rotten inside. To take this view into an interpretation for worldbuilding is to show that the world presented in this movie is both rebuilt and destroyed by political events, the egg is destroyed and rebuilt with the rot on the outside. This is also represented by events in the real world, where viewers may interpret the events shown as events that may and can occur in modern day governments. Therefore the worldbuilding that takes place here, is one that not only destroys and rebuilds a digital world, but the changing of the viewers world by considering the possibility that the events taking place in the movie, can and will happen to the governments of the viewers world.



Revenge of the Sith invokes a war that destroys a digital republic in a similar way to the fall of the Roman Republic in the real world. The image above takes place in a scene occurring at 1:35:36, where Palpatine is announcing the reorganization of the republic into the Galactic Empire, the fall of the republic. This shot in particular shows Palpatine in a higher standing than any other person in the room with red clothing, representing the bloody rule he will have in the empire. This red also represents the color of the republic and having palpatine wear this color specifically gives us the idea that palpatine has hijacked all the power of the republic, and wearing it shows that he decides the fate of the republic. The republic is very similar to Rome, who also fell from a republic into a dictatorship by a man who was smart enough to seize power. The power of a tyrant was achieved by Palpatine similar to Caesar, through “exploiting and exacerbating genuine weaknesses in the political system rather than creating or fabricating them” (Casey, Kenny). This shows that the republic was weak enough like the roman republic to be exploited by an individual, and the unicameral nature that these two republics shared had no other separation of power into other legislative branches. This allowed bureaucrats to corrupt their power to the point that the senate leader, being the chancellor or president, had no real power and needed to be replaced. Thus an opportunity for a tyrant to seize the government had presented itself, the government cant function with all the bureaucratic tape and needs someone to take control of it, “Palpatine had pushed her to seek the election of a new Chancellor, one who will take control of the bureaucrats and give us justice” (Casey, Kenny). This justice that the Naboo queen wants is justice of liberty, renewing the republic to a state in which liberty is able to shine in a state of freedom, she wants to rebuild this political world, but instead has been manipulated into destroying it. This travesty is dramatized spectacularly in the above image for all the senators were blind to Palpatine's overthrow of the senate despite clearly showing evil intent in this image. The sith eyes and decayed image of palpatine clearly shows the evil he wishes to enact, very similar to Julius Caesar in Rome who is often depicted

wearing red. I believe this comparison between the republic and Rome is being used by Lucas to explain the current state of the American government. The republic in its current state was unable to agree on various conflicts in the galaxy and separated into two warring factions similar to that of the Union and the Confederates with the Separatists in star wars having the name of the Confederacy of Independent Systems, or CIS for short. This is a direct correlation between events in star wars and that in America. Since the events of 9/11 and the Cold War, the United States government has been able to revoke more and more of its citizens rights, and we are approaching the government's total control over its people as seen in Episode 3. It only takes one individual with enough power over bureaucrats in America to overthrow the entire system and turn it into a dictatorship, "Palpatine also used his delegated powers to amass a large degree of unilateral authority and national security powers, and eventually deployed these emergency powers to brutally crush his opponents" (Casey, Kenny). The music in this scene starts gloomy, but immediately picks up with the imperial march once the empire is created, turning the republic into a more authoritarian military state, this is why the theme is called "Imperial march". The red of the republic turns into the gray of the empire, for the liberty, the color, has died to a dictator. The spectacle here is one of awe and inspiration for most, but others know, especially the viewers that have seen the original trilogy, what will occur now that this has happened. Liberty has fallen, what remains of the republic will be the government that replaces it, the empire has risen. In this scene the empire is accepted by the applause of the people, all the senators have accepted this change in power dynamic, "So this is how liberty dies, with thunderous applause" (Lucas 1:36:18). The characters themselves in the movie realize that liberty in the republic is gone, the empire has squashed their attempts at restoring it, the world they were trying to rebuild has been destroyed by Palpatine.



The Jedi order during the time of the republic are known as the guardians of justice and peace in the galaxy and before the clone wars, were the go to police force in the republic to resolve political conflicts, but have fallen from this grace they are supposed to represent. The Jedi are sent on missions by the senate to resolve disputes between conflicting senators, therefore the Jedi in this sense, truly represent liberty in the republic because they allow the wheels of the senate to turn and allow the senate to properly represent liberty. At the start of the war every Jedi is thrown into a military position with each throughout the war, slowly losing the status of the peacekeeper they were supposed to represent. The above image, occurring at 48:45, shows a scene in which the Jedi are discussing the various fronts of the war, showing that the Jedi order, due to the war, has become an order of militants, instead of an order of liberty. The floor of the building they are in in this image has an ornate decorative circle with reddish brown and yellow accents. The shape is of a circle which represents the wheel of the senate that I explained earlier. The Jedi sit on the outside of this inner circle, they are the outsiders that see and allow the liberty of the senate to truly be represented. The Jedi step into conflicts that need the distinction between liberty and justice. The skyline in the image is clear and sunny, but is starting to become cloudy, just like the vision of the Jedi. This war has spread the Jedi thin and even some of its members

can't afford to return to the order for this meeting which is why some of them appear as holograms in this image. What once was an order of peace, liberty and tranquility, is now an order filled with political war conflict and dissolution of what the Jedi order is supposed to stand for. The war has infected the order with the same corruption that infected the senate, they have become the same bureaucrats as the senators, and are stained in red tape of the sith," a poorly functioning system, where selfish (Sith-like) desires for power supersede principle and chaos and interpersonal drama abound, is fertile ground for bad things to happen and for the worst characteristics in people, including pathological narcissism, to emerge" (Guerrero). Through this change in the status of the Jedi order, liberty has begun to die, but it is going to die with Order 66. Order 66 is a contingency order for the grand army of the republic that states to execute all Jedi for treason against the republic. Once Palpatine reorganizes the republic into the galactic empire, he enacts this order, killing most of the Jedi in the galaxy and causing all members of the Jedi council to exile themselves. The removal of the Jedi from the galaxy removes what they stood for: Justice, liberty, and freedom. A world without Jedi is a world without liberty, which can be represented in the real world. America is a country filled with Political parties and fake news with the goal of persuading people to one side or another without explaining the greater picture. Without people who can distinguish right from wrong on actions committed by our real world government, nothing will change. In America the people have the right to overthrow the government when they believe their liberty to be infringed upon, yet even though our liberty has been violated multiple times, the people still don't overthrow the government. One would ask why this is so, and I believe it is because there is not enough Jedi in the real world, or people who have an outside view, people who can distinguish between liberty and justice. The news of modern day has turned the American people into a generation of political zombies where people

grow up voting for who they are told instead of considering why they should be voting in the first place. This is why star wars is a political message for the future, it is a warning that if we allow these zombies to control our government, a sith lord will take the opportunity to rise to power and turn our republic, our democracy, into tyranny. In star wars and the real world, “there is no room for complacency when lives and other vital things are at stake, because, as the story illustrates, evil and destruction can be insidious and difficult to see” (Guerrero). Star Wars is not just a mythological wizard adventure, but a political dichotomy where the future of liberty is ever changing in a world of zombie representation and tyrannical oppression.



Revenge of the Sith is a future message for the fall of the United States government because both parallel themes of democratic erosion, loss of liberty, and disillusionment. I explained earlier that Lucas took inspiration from real world events that involved America, including 9/11, the Cold war, and WWII, when making Revenge of the Sith. I also explained how in America, the people are becoming political zombies as a result of not understanding what liberty truly represents. Through analyzing the fall of Rome and the Jedi, I have inherently analyzed how the government and the people fall to the mercy of a tyrant by not realizing that they have the power to overthrow or prevent the rise of a dictatorship. This fall traps the people

into a relationship where they have no real power, similar to the above image. The above image, occurring at 2:08:07, shows how Darth Vader is trapped in a mechanical body at the mercy of his master Emperor Palpatine, which parallels the people and the United States government. In the removal of liberties following the events of 9/11, the United States government has started to become tyrannical, creating a dark future or “an era of surveillance, of illegal wiretaps, and unlawful searches, when various acts were passed into law with hardly a whimper from the public or congress” (Carvalho 79). Palpatine, like the United States government in this fashion, has changed the process of liberty in a republic by circumventing the entire process through manipulation, bureaucratic red tape, and providing disillusionment to the American people. Following 9/11, many directives and acts were passed to better protect the American people from terrorism but “beyond the antidemocratic principles by which such legislation was advanced, what makes these contemporary directives so chilling, are not only their historical legacies that go back to the dawn of the Cold War, but also the veiled intentions embedded in them to consolidate all government power to the executive branch” (Carvalho 79). These acts were passed to provide the American people more protection but in reality were a means to allow the government more power over the people by violating liberties of the people. This is why I believe the political message that *Revenge of the Sith* is supposed to be interpreted specifically for the United States as it has already started to erode the liberty it is supposed to protect and represent, just like the Republic. This image specifically provides the notion that the American people are currently trapped in the suit of Darth Vader, forever tortured and tormented by a master of evil and greedy ambition.

Worldbuilding, a Humanistic Star Wars Ideology

Revenge of the Sith, being a Science Fiction movie, is a world in which multiple worlds are composed and created in tandem with building species with various ideologies, and therefore creates an ideology of building worlds similar and different from those of our own.

Worldbuilding, from a humanistic perspective, is the process of creating and cultivating worlds with the intent purpose of testing human epistemology, and since Revenge of the Sith is a world that was created to affect the viewers knowledge of politics, worldbuilding is then an ideology of Star Wars. This ideology is what allows Science Fiction to be used as a compelling humanistic teaching tool. A good piece of narration provides the best response from the viewer, “a good story about a possible future, with its drama, sensory detail, and nuances, is psychologically more compelling and realistic than an abstract futurist scenario or statistical prediction. Further, science fiction also personally draws us into a rich vicarious experience of the future through vivid and memorable characterizations” (Zaidi 20). Through providing a story of the fall of government and liberty, Lucas has given the viewers a story that created and cultivated a vast community of dedicated more informed fans. Star wars is important not only in Science fiction, but also in the world of humanities with the discourses between star wars fans proving its importance. These discourses between fans discuss the objects in the film such as armor, tanks, and lightsabers which all exist within the filmind, or what is known as “film thinking”. “Film-thinking is (most often) realized, correctly, as an intention towards recognisable objects (characters, sunsets, guns); as a result, it normally accords with our experience of everyday life,” therefore the objects that provoke discourses because of star wars, further prove the point that star wars creates humanistic discourse and a world of Science Fictional epistemology (Winters 234). These discourses that make and change peoples epistemology, therefore creating a

worldbuilding ideology, proves that Revenge of the Sith is a notable piece of modern scholarly literature in the world of Humanities.

Conclusion

The republic has fallen, liberty has fallen, an order has fallen, a future message has fallen into our hands. Revenge of the Sith portrays a political message that it is indeed the people who allow governments to fall by not taking action or realizing their greed corrupts the greater purpose for their government. This message is a real world message, and has the specific aim of teaching newer generations to learn to be a jedi, not a political zombie. This digital world is destroyed and rebuilt to explain this message, so that it may build a better real world. Therefore my addition to the scholarly convention surrounding Revenge of the Sith is that this worldbuilding project is used to teach its viewers what it actually means to be free, through creating, destroying, and rebuilding worlds involving liberty.

Works Cited

Lucas, G. (Producer/Director). (2005). *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*. [Motion Picture]. United States. Lucasfilm Ltd. & 20th Century Fox Entertainment

Briggs, Judith. "Star Wars, Model Making, and Cultural Critique: A Case for Film Study in Art Classrooms." Taylor & Francis, 17 Nov. 2015,
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00043125.2009.11519036>.

Carvalho, Edward J. "Star Wars and 'Star Wars': Teaching Pre-9/11 Literature as Post-9/11 Reality." *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2011, pp. 70–95. *JSTOR*,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41445151>. Accessed 6 June 2023.

Conor Casey, David Kenny. "How Liberty Dies in a Galaxy Far, Far Away: Star Wars, Democratic Decay, and Weak Executives, Law & Literature." Taylor & Francis, 10 Nov. 2021,
<https://www.tandfonline.com/share/MVBXTDCYUQWGWKMHSME?target=10.1080/1535685X.2021.1991610>

Guerrero, A.P.S., Jamora, M.J. The Fall and Redemption of People and Systems: Potential Lessons From the "Star Wars" Saga. *Acad Psychiatry* 31, 485–490 (2007).
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ap.31.6.485>

Klein, Christopher. "The Real History That Inspired 'Star Wars'." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 17 Dec. 2015, <https://www.history.com/news/the-real-history-that-inspired-star-wars>.

Winters, Ben. "THE NON-DIEGETIC FALLACY: FILM, MUSIC, AND NARRATIVE SPACE." *Music & Letters*, vol. 91, no. 2, 2010, pp. 224–44. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40871578>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2023.

Zaidi, Leah. "Worldbuilding in Science Fiction, Foresight and Design." *Worldbuilding in Science Fiction, Foresight and Design*, jfsdigital.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/03-Zaidi-Worldbuilding.pdf. Accessed 30 May 2023.