

TRULY SKYWALKER?
THE MANY LUKE SKYWALKERS: A CASE STUDY IN DERIVATION
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INTRODUCTION

In 1977, George Lucas introduced the world to a young intergalactic farm boy named Luke Skywalker (henceforth “Luke” for clarity)¹. Luke went on to star in many works. Yet Lucas was originally worried, during the production of what would later be called *A New Hope* (ANH), that there would only ever be one Star Wars movie², even though his story and his characters were larger the limits of the medium of film. However, ANH turned out to be a successful movie, grossing more \$35 million in its opening weekend alone³. Star Wars became a media empire, spanning movies to books, comics, television shows and unauthorized fanfiction. The character Luke survived and flourished. He appeared, of course, in *The Empire Strikes Back* (ESB), *Return of the Jedi* (ROTJ), and in many other instances.

However, as Sammons notes, even in the original trilogy, Luke has at least three very distinct roles as a “boy” in ANH, as an “adolescent” in ESB, and as an “adult” in ROTJ⁴. But those are not the only roles Luke had. Were Sammons to write on the same subject after the 2005 release of *Revenge of the Sith* (ROTS), he would also have to analyze Luke as a baby⁵. And there is no reason to limit an analysis of character roles to only those essentially age-based roles. As Star Wars media expands, it seems, Luke takes on more and more roles. It is not clear that these are the same Lukes or that there even is one Luke in the myriad of roles the character has been used in.

¹ Lucas, 1997

² Lucasfilm, 2004a

³ According to <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076759/>

⁴ Sammons, pg. 355.

⁵ Lucas, 2005

To modify McLuhan⁶, is the medium the character? Is the author the character? Or is the theme the character? Through an analysis of Luke's roles in movies, books, and fanfiction, this essay will attempt to discover what factors result in different characterizations of Luke and from what source the character should be said to be derived from. To quote Marshall Mathers III⁷, will the real Luke please stand up?

LUKE SKYWALKER in EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and BEYOND

Luke takes many roles in ESB. In a direct continuation of ANH, he is first presented as a friend of Han Solo (Han) as they patrol Hoth early in the movie. His romantic interest in Leia, later revealed as incestuous, continues from ANH as Princess Leia (Leia) consoles him with a kiss during his recovery from the wampa attack. During the Battle of Hoth, Luke is again presented as an expert fighter pilot, continuing the role he played in the first Death Star's trench, but this time he has evolved to be the leader of Rogue Squadron. After this battle, in order to continue his role as a Jedi trainee, Luke deserts the Rebel Alliance to train under Yoda on Dagobah. Up until this point, Luke had been portrayed as loyal to a fault. He had pursued two suicide missions, one to rescue Leia and the other to destroy the Death Star. However, Luke remains loyal to his friends and the Rebel Alliance to some degree when he decides to temporarily abandon his training as a result of Force-inspired visions of the future. He leaves Yoda to help Han and Leia on Bespin⁸.

Luke had a different relationship with his two teachers. In ANH, Luke follows Obi-Wan Kenobi's (Kenobi) instructions with few questions⁹. In ESB, Luke seriously doubts that he or Yoda can lift his X-Wing fighter out of the swamp¹⁰. As Luke matured he became more of a

⁶ McLuhan, 1994 pg. 7

⁷ Mathers III, 2000.

⁸ Kershner, 1997

⁹ Lucas, 1997

¹⁰ Kershner, 1997

skeptical character. Finally, Darth Vader reveals that he is in fact Anakin Skywalker (Anakin), Luke's father. These myriad roles, taken together, show a Luke Skywalker who retains the essence of the farm boy from Tatooine but is a character that has changed somewhat.

It would at first seem that there are no derivation issues in considering Luke in ESB. The character simply evolved with the more complex story, one might argue. However, a closer examination reveals issues beyond this evolution. Just as the question "who shot first, Han or Greedo?" plagues ANH, Luke undergoes critical changes. This begs the question: is this the same Luke?

Between the filming of ANH and ESB, Mark Hamill, who played Luke in the films, was in a car crash. George Lucas admitted that Hamill made Luke look different in ESB, but incorporated this into the movie with the wampa attack and Luke's recovery¹¹. This scene is also famous for the Luke/Leia kiss. What is often overlooked, however, is an alternate version of this scene. Luke and Leia have a conversation before Han and Chewbacca enter the room. In the conversation, Luke mentions that he's going to Dagobah. This hurts Leia, as she compares this to Han needing to leave to pay off Jabba the Hutt¹².

The result of this scene is the potential of a dramatically different relationship between not only Luke and Leia, but also Han and Leia. Were this scene to be incorporated into the movie, both of the men in Leia's life seem flaky, wanting to leave her. She has the potential to be angry with both of them and as a result embrace neither of them. But that was not the film Lucas wanted to make, and the scene was cut. This scene is also not present in Donald Glut's novelization of ESB¹³.

¹¹ Lucasfilm, 2004b

¹² Lucasfilm, 2011

¹³ Lucas et al, 1993 pg. 206-208

Alternate material like the scene between Luke and Leia cannot be written off out of hand. In the novelization of Star Wars by Lucas, Luke meets up with some of his friends, including Biggs Darklighter, at Anchorhead on Tatooine¹⁴. This scene was filmed for ANH¹⁵. It was ultimately cut because 20th Century Fox felt it made the film feel too much like Lucas' American Graffiti¹⁶, but when Luke and Biggs meet on Yavin IV before the raid on the Death Star, they act as though that scene were in the movie. They are good friends reunited.

A third interesting case is a deviation between the novelization and the film of ROTJ. In the novelization by James Kahn, Luke comes off as a much stronger Jedi than in the film¹⁷. Likely because of the technical limitations of the time, a scene in which Luke uses the Force to deflect some of Palpatine's lightning is omitted¹⁸. As special effects technology improved and Lucas completed the prequel trilogy, lightning deflection became artistically possible. Three of the most powerful Jedi, Kenobi¹⁹, Mace Windu²⁰, and Yoda²¹ were shown using the power.

While the example of Luke at Anchorhead contributes to character traits that are later expressed in ANH, other removed material, like the aforementioned scene on Hoth, reveals potential avenues that Lucas believed the character would have been viable in. The ease of publishing content to the Internet now allows these potential avenues to be explored. And many of them are explored in the medium of fanfiction, which raises further derivation problems which this essay will explore in its third section. It will never be clear if Han or Greedo shot first, or if Lucas would have intentionally aged Luke had Hamill not been involved in that car accident. However, it is clear that there is some degree of validity to Star Wars material beyond the

¹⁴ Lucas et al, 1993 pgs. 16-18

¹⁵ Lucasfilm, 2011

¹⁶ Lucasfilm, 2004a

¹⁷ Lucas et al, 1993 pg. 484

¹⁸ Marquand, 1997

¹⁹ Lucas 2002

²⁰ Lucas, 2005

²¹ Lucas 2002, 2005

movies. In the remaining sections, this essay analyzes a Star Wars book that has not been made into a movie and instances of Star Wars fanfiction to attempt to more thoroughly understand the derivation of Luke.

LUKE in EXILE

By the time Luke appears in the novel “Exile” by Aaron Allston²², Luke has aged significantly. Exile takes place approximately 36 years of in-universe time after the Battle of Endor in ROTJ. At this time, a Second Galactic Civil War is taking place, with the government that evolved from the Rebel Alliance actually playing the part of Palpatine’s Galactic Empire. The role of the Rebel Alliance is played in this instance by the planet Corellia, Han’s home world. However, the lines are not so clear in this case. Good and evil are not black and white as they are in ANH, ESB, and ROTJ. The Jedi Order, led by Luke, is a third party, playing politics like the other parties to the war. This echoes the Jedi Order’s role in the Clone Wars, in which Luke did not participate. But in the Clone Wars, the Jedi Order was much more clearly aligned with the Galactic Republic. In the case of the Second Galactic Civil War during “Exile,” some Jedi support the Galactic Alliance, while others support the Corellians. As an attempt to shore up the fractured Jedi, Luke plays the role of Jedi Grand Master²³, as Yoda once did. Yet there is the same tension between the Jedi and the Galactic Alliance, as there was between the Jedi and Palpatine’s Galactic Republic.

Like in the Clone Wars, the Jedi, most specifically Luke, sense that the war itself is a sham, that someone is manipulating the whole conflict for personal gain. In the movies, the manipulative character is Palpatine. In “Exile,” that character is Dark Lady of the Sith Lumiya. However, Lumiya does not act through an official source of power as Palpatine does. Instead, she only attempts to recruit a powerful Jedi (Jacen Solo, henceforth Jacen) as Palpatine did with

²² Allston 2007a

²³ Ibid, pg. 6-7

Anakin²⁴. At the same time, Luke has to deal with Alema Rar, a deformed Jedi who had turned to the dark side²⁵. This mirrors the brief campaign Yoda leads against a once again multipronged Sith in ROTS²⁶. So while the role is established in Star Wars movies, it was not established through Luke. That role is not associated with Luke. Neither is the role of playing politics, being more of a gray actor in a non-black and white world like Palpatine. Yet, at the same time, Luke's overall role here is similar to his role in ROTJ. He seeks out Rar like he did his father. But at the same time, he preemptively tries to stop Jacen before he fully turns to the dark side and before his son Ben (Jacen's Jedi apprentice) follows²⁷.

Analyzing Ben Skywalker (Ben) sheds light on the derivation of Luke Skywalker²⁸. Luke does not interact with any children or young relatives in the movies from which we traditionally assume he is derived from. There is no filmed characterization from which to analyze Luke's interaction with his son. There is no base from which to say this is either a legitimate or illegitimate characterization. However, his son's name alone shows a careful attention paid to attempting to properly characterize Luke in the vein of the movies. "Ben" Kenobi, Ben's namesake, was Luke's first mentor²⁹.

Allston has written many Star Wars novels. About half of them were books that deal with Luke³⁰. These are all authorized books, so they have some measure of approval of Lucas through Lucas Books. Yet the large number of Luke-related books Allston has offered is clearly enough to allow him to add his own personal touch to the character, no matter what Lucas Books approved. Even assuming Allston did not add to Luke in his characterizations of the character in

²⁴ Ibid, pg. 4

²⁵ Allston 2007a, pg. 50-55

²⁶ Lucas, 2005

²⁷ Allston 2007a, pg. 49-50

²⁸ Ibid, pg. 7

²⁹ Lucas, 1997

³⁰ Allston 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2010, 2011.

any of his Star Wars novels, there had already been 36 years of Star Wars novels, many of which involved Luke, between the last Star Wars movie featuring Luke and the book “Exile.” Luke could have become a different character in that span of Star Wars universe time.

At the same time, Luke reprises many of his familiar roles in “Exile.” As the Second Galactic Civil War progresses, Luke is forced once again into the role of X-Wing fighter pilot in Ganner Squadron³¹. The reader is reminded of Luke’s failure to defeat Darth Vader in ESB as Luke adjusts to a replacement³² for the prosthetic hand he received as a result of the lightsaber fight in the bowels of Bespin’s Cloud City³³.

LUKE in FANFICTION

It is not possible to do a thorough survey of Luke in fanfiction. However, a few carefully chosen examples shed some light on the problem of Luke’s derivation. In a series of short fanfiction stories, an author who goes by the screen name “funfan41” focuses on an aspect of Luke Skywalker not substantiated in Star Wars movies or books. This relationship is a romantic pairing of Han and Luke. At first it seems like a silly premise, and the author admits that one of the stories is “hopelessly romantic, corny”³⁴. But, once again, a close examination reveals issues in thinking of Luke as a monolithic character with one clear identity derived from one source.

Funfan41 situates Han/Luke stories in a myriad of time periods; from right after the Battle of Endor to during the Yuuzhan Vong War described in authorized fiction, and a time period, “loooong after ROTJ”³⁵ when Luke is ready to join Han in embracing death³⁶. All of the stories reviewed for this essay are short, a scene or two at most. But in that small space, they all display Luke in a role derived from his existence in either films or authorized fiction. He

³¹ Allston 2007a, 206-208

³² Ibid, pg. 6-7

³³ Kershner, 1997

³⁴ Funfan41, 2006.

³⁵ Funfan41, 2005c.

³⁶ Funfan41, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006

attempts to figure out his relationship with Leia³⁷ and worries about being the last of the Jedi after the Battle of Endor³⁸. Luke is the leader of a new Jedi Order during the Yuuzhan Vong War³⁹. And he uses the Force to meditate as he approaches death⁴⁰. Yet all of these standard characterizations of Luke occur in the context of a romantic relationship with Han. While this may at first seem anathema to Luke and Han, the two characters had a strong relationship in the films which continued in various books. Lucas opened up at least Luke and possibly every Star Wars character for this sort of relationship by opening up the realm of another non-standard sexual role of a hero, incest, in ESB⁴¹.

These works of Han/Luke fanfiction make very clear attempts to be legitimate, to situate themselves in the known and accepted Star Wars universe. When Luke is sick in “Rain,” the author uses the analogy of Hoth for a cold. The smooth Lando buys Leia one of the last bottles of Alderaanian wine⁴². In “Mornings,” “both Han and Luke were not as confident and reckless as they used to be. In the past, they had nothing to lose. War had brought them together, war could break them apart”⁴³. This reminds readers of the visibly angry Luke worrying about Leia potentially turning to the dark side of the Force if Luke allowed Darth Vader to live and find her. At some point in each story, the author has Han refer to Luke as “kid” as he does in ANH⁴⁴. Even the specific details reference back to clear images of Luke, describing him with his blonde hair, boots and black cape from ROTJ.

So while the homosexuality of these stories does not fit into the standard characterizations of Luke in films and authorized fiction, the other aspects of the character do fit.

³⁷ Funfan41, 2005a

³⁸ Funfan41, 2006

³⁹ Funfan41, 2005b

⁴⁰ Funfan41, 2005c

⁴¹ Kershner, 1997

⁴² Funfan41 2005a

⁴³ Funfan41 2005b

⁴⁴ Lucas, 1997

They make perfect sense and have clear origins that are easily traced. Other than the one dramatic change to Han and Luke, these stories create “true” versions of both characters. Essentially, funfan41 is at once changing and keeping Luke the same, adding a new spin to the old character while referring back to the character himself.

One review of funfan41’s “Mornings” by a user called “Gilded Muse” shows the problem of deriving Luke identity well by saying, “I love your Han, because he could be straight from the movie and it makes my day, being able to picture this scene so clearly”⁴⁵. The use of “your Han” in the comment shows that the author, funfan41, owns this version of Han. Furthermore it distinguishes from recognized *other* Hans. The author is the creator and can decide exactly how this version of the character will act. Yet, as mentioned before, part of this author’s unique Han is not so unique. Star Wars fans already know Han as the oil-stained smuggler who calls Luke “kid.” This familiar tie to the movies allows being “straight from the movie” to also be a compliment. Although the commenter described the problem of deriving Han, there is the potential for the same kind of use of Luke as both the traditional and author-invented character.

At the same time, funfan41 posts this disclaimer on at least two stories: “Luke, Han, and the whole Star Wars Universe belongs [sic] to George Lucas. Pity”⁴⁶. This makes Luke and every other Star Wars character out to be public goods. They are an intellectual product with a clear origin, but, as shown by the myriad characterizations and versions of Luke no one can agree on exactly what was created. On funfan41’s profile page, the stated motivation for writing fanfiction is, “I like wondering ‘what if...?’ and I like reading but very few people write the kind of things I really, really enjoy reading”⁴⁷. Considering this motivation, there is clearly a desire for Luke to fill a homosexual role. Beyond their creation, Star Wars character should not be

⁴⁵ Fanfiction.net, 2005b

⁴⁶ Funfan41, 2005a, 2005b

⁴⁷ Fanfiction.net, 2005a

limited to be used only by Lucas in the specific mediums and the specific ways he approves, according to the sentiment of the disclaimer and funfan41's profile. Luke and other Star Wars characters have more potential than just what is displayed officially. But what is truly Skywalker?

WHICH LUKE SKYWALKER?

The Luke Skywalker of movies, authorized fiction and unauthorized fanfiction have been intertwined from the start. Luke evolved in the three original movies and took on an even greater role in stories beyond film. Though there are clear differences between the different versions, there are similarities as well. This makes it impossible to consider the derivation, the origin of Luke without considering a number of the mediums he appears in. In this study, only films, novels, and fanfiction are considered, but Luke also is portrayed in comics, parodies, and other media like television shows⁴⁸ and even action figures. Each medium has strengths and weaknesses, and understanding them helps in deriving the origin of Luke.

As a large part of the Star Wars audience is a young demographic, it is important to consider the implications of there being multiple versions of Luke or any other Star Wars character derived from different source materials. Children do understand the difference between reality and fantasy, but some do not understand the interactions of characters within fantasy universes⁴⁹. Children may interpret different expressions of Luke as totally different characters who may or may not be able to interact with one another. Simply put, if the origins of character such as Luke are not well understood, it becomes difficult for readers or viewers new to the series to understand. Clarity of identity is a clear weakness of written media, because in audio-visual media, people are able to clearly perceive, if characters are portrayed by the same actors in sequels or prequels.

⁴⁸ the [infamous](#) Star Wars Holiday Special

⁴⁹ Skolnick et al, 2006 pg. B12.

A case study with a similar methodology to this essay was conducted on characters from the multimodal science fiction series *Star Trek*. In this study, Cranny-Francis essentially agrees with funfan41's assertion that characters often times have more potential than the first mediums they are presented in. New meanings of characters can be explored while maintaining the characters themselves, the study concludes based on an analysis of a Kirk and Spock homosexual relationship⁵⁰. In discussing the extensions of the roles of women in the authorized *Star Trek* fiction of Jean Lorrh, Cranny-Francis says,

Lorrh has written these narratives especially for the women of her *Star Trek* world, rather than simply enhancing already existing narratives. In a sense, these are the women whom we early ST [*Star Trek*] viewers knew were there, even though the series itself rarely made them available to us. (Cranny-Francis, pg. 251)

By saying that, Cranny-Francis recognizes that Lorrh is creating new material in the *Star Trek* universe, but that it can qualitatively be linked to original *Star Trek* material as this essay has attempted to do with authorized and unauthorized *Star Wars* fiction. Yet there are clear differences as the roles of women are expanded. In a new official expression of *Harry Potter* material called "Pottermore," J.K. Rowling identified the same situation before even publishing her famous novels:

I also found myself developing storylines for secondary (or even tertiary) characters that were superfluous to requirements. More of a wrench were the plots I worked out for some much more important characters that had to be sacrificed for the bigger story. All of these I inwardly termed 'ghost plots,' my private expression for all the untold stories that sometimes seemed quite as real to me as the 'final cut.' I have occasionally been in conversation with a reader and made mention of part of a ghost plot; looks of consternation cross their faces as, for a split second, they ask themselves whether they have accidentally skipped twenty pages somewhere. (Rowling, 2011)⁵¹

The key here is that the readers she encounters believe what she is saying and question their own understandings of the characters, rather than accuse Rowling of changing her characters on the

⁵⁰ Cranny-Francis, 1997 pg. 247-248

⁵¹ Pottermore is still in beta and requires a user to establish a username and password to view. The author of this essay is happy to provide a dated screenshot to confirm the veracity of this quote upon request.

fly. This interaction of reader and a newly expanded or changed character works because the origin of the character and the change to the character is very clearly understood to be Rowling.

That is simply not the case for Luke. Luke is so similar to the archetypal hero that it could be argued that he is derived from Joseph Campbell's seminal work on the subject, not even Lucas' imagination. In a brief review of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Lucas says, "In the three decades since I discovered *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, it has continued to fascinate and inspire me"⁵². The implications of this statement are fairly obvious. Consider how Luke fits into the monomyth⁵³: R2-D2's message from Leia is the call to adventure. Luke at first refuses the call but quickly agrees to go after the evil Galactic Empire proves responsible for his parents' death. The first threshold is very quickly passed as Kenobi and Luke manage to escape Mos Eisley spaceport with the help of Han and Chewbacca. During the trip to Alderaan, Kenobi teaches Luke the ways of the Force⁵⁴ and Luke continues his studies under Yoda. Luke confronts his father and almost kills him out of anger in ROTJ, but, seeking atonement, attempts to save Anakin from the imminent destruction of the second Death Star. Luke as the archetypal hero is an essay unto itself, but it is sufficient in terms of deriving Luke's identity to say that he clearly *can* be tied back to Campbell⁵⁵.

CONCLUSION

The questions and problems of from what origin characters are derived will likely never be solved. Within the official Star Wars movies there were changes to characters this essay has identified, and beyond movies to authorized fiction and unauthorized fanfiction there are expanded and changed characters. These changed and expanded characters sometimes conflict

⁵² Quoted in Campbell, 2008, back cover.

⁵³ Ibid, pg. 6

⁵⁴ Ibid, pg. 57

⁵⁵ Ibid, pg. 28-29

with what would at first seem to be the source of that character, but this essay has also shown that simple derivations of character origins in Star Wars can also be flawed.

In all odds, there will likely never be a sort of litmus test for Luke Skywalker. There will never be a definitive way to say Lucas' Luke in ANH, ESB, or ROTJ, or Allston's Lukes or even funfan41's Lukes are the right one. They are all truly Skywalker, to a degree. A general answer to this type of derivation problem may lie in another Star Wars character—Yoda. It is possible that the only way to productively iron out this type of problem is to show the version of the character in question to a wide audience and gauge the resulting response. The Yoda in *Phantom Menace* was largely rejected by the community of Star Wars fans because the new puppet⁵⁶ did not look like the old puppet⁵⁷. Though it is likely that no Star Wars fan could have defined Yoda in a way that would have pleased every other Star Wars fan, the community largely agreed that the Yoda in *Phantom Menace* was not actually Yoda. Lucas understood this backlash and enough attention was paid to the digital versions of Yoda in *Attack of the Clones* and *ROTS* that the end result was generally accepted⁵⁸. This acceptance was even despite the fact that Yoda took on the new role of fighting Sith Lords like Count Dooku and Darth Sidious⁵⁹. Simply put, the communities that create these sorts of Jungian collectively unconscious understandings of characters⁶⁰ are the only entities that can filter out which characterizations, which versions do not belong.

Were there ever to be a widely rejected version of Luke in a movie or a work of authorized or unauthorized fiction, it would quickly become apparent exactly what it means to be Luke. In the case of Yoda, no matter if Lucas' idea of the old Jedi Master, if the recently

⁵⁶ Lucas, 1999

⁵⁷ Kershner, 1997

⁵⁸ Lucasfilm, 2005

⁵⁹ Lucas, 2002, 2005.

⁶⁰ Jung, 3-4.

deceased Star Wars concept artist Ralph McQuarrie's sketches, or if the puppet makers' final product (not to mention Frank Oz's acting) was the true origin Yoda, it became clear that his expression in ESB was the one to start with. But, in the case of Luke, without the exception that proves from which source a character should be derived, catalogers and Star Wars fans are only left to note the differences between the versions and attempt to understand them.

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