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Tragic Hero (2021-2022)

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“Tragic Hero” Nicholas Lardaro (research inquiry example)

Questions to Consider For Discussion and Reflection

In this research inquiry essay, Lardaro examines how the prequel films from the series, *Star Wars*, and in particular *Revenge of the Sith*, use the trope of the tragic hero to create a compelling narrative depicting the downfall of Anakin Skywalker. As you read Lardaro’s essay, explore the following:

- What prior arguments or ideas does Lardaro acknowledge in the setup of his research inquiry? What expectations do you think an audience would have in reading about the prequel films from *Star Wars*?
- Lardaro spends time setting up and presenting the sources that he is using in his research inquiry essay. Were there any sources that surprised you or that you found especially useful in this presentation? What can you learn from this research inquiry in terms of stating the context and publication information for any given source?
- What do you think were some of Lardaro’s research questions going into this project? How do you think he found or selected sources? What can you apply from Lardaro’s research inquiry to your own research process?

Tragic Hero by Nicholas Lardaro

A tragic hero trope is used throughout the film and entertainment industry as a compelling attraction to the audience. He or she is a protagonist who usually begins a great hero, but turns evil for one reason or another. There are many film examples of the tragic hero, and they are all well known because of how greatly their changing of sides affects the audience. The film *Star Wars* directed by George Lucas is recognized as one of the most well plotted films in the industry. The original movies, four, five and six were known for their special effects, which had been like nothing ever seen before. But the prequels, and especially *Revenge of the Sith*, are so special because of their depiction of Anakin Skywalker's downfall. He is known across the film industry as one of the greatest tragic heroes ever created. *Star Wars*' tragic hero Anakin Skywalker is a groundbreaking character who makes the film more engaging, more emotionally compelling, and more successful.

The use of Anakin Skywalker and his fall as a tragic hero is one that helps the film become more engaging because of how misinterpreted a tragic hero can be. What’s so interesting about Anakin is that many people believe morally he is a good man, one who just wants to do good for his new family and save the ones he loves. Charles H. Greeves, who wrote *The Aristotelian Concept Of The Tragic Hero*, in which he dives into Aristotle’s view on the tragic hero, writes how “A good man passing from happiness to misery” refers to a morally blameless man. (Reeves-182). Greeves is talking about all tragic heroes, and it matches the story of Anakin and how in the opposite point of view, there are reasons for why he turns to the dark side in the film such as his desire to learn how to heal the ones he loves, a power only the Sith could learn, told to Anakin by Darth Sidious. Anakin watches his mother die in front of him, and he couldn’t save her, so this

stuck with him throughout the film as he desires to never let another one he loves, such as Padme, be killed and hurt. Chuck Vinch, a well-known writer and reviewer for numerous military branches, such as the *Navy Times*, reviews the movie and looks at all aspects of the film, asking questions about Anakin like, “How and why did he become scarred and turn into the monster known as Darth Vader” (Vinch-39)? Vinch acknowledges that Anakin was once a hero and turns into this monster of a person, but questions why? Vinch is asking questions like these to point to the severity of the reasons why Anakin turns, and the hardship that came with dealing with them for both Anakin and the ones who love him. In the film, Anakin has to choose between saving the ones he loves by learning the ways of the Sith, or the dark side, or watch the ones he loves die in front of him. Of course, this is told to him by a Sith Lord, but as a man who only wants to save his love, what options does he really have? In the *Rolling Stone*, a top fifty ranking of *Star Wars* characters was done, and Anakin/Darth Vader was ranked second, right behind Han Solo. In the bio for him, it says “Now, Darth Vader isn’t just a compelling force of evil, one of cinema’s most magnetic villains: He’s a tragic figure crying out to be saved” (Grierson 1). Grierson, who writes the article, points to him needing saving, because he had once been a hero who just made the wrong decisions out of fear, and feeling no Jedi should feel, according to the film, where Master Yoda said no Jedi should act out of fear or pain. Anakin is a tragic hero at its finest, a man who turns evil and loses sight of what he was fighting for once his anger became too high, even choking Padme with his force abilities out of anger and pain, believing she didn’t trust him after what he did to the young Jedi padawans. His misleading turn to evil is one that makes this film that much more engaging to watch.

Anakin’s rise and fall was one that had the audience emotionally reeling, because of the connection viewers have with Anakin the good guy, as opposed to those of the bad guy. His switching of sides does change many, but not all opinions of him. Later in Greeves’ article, he is seen talking about that tragedy in all tragic hero stories saying, “The end or purpose of tragedy, accordingly, is the catharsis of pity and fear and similar emotions” (Greeves 185). By this, he means that the end of tragedy is the letting out of pity along with fear, so in respect to Anakin’s story, seeing his demise and change to evil, is one that viewers can feel pity along with fear because of what happens to him to arrive at this point. This point refers to in the film, when he went from killing enemies such as Dooku, to murdering dozens of young Jedi children to follow his master Palpatine and become a Sith Lord, then at the end of episode six, *Return of the Jedi*, he is restored, watching his son Luke grow into the hero Anakin once was. Vinch continued asking questions in his review of the third movie in the *Star Wars* timeline, including one where he asked, “What fueled the final descent of Anakin (Hayden Christensen) to the Dark Side” (Vinch 39)? Vinch is trying to ascertain the main reason why Anakin changes, since there are a few, and Anakin’s change is one that leaves all viewers confused and upset, since Anakin is such an iconic character. In the film Anakin saving his loved ones is one option, but there are other factors that add to his downfall. Anakin had much fear and anger in him, two emotions that Jedi should not feel since it could take control of them and allow them to do foolish things. For instance, in the film when Anakin finds his mother dead in a camp full of Tusken Raiders, he murders all of them out of extreme anger, including the children and mothers of the Tusken Raider tribe. A.O Scott, an American Journalist and Culture Critic, wrote his impressions of *Revenge of the Sith*, in which he says, “We are witnessing a flawed hero devolving into a cruel and terrifying villain” (Scott 1). He is acknowledging the scariness that Anakin holds once he becomes Darth Vader, and the tone that sets for the audience the emotion they’ll feel when they see Anakin’s face burn off in the lava following his fight with Kenobi in the film. Anakin’s turn

to the dark side is one that leaves all the viewers shocked, feeling one of many emotions, such as sadness, fear, maybe even happiness, and these emotions made the film that much better overall.

The movie has become successful because of Anakin's tragic downfall, which adds a storyline that is quite appealing to the audience due to their investment in the character. Also, the appeal to Darth Vader was so high, so seeing his back story and fall into his role as a Sith was so popular at this time. Vinch continues his review saying, "The main reason this film not only soars above the last two but hangs with any of the first three - is the fully formed re-emergence of one of the best villains in film history, Darth Vader" (Vinch 39). Vinch is stating that Darth Vader was such a great character, and Anakin's backstory of being the tragic hero makes this movie the best out of the three prequels and hangs up there with the original movies, in his opinion. The top fifty ranking in *Rolling Stone*, which includes Darth Vader at two, adding to the realization of the success he, Vader, has by saying, "Continuing Hollywood's fascination with origin stories, the second cycle of movies deepens our understanding of the man who would become Darth Vader" (Grierson 1). Grierson points out the interest that everyone has in Vader or Anakin, and points that Anakin's back story adds to the fascination of the film, increasing the success it has. Scott adds to this trend of complimenting the film by saying, "As the flawed Anakin devolves into a terrifying villain, 'it is a measure of the film's accomplishment that this process is genuinely upsetting'" (Scott 1). He is applauding the tragic hero storyline of Anakin as it was so well put together that people were truly upset he turns into Darth Vader, which Scott says is a measure of how successful this film was. The success this film gets is due to many ideas and history that went into it, but it can clearly be credited by the backstory of Anakin and his tragic downfall, otherwise known as his story as a tragic hero.

There are some people that would argue that the tragic hero, Anakin Skywalker would not be popular if it wasn't for the original three movies. Some may believe there was no one reason that that movie was what it was, but it was just the belief that the movies are so popular because they are known as *Star Wars* films. For instance when Vinch talks about how the movie only hangs with the original three films (Vinch 39), people would believe if those original three movies weren't created, these movies wouldn't be what they are today, and the Anakin backstory would be meaningless. The truth is, even if there were no originals, the tragic hero story of Anakin is known universally as one of the greatest examples of a tragic hero in existence. The definitions that Aristotle provides backup Anakin's case. Greeves talks about how "Aristotle makes it quite clear that the plot must not show a bad man under any circumstance"

(Greeves 174). Anakin was never portrayed as a bad man, always a great man with good intentions; everything he did during his lifetime as Anakin up until he truly became Darth Vader, was done out of good intentions, such as in the film when he was trying to save Padme, his wife who he knew would die during birth unless he could somehow alter it. With this said, a tragic hero this well created would catch the eye of most viewers of good quality film, and therefore without the originals, *Revenge of the Sith* would still be a popular film.

Star Wars tragic hero Anakin Skywalker is a groundbreaking character who makes the film more engaging, more emotionally compelling, and more successful. Anakin fits the role so perfectly since his story is so complex and tragic, yet leaves people to decide if he truly is a bad man for why he changes to the dark side. The tragic hero needs to have a complex story, one that leaves questions of why and should the hero tragically turn evil? Those questions are answered in

Revenge of the Sith, with one of the greatest tragic hero stories ever created, with the backstory of Darth Vader, otherwise known as Anakin Skywalker.

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