

Anakin Rex and Vader at Colonus: The Influence of Sophocles on George Lucas' Tragic Hero

Ever since George Lucas' film, *Star Wars*, first released in 1977, it has captured the imaginations of audiences spanning the globe. *Star Wars'* global popularity is largely due to viewers being able to identify with the characters and themes presented in the film and the films that followed. The films themselves are much indebted to early works, but perhaps the most prominent of these is Joseph Campbell's work, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, which was written nearly three decades earlier. In this work Campbell observes common hero motifs, what he calls a monomyth that can be seen throughout history and across the globe, and Lucas once commented that without Campbell's work, "he would still be writing *Star Wars* today." The documentation for Lucas using Campbell's monomyth is in fact nothing new nor surprising, however, while *Star Wars* can be seen to follow many of the monomyth's elements broadly, it appears that George Lucas may have drawn more specifically from Sophocle's famous character, Oedipus, for his own tragic hero, Anakin Skywalker, using the plays *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.

This paper observes Campbell's three main stages on the monomyth: departure, initiation, return, and looks at the ways that Oedipus and Anakin interact similarly enough to question coincidence. The first similarity is "The Call to Adventure" where Anakin and Oedipus are revealed to play part in an ambiguous fortune/destiny. Next this paper looks at "Women as the Temptress," where both Oedipus and Anakin find themselves to be led astray from the hero's falling in love with an older women. Following that is, "The Ultimate Boon," where Oedipus and Anakin first begin to deviate from the monomyth, because instead of seeking a form of immortality, they achieve the goal they seek and undergo a severe disfigurement as a result. The

final similarity observed between the two characters is the method of which they ‘return’ and are redeemed in their final moments.

This paper challenges the notion that *Star Wars* merely parrots the monomyth of Campbell, and instead asserts that its tragic hero deviates from the cycle in ways that are uncannily shared between Oedipus and Anakin. By examining these works this paper shows the continuing effects that ancient Greek drama has directly on media even into in the 21st century.