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EWOKS VERSUS DEAD HEROES: CREATIVE CONFLICT IN WRITING RETURN OF THE JEDI

EWOKS CONTRA HERÓIS MORTOS: CONFLITO CRIATIVO NA ESCRITA DE RETURN OF THE JEDI

ABSTRACT

The original Star Wars trilogy established a storytelling model that still influences Hollywood filmmaking today. However, the third episode in the saga, Return of the Jedi (1983), was received less favorably than its predecessors by critics. This article will examine historical record and analyze aspects of syuzhet ('plot') and fabula ('story') (BORDWELL, 1985, pp. 49-50) in the screenplay in order to establish why Return of the Jedi works less successfully as a narrative than the first two films. The results of the investigation suggest that this was due to a fundamental philosophical conflict between screenwriters George Lucas and Lawrence Kasdan.

Keywords: Star Wars, George Lucas, Lawrence Kasdan, syuzhet, fabula.

RESUMO

A trilogia original de Star Wars estabeleceu um modelo de narrativa que ainda hoje influencia o cinema de Hollywood. No entanto, o terceiro episódio da saga, Return of the Jedi (1983), foi recebido pela crítica de forma menos favorável do que seus antecessores. Este artigo examinará o registro histórico e analisará aspectos de syuzhet ('enredo') e fabula ('história') (BORDWELL, 1985, pp. 49-50) no roteiro, a fim de estabelecer porque Return of the Jedi teve menos sucesso como narrativa em comparação aos dois primeiros filmes. Os resultados da investigação sugerem que isso se deveu a um conflito filosófico fundamental entre os roteiristas George Lucas e Lawrence Kasdan.

Palavras-chave: Star Wars, George Lucas, Lawrence Kasdan, syuzhet, fabula.

Received: 13/03/2021 / Approved: 14/04/2021

How to quote: DAVIES, Brett. Ewoks Versus Dead Heroes: creative conflict in writing Return of the Jedi. Revista GEMINIS, v. 12, n. 1, pp. 102-115, jan./abr. 2021.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lawrence Kasdan is one of Hollywood's most prolific screenwriters, working both as a 'writer for hire' and a writer-director for over 40 years. His diversity of output in that time has led to a variety of perceptions from critics, some of whom consider him primarily as the creator of socially conscious works that critique and reflect the concerns of his baby-boomer generation (HEUNG, 1985, p. 548; BALINGIT, 1992, p. 158). Kasdan's predilection for writing for ensemble casts is also discussed frequently (BILBOW, 1984, p. 20; SCHAGER, GONZALEZ, 2003; RECHSTAFFEN, 2012); while other critics highlight his "promiscuous genre-hopping" (NEWMAN, 1984, p. 42) between Westerns, films noir, comedy, and science fiction. For all these labels, he is perhaps best known as the screenwriter of four instalments in the Star Wars¹ saga.

Lawrence Kasdan's first Star Wars screenplay was as a late replacement on the second film in the series, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, directed by Irvin Kershner). His participation was predicated on chance, with executive producer and story writer George Lucas initially hiring the veteran Leigh Brackett to write the script. However, when she passed away just after completing a draft, Lucas required a new writer. Kasdan had finished a first draft of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), also for Lucas (and director Steven Spielberg). On submitting his script, according to Kasdan (2020), "[Lucas] says 'I'm in big trouble with the second Star Wars. We've got all these people working [to build sets] in England and I don't have a script.' He said 'I'm really in a hole here. Will you write this movie?'" Kasdan agreed, completing the screenplay for the film that would become widely regarded as the best in the series (EBERT, 1997; FRANICH, 2015; BRADSHAW, 2018). Indeed, at a time when movie franchises were not common – and George Lucas's only previous sequel, *More American Graffiti* (1979) had been a critical and commercial failure (POLLOCK, 1999/1983, p. 204) – *The Empire Strikes Back* was the film that transformed Star Wars from a single surprise hit into a series that would change the face of Hollywood moviemaking for decades to come.

When George Lucas employed Kasdan again to work on the final episode of the trilogy, *Return of the Jedi* (1983), he was the first writer hired. Kasdan now had much more experience, both in writing 'blockbuster' movies for Lucas (*Raiders of the Lost Ark* had become a commercial hit, as well as *Empire*) and in developing smaller character-driven pictures such as *Continental Divide* (1981, directed by Michael Apted), and *Body Heat* (1981, which Kasdan also directed). *Return of*

¹ In the interests of clarity, this article will refer to the series as Star Wars (no Italics) then the individual films by their original titles, in Italics: *Star Wars* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983).

the Jedi, though, while becoming a financial success, was less favorably received than its predecessors. *The Hollywood Reporter*, for example, complained that:

Lucas and co-writer Lawrence Kasdan are simply trying to figure out what they can do next to amuse the kiddies. The stuff of legend that inspired and elevated the earlier episodes has here been replaced largely by the stuff of comic books (KNIGHT, 2014/1983).

By utilizing historical sources, and through analysis of the script itself, this article seeks to examine the reasons for this apparent failure of *Return of the Jedi* to replicate the narrative quality of *The Empire Strikes Back*. In doing so, it will establish what conflicts occurred during the writing process, why they occurred, and how they affected the final film.

2. CREATIVE DYNAMICS

According to the official Lucasfilm history, it was Richard Marquand, during his own interview for the role of director, who convinced George Lucas to rehire Lawrence Kasdan for the third film in the Star Wars saga, *Return of the Jedi*. When discussing potential screenwriters, Marquand suggested Kasdan, but Lucas told him that Kasdan was directing his own films now and no longer interested in writing for others. Marquand responded: “if anybody owes you something... I’m sure he would do it” (RINZLER, 2013, p. 40). Lucas asked Kasdan and he agreed, saying soon after signing, “I’m doing the script because I feel that I owe George a lot” (BURNS, 1981, p. 59), both in offering him his break with *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and in acting as guarantor on his directorial debut *Body Heat* (1981).

Kasdan says that on joining the project, “we were already on a speeding train [...]. There were designs and pictures of things before I even started writing” (RINZLER, 2013, p. 59). The story conference for what was initially being called ‘Revenge of the Jedi’ took place less than 22 months prior to the planned release date, compared to the first conference for *The Empire Strikes Back* (between Lucas and Leigh Brackett) that occurred almost 30 months before the film would open. However, whereas Kasdan had joined *Empire* as a late replacement, at least in this instance he was the first writer hired (besides Lucas himself), and he played an active role in the script meeting alongside Lucas, director Marquand and producer Howard Kazanjian, that took place in July 1981 (DUNCAN, 2020, p. 381). Kasdan’s status was also very different by this point: while on *Empire* he still did not have any screen credits to his name, both that film and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* had now become massive commercial successes for Lucasfilm; he had also written *Continental Divide*, as well

as his directorial debut *Body Heat*, both being released a few weeks later. Therefore, he was working on *Jedi* as “a favor” (RINZLER, 2013, p. 46) rather than as a Hollywood newcomer. This perhaps contributed to him becoming a much more confident participant in the meeting compared to the *Raiders* story conference (INDIE, 2019) – when Kasdan had been the ‘junior partner’ in the room alongside Lucas and director Steven Spielberg – or during discussions on the previous Star Wars episode. He says of *Jedi*, “I’d force George to react to things much more volubly than on *Empire*” (RINZLER, 2013, p. 60). The full 268-page transcript of the five-day *Return of the Jedi* story conference has not been made public, but the excerpts reproduced by Rinzler (2013, pp. 62-77) and Duncan (2020, pp. 381-411) certainly reflect a changed dynamic, with Lucas and Kasdan doing most of the talking, Marquand – the newcomer now, just as Kasdan had been on *Raiders* – pitching in occasionally with shorter questions and comments, and Kazanjian mostly silent. Kasdan appears very willing to argue with Lucas; for example, when he posits that one of the main characters should die:

Kasdan: I think you should kill Luke and have Leia take over.

Lucas: You don’t want to kill Luke.

Kasdan: Okay, then kill Yoda.

Lucas: I don’t want to kill Yoda. You don’t have to kill people. You’re a product of the 1980s. You don’t go around killing people. It’s not nice.

Kasdan: No, I’m not. I’m trying to give the story some kind of an edge to it. [...] No one has been hurt [in the trilogy].

Lucas: Ben and Han, they’ve both– Luke got his hand cut off.

Kasdan: Ben and Han are fine. Luke got a new hand two cuts later.

(RINZLER, 2013, p. 64)

Lucas and Kasdan’s debates become so bristly at one point that Marquand says: “I’m surprised at you guys – you spend a lot of time throwing scorn on each other’s ideas. I must say this, that what you have got to get to is an agreement” (RINZLER, 2013, p. 76). While this suggests more discord than in Kasdan’s previous experiences on Lucasfilm productions, it also points to a more open exchange of ideas, and Lucas does not appear to take offence. In fact, despite being the creator of the saga, Lucas is often willing to cede to others, even if he clearly leads the discussion. For example, in plotting out the early sequence in the palace of crime boss Jabba the Hutt, Marquand suggests Leia disguising herself as a bounty hunter to gain access, and Lucas says “I could go with that”; then Kasdan develops the notion further, and Lucas says “Yes, that’s possible” (RINZLER,

2013, p. 66). Furthermore, the three main participants often build on one another's ideas, such as when discussing Jabba's death at the hands of the captured Princess Leia:

Marquand: Would be nice to have a chain around her ankle [...].

Kasdan: How do you feel about her being the one that causes Jabba's death?

Lucas: That I could go for. She could strangle him.

Marquand: With the chain.

(RINZLER, 2013, pp. 67-68)

Thus, unlike on *Empire*, where Kasdan was hired only after Lucas (with Leigh Brackett) had already established the overall structure and main story arcs, he was now very much part of that process. To utilize Bordwell's paradigm (1985, pp. 49-50) adapted from the work of the Russian formalists, Kasdan was now able to design not only the *syuzhet* (the plot as it is presented on screen) but also the *fabula* (the overarching story from which the *syuzhet* is formed).

As intimated above, Kasdan was keen to have one of the main characters be killed, later saying that he wanted Han Solo to be sacrificed: "we're closing off the trilogy. And we want to lose somebody important. It would give some stakes to this thing" (ITZKOFF, 2018). Kasdan does not mention Han dying in the available sections of the story conference, but he does say "the movie has more emotional weight if someone you love is lost along the way; the journey has more impact" (RINZLER, 2013, p. 64). While Lucas initially vetoes the idea of losing a main character, in subsequent screenplays and the finished film Yoda eventually would 'die', although his appearance as a 'Force ghost' at the denouement rather negates the emotional impact.

Kasdan also streamlines many threads of the story during the conference, replacing the idea of two Death Stars (as proposed in Lucas's rough draft) with just one, simplifying the logistics of Luke's meeting with Darth Vader, and giving Lando Calrissian the role of piloting the *Millennium Falcon* and destroying the Death Star. This last contribution solves the problem of what to do with a character whom Lucas had struggled to include in his script in any meaningful way, even after telling the actor Billy Dee Williams that "his part would probably be bigger" in *Jedi* compared to *Empire* (RINZLER, 2013, pp. 70-77). Given his position as the only non-white character (excluding aliens

and droids) in the trilogy, his was an unfortunate omission from Lucas's plans, and Kasdan's solution was simple but effective in making Lando a significant part of the series climax.²

One aspect of the fabula that Kasdan was unable to change was the inclusion of the Ewoks, the teddy-bear-like creatures that Lucas admits he included to please his baby daughter (BAXTER, 1999, p. 329). While these characters would prove divisive among the makers, as well as critics and audiences, Lucas has since drawn parallels between the Ewoks and real-life examples of supposedly primitive forces defeating more advanced armies, citing specifically the Viet Cong's victory over the United States in the 1970s (DUNCAN, 2020 p. 373). Kasdan remained skeptical, but his and Lucas's script (they would eventually share screenplay credit, although there is no evidence that they wrote in tandem) integrates the Ewoks effectively into the plot, making them vital to the eventual victory of the Rebels over the Empire. Aesthetically, the juxtaposition is a stark one – these furry brown creatures dressed in animal pelts and leaves, pitched against the shiny whites, blacks and greys of the Imperial armor. For all Kasdan's protests, they continue a theme established in the previous two Star Wars films, the heroes apparently hewn from nature: Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, a child of the desert, dressed in cream and khaki; then Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back*, living in a swamp, green-skinned and wrapped in a primitive sackcloth robe. The Ewoks, too, are at one with the forest, defending their homeland with the simple tools available. Against such a rag-tag adversary, the soldiers of the Empire appear even more uniform in action and dress, emblematic of history's colonial invaders, as Lucas himself has alluded to (RINZLER, 2013, p.11). Furthermore, the addition of red 'Imperial Guards' to the ranks of white- and black-clad troopers make parallels to Naziism more explicit in *Return of the Jedi*.

Even if accepting Lucas's after-the-fact justifications for including the Ewoks in the movie, Kasdan's opposition points to a wider issue. Although there were disagreements in the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* story conference (INDIE, 2019), the three creators appeared satisfied with most solutions to the questions raised and Kasdan's screenplay was seemingly to Lucas and Steven Spielberg's liking. But Kasdan would need to write a major part of *Jedi* with characters against whom he had expressed opposition. He would also need to create a story arc for Han Solo, whom, given the choice, he would have killed off at the opening of the film (KASDAN, 2004; ITZKOFF, 2018).

Perhaps most importantly, Kasdan was no longer writing what he considered the "fun" second act, in which the film could end in "chaos" (AUGUST, MAZIN, 2020). Indeed, writing the

² According to Baxter (1999, p. 327), Kasdan – clearly still intent on 'raising the stakes' by killing off a major character – later wrote a scene in which Lando dies while destroying the Death Star, and it was even trialed in preview showings, but cut after negative audience feedback.

middle part of the series, *The Empire Strikes Back*, lent itself to Kasdan's sensibilities, who frequently ends his stories ambiguously. For example, during the same period of his career, *Continental Divide* and *Body Heat* both ended with a note of uncertainty, the characters' fates not entirely clear; and even *Raiders of the Lost Ark* finished with the hero dissatisfied and the Ark hidden away in a warehouse, apparently buried forever in a pile of wooden crates and government bureaucracy. Kasdan says that "*Empire Strikes Back* is the second act. And [...] when I realized that immediately I thought this is really fun. [...] We want it to be chaos at the end of this movie" (AUGUST, MAZIN, 2020). Conversely, *Return of the Jedi* needed to tie up all of the storylines in a way that would satisfy an increasingly invested and growing fanbase as well as George Lucas's preference for stirring, life-affirming heroism in which, he says, friends "help each other and [...] join together against what is negative" (BAXTER, 1999, p. 403). In Campbellian terms, following Luke Skywalker's 'Departure' in *Star Wars* and 'Initiation' in *The Empire Strikes Back*, this third part would, appropriately, show his 'Return', when the protagonist will finally succeed in his task and earn the "freedom to live" (CAMPBELL, 1949, p. 205). Lucas told Kasdan that the Star Wars trilogy is a "fairy tale" (JONES, 2016, p. 306) with a climax aimed to make the audience "be real uplifted, emotionally and spiritually, and feel absolutely good about life" (POLLOCK, 1999/1983, p. 271). *Jedi*, therefore, may have been a less appropriate fit for Kasdan's storytelling preferences than the more downbeat *Empire*.

3. STRUCTURE

Return of the Jedi builds upon its predecessors' pattern of having multiple storylines take place simultaneously for much of the film. Even within sequences in which the main characters are geographically proximal, most of their actions occur separate from one another, either in groups or individually. For instance, in the early fight aboard Jabba the Hutt's sail barge and skiff, all of the leads are present. However, the exchanges between them are fleeting and infrequent: Leia is on her own for much of the battle, attempting to escape from – and eventually kill – Jabba the Hutt inside the hull of the larger craft, while Luke is on-deck fending off laser bolts with his lightsaber; at the same time, Han, Lando and Chewbacca fight to win control of the smaller skiff and avoid being swallowed by the Sarlacc monster in the great pit beneath them. Meanwhile, the droids C-3PO and R2-D2 interact only intermittently with their human counterparts, until the very end of the sequence when they all escape together.

In the film's climactic battle, the protagonists are spread even more widely, with Luke alone in his confrontation with Darth Vader and the Emperor, while Han and Leia fight alongside

Chewbacca and the droids on the forest moon; concurrently, Lando leads a massive Rebel spaceship assault on the Death Star. This continues the multi-strand structure utilized so effectively in *Empire*; however, in *Jedi* the story is focused much more strongly on the Hero's Journey rather than the supporting members of the ensemble. This is logical within the Campbellian structure of the trilogy, with the emotional core of the story about Luke's defeat of the Dark Side – within his father and himself – by overcoming the Emperor's attempts to turn him away from the Light. However, whereas in *Empire* Kasdan assigned almost equal screen time to Han and Leia's relationship alongside Luke's trials with Yoda, in *Jedi* these supporting characters are relegated to a more functional role of fighting off stormtroopers alongside the forest-dwelling Ewoks. Lando too – for all that Kasdan gives him a superficially important part in destroying the Death Star – develops very little. His transformation from betrayer to savior in the previous episode is left unexplored as he is mostly kept apart from the other leads and paired in the *Millennium Falcon* with a new, thinly drawn, non-human co-pilot character, whose name – Nien Nunb, according to the script and end credits – is not even mentioned in the film itself. So, although Kasdan's screenplay incorporates every member of the ensemble and gives them important roles in defeating the Empire, most of the characters – with the exception of Luke and the antagonist Darth Vader – barely evolve during the story. Even Princess Leia's discovery that she is Luke's twin sister and possessed of the Force receives little interrogation, despite the fact that we now know that she is the “other” last hope that Yoda spoke of in *The Empire Strikes Back*, so presumably as able as Luke to become a Jedi.

As seen in the disagreements during the story conference, Lawrence Kasdan's storytelling preferences do not always align with George Lucas's. This is not necessarily detrimental to the finished film, and Kasdan, in discussing *The Empire Strikes Back*, says that:

there was always this slight frisson, a tension between my desire to have the characters [...] have a little more depth, to let the love scenes play a little bit, to let Yoda's philosophy be heard. And always George's instinct to go fast, or faster, faster. And looking at the movie now I think it really combines those things pretty well (AUGUST, MAZIN, 2020).

In *Return of the Jedi*, despite Kasdan joining the project earlier in the story development process, it would seem that Lucas's sensibilities won out over Kasdan's, with the pace of the film even faster and more action-oriented than in *Empire*. So, as mentioned above, Luke's revelation to Leia that she is his twin sister receives almost no further attention after their conversation ends and Han, misunderstanding their relationship, shows his jealousy. Then, Leia and Han's very next appearance in the film is when they are scouting the shield generator that they need to disable, with Leia's next utterance: “The main entrance to the control bunker's on the far side of that landing

platform. This isn't going to be easy." This is representative of Leia and Han's scenes in the second half of *Jedi*, the characters mostly relegated to proffering exposition and lending support to the more important events occurring on the Death Star. Even an attempt to call back the pair's famous exchange from *Empire* ("I love you"/"I know") – when Leia has been shot but is still able to fire off a laser bolt against their captors – feels forced, the emotional weight countered by the superficiality of Leia's wound. It may be possible to blame this lack of drive on the syuzhet, but it also adds credence to Kasdan's argument that Han Solo should have been killed off early in the fabula. This would have solved the problem of trying to create engaging moments for a character who – now that he had been humbled by his love for Leia and his rescue by Luke – did not have much more to contribute to the saga. In turn, Han's death would have given Leia a more dramatic character arc, her romantic partner dying just as she learns of her true lineage and her potential in the ways of the Force.

This prejudice towards action over character may have stemmed from editing choices rather than writing, of course, with Lucas famously protective of the post-production process, saying "I cut the movie together, I look at it and figure out what I'm missing. At that point it's more about how the movie flows together rather than how the script flows together" (BOUZEREAU, 1997, p. 319). Lucas was a more hands-on producer in this, the most expensive and technically complex movie in the trilogy, remaining on set for much of the shoot and supervising the relatively inexperienced director Richard Marquand more closely than he had Irvin Kershner on *Empire* (POLLOCK, 1999/1983, p. 276). Thus, it is likely that on *Return of the Jedi* Lucas retained more control over the syuzhet as well as the fabula, all the way from pre-production until the film's release.

The much faster pace of *Jedi* may also have been an unavoidable consequence of telling the final part of a wider story. *The Empire Strikes Back*, according to Roger Ebert (1997), "surrenders more completely to the underlying mystery of the story" and is the episode in which "the entire series takes on a mythic quality". As the second part of the trilogy, *Empire* has the luxury of being able to explore characters more deeply and open up the wider saga with further questions – thus dovetailing with Kasdan's proclivity for ambiguity. Conversely, *Return of the Jedi* is limited by its responsibility to conclude the many plotlines, to answer those questions raised in *Empire*, and to provide a satisfactory ending in that same mythic tradition that had been developed in the 'middle act'. The difficulty of this task was exacerbated by the need to deal with plot discrepancies raised in the previous episodes. For example, in *Star Wars*, Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke that Darth Vader "betrayed and murdered your father", but in *Empire* Luke discovers that Vader *is* his father – an element that was not present in Lucas's early treatments of *Empire*, nor in Leigh Brackett's screenplay draft. In order to excuse this apparent deception on the part of Obi-Wan, a Jedi Master

whom one would not expect to lie, Kasdan and Lucas devised an inelegant solution, having Obi-Wan's 'ghost' tell Luke in *Jedi* that:

Your father was seduced by the Dark Side of the Force. He ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed. So what I told you was true... from a certain point of view.

Furthermore, while *Jedi*'s pace and optimistic tone are more similar to *Star Wars* than *Empire*, the screenplay has to serve the narratives of not only the original ensemble, but also of all those characters added in the middle episode (Lando, Yoda and the Emperor having first appeared in *Empire*), as well as introducing new characters, at Lucas's insistence, in Jabba and the Ewoks. Thus, there is necessarily less screen time available to spend on any individual among the supporting cast, leading to the need for fast-paced, shorter scenes, and less scope for significant character development.

The 'ensemble' is still very much active, as one would expect in a Kasdan script. In the story conference, he even petitions for a chance to write a scene after the heroes' escape from Jabba the Hutt, in which the main characters have some "camaraderie time" after being mostly separate since the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back* (DUNCAN, 2020 pp. 391-392). On the whole, though, in *Jedi* the central Hero's Journey story takes greater priority over the group. It is this aspect of the fabula that works most successfully within the syuzhet: Luke Skywalker's temptation towards the Dark Side, then his refusal of the Emperor's attempt to seduce him to evil, leading to his father Darth Vader's ultimate redemption. There is hidden complexity beneath this apparently simple battle of good versus evil, with Vader's secret plan to join with Luke and overthrow the Emperor pitched against the Emperor's own plot to have Luke kill Vader and become his new apprentice. At the center is Luke, still not fully prepared for this final trial on his path to becoming a Jedi but who believes that he can turn his father away from the Dark Side. These conflicting character goals are clearly defined without the need for excessive exposition; and it is this three-way battle that gives *Jedi* its emotional core.

It is perhaps surprising, then, that George Lucas's original rough draft had reduced Darth Vader's importance within the Empire (and, therefore, the story as a whole), showing him vie for the Emperor's attention with a rival, Grand Moff Jerjerrod, at the beginning of the script (RINZLER, 2013, p. 21-25). Again, it would appear to be Kasdan's influence that kept the fabula more focused

on existing characters and the central dramatic question that had been established at the end of *Empire* – whether Luke would accept Vader’s offer to join him and to ‘rule the galaxy as father and son’³.

During the story conference, Lucas also abandoned his idea of having the apparitional forms of Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda aid Luke physically in his fight against the Emperor, later conceding that “Luke is finally on his own and has to fight Vader and the Emperor by himself. If you get a sense that Yoda or Ben [Obi-Wan] is there to help him [...], it diminishes the power of the scene” (BOUZEREAU, 1997, p. 301). Within the context of the classic Hero’s Journey, this is certainly true, and it is perhaps surprising that Lucas did not realize this until comparatively late in the development process. While it is not certain how much agency Kasdan or Marquand had in this change, such admissions by Lucas are evidence that, for all his declarations that Star Wars is part of a mythological tradition and a way for children to satisfy their need for stories that show “the adventure in living” (DUNCAN, 2020, p. 47), some of the most classically ‘mythological’ moments, such as Luke facing his final trial alone, were not present until Lucas had discussed ideas with others, including Kasdan.

Kasdan’s major contribution to *Return of the Jedi*, then, is in streamlining the syuzhet and excising redundant elements, corralling the complex central intrigues into an understandable narrative, and completing the trilogy in a way that remains true to its mythical undertones. Those elements of the screenplay to which Kasdan voiced opposition, however – such as the Ewoks’ inclusion and Han’s usefulness to the story – are less successful dramatically. While there is some witty dialogue, especially from Kasdan’s favourite character Han Solo (for example, telling Chewbacca to “fly casual” in order to bypass an Imperial security check on their stolen shuttle), the film does not allow the time for the same 1940s-style banter that was so appealing in *The Empire Strikes Back* and that had attracted Lucas to Kasdan’s writing in the first place. The uplifting ending that Lucas had wanted for his trilogy remained intact, but Kasdan’s writing probably suffered as a result, with Lucas biographer John Baxter calling it “a thankless task” that resulted in “one of Kasdan’s least distinguished works” (1999, p. 327).

4. CONCLUSION

Return of the Jedi was a major financial success, breaking the opening-week box-office record in the United States and earning \$30 million more than *The Empire Strikes Back* on its initial release (BAXTER, 1999, p. 334). However, whereas the preceding Star Wars episodes are widely

³ Jerjerrod, the “Death Star commander”, does feature in the final screenplay and film, but he is a relatively minor character and clearly subordinate to Darth Vader, swallowing nervously as Vader’s shuttle lands on the incomplete Death Star, then immediately groveling: “Lord Vader, this is an unexpected pleasure. We’re honored by your presence” (BOUZEREAU, 1997, p. 234).

regarded as classics of the genre, *Jedi* is viewed less favorably by audiences and critics, a movie that “falls apart because the mythic core fails” (GORDON, 1984, p. 45) and that “shies away from the darker, tangled implications of the unanswered questions in *Empire*” (ARNOLD, 1983).

This investigation suggests that the main reason for these failings may have been the philosophical differences between the two screenwriters, George Lucas and Lawrence Kasdan. While Lucas strove to create a fairy tale ending that would satisfy his desire to make the audience feel “uplifted, emotionally and spiritually” (POLLOCK, 1999/1983, p. 271), Kasdan’s sensibilities were aligned more with the “chaos” and ambiguity of the middle part of the trilogy. Furthermore, Kasdan’s proclivity for writing interesting characters and relationships was less necessary in *Jedi* compared to *The Empire Strikes Back*, with Lucas preferring a faster pace as the Hero’s Journey reached its climax. The writers’ attempts to reconcile their disparate approaches contributed to an uneven narrative that concluded Luke Skywalker’s Campbellian quest satisfyingly but, compared to the earlier films, deprived the co-protagonists of any significant narrative function. Thus, for all *Return of the Jedi*’s commercial success, in its favoring of action over character development, it is perhaps the least emotionally engaging of the original Star Wars trilogy.

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Paper Informations

Results of research project, dissertation, thesis: not applicable

Funding sources: not applicable

Previous presentation: not applicable

Thanks/Additional Contributions: not applicable

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