

*WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®*  
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



By Ian Doescher

## INTRODUCTION

Like the *Star Wars* movies, William Shakespeare's plays are full of great stories and engaging characters. I picked up my first copy of *Hamlet* in the eighth grade, because my brother Erik was reading the play as a senior in high school. I was hooked on Shakespeare from the start—and I hope you will be too. This guide offers a brief introduction to Shakespeare and the elements that *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*® has in common with his plays.

Let's start with the basics. Here are some quick and easy elements you'll find in Shakespeare's plays, all of which can be found in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®:

- Each play is in five acts. This was the usual structure of plays in Shakespeare's time, which drew on the earlier tradition of ancient Roman plays, many of which also had five acts. There can be any number of scenes within each act. When you are referring to a specific act, scene, and line from that scene, the typical convention for Shakespeare is something like II.iii.45—which means Act 2 (represented by II, the upper case roman numerals), scene 3 (represented by iii, the lower case roman numerals), line 45. I use the same references for lines in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®.
- Minimal stage directions. Shakespeare left it to his plays' performers to determine who should do what on stage.
- Rhyming couplets at the end of scenes. A couplet is two adjacent lines of verse that rhyme with each other, like "Thou must hold with thy conscience, it is true, / Whate'er thou thinkest right, thus thou shouldst do." Shakespeare often ended his scenes with a rhyming couplet as a simple way to mark a narrative shift, similar to a final cadence in music. I followed the convention in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®.
- Language that is meant to be spoken, not just read! Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed by actors he knew in local London theaters. They were not at first intended to be put in a book and assigned as reading, though that's how most modern students first encounter Shakespeare. If you are trying to make it through a Shakespeare play for the first time, gather around with some friends and read the play out loud together. The words will make more sense when you hear their rhythm and their cadence. You'll get less caught up in the old-fashioned language and more engaged by in the quick and witty dialogue, beautiful metaphors and clever jokes.
- Characters sometimes have "asides." An aside is a line spoken so the audience can hear but the other characters on stage (supposedly) cannot. Often, an aside explains a character's motivations or inner thoughts, or a background situation the audience wouldn't otherwise know. These days an aside in theater is sometimes called breaking "the fourth wall," that is, the imaginary divide between stage and audience. Asides in Shakespeare tend to be fairly short, though not always.
- Characters also make long speeches by themselves, known as soliloquies. They are similar to asides in that they often explain why a character is acting the way s/he is, but they occur when the character is alone on stage. In general, soliloquies are longer than asides. (The longest soliloquy by a Shakespearean character is 63 lines, spoken by the character Canterbury in Act 1, scene 2 of *Henry V*.)

## THE LANGUAGE

Shakespeare's old-fashioned language can be one of the hardest hurdles to jump when you're getting started. Here are some things to know about the language of Shakespeare's time.

Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameter, which is a line of poetry with a very specific syllabic pattern. An "iamb" has two syllables—the first is unstressed (or soft) and the second is stressed (or emphasized). An iamb sounds like da-DUM, as in the following words:

Result (re-SULT)  
Enjoy (en-JOY)  
Below (be-LOW)  
Belief (be-LIEF)  
Pursue (pur-SUE)  
Beru (be-RU)

"Pentameter" means there should be five iambs in a line, so iambic pentameter is a line of ten syllables: da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM. Here's a classic line, with the unstressed part of each iamb in regular text and the stressed part of each iamb in bold: "I'd **rather** be a **hammer** **than** a **nail**." So, in other words, the five iambs in this line are (1) I'd RATH- (2) er BE (3) a HAM- (4) mer THAN (5) a NAIL. (When I was in high school, my English teacher Jane Bidwell had to convince me that words like "nail" or "tale" only have one syllable. After all these years, I finally believe her.)

Shakespeare uses iambic pentameter for most of his characters most of the time, but it also has an element of class to it. In other words, most of Shakespeare's characters speak in iambic pentameter, but some speak in prose (normal speech) when Shakespeare wanted to set them apart as lower class. Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* is a textbook example.

Shakespeare also sometimes breaks the rules of iambic pentameter. The most famous Shakespearean line of all actually has eleven syllables: "To **be** or **not** to **be**, that is the **question**." That last "-ion" is known as a weak ending, and is common in Shakespeare. It's also common that he will slip two unstressed syllables into a space where there should be just one, or he'll leave out a syllable entirely. As much as we associate Shakespeare with iambic pentameter, he broke the rule almost as much as he observed it. By comparison, *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*® uses much stricter iambic pentameter than Shakespeare himself used. I kept rigidly to ten-syllable lines as I wrote—I didn't want to be accused of laziness! There are maybe a dozen lines in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*® that don't conform to the iambic pentameter pattern. Can you find them?

The final—and maybe most important—thing to say about iambic pentameter is that it's one of those things you should know about and then not be too worried about. If the whole idea of meter and stressed and unstressed syllables leaves you feeling stressed, just read Shakespeare's lines out loud and forget about the meter. Pay attention to the punctuation, and let it guide your pauses. Whatever you do, don't feel that you have to pause at the end of each line of Shakespeare. Unless there is a comma, a period or some other punctuation—or some other break in the meaning—each line should follow immediately after the preceding line.

Here are some lines from *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*® (I.ii.4-14), followed by some things to notice:

Darth Vader:

*Thou speakest well, my stormtrooper, and yet  
Not well upon my ear the message falls.  
I turn to thee, thou rebel. Aye, I lift  
Thy head above my own. Thou canst now choose  
To keep thy secrets lock'd safe in that head,  
And therefore lose the life thou holdest dear,  
Or else to keep thy head and, thus, thy life.  
My patience runneth quickly out much like  
The sands across the dunes of Tatooine.  
So tell me, else thou diest quick: where shall  
We find transmissions thou didst intercept?  
What hast thou done, say, with those plans?*

This speech of Darth Vader's—his first lines of the movie and the book—illustrates a few different points:

- First, as noted above, the punctuation should guide how you say these lines, not the actual ends of the lines themselves. Obviously, in lines 6-7, “I lift thy head above my own” is a single thought that just happens to be split across two lines. Five of the twelve lines in this speech don't end with any punctuation, so they should roll right into the next line.
- All twelve of these lines follow the rules and rhythm of iambic pentameter, but I think you can hear it clearest in line 5: “Not well upon my ear the message falls.” Not **well upon my ear** the **message falls**. Got it?
- You may be wondering: what happens if a word has more than two syllables, since an iamb calls for only one stressed syllable? Are you saying that every word in the English language really only has a single syllable emphasized? Those are important questions. When it comes to multi-syllabic words, you have to figure out, first, which syllable has the main emphasis. Here are three examples of three-syllable words, and each with an emphasis on a different syllable:

**S**tormtrooper (emphasis on first syllable)

Trans**m**issions (emphasis on second syllable)

Tatoo**i**ne (emphasis on final syllable)

This can get even trickier with four- and five-syllable words. The basic pattern in most words is that you figure out which syllable should be emphasized, and then see if another syllable has a minor emphasis. The word Imperial is a good example. The main emphasis is on the second syllable, **Imperial**. In iambic pentameter, it makes sense for the first iamb to be **Imper** and the next iamb to be **ial**. So “al” at the end of the word Imperial has a secondary stress that fits the meter nicely. (To give you an idea of how these decisions are made... if you read carefully you'll notice that throughout *William Shakespeare Star Wars*® I use the word stormtrooper as if the emphasis is in the middle—**stormtrooper**. I did this mostly because stormtrooper is a challenging word. It's a compound word, and if you break it into two words it has two stressed syllables at the front—**storm trooper**. To put it in iambic pentameter either means stressing the middle syllable as I did—**stormtrooper**—or making the “er” on the end a secondary emphasis syllable—**stormtrooper**. That second option sounded wrong to my ear, so I took a liberty with the emphasis in the word.)

- All those –est and –eth endings. When I started writing *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars*®, I had a rough idea from reading Shakespeare when the –est ending on a verb was used, and when the –eth ending was used. But it wasn’t until my college English professor, good friend and Shakespeare scholar Murray Biggs, read the manuscript that I learned the actual rules (he set me straight more than once or twice). In general, the –est ending happens when you are using the pronoun “thou”: “Thou speakest” and “thou holdest” in the speech above, referring to a singular “you.” The –eth ending is used for “he” or “she” or a neutral (but always singular) “it”: “patience runneth” in Vader’s speech.
- You’ll often see words that would normally end in –ed, like the word “locked,” spelled in Shakespeare as “lock’d” (as in the speech above). The reason these words are printed this way is that in Shakespeare’s time, the –ed was sometimes actually pronounced, so instead of pronouncing the word “locked” as “lockt” (as we do now), they would have pronounced it in two syllables, “lock-ked.” When such a word was to be shortened because of the meter, the word was turned into a contraction, “lock’d.” Often, in modern editions of Shakespeare—and in *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars*®—if there’s a word ending in –ed that is supposed to have the –ed pronounced as a separate syllable, it will appear with an accent over the e: “lockèd.”
- On thees and thous:
  - thou = you (as the subject of a sentence, like “thou speakest”)
  - thee = you (as the object or of a sentence, like “give it to thee”)
  - thy = your (before a word starting with a consonant, like “thy life”)
  - thine = your (before a word starting with a vowel, like “thine attitude”)
  - ye = you (as the subject of a sentence for more than one person, like “ye people”)

A final note about Shakespeare and language: when in doubt, look up words you don’t know and even write their definitions in the text next to them if it helps. Most good Shakespeare editions have footnotes that explain unusual words (like “fardels”) or a glossary of terms at the end. This will help you when even reading the text aloud doesn’t do the trick.

## SHAKESPEAREAN REFERENCES IN *WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S STAR WARS*®

Some good news: if you have read *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars*®, you’ve already read some Shakespeare. Not much, but it’s better than nothing. *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars*® makes direct reference to several lines in Shakespeare’s plays. Here’s a guide to where you can find Shakespearean references in a galaxy far, far away.

### **Henry V**

The overall structure of *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars*® is probably most similar to the history play *The Life of Henry the Fifth* (more briefly known as *Henry V*). *Henry V* has a grand story to tell—the English defeat of the French in famed battles such as Harfleur and Agincourt, and King Henry V’s rise to power over two kingdoms. But how could such a sweeping tale be told on a small stage, in the days before movies or computer animation? Shakespeare handles this by using a Chorus. The dramatic device of a Chorus—which goes back at least to early Greek drama—is a narrating character who is not

involved in the action and is voiced either by a single person or by a group. The Chorus helps explain what is happening, particularly when the action is too grand to be depicted literally on the stage.

When I began writing *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®, I was faced with a dilemma: how do you show the action of *Star Wars* in a play with minimal staging opportunities? I decided early on to take a page from Shakespeare and add a Chorus to the play, to explain the visual elements that a theater audience wouldn't necessarily be able to see. In that way, my Chorus functions in the same way as Shakespeare's Chorus in *Henry V*. I decided—just for the challenge and the fun of it—to have my Chorus speak in rhyming sets of four lines called “quatrains” (with lines 1 and 3 rhyming and lines 2 and 4 rhyming). Shakespeare doesn't go quite that far!

Great film version: Kenneth Branagh starred in and directed the 1989 film version of *Henry V*, with Derek Jacobi as the Chorus.

#### HENRY V

##### Prologue, 1-34

*O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend  
The brightest heaven of invention!  
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,  
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!  
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,  
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels  
(Leash'd in, like hounds) should famine, sword,  
and fire  
Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraised spirits that hath dar'd  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object. Can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may  
Attest in little place a million,  
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
On your imaginary forces work.  
Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confin'd two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high, upreared, and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.  
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;  
Into a thousand parts divide one man,  
And make imaginary puissance;  
**Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them**  
Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth;  
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck  
our kings,  
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,  
Turning th' accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,  
Admit me Chorus to this history;  
Who, Prologue-like, your humble patience pray,  
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.*

#### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

##### V.v.1-12

##### Chorus:

*As our scene shifts to space, so deep and dark,  
O'er your imagination we'll hold sway.  
For neither players nor the stage can mark  
The great and mighty scene they must portray.  
We ask you, let your keen mind's eye be chief—  
**Think when we talk of starships, there they be.**  
If you can soon suspend thy disbelief,  
The Death Star battle shall you plainly see!  
So now: the preparation made with care,  
Toward the Death Star rides the noble fleet.  
By whirr of engines rebels take the air,  
With courage strong their unknown Fate  
to meet.*

At two points in *Henry V*, the king makes a stirring speech to his troops to invigorate them for battle. One of these is his speech before the battle of Agincourt, where the English were far outnumbered by the French, to say nothing of being weary from weeks of battle and travel. I put echoes of these stirring speeches into Luke Skywalker's mouth as he encourages his rebel friends.

HENRY V  
IV.iii.20-23, 64-67

Henry V:

*If we are mark'd to die, we are enow  
To do our country loss; and if to live  
The fewer men, the greater share of honor.  
God's will, I pray thee wish not one man more.*

...

*And gentlemen in England, now a-bed,  
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here;  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles  
any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's Day.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®  
V.iv.66-69, 101-104

Luke:

*Wish not we had a single fighter more,  
If we are mark'd to die, we are enough  
To make our planets proud. But should we win,  
We fewer rebels share the greater fame.*

...

*And citizens in Bespin now abed,  
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here.  
For never shall Rebellion see a time  
More glori'us than our strong attack today!*

Henry V's speech during the battle of Harfleur (earlier in the play than Agincourt) encourages his men to keep up the siege of the city and win the day. That speech begins with a famous line of Henry's (III.i.1, below). I used almost the same line for Luke's encouragement of Biggs and Wedge as they approach to take on the Death Star one final time. But I also draw on Henry V's Agincourt speech (IV.iii.60) and the moment when—after the English victory at Agincourt—King Henry realizes that during the battle the boys who traveled with the army have been slaughtered: "I was not angry since I came to France / Until this instant."

HENRY V  
III.i.1

Henry V:

*Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more...*

IV.vii.55-56

Henry V:

*I was not angry since I came to France  
Until this instant.*

IV.iii.60

Henry V:

*We few, we happy few, we band of brothers*

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V.v.331, 334-335, 350-351

Luke:

*Once more unto the trench, dear friends, once more!*

...

*I was not angry since I came to space  
Until this instant!*

...

*We three, we happy three, we band of brothers,  
Shall fly unto the trench with throttles full!*

## Richard III

*The Tragedy of Richard III* is part history and part tragedy. The play tells the story of Richard of Gloucester, an obsessively ambitious man whose deceptions and bloodlust put him on the throne as Richard III (and leaves him with no one to trust once he is there). Great film versions: *Looking for Richard*, which is half film and half documentary by Al Pacino about how to approach the play and Shakespeare in general. Also, Ian McKellen in the 1995 film of *Richard III*.

The first lines of *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*® (not counting the opening prologue) plays off the first lines of *Richard III*:

RICHARD III

I.i.1-2

Richard:

*Now is the winter of our discontent  
Made glorious summer by this son of York...*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

I.i.1-12

C-3PO:

*Now is the summer of our happiness  
Made winter by this sudden, fierce attack!*

Toward the end of *Richard III*, the king is on a battlefield about to lose the battle (plus his kingdom, and his life) to the Earl of Richmond, who will become King Henry VII. It's during that final battle that Richard utters the famous line, "A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" The rebel general Dodonna makes reference to this situation, in the only direct reference to the plot of a Shakespeare play by a character in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®:

RICHARD III

V.iv.7

Richard:

*A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

V.iv.30-31

Dodonna:

*But like the king who fell for want of horse  
This station may be crush'd by smaller might.*

## King Lear

*The Tragedy of King Lear* is the story of an old king who tries to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. In the opening scene, his first two daughters Goneril and Regan—who turn out to be rotten—give him the ego-stroking he craves before he grants them their inheritance. But his good, youngest daughter, Cordelia, refuses to lavish praise on Lear just to receive her part of the kingdom. Lear, in his rage, sends her into exile and splits his kingdom into two parts for Goneril and Regan instead of three. Thus begins the tragedy, which ends with Lear's madness and death (not to mention the death of all of his daughters and a handful of other people). Great film version: Laurence Olivier played King Lear in the 1983 BBC version. The cast and crew were in tears as they watched Olivier perform Lear's death scene, because Olivier himself was old and unwell.

One of *King Lear's* most memorable characters is the Fool, a jester-like figure whose job is to entertain the king. However, the Fool is more than just a comedian—he tells truths no one else will utter or accept, words that few take seriously because he is a Fool. Shortly after Lucasfilm encouraged me to take some liberties with the original movie of *Star Wars*, I had the idea to make R2-D2 a Shakespearean fool in the tradition of *King Lear*. R2 bursts into English when he's alone or speaking an aside.



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

I.ii.56-68

R2-D2:

*This golden droid has been a friend, 'tis true,  
And yet I wish to still his prating tongue!  
An imp, he calleth me? I'll be reveng'd,  
And merry pranks aplenty I shall play  
Upon this pompous droid C-3PO!  
Yet not in language shall my pranks be done:  
Around both humans and the droids I must  
Be seen to make such errant beeps and squeaks  
That they shall think me simple. Truly, though,  
Although with sounds oblique I speak to them,  
I clearly see how I shall play my part,  
And how a vast Rebellion shall succeed  
By wit and wisdom of a simple droid.*



At one point, when King Lear has been staying in the house of Goneril, he announces that he and his hundred knights will now be staying with Regan. His daughters tell him that neither of them is prepared to continue taking care of his entourage. This is one of Lear's early signs that his daughters don't love him as much as they professed to at the beginning of the play. Goneril and Regan finally ask him why he needs even fifty men, or twenty-five, or even ten, five or one. He blurts out "O, reason not the need." In other words—don't ask why! Luke tells himself the same thing when he starts to ask himself whether the rebellion is worth its price in human life.

THE TRAGEDY OF KING LEAR

II.iv.264

King Lear:

*O, reason not the need...*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

V.v.268

Luke:

*Thus reason not the need, my troubl'd soul.*

## Hamlet

*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* is Shakespeare's most famous play. It's also the play I make the most references to in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars®*. The work tells the story of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, whose father has died and whose mother Gertrude has married his uncle Claudius (Hamlet's father's brother). In the opening scenes, the Ghost of King Hamlet returns to tell Hamlet that he was actually murdered by his brother, so that his brother could marry Hamlet's mother and take the throne. The tragedy unfolds as Hamlet tries to figure out the best way to avenge his father. Great film versions: Kenneth Branagh's 1996 version is good if you want to see Hamlet played sane, Mel Gibson's 1990 version is good if you want to see Hamlet played mad (I prefer Branagh's take).

From the start of the play—even before Hamlet learns of his father's murder—Hamlet is upset with Gertrude and expresses his unhappiness at her hasty marriage to his uncle Claudius. Gertrude tells Hamlet it is natural for people to die, and asks why his father's death seems so particular. I had Obi-Wan echo Hamlet's response.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

I.ii.76

Hamlet:

*Seems, madam? nay, it is, I know not "seems."*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

III.vi.102

Obi-Wan:

*Seems, young one? Nay, thou didst!  
Think thou not seems.*

Later in the same scene, in his first soliloquy, Hamlet expresses just how angry he is that his mother has remarried so quickly. He says, famously, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" I decided that Luke, getting shocked by the remote as he begins his Jedi training inside the *Millennium Falcon*, might think something similar about the Force.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

I.ii.146

Hamlet:

*Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman!*

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III.vi.52

Luke:

*Aye: frailty, thy name—belike—is Force.*

It made most sense to describe Obi-Wan's voice (when he speaks to Luke after being killed by Darth Vader) as an entrance of his ghost. Like Hamlet's father, Obi-Wan bids Luke to remember him.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

I.v.91

Ghost:

*Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

V.v.427

Ghost of Obi-Wan:

*Remember me, O Luke, remember me,*

"To be or not to be, that is the question," is, as I indicated above, probably Shakespeare's most famous line. It begins Hamlet's soliloquy in Act III, in which he questions what is useful about life and why human beings don't just kill themselves, given how hard life is. He then realizes it is the fear of what may come after death—"the undiscover'd country"—that makes people prefer to stay alive and deal with their troubles on earth rather than die and take their chances on the afterlife. I used several well-known lines from the "To be or not to be" speech in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®. You can see the whole speech below with the parts I referenced highlighted.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

III.i.55-87

Hamlet:

*To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep—  
No more, and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep—  
To sleep, perchance to dream—**ay, there's the rub,**  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause; there's the respect*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

III.i.101

Han Solo:

**Aye, there's the rub,** so shalt thou further pay.

That makes calamity of so long life:  
 For who would bear **the whips and scorns** of time,  
 Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
 The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay,  
 The insolence of office, and the spurns  
 That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,  
 When he himself might his quietus make  
 With a bare bodkin; who would fardels bear,  
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
 But that the dread of something after death,  
 The **undiscover'd country**, from whose bourn  
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
 And **makes us rather bear those ills we have,**  
**Than fly to others that we know not of?**  
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
 And thus the native hue of resolution  
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
 And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
 With this regard their currents turn awry,  
 And lose the name of action.

II.i.49

Luke:

O, I shall taste **the whips and scorns...**

IV.vii.55-58

Obi-Wan:

And so, unto this death I'll go, this sleep,  
 This sleep that promises the dream of peace.  
**This undiscover'd galaxy...**

I.v.18-19

C-3PO:

Aye, rather would I bear the ill I have,  
**Than fly to others that I know not of.**

After Hamlet kills Polonius, an advisor to his uncle Claudius (thinking perhaps he was killing Claudius himself), Hamlet is sent by his uncle to England. When he returns, he and his friend Horatio come across two men digging graves. Hamlet notices one skull in particular, asks the gravedigger whose it was, and learns that the skull is that of Yorick, a clown who amused Hamlet when he was a child. (Yorick is similar to the Fool in *King Lear*.) Hamlet holds up Yorick's skull to look at it and speaks about his memories of Yorick. This is probably the image we associate most with Shakespeare—Hamlet holding up a skull—and I couldn't resist writing a similar moment for Luke.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

V.i.184-195

Hamlet:

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow  
 of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath  
 bore me on his back a thousand times, and now  
 how abhorr'd in my imagination it is! my gorge  
 rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd  
 I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now,  
 your gambols, your songs, your flashes of  
 merriment, that were wont to set the table on  
 a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning—  
 quite chop-fall'n. Now get you to my lady's  
 chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick,  
 to this favor she must come; make her laugh at that.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

IV.vi.1-9

Luke:

Alas, poor stormtrooper, I knew ye not,  
 Yet have I ta'en both uniform and life  
 From thee. What manner of a man wert thou?  
 A man of inf'nite jest or cruelty?  
 A man with helpmate and with children too?  
 A man who hath his Empire serv'd with pride?  
 A man, perhaps, who wish'd for perfect peace?  
 Whate'er thou wert, good man, thy pardon grant  
 Unto the one who took thy place: e'en me.

The final action of the play occurs when Hamlet is challenged to a duel by Laertes, Polonius' son and the brother of Hamlet's romantic interest Ophelia (who is also dead by now). Horatio warns Hamlet against the duel, because Laertes is a skilled swordsman. Hamlet responds by saying, in essence, that his time to die will come at some point, so it might as well be now—the main thing is to be ready for it. It's the sort of line a person might say when preparing to meet her or his fate, as the rebels do when faced with the Death Star. (When I graduated from high school, I wrote "The readiness is all" on my graduation cap. Yes, a little pretentious.)

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK  
V.ii.220-222

Hamlet:

*If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come,  
it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come—  
the readiness is all.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®  
V.v.141-142

Red Leader:

*The time is here, good men, 'tis not to come:  
It will be now. The readiness is all.*

Hamlet and Laertes duel, and because this is a tragedy both of them are dead by the end, along with Claudius and Gertrude. Horatio, Hamlet's friend, is one of the last left alive. He speaks of his heartbreak at losing his friend. Luke expresses a similar heartbreak when he is told he won't be able to attend the Academy.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK  
V.ii.359

Horatio:

*Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince...*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®  
I.vii.72

Luke:

*Now cracks a hopeful heart...*

## Macbeth

The title character of *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is a close companion and courtier of the Scottish King Duncan. Macbeth is led via his own ambition, fortunetelling witches and a devious wife to murder the king. *Macbeth* is a play full of ghosts and witches and visions—it has a reputation among actors and stage crews for bringing bad luck, so many people who work in theater have a superstition about saying the word "Macbeth" anywhere near a playhouse. (In conversation, they call it "the Scottish play.") Great film version: the best might still be Orson Welles' 1948 *Macbeth*.

At one point, Macbeth has a vision of a dagger, which strengthens his resolve to kill the king. Duncan is dead shortly thereafter, Macbeth becomes king, but this is a tragedy so you can guess his reign doesn't last long...

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH  
II.i.33

Macbeth:

*Is this a dagger which I see before me?*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®  
III.vii.5

Han Solo:

*Is this an ast'roid field I see before me?*

## Julius Caesar

*The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* tells the story of the famous Roman leader, the man who helped kill him (Brutus) and the friend who eventually co-ruled in his place (Marc Antony). Great film version: you can't beat Marlon Brando as Marc Antony in the 1953 film version of the play.

The famous warning given to Caesar by a soothsayer (fortuneteller) is “Beware the ides of March”—meaning March 15th, the day on which Caesar was killed. In the speech Caesar gives shortly before he is killed, Caesar proclaims his eternal nature, comparing himself with the North Star. It sounds like the kind of thing someone as arrogant (and equally doomed to die) as Grand Moff Tarkin might say.

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

III.i.60

Julius Caesar:

*But I am constant as the northern star.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

II.iii.99-100

Tarkin:

*I am as constant as the Endor moon,  
And shall Rebellion crush, and do it soon.*

After Caesar is killed, Brutus explains to the crowd why he and his co-conspirators assassinated him. His speech pales in comparison to the speech given by Marc Antony, who reminds the crowds how much they all loved Caesar. (It's worth nothing that Brutus' speech is in prose, while Marc Antony's is in iambic pentameter, which gives it more importance.) Marc Antony's speech begins with the famous line, “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!” It seemed like a good way for Luke to get his fellow rebels' attention and begin a stirring speech, too.

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

III.ii.73

Marc Antony:

*Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

V.iv.65

Luke:

*Friends, rebels, starfighters, lend me your ears.*

## Romeo and Juliet

*The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* is the famous story of two rival families and the young woman and man from each of those families who fall deeply in love. It doesn't end well. Romeo and Juliet speak in rhyming couplets and quatrains when they speak to each other. I borrowed several lines from *Romeo and Juliet* for *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®. Great film versions: Baz Luhrmann's 1996 movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes is a fast-paced, fun modern take. Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* is also based on *Romeo and Juliet*.

At the start of the play, men from the two rival families—the Capulets and the Montagues—encounter each other in the street. There is some question between the two groups as to whether or not someone bit his thumb at a rival. Biting the thumb was quite an insult—a good way to pick a fight, as the creatures in the cantina try to do with Luke.

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

I.i.44-45

Abram:

*Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?*

Sampson:

*I do bite my thumb, sir.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

III.i.58

Creature 2:

*I bite my thumb at thee...*

After Romeo meets Juliet by chance at a ball, he makes his way to her garden for a glimpse of her. When she appears at her bedroom window, he exclaims: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun." Luke is moved by fear rather than passion when he speaks a version of this line in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®.

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

II.ii.2

Romeo:

*But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

III.iv.46

Luke:

*What light through yonder flashing sensor breaks?*

Juliet's brother Tybalt finds out that Romeo and Juliet have fallen in love, so he pursues Romeo. When he catches up with him, Romeo's friend Mercutio is there as well. They all fight, and Mercutio is stabbed. As he lays dying, he comments that the next day he will be a "grave" man (an obvious double meaning), and curses the houses of both Capulet and Montague.

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

III.i.97-98

Mercutio:

*Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me  
a grave man.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

III.i.156-157

Han Solo:

*The day when Jabba taketh my dear ship  
Shall be the day you find me a grave man.*

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

III.i.99-100

Mercutio:

*A plague a'both your houses!*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

IV.iv.120-122

R2-D2 [aside]:

*A plague on 3PO for action slow,  
A plague upon my quest that led us here,  
A plague on both our circuit boards, I say!*

Tybalt is then killed by Romeo, who calls himself "fortune's fool" for having slain his beloved Juliet's cousin. If anyone in *Star Wars* thinks of himself as fortune's fool, it is Luke cursing his luck that he is bound to Tatooine.

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

III.i.136

Romeo:

*O, I am fortune's fool!*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

I.vii.89

Luke:

*O, I am Fortune's fool...*

## As You Like It

*As You Like It* is a comedy—the only comedy directly referenced in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®. It tells the story of Duke Senior, whose throne is taken away by his brother Duke Frederick. The rightful Duke Senior begins living in the Forest of Arden with his followers, until he is finally restored to his throne. Great film version: Kenneth Branagh directed *As You Like It* in 2006, setting the play in Japan.

The character Jacques, one of the loyal subjects living in the forest, has a famous speech that begins “All the world’s a stage” and explains the different parts a man plays in his lifetime.

AS YOU LIKE IT

II.vii.139

Jacques:

*All the world's a stage...*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

I.vii.97-98

Luke:

*Those oft-repeated words of my mate Biggs  
I do believe—that all the world's a star.*

## The Sonnets

In addition to plays, Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets and a handful of other poems. A sonnet—as a poetic form—always has 14 lines (just like a limerick has 5 lines and a haiku has 3). Shakespearean sonnets are in iambic pentameter and have the following rhyme scheme: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. (That is, lines 1 and 3 rhyme, lines 2 and 4 rhyme, and so on—lines 5 and 7, 6 and 8, 9 and 11, 10 and 12, and then the final two lines rhyme, 13 and 14.) As I said above, I took the idea of the Chorus from *Henry V* one step further and made the Chorus' lines rhyme. I also wrote the Chorus' opening Prologue and closing Epilogue as Shakespearean sonnets.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

Chorus:

*It is a period of civil war.  
The spaceships of the rebels, striking swift  
From base unseen, have gain'd a vict'ry o'er  
The cruel Galactic Empire, now adrift.  
Amidst the battle, Rebel spies prevail'd  
And stole the plans to a space station vast,  
Whose pow'rful beams will later be unveil'd  
And crush a planet: 'tis the DEATH STAR blast.  
Pursu'd by agents sinister and cold,  
Now Princess Leia to her home doth flee,  
Deliv'ring plans and a new hope they hold:  
Of bringing freedom to the galaxy.  
In time so long ago begins our play,  
In star-crossed galaxy far, far away.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

Chorus:

*Now dawns a new day with the sun of Peace,  
The day whereon the rebels welcome Fate.  
For from their enemies they find release  
And now with mirth they come to celebrate.  
Young Luke, strong in the Force, doth walk beside  
The noble Han, whose valor won the day.  
The rebels form an aisle and rise with pride,  
As Luke and Han march forth in grand display.  
Now Leia smiles and gives them their reward,  
As each bows low with hope and joy sincere.  
C-3PO and R2, now restor'd,  
Look on as brave Chewbacca sounds the cheer.  
There let our heroes rest free from attack,  
Till darkness rise and Empire striketh back.*

## SHAKESPEAREAN DEVICES IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

In addition to direct references to various plays, *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*® contains a handful of literary devices that are used by Shakespeare as well. Here's a sampling of them.

### The Fable

Shakespeare sometimes makes reference to a minor story—unrelated to the plot—that sheds light on the action at hand. These are fables, which tell a tale with a moral and often end in an aphorism (a short wise saying). I used two such fables for the Imperial Commander—warning Darth Vader of the Rebellion's danger if the Senate takes its side—and for Luke, as he decides the best way to convince Han to help him rescue Leia. Those examples are below, preceded by one from Hamlet.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

IV.iii.21-31

Hamlet:

*Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat  
all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves  
for maggots; your fat king and your lean beggar  
is but variable service, two dishes, but to one  
table—that's the end.*

King:

*Alas, alas!*

Hamlet:

*A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a  
king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.*

King:

*What doest thou mean by this?*

Hamlet:

*Nothing but to show you how a king may go a  
progress through the guts of a beggar.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS

I.iii.33-38

Commander:

*'Tis like the tale my mother told me once  
Of bygone emperor whose reign was lost  
When putrid Ugnoughts rose against his throne.  
So hath my mother said, and I with her:  
A deathly blow oft comes from tiny fist,  
And greatest tree may fall by smallest axe.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

IV.ii.226-237

Luke:

*My aunt Beru hath told me once a tale:  
She said when first the deep, vast Kessel mines  
Were dug, it was reveal'd that the pearls  
Of greatest value must by clever means  
Discover'd be. So did the miners band  
Together, so to make a useful tool.  
This tool would pull the pearls out of the rock  
In such a way they seem'd t' emerge by ruse.  
This practice had a name: the Hammer Ploy.  
Now shall I play a Hammer's Ploy upon  
The soul of this good smuggler, coaxing him  
By means most indirect to rescue good.*



## Extended Metaphors

Frequently, Shakespeare will draw out a metaphor and squeeze as much life from it as possible. I tried my hand at an extended metaphor around food in the dialogue between Luke and C-3PO. Examples of this are plentiful in Shakespeare, but here's an example from the scene when Romeo and Juliet first meet and kiss, with an extended religious metaphor.

### THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

I.v.93-109

Romeo:

*If I profane with my unwortheist hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.*

Juliet:

*Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this:  
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,  
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.*

Romeo:

*Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?*

Juliet:

*Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in pray'r.*

Romeo:

*O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do,  
They pray—grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.*

Juliet:

*Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.*

Romeo:

*Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.  
[kissing her]*

*Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purg'd.*

Juliet:

*Then have my lips the sin that they have took.*

Romeo:

*Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urg'd!  
Give me my sin again. [kissing her again]*

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

I.vi.56-70

Luke:

*And hast thou been in many battles? Speak!  
Whatever morsel thou mayst serve to me  
Shall be a feast unto my waiting ear;  
The smallest tale of battle lost or won  
Shall feed my soul's ne'er-ending appetite!*

C-3PO:

*Full many battles, aye, Sir. But I fear  
I have but little food to fill thy heart—  
A banquet, sadly, I cannot prepare,  
'Tis certain that of tales I am no chef.  
But rather, I confess that not much more  
Than an interpreter am I, and not  
Much good at telling stories—verily,  
I've not the salt or spice to season them.*

Luke:

*'Tis well, my droid. So shall my hunger wait  
To feast one day upon another's tale.*



## Anaphora

The literary device anaphora means that the same opening of a line is used repeatedly over the course of several lines. An example from Shakespeare's *The First Part of Henry the Sixth* is shown here, as well as a few examples from *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®.

HENRY VI PART ONE

II.iv.11-15

Warwick:

*Between two hawks, which flies the higher pitch,  
Between two dogs, which hath the deeper mouth,  
Between two blades, which bears the better temper,  
Between two horses, which doth bear him best,  
Between two girls, which hath the merriest eye—*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

I.vii.38-41

Owen:

*The time so long ago when wars were fought,  
The time when men did battle to the grave,  
The time before the Empire rul'd supreme,  
The time wherein thy father died as well.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

IV.vi.75-78

Princess Leia:

*A kiss for luck before our flight, dear friend,  
A kiss upon thy cheek from lips of mine,  
A kiss to give thee hope and confidence,  
A kiss to bring us courage in this time.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

V.iii.3-6

Han Solo:

*Amazing hath my rescue of thee been,  
Amazing is my hand at piloting,  
Amazing all my part in this escape,  
Amazing—aye, 'tis true—my handsome looks.*

## Premonitory Dreams

Shakespeare sometimes has a character describe a dream that s/he has had, a dream that in some way predicts the character's fate. C-3PO has such a dream after he and Luke are attacked by the Tusken Raiders (do droids dream?). George, Duke of Clarence—brother of Richard III—has a famous premonitory dream about his own fate. Clarence is later killed by murderers hired by Richard as Richard strives to secure the throne.

RICHARD III

I.iv.58-63

Clarence:

*With that (methoughts) a legion of foul fields  
Environ'd me, and howled in mine ears  
Such hideous cries that with the very noise  
I, trembling, wak'd, and for a season after  
Could not believe but that I was in hell,  
Such terrible impression made my dream.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

II.i.186-190

C-3PO:

*Where am I? Have I ta'en an ill-tim'd step?  
In dreams have I seen visions of my death—  
Ten thousand soldiers pranc'd upon my grave,  
And I, alone to face the murd'rous mass,  
Could only weep at my untimely end.*

## Songs

Shakespeare's plays are full of songs. Sometimes playful, sometimes mystical, sometimes sorrowful, songs can appear at unexpected moments and often break from the rhythm of iambic pentameter. After Leia watches her home planet Alderaan be destroyed by the Death Star, I felt she had to sing a song about it. I was inspired by the melancholy song of Desdemona, the tragic heroine of *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*.

### OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE

IV.iii.40-56 (selections)

Desdemona:

*The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,  
Sing all a green willow;  
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,  
Sing willow, willow, willow.  
Her salt tears fell from her, and soft'ned the stones,  
Sing willow... willow, willow...  
Sing all a green willow must by my garland.  
Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve...  
I call'd my love false love; but what said he then?  
Sing willow, willow, willow.*

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

III.v.59-70

Leia [song]:

*When Alderaan hath blossom'd bright,  
Then sang we songs of nonny,  
But now her day is turn'd to night,  
Sing hey and lack-a-day.  
My friend and I stood by the river,  
Then sang we songs of nonny,  
But I could not her soul deliver,  
Sing hey and lack-a-day.  
My planet hath the bluest shore,  
Then sang we songs of nonny,*

## Stichomythia

Stichomythia is a literary device in which two characters exchange lines back and forth in rapid dialogue, usually with echoes and repetitions of what each other is saying. Stichomythia is most often used in single lines of dialogue, but in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars®* I used it in chunks of four lines (technically quadristichomythia or something like that). These lines alternate back and forth between Luke and Leia after Alderaan is destroyed and Obi-Wan has been killed. There is a wonderful example in *Hamlet*, when Gertrude chides Hamlet for his disrespect to her new husband (Hamlet's uncle) Claudius, and Hamlet in turn chides her for her betrayal of his father, King Hamlet.

### HAMLET, THE PRINCE OF DENMARK

III.iv.9-12

Queen:

*Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.*

Hamlet:

*Mother, you have my father much offended.*

Queen:

*Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.*

Hamlet:

*Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.*

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

V.i.1-8

Luke:

*My heart doth break at this most recent loss,  
And how shall heart be heal'd of this grave pain?  
My aunt and uncle first, and now this Ben:  
Did e'er a person know such grief as mine?*

Princess Leia:

*His heart breaks for a person, Obi-Wan—  
My heart breaks for a people, Alderaan.  
My ship crush'd first, and now my planet too:  
Did e'er a person know such grief as ours?*