

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK®
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



By Ian Doescher

INTRODUCTION

This guide offers a brief introduction to Shakespeare and the elements that *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back* 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 The Empire Striketh Back*:

- 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 The Empire Striketh Back*.
- Minimal stage directions. Shakespeare left it to his plays' performers to determine who should what on stage. That said, *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back* has more in the way of stage directions than *William Shakespeare's Star Wars®* did, as I imagined more fully what it might look like staged.
- Rhyming couplets at the end of scenes. A couplet is two adjacent lines of verse that rhyme with each other, like "Our swift evacuation shall commence, / And till 'tis done, make ready our defense." 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 The Empire Striketh Back*.
- 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 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:

Defend (de-FEND)
Consult (con-SULT)
Beyond (be-YOND)
Across (a-CROSS)
Forsooth (for-SOOTH)
Piett (pi-ETT)

"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.

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. In *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back*, Boba Fett speaks in prose as a similarly low-class character.

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 The Empire Striketh Back* uses stricter iambic pentameter than Shakespeare himself used, though I did allow for far more weak endings than I did in *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®.

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 The Empire Striketh Back* (I.i.40-47), followed by some things to notice:

Wampa:

You viewers all, whose gentle hearts do fear 40
The smallest womp rat creeping on the floor,
May now perchance both quake and tremble here,
When wampa rough in wildest rage doth roar.
Pray know that I a wampa simple am,
And take no pleasure in my angry mood. 45
Though with great force this young one's face I slam,
I prithee know I strike but for my food.

This speech from the wampa creature 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 40-41, “whose gentle hearts do fear the smallest womp rat...” is a single thought that happens to be split across two lines. Any line like that one that doesn't end with any punctuation should roll right into the next line.
- All eight of these lines follow the rules and rhythm of iambic pentameter, but I think you can hear it clearest in line 41: “The smallest womp rat creeping on the floor.” The **smallest womp rat creeping on the floor**. 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 multisyllabic 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:

Stormtrooper (emphasis on first syllable)
Trans**mis**sions (emphasis on second syllable)
Tattoo**ine** (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 The Empire Striketh Back* I use the word “Skywalker” variably—sometimes as if the main emphasis is on the first syllable (**Skywalker**) and sometimes as if the middle syllable gets the main emphasis (**Skywalker**). I did this because *Skywalker* is a challenging word. It's a name made from a compound word, and if you break it into two words it has two stressed syllables at the front—**sky walker**. To put it in iambic pentameter means having to pick a syllable to stress, so I did what (I hope) Shakespeare would have done and stressed the syllable one way when it suited certain situations, and the other way for other situations.

- All those –est and –eth endings. In general, the –est ending happens when you are using the pronoun thou, like “Thou speakest” or “thou holdest,” referring to a singular you. The –eth ending (or “doth”) is used for he or she or a neutral (but always singular) it: “When wampa rough in wildest rage doth roar” in the wampa’s speech.
- You’ll often see words that would normally end in –ed, like the word “locked,” spelled in Shakespeare as “lock’d.” 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 The Empire Striketh Back*—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 THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

Some good news: if you have read *William Shakespeare’s The Empire Striketh Back*, you’ve already read some Shakespeare. *William Shakespeare’s The Empire Striketh Back* 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

Like *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars®*, *William Shakespeare’s The Empire Striketh Back* borrows heavily from the history play *The Life of Henry the Fifth* (more briefly known as *Henry V*) in terms of structure. *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*. After my first book came out, one criticism I heard (and agreed with) was that I had used the Chorus too much, so the Chorus is still there in this second book but doesn't have as much to say.

In *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®, just for the challenge and the fun of it, I had my Chorus speak in rhyming sets of four lines called "quatrains" (with lines 1 and 3 rhyming and lines 2 and 4 rhyming). I continued this convention in *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back*.

Recommended 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

Prologue:

*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!*

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II.ii.1-4

Chorus:

*The transports make their way deep into space;
The ion cannon leads as they take flight.
But now the rebels grave new dangers face,
As th'Empire sends a ground assault to fight.*

Much Ado About Nothing

As I was writing *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back*, I was surprised to realize I had made more references to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* than any other play. *Much Ado* is a comedy—probably my favorite of Shakespeare's comedies—so it was strange that lines from it kept popping up in the darkest of the original *Star Wars*® trilogy.

Much Ado About Nothing tells the story of two sets of couples: Hero and Claudio, who are natural lovers, and Beatrice and Benedick, who are both sharp-tongued and have sworn off love. All ends well, but not before Beatrice and Benedick are tricked into loving each other (by overhearing their friends say that the other loves them) and Claudio and Hero are saved from a huge misunderstanding—engineered by the villain Don John—that nearly results in her death.

Recommended film versions: Kenneth Branagh's 1993 *Much Ado* is still my favorite—it was one of the things that turned me on to Shakespeare in the first place. Joss Whedon's 2012 version is also required viewing.

When we first meet Beatrice and Benedick, they are verbally sparring and Beatrice questions why Benedick is still yammering when no one seems to be listening anymore. C-3PO has a similar (though more self-aware) moment.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

I.i.116-117

Beatrice:

*I wonder that you will still be talking,
Signior Benedick, nobody marks you.*

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IV.iii.60-61

C-3PO: [Aside:]

*I wonder that I still am talking here:
Nobody marks me.*

After some verbal sparring, Benedick makes a joke about a horse and walks off, always trying to get the last word. Beatrice refers to this as a "jade's trick," a phrase Boba Fett picks up when Han is trying to escape:

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

I.i.144-145

Beatrice:

*You always end with a jade's trick,
I know you of old.*

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IV.i.78

Boba Fett:

*I refuse to let thee play a jade's trick and
go thy merry way.*

Claudio asks Benedick what he thinks of Hero, and he twists his words to say that as she is, he doesn't like her, and if she were different, he wouldn't like her either. Leia feels the same way about Han:

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

I.i.173-176

Benedick:

*...only this commendation I can afford her,
that were she other than she is, she were
unhandsome, and being no other but as
she is, I do not like her.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
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III.i.39-41

Leia:

*However can I love thee, being as
You are? But being other than you are,
I would not love thee.*

At a costume dance, Benedick dances with Beatrice while pretending to be someone else. She guesses who he is, though, and ends up saying some mean things about him as though to a stranger (in the grand tradition of "be careful what you ask for"). Afterward, Benedick complains (as the exogorth, or space slug, does) that he has been used past the endurance of a block:

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

II.i.239-240

Benedick:

*O, she misus'd me past the endurance of
a block...*

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III.iv.58-59

Exogorth:

*These travelers who have escap'd my reach
Us'd me past the endurance of a block!*

Claudio and Hero become engaged and want to marry immediately, but her father Leonato wants them to wait seven nights to get married. Don Pedro tells them not to worry, that the time won't go by dully because in the meantime they will try to trick Beatrice and Benedick into loving each other. Darth Vader similarly reminds himself not to worry that they haven't found the rebels yet, because it will give him time to finalize his plans.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

II.i.363-364

Don Pedro:

*...I warrant thee, Claudio, the time shall
not go dully by us.*

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III.vi.92

Vader:

The time shall not go dully by us...

Just before Don Pedro, Leonato and Antonio appear to trick Benedick into thinking Beatrice loves him, Benedick has a soliloquy in which he laments the kind of men who fall in love. Claudio is just such a man. Han says something similar about Lando, who is just the sort of man who knows other men's pasts.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

II.iii.12

Benedick:

... and such a man is Claudio.

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IV.i.55

Han:

And such a man is Lando...

Don John arranges for Claudio to see a woman whom he thinks is Hero having an affair with another man. Claudio decides to turn her away on their wedding day, and when he accuses her of not being a maid her father Leonato asks if he (Claudio) is responsible for taking her virginity. Claudio responds with these words, words Luke echoes when he discusses how nobly he feels toward Leia:

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

IV.i.

Claudio:

I never tempted her with word too large.

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I.vi.58

Luke:

I ne'er would tempt her with a word too large.

Everything ends well—misunderstandings are corrected and the two sets of lovers are united. Don John is captured and brought to the wedding feast, where Benedick promises punishment for him the same way Darth Vader promises punishment for those who let the rebels escape.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

V.iv.127-128

Benedick:

*Think not on him till tomorrow. I'll devise
thee brave punishments for him.*

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V.iii.248-249

Vader:

*I shall devise brave punishments for those
Who put upon our state this grievous blight.*

Hamlet

The *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* is Shakespeare's most famous play. 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.

Recommended 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).

"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. At the end of the speech, he tells himself to be quiet because Ophelia (his girlfriend) is coming. I borrowed a couple moments from the end of this speech—Han tells himself to shush, and Darth Vader uses that great word "orisons" (which means prayers).

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

III.i.87-89

Hamlet:

*—Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia. Nymph, in thy orisons,
Be all my sins rememb'ed.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

I.iii.71

Han:

But soft you now: the officer returns.

V.i.89-90

Vader:

*In all thy orisons thou mayst yet plead
The deal no further alterèd will be.*

While Hamlet is talking with his mother, he realizes that someone is hiding behind the arras (essentially a large tapestry or curtain). Hamlet reacts rashly, killing Polonius (an advisor to his uncle Claudius) and thinking he may be killing Claudius himself. As he does it, he says "Dead for a ducat!", the same phrase Darth Vader uses when he kills Captain Needa, who has just let the Millennium Falcon escape:

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

III.iv.22-23

Hamlet:

Dead, for a ducat, dead!

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

III.vi.72

Vader:

And thus thy life—dead for a ducat, dead!

Claudius sends Hamlet to England, and when he returns he sees a funeral procession. The manner of the procession tells him someone has committed suicide (spoiler alert: it's Ophelia). Luke sees a similar grave procession as Han's carbonite-encased body is transported to Boba Fett's ship:

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

V.i.218-221

Hamlet:

*The queen, the courtiers—who is this
they follow,
And with such maimèd rites? This doth betoken
The corse they follow did with desperate hand
Fordo its own life.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

V.ii.7-9

Luke:

*But wait, what's this? Procession most sincere,
And with such maimèd rites? This doth betoken
The corpse they follow was an enemy.*

The final action of the play occurs when Hamlet is challenged to a duel by Laertes, Polonius' son and the brother of Ophelia. As they duel, Osric (who is judging the duel) enthusiastically proclaims that Hamlet has struck a hit on Laertes. Luke says something similar when shoots the AT-ATs:

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

V.ii.281

Osric:

A hit, a very palpable hit.

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II.ii.55

Luke:

A hit! A very palpable hit.

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.”) Recommended film version: the best might still be Orson Welles' 1948 *Macbeth*.

The play opens with three witches prophesying about what is to come. One of their famous lines, showing how things will be flipped upside down, is “fair is foul and foul is fair.” Luke makes references to these lines after his run-in with the wampa:

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

I.i.11

Witches:

*Fair is foul and foul is fair,
Hover through the fog and filthy air.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
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I.vi.5

Luke:

Thus is the creature's foul at last made fair.

Macbeth hears the witches' prophecy, that he will become king of Scotland. He decides this means he needs to kill the king, but he wavers back and forth as he finds the nerve to do it. His wife, Lady Macbeth, is more decisive (and has less of a conscience) than he, and she tells him to be strong. Leia—who is far nicer than Lady Macbeth, I think we would all agree—urges the rebels to have courage with similar words:

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

II.i.33

Lady Macbeth:

*But screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
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II.i.67

Leia:

Pray, screw your courage to the sticking place.

Macbeth employs two murderers to kill Banquo, one of the former king's men. The next time we see the murderers, though, there are three of them. When I was a junior in high school we all wrote papers hypothesizing who this previously unknown third murderer might be—one of the witches? Lady Macbeth? It's one of those fun Shakespearean conspiracy theories. In any case, the sudden appearance of the third murderer makes the first murderer ask who sent them. The AT-ATs follow suit:

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

II.i.33

Murderer 1:

But who did bid thee join with us?

Murderer 2:

—*Macbeth.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
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II.ii.22

AT-AT1:

But who did bid thee join with us?

AT-AT2:

—*Piett.*

When the final battle is upon him, and Macbeth's ill-gotten kingship is about to fall, he hears news that Lady Macbeth has died (essentially of her own guilt at the old king's murder). He has a beautiful speech about how meaningless life is, in which he refers to life as a "walking shadow." Luke uses the same phrase to describe Dagobah:

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

V.v.24-28

Macbeth:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
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II.vii.22

Luke:

It seems the place is but a walking shadow—

When Macbeth's rival (and ultimately, his killer) Macduff storms the castle, Macbeth welcomes the fight by saying, "Lay on, Macduff!" Luke uses this phrase twice in *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back* as he is about to fight:

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

V.viii.33-34

Macbeth:

*...Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries,
"Hold, enough!"*

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I.iii.119

Luke:

Unless I am the first to strike. Lay on!

III.v.96

Luke:

Lay on, Darth Vader, damnèd henchman vile.

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).

Recommended film version: you can't beat Marlon Brando as Marc Antony in the 1953 film version of the play.

After Caesar is killed, Marc Antony eulogizes him with his famous, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears" speech. In the speech, he says that those who killed Caesar did so because they said he was ambitious. Marc Antony points out how wrong they are, saying that Caesar was really not that ambitious—after all, when the poor cried Caesar wept, and ambition should be made of sterner stuff. AT-AT 1, who is a bit full of himself, voices a similar sentiment:

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

III.ii.92

Marc Antony:

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
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II.ii.40

AT-AT 1:

An AT-AT should be made of sterner stuff.

Brutus, one of Caesar's murderers, is finally hunted down by the forces of Marc Antony. Brutus reflects, before this battle, on the fact that although he is at his height now, the tides of Fate take you sometimes up and sometimes down. I borrowed liberally from his speech when Luke decides to go to Dagobah.

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

III.ii.73

Brutus:

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

II.iv.27-33

Luke:

*There is a tide in the affairs of Jedi,
Which taken at the flood, leads to the Force.
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in black holes and in miseries.
On such a full sea I am now afloat.
And I must take the current where it serves,
Or lose my chance to find my destiny.*



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.

Recommended 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*.

One of the first things to note is that Romeo and Juliet speak in rhyming couplets and quatrains when they speak to each other. Since *The Empire Strikes Back* is the first time when two characters in the *Star Wars*® trilogy get romantic, I decided it would be natural for Han and Leia to speak in rhyming quatrains with each other whenever the two of them are alone. This begins just after Han takes Leia's hands in his on the Millennium Falcon:

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

I.v.93-110

Romeo:

*If I profane with my unworthing 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.
[they kiss]*

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. [kisses her]*

Juliet:

—You kiss by th'book.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

III.i.113-128

Han Solo:

*A scoundrel? "Scoundrel" is the word you choose?
I like that word, when spoken from your lips.*

Leia:

Pray cease that touch, it doth my heart confuse.

Han Solo:

*But wherefore cease? What reason shall eclipse
The greater reason of my heart's intent?*

Leia:

But lo, my hands are dirtied by my work.

Han Solo:

*My hands are likewise dirty. Pray, assent
Unto this moment. What fear makes you shirk?*

Leia:

What fear? I tell thee, I am not afraid.

Han Solo:

*Did I imagine that your hands did shake?
Thou likest that I am of scoundrel made.
For thy life could more scoundrel gladly take.
If thou wouldst cast my suit off, think again—
I would that thou within me deeper look.*

Leia:

I tell thee true, that I do like nice men.

Han Solo:

I too am nice.

[They kiss. Enter C-3PO]

Leia:

[Aside:] —He kisses by the book.

After they first meet and have the interaction above, Romeo comes to Juliet's balcony by night and they have a famous scene of wordplay and love. At the end, Romeo speaks sweet words to Juliet, saying he doesn't want to leave. I have C-3PO mess these words up as he says goodbye to R2, because after all, he's a droid and no poet.

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

I.i.44-45

Romeo:

*Good night, good night! Parting is such
sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.*

*WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK*

II.iii.16-17

C-3PO:

*Farewell, farewell! Parting is such
sweet sorrow
That I shall say farewell till thou hast left.*

When the play is over, Romeo and Juliet are dead (sad, but true), as are a few other characters. When all is done, the prince comes and declares that although peace has come with the morning, it is an unhappy one. The Chorus says the exact same thing as *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back* ends, with the rebels safe but in trouble.

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

V.iii.305

Prince:

A glooming peace this morning with it brings...

*WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK*

V.iv.39

Chorus:

A glooming peace this morning with it brings...

As You Like It

As You Like It is a comedy that 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.

Recommended film version: Kenneth Branagh directed *As You Like It* in 2006, setting the play in Japan. Touchstone, the court fool, arrives in Arden and proclaims himself a fool for not being at home. Luke feels equally foolish when he arrives on Bospin without any assurance that his friends are there:

AS YOU LIKE IT

II.iv.16

Touchstone:

Ay, now am I in Arden; the more fool I...

*WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK*

V.ii.1

Luke:

Yes, now am I in Bospin—more fool I...

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 schoolboy who creeps like snail unwillingly to school, and the soldier who is sudden and quick in quarrel. A couple of characters in *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back* pick up these lines:

AS YOU LIKE IT

II.vii.146-147 and 151

Jacques:

Creeping, like snail, unwillingly to school.

...

*Jealous in honor, sudden, and quick
in quarrel...*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

I.iv.1-2

C-3PO:

*O horrid interim of waiting, time
That doth like snail unwillingly creep by.*

III.iii.42-44

Yoda:

*Much anger in him.
Sudden and quick in quarrel:
Too like his father.*

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a fantastical comedy full of spirits and sprites, and the lovers they confuse and ultimately bring together. 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.

Recommended film version: 1999's film version with an all-star cast including Kevin Kline, Michelle Pfeiffer, Rubert Everett, Stanley Tucci, Calista Flockhart, Christian Bale and others.

The lovers Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia and Helena are led into the forest, where a mischievous spirit named Puck plays mercilessly with them. At one point, as he is getting them to run around the forest chasing each other, he promises to lead them up and down. Han says a similar thing as he flies into the asteroid field. Note, by the way, that Shakespeare wrote Puck's lines in iambic tetrameter (only four iambs per line instead of five), so I had some adjustments to make:

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

III.ii.396-397

Puck:

*Up and down, up and down,
I will lead them up and down...*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

II.v.14-15

Han:

*First up and down, aye, up and down, this Han
Will lead them up and down. Away we go!*

Everything ends well with the lovers because this is Shakespeare (and not Romeo and Juliet). Once they have made their way back to Athens, they enjoy a feast together and a play put on by a small group of tradesmen (who are endearing fools). Snug the joiner plays the part of a lion, and because he is nervous about scaring the women in the audience, he gives a little speech telling them not to be too scared. I thought it would be funny if the wampa did the same thing:

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

V.

Lion:

*You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps
on floor,
May now perchance both quake and
tremble here,
When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.
Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am
A lion-fell, nor else no lion's dam;
For, if I should as lion come in strife
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

I.i.1

Wampa:

*You viewers all, whose gentle hearts do fear
The smallest womp rat creeping on the floor,
May now perchance both quake and tremble here,
When wampa rough in wildest rage doth roar.
Pray know that I a wampa simple am,
And take no pleasure in my angry mood.
Though with great force this young one's
face I slam,
I prithee know I strike but for my food.*

As the play closes, Puck tells the audience that if they have been offended, they shouldn't worry because Robin Goodfellow (his alter ego) will make it all better. Lando offers to make similar amends for the wrong he has done:

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

V.i.437-438

Puck:

*Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

V.iii.194-195

Lando:

*Give me your hand, good Sir, if we be friends,
And Lando shall, in time, restore amends.*

Twelfth Night

Twelfth Night tells the story of Viola, shipwrecked and separated from her twin brother Sebastian. She dresses as a man and enters the service of Orsino, Duke of Illyria. By the end, Viola and Orsino are to be married and Viola and Sebastian have been reunited.

Recommended film version: Trevor Nunn's 1996 *Twelfth Night* starring Helena Bonham Carter is a good place to start.

As I mentioned above, I wanted to find an opening line to a Shakespearean play that fit with *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Twelfth Night* provided just the solution:

TWELFTH NIGHT

I.i.1

Duke Orsino:

If music be the food of love, play on.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

I.i.1

Luke:

If flurries be the food of quests, snow on.

When Viola and her shipmates land on Illyria, she famously asks a ship's captain where they are. Luke, finding himself upside down in the wampa's den, asks a similar question:

TWELFTH NIGHT

I.i.1

Viola:

What country, friends, is this?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

I.iii.90

Luke:

What warren, friends, is this?

The Winter's Tale

The Winter's Tale, one of Shakespeare's darkest comedies, tells the convoluted story of a the kings of Bohemia and Sicilia, Polixenes and Leontes. The story sweeps over decades and is a tale of misunderstanding, mistrust, and ultimately reconciliation.

Recommended film version: there are not many movie versions of *The Winter's Tale*. The BBC made TV films of all of Shakespeare's plays in the early 1980s; I recommend their version of this play.

The most famous stage direction in all of Shakespeare comes from *The Winter's Tale*—I couldn't write a series of Shakespearean parodies without using it.

A WINTER'S TALE

III.iii.

[Exit, pursued by a bear]

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

I.i.

[Exit, pursued by a wampa]

The Comedy of Errors

Perhaps the silliest of Shakespeare's comedies (bordering on Farce), *The Comedy of Errors* tells the story of two sets of twins who have the same names: Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus. And that's about all you need to know to understand that a lot of crazy cases of mistaken identity take place. Every production of *The Comedy of Errors* I've seen involves a good deal of physical comedy as well—it's a fun ride.

Recommended film version: like *The Winter's Tale*, this does not get made into a film version often. Again, the BBC's version is the best there is.

Sometimes you just need a good insult, and Shakespeare had plenty of them. I borrowed one of Antipholus of Ephesus' insults for Leia to repeat to Lando:

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

IV.iv.24

Antipholus:

Thou whoreson, senseless villain!

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

V.ii.48

Leia:

... thou whoreson, senseless villain!

The Tempest

One of my favorite Shakespeare plays, *The Tempest* is a fantasy in which Prospero, rightful Duke of Milan, has been exiled on an island by his wicked brother Antonio. Using magic and through the help of two spirits named Ariel and Caliban, Prospero shipwrecks a boat of his former countrymen on the island and maneuvers their experience so that he gets his post back and his daughter Miranda finds a husband.

Recommended film version: Julie Taymor's *The Tempest* from 2010 starring Helen Mirren as Prospero is fabulous.

At one point, as Ariel is trying to lure Ferdinand (Miranda's soon-to-be husband) to where Prospero and Miranda are, he sings him a song. Leia borrows the lyric to lament Han's freezing in carbonite:

THE TEMPEST

I.ii.397

Ariel:

Full fathom five thy father lies...

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

V.i.95

Leia:

Full fathom five my lover lies...

The Merchant of Venice

The Merchant of Venice is considered a comedy because it ends with (most) everyone happy and lovers uniting. However, it is a difficult play because of the presence of Shylock, a Jewish merchant who is stereotypically and unfairly painted as a villain.

Recommended film version: try the 2004 version with Al Pacino as Shylock.

Shakespeare does not imbue Shylock with much humanity, though one exception is when Shylock pleads that Jewish people are just as prone to hurt and emotion as anyone else. Darth Vader makes the same case for the Sith:

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

III.i.58-67

Shylock:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

I.vii.32-37

Vader:

*—Hath not a Sith eyes?
Hath not a Sith such feelings, heart and soul,
As any Jedi Knight did e'er possess?
If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you
Blast us, shall we not injur'd be? If you
Assault with lightsaber, do we not die?*

Othello

The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice is a tragedy about jealousy, with a truly evil villain. Othello, a Moor living in Italy, is married to Desdemona. Iago, a soldier who is very evil but also very trusted by Othello, convinces Othello through deceit that his fellow soldier Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona. Othello enters a slow descent into near-madness, throwing his relationship with Desdemona into a storm that will ultimately take their lives.

Recommended film version: Laurence Fishburne as Othello and Kenneth Branagh as Iago in the 1995 version can't be beat. There's also a modern retelling of the play called simply *O* from 2001 that puts a good spin on the tale.

Early in the play, Othello tells the story of how he and Desdemona came to love each other. In the midst of that story, he describes Desdemona's reaction to his past: what a strange and pitiful past he had. Luke echoes these words when he finds himself on Dagobah, an unlikely place for a Jedi master:

OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE

I.iii.160-161

Othello:

*She swore, in faith, 'twas strange,
'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful:*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

II.vii.48

Luke:

'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange, 'tis pitiful.

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 THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

Chorus:

*O, 'tis for the rebellion a dark time.
For though they have the Death Star all destroy'd,
Imperi'l troops did from the ashes climb
And push the rebels closer to the void.
Across the galaxy pursu'd with speed,
The rebels flee th'Imperi'l Starfleet vast.
A group with Luke Skywalker in the lead
Hath to the ice world known as Hoth flown fast.
Meanwhile, the cruel Darth Vader is obsess'd
With finding young Skywalker. Thus he hath
Through ev'ry point of space begun his quest*

*By sending robot probes to aid his wrath,
In time so long ago begins our play,
In war-torn galaxy far, far away.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

Chorus:

*A glooming peace this morning with it brings,
No shine of starry light or planet's glow.
For though our heroes 'scape the Empire's slings,
The great rebellion ne'er has been so low.
Brave Han is for the Empire's gain betray'd,
Which doth leave Princess Leia's heart full sore.
Young Luke hath had his hand repair'd, remade—
The man is whole, but shaken to the core.
Forgive us, gentles, for this brutal play,
This tale of sorrow, strife, and deepest woes.
Ye must leave empty, sighing lack-a-day,
Till we, by George, a brighter play compose.
Our story endeth, though your hearts do burn,
And shall until the Jedi doth return.*



SHAKESPEAREAN DEVICES IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S STAR WARS®

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

Extended Wordplay

Frequently, Shakespeare drew out a word and squeezed as much life from it as possible. The best example of this in *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back* is Luke's use of the word "right" as he considers the hand he has lost. By my count, I used the word "right" in five different meanings here. Examples of this are plentiful in Shakespeare, but my favorite is a time when Benedick and Beatrice are parrying with words and Benedick admits she's totally wrung the meaning out of the word "foul":

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

V.ii.47-56

Beatrice:

...yet ere I go, let me go with that I came,
which is, with knowing what hath
pass'd between you and Claudio.

Benedick:

Only foul words—and thereupon I
will kiss thee.

Beatrice:

Foul words is but foul wind, and foul
wind is but foul breath, and foul
breath is noisome; therefore I will
depart unkiss'd.

Benedick:

Thou hast frighted the word out of his
right sense, so forcible is thy wit.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

V.iv.12-16

Luke:

Then rise once more with me, my true right hand—
Thy rightful place thou shalt take at my side
To right the wrongs that we have sufferèd,
And right now thou and I begin to work
T'ward righteousness in great rebellion's cause.

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 The Empire Striketh Back*:

HENRY VI PART ONE

II.iv.11-15

Warwick:

Between two hawks, which flies the
higher pitch,
Between two dogs, which hath the

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

II.ii.12-15

Dack:

A single warrior to bring them down,
A single hand to show rebellion's strength,
A single mind that could outwit them all,

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—

A single Dack to best the empire's might.
III.iv.67-70
Exogorth:

Was e'er a beast by supper so abus'd?
Was e'er a creature's case so pitiful?
Was e'er an exogorth as sad as I?
Was e'er a tragedy as deep as mine?

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. I had so much fun writing a song for Leia after Alderaan was destroyed for *William Shakespeare's Star Wars®* that I had to add more songs in *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back*. The Ugnaughts sing, of course, but one song in particular is based on Shakespeare. After Han is frozen in carbonite, Chewbacca and Leia sing a song strongly reminiscent of Desdemona's melancholy song in *Othello*.

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
THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK
III.v.59-70

Chewbacca:

[Sings:] Auugh, egh, auugh, auugh egh.
Auugh, muh, muh,
Egh, egh, auugh, egh, egh, muh, muh.
Auugh, auugh, egh, auugh, muh, egh, muh, muh,
Muh, wroshyr, wroshyr, wroshyr.

Leia:

[Sings:] Full fathom five my lover lies,
Within an icy tomb,
They say he lives, yet my heart dies,
Sing wroshyr, wroshyr, wroshyr.

Chewbacca:

[Sings:] Egh, auugh, auugh, auugh egh, egh,
muh, muh,
Auugh, egh, egh, auugh, auugh, muh, muh.
Egh, auugh, auugh, grrm, auugh, egh,
muh, muh,
Muh, wroshyr, wroshyr, wroshyr.

Leia:

[Sings:] Now he is gone, and so's my life,
All frozen in a moment.
He my seiz'd lov'd one, I his strife,
Sing wroshyr, wroshyr, wroshyr.

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. In *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back*, Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker share a bit of stichomythia after their lightsaber battle. 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

THE EMPIRE STRIKETH BACK

V.iii.148-159

Luke:

I fall, and yet no death's upon me yet.

I fall, for 'tis a better path than hate.

Vader:

He falls, and welcomes death instead of pow'r.

He falls, but I can sense he liveth still.

Luke:

I have not died—but pass into this shaft.

I have not died—though I may wish it so.

Vader:

He hath not died—his heart screams in its fear.

He hath not died—so may he yet be turn'd.

Luke:

I am held fast by this vane o'er the clouds.

I am held fast by some mirac'lous pow'r.

Vader:

He is held fast within the dark side's grasp.

He is held fast by his own clouded mind.