

Game of Thrones: Ser Brienne of Tarth and a Feminine Reinterpretation of Classical Heroes

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Abstract

One of the most remarkable aspects of the highly popular television phenomenon *Game of Thrones*, adapted from the saga *A Song of Ice and Fire*, by G.R.R. Martin, is the development of one of the most important feminine characters, Brienne of Tarth, and the feminist implications of this authorial decision. At the conclusion of the televised series, Brienne of Tarth is the only woman in the fictional realm of Westeros officially initiated into the profession of arms who attains the title of *Ser*, a designation that in the context of the story relates to knights, paladins, heroes, protectors, and defenders of their people. Brienne's knighting and initiation acknowledge her fighting skills, courage, personal ethics, and most importantly, her demonstrated aspirations for the defense and protection of the people of Westeros. Despite the long list of characters and their heroic deeds in battle, at the conclusion of the televised series Brienne of Tarth is the only character in the story who possesses the attributes and follows to completion the arc of development that configure the archetype of the hero, identified by important mythographers such as Joseph Campbell, Carol Pearson, Mircea Eliade, C.G. Jung, Gilbert Durand, and others.

Keywords: G.R.R. Martin, myth, audiovisual production, feminism, hero/heroine.

1. Introduction

One of the most remarkable achievements in audiovisual productions in the last decade has been the success of the televised series *Game of Thrones*, based on the original *A Song of Ice and Fire*, a series of epic fantasy novels by American novelist and screenwriter George R. R. Martin. The first volume of the series, titled *A Game of Thrones*, was published in 1996. Initially envisioned as a trilogy, five out of a planned seven volumes have been published to date. The fifth and most recent volume *A Dance with Dragons* was published in 2011. The sixth novel, *The Winds of Winter*, will be published in 2020. The televised series premiered on HBO in the United States on April 17, 2011, and concluded on May 19, 2019, with 73 episodes broadcast over eight seasons.

The ability of the series to captivate the imagination of audiences throughout the world is evidenced by the number of countries transmitting the television show and its high ratings worldwide.¹ The immediate fascination of the show on viewers also resulted in an overwhelming number of online forums,² where thousands of participants comment and share theories about each season and individual episodes, demonstrates that audiovisual productions with mythical, heroic, and epic content appeal to the subconscious of readers and spectators, independently of their level of knowledge regarding the functions of myths and literature.

Given the fascination of most civilizations with heroes, masculine figures who represent the human struggle and the struggle to acquire power, wisdom, recognition, grandeur, and honor, the development of a heroine who has an important role in the action of a story from beginning to end has wide-ranging implications for contemporary societies. The objective of this study is to identify Brienne of Tarth as the true hero/ine of the televised series *Game of Thrones*, through an analysis of her evolution as a character, which is comparable to the journey of classical heroes, their attributes, and her importance as a new archetype for the collective imagination of 21st century audiences. To this effect, I will trace the heroic journey of Brienne of Tarth aided by studies on myth such as Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949); Mircea Eliade's *The Myth of the Eternal Return: or Cosmos and History* (1954) and *Symbols and Images* (1961); C.G. Jung's *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1969); Carol S. Pearson's *The Hero Within* (1998); Gilbert Durand's theories of myth criticism and myth analysis in *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (1992),³ as well as other resources related to the content of myth in audiovisual productions in the age of globalization.

2. The Archetype of the Hero, Myth, and its Function

Fascination with the stories of heroes is common to all civilizations and historical periods. In her Introduction to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), Pinkola Estés comments on the universal fascination of human beings with myths and stories of the past:

One of the most remarkable developments that crisscross the world, no matter how urbanized a people may become, no matter how far they are living from family, or how many generations away they are born from a tight-knit heritage group—people everywhere nonetheless will form and reform “talking story” groups. There appears to be a strong drive in the psyche to be nourished and taught, but so to nourish and teach the psyches of as many others as possible, with the best and deepest stories that can be found. (xxxv)

From those narratives and myths of the ancient past, the collective unconscious in all cultures identifies specific elements that in turn create archetypes. For C.G. Jung, archetypes are the most important elements of the collective unconscious, full of universal images and meaning repeated through time in the tales, stories, and myths pertaining to all social groups (4-5).

For Pearson, “Archetypes—the fundamental structures of the psyche, can help us decode our own inner workings, as well as the inner lives of other people, groups, and social systems, so that we can rise to the challenge of contemporary life” (x). On the importance of archetypes for societies, Eliade indicates that “The meaning and function of what we have called ‘archetypes and repetition’ disclosed themselves to us only after we had perceived these societies’ [...] hostility toward every attempt at autonomous history, that is, at history not regulated by archetypes” (ix). Campbell's theory of the monomyth proposes the idea that inspirations, revelations, and actions in heroic narratives are found universally in all human beings and cultures. Furthermore, this primordial understanding can propel humans into more evolution: “It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back” (10).

Historically, audiences are familiar with the configuration of male heroic characters, but in the 21st century, it is clear that the traditional patterns of cultural consumption have changed. Audiences are more open at this time to give the heroic archetype a feminine face and accept new stories and far-reaching myths, capable of resonating with both genders at that deeply personal and fundamentally human level that will propel contemporary civilizations into the future.

Since the early days of cinematography and television, spectators have shown a fondness for stories containing mythical and ritual elements that trace the journey of heroic characters and the symbolism contained in those stories. Numerous recreations of Hercules, Jason, Perseus, Theseus, Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus; their Nordic counterparts Beowulf and Ragnar Lodbrok; the Assyrian Gilgamesh; and the Biblical Samson and David confirm that myths of the past and archetypes of heroes survive through time and space to reflect and reminisce the history of their individual societies. Even though the representation of heroes is in constant evolution, the symbolism of the archetype and its development is not negotiable, the main elements persist through the ages in new narratives. As a result, *The Song of Ice and Fire* by G.R.R. Martin and the televised series *Games of Thrones* follow the familiar pattern concerning the quest of the hero, central to the mythological systems of numerous cultures, but in the end, it is a woman who will go through all the stages of that quest.

Although Greek mythology gives voice to a few women, myths and stories of heroines are scarce. In literature and myth, participation of women in valiant deeds and a positive impact on their societies is mostly limited to episodes within longer narratives. Generally, authors do not bestow feminine characters with deep moral, spiritual or psychological configurations or evolution. In the *Timaeus*, Plato refers briefly to the warrior goddess Athena as a “lover both of war and of wisdom,” and in his *Critias*, Socrates refers to warrior women who used to make war alongside their male counterparts in times past:

[M]ilitary pursuits were then common to men and women, the men of those days in accordance with the custom of the time set up a figure and image of the goddess in full armour, to be a testimony that all animals which associate together, male as well as female, may, if they please, practise in common the virtue which belongs to them without distinction of sex.

In other European narratives, Brunhilde in *The Ring of the Nibelung*, Clorinda in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, and the wives of the Berserkers in the *Song of Harbarðsljóð* of the *Poetic Edda*, are recognized for their courage and commitment to arms and wisdom; they may be recognized as models of inspiration for Brienne of Tarth, but their participation is still episodic.

Inclusion of women in audiovisual productions comprise a substantial number of superheroines, such as Wonder Woman and X-Women Jean Grey, Storm, Rogue, etc. However, it is somewhat problematic for audiences to relate to the superiority of characters with powers that transcend the human. Furthermore, many of the popular superheroines lack a deep psychological configuration for audiences to relate to their actions or the background that propels them to a quest. Therefore, few superheroines—with the exception of Wonder Woman, who according to Elisa McCausland in *Wonder Woman: El feminismo como superpoder* (2017) constitutes the epitome of a successful feminist icon—succeed in producing a new heroic archetype for the 21st century. In this sense, the story of Brienne of Tarth, a woman who is not conflicted between divinity and mortality,

but rather prevails in spite of her very human limitations, constitutes a momentous development. Martin is careful to introduce Brienne of Tarth as a rather unremarkable woman in terms of appearance, at the same time that he endows her with remarkable physical, psychological, and moral attributes, but most importantly, with the mythical stature and an arc of development comparable to that of the ancient heroes. Brienne's configuration and heroic journey appeal to the collective consciousness of contemporary viewers from all lifestyles. Brienne becomes a symbol that relates to the audience of the show as a personal encouragement to continue their own journey, corroborating Eliade's theory that symbolic thinking is not exclusive to children, artists, or delusional individuals, but rather an endeavor common to all human beings that comes before language and discursive reason because "The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality—the deepest aspects—which defy any other means of knowledge" (12). Eliade also indicates that images and symbols are essential in the construction and persistence of myths through time, because they frame the existence of human beings from the beginning of time:

As is generally admitted today, a myth is an account of events which took place *in principio*, that is, "in the beginning", in a primordial and non-temporal instant, a moment of *sacred time*. This mythic or sacred time is qualitatively different from profane time, from the continuous and irreversible time of our everyday, de-sacralised existence. (Eliade, 57)

In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung indicates: "The primitive mentality does not *invent* myths, it *experiences* them" (154). A hero is a man *in principio*, but the recurrence of the mythical legacy that informs the configuration of the archetype implies that the 21st century is the moment to extend that legacy to a feminine character. In the Preface to *The Hero Within*, Carol Pearson indicates: "More people than I ever dared imagine seem prepared and even eager to respond to the call of the heroic quest with an enthusiastic 'Yes!'" (xiii). Clearly, in the 21st century audiences are still eager to rise to the challenge of remembering their shared human experience, to reinvent the myth of the hero, and to accept that the hero for our time can be a regular human with a woman's face.

3. Brienne of Tarth and her Heroic Journey in *Game of Thrones*

In the televised series *Game of Thrones* there are several characters who seem to be on the path of the heroic at different points of the story: Tyrion, Jaime Lannister, Jon Stark, Arya Stark, and Daenerys Targaryen. However, the actions resulting from the distinct archetypal configurations of these characters and their incomplete arc of development cast them as subordinate to Brienne's journey. Both in the battlefield and in their personal life, several characters experience self-doubt and suffer injustice, disappointment, terror, and moments that always require extreme courage and an honorable conduct. Brienne is the only character who, rather than surrendering to selfishness or revenge, applies this education to an expanding experience that allows her to survive and return bearing boons for her people, which constitutes a key element of the heroic journey. Mythographers agree that the stages of a quest undertaken by humans with credible characteristics of doubt and evolution are central in the creation of a heroic character. According to Bakhtin (1981), and perfectly applicable to the feminine (as with Campbell's definition of a heroic journey):

[T]he hero of a novel should not be “heroic” in either the epic or the tragic sense of the word: he should combine in himself negative as well as positive features, low as well as lofty, ridiculous as well as serious [...]. [T]he hero should not be portrayed as an already completed and unchanging person but as one who is evolving and developing, a person who learns from life. (10)

Faithful to the historical realities of patriarchal values associated with medieval societies, Brienne begins her story unable to make decisions or take actions associated with contemporary models of superheroines of popular culture. Instead, the view of women in the Westerosi societies represented in Martin’s works conforms to the traditional gender concepts of Aristotle, Saint Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and others, who maintain the inferiority of women, prescribing social and economic submission to men’s authority. In the fictional realm of Westeros, the subjection of women occurs as it does in most Western societies. This subjection as Agonito indicates (1977):

[Is] twofold. One is servile by virtue of which a superior makes us a subject for his own benefit; and this kind of subjection began after sin [...] there is another kind of subjection, which is called economic or civil, whereby the superior makes use of his subject for their own benefit and good; and this kind of subjection existed even before sin. (85)

In terms of physical appearance, Martin also sets Brienne apart from the unattainable models of beauty of fairy tale princesses or the physical perfection of contemporary superheroines such as described by Kaul:

Much like their male counterparts, their bodies are hypersexualized, but their attractive physical presence is also fearsome and daring, not to forget that they embody an impossible physicality—a narrow waist, a muscular body and large breasts. The “super body” of a female superhero just cannot be attained. No human, super or otherwise, can sustain these anatomical dimensions. (22)

Since Martin is aiming at the creation of a credible human heroine or *mythos in principio*, in *A Clash of Kings* (1998), where Brienne is first introduced, the reader makes the acquaintance of a very imperfect character:

Beauty, they called her [...]. Mocking. The hair beneath the visor was a squirrel’s nest of dirty straw [...] Brienne’s eyes [were] trusting and guileless, but the rest [...] her features were broad and coarse, her teeth prominent and crooked, her mouth too wide, her lips so plump they seemed swollen. A thousand freckles speckled her cheeks and brow, and her nose had been broken more than once. Pity filled Catelyn’s heart. *Is there any creature on earth as unfortunate as an ugly woman?* (344)

Brienne’s lack of beauty does not make her unfortunate in her own eyes. She starts her saga as the sole heir of the kingdom of Tarth. Thanks to the wealth and indulgence of her father, the rebellious princess learns skills at arms from Ser Goodwin and has access to a variety of weaponry and armor proper of nobility, but her military training is expected to be a passing interest. As a noble woman, Brienne must continue the patriarchal tradition of a marriage of convenience to cement political alliances. She rebels against the expectations of her gender and position, fighting a duel for the right to reject the marriage with her prospective husband, Ser Humfrey Wagstaff, whom she soundly defeats in combat. Led by an idealistic infatuation and despite lacking official admittance into knighthood, which is reserved for males only, Brienne abandons the paternal house to follow Renly Baratheon, a contender to the Iron Throne, as his personal guard. Accused

and later acquitted of Renly Baratheon's murder, Brienne meets and pledges her loyalty to Catelyn Stark, the matriarch of the Stark clan, who provides Brienne with the quest that she will follow until the end of the televised series. Recognizing her talent as a warrior and her high sense of honor, Ser Jaime Lannister knights Brienne, bestowing her the title of *Ser* and bequeathing upon her the sword *Oathkeeper*, the most legendary sword in the realm. Ser Brienne of Tarth is the only woman in Westerosi history to become a knight of the Seven Kingdoms. After Jamie's death in Daenerys Targaryen's destruction of King's Landing, Brienne writes an honorable entry immortalizing Jaime Lannister's name and deeds into the *Book of Knights*, and goes on to become Commander of the Royal Guard, protector of the people, and member of the council of the new King, Bran the Broken.

Brienne's journey begins by questioning her position in her birthplace. She aspires to transcend the restrictions of her gender and be able to protect her people, thus, her most valiant enterprises are consistent with those aspirations. In her Introduction to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), Nicola Pinkola Estés indicates:

Almost invariably every story, myth, legend, saga and folktale begins with a poignant question of one kind or another. In tales, this premiere query may be spoken—or only inferred. But regardless, the poignant question strikes a spark to the engine that ignites the heart. This starts up the energy of the story; it rolls the story forward. The mythic tale unfolds in response to that single igniting question. (xlvii)

Once the poignant question appears, Brienne abandons the kingdom of Tarth and her heroic quest begins. Campbell's concept of the monomyth identifies three major stages of the heroic progression—separation or departure, initiation, and return. Brienne's completion of those precise stages, as well as the surrounding events and ancillary characters associated with the journey, confirm her status as the true heroine of the story at the end of the television series. In the separation stage, Brienne abandons her land and the privilege of her station, plunging into a journey of adventure, terror, misfortune, detours, and gratifications. This event confirms Campbell's theories that a separation from the original environment must occur for the hero to transfer his emphasis from the external to the internal realm of the childhood unconscious, of dreams, nightmares, and fears where the hero will become aware of and internalize all the life-potentialities that he never managed to bring to adult realization (12).

Brienne responds to her inner desires and to the mythical call for adventure. There will be an initial blunder, too, in the form of her romantic infatuation with Renly Baratheon. For Campbell, blunders are not irrelevant occurrences, but rather doors to destiny (42). In Brienne's case, this blunder is the door that opens to her destiny. Later, in Renly's service, Brienne crosses the mythical threshold into a world rife with corruption, betrayal, dark forces, rape, and murder. The symbolic crossing to another world as represented in myths is not an easy feat: crossing from the human world to the other worlds confronts the hero with gods and guardians—such as Cerberus or Charon—who impede the pass to humans. In *Game of Thrones*, these guardians are represented by a supernatural world of dark forces, magic, monsters, and death, but also by the ruthless defenders of a male dominated system who deem women the antithesis of anything noble or heroic, displaying unforgiving skepticism about the virtues of women and their capabilities to perform heroic tasks for the common good.

After Renly's death, Brienne meets Catelyn Stark, who becomes an important, albeit momentary protective figure, or the supernatural aid akin to those mentioned by

Campbell (63). Catelyn Stark is also a woman suffering the misfortunes of her gender, incapable of protecting her children after the death of her husband, Ned Stark. Catelyn provides Brienne with the lofty quest of her heroic journey: to rescue her daughters Sansa and Arya Stark from the Lannisters. The encounter with Catelyn and Brienne's unhesitant acceptance of her mission are consistent with Campbell's theories regarding the courage and determination of the hero:

The hero whose attachment to ego is already annihilated passes back and forth across the horizons of the world, in and out of the dragon, as readily as a king through all the rooms of his house. And therein lies his power to save; for his passing and returning demonstrate that through all the contraries of phenomenality the Uncreate-Imperishable remains, and there is nothing to fear. (78)

Catelyn introduces Brienne to her prisoner, Ser Jaime Lannister. Once the most celebrated knight for his courage and skills, he is now disgraced in the kingdom after his murder of the last Targaryen King, whom he had sworn to protect. While being escorted by Brienne to King's Landing for an exchange for the Stark sisters, Jaime confesses the truth of his actions when he is sharing bath waters with Brienne in Harrenhall, long before the knighting ceremony. In an effort to vindicate his honor, immersed in this bath Jaime confesses that he killed his king to prevent him from exterminating the population of King's Landing with wildfire, a green, extremely flammable liquid created by The Alchemists Guild for the mad king. What this episode reveals in retrospect is that Brienne's mythical instruction for initiation had symbolically started long before her knighting by Jaime; thus, the ceremony in Winterfell is not spontaneous or disorganized. According to Durand (1999):

The second archetype in which purifying intentions are concentrated is the limpidity of lustral water. Lustral water immediately has a moral value. It does not wash clean in proportion to its volume but becomes the substance of purity itself [...]. For Bachelard, the sprinkling of water is the primordial purifying operation and the main archetypal image. Washing is merely its crude exoteric doublet. Indeed, we see here the transition from a substance to a "radiating" force, for water not only contains purity but radiates purity. (167)

Other events surrounding Brienne's encounter with Catelyn Stark adhere to Campbell's principle that a "helpful crone and fairy godmother is a familiar feature of European fairy lore" (65). Catelyn Stark plays this protective role vouching for Brienne after Renly's death. Concerning the presence of an old woman met at the separation stage, Campbell indicates that since ancient times, this is a frequent event in tales and stories:

What such a figure represents is the benign, protective power of destiny [...]. One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear. Having responded to his own call, and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at his side. (59)

Brienne's fulfillment of the promise to Catelyn takes her to perilous roads traveled at the time of a bloody war of succession raging in Westeros. According to Campbell: "The folk mythologies populate with deceitful and dangerous presences every desert place outside the normal traffic of the village" (64). Brienne's path outside her kingdom is full of danger, in a world very hostile to women in general. The Brave Companions, and other rapists and murderers who lay waste to roads and villages throughout Westeros

represent the mythical ogres and monsters of Campbell's monomyth recognizable in Martin's story. Brienne fights to the death with Ser Sandor "the Hound" Clegane for the custody of the young Arya Stark and avenges Renly's death by righteously killing Stannis Baratheon. Brienne is now fully committed to justice through arms and death. This is the dark path of initiation, such as also described by Campbell:

And so it happens that if anyone—in whatever society—undertakes for himself the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself in a landscape of symbolical figures. (84)

In Brienne trials, an aware spectator is able to recognize the presence of some symbolical events and characters that normally accompany the hero, which Campbell also addresses: Jaime Lannister takes the role of the mythical mentor who accompanies Brienne in her journey and the succession of her trials. Breaking with misogynous traditions, Jaime knights Brienne before the Battle of Winterfell, in the presence of trusted male companions Tyrion Lannister, Ser Davos, Ser Bron, and Tormund, the wildling warrior. On the importance of initiation ceremonies, Gilbert Durand indicates: "All initiation ceremonies which are liturgies of the temporal sacred drama and of Time controlled by the rhythm of repetition, are isotopic with the dramatic cyclical myth of the son. Initiation is more than just baptism: it is a ritual of commitment, of magical bonding" (295). For his part, Campbell mentions that:

The traditional idea of initiation combines an introduction of the candidate into the techniques, duties, and prerogatives of his vocation with a radical readjustment of his emotional relationship to the parental images. The mystagogue (father or father substitute) is to entrust the symbols of office only to a son who has been effectually purged of all inappropriate infantile cathexes—for whom the just, impersonal exercise of the powers will not be rendered impossible by unconscious (or perhaps even conscious and rationalized) motives of self-aggrandizement, personal preference or resentment. (115)

When Brienne becomes a knight, she receives the title of *Ser*,⁴ held in the story by noble warriors who normally exhibit great moral strength and bravery in any course of action. When bestowed upon Brienne, the title restores the heroic connotation that includes the protection of others. In works of literature the title *Ser* is an uncommon designation, but present in a fair number of different sources, referring to noble men as a general honorific. Julius Kirshner refers to the *Confessio Dotis* by Chirico di Giovanni (1 Feb 1464/5), where this is the customary treatment accorded to lords (230).

An important aspect of Brienne's knighting is that it legitimizes her use of armor and the wielding of *Oathkeeper*, one of the two swords—the other one is *Widow's Wail*—that were forged from Ned Stark's legendary sword *Ice* after his death. The symbolic importance of this event is remarkable: *Oathkeeper* now becomes an amulet from a supernatural helper, the defunct Ned Stark, whose bravery, honor, and protective nature are attributes of the archetype of classical heroes, which according to Campbell, "is a favorite phase of the myth adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region." (81)

Further commenting on the relationship between Jaime Lannister and Brienne of Tarth, a correspondence can be established with Durand's theories about two distinct types of heroes and their temperament, which ultimately determines their fate:

The solar hero is always a violent warrior and is thereby opposed to the lunar hero who, as we shall see, is a submissive being [...]. It could be said that transcendence implies primordial discontent, the action of ill-humour being translated into the audacity of the gesture or the rashness of the enterprise. (154)

Jaime is a solar hero by all attributes, including his dazzling physical beauty and prowess, his golden hair, his golden armor, the golden lion of his crest—but also the recklessness of his actions—the antithesis of Brienne, who does not act impulsively, disobey rules or break oaths, although her daring knows no limits.

The conclusion of the televised series portrays Brienne of Tarth not only as a heroic and noble survivor of numerous trials, but also as a committed protector of the people. Her strength, nobility, and new position in her society relates accurately attributes of the diæretic symbol and to the “schemata and archetypes of transcendence” identified by Durand:

[A] polemical complex and schema of verticalising effort or elevation, accompanied by a feeling of monarchical contemplation which diminishes the world so as better to glorify the gigantic, and the ambition inherent in ascensional reveries. (154)

4. Brienne of Tarth vs Daenerys Targaryen

Throughout the story, Daenerys Targaryen is a central character, presented frequently as the potential heroine of the televised production. Daenerys also possesses a considerable arc of development towards the heroic: She abandons her home after her father is murdered; she questions her place in the world, liberates entire nations from slavery; she wants to punish evil and protect her subjects. However, her nature and motivations are selfish and sinister. Daenerys sees the recovery of the Iron Throne as her birthright, becoming the reason of her entire existence; consequently, her quest is not the protection of her people. Her survival in the bonfire where she is able to hatch three dragon eggs exposes her otherworldly nature; it is also revealed that in the past Daenerys gave birth to a monstrous creature with scales and leather-like wings. Clearly, in Daenerys the prophecy of a Targaryen descendant with dragon blood has been fulfilled.

Brienne of Tarth joins Daenerys because of her allegiance to Catelyn Stark and later to Jon Snow. Throughout several seasons, Daenerys is portrayed as an enigmatic character in the televised production. In spite of calling herself *Mother* of several subjects, Daenerys is not nurturing or protective; she makes her subjects fight for her and punishes disloyalty with death. In the end, her dragon legacy overcomes her human nature. No longer capable of human emotion or compassion, she becomes a murderous tyrant, an enemy of all humans. In an obsessive desire to punish the ones who wronged her family, she kills countless people in her dragon's torching of King's Landing. Understanding her dangerous inclinations, Jon Snow kills Daenerys in the last episode of the televised production.

The conclusion of the show greatly disappointed thousands of spectators, who rooted for Daenerys's success captivated by her beauty and extraordinary supernatural powers, strength, and determination. Thousands of viewers saw in this character the true heroine of the series, hoping that she could make good use of her colossal dragons to protect her people. For a mythographer, however, the denouement of the televised series was the most logical possibility, the one consistent with the destruction of the mythical antihero/ine, tyrant, dragon, or selfish monster represented in all myths. Campbell indicates that:

The figure of the tyrant-monster is known to the mythologies, folk traditions, legends, and even nightmares, of the world; and his characteristics are everywhere essentially the same. He is the hoarder of the general benefit. He is the monster avid for the greedy rights of "my and mine." (11)

On the specific image of the dragon, Durand mentions that dragons, theriomorphic and aquatic creatures, are animals of devouring and terror (85):

The Dragon resumes symbolically all the aspects of the Nocturnal Order of the image that we have so far considered: the antediluvian monster, the thunder beast, the fury of water, the sower of death—it is certainly "a creation of fear" [...], as Dontenville has noted. (94)

Despite her close biological ties with Jon Snow, Daenerys desires to continue their incestuous relationship. Incest, a common practice in Targaryen families, was practiced specifically to preserve the dragon blood and its magic, as indicated in Martin's story. Through the ages, civilizations have known and feared the dark relationship between incest and dragons, as Durand indicates:

This devouring aquatic ferocity is popularised in all mediaeval Bestiaries [...]. Jung sees her as the incarnation of a "mass of incestual libido" [...]. In the Apocalypse the Dragon is indeed linked to the Sinful Woman [...]. (95)

Although writers of the series manipulate the image and actions of Daenerys Targaryen throughout the different seasons, in the end she is revealed as a false heroine and a cruel, chthonian character. In spite of her murderous rampage, Daenerys's unforeseen destruction outraged viewers and fans of the televised series. The backlash against the conclusion of the televised series, with the rather unceremonious death of the dragon queen, proves that modern societies, as Jung indicates (96), may have the problem of an impoverishment of symbolism, of not knowing the myths and lessons that have ensured the survival of the human race, and having rationalized gods and devils out of existence:

There can be no question: the psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religions inheritance, we today (in so far as we are unbelievers, or, if believers, in so far as our inherited beliefs fail to represent the real problems of contemporary life) must face alone, or, at best, with only tentative, impromptu, and not often very effective guidance. (96)

To Martin's credit, providing such an ending for the television series, he recaptures the workings of myths and legends preserved and collected from all ends of the world and delineates the course of properly identifying good and evil that has assured the survival of the civilizations through the ages.

5. Conclusion

Referring to epic and novel, Bakhtin used the specific word *hero* to indicate the idea of evolution: "The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making" (7). Traditional studies of the heroic concentrate on heroes, since few narratives have heroines, but they refer to characteristics that are no different in men or in women, capable of reflecting the tendencies of a world in transformation. In the 21st century, a new recreation of myths must include the feminine as one of the thousand

faces of the hero in evolution identified by Campbell. The exclusion of the feminine in heroic narratives no longer serves the advancement of societies or the production of new narratives or audiovisual productions, because social groups are more open to recognize the contributions of women to the collective stories that will propel their societies into the future. The massive interest generated by the volumes of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as well as the televised series *Game of Thrones*, have encouraged new lines of investigation in literature and audiovisual productions that address the resurgence of questions, problems, visions of the world, and another look at the heroic archetype for the 21st century.

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Notes

¹ According to Wikipedia “Viewer numbers for the first season averaged 2.5 million viewers for its first Sunday-night screenings and a gross audience (including repeats and on-demand viewings) of 9.3 million viewers per episode. For its second season, the series had an average gross audience of 11.6 million viewers. The third season was seen by 14.2 million viewers, making *Game of Thrones* the second-most-viewed HBO series (after *The Sopranos*). For the fourth season, HBO said that its average gross audience of 18.4 million viewers (later adjusted to 18.6 million) had passed *The Sopranos* for the record. By the sixth season, the average per-episode gross viewing figure had increased to over 25 million, with nearly 40 percent of viewers watching on HBO digital platforms. In 2016, a *New York Times* study of the 50 TV shows with the most Facebook likes found that *Game of Thrones* was “much more popular in cities than in the countryside, probably the only show involving zombies that is.” By season seven, average viewer numbers had increased to 32.8 million per episode across all platforms. The series set records on pay-television channels in the United Kingdom (with a 2016 average audience of more than five million on all platforms) and Australia (with a cumulative average audience of 1.2 million) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game_of_Thrones#Viewer_numbers. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*: “The final season has recorded five of the six most-watched episodes in the history of *Game of Thrones* (the season seven finale is the sixth). With continued streaming, DVR and on-demand viewing and additional replays, HBO says season eight is averaging an unheard-of 44.2 million viewers through Sunday. That’s more than 10 million people ahead of the average for season seven.” <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/game-thrones-series-finale-sets-all-time-hbo-ratings-record-1212269>

² <https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/film/news/a6415/best-game-of-thrones-websites/>. Accessed Oct. 23, 2019.

³ In *Les Structures anthropologiques de l’imaginaire* (19), Gilbert Durand explains that myth criticism and myth analysis are related disciplines. Durand asserts the concept that literary studies must expand readings to other disciplines (mythology, anthropology, sociology, ethnology, psychology, art history, psychoanalysis). The literary text becomes a rich field of study for numerous disciplines. In 1990, according to Jane Chance, mythology and allegorization remained unfamiliar to scholars: “Mythography, the explanation of classical mythology that often involves moralization or allegorization, remains unfamiliar even to most

medievalists, unless they have worked specifically in the field" (ix). Within the context of mythology, myth criticism and myth analysis, the Greco-Roman paradigm is often utilized because of the wealth of epistemological models of analysis, but it is not the only one.

- ⁴ According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, the Proto-Indo-European language root of the word is of uncertain origin, but includes primarily the element of protection: ser-1 To protect. Extended form *serw . conserve, observe, preserve, reserve, reservoir, from Latin servâre, to keep, preserve. Perhaps suffixed lengthened-grade form *sçr-ôs . hero, from Greek heros, "protector," hero. [Pokorny 2. ser 910.] <https://ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html>. Accessed May 15, 2019.

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