Brienne of Tarth and Jaime Lannister: A Romantic Comedy Within HBO's *Game of Thrones*

Inbar Shaham  
*The Open University of Israel*

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Abstract

“Romantic comedy” is not a genre whose conventions one would readily associate with the television series Game of Thrones, but this article makes a case for the evolving relationship between Brienne of Tarth and Jaime Lannister as an intrusion of the “green world” of spring and summer into the bleak winter of the show. The unconventional ways in which both characters perform their genders are part of the interest and challenge of this relationship.

Additional Keywords

Game of Thrones (TV series)—Characters—Brienne of Tarth; Game of Thrones (TV series)—Characters—Jaime Lannister; Martin, George R.R. A Song of Fire and Ice—Characters—Brienne of Tarth; Martin, George R.R. A Song of Fire and Ice—Characters—Jaime Lannister; Romantic comedy
HBO's *Game of Thrones* depicts many "odd couples," due to the decision of showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss to reveal characters mainly through their relationships. In this wide-ranging epic, the old and the young, the powerful and the meek, and relatives and strangers are joined in a series of limited or evolving relationships. These include the characters of Tywin Lannister and Arya Stark, Arya and the Hound (Sandor Clegane), Tyrion the imp and Bronn his bodyguard, and Bran Stark and Osha the wildling, among others.

The relationship between Brienne of Tarth and Jaime Lannister is one of the most interesting in the show. Although not one of the main plotlines in the series, which focuses on political intrigues among noble families, the relationship between these two characters has developed a large fan base due to the unexpected nature of their bond. Despite their complicated connection, which first began developing in the second season, many fans perceive their relationship in the generic terms of a budding romantic-comedy.

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1 This essay addresses the first four seasons of the TV series *Game of Thrones*, and does not contain spoilers for events depicted in the books series *A Song of Ice and Fire* that have not yet been shown on the TV series. The differences between G.R.R. Martin’s books and their TV adaptation will not be discussed here, but rather only the TV adaptation.

2 Dan Weiss explained in an interview with *Vanity Fair*:

   The books are written in a point-of-view chapter technique, where each chapter belongs to somebody. It’s third person but it’s told through their point of view and it allows you access to their minds, and you can characterize them directly by how they are mentally responding to things. Without voiceover for every character, there’s no way to do that in a show. So every single piece of characterization, every single element of a person that you want to put out there, needs to come out through their interactions with somebody else. It’s not a very deep thought, but you start to realize that, on the scale that the show was going to take place, you really needed clearly defined ways to let you know who these people are relative to each other, which involves not just strong characters but strong relationships between different characters.
In this paper, I address the assumptions which predict a romantic union between Brienne of Tarth, a woman-warrior serving Lady Catelyn Stark, and Jaime Lannister, a prisoner of war at the Northerners camp, despite evidence to the contrary. I will attempt to explain why the harshly realistic depiction of a medieval-European-type world and the generally tragic tone of the series do not stop many viewers from wishing for a happy, or at least romantic, end for Brienne and Jaime.3

I will also show how Brienne and Jaime’s story includes elements typical of a certain type of romantic comedy—the one Northrop Frye found in Shakespeare’s comedies and referred to as “the drama of the green world” (182). As its literary source, the TV series uses the seasons of the year and their archetypal attributes, and therefore invites analysis in terms of Frye’s theory of myths. Brienne and Jaime’s story specifically combines elements of the myth of spring (comedy) and the myth of summer (romance) thus giving a glint of hope and anticipating the banishment of winter, which threatens the whole realm (“Winter is Coming” is the title of the first episode of the series).

The hybridity of Game of Thrones—a hybridity that also exists in its source, George R.R. Martin’s book series—naturally affects the manifestation of the conventions of romantic comedies in it. The series is based mainly on the conventions of fantasy, adventure stories, myths, historical epos, and knights’ tales. Elements of folktales and allusions to historical events are also discernible. The dominance of the conventions of adventure stories causes a relocation of components of romantic comedies, ironic reversals in the meaning of generic elements, and a fundamental uncertainty about the application of forthcoming elements in the familiar patterns of romantic comedy. This study follows Deleyto’s notion of films as participating in genres, as opposed to films belonging to specific genres. Deleyto showed how films identified as a western (Rio Bravo), a thriller (Rear Window), a crime film (Out of Sight), and so on also have romantic comedy elements, without being labeled

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3 Romantic hopes regarding this couple’s future are expressed by readers of A Song of Ice and Fire as well. See, for instance, the blogs by desidangerous “Marriage, Swords and Shared Custody: Why Brienne and Jaime are Practically a Married Couple,” and “Jaime x Brienne: There’s Nothing Platonic About Courtly Love.” “Shipping,” that is, the hypothetical coupling of fictional characters by fans, is also expressed through fans writing alternative and future plot lines diverting from the original text. More than 1330 such tales about Brienne and Jaime’s relationship are already posted at “Archive of Our Own,” and most of them have romantic/sexual content.

4 Combining the conventions of romantic comedy with those of adventure is quite frequent in Hollywood films, as seen, for instance, in The 39 Steps, It Happened One Night, Romancing the Stone, and Six Days Seven Nights.
as such. He also claims that this hybridity is a widespread phenomenon in Hollywood films.

As we will soon see, the viewers’ expectations are not unfounded. Benioff and Weiss designed5 Brienne and Jaime’s relationship to follow the book series and, among other things, to contain components characteristic of romantic comedies—specifically, elements that are typical of the first third of Hollywood romantic comedy plotlines.

Since a formulaic narrative structure is the central ingredient according to which texts in literature, film and TV are identified as belonging to romantic comedy (Deleyto 23), I will first detail major happenings in Brienne and Jaime’s story. Here is a summary of the events in their shared scenes so far:

Brienne first meets Jaime in episode 2.07, “A Man Without Honor.” She escorts Lady Catelyn, who confronts the honorless Jaime. In the next episode (2.08), we realize that Brienne has been given a mission by Catelyn: to return Jaime to King’s Landing, where his family and his sister-lovers await him, in return for her captive daughters. Early on in their journey, Jaime attempts to embarrass and confuse Brienne, but she proves invulnerable to his manipulations. As they stop along the way (2.10), they encounter the bodies of women hanged by three Northerners. To Jaime’s great surprise, Brienne single-handedly kills the culprits. At the opening of the third season, Brienne still leads Jaime by a leash of rope, and he keeps questioning her about her past and especially about the love life of an unattractive woman such as her. He guesses that she was in love with the gay king Renly, and they argue over who knew Renly best (3.02). Brienne refrains from killing an elderly passerby, even though she suspects he may have recognized her well-known prisoner. During a short rest on a bridge, Jaime, attempting to escape, grabs one of Brienne’s swords and they duel. Their battle is stopped by Locke and his men. Jaime has indeed been identified by the passerby and now they both find themselves captured by Northerners. In the next episode (3.03), they both have been taken

5 Brienne has appeared in 21 of the series’ 40 episodes broadcast thus far (seven episodes per season, since the second season). She has appeared with Jaime in 13 episodes. In the second season, three episodes feature Jaime and Brienne; in the third season, seven episodes; and in the fourth season, three episodes. Showrunners Benioff and Weiss wrote eight of the 13 episodes depicting their story. Vanessa Taylor wrote one episode: Dark Wings, Dark Words (3.02). Bryan Cogman wrote two episodes: Kissed By Fire (3.05) and Oathkeeper (4.04). G.R.R. Martin wrote two: The Bear and the Maiden Fair (3.07) and The Lion and the Rose (4.02). Wikipedia’s page about episode 3.07 notes that Benioff and Weiss wrote the scene in the bear pit, and not Martin.
prisoner and, tied up, are on their way to Lord Bolton, who is affiliated with Robb, the King of the North. At night, as Jaime has predicted, Brienne is almost raped by their captors. Jaime saves her by lying to Locke and promising him that Brienne will be worth her weight in sapphires, if left unharmed. Locke believes him, yet, angry at Jaime's arrogance, he chops off his sword hand. The following day (3.04), Locke and his men torment the feverish Jaime. Brienne tries to help him, but to no avail. As Jaime loses his will to live, Brienne eventually coaxes him back to life. As to her question of why he saved her, Jaime has no answer. On the next episode (3.05), the group reaches Harrenhal, where Lord Bolton greets Brienne and Jaime as highborn captives. Jaime's stump is treated and they both are given a chance to clean up. Jaime enters Brienne's bath and apologizes for the way he has behaved. He asks for a truce and reveals the real reason he had killed the mad king, an act of treason which had earned him the title "Kingslayer." Brienne again rescues his life, this time from drowning when he collapses in the bath. During dinner with their host (3.06), they ask to continue their journey together to King's Landing. Bolton will allow Jaime to return to his feared father, but insists on punishing Brienne for her part in Catelyn's treason. As Jaime struggles to cut his meat during dinner, Brienne begrudgingly helps him. A moment later, he stays her hand from attacking the intimidating Bolton with her knife. The next episode's title, "The Bear and the Maiden Fair" (3.07), relates to their story. Jaime comes to Brienne's cell to say goodbye. She will surely die the next day, but seems calm, for she is convinced that Jaime will keep the promise they both made to Lady Catelyn to return her daughters to her. Jaime leaves Harenhall, but en route, realizes that the lie he had told in order to save Brienne might ultimately result in her death, as her father has no idea he will be expected to offer such a high ransom in sapphires. He returns to rescue her. He finds that Locke has forced her into a pit and has made her fight a bear with a wooden sword. Jaime jumps into the pit, knowing that his only weapon is his worth as a prisoner. The two are eventually pulled from the pit and leave together for King's Landing. In the last episode of the third season (3.10), they enter the capital, and when Jaime is unrecognized, Brienne smiles at him. He is reunited with Cersei, his sister-lover.

Already in the first episode of the fourth season (4.01), Brienne reminds Jaime of their promise to Lady Catelyn. But the situation is complicated: Catelyn is dead and her daughter Sansa has become Jaime's sister-in-law by her marriage to Tyrion. Jaime teases Brienne that perhaps they are related, since, like his family, she is displeased with him. In "The Purple Wedding" (4.02), Brienne approaches to greet the bride and groom, and is humiliated by Cersei, who mocks her lack of feminine grace (she curtsies awkwardly), and harshly accuses her of loving Jaime. Brienne is shocked and
leaves in silence. Jaime watches them from afar, not hearing their conversation. In the fourth episode (4.04), they separate. Jaime sends Brienne to fulfill their mission—to find Sansa, who has escaped, and bring her to safety. He gives Brienne a sword, armor, and a squire. In an emotional farewell scene, Brienne names her new sword “Oathkeeper” and goes on her way.

The events so far have been structured more or less according to the familiar pattern of romantic comedy, summarized by Abbott and Jermyn thus—“the genre is widely depicted as slavishly formulaic, adhering to well-worn and obvious conventions (boy meets girl; boy and girl face obstacles to their romantic union; boy and girl conquer obstacles to find true love)” (2).

It seems that Jaime and Brienne have been through the first third of the generic plot: they meet cute, they instantly despise each other, quarrel, become close, and build mutual respect and trust. During season four they separate, each pursuing his or her duties. Indeed, there have been no love declarations, since Brienne is probably still unaware of her feelings toward Jaime, and Jaime feels affection and closeness toward her, but nothing else. Whether they will meet again in future episodes, and will add romantic feelings to their friendly intimacy, is yet to be seen.

Since Martin has thus far written only five of seven planned volumes, and the series has adapted about three of them, both readers and viewers are therefore busy wondering about the future of the various realms and their inhabitants.

The series’ creators, for their part, remain vague when addressing future developments. They also emphasize the possibility of changes in the televised version of the books, so readers of Martin’s books should also feel uncertainty and suspense. For instance, in an interview with www.westeros.org, Bryan Cogman, one of the series writers, mentions that he missed the romantic-sensuous aspect of Brienne and Jaime’s relationship, but other crew members brought it to his attention:

You know, when you have actors with that kind of chemistry, it brings a dynamic to the relationship that I didn’t see when I was writing it. Romance, isn’t the right word . . . but there’s definitely a . . . I don’t know how to put it—a tension, a sensuality that isn’t necessarily on the page. [...] We had some crew members who are insisting the two of them end up together! But it is a love story of sorts, not a conventional one by any means . . .

Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, the actor playing Jaime, is also aware of viewers’ romantic expectations, but believes they will come to nothing, as he said to Access Hollywood:
[I]t’s been interesting to watch the reaction to the season because . . . you felt a real hope in the audience in a way, and almost anticipated, ‘We need these two to get together. For God’s sake, don’t go back to Cersei! This is the woman you should be with.’ [...] There’s almost a sense of betrayal with Jaime then, still wanting to be with his sister. Couldn’t he just be with Brienne for god’s sake? But, he can’t and that’s very unfortunate, because it would have been beautiful.

Gwendoline Christie, the actress playing Brienne, is also vague on the will they/won’t they question. In an interview with Sean T. Collins of Rolling Stone, she insists she has no clue as to what will happen next, neither promising, nor revoking a romantic turn:

Do I think they will get together? [Laughs] I mean, it’s very . . . The world of Game of Thrones, the world that George R.R. Martin has created and that Dan [Weiss] and David [Benioff]’s translation adapts brilliantly, is a world that’s never straightforward. I genuinely have moments of absolutely no idea. I don’t even know if I want them to, because what they’re experiencing is a bond that is quite unusual and quite pure bond. He did come back and save her life, which is enormous. I think it makes us examine a lot of possibilities and angles of what love is, and what love makes us capable of.

However, in another interview, Christie told TVLINE that Martin explained to her the nature of Jaime and Brienne’s relationship using an allusion to a well-known romantic work. He said “what he wanted to do was to take the traditional format of Beauty and the Beast and change the roles—and also the genders.”

Hence, the hope for a romantic future is not fundamentally baseless.

Let’s take a look at some more marked similarities between elements in Brienne and Jaime’s story and features of romantic comedy.

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6 Interestingly, G.R.R. Martin wrote 14 of the 46 episodes of the popular TV series Beauty and the Beast (1987-1990). It seems that the creators of Game of Thrones built an elaborate allusion to this romantic tale within the Jaime and Brienne story. For instance, the first question Jaime asks Catelyn about Brienne, a moment after he wonders whether ‘it’ is a woman, is: “Where did you find this beast?” Brienne’s ugliness is mentioned time and again, and as in Beauty and the Beast, exterior ugliness hides inner beauty, and vice versa.
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE TWO LOVERS

Alongside structural definitions of romantic comedy, the genre also has thematic ones. For instance, Celestino Deleyto defines the genre thus: "Romantic comedy could, therefore, be defined as the genre which uses humour, laughter and the comic to tell stories about interpersonal affective and erotic relationships" (30).

Indeed, as in Deleyto's definition, the main theme throughout Brienne and Jaime's journey to King's Landing is their budding relationship. Numerous shots in their story include the two of them facing a third party, or facing each other in shot-reverse-shot pattern. Even when one is interacting with someone else, quick glances at the other's reactions are given (for instance, when Lord Bolton tortures Jaime with a slow rendition of bad news about his family, short shots depict Brienne's reactions). When one is missing, the other talks to a third party about the missing one (Jaime negotiates Brienne's ransom with Locke; Qyburn tells Jaime what will happen to Brienne in Harrenhal). In other words, their story has a central ingredient of romantic comedies: a focus on a pair of characters and their evolving rapport. Despite the considerable presence of elements featured in adventure stories, such as fearsome obstacles and extreme physical hardship, the tale mainly concerns their interpersonal relationship. They are 'in it together' and the gazes that pass between them accumulate meaning as they accumulate shared adventures. The rest of the characters are there to test their bond and provide them with joint or mutual challenges.

RETARDATORY STRUCTURE

Scriptwriters of romantic comedies face the challenge of building an artificial conflict between the two protagonists. The conflict in action films invites viewers to identify with the protagonist and to root for his triumph over the antagonist. Conversely, romantic comedies prompt viewers to like both rivals equally, knowing that they will ultimately realize the futility of their initial conflict and unite. Anything that can hinder romantic unions, such as opposed interests or personalities, misunderstandings, and other external factors, serve the same purpose. The conventional outcome is delayed and the storyline of "hostility melting into love" is stretched to the length of a feature film. A retardatory structure is therefore constructed between the fixed points of beginning and end (Sternberg 177-78).

The retardatory structure in Brienne and Jaime's story is stretched also, due to the epic scale of the series. The typical breadth of the epos, which follows dozens of characters in different places and in interwoven tales, spreads and protracts the basic generic process "from hostility to love." Brienne and Jaime's story, from first encounter and initial feelings of mutual
contempt, to the eventual formation of trust and friendship, spans the second and third seasons of the TV series. Here, the retardatory structure remains ambiguous regarding the direction of their story. Does the move from enmity to camaraderie and mutual respect anticipate a further move to other beautiful feelings, beyond the platonic bond of two warriors? No one can tell. Since we are dealing with a hybrid text in which other genres take precedence over romantic comedy, each of the characters, or both, may die before fulfilling the whole story arc of a romantic comedy.

Brienne and Jaime’s starting point is traditional for a romantic comedy. Her first words about him are: “Who wants to die defending a Lannister?”, and his of her: “Is that a woman?” Obviously, each lacks qualities the other values: he is a man without honor, and she does not possess feminine beauty. Considering this low point of mutual disdain, their miraculous friendship is surprising, especially in light of the generally tragic and somber tone of the series. By the end of season three, both characters seem to have gained something quite rare in the graceless world they inhabit, a true camaraderie. Meanwhile, as is customary in the first third of romantic comedy plotlines, their shared moments of intimacy are framed in a non-romantic, non-sexual context. Some examples include a scene in which Brienne furiously holds Jaime down in a conventional kissing scene mode, after he makes a snide remark; Jaime explains to Locke and his men that his duel with Brienne is a form of foreplay; a bathhouse scene features Brienne and Jaime, both naked, in a Pieta-style position, as she saves him from drowning; and, at a table with the menacing Lord Bolton, Jaime gently holds Brienne’s hand to prevent her from using her knife as a weapon against their unfriendly host.

The bond that forms between them is visualized by various means, all seemingly unromantic: at first, it is the rope with which she leads him as a captive. When he cuts this cord and fights her, another rope is introduced that ties them together, this time as equals, as both are captured by Locke. Later on, no physical tie is needed; they both ask their captor to continue the journey together.7

7 The use of ropes, chains, handcuffs, etc. to form a couple also appears in romantic comedies. For instance, in The 39 Steps (Hitchcock, 1935), the protagonist, wrongly accused of murder, is handcuffed to a woman on the train he boards. His pursuers, pretending to be policemen, are planning to get rid of them both. Still chained together, the two escape. Their forced proximity and common goal to survive bring about their romantic union. A similar thing happens in Broadway Danny Rose (Allen, 1984). Gangsters tie Danny, a nerdy talent agent, to Tina, whose ex is mob-affiliated. They leave the two alone in order to check whether Danny is the one she is cheating with, or just the “beard,” as he claims to be. Tied face to face, Tina and Danny wriggle out of the ropes.
To the ropes tying them together, the caress-like gesture at dinner, and the semi-hug in the bath, can be added romantic images such as their sailing in a little boat down a beautiful river (Brienne rows the boat), or a knight saving a damsel in distress (in a pink dress no less!). These images have outwardly pragmatic or platonic reasons, undercutting their original romantic meaning.

Ambiguous moments in their dynamics continue when they return to King’s Landing. For example, during an argument about Sansa’s future and safety in the capital, Jaime’s retort to Brienne’s accusations is: “Are you sure we’re not related?” As we know, familial kinship has, for him, erotic rather than platonic meaning. When Jaime decides to send Brienne away from the capital, he gives her three gifts to aid her quest: a sword, armor, and a squire. Referring to the armor, he says: “I hope I got your measurements right.” In the next scene, we see Brienne in armor that fits her perfectly, proving Jaime’s accuracy in memorizing her figure. In fact, Cersei, Jaime’s sister-lover, is the one who breaks the pattern of hidden intimacy developing between Brienne and Jaime. In direct confrontation with Brienne, she blatantly accuses her, stating “but you love him.” Brienne and Jaime’s farewell scene is full of sorrowful gazes and somber music, a testament to emotions that may have become conscious of but not yet expressed. The gender switch is amusing; both are in armor, yet Jaime stays in the fortified city, while Brienne goes out to seek adventures. The double layers continue as they can be viewed as two veteran warriors parting ways.

**EQUAL PARTNERS**

According to Neale, romantic comedy is “a genre committed—however disingenuously at times—to an ideal of ‘equal partnership’” (288).

The battle of the sexes in romantic comedies is based on a delicate balance between equal but dissimilar characters. A delicate balance is also maintained between their mutual feelings of attraction and rejection. The genre tends to mismatch couples, to bring together characters with opposing traits, backgrounds, or goals. All these disparities explain both the attraction and the antagonism between the couple, who quarrel until the ultimately happy end. The backbone of the story is antagonism, behind which a different sentiment slowly grows: the loud refutation of love is its strongest evidence. As stated, Brienne and Jaime have to put up with each other along an arduous journey, and the forced intimacy entailed in such a trial enhances their mutual

Inadvertently, the mobsters have charged their relationship with eroticism, which increases as they contort close together.
disrespect. Yet, along the way, the viewers and the characters are given plenty of opportunities to sense that a different relationship might evolve between them.

The dynamics between Brienne and Jaime, as well as the dynamics between the two and those around them, accentuate the differences between them. First, they belong to rival armies. He is a prisoner of the king of the North; she serves the mother of the Northern King. They contrast in other respects too: he is considered a handsome man, she is regarded as an ugly woman; he is arrogant, she is shy; he is talkative, she is mostly silent; he is clownish, she is somber; he is older and experienced, she is young and innocent. Jaime is trapped, and his only weapon for now is his ironic scorn (identified with winter, according to Frye), whereas Brienne is pursuing a romance-like quest8 (identified with summer).

Brienne faithfully adheres to the code of chivalry (i.e., she refuses to kill an innocent passerby, although not doing so will jeopardize her journey). She is devoted to her knightly vocation and the task she was sent to accomplish. Jaime, on the other hand, is bored and annoyed by her impracticality. He is cynical and sarcastic about everything and everyone. For instance, he explains to Lady Catelyn why oaths, the foundation upon which the chivalric ethos rests, are illogical, since they are many and conflicting, and therefore impossible to honor. As Frye notes, the plot of comedy runs toward the triumph of summer over winter (189), therefore optimistic viewers can expect Brienne to change Jaime rather than the other way around.

Upon closer examination, Brienne and Jaime also have much in common: they are both accomplished knightly warriors, both were guarders of kings, and both are considered to be the slayers of the kings they were meant to protect: Brienne is mistakenly thought to be Ranly’s assassin, and Jaime indeed murdered the mad king Aerys, but there were exonerating circumstances that lessen his guilt. They both step outside conventional social roles. Brienne is a fighter, and has no interest in becoming a wife and mother.

8 According to Frye, romance heroes must save someone (190-191), slay a dragon (189), or find a lost treasure (193). Brienne, likewise, must return the Stark girls to their mother. Other elements in her storyline are also in the spirit of romance. For instance, romance plot entails an arduous quest (187) and it usually ends in an epiphany (203-206), embodied in the patterned ending “and they lived happily ever after.” The characters are wholly good or bad, in contrast with the complexity of characters in tragedy. The hero deals with foes rather than with clashing aspects of his personality (195). His enemy is identified with winter, the hero with spring (187-188). Brienne is therefore depicted as a righteous character, on a dangerous and difficult quest.
Jaime also refuses traditional male roles. Although he is the eldest son of a wealthy family, he joins the Kingsguard, thus relinquishing his title, property and marriage prospects. He nevertheless breaks his oath of celibacy and fathers three children with his twin-sister (thus breaking also a universal taboo). Both Brienne and Jaime lost their mothers at an early age, and both rebel against their loving fathers through an identical escape route—knightly service— which negates political marriage and a continuation of their lineage. These two anarchists are, nevertheless, close to kings and the political games played among the powerful families of the seven kingdoms. They seem to hold no political ambitions or fondness for court intrigues. Both are ridiculed and scorned by the general public, though they pretend it does not affect them. They conceal secrets to be later revealed. Jaime is a “closet moralist”: behind his cynicism hides the fact that he sacrificed his reputation to save hundreds of thousands. Brienne hides a womanly heart beneath her armor—and the fact that she was in love with the king she guarded. Each says to the other, on different occasions, the exact same sentence, in response to what may seem like a sexual invitation: “not interested.” They are both involved with the wrong partners, which is a staple of romantic comedies (Neale 289): Jaime is in love with his twin-sister and has an incestuous relationship with her; Brienne is devoted to her dead King Renly, who was gay and therefore could not have returned her feelings.

As in all romantic comedies, the relationship between the two characters consists, at first, of disagreements and quarrels. Their clashes are balanced, since sometimes he is in the wrong and at other times the mistakes are hers; sometimes she saves him (from three northerners; from suicidal desperation) and at other times he saves her (from rape; from a bear). As they together face challenges along their adventurous journey, a silent dialogue develops between them—the true mark of a budding alliance. Their bickering proves, time and again, the mutual benefit in their partnership. In fact, some of the troubles they face might have been avoided through better cooperation (for example, preparing a better cover story for their journey). After Jaime loses his sword hand, he realizes that Brienne is the best defender he could have, and therefore asks for her to continue escorting him to the capital. As in romantic comedies, this is a forced relationship which continues after the coercion is gone, resulting in a stronger bond than a simulated harmony, untested by its negation, or by the inevitable frictions between two autonomous individuals. This bond—strong enough to withstand its negation (conflict)—gives their story a romantic tone, but also contributes to comic effect: the viewers are familiar with this generic convention and know more about the characters’ subconscious feelings than the characters themselves do.
The equality of the protagonists’ relationship is informed by feminist-enlightened, late-twentieth-century standards, but there is no notable anachronism. Brienne is an exceptional woman, but she has no contemporary feminist consciousness (e.g., she uses the word ‘woman’ in a derogatory sense). Jaime, the “kingslayer,” is also unconventional, and with the loss of his hand, he is even more so, among the combative nobility. He needs Brienne to be his “right-hand woman” (pun intended), and unlike other defective men, such as his brother, paid bodyguards will not do. In fact, long before he lost the use of his arm, he had feminine attributes (he is chatty and good-looking; his sister-lover dominates him, and their children are hers, not his). A mannish woman, therefore, suits him perfectly.

A LEARNING PROCESS

According to Steve Neale, “central to romantic comedy is a learning process, a process in which the members of the couple come to know themselves as they come to know one another, and in which, in doing so, they come to develop and acknowledge compatibility and mutual love” (292-93). The learning process in romantic comedies therefore consists not only of getting to know each other, but also of self-acquaintance; of a revelation of hidden qualities and of acquiring good qualities; changing through learning a lesson, or education by imitation. The variations in this process are, of course, endless, but for the identity of teacher and pupil, three main groupings emerge:

1. Mutual learning (e.g., Pretty Woman, When Harry Met Sally);
2. A woman teaching a man (e.g., Bringing up Baby, What’s Up Doc?);
3. A man teaching a woman (e.g., The Taming of the Shrew, Overboard).

At first, it seems that Jaime is Brienne’s teacher. This impression is formed due to their differences in age and relative life-experience, as well as Jaime’s typical arrogance. Soon enough, however, Jaime realizes that Brienne is not as innocent or stupid as he had hoped. She understands that his insulting questions and remarks are meant to upset her; to “push her buttons” so he can escape, and she informs him that he will not provoke her to anger. He nevertheless continues with his snide remarks, for he knows no other way to carry on a conversation.

9 In Hollywood romantic comedies, women teach men by being their role models. Teaching from an authoritative position is reserved for men. Even very childish men (e.g., Groundhog Day), are disciplined by fate, rather than by the women they fall in love with. This gender bias can be found all through the history of the genre.
Their relationship at this stage is similar to that of Sir Gareth (Beaumains) and the insulting damsel Linet, in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Like Sir Gareth, who is a knight of the round table, Brienne tries to keep calm as Jaime taunts and offend her. As any knight knows, Brienne understands that she must be skilled, not only with swordplay, but also with mental armor, holding steadfast against verbal and psychological attacks. Brienne has perfected this particular knightly skill through years of coping with scornful comments about her homely looks and her unfeminine behavior, so Jaime does not challenge her in a new or special way. Jaime is also on familiar ground: with or without a sword, he uses his wit in verbal combats. Thus, the most mocked woman in the seven kingdoms meets the man who has turned mockery into an art form. Initially they seem to equally offend one another—he with unrelenting toxic chatter, she with silence. Brienne is mostly quiet, but at times, is also capable of making quips. One such moment occurs before they cross a river. Jamie is talking, but with no reply from Brienne, he verbalizes what she is probably thinking—he understands by now that she is no fool, and can devise an effective tactic and act upon it. When he adds to his expressed thoughts the moves he may perform, such as jumping into the river, she retorts: “good luck with that.” The glowing smile on Jaime’s face reveals to us that what he really needs is a rival who is able to match his sharp speech. Here he gets a first glimpse of Brienne’s flexibility and ability to learn; she is by no means as boring as he had thought. Her greater virtue—the ability to listen to others—will be revealed to him later on, but for now, he is babbling. The time for important, serious, non-cynical words, about ideals and their place in real life, is yet to come.

Along their journey, Brienne wisely and courageously confronts the challenges put before her by Jaime and others. Jaime learns to respect her as a fellow warrior, but is too proud to admit that, despite her gender; she is as good a knight as any, even after she survives a duel with him and defeats three men by herself. An inkling of the change in his attitude towards her appears when they are captured by Locke. He tries to advise her on surviving the upcoming horrors she will probably endure as a woman in Locke’s camp. His advice on yielding to rapists, however, is not well-received by Brienne. Although Jaime appears annoyed with her reaction, he actually understands and shares her view: he too would rather die than yield to rapists. When Jaime saves Brienne from rape, yet loses his hand, she spurs him back to life. Now she is the teacher and he is her pupil. Though she is half his age, she patiently explains to him how spoiled and inexperienced he is. He accepts her reproach and changes his attitude towards what he had considered a life no longer worth living.
Jaime’s esteem for Brienne continues to grow as he witnesses her valorous deeds, and as she demonstrates strength in agonizing circumstances. Brienne, for her part, learns to respect him when he reveals to her the real, chivalrous motive that made him slay a king, and how he does take to heart the insults he faces. A dramatic moment in their relationship comes when Jaime realizes Brienne is a truer knight than he will ever be; the kind of knight he once thought he would be, before real life hardened and numbed him. This moment of recognition is heart-breaking, since it happens when both know she will surely die the next day. Finally, Jaime has no quick retort, and is silent. He has lived long enough among knights to recognize the difference between high ideals and the ugliness of mundane reality. Brienne astounds him. For the first time, he finds himself facing a person that embodies the knightly ideal with no hesitation or fear. She quietly prepares for her death, trusting him to complete her task. For Brienne, her vocation is more important than her life. Jaime recognizes that a true knight knows not only how to win, but also how to accept defeat and one’s own demise. Jaime and his comrades’ inflated egos have left them unable to rise to this particular challenge. Therefore, in the face of Brienne’s impressive display of humility and acceptance, Jamie is left speechless. Unlike their duel on the bridge and its unclear outcome, here he knows for certain that he is defeated. Brienne is the ultimate knight, and not merely a womanly parody of one. Her exemplary behavior teaches him a lesson, or rather, reminds him of something he already knew. Having been brought up with the same values, Jaime recognizes that chivalry is a state of mind, and does not depend on having a specific anatomy.

Jaime soon has a chance to prove that he has learned that lesson well. The day after his realization, he leaps into a bear pit, unarmed in more than once sense, and saves Brienne’s life. The only weapons left to him are his value to his captors, and of course, his valor and new appetite for altruistic gestures. Jaime’s jump into the bear pit also has symbolic value. It is part of a series of leaps, falls and vertical movement that reflect his character and manifest the redemptive process he is undergoing—a key theme in comedy, according to Frye (43).

In his book on romantic comedy, Mark Rubinfeld traces four types of plots typical to Hollywood romantic comedies. One of these is the redemption plot, in which a cold-hearted or broken-hearted man is saved by the love of a good woman (Rubinfeld 13). It seems expected that Jaime, much like the flawed men in Pretty Woman and Groundhog Day, will go through an emotional and moral transformation. His redemption process, however, may be longer and more complex, for his sins are graver than those usually found in comedies (he slept with his sister, threw a child from a window, and killed countless men). Redemption is impressive, inasmuch as its starting point is
low, and Jaime literally begins in the gutter. He is dangerously drawn to jumps and falls, which together with his less-than-knightly actions, reflect his self-destructive instinct. In fact, the first thing we learn about him is that his natural trajectory is downward. Jaime’s introductory scene in the series is with his sister-lover. In a conversation, she reminds him of his dangerous childhood hobby of jumping off the cliffs of Casterly Rock into the ocean. His only fear at the time was that his father would find out about his risky behavior. Secret jumps and falls, both physical and moral, continue in his later life. Willingly and unwillingly, Jaime keeps on jumping and falling during his journey home. Several examples of how his downward movements accumulate meaning along the route, mirroring the development of his character, take place throughout the series. The first shot depicting their journey shows Jaime falling off a horse. Brienne decides to continue by foot, after lifting him up and spurring him forward. Along the way, he continues to trip and fall, eventually collapsing. After chopping Jaime’s hand off, Locke and his men subject him to abuse, making him the butt of jokes, jibes and humiliation, in a situation that is far from comic. Too weak to ride, Jaime falls from his horse into a mud puddle, while attempting, in vain, to fight his torturers. Brienne jumps to his assistance, but is also helpless. Though they have reached the low point of their horrifying ordeal, their attempts to fight are impressive. Jaime falls yet again at Bolton’s feet, as Bolton torments him with a slow narrative about the fate of his family. Later, given the chance to wash their weary bodies at the baths of Arenhall, Jaime enters Brienne’s pool, fearing he might drown. He asks her to pull him out should he sink, and indeed he does faint and fall and she saves him from drowning. While Jaime is fixed on his descent, Brienne remains true to the meaning of her name, and ascends.

Sealing this section of Jaime’s redemption story is his heroic leap into a bear pit in order to save Brienne’s life. It seems that a pure-hearted woman has awakened the soul of a dark knight, as did Rebecca the Jewess for Brian du Bois-Guilbert in Sir Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe, and Jane Eyre for Edward Rochester in Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre. In all three, the hero begins his path to redemption, thanks to the good example given by an impressive woman. Jaime has saved Brienne before, but the rescue from the bear pit is more challenging and dangerous. In a way, it contrasts with his grave sin of pushing Bran Stark from the window. The altruistic jump does not, of course, eradicate

10 See Alejandro Sosa’s examination of Christian motifs in the bathhouse scene.
11 See also Susan Johnson’s (148-150) examination of Brienne’s part in the conversion Jaime undertakes.
his guilt, but the visual similarity between the two deeds starts to shift the moral balance weighing against Jaime.

According to Frye, in all types of comedy the forces of life triumph over the forces of death, the healthy prevail over the ill, and the story moves toward a restoration of life (171). The same is true for Jaime’s story. He is trapped in obsessive, hopeless patterns; his union with Brienne, as well as the loss of his hand, may redeem him. Even if the story ultimately “changes key” or the pair eventually parts, the dramatic unit, starting with their voyage to King’s Landing and ending with their arrival there as promised, and Brienne’s new quest, has a structure typical of comedy. Brienne not only fulfills her mission, but saves Jaime’s life. In doing so, she changes his attitudes towards life; the very ethos he has lived by thus far. A defective Byronic hero, a vile man, improves because of her. Jaime, for his part, cannot change Brienne even if he wants to. If the story follows the conventions of romantic comedy, a change in Brienne might awaken her dormant feminine aspects. But until this (or another change) occurs, she affects others, functioning as a mentor for a knight undergoing rehabilitation.

A JOURNEY THROUGH A GREEN WORLD

Immediately after their first encounter, Brienne is told to take Jaime from the Northern King’s camp in Riverrun to the capital city King’s Landing (to be exchanged for the two sisters of the king). They travel in pleasant weather through green fields, groves and forests. The landscape they cross together is one of the elements that make us hopeful about a romantic future between them, for the verdant scenery connotes comedy in literary criticism (Frye 43, 182). As stated above, in Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye divides western literature into four modes, each relating to one of the four seasons: tragedy (autumn), irony and satire (winter), comedy (spring), and romance (summer). It appears to be spring or summer in the setting in which their story unfolds, both of which are combined in romantic comedies.

The book series A Song of Ice and Fire makes use of all four myths described by Frye, and of their various archetypical qualities. For instance, Tragedy, the myth of autumn, is embodied in the fate of Ned Stark and his family. His family motto “winter is coming” literally expresses their autumn existence—as they dread the coming winter. Unfortunately, Ned Stark becomes entangled in an autumn plot, that is, a plot tragic in theme and structure. Like Sophocles’ Oedipus, Ned is forced to solve a riddle regarding royal lineage. He indeed finds out who is Jeoffrey’s biological father, the future heir-in-name of King Robert, yet, like Oedipus, Ned pays dearly for the solving of the riddle. The revelation brings Ned’s death, without ending the reign of an unworthy king—a tragic result for his good intentions. See also Gary Westfahl’s article about the comedic aspects of Martin’s prequels for A Song of Ice and Fire.

64 © Mythlore 126, Spring/Summer 2015
Frye explains that in typical romantic comedy plots (such as Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), the two lovers leave the city and go into the forest, the green world, in order to escape social constraints against their love. At the end, after their rebellion against social norms, parents, or representatives of the law has been resolved, the lovers return (Frye 44, 169-71, 182-84).

The basic elements of the “drama of the green world” (82) are handled here ironically: Brienne and Jaime are not lovers escaping social constraints in a pastoral, liberating landscape; they do not meet innocent villagers, fairies, or other magical forest creatures, but instead, brutal warriors, who inflict great pain on them. While the enchanted settings of romantic comedies facilitate transformation, here they function as the background for a painful kind of transformation, in the form of maiming. Their journey negates society’s laws in one respect: a mother’s concern for her daughters is at its root, and it goes against the king’s decision not to exchange prisoners of war. Despite these differences, Brienne and Jaime’s journey in a hostile green world builds some kind of intimacy between them.

Brienne and Jaime’s adventures together have an interesting similarity to the plots of two masterpieces of romantic comedy—*It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934), and *Bringing up Baby* (Hawks, 1938). Both films belong to the genre of ‘screwball comedy,’ a cycle which flourished in the 1930’s and 1940’s, and each features a journey to a green world.

Capra’s film initiated what is known today as the ‘madcap heiress on the run’ formula: Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert), a spoiled millionaire’s daughter, runs off to join her bridegroom, against her father’s wishes. A journalist who has just lost his job (Clark Gable) recognizes her, and decides to aid her cross-country flight and earn a journalistic scoop. On their way, they fall in love. Their class differences, different life experiences, and mutual stubbornness generate a stormy relationship.

In a way, Jaime’s predicament is similar to that of Ellie, the spoiled heiress. He is also wealthy and privileged. Indeed, Brienne, his escort, is noble as well, but is not as rich, and surely has never known the privileges that a powerful family, great beauty, and military reputation generate. Like Ellie in *It Happened One Night*, Jaime is in a quest for love. He has done awful things, including murder, in order to get back to his lover, and has lost his hand and his identity as a warrior in the process. Like Ellie, he does not know that his persistence in returning to his woman will give him a chance to meet a much better woman, and one more suited to him. Brienne, unlike Cersei, may save Jaime from an honorless life; a life without awareness of others (as might be the fate of Ellie Andrews should she chose the wrong man). Brienne, like the highly motivated news reporter in the 1934 screwball comedy, is still unaware
of her role in the life of her companion. She does not know that their voyage is not just “work,” but also a quest to find the right mate. Although the genders are reversed, the two stories highlight equality and balance, and in both, the young ingenue surprises the more experienced man in key moments along their way.

In *Bringing Up Baby*, a madcap heiress falls in love with a stern paleontologist, abducts him from his dull museum and forces him to join her leopard hunt in Connecticut, thus awakening in him a lust for life and fun. The loony plot of *Bringing Up Baby* symbolically depicts the learning process and awakening of a “sleeping beauty” professor by an unconventional woman. Despite the pastoral landscape of affluent Connecticut, the hunting theme in this film gives a constant reminder that the green world is also a variation of the jungle, where we are all hunters and the hunted. This sad truth applies even to seemingly benign and funny contexts, where love and personal growth occur. Due to the hybrid nature of *Game of Thrones* this dark aspect of the green world is more fully acknowledged and displayed in Brienne and Jaime’s story.

The two films are filled with slapstick humor and witty dialogue, as is customary in screwball comedy. In Depression-era comedies, the escape from society to nature expressed a wish to evade a world gone mad and bankrupt. In *Game of Thrones*’ medieval world, escape seems impossible.

*Game of Thrones* apparently has no real separation between civilized, ordered society and free, natural space. Chaos is everywhere; danger and instability abound. Brienne and Jaime’s random encounters in the verdant countryside with people connected to the various lords fighting for the throne demonstrate, time and again, the dangerous lack of one center of power and of a system of rules binding to all. The natural, rural areas are no less dangerous than the corrupt and licentious capital, and no ideal alternative exists.

**HUMOR AND VIOLENCE**

Romantic comedy combines verbal humor with physical, slapstick humor, borrowed from clown comedy. These two types of humor also appear in Brienne and Jaime’s story; however, they are influenced by other, more dominant genres. A cynical, anti-sentimental tone is quite common in romantic comedies, especially those of the 1930s and 1940s, but here, because of genre hybridity, the humor is blacker than black. In both romantic and clown comedy, slapstick replaces violence, which is suppressed and censored. In *Game of Thrones*, true to the tales of medieval knights, a real and extreme violence prevails. Alongside physical antics such as shoving and childish object-throwing, the series contains scenes of duels, torture, dismemberment, rape and murder. Unlike most characters found in romantic comedies, those in this series are blunt and coarse. As in romantic comedies, there are instances of
witty, mocking, wisecracking, and clever ironic phrasing, but also of vulgar cursing, bawdy songs, insulting nicknames and verbal abuse to an extent that is rendered unamusing. Speech is used more as a weapon than a bonding device.

Jamie is well aware of his verbal prowess; he is even proud of it. However, since he is not in a proper romantic comedy, but inhabits a more serious genre, he pays dearly for boasting of this superiority. Facing the cynical Locke, Jaime uses too many “fancy words.” Locke believes the lie that Jaime tells to save Brienne, but nonetheless, he chops off Jaime’s hand for being too rich, too erudite, and too articulate a man. Eloquence, a merit in romantic comedy, here displeases a character belonging to a different, more reticent genre.

Despite being earnest, Brienne also has trickster-like qualities. Every man she meets underestimates her and she uses this knowledge to surprise and defeat them. This is how she is first introduced: She removes her helmet after a match, revealing to the crowd around her and to her male opponent that he has just been bested by a woman-warrior. Like a joke with a punchline, the revelation about her gender is unexpected, but the circumstances are truly violent. Her punches are not metaphorical, as in verbal jokes, for they win battles (i.e., against Loras Tyrell), and even annihilate enemies (i.e., the three Northerners).

Brienne and Jaime find themselves obliged to fabricate identities and lies for inquisitive strangers, much like the protagonists of many romantic comedies (e.g., *It Happened One Night, Bringing Up Baby, Some Like it Hot*). While the protagonists of *It Happened One Night* manage to pose as a bickering old married couple to fool the detectives on their trail, and *Bringing Up Baby*’s protagonists have fun impersonating various characters (gangsters, madmen, etc.), Jaime and Brienne are not particularly skilled at this joint deception, and are continually caught and exposed. Perhaps they have not yet reached the level of intimacy needed for shared improvisation. Or perhaps the fault lies in the inflexible world they occupy, a world that does not allow for humorous situations and easy getaways from traps and pursuers.

Hence, while pretense and masquerade free the protagonists of romantic comedies from “their original personalities, expectations and value systems” and “[e]xperimenting with other identities allows them to grow together” (Lent 323), in the world depicted in *Game of Thrones*, such freedom is impossible. In the TV series’ violent society, there is no way to escape familial and tribal identity. The attempt to disguise Jaime’s identity from the Northerners fails and he is immediately recognized. Trying to deceive their captors in order to save Brienne is also unsuccessful: the lie about the sapphires her father will pay as ransom backfires and almost gets her killed.

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When Jaime returns to the capital, he doesn’t look like himself, but his costume is not comical, and is not the result of tricks. He really does look like an obscure villager, and his loss of identity is alarming, rather than representing a wish come true.

Instead of the lighthearted humor typical of romantic comedy, George R.R. Martin instills humor in unfunny situations. For instance, in the bear pit scene, Brienne finds herself in the worst possible role—for all of her knightly prowess, she has become a “damsel in distress.” After trying so hard to become a perfect knight, poor Brienne is trapped in a “sweet” pink dress, with a useless wooden sword and a very serious opponent. Although that parody of a duel is expected to end with her being brutally killed by the bear, Jaime rushes in and saves her. The person least expected to function as a “knight in shining armor” becomes her rescuer. Jaime’s altruistic gesture is both impressive and ridiculous, unexpected and clichéd. A hurried run toward one’s beloved is a staple of romantic comedy endings (e.g., *Girl Shy*, 1924, *The Apartment*, 1960, *The Graduate*, 1967, *Manhattan*, 1979, *When Harry Met Sally*, 1989, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 2001) and here it also makes an appearance. Jaime’s leap into the pit where Brienne is fighting a bear is both romantic and comic, because, among other things, it acts out puns and word plays—a literalization of the figurative. The phrase “he single-handedly saved her” applies in this case in more than one sense. In addition to having heroically rescued Brienne, he has literally saved her with the only hand he has left. Other humorous wordplays come to mind in these exciting and dangerous moments. For instance, Jaime has saved Brienne from a bear with his bare hand(s). This also connects to the fact that the torment Locke and his men have devised for Brienne is based on a lewd song entitled, “The Bear and the Maiden Fair,” that is sung in this episode. Hence, the sensational rescue is ready, in terms of content, lyrics and allusions, for a poetic treatment by talented bards.

It is yet to be seen whether Jaime will complete his redemption process. Considering the high mortality rate in the series, it is doubtful. So far, his relationship with Brienne has had a good start, based in part, on the conventions of a very old and familiar genre—romantic comedy. In addition to romantic hopes, this genre’s conventions have added some relief from the very serious and tragic mood of *Game of Thrones*. If Brienne and Jaime remain platonic friends, despite being a man and a woman rather than male comrades-in-arms, their story will still be true to the spirit of medieval romance. After all, a key ideal of courtly love, formed in medieval Europe, was that of chaste love, and of admiration that triggers self-improvement, without sex (Shumway 91).
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**About the Author**

Inbar Shaham teaches courses in film history, film language and film genres at the Open University of Israel. She has previously published "The Structure of Repetition in the Cinema: Three Hollywood Genres" in Poetics Today.

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