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Tyrion Lannister: A Fulcrum of Balance in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*

Abstract

Tyrion Lannister, a central character in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is described as a fulcrum point within the series. In Monk's reading, the dwarf Tyrion's experiences can be mapped onto the hero's journey. He is surrounded by dragon imagery which, in a Jungian interpretation, positions him as a potential heir to the throne of Westeros.

Additional Keywords

Martin, George R.R. *A Song of Ice and Fire*; Martin, George R.R.—Characters—Tyrion Lannister; Hero's journey in George R.R. Martin



URION LANNISTER: A FULCRUM OF BALANCE
IN GEORGE R.R. MARTIN'S
A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

PATRICIA DONK

WHEN GEORGE R. R. MARTIN STARTED ON THE MULTI-VOLUME NOVEL *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it is evident that whatever he had in mind would be a *magnum opus*, for eventually he admitted in an interview that “I just made these novels as big as my imagination could allow” (qtd. in Edwards). Although Martin is an experienced and respected writer of science fiction and fantasy, with a considerable volume of work behind him, his output has largely been in shorter forms. The change of scale of Martin’s new and enlarged imaginative concept, backed up by extensive historical and other research, now allows Martin to reflect a chthonic, realistically crude, and demonized world from which our twenty-first-century world may not be sufficiently safely distanced.

Although the usual reviews appeared with the publication of *A Game of Thrones* in 1996, scholarly criticism of *A Song of Ice and Fire* was late in getting started—much, if not all of it, after the HBO dramatic television adaptation was first screened and so boosted interest in the books. A master’s thesis by Kent Erik Heen, entitled “A Perspective on the Unfamiliar: Epic Fantasy in George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*,” dealt with how the novels’ “polyphonic narrative questions several of the conventions within the epic fantasy genre” (2012). Subsequently, Vike Magnus examined the novels in a discussion of fantasy as a literary genre, its subgenre high fantasy, and contemporary “genre theorizing” (4) in a dissertation entitled “The Familiar and the Fantastic: A Study of Contemporary High Fantasy in George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Steven Erikson’s *Malazan Book of the Fallen*” (2015). Susan Johnston’s article “Grief Poignant as Joy: Dyscatastrophe and Eucatastrophe in *A Song of Ice and Fire*” (2012) addressed a specific aspect of epic structure in fantasy. Political aspects of Martin’s neomedievalism are addressed in Rainer Emig’s “Fantasy as Politics” (2014) and Ricarda Schulten’s “A Game of Thrones Indeed: A Lot of Politics and Just a Bit of Magic” (2012), social aspects in “Unsettled Accounts: Corporate Culture and George R.R. Martin’s Fetish Medievalism” (2012), and ethics in Pascal J. Massie’s “Bringing Elsewhere Home: A Song of Ice and Fire’s Ethics of Disability” (2014) and Christopher Roman’s “The Ethical Movement of Daenerys Targaryen” (2014). Sharon Dee Goertz directed critical attention to

Martin's hints of mythology in "Mothers and Monsters: The Return of the Great Goddess in George R.R. Martin's Song of Ice and Fire" (2014). An example of Martin's use of romance theory is demonstrated by Inbar Shaham's "Brienne of Tarth and Jaime Lannister: A Romantic Comedy Within HBO's *Game of Thrones*" (2015). The topics covered by scholars so far (at the end of *A Dance with Dragons*) leave a great deal of room for other aspects to be critically examined.

Stretching the definitions of mythology a little reveals the emergence of a mythological streak in the books. For submerged, almost without trace, in the mountainous accumulation of words lies a braided trio of themes, loosely identifiable as the making of a king, the icons of balance, and the myth of the hero. In the actions and personality of the dwarf Tyrior of House Lannister, all three themes are blended and run concurrently through all five volumes.

THE BROKEN KINGDOM

Tyrior Lannister is first introduced from the viewpoint of Jon Snow, during King Robert Baratheon's visit with his family to the Starks at Winterfell in the early chapters of *A Game of Thrones* (1996). In Jon Snow's eyes, Tyrior's ugliness is emphasized:

He was a dwarf, half his brother's height, struggling to keep pace on stunted legs. His head was too large for his body, with a brute's squashed-in face beneath a swollen shelf of brow. One green eye and one black one peered out from under a lank fall of hair so blond it seemed white. (*A Game of Thrones* [Game] 51)

Comparing him to his brother, the "tall and fair" Ser Jaime, and noting that "all that the gods had given to Cersei and Jaime, they had denied Tyrior," Jon thinks that Ser Jaime "is what a king should look like" (Game 51). At this point, Jon sees Tyrior, as most people in the politically and psychologically complex neo-medievalist surface narrative of the Song see him, as almost a monster.

But "almost" allows "monster" to give way to quick contradiction. It emerges in what follows after Jon Snow first sees Tyrior at the banquet and compares him to Ser Jaime, when they meet in a darkened courtyard. Here Tyrior approaches the bitter and angry teenage Jon with apparent warmth and empathy, at the same time acknowledging his own predicament with edged humor:

"Did I offend you?" Lannister said. "Sorry. Dwarfs don't have to be tactful. Generations of capering fools in motley have won me the right to dress badly and say any damn thing that comes into my head." (Game 56)

He also takes time to counsel Jon, and to counter Jon's resistance to counseling with sardonic humor (*Game* 57). As Tyrion leaves the dark courtyard on foot, "[w]hen he opened the door, the light from within threw his shadow clear across the yard, and for just a moment Tyrion Lannister stood tall as a king" (*Game* 57). It is a quick, sharp, ambiguous foreshadowing of what the reader is to learn in the narrative about Tyrion: can he meet the challenges of his own nature as well as those that the chaotic world he lives in throws at him? But from this point on, much of his development is embedded in Martin's notion of kingship and kingliness.

But if Tyrion is to become a king in Westeros, Martin allows him no clear or good model among the leaders of the seven kingdoms to follow. Robert Baratheon is an incompetent, feckless alcoholic, whose failings lead directly to his assassination; Eddard Stark is embedded in static codes (like his decision to execute a prisoner personally rather than delegate the task to a subordinate); Tywin Lannister, whose power, ruthlessness, and intelligence seem at first more suitable, and whose claim Martin appears to be exploring in depth in the narrative, may be too bound up in the creation of his own family dynasty. (Leaders of the other houses are not presented as contenders.)

At first view, moreover, Tyrion is not the only contender for the kingship. Initially, on the death of King Robert Baratheon, in direct line of male succession are the king's sons and heirs, Joffrey and Tommen, then his brothers, Stannis Baratheon, and Renly Baratheon. Here the direct line of succession stops. Claimants not legally in the line of succession are Robert's still living unacknowledged and unknown bastard sons (for example, Gendry if he is one of these), who could be included under the fictional legal system of Westeros or might otherwise be legitimized after Robert's death (and Cersei's anxiety to eliminate all of them would suggest they would or could be included). Among the claimants who might seize the throne by *force majeure* are the Starks (Eddard, his sons Robb, Bran, and Rickon, and his bastard Jon Snow) and the Lannisters (Tywin, Jaime, Tyrion, and Kevan). If the laws of succession in Westeros were to be changed to permit women to succeed to the throne, Robert's daughter Myrcella could claim to succeed her brothers, or one of Eddard Stark's daughters (Sansa or Arya) could put in a claim after their brothers. Daenerys, however, could have a much stronger legitimate claim by conquest than by her alleged claim as a surviving heir of Aerys Targaryen II. If the mysterious boy in hiding in Es with Lord Connington really is Prince Aegon Targaryen, the presumed dead grandson of Aerys Targaryen, he would take precedence over any of the other claimants, by birth and/or conquest.

Early in the story, however, death starts to whittle down the claimants to the throne. Some survive but lose their eligibility for various other reasons. The most cogent is the association with the supernatural and magic that affects

both Stannis (who is apparently insane and enchanted by the demonic Melisandre) and Bran (who is a lycanthrope, a skin-walker, as well as being paraplegic and psychic in his human form). Ser Jaime Lannister is disadvantaged by the loss of one hand, guilty of regicide (as Kingslayer), and also guilty of incest (with his twin sister Cersei), even if he survives assassination. Similarly, the embittered and volatile Jon Snow's birth is allegedly illegitimate, and although his time beyond the Wall might suggest that, like Tyryon, he is on a Hero-quest, he also is forsworn of his vows as Night Watcher, among his other breaches of honor. At the end of his last appearance in *A Dance with Dragons* he is stabbed four times (*Dance* 1000), although his actual death is not recorded anywhere subsequently and he may therefore not be ruled out definitively as a candidate. Similarly, Sansa (too passive), Arya (obsessed with blood revenge), and Daenerys (bound with the preternatural) are also disabled by more than their gender. Behind their various faults and fates, however, lies the question of balance—each of them appears to be temperamentally unbalanced to some degree and in some direction, reflecting the imbalance of the world itself with its erratic climate and unpredictable length of seasons.

THE ICONIC BEAR

The overriding imbalance of the world appears to be recognized in the battle-cry of Starks of Winterfell—"Winter is coming!"—and in the face of this climatological threat, Tyryon manifests symbolically as grounded in the natural world of Westeros. Certainly Westeros seems to be getting colder; Essos, on the other hand, seems to enjoy considerable warmth. Heat and cold bracket the world and forge the inhabitants' temperaments. Whatever might be happening in cosmological terms, the World of Ice and Fire is purported to be swinging between extremes of ice and fire which are the two lethal elements of medieval belief about the elements forming the world and bringing about its end: ice leading to frozen extinction and fire leading to flaming destruction. But these elements are also represented as part of the lethal elements of the characters' makeup: the Starks and others of Westeros are given to cold and implacability, the Lannisters of Casterly Rock and others are given to heat and fury. Sansa Stark and Daenerys Targaryen demonstrate, for example, the opposite poles of the cold-heat spectrum as manifest in the female temperament, and Eddard Stark and Tywin Lannister (witness the hot fury responsible for the "rains of Castermere") are the opposite poles of the cold-heat spectrum as manifest in the male temperament. Importantly too, both sides are politically locked into a form of rigid hierarchical feudalism which acts like a pressure cooker intensifying both the elements.

No world, however, consists of only two elements; between ice and fire there must be a point of balance: earth. Its properties stabilize and balance the

other two. In the familiar children's playground of seesaw, what holds a balance between two opposite forces is a long board balanced on a post which acts as a fulcrum. Tyrion stands between the two elements, partaking of the ice of the Starks and the fire of his father, but manifesting the balance point of the fulcrum as an earth symbol. Appropriately this is achieved by associating him with the bear. Generally speaking, the bear is the animal most closely associated with winter and cold and also symbolically with the earth by its annual hibernation and tenacious holding power.

The first mention of the bear is in the Prologue, when Will, the surviving young Night's Watch guard, reflects that "that old bear Mormont" would know what to make of the supernaturally mangled sword (*Game* 11) if he takes it back to the Wall. The bear's associations are blended into the narrative again when Tyrion rides north from Winterfell with the Night's Watch garrison ranger Benjen Stark and the newly recruited Jon Snow to visit the Watch's garrison at the Wall. It is bitterly cold when they travel, and Benjen Stark contemptuously provides Tyrion with "a riding fur, a tattered bearskin, old and musty-smelling" (*Game* 120), thus "cloaking" him not only physically but also unknowingly symbolically in the protection of the animal spirit of the cold region. Later, after their arrival, in an encounter on the ramparts of the Wall, Jon Snow on his watch turns around to see Tyrion behind him "bundled in furs so thickly he looked like a very small bear" (*Game* 184). Tyrion is also linked to the bear (and the earth) by similar bodily characteristics (clumsiness, disproportionate limbs, and awkward gait) which are repeatedly emphasized to strengthen the associations, as are his sensual physical appetites (women, heavy drinking, food).

In this part of the narrative, therefore, the symbol of the bear signals Tyrion's mythographic role as a third element of the medieval set—earth. But as a symbol of the earth, the bear resonates with more than simply the stability of the earth. In mythology the bear is also representative of the ambivalent feminine principle—responsible for both the maternal hug and the destructive crushing embrace (Jung, *Symbols* 306-307; par. 465 and 332; par. 496). The bear here is associated with Tyrion himself symbolically (its implications carry over, but Tyrion is not a skin-walker as Bran Stark is). The bear later appears as a version of the hero's "friendly animal" (Jung, *Archetypes* 231-32; par. 421-423) in the person of Jorah Mormont, whose House affiliation is the bear, and who therefore wears its sigil on his surcoat. With the bear as the friendly animal companion, Tyrion therefore has a tenuous link with the feminine principle in his relationships with women as he continues his journey into Essos.

THE ICONIC DWARF

Tyryon's dwarf stature is equally tied, not only to his key role in the construction of the narrative, but also to his iconic significance as the fulcrum of balance between ice and fire. In his interview with Gavin Edwards, Martin grants Tyryon a very important place in the genesis of A Song of Ice and Fire. Referring back to his collaboration with Lisa Tuttle on *Windhaven*, he reveals that

[I]n it there's a throwaway line—one of the characters is talking about visiting some distant island and says, "There is a dwarf; he's the ugliest man I ever met, but the cleverest." For some reason that stuck in my head, and when I started writing *Game of Thrones*, there he was. And he got his claws into me and became one of the most vital characters who really moved the series forward. (qtd. in Edwards)

In Jungian theory, this type of psychic hint from the unconscious clearly indicates a special importance for the character. How much of this "ugliest and cleverest" source, however, persists and how much is subsequent development is not clear. Tyryon carries much of the traditional baggage of the dwarf of myth and folk-tale alike.

As the fulcrum of ice and fire, the dwarf Tyryon represents an elemental defense against the apocalypse which threatens this world. Like the bear, the dwarf is an earth symbol. In pre-Christian times, the mythological beings known as *dwarfs* were intimately involved with the earth as chthonic gods or demi-gods. In an article in *Modern Language Notes*, Alexander H. Krappe asserts that "D'un autre côté [...] les nains celtiques et germaniques sont sans exceptions des êtres chthoniens, les ancêtres divinisés (*manes*)." ["On the other hand [...] Celtic and Germanic dwarfs are without exception chthonic beings, deified ancestors (*manes*)"] (446-447). Elsewhere, Egerton Sykes describes Bes, the Egyptian god of music and pleasure, as a "bandy-legged dwarf demigod" (Egerton 34), and Jung points out that Siegfried's foster parent in Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelungs* is "a chthonic god, Mime, a crippled dwarf" (Jung, *Symbols* 361; par. 566). In the historical period represented by Martin's neo-medievalism, these powerful mythological beings had started to lose some, although not all, of their traditional magic and supernatural associations. In the early medieval Westeros, it is possible that his "mismatched eyes," one black and one green (*Game* 51), with which he is introduced and which are noticed uneasily by several people in talking to him, might constitute evidence of supernatural nature in the neo-medieval context. But he displays no magical abilities, and is a rationalist with regard to the supernatural. Even his nickname of "Imp," which up to the 17th century in general English use referred indifferently to the youngest scion of a highborn family, does not necessarily characterize him as a child of the devil, a link which came only later (*OED Online*). Tyryon Lannister, although his

independent personality (constantly thinking outside the box in a rigorously hierarchical boxed-in feudal world) is clearly somewhat anomalous (as though he were a cat in a world of dogs), is himself not tagged as preternatural in any way in society.

THE ICONIC PARAGON

The fulcrum of kingship is the *paragon*. This term originally referred to a “touchstone” (*OED Online*), which was used to test the value (actually the purity from alloy) of precious metals. In its extended metaphorical sense, as a fulcrum it can be used to check the balance of any opposites. In the realm the king is preeminent. However he reaches his preeminence, he becomes not only actually preeminent but also theoretically perfect. In order to rule he must adjust himself to the demands of what his preeminence means to the realm. In myth and as symbolic fulcrum he must balance himself in equilibrium, free from base characteristics. The balance he achieves is the standard by which everyone else is tested.

Myth, legend, and folklore reveal that some kings become paragons; *vide* King Arthur. History reveals that that most do not; *vide* King George III. But what Tyrion Lannister reveals throughout Martin’s novel is that paragons are made, not born. From the beginning of *A Game of Thrones* to the end of *A Dance with Dragons*, Tyrion, albeit unwittingly, is in pursuit of the equilibrium of the paragon, as the presumptive pre-eminent king of Westeros.

THE MAKING OF A KING

In Tyrion himself as a personality, there is a point of balance between his physical constraints and his enormous intellect. His physique does not permit him to commit to the values of the society into which he is born because as a dwarf he cannot become a knight—which is the highest achievement a high-born male like his older brother, Ser Jaime, who is an exemplar of the feudal warrior codes, can achieve. But he is free to develop his mind to its full extent, considerably above the level of most of those around him. He is introspective: a thinker, a reader, and a student of human nature. Given his intellect and his introspection he also develops a constant habit of sardonic irony (irony being a preferred tool of those who see both sides of every issue). From childhood, therefore, he is psychologically open to the possibility of choices and of compromise in a way that is foreign to his community.

As a corollary of this openness to choices and compromise, his personality is checkered with numerous human contradictions. Certainly, he acknowledges his standing in the feudal stratification of Westeros. When Benjen Stark contemptuously (thinking it will be refused) gives him an old musty riding fur when Tyrion asks to travel with him to the Wall, Tyrion disconcertingly

accepts it because “[t]he Lannisters never declined [anything], graciously or otherwise. The Lannisters took what was offered” (*Game* 120). But when the weather gets colder on the journey to the Wall, he enjoys a small feeling of revenge (*Game* 120). Although he uses the power that his standing as a Lannister affords him to obtain some things he wants—for example, his demand to go to the Wall—he does not abuse it. Moreover, even when he is signing a contract to join a mercenary company called the Second Sons, he thinks carefully about who he is before signing his real name (*Dance* 942). He also prides himself on keeping his word as a Lannister, and as such even keeps his promise of gold to his jailor for helping him when he is Catelyn’s captive (*Game* 456).

In spite of his pride in his status, when taking on the position of King’s Hand on his father’s instructions, he is able to present himself carefully with an ironic self-deprecation. “I would be only a small disturbance, ser” (*Clash* 53), he tells the guard at the Council Chamber when he tries to enter and present his father’s letter. He recognizes that if he allows himself to be turned away, “where was his authority” even as he acknowledges that “his” authority in this hierarchy derives from his father Lord Tywin. When he is granted entry, he regards it as “*A small victory [...] but sweet,*” and knowing that he “had passed his first test” he “shouldered through the door, feeling almost tall” (*Clash* 54). The qualification “almost” here is another instance of ironic self-deprecation even to himself and simultaneously a narrative signal of the type of hero he represents.

Yet there is always a measure of duplicity in his dealings with his enemies and allies alike. He lies without hesitation to his sister, agreeing as the King’s Hand to go along with her wishes: “‘Certainly,’ he lied. ‘I am yours, sister.’ *As long as I need to be*” (*Clash* 60-61). He uses people, giving someone who wants to petition the king a “comfortable chamber and a hot meal” and “a new pair of boots as well, good ones, courtesy of King Joffrey,” while at the same time arranging to “make time for him on the morrow” himself, because “A show of generosity never hurt” (*Clash* 226).

One of the keys to this checkering is perhaps his ability to get along with a wide range of people: he can be very diplomatic when he needs to be (*Clash* 57), although he is also very sharp-tongued. Often he responds with jokes in edgy interactions with other people, but for Tyryon, humor is displaced aggression. On occasion, he can be kind: in his treatment of his nervous page (*Clash* 269) and in his rejection of the dwarf Penny’s timid advances in Essos (*Dance* 835-836). Although in general he is quick-witted at getting out of trouble, he is perhaps too quick-witted. Sometimes it leaves him thinking “If only he had shut his mouth” when it gets him into trouble because he does not think ahead sufficiently carefully (*Game* 412). His rage, when it flares up, signals that the lion of House Lannister’s fury is not missing from his temperament.

In two important respects, however, his manipulative and interpersonal skills are severely tested on his human level. Most obviously, his infatuation with Shae is recklessly indulged; in spite of the fact that he knows she is a “whore” he explicitly reminds himself “*Will you never learn, dwarf? She’s a whore, damn you, it’s your coin she loves, not your cock*” (*Clash* 69). He even treats her fairly, resisting temptation to bed others. To do this is an honorable moral/ethical decision on his part, regardless of whether or not she would value this at all. But infatuation is a human failing and is a dangerous fault in a king (it is the same fault which blocks Stannis Baratheon in his attempt to claim the kingship). Eventually, the excess of his infatuation for her is matched by the excess of rage in which he kills her, strangling her when she betrays him with his father (*Storm* 1071).

At this point Tyrion’s submission to his father must be tested and ended. His failure to protect himself from his father is more longstanding than his relationship with Shae. Since childhood Tyrion has desperately sought his father’s approval—he wants and works for it by doing whatever he must (even glossing over the affair with Tysha, which has traumatized him immeasurably). He persistently accepts abuse from Lord Tywin (*Storm* 65), going into battle for him, taking second place to Jaime, and even ironically giving up Shae’s companionship in his bed in the city (but not altogether in his life). As long as Tyrion stubbornly resists Tywin’s refusal to believe he is Tyrion’s father, he will not be free of Tywin’s power over him. This killing, however, is required of Tyrion as part of the neo-medieval contexts of human society. When Tyrion finally discovers that Tywin has betrayed him over Tysha (the victim of Tyrion’s early fake marriage), his rage flares up and he uses a cross-bolt reflexively to kill Tywin at his most vulnerable, shooting him in the groin while he is on the privy. Tyrion is finally released from the familial bond that has held him until this point. Neither as a hero or a king can he be subject to any authority; what power and authority he wins must be his own. Although the death of the father as an incident of some hero-quests has precedents in myth (Oedipus, Theseus), it is not usually a deliberate murder.

The tests Tyrion must face, however, do not always mean cutting himself free of a bond. He is also required to build on his human self-discipline. He has always kept his word, priding himself on his honor according to social values in Westeros. His honor is severely tested when Queen Cersei orders him to marry Sansa Stark. He has had a minimal acquaintance with Sansa since taking over as the King’s Hand (*Clash* 59), and has rescued her from a severe episode of abuse by Joffrey and his Kingsguard (*Clash* 487-488), although she has chosen to remain under Joffrey’s influence (*Clash* 494). An arranged marriage, of a common medieval sort, does not affect his honor. When Sansa humiliates him at the wedding ceremony, by refusing to kneel to accept the

cloak symbolizing his protection, he is extremely angry, but even so, he plays the fool to avoid dragging her through the ceremonial bedding. When she offers passive resistance to consummating the marriage, he refuses to force her to accept him. "On my honor as a Lannister," the Imp said, "I will not touch you until you want me to," and he accepts her indication of "Never" (*Storm* 394). They therefore enter a *mariage blanc* (unconsummated marriage)—when she and Tyryon share a bed it is just to sleep. Under tremendous pressure his self-disciplinary promise remains unbroken.

In another important respect, however, his relationship to power, Tyryon is continuously tested. Serious power is assigned to him when Lord Tywin tells him to go to King's Landing and "Rule" (*Game* 769) as Tywin's surrogate on the King's Small Council. After taking his father's seat in the Council, he first sensibly negotiates his position in regard to Queen Cersei and then immediately sets out to take "the measure of the city," studying how it seems different from usual and questioning the guard captain Vylarr about conditions. Tasked with ruling, he is tested—although not with the tests the traditional hero meets on quest. In the court there are no snakes or demons or dragons, only equally dangerous people, lies, evasions, deceptions, and pitfalls. He works diligently: "Even abed, he worked well into the morning—reading by the flickering light of a candle, scrutinizing the reports of Varys's whisperers, and poring over Littlefinger's books of accounts until the columns blurred and his eyes ached" (*Clash* 444). If he is to be a king, he is getting a good grounding in administration.

Tasked as his father's surrogate on the Council with commanding King's Landing against the naval attack of Lord Stannis Baratheon, he is also tested in the more traditional ways of Westeros. By defending the city he proves himself as a capable commander. The odds are hugely stacked against him, but he is able to hold the city until Lord Tywin's army arrives to finish the battle. He proves himself a warrior, also important in the culture of Westeros: leading a vital sortie against the enemy, he is only brought down by trickery from Ser Mandon Moore to whom, as Tyryon believes, Queen Cersei has given orders that Tyryon should not survive the battle. Moreover, neither for his skill arranging a strong defense against the ships nor to his courage in leading troops into combat is he given full credit. Nevertheless, he has satisfied his own expectations by proving himself in action, and satisfied what might be expected of a claimant for the Iron Throne.

In the ordinary world of Westeros he has been surviving among people with wealth, power, and authority, and he has learned the art of using power and authority, albeit mostly by proxy and observation and protected by his family's wealth and power. It is a closed world, and although he moves about in it, he is always within its known boundaries. His remaining pride, however,

leads to his fall when he is accused of assassinating King Joffrey, is tried for regicide, fails to prove his innocence in trial by combat by proxy, and is imprisoned to await execution.

THE TRIALS OF THE KING AS HERO

After his escape from prison, he is spilled out into Essos, the underworld, ironically from a wine cask serving as a symbolic womb for a symbolic rebirth. Tyrion's physical wanderings manifest the trials of a spiritual journey, during which his soul must be remade, and he himself reborn. As presumptive king, he also bears the marks of the Hero. It is an open, unknown world, unlike closed and known Westeros. Like Westeros, however, Essos is divided—broken apart in conflicting societies, religions, cities, barbaric tribes. But unlike Westeros, in Essos past and present run loose together interactively. In his association with the archetype of the mythical hero, if successful, Tyrion must face a final challenge and get the traditional reward and then return to the overworld of Westeros. As the presumptive future king of Westeros, he must assert his temporal sovereignty. In Essos, therefore, Tyrion's activities must be viewed both metaphorically and naturalistically.

Metaphysically, he becomes exposed to the prevalence of the preternatural and he must learn the spiritual lessons he has previously avoided. He has to feel shame and humility, practice subservience and responsibility for others, and use his wits to survive without power or protection from others, living among those who are equally powerless and unprotected and therefore vulnerable. These lessons are the converse of those learned in the overworld of Westeros. At least one obstacle remains from the overworld to trip him up. Throughout his journey his father's last enigmatic words about Tysha—that she went "wherever whores go" (*Storm* 1073)—creates in him an obsession with the question "Where do whores go?" (*Dance* 126). At a critical moment he allows this to distract him from his path and from what he must learn.

Naturalistically, and therefore also psychologically, he is given no choice about what is expected of him by Varys, who has arranged his arrival in Essos. Seeing ships from his window when he first wakes in the house of the eunuch Ilyrio Mopattis in Pentos, he thinks one of them could take him back to Westeros—at least to Dorne or Eastwatch. But he is ordered by Mopattis to join and serve Queen Daenerys (*Dance* 79) in her war, and quickly dispatched by river to meet her in Volantis. The riverboat is also carrying a young man whom Tyrion believes is the presumed dead Prince Aegon Targaryen, rightful heir to the Iron Throne. On board, he accommodates himself to what he must do of crew duties and sensibly makes no attempt to escape. He is accepted into the group when Tyrion saves Aegon's life at the cost of nearly drowning himself and exposing himself to the deadly disease of grayscale.

The voyage on the riverboat is Tyrion's deepest experience of the nearness of the preternatural. The river itself is grim and unpleasant. Even to the educated rationalist Tyrion, the river seems somehow evil (*Dance* 254-255). The boat passes ruined cities (*Dance* 258). Everything is shrouded under fog, making navigation and identification of landmarks dubious, and the water itself conceals mysterious inhabitants as well as huge turtles (*Dance* 209). The river current is sluggish, and at one point even seems to curve back on itself to take the boat twice to the same haunted spot, The Bridge of Dream (*Dance* 259-261).

Tyrion's obsession with "where whores go," however, soon trips him up. Although he is not exactly a prisoner on board, Tyrion takes the opportunity of their docking in Selhorys to slip his leash. Distracted by researching "where whores go" in a brothel, he takes a prostitute, but although he feels ashamed and acknowledges "*That was a mistake. What a wretched creature I've become*" (*Dance* 318), he fails to learn from his lesson in shame. He gets drunk, and as he leaves the premises, runs afoul of a Westeros man (Ser Jorah Mormont) with a "big black bear on his surcoat," who kidnaps him to "deliver [...] to the queen" (*Dance* 319-20). The queen he is to be delivered to, he discovers, is still Daenerys, not Cersei, so in effect, although he has changed his former companions for a new captor, he is continuing the same physical journey to Volantis to meet the same person as he was dispatched to do by Mopattis.

The memory of shame is soon reinforced by extensive lessons in humility. When Mormont leaves Volantis with Tyrion to go to Meereen in order to reach Daenerys, he takes along Penny, the dwarf woman who tried to kill Tyrion (blaming him for her brother Oppo's death after they performed at Joffrey's wedding). He is taught the price of pride and the need for humility when she castigates him bitterly for not getting on the pig to joust with her when Joffrey commanded it (*Dance* 484). She is persuasive enough to teach him to forego pride and learn the jousting routine with her and her pig and dog. In the process, although he has managed to avoid earlier opportunities to meet other dwarfs in Westeros (*Dance* 484) he learns much of what life is like for a dwarf who has not lived as richly and freely and as well sheltered as he has been. Alongside her, he also learns valuable lessons in the subservience necessary to survive as slaves, when they and Mormont are taken by slavers, and sold at auction to a rich merchant in the army besieging Daenerys in Meereen (*Dance* 677). He grows more sensitive to her powerlessness, and her need for protection, but he will not take advantage of her sexually (*Dance* 583), and he avoids frightening her with more information about their problems than she can cope with (*Dance* 835-836).

In the short time he is a slave in Meereen, learning along the way to give up answering back and concealing his habitual attitude when something annoys him, Tyrion uses his wits to devise a plan to free them from slavery by

taking advantage of a cholera epidemic (“the pale mare”) which sweeps through the besieging armies’ encampment. Having persuaded the overseer to let him and Penny and Mormont go for the “clean water” for their owner who is dying, on the way back to the owner’s tent, he persuades the other two (by pressuring their trust in him) to follow him to the camp of a mercenary whom he knows will recognize him and whose mercenary troop, the Second Sons, he can contract into his service.

In being reduced to slavery, Tyrion reaches the lowest point of his journey. It is at this point that he begins at last to make his own choice of the way forward. When he takes over the mercenary troop, he turns toward the overworld of Westeros. Orderly overworld customs begin to replace the haphazard customs of Essos. He purchases the services of the Second Sons by signing promissory notes to reward the individual mercenaries when he gets them and himself home, and he signs them (in ink) as “Tyrion of House Lannister.” To mark his commitment to the troop itself, however, he commits himself more thoughtfully and according to an older custom by signing the roll-book of admissions in his own blood. In addition, by signing up at all, he is choosing specifically to take on a military role for the next part of his journey, although it is not of the same type (sworn allegiance to his father or the king) as he has been used to, and his position in it is less defined.

By choosing it, however, he has taken his life and his destiny into his own hands. From this point, whatever happens and wherever it happens, he will be moving forward towards the final, decisive challenge in which he either triumphs or fails to return to the overworld. At the end of *A Dance with Dragons*, Tyrion Lannister himself is still a possibility that must be realized, but in terms of his association with the Hero, he is within sight of his final challenge.

THE DRAGON KING

Even before the fifth instalment of the Song of Ice and Fire appeared with the title of *A Dance with Dragons*, the importance of the dragon to the work started to be apparent. Journeying in Essos, where dragons actually fly overhead and prey on humans, Tyrion Lannister is still working towards his acquisition of the kingship. Martin, although he has left the exact nature of the final challenge open so far with only intermittent hints of what the challenge is to be, has positioned the dragon as a symbol of considerable importance. The hints he includes are extremely ambivalent, as is the symbolic significance of the dragon itself. This symbolism underpins the narrative over the five books as a whole in several ways.

Most generally, as the animal symbol of House Targaryen, which until the assassination of the Mad King has been the legitimate royal line of Westeros, it represents the lost ordered government of the realm by its winged power. It

is to the return of this order that the action of the narrative in Tyrion's rise to the kingship is trending.

The dragon differs from the symbolic lion of the Lannisters and the symbolic direwolf of the Starks by being not only winged but also in some sense preternatural. It differs from them also being, according to Jung, a symbol of the unconscious realm and a symbol of the feminine principle.

More specifically, it links both aspects of Tyrion's journey. It consolidates his representation of the mythic hero with his rise to the kingship. In association with the Hero myth in which Tyrion shares, the dragon represents what Tyrion is going to face as his final challenge. The challenge generally takes the form either of fight to the death with the representative supreme male principle of the chthonic realm, or of contracting a sacred marriage with the representative of the ultimate feminine principle. In general, the dragon is viewed as a symbol of evil, in its almost global appearance as the antagonist killed by heroes, saints, and kings (Cirlot 85-89). Tyrion is positioned either to fight a dragon or to contract a sacred marriage with the feminine principle. In terms of Tyrion's rise to the kingship of Westeros, the dragon represents the final rise to maturity as ruler, taking on the psychological equivalents of the dragon's power and preternatural qualities. In addition, the dragon manifests in each of the important women in Tyrion's life. Although the Hero's dragon is usually regarded as a masculine antagonist, Jung generally regards it as a feminine symbol, and as a configuration of the anima, or of the "evil mother" (Jung, "Tavistock Lectures III" 91; par. 193). (While Joanna Lannister, Tywin's wife, cannot be characterized as evil simply because she dies in childbirth and leaves Tyrion motherless, the absentee mother can be positioned as a symbol of evil if her absence affects her child's further development.)

More relevant, perhaps, is the fan-theory meme, floating round the internet, that Tyrion is the product of an adulterous relationship between the Mad King and Joanna Lannister. In his web article "Is Tyrion not actually a Lannister," Larry Carroll explains the theory and reports on its web history. If it can be accepted as a legitimate inference from the text of the five books, this theory would contribute to Tyrion's claim to the throne of Westeros as the Mad King's heir, a male heir overriding a female (Daenerys). But Martin has provided nothing that would give weight to the theory.

Psychologically speaking, Tyrion is surrounded by a changing cluster of dragon avatars all of whom come together to configure his innate concept of women. Beginning with his older sister Cersei—a reasonable stand-in for his dead mother, Joanna—as the dark or "evil mother" configuration, Tyrion subsequently faces other versions of the evil mother in Lyssa and Caitlyn Stark, who both, like Cersei, try to kill him.

Tyrion's marriage as an adolescent to Tysha, however, is the anima configuration which consolidates Tyrion's deepest concept of woman, leaving him pursuing sexual fulfilment through a seemingly endless stream of prostitutes, never having had sex with a woman without seeing revulsion in her eyes unless she had been paid. The simple sexuality of this relationship is destroyed by his father's having Tysha gang-raped by his guards, and the anima is imprinted in Tyrion's consciousness as "whore." The imprint of woman as whore continues to dominate him. Subsequently he encounters Shae, who configures the dragon as a sexual dominant and confirms the imprint of "whore" in and up to including her final treachery in betraying him with his father Tywin. Shae as a prostitute configures the dragon's avatar as a dark anima, existing alongside the evil mother but introducing the dragon's reptilian treachery.

Eventually, in this succession of women, Tyrion undergoes what might be called an epiphany which begins to displace the imprint of the dark anima. In his forced marriage to Sansa Stark, Tyrion is confronted by a beautiful, chaste woman, barely past childhood, handed over to him as a sexual partner, who is evidently willing at least to acquiesce in the relationship as a matter of obedience and duty. She does not consent of her own free will and there is nothing Tyrion can offer her. Sansa configures the dragon avatar as the light anima. The conflict between Shae and Sansa in his life reflects the beginning of a process of psychological balancing of the feminine image in his unconscious.

In Essos he has two more dark anima figures to deal with. He hires a prostitute, but cannot return with her to this earlier relationship. He is guilty of bullying and abusing her. Later, he deals with another configuration of the dark anima by rejecting the dwarf woman Penny, realizing that she is selling herself to him not as a woman out of affection but simply for protection. In both encounters he finds himself sexually past what had earlier been natural and comfortable, and is prepared to approach his final encounter with the feminine principle in the person of Daenerys, who presents the ambivalent light/dark avatar of the dragon. In Daenerys he will find the final balance of sexuality that will raise him to more emotional balance in the kinship.

In steering Tyrion towards Daenerys in *A Dance With Dragons* Martin insinuates, while not making more explicit, what Tyrion's final challenge will be. On the purely human narrative level, Daenerys is "the mother of dragons," as we already know from her first introduction in *A Game of Thrones*. But as a preternaturally gifted human "mother of dragons" of live dragons hatched in fire from eggs, she is also an avatar of the dragon's significance as the feminine principle, commensurate with Tyrion's destiny as king and hero. Moreover, in the hatching of the three stone eggs into dragons, Daenerys is marked as a true Targaryen, associating her with the order and law of government (relative to the

neo-medieval model that Martin has constructed) that Tyrior, regardless of his birth, and in keeping with his fully balanced personality, has achieved.

At the end of *A Dance With Dragons* Tyrior has reached the optimum equilibrium. The dance with each of the women (Tysha, Cersei, Shae, Sansa, the unnamed prostitute in Essos, and Penny) representing an aspect of the dragon that he has danced with in his life in order to accommodate the feminine in himself, is over. His eventual meeting with a dragon in person will serve to confirm this balance of gender as well as his stability as the fulcrum for the balance and reunification of Westeros.

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