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**The monomyth today: the journey of the mythological hero in
Catching Fire, by Suzanne Collins**

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Abstract

In this article, my objective is to analyse and revise the classical hero model, based mainly on *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*,¹ a theoretical apparatus of great importance with regard to the characterization of mythological heroes. Concurrently, I will demonstrate, from Campbell's theory, how Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*'s author,² performs in her work the *monomyth*, and how she inserted the model of the classical hero into the narrative road of her main character, Katniss Everdeen.

Keywords: Joseph Campbell; Classical hero model; mythological hero; Suzanne Collins; Katniss Everdeen.

¹ Campbell 2004.

² Collins 2009.

This work proposes to analyse and revise the classical hero model in the novel *Catching Fire*, by the American author Suzanne Collins. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*³ will be the most important theoretical apparatus of this essay. I use, as a source of the classical myths, authors such as Homer and Ovid, but I also use *The Concise Dictionary Of Classical Mythology*, by Pierre Grimal, a French historian, classicist and Latinist.

Campbell analyses the exploits of heroes from various narratives, not sticking merely to the classics (namely the most well-known myths, such as Perseus, Heracles, etc.), and uses hero narratives to suggest that humanity has always had the same dreams and fears. Campbell discusses the stages of life of the great heroic characters of history (real or fictitious) who were, or are until today, the target of the trust and faith of many cultures and peoples. When necessary, I will also discuss other works, as well as some narratives, hero tales, from Classical Literature.

Before I start the analysis, a brief summary of *The Hunger Games* series is in order. The series follows the heroine Katniss Everdeen, a sixteen-year-old girl who lives in a dystopic country called Panem – located in the former United States of America. The country is divided into twelve districts, dominated and subdued by a metropolis called the Capitol which annually performs the so-called Hunger Games, the purpose of which is to keep alive the memory of the outcome of a revolt which happened seventy-four years before. The rules of the games are as follows: two tributes, one boy and one girl from each district, are selected through a lottery called the Reaping and must fight in an arena until only one of the twenty-four selected survives. The Games are televised and broadcast throughout Panem in the form of entertainment.

Catching Fire, the series' second novel, continues the story of Katniss and Peeta after they have won the 74th edition of the Hunger Games. In the end of the first novel, the two tributes return to District 12 and move to the Victor's Village, a place reserved solely for the winning tributes of the Games. At the start of *Catching Fire*, Katniss receives Coriolanus Snow in her home, the president of Panem, who shows

³ Campbell 2004.

her that she is at risk for violating the rules of the Games when she threatened to eat poisoned berries, even though she couldn't predict what would happen, if they would survive or not, in the hopes that this would force the Gamemakers to let both she and Peeta win. The act culminated in some revolts and was considered an affront to the Capitol by President Snow. In order to prevent their families and loved ones from being penalized, Katniss and Peeta must convince Panem that the only reason they tried to eat the poisoned berries, called Nightlock, was because they were really in love with each other. This is due to, in the first novel, *The Hunger Games*, the 'star-crossed lovers dynamic'⁴ created by Peeta, who confessed his love to Katniss in the interviews that precede the games. The audience believed in his confession and thus Katniss and Peeta must maintain this "play" in order to protect their families.

The attempts of Katniss are ineffective in the eyes of President Snow and thus provoke the convening of twenty-four of the former winners to hold the *Quarter Quell*, a special edition of the Games which takes place every twenty-five years. In this way, the 75th edition of the Hunger Games becomes a clear attempt to eliminate Katniss from the scene, as the girl is the only female winner of District 12 and therefore will be sent to the arena once again. So, Katniss will go through innumerable obstacles, just like in the first novel. After this brief introduction to the novel, we can understand Campbell's monomyth theory and analyse how it occurs in myths and also in *Catching Fire*.

Generally speaking, the mythological hero is a character who has overcome every obstacle imposed on him. After returning from his adventure, he is no longer the same because he has achieved his goals by facing what nobody else could; transfigured into an eternal man, he remains in the memory of those who know him and it is up only to him to teach posterity to the people who live in the same place as him, everything he has learned in the course of his journey.

⁴ Collins 2008: 165.

Campbell states that:⁵

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero [...]: separation — initiation — return: [...] might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.

The monomyth is a system observed in narratives of a heroic nature. In other words, there is 'a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return'.⁶ This is the model I intend to use to analyse Katniss Everdeen's adventure in *Catching Fire*.

I must begin the study of the hero with the fact that he finds himself in the intermediate position between gods and men, that is, the hero has, in most cases, a divine or at least a noble lineage. He:⁷

[...] is born generally of illustrious parents: his father, or his mother, is of divine nature (Heracles, Achilles); or, at least, their parents are earthly reflections of divinity: kings, princes, beings close to the gods.

Whilst the classical hero is a descendant of a mortal and a god, thus making him a demigod, or at least the son of illustrious parents, Katniss Everdeen is not a demigod she is an ordinary person. Her father was a poor worker in the coal mines of District 12 and her mother was a merchant's daughter.

The Classical Hero possesses this divine ascendancy, but he inhabits a common, an ordinary world. In this way, the hero has to accept and understand his role in the world, and finally to start his journey. After all, according to Campbell, the hero, in the complete course of his journey, comes from:⁸

⁵ Campbell 2004: 28.

⁶ Campbell 2004: 33.

⁷ Sellier 1998: 468 (translated by the author).

⁸ Campbell 2004: 28.

[...] the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

We can look at the example of Perseus, son of Zeus, the ruler of gods and men. In the *Metamorphoses*, by Ovid, for example, we observe that the hero and his mother, Danaë, are thrown into a chest by her father, Acrisius – because of a prophecy he receives from Delphi that his daughter's son would kill him. At the moment they are rescued by Dictys, they begin to inhabit the common world of the fisherman, who raises Perseus as if he were his own son. The hero and Danaë live with Dictys and his wife for many years because 'Dictys welcomed them and raised the young Perseus, who became a handsome and courageous young man'.⁹

With this example, I can clearly observe two characteristics of the heroic being: (i) Perseus is a demigod and (ii) he inhabits a common world (Dictys' world). Despite being a descendant of a god, Perseus is raised by a fisherman and had followed the path of his adoptive father, accompanying him and learning the craft of fishing. A totally ordinary world for a person who would still be a hero.

Katniss Everdeen, protagonist of *Catching Fire*, also lives in a natural world: Her home is a house in the twelfth district of Panem, one of the most distant from the Capitol, whose trade is to supply coal to the capital of the country. Katniss, like any other teenager, attends school and does reading, math, and coal assignments. However, with the death of her father, the character had been forced to take on her father's role, to hunt illegally in the surroundings of the district and to sell the meat of the animals and also fruit and fish in the Hob. Like Perseus, Katniss lives in an ordinary world (at least to her, in spite of all the dangers she faces to hunt) and both are not members of a ruling class.

⁹ Grimal 1986: 342.

Knowing that the hero inhabits a natural world, I must understand that in order to withdraw from this world, he will receive the call to adventure. According to Campbell:¹⁰

Typical of the circumstances of the call are the dark forest, the great tree, the babbling spring, and the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny.

Still according to Campbell, the call to adventure can also be initiated by a blunder:¹¹

[...] apparently the merest chance – [which] reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. [...] The blunder may amount to the opening of a destiny.

This leads us to infer that, when the journey is introduced by a blunder, the hero may not be prepared for the adventure because he still does not understand the reason that led him to start it. Therefore, only in the development of his adventure will the hero recognize himself as such.

Whether by a call, a prophecy, a blunder, a prohibition or for any other reason, the adventure usually begins from a search, marked by benevolent, noble and altruistic ideals – the need to release a person or a people, redemption, brotherhood (sisterhood, in the case of *The Hunger Games*), sacrifice for someone, courage, justice, morals, peace, etc. Eventually he will have supposedly selfish targets, such as revenge, retaliation; however, his foundations will always be morally right, even when vengeful, or at least ethically right.

¹⁰ Campbell 2004: 47.

¹¹ Campbell 2004: 46.

Concerning the 'call to adventure,' I can recall the myth of the twelve labours of Heracles. Hera, jealous, had inflicted on the hero enormous madness, causing Heracles to kill his wife and his own children. When he realized what he had done, the hero isolated himself, fleeing into the countryside and living alone. He was found and encouraged by his cousin, Theseus, to visit the oracle of Delphi, and ask for a way to regain his honor. The oracle told him that, as penance, he should perform a series of twelve tasks decided by Eurystheus, another cousin of Heracles, who ruled Tiryns, Mycenae and Midea.¹²

I understand that the motives that led Heracles to begin his adventure, more specifically, the cycle of the twelve labours, were the restitution of morality, redemption, and atonement – to purify himself and to pay for the slaughter that he had carried out. The purpose of the twelve labours was to free Heracles of his blood guilt. Heracles proved to be worthy of the position of hero since, after the twelve labours, he faced other adventures, becoming the most beloved hero of the Greeks.

In *Catching Fire*, Katniss' call to adventure has its beginning marked by a mistake – the act of trying to eat the Nightlock is considered an act of rebellion – and by an order to repair that mistake, imposed by President Snow. Thus, an analogy to the myth of Heracles is possible since the cycle of the hero's twelve labours was marked by a blunder, the murder of his wife and children (though his madness had been the effect of Hera's wrath), and all the tasks that were imposed upon the hero were intended to atone, to repair his errors. There is a difference, however, that needs to be emphasized: while the Greek hero needed to complete the twelve labours in order to redeem himself for the death of his family, Katniss needs to fulfil Snow's task in order to protect everyone she loves from death. Either way, the future of both heroes are consequences of their own actions. However, Katniss is unable to repair the blunder and is selected, once again, to participate in the Hunger Games. This is the punishment of Katniss designed by her antagonist.

¹² Hamilton 1992.

It is interesting to observe that between the call to adventure and the beginning of the journey (or even before the call to adventure for those who were born under a heroic prophecy), the classical hero is trained by a mentor, a teacher whose teachings, whether they are physical or spiritual, will have the purpose of facilitating, or at least assisting, the hero on his journey. Thus, the mentor, usually an elder man or woman, '[...] provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass'.¹³

One of the most famous mentors in the heroic myths is the centaur Chiron, considered:¹⁴

the most famous and wisest of all the Centaurs; [...] He was very friendly with humans and was judicious and kindly. [...] Peleus entrusted his son Achilles to Chiron after his separation from his wife. He also brought up Jason, Asclepius and others; Apollo himself is said to have had lessons from him. His knowledge covered music, the martial arts, hunting, ethics and medicine [...].¹⁵

According to Ribeiro, Chiron was a:¹⁶

great hunter, connoisseur of music, medicinal plants, surgery and other practical knowledge prized by the ancients [...]. It can be said that he is the oldest teacher of Greek mythology.

Jaeger states that the name Chiron 'was linked to an epic style didactic poem [...] which kept pedagogical wisdom in a series of sentences in verse [...].'¹⁷

¹³ Campbell 2004: 63.

¹⁴ Grimal 1986: 96.

¹⁵ Grimal 1986: 96.

¹⁶ Ribeiro 2006 (translated by the author).

¹⁷ Jaeger 2011: 49 (translated by the author).

The figure of the mentor may also arise in the form of a god or goddess, as in the case of Athena in the *Odyssey*. The goddess of wisdom, sympathetic to Telemachus, gives advice to the young man about his father's absence, helps him prepare for his trip to Sparta and Pylos, and accompanies him on the journey. I therefore conclude that the archetypal figure of the mentor, be it male or female, is of extreme relevance to the hero's journey, which leads us to infer that, untrained and without guidance – whether from the guidance of Chiron to Achilles, or Athena to Telemachus (and several other mentors and heroes) – the hero would quite possibly succumb before the victory, failing on his journey.

Katniss also has a mentor and his name is Haymitch. It is valid to emphasize beforehand that Haymitch proves to be a great mentor and helper of Katniss, however, at the beginning of the plot of the first novel, *The Hunger Games*, he is configured as the opposite of a good and wise master like Chiron, because he refuses to put in the effort to help the hero. By this I can say that Haymitch is, a priori, a parody of the mentor role.

After being selected to participate in the 75th Hunger Games, Katniss seeks the help of her mentor and begins intensive training, accompanied by him and Peeta, the male tribute from District 12:¹⁸

Every morning we do exercises to strengthen our bodies. We run and lift things and stretch our muscles. Every afternoon we work on combat skills, throwing knives, fighting hand to hand [...].

This clearly demonstrates the stage of the journey in which the hero is trained before beginning his adventures. Katniss responds to the call to adventure, that is, she finds all the necessary reasons for her to be able to train and follow the path of the adventure. An unknown path of desolation, danger and confrontation, the supernatural world and a place where opposing forces will do anything to defeat her.

¹⁸ Collins 2009: 22.

Finally, the hero crosses the first threshold, which coincides with a separation, real or symbolic, that exists between the natural and supernatural worlds. In this respect, the hero may enter by himself or he may be taken by someone/something into the unusual world, in order to begin his journey. In any case, he leaves the common world and all that he has ever been or has ever done in it. There is no turning back, the heroic has to follow the adventure to the end and to face all that will be imposed.

The hero enters the supernatural world – ‘desert, jungle, deep sea, alien land, etc.’¹⁹ – where evil forces will do everything to prevent him from becoming victorious. As if divided by a barrier, the supernatural world is a place where there is ‘[...] darkness, the unknown, the danger [...]’.²⁰

The passage through the first threshold can (and will) be different for each hero, but I can recall the myth of Perseus when he had to face the Gorgons:²¹

[...] Polydectes conceived a passion for Danae, but Perseus guarded his mother well and the king did not dare resort to violence. One day Polydectes invited his friends, including Perseus, to dinner and asked what gift each was willing to offer him. All the other guests said that a horse was a fitting gift, but Perseus declared that he would bring him the head of the Gorgon Medusa. The next day all the princes brought Polydectes a horse, except for Perseus, who brought nothing. Polydectes then ordered him to fetch Medusa’s head, saying that otherwise he would take Danae by force [...].

As a natural man, Perseus was foolish, for he had no knowledge of what he would face. He only knew the story of the Gorgons – Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa – who

¹⁹ Campbell 2004: 72.

²⁰ Campbell 2004: 71.

²¹ Grimal 1986: 342.

lived 'in the far west,'²² not far from the realm of the dead, of the country of the Hesperides, of the G erion, etc.:²³

Their heads were entwined with snakes and their necks were protected by dragons' scales; they had huge tusks, like those of a boar, hands of bronze, and golden wings.

Medusa was the only one mortal. Perseus thus had to pass through the symbolic threshold that separated his ordinary world from the magical world of the Gorgons, which was in the Far West, far away from where he lived, to confront them and be born as a hero.

As in the plot of the first novel, Katniss is taken to the Capitol, which might be understood to represent the supernatural world, by a fast train which, as I have already mentioned, based on Propp, becomes the necessary transport that separates the heroine from her common world and leads her to the unusual world.

After crossing the first threshold, the adventure itself begins, for the hero is faced with various obstacles and trials. It is at this stage of the monomyth that the hero will demonstrate just how brave, strong and fearless he is. According to Campbell, the acceptance of the adventure and his encounter with the mentor symbolize:²⁴

the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiator [...]. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed — again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories [...], and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land.

²² Grimal 1986: 164.

²³ Grimal 1986: 164.

²⁴ Campbell 2004: 100.

In fact, the classical myths have much to tell us about the path of obstacles and it is possible to state that among the many heroes we know, Odysseus is the hero who has faced most obstacles during his journey from when he left Ithaca to his return, as we can observe in the following two excerpts:^{25 26}

[...] moreover *he suffered* much by sea while trying to save his own life and bring his men safely home [...] (emphasis added).

[...] it is for Ulysses that my heart bleeds, when I think of *his sufferings* in that lonely sea-girt island, far away, *poor man* [...] (emphasis added).

I can highlight one of the numerous trials of Odysseus who, on his return to Ithaca, faced monsters and dangers. Odysseus and his sailors, as they investigated the island of the Cyclopes – creatures of ‘[...] only one eye in the middle of the forehead and they were distinguished by their strength and manual dexterity [...]’²⁷ – are captured by Polyphemus. In disgust at the request of the sailors, who wanted to steal the cheese and animals from the Cyclopes, Odysseus decided to wait for Polyphemus to see if he would receive hospitable gifts from him, however, the Cyclops killed and fed on the flesh of some of the hero’s companions. As an example of the monstrosity of Polyphemus, we can read the following passage:²⁸

The cruel wretch vouchsafed me not one word of answer, but with a sudden clutch he gripped up two of my men at once and dashed them down upon the ground as though they had been puppies. Their brains were shed upon the ground, and the earth was wet with their blood. Then he tore them limb from limb and supped upon them [...].

²⁵ Homer 1921: 13.

²⁶ Homer 1921: 14.

²⁷ Grimal 1986: 112.

²⁸ Homer 1921: 151.

Odysseus planned to blind the monster with timber heated in the fire. Polyphemus, not at all suspicious, drank his own wine and asked for the name of Odysseus:²⁹

I then gave him some more; three times did I fill the bowl for him, and three times did he drain it without thought or heed; then, when I saw that the wine had got into his head, I said to him as plausibly as I could: ‘Cyclops, you ask my name and I will tell it you; give me, therefore, the present you promised me; my name is Noman; this is what my father and mother and my friends have always called me.

In this way, through intelligence, by lying about his own name, by the wit of a good plan, and with the help of the rest of his companions, Odysseus deceived Polyphemus, pierced his one eye, and he, inflamed with pain, cried out for the Cyclopes of the island, who came to aid him. However, the call was of no use because, when he said that “Noman” (Nobody) had struck his eye, the other Cyclopes left. Odysseus and the sailors left the cave, clinging to the Cyclops sheep’s breast (to prevent Polyphemus from finding them as they passed the entrance of the monster’s home). Then, the crew abandoned the island of Polyphemus, not without obstacles.

Katniss, like Odysseus, faces other dangers in the arena of the 75th Hunger Games. Among the many obstacles faced, I can cite, for example, the episode in which Katniss confronts a horde of ferocious monkeys:³⁰

[...] Not five or ten but scores of monkeys weigh down the limbs of the jungle trees. The pair we spotted when we first escaped the fog felt like a welcoming committee. This crew feels ominous.

²⁹ Homer 1921: 154.

³⁰ Collins 2009: 370.

Katniss, realizing the danger, prepares her bow, while Finnick, a tribute from District 4, who becomes her ally, positions his trident. Peeta, who was drilling a tree to collect water, returns to where Katniss was, and the brigands attack:³¹

I've never seen any animal move so fast. They slide down the vines as if the things were greased. Leap impossible distances from tree to tree. Fangs bared, hackles raised, claws shooting out like switchblades. I may be unfamiliar with monkeys, but animals in nature don't act like this. "Mutts!" I spit out as Finnick and I crash into the greenery.

We can remember the sixth labour of Heracles, which involved killing the innumerable Stymphalian birds:³²

These birds lived in a forest on the shores of Lake Stymphalus in Arcadia, whither they had fled to avoid an invasion of wolves. They had become a plague to the surrounding territory; they ate the fruit of the fields and ravaged all the crops. Eurystheus ordered Heracles to destroy them. The difficulty lay in driving them out of the dense thickets; to achieve this the hero used castanets of bronze. Frightened by the noise of these castanets, the birds broke cover, and Heracles killed them with his arrows. Other traditions portray these creatures as birds of prey, which even devoured men. In some accounts their feathers were of sharp metal, and they shot them at their enemies like arrows.

Just as the Greek hero had Athena's help, Katniss, Finnick and Peeta kill countless monkeys, she with her bow and arrow, Finnick with his trident, and Peeta with his knife. A great monkey attacks Peeta, and Katniss tries to protect him. However, a District 6 woman, '[...] Materializing, it seems, from thin air [...]', '[...] throws up her skeletal arms as if to embrace the monkey, and it sinks its fangs into her chest.'³³ One more tribute, therefore, plays the role of hero's helper by sacrificing and taking Katniss' place, so she could win another labour and continue her journey.

³¹ Collins 2009: 371.

³² Grimal 1986: 187.

³³ Collins 2009: 372-373.

In this way, 'the trials are designed to see if the hero suitor can really be a hero. Is he up to the task? Can he overcome the dangers? Does he have the courage, the knowledge, the capacity that enables him to serve?'.³⁴ Consequently, Odysseus proved worthy of the fame of a hero conferred upon him, for he had courage and intelligence, proving himself capable of facing the dangers and threats through which he passed. Thus I can say that the adventurer engages in types of situations that name him as a hero 'because he is always ready to face the situation'.³⁵

During the course of the adventure, so as to make the road of the trials less complex, the auxiliaries or the helpers, whose forms may be supernatural beings, gods, magical beings (and even the figure of the mentor can return to the context), appear to the hero who '[...] is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region [...]'.³⁶ This protector can still offer him paths, solutions to puzzles, strength and weapons – that will protect the hero against what he is about to face.

In this regard, Achilles is offered a great gift of protection by his mother. Thetis, in order to strengthen her son's mortal essence, plunged him, still very young, into the waters of the River Styx, '[...] whose waters had the power of making invulnerable all who were steeped in them [...]'.³⁷ I may infer that without this act, or otherwise, without this divine assistance – which had been given to the hero even before he began the adventure –, Achilles would quite possibly have succumbed before effecting his innumerable wonders, for only at the end of the Trojan War, he is struck by an arrow in the heel. It is worth mentioning that Thetis also aided Achilles during the Trojan War by giving him, through Hephaestus, the god of forges, a new armour of combat. I can thus affirm that the figure of the helper is of great importance to the adventure of the hero.

³⁴ Campbell 1990: 133-134 (translated by the author).

³⁵ Campbell 1990: 137 (translated by the author).

³⁶ Campbell, 2004: 89.

³⁷ Grimal 1986: 6.

Katniss, throughout her adventure, enjoys the benefits and aid of many characters, as we observed in the confrontation with the wild monkeys. Katniss, with the help of her helpers, whether Finnick or Peeta, or the District 6 woman who sacrificed herself, surpasses and wins another clash, or to make use of the term employed in the myth of Heracles, one more labour. I emphasize, once again, the importance of characters in the role of auxiliaries in the narrative journey of the hero. Odysseus, Heracles and Perseus had the assistance of helpers. Katniss, in a similar way, could only face and defeat all the monkeys because she had the aid of her helpers, Finnick and Peeta.

Intrinsically linked to the trials and a counterpoint of the hero's helpers, I find the enemies, or evil forces, who will do anything to delay the hero's victory. I can extend Propp's, a Russian folklorist and researcher, well-known as a structuralism theorist, considerations from the wonderful tale to heroic mythological narratives since the author shows us that the antagonist can cause various kinds of damage to the hero, such as abducting a beloved person from the hero, robbing him of a precious object, inflicting bodily harm, bewitching, murdering or threatening someone, etc. Therefore, there are innumerable possibilities for damage and manifestation of the enemy in the journey of the hero.³⁸

The opponent may appear in the form of a god who, regardless of his motives (often private), has no affection for the hero. According to Meletínski, this is the result of the relations that the gods maintain among themselves.³⁹ In fact, in the myth of Heracles, Hera manifested against the son of Alcmena precisely because the hero was the result of a betrayal. The goddess felt jealous and angry at her husband, Zeus, and consequently attacked his son.

The enemy may even be in the form of a king who stole the hero's throne when he was still young, or who received a prophecy claiming that someone (the hero) would take the throne for himself or even would kill him. The king can still be someone who protects something, as it is the case in the myth of Jason, since King Aeetes,

³⁸ Propp 2010.

³⁹ Meletínski 1998.

Medea's father, owner of the Golden Fleece, imposed on the hero dangerous tasks so Jason could attempt to win the magic sheep skin.

Katniss, like all classical heroes, has enemies. Let's look at an episode that illustrates this statement. As Katniss, Peeta, and Finnick feed on the shores of the beach of the arena, at the opposite side of the island they see Johanna, accompanied by Wiress and Beetee, who are fleeing from a blood rain in the jungle. Up until then, the reader will have considered these to be Katniss' enemies, but they now become her allies. After the reunion, they decide to go to the Cornucopia, in search of a temporary shelter. There, a confrontation takes place against Gloss and Cashmere (District 1) and Brutus and Enobaria (District 2), which results in the death of Wiress, whilst Katniss kills Gloss.

Despite all the enemies the hero possesses, he can always count on aid from the archetypal figure of the helper. The trials, confrontations against enemies and the aid of helpers do not have a fixed order to occur in the adventure of the hero: the help, for example, may come before confrontation, as it may happen also during the onslaught of the enemy. However, it is certain that these elements happen in the adventure so that the hero can prove at each stroke that he is brave, but that he will always need the help of others to win.

As if on a very steep climb, the hero climbs the mountain of adventure, and each step represents something overcome. The closer to the end of his journey – and regardless of the number of trials or, to use Campbell's terms, thresholds and dragons that the hero has surpassed and bested – the more difficult and complex the confrontations become, in order to improve the hero physically and spiritually for the great final clash: the greatest confrontation of all, which puts the hero's life at imminent risk. For Campbell, the final crisis of the course is the height of the adventure and all the trials prior to it do not compare with respect to the degree of dangerousness.

Possibly one of the most dangerous final clashes, among all the legends of the great mythological heroes, was the twelfth labour of Heracles, which consisted of capturing Cerberus, the three-headed dog, keeper of the gates of the underworld, which, according to Salis, was 'his last and most difficult of all tasks,' after all, 'Cerberus was docile with whoever entered the gates of Hades, but he was ruthless with whoever tried to leave.'⁴⁰ The spectre of Heracles came to Odysseus when he summoned the dead of Hades to talk to Tiresias, the seer, and the great Greek hero recounts how difficult his last task was:⁴¹

My poor Ulysses [same as Odysseus], noble son of Laertes, are you too leading the same sorry kind of life that I did when I was above ground? I was son of Jove, but I went through an infinity of suffering, for I became bondsman to one who was far beneath me — a low fellow who set me all manner of labours. He once sent me here to fetch the hell-hound — for he did not think he could find anything harder for me than this, but I got the hound out of Hades and brought him to him, for Mercury and Minerva helped me.

In *Catching Fire*, Katniss' final confrontation is equally dangerous. The girl needs to execute a plan drawn up by Beetee, which consists of killing their remaining enemies in the arena of the Hunger Games. However, the plan does not run as it should, and Katniss therefore realizes that the real plan which had been kept from her was for them to destroy the arena shields – a force field constructed by the Gamemakers in order to imprison the tributes in the arena and this is the purpose of destroying it, so they can escape from it. Katniss, when she sees the protections at the top of the slope, uncoils the knife, ties it in one of her arrows, arms the bow and, at the very moment when the lightning strikes the tree, shoots into the force field and destroys it:⁴²

⁴⁰ Salis 2003: 165 (translated by the author).

⁴¹ Homer 1921: 198.

⁴² Collins 2009: 458.

Everything seems to erupt at once. The earth explodes into showers of dirt and plant matter. Trees burst into flames. Even the sky fills with brightly colored blossoms of light.

Overcoming all obstacles and ending the adventure with 'triumph [...] over the mighty adversary'⁴³, which the Greeks called *aristeia*, the hero must return to the common world. The hero can begin the return with an escape followed by persecution – exactly the case for Jason who, with the magic aid of Medea, managed to win the Golden Fleece, to the detriment of King Aetes, and for this reason the hero and the witch, along with the Argonauts, had to flee the kingdom. In his escape, Medea:⁴⁴

had not only betrayed her father but she had taken as a hostage her brother, Apsyrtus, whom she killed and cut into pieces to delay the pursuit of Aetes.

The hero can also be rescued by some supernatural entity, which Campbell terms 'assistance from without,' that is, 'the world may have to come and get him,'⁴⁵ possibly because the hero is impeded by the enemy who imprisons him or exhausts him of his own strength; so it is necessary that someone, pitying him, rescues him so that he can return.

And this is exactly the case with Katniss, 'the assistance from without.' A hovercraft appears on the scene while the arena is destroyed, and captures the protagonist. Plutarch Heavensbee, Head of the Gamemakers, who has rebelled against the Capitol, and Haymitch, her mentor, are waiting for her. With this, the return of the heroine is marked by an escape – as was Jason's return – after all, she had destroyed the force field of the arena, and what Campbell calls 'the assistance from without,' that is, when forces outside the adventure need to rescue the hero because he is powerless and/or unable to return by himself – as is the case with Katniss, who

⁴³ Jaeger 2011: 71 (translated by the author).

⁴⁴ Grimal 1986: 259.

⁴⁵ Campbell 2004: 192.

was '[...] body useless, paralysed, eyes frozen wide [...]'.⁴⁶ Both Plutarch and Haymitch assume, in this episode, the function of hero auxiliaries because they rescue the heroine.

Although it is rare to find cases of rejection of return, the hero may, according to Campbell, refuse to return to the common world because of the responsibility of bringing the reward or blessing raised at the end of the adventure to his community. In any case, it will be necessary for the hero to return to the common world, even if he refuses because it is his duty to bring all the benefits of his journey back to his old world of origin, and only then will the journey be completed.

According to Campbell, the return will be marked as:⁴⁷

[...] the final crisis of the round, to which the whole miraculous excursion has been but a prelude — that, namely, of the paradoxical, supremely difficult threshold-crossing of the hero's return from the mystic realm into the land of common day.

This passage, then, from the supernatural to the natural world is more difficult than the whole adventure of the hero. The return of Odysseus to Ithaca, for example, was extremely difficult, given all the obstacles he faced.

However, in spite of all the difficulties faced and overcome, the hero will receive, in the end, a reward, a blessing that "is simply a symbol of life energy," and it is common to see him asking for longer years to live, weapons with which to slay his neighbor, or the health of his child',⁴⁸ and the reward may also be the recovery of a

⁴⁶ Collins 2009: 457.

⁴⁷ Campbell 2004: 201.

⁴⁸ Campbell 2004: 175.

throne and, perhaps the greatest desire of all, ‘the possibility of physical immortality [that] charms the heart of man’.⁴⁹

Although most of the time being a demigod, and even being able to receive his apotheosis as a reward and living with the other gods on Olympus – Heracles, for example, ‘[...] is feasting ever with the immortal gods, and has lovely Hebe to wife [...]’⁵⁰ –, the physical life of the hero comes to an end and his final destination may be the Elysian Fields which, for the Greeks, were:⁵¹

[...] “the islands of the blessed” [...], the place where the gods sent their chosen ones, after earthly death, to a new, perfect and pleasant life. The island was loosely situated at the western end of the Ocean River [...].

It is pertinent to mention, in order to finish the analysis of *Catching Fire*, that Katniss receives no reward after her return to the common world because, when she was rescued, her journey was, in a way, interrupted. On the contrary, Katniss receives the news that Peeta has been captured by the Capitol, that is, the person she fought for the most and tried to protect was far from her hands.

Finally, the monomyth cycle (separation, initiation, return) proposed by Campbell is concluded exactly, with the hero returning to the common world, followed by a long life or death and the blessing of living forever in the Elysian Fields. In the case of Katniss, the monomyth is completed at the very moment she is rescued, with the difference that in *Catching Fire*, there is no reward, no blessing.

As much as Campbell draws a hero model based on a variety of legends and cultures, such as Greek, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, etc., ‘there is no final system

⁴⁹ Campbell 2004: 174.

⁵⁰ Homer 1921: 198.

⁵¹ Ribeiro 2000 (translated by the author).

for the interpretation of myths, and there will never be any such thing [...]'.⁵²

However, as my goal was to specifically analyse the hero of Greco-Roman Classical Antiquity in the novel *Catching Fire*, I believe it is possible to conclude that the monomyth is a system relatively stable. Thus, in heroic mythological narratives, we have a group of relatively fixed sequences of action that determine the course of the hero.

The description and analysis of the hero's journey as something totally stable may be challenged by some of Campbell's postulations, as it is the case with certain extensions or different intercalations in certain sequences of action – the encounter with the mentor, for example, may occur before or after the call to adventure; the reward may come before his returning. We can still find elements that 'string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the *Odyssey*). Differing characters or episodes can become fused [...] in just one character or episode, etc. However, regardless of this, '[...] his journey varies little in essential plan'.⁵³ As we saw in the *Catching Fire* analysis, there is no reward, so there is a *missing item* in Katniss' journey.

I understand, then, that the heroic model, and all that pervades it (his adventures, his helpers, his mentors, his trials, etc.), is relatively stable since the modifications implied by a certain social community, in the model of classical heroism, are bound to happen, but they are minimal. Even in the twenty-first century, re-readings of heroes provided by literature, painting, cinema, or any other type of art can provoke in their readers or spectators an interpretive look that leads them to the origins of these brave men, contemplating their achievements and their victories. So, the hero returns and the classical past accompanies him.

Greek-Roman mythology and classical heroism, therefore, are archaic symbols still present in contemporary times and it is up to us researchers to analyse them, so that it is possible to understand how the symbols are rescued and, at the same time,

⁵² Campbell 2004: 353.

⁵³ Campbell 2004: 35.

transformed to a new reality. Thus, I hope that this article may influence researchers, in regard to the study of the Classical Hero in contemporaneity: in the cinema, literature, comics, etc.

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