

Archetype and catharsis in audiovisual narratives

Arquétipo e catarse nas narrativas audiovisuais

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ABSTRACT

Climax in movies and TV series is built by combining images and sounds that emotionally impact the audience, generating catharsis – an essential effect in genres like adventure, western, and horror. This paper analyzes the role of archetypes as an emotional trigger for catharsis in audiovisual narratives. By articulating theories on catharsis (Aristotle, Jauss) and archetype (Jung, Durand), the text establishes relations between both concepts and discusses how they operate using movies and TV series as examples. The analysis shows the archetypal opposition hero-monster acting as an emotional trigger for catharsis and the relation between archetypal images and the historical-social context in cathartic scenes.

Keywords: Catharsis, archetypes, audiovisual narratives, movie, TV series

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RESUMO

O clímax em filmes e séries televisivas é construído pela combinação de imagens e sons que impactam emocionalmente a audiência, gerando a *catarse*. O efeito catártico é peça-chave em gêneros como aventura, western e horror. Este artigo analisa o papel que o arquétipo tem na catarse em narrativas audiovisuais ao operar como acionador de emoções. Articulam-se as teorias sobre catarse (Aristóteles, Jauss) e arquétipos (Jung, Durand) para estabelecer as relações entre esses elementos e entender como operam a partir de exemplos de filmes e séries. Resultados mostram a oposição arquetípica herói-monstro como gatilho emocional nas catarses e a relação entre imagens arquetípicas e contexto sócio-histórico em cenas catárticas.

Palavras-chave: Catarse, arquétipo, narrativa audiovisual, filme, séries de TV

INTRODUCTION

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE prevalent in most globally successful TV series and movie scripts rests on the construction of climactic moments during the plot, among other elements. In the narrative structure commonly used by mainstream American movies that aim to conquer large audiences, each act has its maximum tension point. McKee (2010) emphasizes that “an act is a series of sequences that reaches the pinnacle in a climactic scene that causes an important inversion of values, more powerful in its impact than any other previous scene or sequence”. For the author, climactic moments in an audiovisual narrative fall in a scale of importance and reversibility: the climax in a sequence has moderate relevance and, in an act, has great significance, both being reversible. The final climax, however, is usually the climax of the plot and the story, being of major importance and irreversible (McKee, 2010).

In TV series, climactic moments should be understood based on their position in the episodes and on the TV series format – if *procedural*, with auto conclusive and independent episodes; or *serial*, with long arcs and interdependent episodes. In serial shows, we usually have a climax in each episode and a plot climax in the final episode. Procedural TV series, in turn, have a similar structure to movies, with a climax in each act of the episode and a plot climax in the its final sequences.

But the climax has also been explored beyond these traditional bases, especially in TV series characterized by a *narrative complexity* (Mittel, 2012) based on innovations that make the plots more challenging, leading to a more significant audience engagement. Authors such as Mittel (2012) and Dunleavy (2018) identified the use of seriality and long arcs, conceptual originality, and non-conventional temporality and spatiality as some of these new narrative special effects. One such example is when climactic moments happen at the beginning of an episode or movies, in narrative structures that privilege telling the story in flashbacks. Building these climax for a sequence, an act, or a plot – in a conventional or non-conventional narrative – is usually done by combining images and sounds that seek to explore the audience’s emotions to the extreme.

In audiovisual narratives, particularly those in which predominate or there is a mix of genres of adventure, action, science fiction, horror, and fantasia, the climax is associated with *aesthetic catharsis*, as defined by Scharper (1968, p. 135): “the peculiar effect which only works of poetic art have.” *Aesthetic catharsis* that was identified initially by Aristotle in his observations about Greek arts, especially in the dramatic art, corresponds to a type of audience

emotional engagement different from that experienced in real life: “Catharsis through tragedy accounts for the transformation of what would be painful in real life to what is deeply enjoyable when embodied in the structure of a work of art” (Schaper, 1968, p. 140).

In this aesthetic realm of *feeling-in-common* established between the spectator and the protagonists from the diegetic world, one narrative component that proves essential in composing scenes to provoke aesthetic catharsis is the role played by the *archetype* – understood in its comprehensive contemporary definition established by Jung (1976/2014) and Durand (2002). In their perspective, the archetype, as a psychic phenomenon, *materializes itself* when expressed symbolically in artistic creations and narratives, such as movies and TV series.

Based on these ideas, this essay explores how the archetype, when materializing itself as specific psychic images whose latent content is interpreted by conscience, play a decisive role in producing catharsis, since it is through the set of archetypes encompassed by the protagonist that viewers identify with the protagonist’s point of view and emotions.

This implies a close connection between aesthetic catharsis and archetypes in the climactic moments of audiovisual narratives. Consequently, the archetypal characteristics of each character define the image and sound components in extremely tense scenes – sources of the audience’s catharsis.

To develop such thesis, we first present a conceptual reflection on the connection between the archetype and aesthetic catharsis theories. Subsequently, we discuss how the use of specific archetypes intensifies the emotional effect on the audience, analyzing one scene from the movie *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) and another from the episode “The Spoils of War” from *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019).

ARCHETYPES AS THE EMOTIONAL SOURCE IN NARRATIVES

When developing the contemporary conceptual basis of the archetype, to be used mainly in analytical psychology, Jung (1976/2014) establishes an inseparable relation between emotions and archetypal images.

For Jung, archetypes are primordial, universal, and ahistorical images situated in the undermost level of the human unconscious, which he named the *collective unconscious* (Jung, 1976/2014). When they emerge from the unconscious to the conscious level, these archetypes are *filled* with images.

In such a perspective, a first expression of archetypes and archetypal images is the creation of mythological narratives. For Durand (2002, p. 63),

myth is a narrative created from an initial rationalization that transforms archetypes into ideas and converts archetypal images into words. Since then, the expression of archetypes by human symbolical production, especially in mythologies, religions, and arts, constitutes a repertoire of characteristics and emotions associated with each archetype, which has been widely explored by contemporary audiovisual production.

But while archetypes are universal and ahistorical, the images that *fill* them – the *archetypal images* – are cultural and historical products experienced by the individual and their collectivity. The same archetype can thus be *filled* with different images depending on the culture and the historical moment. An excellent example of a specific archetypal image is that of the typical US *hero*: the *vigilante*, characterized as a type of hero that acts only according to their own moral code, without answering to authorities, laws or legal processes that do not align with their values. In the past two centuries, the archetypal *vigilante hero* has been represented by different images: from the cowboy and Old West pioneer – period in which the absence of laws and authorities encouraged its existence – to contemporary characters like Rorschach, from the graphic novel *Watchmen*, created by Alan Moore and David Gibbons (1988-1989) – where the existing laws and authorities can be an obstacle to satisfy the desire for taking justice into one's own hands and effect it as immediately as possible.

The images that emerge at the conscious level, however, are only archetypal if imbued with either positive or negative emotions. According to Jung (1976/2014), an archetype is manifested when the image gains *numinosity* or psychic energy and becomes dynamic and meaningful enough to impact the individual. Back to our example, the archetypal images of the *vigilante hero* emotionally affect the viewers by the broad characteristics that define a hero, of any kind, and by the particularities of the *vigilante* type.

On a broader dimension, the audience connects with the general characteristics that define the fictional *hero*: self-sacrifice¹, the journey of transformation (of oneself and/or the surrounding world) and, according to Coogan (2009, p. 77), an altruistic and pro-society mission. The hero's struggle against evil, therefore, is not for their own benefit, but rather to serve the moral codes of the society they live in. In a more specific dimension, the *vigilante hero* also causes empathy due to their main particular characteristics: ignoring legal limits or authorities and punishing criminals immediately, without waiting for judicial proceedings.

This connection between archetypes and emotions suggested by Jung² can also be investigated based on advances in neuroscience and psychology,

¹ In this sense, the hero comes to resemble divinity, even in the contemporary sense, for they practice unrestricted abnegation: "This is the case of the sacrifice of the god, for the god who sacrifices himself gives himself irrevocably" (Mauss & Hubert, 2005, pp. 106-107).

² Jung's concept of the archetype was tested in studies on symbolic production led by researchers like Joseph Campbell (1997) and Gilbert Durand (2002), among others, that show the existence of narrative patterns – from archaic mythologies to contemporary fictions – and the redundancy of symbolical images and their meanings, which support the Jungian thesis of archetypes.

particularly by studies on human feelings and emotions, adding essential contributions to understanding the phenomenon.

Ekman (2011) states that the most basic and vital motive for generating emotions occurs “when we feel, justifiably or mistakenly, that something that seriously affects our well-being, for better or worse, is happening or about to happen” (p. 36). Based on empirical studies with neurological patients, Damásio (2012) argues that reason and emotion operate together in the cognitive process; that emotion helps and engages with reason and also conveys cognitive information:

the reasoning system evolved as an extension of the automatic emotional system, with emotion playing various roles in the reasoning process... The obligatory presence of emotion in the reasoning process can be either advantageous or harmful, depending on the circumstances of the decision and the past history of the decision-maker. (Damásio, Retorno ao erro de Descartes, paras. 5-6)

Viewers interpret the archetypal image based on rational reflections about the image and its meanings, and on the emotional responses they have to it. Durand (2002) thesis of the *anthropological route* posits that the archetypal image is fruit of the *imaginary*³ and a product of imagination that operates between contradictory forces: in one direction, the drives (internal to the individual) and, on the opposite direction, the coercions (external to the individual) imposed by the cultural and natural worlds, and also pointing out the simultaneous operation of rational and emotional elements in the process.

Damásio (2012, Emoções, para. 7) emphasizes that “emotions are triggered only after a mental process of evaluation that is voluntary and not automatic.” After all, as Durand (2013, p. 23) states, what distinguishes the behavior of *Homo sapiens sapiens* from that of other animals is that almost all human psychic activity is indirect, reflexive, lacks immediacy, and has certainty and univocity of instinct, with reason in *sapiens* resulting from this neuropsychological mediation. For Damásio, emotions are the result of a *mental evaluative process* that affects the human body – changes in skin color (blushing), body posture, facial expression, and in the brain itself (mental alterations) –and that we operate cognitively as an *evaluation and reflexive filter*, which controls the variations in the intensity of emotions (Damásio, 2012)⁴.

In the enjoyment of the narrative, an archetype would be rationally and emotionally identified almost simultaneously; the cognitive process,

³Durand (2002) understands the imaginary as a *process* from which emerge the symbolical elements (archetypes, archetypal images, stereotypes, and myths) created by *Homo sapiens* to give meaning to the world.

⁴Such control stems from the fact that the emotions associated with the archetypal image – and therefore with the manifestation of the archetype – are not constant throughout the narrative. Fear or anger associated with the *monster* archetype, for example, varies with the stimulus and situations presented by the narrative and according to the audience's interpretations.

in turn, activates elements from memory, product of the individual's knowledge and experience – information that leads them to conceptually identify the hero or the *monster*, for example. This process provokes an impulsive reaction, with the archetypal manifestation acting as a trigger for the audience's emotional response.

The hero archetype, for example, regardless of the archetypal images created by the human imagination to express it (Gilgamesh, Hercules, Mahyra, Chibinda Ilunga, Batman, etc.), is felt and identified by the individual's mental projection of the primordial, universal, and ahistorical image of the hero in the world. Thus, although the same archetype can be represented by different images, it is identified and felt as an atemporal and universal figure, transcending cultural, religious, ethnic, and historical borders and triggering the same emotions collectively. *Subjectivity* also factors in this process, since specific narrative elements are associated with the individual's knowledge and particular world experience and perspective, thus recognizing their personal traits in the archetypal hero images – be they true or not – and *feeling* specific emotions triggered by this archetype.

Take, for example, the archetypal opposition *hero-monster*, part of Durand's (2002) *archetypology*. In the author's proposed classification, resulting from extensive research of symbolic images produced by several cultures in history and based on the assumption that symbolic production is a means to face the anguishes of finitude and becoming, the archetypal hero-monster opposition fits into the logic of overcoming death and time – what Durand called the *regime of daytime images*. In such regime, the ideas of opposition, combat, and separation/distinction prevail, in which archetypes operate as two sides of the same coin, for one only exists because of the other, as seen in the great archetypes *high-low*, *bright-dark*, and *pure-sullied*⁵. In this perspective, the hero archetype always emerges in opposition to the *monster* archetype, with the first being valued positively and the second negatively, usually. To this end, the process of narrative building leads to these valuations that negatively or positively impact the emotions felt by the audience.

Based on a more pragmatic perspective on the creative process and evaluation of screenwriting for movies and TV series, Vogler (2005) pointed out the importance of body reactions in the fruition of narratives, arguing that body reactions are quality indicators of what is being watched or read. Regardless of the quality of the images created to fill the archetypes, however, these in themselves generate certain emotions and their manifestation in the narrative triggers certain sensations in the audience.

⁵ Besides the daytime regime of images, Durand also establishes the *nocturnal regime of images*, in which the symbolic images seek to *euphemize* death and time, making them acceptable. This regime accounts for the logics of harmonization of opposites and the dialogue between them.

According to Damásio (2012), we must distinguish between emotion and feeling because not all feelings come from emotions. While an *emotion* corresponds to “a set of changes in the body’s state associated with certain mental images that triggered a specific brain system,” a *feeling* that comes from an emotion is the experience of these bodily changes in juxtaposition with the mental images that started the cycle (Sentimentos, para. 3).

For Damásio, humans experience two groups of feelings: *background feeling* and *emotional feeling*. The first, and the most present throughout life, concerns the *feeling of existing* and is neither too positive nor too negative, as it occurs between emotions. On the other hand, *emotional feeling*, which interests us here, is that which we feel in response to bodily states corresponding to emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, etc.) (Damásio, 2012). *Emotional feelings* emerge when neural and chemical signals act on the body in response to instinctive or conscious stimuli, or in response to mental states that simulate emotions, that is, that draw on “neural mechanisms that help us feel ‘as if’ we are experiencing and emotional state, as if the body is being activated and changed” (O corpo como teatro das emoções, para. 1).

Resuming the connection archetypes-emotions proposed by Jung, Neumann (1999) argues that the archetype constitutes an energetic process in the psyche that results in positive and negative emotions, which move and animate the individual: “its dynamics exerts irresistible pressure and determine human behavior (unconsciously), according to laws, and independently of each individual’s experiences” (p. 20). The archetype leads to a state of biopsychic commotion, influencing the individual’s willingness, tendencies, opinions, intentions, and interests, as well as the conscious and intellect (p. 20). Relating this perspective to and Damásio’s (2012), we argue that archetypes would operate by triggering *emotional feelings*. Antunes (2016) talks about “archetypal emotional triggers” activated by audiovisual narratives, which would lead audiences to feel empathy for the characters. In narratives, due to the intrinsic association between archetypal images and emotions, the materialization of archetypes in fictional creations would operate as a positive or negative *emotional catalyst* to the audience, having bodily impacts, or as simulation in the mental level. Having empathy for the hero and feeling repulsion towards the *monster* are classic (albeit simplistic) examples of this process.

In audiovisual narrative, the emotion-triggering archetypal image is built by the *mise-en-scène* and the soundtrack. Based on these sources of iconic, sound, musical and verbal images, we create *mental images*, which are archetypal insofar as they fill certain archetypes projected in the real or imagined world and

which trigger an emotional feeling in the individual, as well as in a collectivity. Usually, in scenes or sequences of scenes at the end of each act, and especially in the resolution of the final act, the emotional impact becomes increasingly significant to the point of producing *catharsis* in the audience. To better understand such process, we need to reflect on how archetypes contribute to the cathartic process in narratives.

CATHARSIS AS EMOTION TRIGGERED BY ARCHETYPES

The enjoyment of audiovisual narratives occurs with emotional variations determined by the contribution that the visual, musical and textual elements of the film or TV series episode make to constructing images in the audience's mind. *Archetypal images* – those that fill specific archetypes actualized by the narrative and projected into each individual's consciousness – are the ones capable of generating emotions that impact the individual, making them feel these images in the body and mind or, in a simulated way, only in the mind.

We assume, therefore, that the archetypal image can emerge immediately, as an *epiphany*, in the fruition process, or be the product of a *construction* fed by the elements of several scenes and sequences. As an *immediate revelation*, the archetypal image emerges from a single symbolism in a scene – whose source can be the image of a character or a place, a soundtrack, a word, or a combination of these elements – and immediately reveals the archetype it is filling. This occurs because one scene is enough for the audience to identify the archetypal image as a manifestation or perception of the nature or essential meaning of the archetype, intuitively grasp its symbolic meaning, and experience the corresponding emotional feelings. As a *construction*, the archetypal image is developed gradually in the audience's mind from a set of scenes that present information, which make up the viewer's emotional feelings in relation to the actualized archetype.

Compelling examples of both possibilities appear in the TV series *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019). The narrative centers on the political-military dispute for the Seven Kingdoms' Iron Throne, showing intricate power games, alliances, betrayals, and conflicts between dynasties vying for the throne. One main narrative strategy of the show is the multiplicity of points of view that leads to multiple *windows* being opened for the audience, allowing viewers to identify with more than one protagonist who displays archetypal hero characteristics. Such is the case of Eddard “Ned” Stark

(Sean Bean), leader of the Stark dynasty, whose archetypal image as a hero is built in the first nine episodes until his death. Gradually, values such as loyalty, honor, kindness and justice, and characteristics such as courage, cunning and self-sacrifice, are associated with his image. As a result, after six episodes, Ned Stark becomes one of the archetypal images of the hero archetype in *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019). Stark's appearances emotionally impact the audience, who generally feel *satisfaction* at his actions of justice, loyalty, and courage; and *sadness*, *anger* and *surprise* when he is unfairly convicted and killed.

While one of the hero images is *built* over several episodes, one of the archetypal images of the monster is given *immediately*, presented in a single scene at the beginning of the first episode. In its opening shot, we see the appearance of undead supernatural creatures attacking guard's from the Night's Watch, men tasked with protecting a giant ice wall used to prevent the Seven Kingdoms from invasion by these creatures and other threats. The emotional feelings generated by this archetypal image of the monster are usually those of *fear* and *disgust*⁶.

Archetypal images generate different degrees of positive and negative emotional impact. Successful fictional audiovisual narratives are filled with scenes and sequences that fulfill certain viewer expectations, generating a cathartic emotional effect in the audience.

The concept of catharsis – meaning *purgation*, when used in a neutral or medical sense, and *purification*, when used in a moral or religious sense – as related to artistic works⁷ is adopted by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (350 BC), while developing his analysis of tragedy:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (Aristotle, 350 BC/2018, pp. 47-48)

According to Santoro (2007), by considering catharsis as the finality of tragedy, Aristotle understands that “provoking and transforming human emotions in poetical works is something as or even more important than expressing values and moral content” (p. 10).

For Aristotle (350 b. C./2018), catharsis is a constitutive element of tragedy, and it is tragedy's ability to lead to catharsis that defines its quality:

⁶ For Paul Ekman (2011), there are at least seven universal emotions: *satisfaction*, *sadness*, *fear*, *anger*, *contempt*, *disgust*, and *surprise*.

⁷ The concept of catharsis emerges in Greek culture in the works of Democritus, Plato, and Pythagoras, who precede Aristotle, with the meanings of purification and purgation aimed at medicine, the arts and morals (Freire, 1979, p. 1).

Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place. This is the impression we should receive from hearing the story of the Oedipus. But to produce this effect by the mere spectacle is a less artistic method, and dependent on extraneous aids. Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy; for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it. And since the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity or fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents. (pp. 63-64)

For Schaper (1968), Aristotelian catharsis refers to an aesthetic concept, to the peculiar effect that only art provokes in people: catharsis “accounts for emotional involvement of a different kind from that experienced in the emotional impact of real events... Enjoyment derived from works of art of any kind exhibits a shift of levels, from the ordinary to the aesthetic” (p. 140).

Paskow (1983) agrees with Schaper and sees Aristotelian catharsis as a phenomenon in the scope of aesthetic experience:

Aesthetic catharsis is a purification in the spectator of the tragedy of his capacities to experience pity and fear; it is also a pleasurable experience... It is an emotional response appropriate at once to a sequence of dramatic events and the spectator's most significant individual and human possibilities. The term “catharsis”, therefore, is meant to have an internal and external reference; perhaps that is why Aristotle chose just that word, which has both medical, moral, and religious significations. (pp. 61-64)

For Aristotle, the emotions felt while enjoying a narrative are created. Schaper (1968) states that for the Greek philosopher, “we do not simply take over or copy the emotions which are fictionally presented to us; we respond to the total structure of fictional events with emotions of our own, not with emotions caught by ‘infection’” (p. 142). In this perspective, the cathartic emotional experience relates to the enjoyment of the narrative, when the audience empathetically puts themselves in the protagonist's place to *feel* what they imagine the character is *feeling*.

According to Janus (1974), such emotional experience “occurs when the spectator of tragedy can place himself so completely in the position of

undeservedly suffering hero that he fears for that hero what he would otherwise only fear for himself” (pp. 287-288).

The German thinker understands that the spectator’s experience of catharsis corresponds to two moments: first, the audience’s liberation from its ordinary world – the negation of daily life – and the immersion into the fictional universe of the narrative, which is only possible by the spectator’s identification with the protagonist hero; the second moment, when the audience must also free themselves from the fictional world – although they feel the protagonist’s actual feelings, the audience’s reaction must be within acceptable limits, in a state of desirable composure (Jauss, 1974, p. 288).

The emotional response of catharsis seems to be proportional to the imaginary situation experienced by the protagonist with whom the viewer identifies, usually a character with hero archetype characteristics. Paskow (1983) states that the “the protagonist as psychological competitor helps us, the spectators, to explore in our emotions and imagination (as well as with intellects) a part of ourselves that we ordinarily avoid or altogether repress” (p. 66). The consequences of such exploration can be dire, still according to Paskow, “but it is often liberating, even exhilarating” (p. 66).

Within these assumptions, the manifestation of the hero archetype seems to be the main *emotional trigger* of the cathartic effect that emerges in situations that generate extreme emotions. In audiovisual narratives, the cathartic emotional experience triggered by the archetypal images of the hero has its sources, as discussed above, in a combination of elements, mainly the *mise-en-scène* and the soundtrack.

Scenes in which the archetypal image of the hero appears in confrontation with antagonistic forces – which oppose not only the character, but also the moral principles and values it represents – are usually cathartic and often the high point of audiovisual narrative catharsis. Note that the same archetypes always trigger the same emotions, regardless of the archetypal image used or the social and historical context in which the narrative is produced. To better understand this phenomenon, let us compare some cathartic scenes in two renowned audiovisual productions.

Stagecoach (Ford, 1939), considered one of the most famous westerns, features a sequence of cathartic scenes in its final 30 minutes: a birth, an Apache attack, an arrest, a shootout led by the main hero, and a romantic escape to Mexico. The use of climax after climax is one of the peculiarities of John Ford’s films, which also appears in *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956), for example.

One of the cathartic sequences in *Stagecoach*’s (Ford, 1939) final act, shows the native Apache in a prolonged chase and attack on the stagecoach of a group

consisting of establishment and marginal figures such as a prostitute, a sheriff, a banker, an alcoholic doctor, and a prison fugitive, among others, who are heading toward the Old West and end up ambushed. The sequence culminates in the last-minute arrival of the US army cavalry to save the travelers and chase away the Apache.

The sequence establishes the typical archetypal hero-monster opposition. The hero archetype is filled by the travelers' images, especially by the character Ringo Kid (John Wayne) and the cavalry. The Apache fill the archetypal image of the monster, the *other* in the traveler's perspective, seen as savage and cruel, to the point that the travelers would rather be dead than captured by them. Some of the constructed representations are stereotyped, especially those of the Apache, whose characters are superficial and identified as a threat for being out of their reserves and are led by Geronimo, one of the most important indigenous military leaders in North America, who was against the agreements to confine the native populations to reservations.

Showing the travelers in danger before the Apache attack (Figure 1) – the hero threatened by the monster –, starts the process of catharsis: by identifying themselves with the travelers, the audience *suffers* and, prompted by the fictional world, feels the fear and anger themselves. To overcome fear and satisfy anger, thus achieving catharsis, the audience expects the hero to survive and overtake or kill the monster. And this is what the sequence of scenes in *Stagecoach* shows, especially when everything seems lost (Figures 2 and 3) and the cavalry appears (Figure 4) to save the travelers, thus triggering a feeling of satisfaction in the audience. The catharsis is thus completed as a pleasurable and liberating experience for the audience, who sees the heroes, with whom they identify and show empathy for, overcome the monster, for whom they feel aversion.

Figure 1*Scene from Stagecoach 1*

Note. Beginning of the cathartic sequence shows the Apache, led by Geronimo, waiting in an ambush to attack the stagecoach. Movie frame.

Figure 2*Scene from Stagecoach 2*

Note. Apache attack on the stagecoach. The cathartic process reaches a high point of tension with the imminent threat to the heroes imposed by the monsters. Movie frame.

Figure 3*Scene of Stagecoach 3*

Note. Heroes in action – in this case, the sheriff, on the left, and the fugitive Ringo Kid (John Wayne) on top of the stagecoach. Despite the heroes' appearance, the scene does not lead to the spectator's relief and maintains the tension: despite the heroic action, the stakes increase as they run out of ammunition. Movie frame.

Figure 4*Scene of Stagecoach 4*

Note. The cavalry arrives; the cathartic process is concluded as the soldiers scare off the Apache. Movie frame.

Importantly, the social-cultural context since *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) was released changed significantly and the roles of hero and monster assigned

in that narrative are objectionable. But even if the roles are reversed, the archetypes and emotions triggered by them remain. The following analyzed cathartic sequence shows exactly this inversion of the archetypal images seen in *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939).

In the *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019), one of the key cathartic sequences happens in the episode “The Spoils of War” (Benioff et al. 2017). The scene shows a confrontation between the Lannister’s army and its allies and the armies led by Daenerys Targaryen, which include Dothraki nomadic warriors and dragons. Again, the archetypal hero-monster opposition works as the main emotional trigger. Daenerys and her allies represent the archetypal image of the hero, while the Lannisters and their allies represent the monster. Here, we consider that the narrative presents archetypal and not stereotyped characters, since the authors have developed in-depth sociological and psychological profiles for the protagonists over the previous 63 episodes, showing their virtues and vices, as well as their contradictions, bringing them closer to the human complexity.

The sequence of scenes (Figures 5 to 10) shows the armies led by James Lannister not only having to face the human forces led by Daenerys, but mainly being surprised by the attack of the dragons, who decimate hundreds of Lannister soldiers with their fire. The emotions triggered by the archetypes throughout the battle are of anger – the scene characterizes a possible moment of revenge –, fear – as Daenerys and her dragon are in danger during the confrontation –, and satisfaction – for the victory achieved by the hero.

Two points are of note here: (i) the satisfaction of the audience that identifies and empathizes with Daenerys while disliking the Lannisters and their allies happens mainly when the dragon burns alive hundreds of human beings associated with the archetypal image of the *monster*; (ii) the representation of the hero archetype by images traditionally associated with the *monster*, such as that of the *barbarians* (Dothraki) and the dragon – this inversion, however, is only on the image level, since in essence it maintains the opposition between *good* and *evil*, in which the audience tends to predominantly have empathy and identify with the former, regardless of their images (outsiders, renegades, savages, others, etc.).

Figure 5

Scene from Game of Thrones 1



Note. The Lannister army and their allies. Frame from the TV series.

Figure 6

Scene from Game of Thrones 2



Note. Attack of the Dothraki, starting the cathartic process as they *fill* the hero archetype. Frame from the TV series.

Figure 7

Scene from Game of Thrones 3



Note. James Lannister (right) amazed at seeing something. The scene signals that the hero has resources that surprise the monster. Frame from the TV series.

Figure 8

Scene from Game of Thrones 4



Note. The surprise is revealed: the dragon's attack shows that the hero has a disproportional (superhuman) strength. Frame from the TV series.

Figure 9*Scene from Game of Thrones 5*

Note. Daenerys leading the attack on her dragon; this moment is one of the highlights of the cathartic process as it is the first appearance of one of the main heroes. Frame from the TV series.

Figure 10*Scene from Game of Thrones 6*

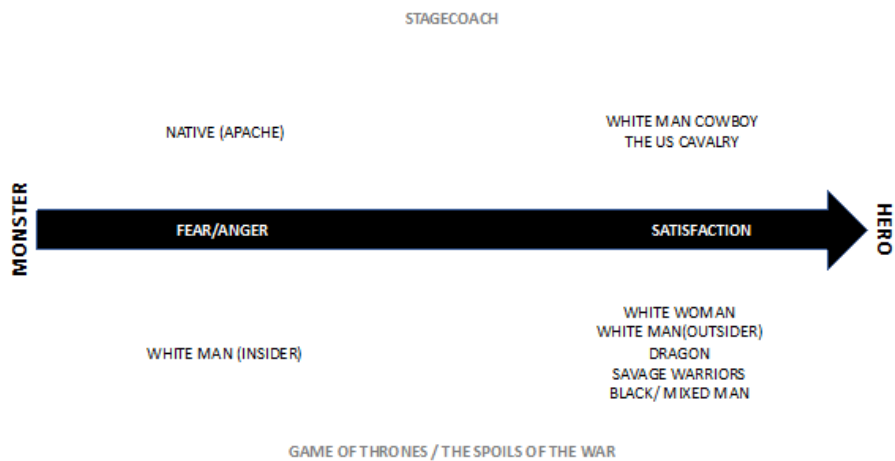
Note. The dragon attacks the Lannisters and their allies; climax of the cathartic process by providing the audience, who identifies with the heroes, with feelings of satisfaction; in this case, the cruelty represented by the burning of living human beings would be *morally justified*. Frame from the TV series.

Both examples analyzed here develop the same cathartic process – from fear/anger emulation to satisfaction with the relief provided by the hero's triumph – and involve the same main archetypes – in the analyzed sequences, the archetypes of hero and monster predominate in the protagonists, as summarized in Figure 11. The scheme helps us visualize how the archetypal images vary, even being

opposites: while the image of the savage (Apache) fills the monster archetype in *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939), in *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019) the savage Dothraki fill the image of the hero, showing the impact that social and historical context has on archetypal images.

Figure 11

Relations between catharsis, archetypes and archetypal images



Note. Elaborated by the author.

It is important to highlight that a TV series with several episodes and seasons, such as *Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011-2019), can develop its protagonists psychologically and sociologically in a much more in-depth way than a 95-minute movie like *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939). Nevertheless, the relation between archetypes and the emotions they trigger shows convergences in both types of narratives.

CONCLUSIONS

The examples analyzed here show that the archetypal hero-monster opposition – one of the *good* versus *evil* variations – plays a significant role in aesthetic catharsis. The spectator's empathy and identification with the image used to fill the hero archetype and their aversion to the image used to fill the monster archetype constitute the basic element of the cathartic process in the sequences analyzed.

The feelings generated during the cathartic sequences – such as anger, fear, and satisfaction – are thus connected to the archetypes at work in the scenes that compose them. As the comparison highlighted, it is the archetypes that operate as emotional triggers in catharsis, and not the characters, their images, or the social-historical context. When mentally filling an archetype with a specific character, image, and/or element, the spectator establishes the potential feelings that may be triggered in key scenes in the narrative. As observed, the social-historical context can reverse the characters' role, but the archetypes and feelings they produce remain the same.

Finally, this initial study signals that it may be promising to analyze cathartic scenes in films and TV series from different genres to verify, with greater scope, the hypothesis developed here: that the archetype – especially the hero archetype (or the archetypal hero-monster opposition) –, given its universality and timelessness and for being a repository of potential emotions, plays a central role in generating feelings in the audience during the process of aesthetic catharsis in audiovisual narratives, regardless of the images associated with it or the social-historical context in which the archetype is inserted.

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Article received on November 11, 2020 and approved on April 17, 2021.