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B.A. Essay

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Abstract

This essay examines the journey of Jon Snow, a character from George R. R. Martin's epic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. As of now, May 2014, the series has not been completed, only five out of a planned seven novels have been published, and uncertainty shrouds the fate of every major character. Despite that fact it will be argued that Jon Snow is the true hero of the story and parallels are drawn between his journey and Joseph Campell's theory of the monomyth, also referred to as the hero's journey, presented in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Campell's theory states that there is a similar pattern that can be found in most narratives, be it fairy tales, myths or adventures. Furthermore, Jon Snow's obscure lineage is explored in detail and an educated guess is made regarding his parentage in order to support the claim that his is the song of ice and fire.
Introduction

*A Song of Ice and Fire* is a fantasy series written by George R. R. Martin. At the time this is written it has not been completed, with only five out of a planned seven novels having been published along with four novellas. The first novel, *A Game of Thrones*, was published in 1996 and immediately became critically acclaimed, winning both the Hugo and Locus awards in 1997. Since its publication Martin's popularity has steadily increased and nowadays *A Song of Ice and Fire* has acquired a cult status; http://asoiaf.westeros.org, the most popular fan site, currently has close to 80,000 members on its forum and more than 3 million posts and its own extensive wikipedia page. It has also been turned into computer games as well as a very successful, multiple Emmy Award winning TV series that is currently running on HBO, titled *Game of Thrones*, further increasing the novel's popularity to the point that it reached number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list in July 2011 (nytimes.com). *A Game of Thrones* was followed by *A Clash of Kings* in 1998, *A Storm of Swords* in 2000, *A Feast for Crows* in 2005 and *A Dance with Dragons* in 2011. As of yet no date has been set for the publication of the final two novels in the series, *The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring* respectively.

American novelist and short story writer George R. R. Martin was born in Bayonne, New Jersey, on the twentieth of September, 1948. As a child, Martin reveled in reading and that inspired him to write his own stories from an early age, including stories of a mythical kingdom inhabited by his pet turtles (Berwick 2012). At the age of twenty-one, in 1970, Martin sold his first story, titled “The Hero”, and he received his B.S. in journalism from Northwestern University the same year, followed by his M.S. in 1971. Thereafter, Martin performed numerous jobs along with his writing until he moved to Santa Fe in 1979 to become a full-time writer. Since then he has published a large variety of novels and short stories from various genres. Martin has written comic books, horror stories and science fiction but he has received the vast majority of his acclaim for his epic fantasy writing, a genre he seemingly excels in.

Fantasy is a very broad and interesting genre. Lucie Armitt, Professor in Contemporary English Literature at the University of Lincoln, states that “Fantasy [...] is the basis upon which all reading and writing is founded” (Armitt 2). Albeit a very broad description, it bears some truth as fantasy has always been a part of literature.
Some of the oldest surviving literary texts on the planet are myths, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh and Beowulf, and they include elements of fantasy and authors have continued using those elements throughout history. The consensus is that the identifying traits of fantasy are that it draws its inspiration from folklore and mythology and it has some fantastical elements such as gods and magic, and the stories are often set in a fictional fantasy world. It is primarily the creation of this fictional world that shows how much the genre has developed over the centuries and this evolution has created the subgenre of high fantasy, otherwise known as epic fantasy. High fantasy differs from fantasy in general because they are set either in an entirely fictional worlds or in a parallel, secondary world that exists alongside our natural world whereas old myths and folklore usually take place exclusively in our world. This subgenre of epic fantasy is usually considered to have been established by English author J. R. R. Tolkien when he created the massive fictional world of Middle-earth, the world in which *The Lord of the Rings*, is set. These high fantasy stories are usually epic in scope and contains the theme of good versus evil, a struggle against supernatural, evil forces.

In 1949 Joseph Campell published his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in which he presents his theory of the hero's journey, also referred to as the monomyth, a term borrowed from the Irish poet and novelist James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Campell's work bears some resemblance with, and can be seen as a continuation of, the works of scholars Carl Jung and Vladimir Propp. Carl Jung was a very influential Swiss psychologist who is considered to be the founder of analytical psychology, a school of psychology that focuses on people's personal development during their adult years. One of Jung's main concepts, first presented in 1919, is that of the archetypes, archetype being elements that are present in people's unconscious mind and can sometimes manifest in certain behaviours. Jung divides these archetypes into events and figures. The archetypal events are birth, separation from parents, initiation, the union of opposites, marriage and death. The archetype figures are numerous, for example the mother, the trickster, the child, the shadow and the hero (Jung 108). It is the last of these figures, the hero, and his or her relationship with archetypal events and the hero's portrayal in literature that are a great influence on Joseph Campell's theory of the monomyth.

Another scholar whose work precedes and resembles Campell's is the Russian philologist Vladimir Propp, often considered to be the father of modern narratology.
In 1928, Propp published his work, *Morphology of the Folktale* and in it he states that all fairy tales are constructed in a similar manner. Propp concludes that these tales have a hero, and that there are thirty-one possible functions, or plots, who affect the hero in some way and propel these stories forward (Propp 25). Propp also identifies seven distinct characters, or character functions that appear throughout fairy tales. These character functions are the hero, the villain, the dispatcher, the helper, the donor, the princess and the false hero (Propp 79-80). The similarities between Propp's and Campbell's works are plain to see. Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth states that most heroic myths and tales follow the same basic pattern, a journey divided into seventeen stages that in turn are divided into three sections, departure, initiation and return. It is essential to take note of the fact that it is highly unlikely that any story includes all seventeen stages, most adventures only include a few.

One of the most interesting characters in Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the apparently illegitimate Jon Snow. What makes Jon interesting is the mystery surrounding his lineage. The reader is purposefully kept in the dark and made to believe that he is the son of a man named Eddard “Ned” Stark and an unknown woman. However, there are certain clues or hints spread throughout the novels and it can be hypothesized that he is in fact not the son of Eddard Stark but instead the son of his sister Lyanna Stark and crown-prince Rhaegar Targaryen, making him the rightful heir to the kingdom and the hero of the story. Jon's journey, his actions, need to be examined and looked at in regard to Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth to establish this fact and show that this is Jon's story, that “his is the song of ice and fire” (Martin 1999:701).
Essential Background Information

*A Song of Ice and Fire* is an epic fantasy series that takes place in an unnamed fictional world, an alternative, medieval, Earth that has magic, dragons, and the terrifying Others that pose a threat to all living things. The majority of the novels takes place on the continent of Westeros, a continent divided into the Seven Kingdoms who are in turn vassals of the Iron Throne. The first novel, *A Game of Thrones* begins in the year 298AL, “AL” meaning after Aegon's Landing.

The part of the story that concerns Jon Snow centers around two families, the Targaryens and the Starks, although a few other characters will be mentioned. Hailing from Dragonstone, an island just east of Westeros, the Targaryens are the most prestigious family in Westeros. In the old days they rode dragons, before the dragons became extinct, and it was Aegon Targaryen, also known as Aegon the Conqueror, who united the Seven Kingdoms under the Iron Throne which he forged from the swords of his defeated enemies. After Aegon's death the Targaryens continued to sit on the throne for almost three hundred years, or until the year 283AL when Robert Baratheon usurped the throne, almost succeeding in wiping out House Targaryen in the process. The words of House Targaryen are “fire and blood” and their sigil is a dragon and they follow the faith of the seven. During the time that the novels are set the only known and proven living members of House Targaryen is Daenerys Targaryen, daughter of the Mad King Aerys and Rhaegar's younger sister, as well as Daenerys's elder brother Viserys. The siblings have, from fear of Robert Baratheon, fled across the Narrow Sea to the continent of Essos. However, Viserys dies early on, apparently leaving Daenerys as the rightful heir to the Iron Throne. The first novel, *A Game of Thrones*, concludes with Daenerys hatching three dragon eggs, and by doing so she brings magic back into the world.

House Stark is an ancient house, seated in the castle of Winterfell in the North of Westeros. Before Aegon's Conquest in the year 1AL they ruled as Kings of Winter but have ever since served as Wardens of the North and vassals of the Iron Throne. The words of House Stark are “Winter is coming” and their sigil is a direwolf, a larger and stronger beast than the traditional wolf, and they had an ancestral great-sword called Ice. The first novel, *A Game of Thrones*, takes place in the year 298AL and the series continues on from there with a lot of flashbacks and stories from previous years. In the
beginning the focus is very much on the Starks and Eddard “Ned” Stark is the head of the family at the time. Eddard is above all an honest and honorable man, as is stated by a number of people; His best friend Robert Baratheon says: “You never could lie for love nor honor” (Martin 1996:310), “You are an honest and honourable man” is uttered by Varys, probably the most well informed man in Westeros (Martin 1996:634), and finally Stannis Baratheon, Robert's brother, tells Jon Snow; “I knew Ned Stark well. Your father was no friend of mine, but only a fool would doubt his honor or his honesty” (Martin 2000:1055). Eddard is married to Catelyn Stark and together they have five children, the eldest is named Robb, followed by Sansa, Arya, Brandon and Rickon. As well as the aforementioned five, Eddard supposedly sired an illegitimate child out of wedlock with an unknown woman, a “bastard” named Jon Snow that has been raised with the other Stark children.
Jon's Journey

Jon Snow is one of the most intriguing characters in the series. He is the only character whose lineage is in serious doubt and he is one of only a handful of characters who appear in all five novels. *A Game of Thrones* commences when Jon is fourteen years old and he, his brothers Robb and Bran, along with their father Eddard Stark discover a litter of direwolf pups, a strange occurrence as direwolves had not been spotted south of the Wall for generations. Eddard wants to euthanize them but Jon points out the fact that there are five pups, one for each of the legitimate Stark children, and as the sigil of House Stark is a direwolf they must surely have been destined to have them. This is a selfless act which shows how good a person Jon is, an act rewarded when he stumbles upon a red eyed albino pup, like Jon himself an outcast from the litter, and he proceeds to name him Ghost (Martin 1996:17-21). Approximately two years go by and Jon makes the pivotal decision to seek his own destiny, his own honour, by joining the Night's Watch, one of the oldest orders in all of Westeros. It was founded over eight thousand years ago when a man named Brandon Stark, also known as Bran the Builder, built a grandiose Wall on the northern border of the Seven Kingdoms, separating and protecting them from the wild lands that lie farther north and whatever resides there. The Wall is truly one of the wonders of the world, it is made of ice and it stretches over three hundred miles and stands a staggering seven hundred feet high. It is also imbued with ancient, unknown sorcery or spells. The Night's Watch used to be a highly thought of order but at the time Jon Snow takes his vows it has severely declined, dwindled. Nowadays the Wall is undermanned and most of the Watch's members are either convicted criminals who chose servitude over a death sentence, bastards or unwanted younger sons who have failed to impress their fathers. Most of the Night's Watch's castles stand empty and, like the Wall itself, require maintenance. The reason for this decline is the fact that the old legends are no longer believed in the realm, no one believes in the Others, giants or other supernatural beings. People believe that the Wall is merely there to protect the Seven Kingdoms from wildlings that live beyond it. Jon's decision to leave for the Wall signals the hero's departure and fits perfectly with Campell's first stage, the “call to adventure”:

This first stage of the mythological journey [...] signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred from within the pale of his society to a zone
unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, super human deeds, and impossible delight.

(Campell 58)

By leaving for the Wall, Jon has started walking on his path, the road that will lead him to his destiny.

After arriving at the Wall, Jon quickly distinguishes himself from the other recruits. Having had the privilege of being brought up with the other Stark children, Jon is well educated and highly trained in the ways of combat, a training he uses to teach others. The current Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, Jeor Mormont, is quick to recognize Jon's potential and appoints him as his personal steward in order to groom him for command. Then one night there is a strange occurrence. A wight, best described as a zombie that has been raised from the dead by the Others, attacks the Lord Commander and Jon comes to his rescue, severely burning his right hand while dispatching the wight. Commander Mormont rewards Jon by giving him the Mormont's family heirloom, a two-handed bastard sword called Longclaw, made of Valyrian steel with a new pommel engraved with a direwolf head. This is a noble, generous and an important gift as Valyrian steel is incredibly rare, the art of making it has been lost and magic plays a role in its forging, and most importantly, it is in all likelihood capable of destroying an Other (Martin 2005:115). This gift corresponds with Campell's third stage of the hero's journey, “supernatural aid”: “the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces” (Campell 69). Mormont is certainly old and a sword that is able to dispatch an Other is no small aid, but so is Jon's direwolf, Ghost, who has aided him numerous times during his journey. Furthermore, Jon is what is referred to as a warg, also known as a skinchanger. A warg is a person with the ability to enter the mind of an animal and even control its actions (Martin 2011:3) and it is extremely rare. Even more unique are the very best of skinchangers, known as greenseers, people with the ability to have prophetic dreams and Jon has both these gifts. Jon's greensight and warg abilities along with Ghost can be seen as a boon bestowed by the Old Gods,
making them protective figures that provide supernatural aid.

Not long after the incident with the wight, Jon discovers that his father Eddard has been executed, his sisters imprisoned, and that his brother Robb has raised the banners and gone to war. Torn between his oath as a Black Brother of the Night's Watch and the love he bears for his family, Jon decides to abandon the Wall and ride to his family's aid. Jon has not ridden long from Castle Black when his friends catch up to him and convince him to stay and honour his oath, the moral thing to do as the threat of the Others has been established, not to mention the fact that Jon could have been executed as a deserter had he been caught. Joseph Campell identifies “refusal of the call” as the second stage of the hero's journey and he defines it as a “refusal to give up one's own interest” (Campell 60). Jon nearly, or temporarily, does so but he shows remarkable restraint by staying put when his entire family is in danger, putting the safety of the realm in front of his own interest.

*A Clash of Kings* begins with Jon having reconciled with the fact that his future, his destiny, lies with the Night's Watch, and he joins the Lord Commander as his squire on a ranging into the Haunted Forest that resides beyond the Wall. The ranging party decides to make its way to the Fist of the First Men and shortly upon arriving Ghost discovers a buried cache of dragon glass along with an old warhorn, providing further aid to Jon Snow. At the Fist, Jon agrees to accompany the renowned ranger Qhorin Halfhand on a small scouting party. While scouting they stumble upon a small band of sentries and Jon captures a wildling woman named Ygritte. Qhorin orders Jon to execute her but Jon secretly lets her go, a merciful, sympathetic, yet a naïve act. Shortly thereafter Jon and Qhorin's group is discovered and chased by a group of wildlings and when Qhorin realizes that all hope of survival is lost he orders Jon to become a turncloak, to pretend to abandon the Night's Watch and join the wildlings to learn what their plans are. In order to prove his loyalty, the wildlings command Jon to kill Qhorin in a duel, a command that Jon carries out with Ghost's help. The wildlings are, reasonably so, not sure of Jon's commitment even after the duel but Ygritte persuades him to trust Jon and bring him to Mance Rayder, a former Black Brother of the Night's Watch and the King-beyond-the-Wall.

Jon's journey beyond the Wall corresponds with Joseph Campell's fourth stage of the hero's journey, which he defines as “the crossing of the first threshold”: 
With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the “threshold guardian” at the entrance to the zone of magnified power [. . .] Beyond them is darkness, the unknown and danger. (Campell 77)

Albeit usually a creature of some sort, such as an ogre (Campell 78), Martin seems to take another route and use an inanimate object, as the Wall is literally a giant threshold that protects the world of men against the Others. Furthermore, very little is known about the Others and only a small minority of people believe they exist, they pose a danger to all life and they are said to have emerged during the Long Night, a period of terrible darkness.

Jon's journey continues in *A Storm of Swords* where he enters Mance Rayder's camp and discovers that Mance has gathered a huge army with the intention of attacking the Wall and the Night's Watch. Jon convinces Mance that he has truly deserted, as Mance himself has done, and Jon becomes infatuated with Ygritte, breaking his vow of chastity in the process. These feelings for Ygritte, along with a certain admiration for the wildlings, or the “free folk” as they like to call themselves, leads Jon to wonder if he should truly desert but he quickly realizes that he must warn the Watch. With that in mind, Jon, along with Ygritte, joins a raiding party set to climb the Wall and lunch a sneak attack on the few men that remain to guard it. Having climbed the Wall, Jon manages to escape from the wildlings, taking an arrow in the leg in the process, and warn his Black Brothers of the impending attack. Upon arriving at the Wall, Jon is informed that his brothers Bran and Rickon have been killed by a man named Theon Greyjoy and that Winterfell has been sacked. This is in fact not the case as both Rickon and Bran managed to escape, but as far as Jon is concerned it is the truth. Thereafter, due to the fact that the Lord Commander and most of the fighting men have not returned, Jon takes it upon himself, with some incentive from the old and wise Master Aemon, to organize the defense of the Wall. First Jon and his Black Brothers manage to defeat the small raiding party and Ygritte dies in Jon's arms. Then Mance arrives with his army of one hundred thousand wildling, as well as a few giants and mammoths, and directly assaults the Wall but Jon succeeds in holding the Wall for several days against vast superior numbers.

Then it occurs that two senior members of the Watch, Janos Slynt and Allister
Thorne, who had been sent south to bring news of the Others and recruit more men, return to the castle, men who both dislike and outrank Jon. They proceed to have Jon arrested, presenting a wildling's testimony as evidence that Jon had deserted the Night's Watch and murdered Qhorin Halfhand. Slynt and Thorne try to have Jon executed but due to Jon's popularity as well as Maester Aemon's support they are unsuccessful. Therefore Slynt and Thorne devise a new plan and send Jon to parley with Mance beyond the Wall with orders to assassinate him. During the parley Mance informs Jon that he has the Horn of Winter, an ancient, magical horn that will, as legend has it, bring down the Wall when blown (Martin 2000:412). Mance expresses his desire to trade the horn for safe passage south of the Wall as his only desire is to escape from the Others, not fight a war or destroy the Wall, simply use it as it was meant to be used, as a shield against the Others. As they are conversing, and before Jon has a chance to assassinate Mance, the wildlings come under attack from Stannis Baratheon, the younger brother of the now deceased King Robert Baratheon, and claimant to the throne. With the wildlings scattered and back at Castle Black, Jon learns that both his brother Robb Stark and Lord Commander Mormont have been killed. Stannis Baratheon then offers to legitimize him, release him from his oath to the Night's Watch and appoint him the Lord of Winterfell as Stannis feels that he requires “a son of Ned Stark” in order to gain support of the North (Martin 2000:1058). At the same time Jon is voted as the next Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, which means that he is has en enormous choice to make. To either accept the lordship, something he always desired but knew to be impossible, or take up the position of Lord Commander. Jon honours his vows and chooses the latter and A Storm of Swords concludes with Jon Snow as the 998th Lord Commander of the Night's Watch.

The temptations that Jon is subjected to in A Storm of Swords can well be applied to Campell's second section “initiation”, which begins with the sixth stage of the hero's journey, “the road of trials” (Campell 97). At this stage the hero will face a number of trials, often three, in order to test his resolve, the hero often fails one or more of them. Jon's hardest trials correspond with Campell's eight stage of the monomyth, “Woman as a Temptress” (Campell 120). Jon is tempted twice in A Storm of Swords, first by Ygritte and then by Stannis. Ygritte is literally a woman who tempts him, she is his first, his only love, and the desire to stay with her, to live free, is very strong. The vows of the
Night's Watch state that “I shall take no wife, hold no lands, father no children” (Martin 2000:207), a vow that clearly implies celibacy, yet it is common amongst the men of the Watch to frequent brothels. That, along with the need to convince the wildlings that he was one of them, explains why Jon broke said oath. Yet despite the desire to stay with her, Jon honours his original vow and returns to the Watch, betraying Ygritte in the process and in the end overcoming the temptation she represents.

Stannis's offer to legitimize Jon and raise him as the Lord of Winterfell provides an even bigger temptation for Jon as it is the thing he has always secretly craved. It is important to realize that albeit Campell chose to refer to this eight stage as “Woman as a Temptress”, it does not necessarily have to involve a real woman, “it is formulated in the broadest terms” (Campell 121). It can stand for either physical or material pleasures in general, as it does here. If Jon had accepted Stannis's terms he would have abandoned his journey, his quest to save the realm from the Others. Matters would also most certainly become complicated if his brother Rickon returns from hiding, or if it turns out that Jon is not Eddard Stark's son. Therefore it is essential for Jon Snow to pass this test if he is to become the true hero of the story and the saviour of humanity.

Nothing of real note transpires to Jon in the fourth novel, *A Feast for Crows*, as Jon only appears briefly but he features heavily in the following, the latest novel, *A Dance with Dragons*. There Jon has assumed command of Night's Watch and he encounters his first problem when Janos Slynt refuses to obey a direct order. Jon gives him three chances to change his mind yet Slynt declines each time, dismissing Jon's authority. Jon is therefore forced to execute Slynt, for by the laws of the Night's Watch the punishment for disobedience is death, and Jon carries out the sentence himself like his father had always done. Beheading Slynt earns Jon respect and strengthens his position as Lord Commander in the process, a mature act. Having asserted his authority, Jon proceeds to arrange negotiations with the wildlings, offering them a piece of land south of the Wall and the chance to man some of its abandoned castles and defend it against the Others. Jon has realized that the wildlings are honourable men and women, and that the Wall was not designed to keep them out. Unfortunately the vast majority of his black brothers do not see it that way, a lifetime of fighting wildlings has blinded them to the sensibility of this proposal, a proposal that the wildlings accept.

With the wildlings south of the Wall and things starting to quiet down, Jon learns
that his sister Arya Stark is being forced to marry Ramsey Bolton, who had by then sacked Winterfell from Theon Greyjoy, to cement Ramsey's claim on Winterfell. A horrifying fact considering that Ramsey is known for his extreme cruelty. In fact the girl is not Arya Stark but an imposter arranged by Ramsey, but not knowing that, and with Stannis Baratheon set to march on Winterfell, Jon sends Mance Rayder along with six female wildling warriors to rescue his sister. Shortly thereafter Jon receives a letter from Ramsey Bolton claiming that Stannis has been defeated and Mance Rayder captured. Jon decides to abstain from a planned ranging north of the Wall and instead gather a force to ride south to attack Ramsey, a decision that is strongly resented by most men of the Watch. This is in strict violation of his oath as it clearly states that the Night's Watch shall not participate in the quarrels of the realm. Jon does not order anyone to follow him but he asks for volunteers from wildlings and black brothers alike. However, before Jon can set off he is attacked by small number of black brothers and stabbed repeatedly. The assailants are crying and muttering “for the Watch” all the while, indicating that they are doing what they think is right (Martin 2011:913).

Embarking on this mission to save Arya can be regarded, after Ygritt and Stannis, as the third temptation that Jon is faced with, one he gives into, a test he fails. Failing this test results in Jon getting stabbed, perhaps even killed, but it is highly unlikely that this is the end of Jon's journey. Maester Aemon tells Jon: “It takes a man to rule [. . .] Kill the boy, Jon Snow. Winter is almost upon us. Kill the boy and let the man be born” (Martin 2011:103). It is very probable that Jon either survives the attack, or that he will be resurrected, and there are a number of ways to achieve that. Melisandre, a red priestess, is currently stationed at the Wall and it is almost certain that she has the power to bring people back from the dead. That assumption can be made because a red priest named Thoros of Myr, a man that seemingly possess much less power than Melisandre, has performed that feat numerous times (Martin 2000:592). Jon's warging, his skinchanging gift, is also capable of prolonging his life. A wildling skinchanger named Orell lives on in his eagle after his death, as does another wildling named Varamyr who resides inside in his wolf One-Eye (Martin 2011:14). Jon's brother, Brandon Stark goes a step further and temporarily takes control of the feeble-minded Hodor, a human (Martin 2011:173). It is therefore a distinct possibility that Jon will, at least temporarily, occupy his direwolf Ghost.
This death and rebirth can be seen as corresponding with Campell's fifth stage, the “Belly of the Whale”, and it is described thus by Campell:

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died. This popular motif gives emphasis to the lesson that the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation. Instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again. (Campell 90)

Even though Jon has been growing as the story progresses he is still a tad naive, childish. The boy needs to be killed for the man to be born, and then rule.

It is fair to say that Jon's journey fits well into Joseph Campell's pattern of the monomyth so far. Jon's story begins in earnest when he sets out and answers the call to adventure, Campell's first stage. Jon then receives supernatural aid from protective figures, Mormont and the Old Gods. He proceeds to cross the magical threshold and he is tempted and tested repeatedly. At the end of the latest novel Jon appears to be at Campell's fifth stage, “Belly of the Whale”, a stage of uncertainty he has to navigate through in order to start on Campell's third and final section, the return.
Jon's Parentage

Throughout the novels we are told what transpired in the years before the series takes place. In 282AL Westeros was ruled by the Targaryens. Aerys Targaryen, known as the Mad, was king and his son Rhaegar Targaryen was the crown-prince. Rhaegar was married to Elia Martell, a marriage arranged by his father Aerys, and together they had two children, Aegon and Rhaenys. Back then Eddard's father, Rickard Stark, was the head of the Stark family and Eddard's elder brother Brandon was the heir. Furthermore, Ned had a sister of great importance named Lyanna, who was engaged to Robert Baratheon, Eddard's best friend. In the spring of 282AL Aerys the Mad King held a grand tourney at a castle called Harrenhal, a tourney that Rhaegar surprisingly won, dismounting some of the greatest knights in the realm in the process. It is customary that the winner crowns the Queen of Love and Beauty once the tournament is over and there Rhaegar shocked everybody by giving the crown of blue winter roses to Lyanna instead of his own wife Elia: “Ned remembered the moment when all the smiles died, when Prince Rhaegar Targaryen urged his horse past his own wife, the Dornish princess Elia Martell, to lay the queen of beauty’s laurel in Lyanna’s lap” (Martin 1996 631). This is even more offensive given the fact that Lyanna was betrothed to Robert Baratheon at the time.

Some time after the tourney, Rhaegar supposedly kidnapped Lyanna and took her to an undisclosed location. This apparent abduction rightly angered Eddard's elder, hot-headed brother Brandon who, along with four companions, went to the capital of King's Landing in search of Rhaegar and his sister Lyanna. Upon arriving he shouted that Rhaegar should “come out and die” (Martin 1999:797), but Rhaegar was not present as he was in hiding with Lyanna and could therefore not answer the challenge. The Mad King responded by imprisoning Brandon and his companions, charging them for intending to kill the prince, and calling for their fathers to appear before the court to answer for their sons' crimes. When Rickard Stark presented himself before the king, Aerys immediately arrested him as a conspirator and the Starks asked for a trial by combat, as was their right. The Mad King granted the request, stating that “fire was the champion of House Targaryen” (Martin 1999:797), dressing Rickard in his armour and burning him in it, while Brandon strangled himself with a leather cord bound around his neck, trying to reach a longsword placed just out of reach, in an attempt to rescue his
After this mockery of a trial, Aerys demanded that Jon Arryn, the Lord of the Vale, one of the Seven Kingdoms, and guardian of both Eddard Stark and Robert Baratheon, present his wards before the Iron Throne. Jon Arryn did not fancy a similar trial for his wards and therefore declared a rebellion. Of the three of them Robert Baratheon had the best claim on the throne and that along with his prowess as a warrior meant that he quickly assumed a pivotal role as the leader of the aforementioned rebellion. Before they set out to war Ned married Catelyn Tully, who had been betrothed to his brother Brandon and a child is conceived on their wedding night. The rebellion later ends with Robert killing Rhaegar in a great battle at the Trident and king Aerys killed on his throne by one of his sworn Kingsguard. The Kingsguard is an order sworn to protect the king and his bloodline. Rhaegar's wife and children are slaughtered as well. Robert then becomes king and Ned returns home, with the male child, Jon Snow.

As mentioned above the series starts in the year 298AL and Jon Snow is being brought up with the legitimate Stark children although Catelyn never takes a liking to him. No one seems to know who Jon's mother is. There are some speculations though. One is that his mother is a noble woman called Ashara Dayne. When Catelyn asks Ned about her he responds: “Never ask me about Jon,” he said, cold as ice. “He is my blood, and that is all you need to know” (Martin 1996:65). There is no real evidence that Ashara Dayne is Jon's mother. Other than the fact that Ned was at Starfall, the Dayne castle, and that she committed suicide after the rebellion in which Ned killed her brother at the Tower of Joy. The line “He is my blood” is especially intriguing since it is Ned speaking. He has never been known to lie so he could easily be implying that Jon is his sister's son and not his own.

Another theory is that a maid in the service of the Dayne family, called Wylla, was Jon's mother. Ned says as much to Robert: “You told me once. Was it Merryl? You know the one I mean, your bastard’s mother?” “Her name was Wylla,” Ned replied with cool courtesy, “and I would sooner not speak of her” (Martin 1996:110). It is no secret that Robert hated all Targaryens and wanted them exterminated; “I will kill every Targaryen I can get my hands on, until they are as dead as their dragons, and then I will piss on their graves” (Martin 1996:113) So it would therefore make a lot of sense for Ned to tell him that his sister's boy was his own and not a Targaryen in order to keep him safe. It can even be considered honorable. The only other real evidence that Wylla
is Jon's mother comes from a conversation between Arya Stark, Jon's younger sister, and Edric Dayne, a young man from Starfall: “Arya was lost. “Who’s Wylla?” “Jon Snow’s mother. He never told you? She’s served us for years and years. Since before I was born” (Martin 2000:596). This information is not trustworthy and by no means makes this a fact as Edric is simply repeating common gossip.

There is very little evidence that Jon is Rhaegar's and Lyanna's child but there are subtle clues throughout the novels. Most of what we hear about Rhaegar comes from Robert who hates him with a passion, believing that he abducted and raped his betrothed: “And Rhaegar [. . .] how many times do you think he raped your sister? How many hundreds of times?” (Martin 1996:112-113). Whenever we hear someone else talk or think about him it is very positive. Even Ned seems to have a very high opinion of him. Ned also remembers a conversation with Lyanna where she said that “Robert will never keep to one bed” (Martin 1996:379). Since this is the only thing she has to say about him it is obvious that she does not fancy this marriage.

Rhaegar Targaryen, Prince of Dragonstone, King Aerys's first born son and heir apparent is a character of great importance. Even though he is deceased at the time the series takes place his name is mentioned in each of the five novels and he is referred to more often than any other character that lived before the novels are set. Rhaegar was extremely popular with the smallfolk and he was thought to be extremely beautiful; “Had any man ever been so beautiful?” is a question posed by Cersei Lannister, the wife of King Robert Baratheon (Martin 2005:513-514). Furthermore, Rhaegar was obviously a very gifted, smart and talented man. He was regarded as a highly competent warrior; Barristan Selmy, one of the greatest knights in the history of Westeros and a former Lord Commander of the Kingsguard describes Rhaegar as a “most puissant warrior” when addressing Rhaegar's sister Daenerys (Martin 2000:110). A remarkable feat considering the fact that he never desired to become a warrior:

As a young boy, the Prince of Dragonstone was bookish to a fault. He was reading so early that men said Queen Rhaella must have swallowed some books and a candle whilst he was in her womb. Rhaegar took no interest in the play of other children. The maesters were awed by his wits [. . .] Until one day Prince Rhaegar found something in his scrolls that changed him. No one knows what it might have been, only that the boy suddenly appeared early one morning in the
yard as the knights were donning their steel. He walked up to Ser Willem Darry, the master-at-arms, and said, I will require a sword and armor. It seems I must be a warrior. (Martin 2000:110-111)

It is difficult to speculate what Rhaegar might have found in his scrolls but it must surely be related to the prophecy of the prince that was promised, an issue that will be discussed in more detail later on.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that Jon is Lyanna's son is Ned's dream version of what transpires at the Tower of Joy. The rebellion is all but over, Rhaegar, his wife and his children, along with his father Aerys are all dead. Ned rides to the Tower of Joy along with his friend Howland Reed and five other men and upon arriving they find three of the Kingsguard present, “Yet these were no ordinary three” (Martin 424). The three men are Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning and Rhaegar's best friend, Ser Gerold Hightower, the White Bull, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard and Ser Oswald Whent. Ned asks them why they weren't at the Battle of the Trident with Rhaegar or in Kings Landing protecting Rhaegar's children as well as the Mad King himself, or escorting Rhaegar's siblings, Viserys and Daenerys to the continent of Essos, to which the three give elusive answers, simply stating that they “swore a vow” (Martin 1996:425). Thereafter a battle commences that only Ned and Howland Reed survive and the dream comes to an end with “A storm of rose petals blew across a blood-streaked sky, as blue as the eyes of death” and Ned making Lyanna an unknown promise on her death bed (Martin 1996:425). Martin gives some more information regarding the events that transpired at the Tower of Joy when Ned is in the Stark family tomb, next to a statue of Lyanna, talking to king Robert:

“I was with her when she died,” Ned reminded the king. “She wanted to come home, to rest beside Brandon and Father.” He could hear her still at times. Promise me, she had cried, in a room that smelled of blood and roses. Promise me, Ned. The fever had taken her strength and her voice had been faint as a whisper, but when he gave his word, the fear had gone out of his sister’s eyes. (Martin 1996:43)

This promise Ned makes is pivotal as it is obviously of great importance to his sister. Lyanna is the only female buried in the Crypts of Winterfell and thus it is conceivable that he is making said promise but it is doubtful. A far more likely possibility is that Ned
is referring to her child, and keeping it safe from Robert. That could certainly make the fear leave her eyes as Ned is a capable and honourable man. Lyanna could also be buried in the Crypts of Winterfell because she died as the queen of the Iron Throne. Furthermore, Ned talks of a room that smells of blood and roses. Rhaegar would hardly go through the trouble of acquiring her favorite, rather rare, flowers if he did not care for her. It is more likely that he brought her these flowers to have around her birth bed, especially if the pregnancy was going badly. The birth of a child would also explain the smell of blood, it cannot have been from the battle as it was fought outside the Tower. In addition, this short sentence: Eddard remembers “Lyanna in her bed of blood.” (Martin 1996:424) sounds an awful lot like childbirth. It is never explicitly stated how Lyanna died but had someone killed here it would not be a secret and Ned would in all likelihood have avenged her. Hence it is far more likely that she died from childbirth. The fact that three of the finest Kingsguard are at the Tower of Joy, guarding Lyanna, while the Targaryen dynasty is crumbling is telling. The Kingsguard's duty is to protect the king and his immediate family. There are only two living Targaryen children at this point, Viserys and Daenerys, so that is where the Kingsguard should be, only they are not and choose not to go to the Targaryen children even though they are well informed about current events. Surely they must have been protecting Rhaegar's heir, the current crown prince.

These glimpses we are shown of Lyanna and Ned's past must serve a purpose as this promise seems to haunt him. Ned is a man of honour. It is doubtful that he would cheat on his wife, albeit if they just got married under tragic circumstances. If Ned had sired a bastard he would sooner have had him fostered with some other Lord in secret, so as to not bring shame on his name and House, or he would have simply admitted everything. However, because of the promise he made, and the threat that Robert Baratheon would pose if he knew Jon to be Rhaegar's son, Eddard will not trust anyone else to take care of his sister's boy, and a potential heir to the kingdom.

More evidence regarding Jon's heritage is discernible in visions that appear to Daenerys Targaryen in the House of the Undying, the abode of a sept of warlocks. “Rubies flew like drops of blood from the chest of a dying prince, and he sank to his knees in the water and with his last breath murmured a woman’s name” (Martin 1999:706). There is no doubt that the man in the vision is Rhaegar and it is likely that
Martin didn't use Rhaegar's wife, Elia's name, on purpose and that Rhaegar died with Lyanna's name on his lips. Daenerys also has a vision of a blue flower growing “from a chink in a wall of ice”, filling the “air with sweetness” (Martin 1999:706). The only blue flower that is mentioned in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the blue winter rose and it is always associated with Lyanna Stark. Ned remarks that she always loved the smell of roses, as well as the fact that the crown that Rhaegar placed on Lyanna's head was made from blue winter roses (Martin 1996:631). Lyanna's statue in the Crypts of Winterfell has a garland of winter roses (Martin 1996:43). The wall of ice that the flower grows from must be the Wall itself and hence it can be assumed that the vision is of Jon, Lyanna's son, and it relays the fact that Jon himself is maturing, growing into the man, the hero, that he will become.

It is also noteworthy that Jon Snow resembles Arya Stark more than any other of the Stark children (Martin 1996:72), and Arya is said to have looked, and behaved, a lot like Lyanna (Martin 1996:221), it can therefore be assumed that Jon bears great resemblance to Lyanna, further strengthening the theory that she is his mother, leaving Rhaegar as the only possible father. It is also worth noting that the Targaryens are connected to fire, as the Starks are with ice. So if this is the true heritage of Jon Snow it gives the title, *A Song of Ice and Fire* a much deeper meaning.
The Prophecy
Campell discusses the transformation of the hero in great detail and many of those apply to Jon Snow. Jon's childhood is that of the “human hero”, a hero of seemingly low birth that rises to renown. If Jon is the son of Rhaegar and Lyanna, the origin of his story resembles that of King Sargon: “King Sargon of Agade was born of a lowly mother. His father was unknown [...] brought up to serve as a gardener [...] Thus he became, at last, king and emperor, renowned as the living god” (Campell 321). Jon's tale also resembles the “popular Hebrew legend of the birth of father Abraham supplies an example of the frankly supernatural [...] the event of the birth had been read by Nimrod in the stars [...] a man would be born in his day who would rise up against him” (Campell 323). This prophecy resembles a prophecy from A Song of Ice and Fire, that of the Prince that was Promised, or Azor Ahai. The prophecy states that when “the cold breath of darkness falls heavy on the world”, a warrior will rise, “and the darkness shall flee before him” (Martin 1999:148). The prophecy also states that the warrior will be of the “blood of the dragon”, a term used numerous times to describe Targaryens, which applies to Jon Snow if he is Rhaegar's son. Another clue as to the identity of Azor Ahai is given by the priestess Melisandre, stationed at the Wall at the time: “I pray for a glimpse of Azor Ahai, and R'hllor shows me only Snow” (Martin 2011:408), R'hllor being the god of fire. The capitalized letter “S” in “Snow” in this sentence is the strongest evidence there is for any character being Azor Ahai reborn, the hero of the story.

Furthermore, this kind of “human hero” often faces an exile, it is a common theme. The Wall can be considered a form of exile, albeit self-imposed, and “folk tales commonly support or supplant this theme of the exile with that of the despised one, or the handicapped: the abused younger son or daughter, the orphan, stepchild” (Campell 325-326). Even though Jon was not despised as such he always felt like an outsider to a certain degree and that is the reason for his exile on the Wall. “In sum: the child of destiny has to face a long period of obscurity” (Campell 326) is true in Jon's case as he has always been, and still is, in that obscurity.
Conclusion

Joseph Campell states that “there is no final system for the interpretation of myths, and there will never be any such thing”, it resembles water as it can “take all manner of shapes” (Campell 381). Despite the fact that the fantasy genre has been evolving for over sixty years since The Hero with a Thousand Faces was published, and the unique shape that Martin has created, Campell's theory can still be easily, and heavily, applied. That makes Campell's work truly remarkable.

What makes George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire unique is the sheer volume of characters and the unpredictability and scope of the story. It is truly an epic fantasy series. The fact that it is by no means certain who will be the real hero of the story, the one who will repel the Others and save humanity, is impressive as there are only two novels to come. Most myths and fairy tales have an obvious hero, for example, The Hobbit begins with Bilbo setting out on his journey and The Lord of the Rings with Frodo and Sam embarking on theirs and there is never any doubt regarding the identity of the protagonists, the heroes. In A Song of Ice and Fire, Jon Snow does appear to be the most likely candidate for the saviour of mankind as he fits very well into the pattern of the monomyth, especially if he is secretly a Targaryen. He has set out on a journey, crossed the magical threshold, received aid from protective figures, been thoroughly tested and tempted, and is currently set for some form of death and resurrection before beginning his return and fulfilling his destiny. Throughout his journey he has made mistakes and steadily grown as a person, as any hero needs to. Furthermore, the evidence supporting the claim that Jon is the son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark, and hence the rightful heir to the crown, is carefully hidden yet very compelling when gathered together. There is the fact that Rhaegar is extremely unlikely to be the kind of man to kidnap and rape a woman, and Eddard is an honourable man who is unlikely to have an extramarital affair. The events at the Tower of Joy are also pivotal; The Kingsguards' presence there cannot be otherwise explained and Eddard's promise to Lyanna has weighed on him ever since. If it turns out that Jon is the offspring of a Targaryen and a Stark he will epitomize both ice and fire and it is surely his song being heard. Only time, and the forthcoming novels The Winds of Winter and A Dream of Spring, will tell.
Works Cited


