

## Arrow: the greenarcher under the hero's journey perspective / 'Arrow': o arqueiro verde sob a perspectiva da jornada do herói

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### ABSTRACT

This work analyzes the narrative of the hero Green Arrow, focused on the series Arrow, shown on TV. To contemplate the general objective, it was necessary to research the history of Oliver Queen and his path to transformation into an archer. In addition, it seeks to explain notions such as the archetype and the hero's journey, as well as reflecting on the presupposed implications in transposing narratives between different media. Therefore, this research has as main theoretical bases Vogler (2006), Campbell (1995), Figueiredo and Diniz (2019), Jung (2000), Clüver (2006) and Franco and Takeguma (2019). It was found in this study that all twelve stages of the hero's journey listed by Christopher Vogler apply naturally to the Star City hero's plot, engendering his deep story marked by conflicts, crises, instabilities, losses, triumphs and redemption. However, these assertions do not end their possibilities of reading and interpreting against their emblematic and long journey.

**KEYWORDS:** Arrow; Green Archer; Hero's journey; Oliver Queen.

### RESUMO

O presente trabalho realiza a análise da narrativa do herói Arqueiro Verde, focado no seriado Arrow, exibido em TV. Para se contemplar o objetivo geral, fez-se necessário uma pesquisa sobre a história de Oliver Queen e seu caminho até a transformação em arqueiro. Além disso, busca-se explicar noções como arquétipo e jornada do herói, bem como refletir sobre as implicações pressupostas na transposição de narrativas entre mídias distintas. Para tanto, esta pesquisa tem como principais bases teóricas Vogler (2006), Campbell (1995), Figueiredo e Diniz (2019), Jung (2000), Clüver (2006) e Franco e Takeguma (2019). Constatou-se nesse estudo que todos os doze estágios da jornada do herói elencadas por Christopher Vogler se aplicam naturalmente à trama do herói de Star City, engendrando sua profunda história marcada por conflitos, crises, instabilidades, perdas, triunfos e redenções.

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*Porém, estas asseverações não findam suas possibilidades de leitura e interpretação diante de sua emblemática e longa jornada.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE:* Arrow; Arqueiro verde; Jornada do herói; Oliver Queen.

## 1 Initial considerations

The immensity of stories of legendary heroes is part of our everyday life. The hero, according to Campbell (1995), is the most universal of myths, constituting an essential archetype in the construction of our being<sup>1</sup>. In addition to comics, traditional support of great importance in the dissemination of the genre, we have cinema screens, books, television series etc. This factor is capable of justifying the plethora of academic texts that focus on the hero character as an object of study.

The contemporary world has in itself the hero as a brand in the face of media culture. From different angles we can analyze the life of a heroic character, either by researching his transposition from myth to mass culture (ECO, 1993), or by studying his role in the individual's psychic formation (CAMPBELL, 1995; JUNG, 2000); either investigating its transposition between different media (MEDEIROS, 2017), among many other perspectives. In addition to the large-scale entertainment that reaches a notable audience, William Irwin (2005, p. 9) indicates that “one of the most notable developments in pop culture today is the strong resurgence of the superhero as a cultural icon”. Universal, the archetype of the hero is updated according to the historical circumstances and the specifics of the media.

Regarding the close relationship between comics and cinema, Figueiredo and Diniz (2019, p. 36) point out that “comics are older than cinema: they appeared in the 1830s, with Rodolphe Töpffer. However, this media still faces resistance to being recognized as art. As a consequence, its critical and theoretical examination is relatively rare compared to that of cinema”. Furthermore, “the past few years have seen a considerable increase in films based on comic books” (FIGUEIREDO; DINIZ, 2019, p. 36-37). The saga of heroes is a strong and current example on movie screens and television series, contemplating this usual adaptation of comics to

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<sup>1</sup> According to Carl Jung (2000), archetypes are universal and recurring substrates of all individual and collective psychological life. Archetypes are not, for the Swiss thinker, specific contents of the mind, but potential models that structure the unconscious mind. They are essential images, which can be accessed and updated. Campbell attributes to the hero archetype a centrality in the formation of ego and in the process of shaping cultures that is not present in the reflections of Jung, who prefers to emphasize archetypes such as anima, animus, persona and shadow.

other media. The special effects from the language of films and series operate as a refreshing aesthetics of the first work, the comics. Figueiredo and Diniz (2019, p. 37) also add that "the influence of the comic book media is not limited to the adaptation of the plot, characters and dialogues, but also applies to appearance, as a result of the evolution of cinematographic techniques". Each type of media requires from us, readers and / or viewers, a specific and careful view in a probable analysis work, since we understand that every textual source, being verbal, non-verbal or hybrid, carries its particular properties of meanings. Thus, in addition to care to consider the specificities of each support, it is necessary to get rid of the prejudice that attributes a supposed aesthetic superiority to the text or source media. According to Claus Clüver,

in the study of transformations and intermediate adaptations, it is preferable to start from the target text and inquire about the reasons that led to the format acquired in the new media. Often, questions about fidelity to the source text and the adequacy of the transformation are not relevant, simply because the new version does not replace the original (CLÜVER, 2006, p. 17).

The cinematic aesthetics extended to television series, for example, allows for a psychological development of a character in a way that other media do not allow, precisely because this is a "serial", something that has more time than other productions. In this environment, there is also the configuration of a "media transposition", which represents "the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or its substrate into another media" (RAJEWSKY, 2005, p. 51, apud FIGUEIREDO; DINIZ, 2019, p. 38). Without a doubt, the adaptation for cinema screens and television series are among the best known forms of media transposition.

In this research, we propose an analysis of the heroic dawn of Oliver Queen or simply - the Green Arrow. We emphasize, therefore, that we will stick to the representation of the character in the TV series ARROW, which has the hero played by the Canadian actor Stephen Amell. The Arrow series was first shown in the United States in October 2012, developed by Greg Berlanti, Marc Guggenheim and Andrew Kreisberg. Today, the series has ended. In mid-2019, they produced the eighth and final season. The forecast for the full display is until January 2020.

Therefore, the idea in this work is not simply to historicize or characterize the life of a specific hero, in this case the Green Arrow. We want, as main objective, to apply the twelve steps of Christopher Vogler's Hero Journey to understand the heroic basis of Oliver Queen, dialoguing with his trajectory as we discuss it, in which we highlight investigations of the different media:

comic books and television series. “The stages of the Journey” comprise the work *The Writer's Journey: mythical structures for writers*, in which Vogler, based on Campbell (1995), points out and analyzes the structure that surrounds all the heroic dawn of these characters in order to understand the moments that engender its construction process. Among so many of Campbell's assumptions, we highlight a maxim that defers the dimension of the hero with regard to the completeness of his trajectory:

Whether the hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan. Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the deed to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained. (CAMPBELL, 1995, p. 22).

When contemplating the stages of this journey proposed by these authors, we will have a greater notion of what understands the nature of a hero strolling through issues such as trial, transformation and redemption. Furthermore, we will confirm the functionality of Vogler's theory applied systematically to the Green Arrow character from the comics to the television series, a guiding question of the present study.

## 2 Oliver Queen: the millionaire, the arrow, the hood and the vigilante

Every creature, heroic or not, engenders its personality from events that shape its essence. The millionaire Oliver Jonas Queen, unpretentious of such feats beyond the life of a spoiled son, was surprised too many times by episodes that transmuted his life, like another close hero, fellow millionaire Bruce Wayne, hidden in Batman's secret identity.

As Rosa and Takeguma explain: “dressed as a hero of the Crusades times, Robin Hood, the Green Arrow appeared in American children's books using arrows with various special functions, such as the glue arrow, the boxing glove arrow, the network arrow and other things like that” (2019, p. 128). Night habits, as well as the use of the hood and the desire to help and protect the neediest classes are other marks of Robin Hood's influence on the personality of the Green Arrow. Rosa and Takeguma further elucidate that “in 1970 he started to goatee, which made him more like Robin Hood, even in attitudes, now more aggressive, like those of the

legendary English archer” (2019, p. 130). Thus, increasingly the Arrow had become some kind of modern Robin Hood. Despite his status as a millionaire, which could distance him from the life of a vigilante in search of equality for all classes, especially the most needy and lacking security and social support, Oliver Queen demarcates yet another characteristic similar to that of heroes who fight for equity issues. When he sank after the sabotage of the Queen’s gambit yacht, Oliver, as the sole survivor of the vessel led by his father Robert Queen, learned on the dark island Lian Yu to fight for his own survival. The young Queen had learned on this distant island many of the values that the millionaire’s daily life could not teach him. The presence of natives in that place greatly affected his personality, since in those long five years in “hell”; Oliver learned to defend himself and to attack in a constant war for life. It is under this background that the first bow and arrow in his life appears, the most present icons in his long journey. Using the bow with mastery brought him a new life in which wealth was no longer needed.

The clashes in Lian Yu were countless. The island also iconizes the Arrow’s trajectory. Oliver’s physical and mental scars came at the expense of these five years. Despite believing in his death, speculation credited by his family, the unknown archer come back to his city alive and surprises everyone. The young millionaire now has new concerns about social justice and the danger that plagues Star City<sup>2</sup>. Behold, Oliver Queen, under dark robes, in a dark and hooded tone, decides to save his city by acting against crime. The green color, more vivid in comics, becomes darker and darker in the television series. The hood protects his identity, hides his new personality and at the same time reveals his new habits. For the Arrow, a man behind a mask is thus able to absorb the danger of his family and friends, since the vigilante becomes highly targeted by criminals and by the police.

Although his city condemns vigilantism, Oliver does not give up on heroic artifice. For many moments, the Arrow acts with the help of other vigilantes on nights of danger. After great achievements in the name of peace for the days and nights of Star City, the Arrow team gets support from the police and the city’s political leaders.

Thus, the arrows demarcate his life and trajectory in the plot of Arrow - a narrative that expresses the dawn of Oliver Queen from the common man, millionaire, to the intrusion of the bow and arrow and the hood on his way to become a vigilante hero.

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<sup>2</sup> The fictional city of Starling City is later called only Star City, a factor exposed in the series Arrow.

### 3. Arrow under the journey of Christopher Vogler

The story of Oliver Queen, of course, fits the model of analysis of the trajectory of heroes proposed by Christopher Vogler, especially in stages that comprise “THE STAGES OF THE JOURNEY”. To contemplate our research objective, we will draw a parallel between the stages of this hero's journey that apply to the heroic dawn of the archer. The narrative of the comics as well as the television series revolves around the adventures of the hero, a night watchman created by DC Comics.

In the first instance, Oliver Jonas Queen always appeared to be an ordinary person: young, flirtatious, son of billionaire Robert Queen and stigmatized by the stereotype of the “playboy” who loved to get ready at nightclub parties. His sense of humor, in the comics, is more effective than in the series, a notable eventuality in the translation of media. From this perspective, it is already possible to start the discussion at stage one, proposed in the work of Christopher Vogler - “The ordinary world”. In this context, the author paraphrases Joseph Campbell when reporting that the hero flirts with the supernatural wonders when leaving his world - the world represented by everyday life. This passage reminds us of the Arrow saga in the middle of the process of transforming into Oliver Queen's well-known alter ego. The conversion of the banal man into a hero figure among the key issues of his plot in the different media presentations.

The DC Universe comic book character was created by Mort Weisinger and George Papp with his first appearance in 1941. In 2012, he starred in a series produced by Greg Berlanti, Andrew Kreisberg and Marc Guggenheim. Oliver was shipwrecked on a hostile island, next to his father, however, under the circumstances; he was the only survivor who landed on Lian Yu, an island in the North China Sea. Since then, he has seen his life in the fictional city of Star City succumb to unpleasant surprises and the constant struggle for survival for five long years away from home in that new home. Thereafter, the bow and arrows became Oliver's inseparable companions, operating as a perennial record throughout the plot whether in the comics or on the TV series.

In confluence with Vogler's words, we can conceive that the existence of certain elements in a narrative is capable of engendering meanings proposed right there before the viewers enter the work, be it a book or film. Thus, the author stresses that “the title, the cover of the book, the advertising and advertisements, the posters and the trailers, and so on. The story is reduced to a

few symbols and metaphors that begin to lead the audience towards the spirit of the journey” (VOGLER, 2006, p. 93).

In the archer, there is a strong metaphORIZATION of his physical scars correlated to the stigmas of his life, such as physical pain, emptiness and lack - factors also remembered by Vogler as aspects concerning the hero's journey:

A hero's injuries may not be visible [...]. But the wound helps to give the hero a sense of personal history and realism, as we all bear scars from past humiliations, rejections, disappointments, abandonments and failure. Many stories have as their theme the journey that is taken with the purpose of healing a wound and restoring the missing piece in a broken psyche (VOGLER, 2006, p. 103).

It is on the island that, despite the suffering that had caused him so many scars, Oliver Queen finds his redemption. Upon returning to the “ordinary world”, his city (where everyone imagined him dead), the character finds a context in which the new skills can be worked on to bring justice to the daily life of *Star City*, especially by valuing the less favored classes.

The five years far from home have done Oliver Queen someone who valued everything he had and what he no longer has. From there the character of a new man was formed, the current Arrow - a hero masked by night habits, dark robes, without paranormal powers and with a partially hidden identity. Always wielding a bow and several arrows, the character is constantly being chased by the police under the guise of a vigilante - an alleged criminal, but who actually proceeds for justice and seeks the salvation of the city even if it costs him blood.

Ahead, the second step that Vogler will call “The call to adventure” presents itself as another stage of the hero's journey applicable to the Arrow saga, also in dialogue with Joseph Campbell. At this stage, there is a break from the routine in which the hero lives. It occurs when an unexpected, unusual event takes you out of your comfort zone. The sinking of a presumably sabotaged ship, the death of his father under his eyes and the battle for survival on the island dubbed hell work as a misfortune for Oliver Queen. This notion of a factor that establishes a state of shock in the narrative, that is, this unexpected event has the importance of demarcating the beginning of the story, as Vogler well recalls: “it takes some event to start the engine, start the story, once the work of presenting the main character is finished” (VOGLER, 2006, p. 108). That's how we met Oliver Queen more accurately under the same environment both in comics and on television.



Despite the constant night struggles in search of justice and better days for his city, the Arrow has a feeling of disgust at his craft. Amid so many villains, the character develops an abomination to his activity as a vigilante and often starts to arrest enemies and hand them over to the police. Without the thirst for blood and death, the archer sometimes chooses to stay in his family stronghold in order not to endanger the lives of those around him. Such repulsion at the calls for heroic missions corroborates the ideas of the third stage of Vogler's hero's journey, which is called "Refusal of the Call". In this scenario, the hero tries not to get involved and chooses to stay out of the events that surround him daily. Vogler (2006, p. 116) adds: "even the hero of the most heroic films, sometimes hesitates, expresses reluctance or simply refuses to be called".

A prisoner from the island where Oliver sinks, together with his daughter, guides the young man towards his life as an archer. Chinese Yao Fei, together with Shado, after 'unpleasant encounters, receive Oliver Queen and teach him how to handle the bow and arrow. The father and daughter duo operate as mentors to the archer. Therefore, there is in the heroic plot of Arrow a clear relationship between hero and mentor, like Yao Fei and Shado, which converges in different media representations. The master represents a lot to the hero on his journey and this is the essence of the fourth step called "The hero finds a mentor".

Then, the hero has a more direct relationship with his task. It's time to get to know the countryside, something that may be unknown or unexpected. In Vogler's own words, it is at this moment when "the hero fully commits himself to the adventure" (2006, p. 132). Oliver Queen had crossed the border of the world in which he was used to living with the world that really expected his heroic condition when he came across his city, after the return of Lian Yu Island, a Star City surrounded by crimes and the presence of "meta-humans" in the position of villains. It is in this timing that the fifth step of the journey is configured - "Crossing the threshold".

In the nocturnal habitat of the Arrow, on the threshold of each fight, you naturally have possibilities of partnerships to fight the crime that plagues *Star City*. It is notorious that Oliver always preferred to act alone even to protect those who accompany him. However, just like in the comics and similar to what happens with other heroes, partnerships arrive and establish themselves there in that universe. The term Arrowverso is even created. Thus, some faithful partners of the archer in their journey were and still are John Diggle (Spartan), Rene Ramirez (Wild dog), Dinah Drake (Black canary), Roy Harper (Arsenal), Quentin and Laurel Lance, among others. The archer knows that he can always count on these allies under any circumstances. As a casual narrative procedure, the directors of the series decided to rearrange the story of some



characters involved in Oliver's plot, about concerning their trajectory from the days as a castaway, until their arrival in their city. These adaptations that result from the transmutation of media enabled in the television series a greater development of parallel occurrences that cross the plot of the central character, in addition to operating in the construction of the work's meanings.

Between comings and goings, some partners of the archer at other times were villains, like Slade Wilson, one of his squires in the work of survival and escape from the hostile island. Although the "exterminator" taught Oliver fighting techniques, Slade was also the killer of his mother, Moira Queen. These trials that the hero goes through, strengthen his mission, discern what is healthy and profitable and contemplate the sixth stage of the journey - "Tests, Allies, Enemies".

The existential crisis is a process that plagues the lives of almost all superheroes. There is time to rethink about your condition, your missions, what you left behind, or even what will come. It remains, at an opportune moment in the singular trajectory of each one, the question of whether it is worthwhile or not to live life in that style. Oliver Queen, fatally, went through this critical phase denoted in the two media. In the series, noting that he had lost many friends, his father, his mother and feeling the bloodshed running down his flaming arrows, the archer then decides to keep his quiver and just watch the crimes that occurred in Star City, without such practicalities intervention. However, in the meantime, the challenges and dangers facing the city are increasing more and more and the need for a superhero arises to combat the danger that emanates on the streets. The public, in turn, is already experiencing the imminent arrival of a large-scale evil force, which will need heroic action to be stopped. It is on this occasion that Oliver Queen resurfaces, stronger than before, psychologically and physically. The character of stepping back in this step so that the hero returns to act more vigorously is in accordance with the words of Vogler in the seventh stage - "Approach". In this scenario, according to Vogler, "it is time for the final preparations for the central ordeal of the adventure" (2006, p.146). It is the moment of culmination, of the assertion of his heroism; however, the ritual can overcome an identity crisis on the part of the hero before the assertion period.

In line with Joseph Campbell's words, Christopher Vogler calls the eighth stage of the hero's journey "The ordeal". Now it's time to wait for the biggest opponent, the biggest villain. Death can be an obstacle for the hero; however, this can be the biggest key to the trial itself - the fact of being reborn after succumbing to some immeasurable evil. According to Vogler, many

times "heroes magically survive this death and are reborn - literally or symbolically - to reap the consequences of having defeated death" (2006, p. 157). It is the opportunity for heroic consecration. In Arrow, Oliver Queen is faced with the ghost of death after dueling the legendary *Ra's al Ghul*<sup>3</sup>. After a strong sword stroke, piercing his abdominal region, the archer plummets down from a mountain and is then again given up for dead. The ordeal comes after his slow recovery, but which had earned him a rematch a few days later with the villain. On that occasion, the archer returns the sword stroke, this time fatal.

The distance from the events that Oliver Queen adopts so that even his secret identity is not fully revealed will give him more support before society and puts him, over the days, as mayor of the city, facts shown in the series Arrow. The archer now fights on two fronts in Star City: by day, he is the mayor and tries to give the population a better living condition; at night, he fights crime directly with his bow and arrow and the help of other guards, although he remains cautious in the face of these "calls". This factor is in dialogue with the "Reward" stage, the ninth stage of the journey, one that brings an advance of knowledge, new skills, and a taste of pleasure to the hero, agents who must symbolize a high step in his trajectory.

After such trials in heroic life, the archer decides to lead a more homely life, remaining on the margins of the criminal events around him. The new stance, adopted as a protection mechanism mainly for his family, results in the almost abandonment of the headquarters of his team, a secret place where the combat clothes, armor, arrows and a technology center<sup>4</sup> for dynamic assistance in missions are kept. It is as if Oliver felt the need to return home after endless fighting. There is yet another moment for reflection. One of the main reasons for such confinement is the fact that she is taking care of her motherless son William. This whole process conjures up the tenth stage of the hero's journey - "The road back", a time of strong decisions, the limbo between a personal goal or something of a greater collective good.

The eleventh and penultimate stage is perhaps the highest point of all the steps that engender the hero's narrative. This is the "Resurrection". In the seventh season of the Arrow series, Oliver Queen makes a deal with the Star City police handing over his secret identity. The pact was intended to stop Ricardo Diaz, the "Dragon", one of his greatest and most relentless

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<sup>3</sup>Ra's al Ghul is one of DC Comics' biggest villains. The character leads the League of Assassins and has appearances in the Batman narratives and also in the series Arrow. Its name, in Arabic, means "demon's head"

<sup>4</sup>The Arrow series features a lot of technology equipment with relevant roles in the plot that appear as factors appropriate to the narrative displayed on television media, such as a monitoring center to investigate the whereabouts of the villains. In this new universe, interconnected by globalization, there is the constancy of hackers executing virtual crimes.

enemies. Partly, the archer and his team defeat Diaz, however, Oliver surrenders to the police and after the trial is arrested and sent to the maximum-security prison Slabside. Oliver would live hellish days in that place. Later, when serving his sentence, he leaves prison and returns to Star City. On the other hand, Ricardo Diaz escapes and still commands incessant crimes everywhere. Oliver's resurrection goes through Diaz's maximum detention. The villain even dies in flames mysteriously in the same Slabside. It was what everyone on his team wanted since the team had suffered from Oliver's stay in jail. The archer and his allies transform themselves before this panorama as if everyone is going through a final battle. For Vogler, this new ordeal is essential from the perspective of the audience, since it needs to “experience another moment of death and rebirth” (2006, p. 195). The scourge of death, it is worth mentioning, is based on the trajectory of the character in both media forms.

In the position of a consolidated hero who now acts with the consent and partnership of the Star City police, the archer abandons the mask, his identity is already known to the people of the city who recognize his power and benefits in the face of almost criminality. Unanimously. Pollard, the current mayor of the city, gives full support to Oliver Queen. The archer, in his new life, comes to heal his city and prophesy his biggest motto - “my mission is to save this city” - catchphrase present in the character's speech in the series and in the comics. His return brings with him his success, his achievements, a breath of hope. In this opportunity, we have the representation of the hero's last journey in the narrative of Arrow - “The return with the elixir”. No one but the Green Arrow can finally cure the city of Star City of all ills.

#### 4 Final considerations

The study under the hero archetype helped us to uncover more meanings about Oliver Queen's universe, the Green Arrow. There is, in fact, an adequacy in the hero's narrative by unleashing it in line with Christopher Vogler's theory, which is already influenced by the thoughts of theorist Joseph Campbell. Undoubtedly, each stage of the journey guides us like a map to capture how heroic narratives unfold, regardless of their media configuration.

We emphasize that we stick to the character represented on TV, more precisely on the television series Arrow. Such discernment was necessary, since the transition from comic support to the television series undoubtedly goes through changes and adjustments as listed by its

producers and directors. However, we emphasize that Oliver Queen's biggest stigmas present themselves solidly in each genre. The cinematic aesthetics extended to the series allows a psychological development of a character in a way that other supports do not allow, precisely because it is a "serial", something that has a longer time than other productions. A form of adaptation was also configured in this scope, which we agreed to call it media transposition (CLÜVER, 2006).

In addition, even reaching the end, the heroic dawn of Oliver Queen continues in full swing in the television series Arrow and the hero faces each challenge leaving marks with his arrows. The trail of blood, incessant struggles, incarceration, involvement with women (heroines and non-heroines), the arrival of children, existential crises and a lot of pain - the physical pain that has been occurring since the years on the island once again appear in his narrative: to the pain of losing parents, best friend and some vigilant partners, all before your eyes. This is the Arrow's trajectory on both supports (comics and television): the darkness metaphorized by the color of his uniform - the green so present on the island and which marks a latent reference to the legendary Robin Hood, in addition to the hood that hides the identity of a new man full of scars that symbolize his personality.

Finally, the Arrow narrative is one of many journeys of heroes and mythical creatures that are open to dialogue with the ideas developed by Christopher Vogler from almost all angles, since his work helps us to systematically dismember the stages that structure the narratives of these genres without ending, however, the interpretative possibilities of each character's singular trajectory.

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