

“I DON’T WANT HER TO MISS A THING”. THE PUNISHMENT INFLICTED TO LAMIA AND ELLARIA SAND (*GAME OF THRONES*)¹

SANDRA MUÑOZ-MARTÍNEZ
UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA
SANDRA.MUNOZ@UB.EDU
[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0002-0546-5224](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0546-5224)

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyse two characters who suffered the punishment of not being allowed to close their eyes so as to retain in their retinas the image of the loss of their children: Lamia and Ellaria Sand. The first one, Lamia, is a Greek mythological or folklore character punished by Hera for having an affair with her husband, Zeus. The second one is Ellaria Sand, from the series *Game of Thrones* (seventh season, third episode, titled “The Queen’s Justice”), who was robbed of her daughter Tyene by Cersei Lannister in King’s Landing. In this paper, the author will also point out the similarities

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and differences between the two scenarios. For this purpose, she will consider the characters' antecedents and evolution after being punished with the impossibility of closing their eyes.

Keywords: Lamia, Ellaria, Cersei, punishment, eyes.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS AND THE PUNISHMENT

This first part is devoted to introducing the main characters of these two episodes in which the victims are punished with the impossibility of stopping contemplating the image of their dead offspring. Additionally, some other pieces of information will be commented on to understand the background of the four female characters who play the lead in the two stories of revenge.

Before getting down to details focused on Lamia, with whom Zeus fell in love and had children (the reason why Hera planned her revenge)², this author would like to make a few brief notes about other creatures of Greek folklore with similar characteristics to her. There were, indeed, other beings in Greek behaviour whose primary purpose was to devour children. One of them was Mormo or Mormolykiae, the Queen of the Lestrigones (according to Sch. Theoc. 15.40), who lost her children and then became a hybrid monster³. Another similar creature was Gelo, a girl from Lesbos who died prematurely (unable to become a mother) and then, jealous of other mothers, devoted her time to kill their children (Sch. Theoc. 15-40; Zen. 3.3; she also

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² An interesting analysis of the influence of women on revenge culture in ancient Greek literary sources (especially tragedy) is McHardy 2004: 108-112.

³ More information about Mormo can be found in Pellizer 1982: 151; Iles-Johnston 1999: 28, 164, 168-169, 173-183; Camps Gaset 2000-2001: 131; Iles-Johnston 2001: 361-381; Patera 2014: 106-144; Ogden 2013b: 91; González-Rivas Fernández 2018: 26.

appears in Sappho's Fr.178)⁴. A not-so-known Greek child-devouring creature is Carco, sometimes assimilated to Lamia (Hsch. s. v. *Karkō*)⁵. On the subject of Empousa, occasionally understood too as a sort of Lamia, it is known that she attacked mothers and children. However, it is unclear whether she killed them or just scared them⁶. The last creatures of this catalogue are the Striges, a sort of bird of prey that snatched babies away to drink their blood (Ov. *Fast.* 6.131-168)⁷.

The reason why the author of this article considers it appropriate to include this catalogue of creatures in this introduction is the fact that there is an element that becomes substantial to understand the situation not only of Lamia and the other Greek creatures but also of the two protagonists women of the scene of the HBO episode of *Game of Thrones* that is going to be analysed: they have all orchestrated the death of other mother's children, and many of them have as their primary objective to avenge the death of their own offspring, either by punishing guilty (Ellaria Sand) or innocent women (creatures of Greek folklore). With these remarks made, one can proceed to introduce Ellaria Sand.

Ellaria Sand is the bastard daughter of Harnen Uller, an important individual in Dorne. Ellaria is the lover of the Prince of Dorne, Oberyn Martell. She and Oberyn begot four (bastard) daughters, also known as the "Sand Snakes". Ellaria Sand and her daughters are characterised by being furious and warrior women.

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4 For further details concerning Gelo, read Pellizer 1982: 153-154; West 1991; Iles-Johnston 1999: 22, 28, 73, 164-183, 193, 215, 224-226, 236; Camps Gaset 2000-2001: 130-131; Iles Johnston 2001: 361-383; Patera 2014: 145-248; Björklund 2017: 7-8, 23, 27-28, 32-35, 46-47, 50-51, 54-56; González-Rivas Fernández 2018: 26.

5 See Pellizer 1982: 152-153; Ogden 2013b: 91 nt.114.

6 Check Pellizer 1982: 151-152, Camps Gaset 2000-2001: 130, and Patera 2014: 249-290.

7 For more information about the child-devouring birds, see Iles-Johnston 1999: 167-168, 179-180; Camps Gaset 2000-2001: 131; Iles Johnston 2001: 374-375; Ahn & Guzmán Guerra 2013; Patera 2014: 151-159.

Before getting to the point, this author would like to emphasise that, even though Ellaria Sand is a character already mentioned in the books of George R. R. Martin, she has based this study on the Ellaria Sand of the *Game of Thrones* series. The author of this study has preferred to focus on the series because this episode of the punishment is only recorded there. Remember that George R. R. Martin has not finished the last volumes of the saga yet, so no detail is still known about the end of Ellaria Sand and her daughter in the books⁸. For more information about women in the *Game of Thrones* saga, read Gjelsvik, Schubart 2016 and Rohr, Benz 2020.

On the subject of this sort of punishment, that is, the impossibility of closing the eyes or sleeping, some points must be underlined. First of all, this is not the most usual eye-related punishment in the Greek tradition. In fact, in Greek literature sources, one can distinguish some “opposite” punishment cases: blinding. See, for instance, that in Euripides’ *Troades*, Hecuba and the Trojan woman kill the sons of Polymestor in front of him, and immediately they remove Polymestor’s eyes (Eur. *Hec.* vv.1035-1106) when they find out that he has killed Polydorus, Hecuba’s son, who was his host. Nevertheless, the most paradigmatic case of chastisement by blindness (in this case, self-imposed) in the Greek sources is Oedipus. In the play, when Oedipus realises that he had killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta (who, discovering the actual facts, hanged herself in the bed-chamber), he took the gold pins of her mother’s dress and gouged out his own eyes in despair (S. *OT* vv.1233-1296). Then, already blind, he prepared to go into exile. For further details concerning Oedipus’ self-blinding and its sense in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* (among other related themes), the author of this article recommends Sissa

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8 As a matter of fact, according to the books, before the episode of the death of Myrcella Baratheon, Ellaria Sand urges against a war with the Lannisters, because she is worried the cycle of revenge will go on until even her daughters were consumed by it. Her daughters, however, show their determination to ruin the house of Lannister.

2006 (especially p.40) and Silva 2018, apart from Dawe's notes in his revised edition (Dawe 2006: 183)⁹.

Secondly, in Greek literature, one can find another example of a character who is not allowed to close his eyes by command of a deity: the myth of Hypnos and Endymion. In this particular case, Athenaeus explained that the poet Licymnius of Chios wrote that Hypnos, god of sleep, blind by the beauty of Endymion, caused him to sleep with his eyes opened, so he could fully admire his face (Ath. 13.17). Despite the similarity of the two cases (Lamia/Ellaria and Endymion), notice that the intention of the characters that cause the impossibility of closing their eyes is quite different. Whereas Hera and Cersei want their victims to suffer, Hypnos simply wants to detailly admire the face of his beloved one (without causing any harm).

Last but not least, some Greek *defixiones* bear witness to individuals who desire that their enemies or beloved ones will not sleep to succumb to their wishes. See, for instance, Supp. Mag.2, 195.237¹⁰ and CIJP, 1504.8683¹¹. Therefore, the punishment related to blindness was deeply rooted in Greek culture, both as physical and psychological punitive measures. For other sorts of curses in the ancient cultures, read Gager 1992.

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BEFORE THE PUNISHMENT

Little is known about Lamia before her affair with the son of Cronos. Some Greek sources claim that she was a Libyan princess, the daughter of

⁹ There are lots of remarkable works focused on this topic. However, considering that this is not the main theme in this article, this author has preferred to include only a few recent publications so that the person interested in that theme could find a complete list of bibliographical material.

¹⁰ Inscription checked via https://heurst.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/html/heurst/viewers/record/renderRecordData.php?db=The_dema&recID=46194 (consulted: 15/3/2022).

¹¹ Reference retrieved from https://heurst.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/html/heurst/viewers/record/renderRecordData.php?db=The_dema&recID=47520 (accessed: 15/3/2022).

Belos. For further details focused on the history of Lamia, cf. LIMC VI.1 s. v. Lamia; Ogden 2013a: 98. For some information concerning the (possible) Semitic origin of Lamia, read West 1991: 361-368; Burkert 1992: 82-87.

The history of Ellaria Sand before she gets punished by Cersei Lannister is well developed in the HBO series. She is presented as a brave and vengeful woman who lost her beloved partner, Oberyn Martell, during a duel with The Mountain (fourth season, eighth episode, titled “The Mountain and the Viper”). After this episode, her primary mission in the series becomes to destroy the house of the Lannister; in fact, she kills Oberyn’s own family in the process of (trying to) annihilate the Lannisters. Her most remarkable blow against the house of Lannister is when she kills Myrcella Baratheon, the only daughter of Cersei and Jaime Lannister (fifth season, tenth episode, titled “Mother’s Mercy”). Ellaria bids farewell to Myrcella with a poisoned kiss. Consequently, Myrcella dies on the ship headed for King’s Landing and in her father’s arms.

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THE PUNISHMENT OF LAMIA AND ELLARIA SAND

Hera, full of fierce, decided to punish her husband’s lover (as usually). On this particular occasion, she thought of making an example of Lamia. Hera orchestrated the death of the children of Lamia (and Zeus). Not satisfied with this, she also punished Lamia with the impossibility of sleeping so that she would never rest, and thus she would always have the image of her dead children on her retinas. As a sort of favour, Zeus brought Lamia the ability to remove her eyes when she wished. This version of the myth can be found in Sch. Ar. *Pax* 758b-d; one can read other versions of this episode in Hor. *Ars* 1.340¹².

12 On Lamia’s eyes in ancient sources, read D. S. 20.41; Plut. *De curios.* 515d-516a. For further information about Lamia, cf. Pellizer 1982: 154-158; West 1991: 361-368; Iles-Johnston 1999: 161-199; Iles-Johnston 1999: 173-183; Iles-Johnston 2001: 361-387; Ogden

On the other hand, the scenario of the moment of the punishment of Ellaria Sand has several revengeful details orchestrated by Cersei Lannister that can be pointed out. Before being captured by Cersei's allies, Ellaria and Tyene Sand were locked in a cell in the Red Keep. Cersei Lannister addresses her prisoners, who are muzzled and enchained face each other. She first brings up the moment when the Mountain killed Oberyn Martell, and she rejoices with the description of the scene. Then, Cersei stresses that Ellaria killed her only daughter, the one whom she herself had fed at her breast, and then she asks Ellaria why she took her only daughter from her. Before this rebuke, Cersei faces Tyene, describes how beautiful she is, and suggests that she seems to be Ellaria's favourite daughter. After this, Cersei says to Ellaria, "We all make our choices. You chose to murder my daughter. You must have felt powerful after you made that choice. Do you feel powerful now?".

Cersei continues and says she does not sleep well because she stares at the canopy and imagines ways of killing her enemies, specially Ellaria Sand, the murder of her beloved daughter Myrcella. She first -goes on- thought about having the Mountain crush Ellaria's skull (as Oberyn), but then she considered that the scene would be more appropriate if the crushed skull were Tyene's one. Suddenly Cersei says, "no, it's just not right", and rapidly kisses Ellaria's daughter. Immediately Ellaria and Tyene realise that Cersei had poisoned her lips with the same venom used by Ellaria to kill Myrcella.

The Queen then addresses Ellaria and claims that her daughter will die there in the same cell, and she will be there watching as she does since she will be imprisoned for the rest of her life. Cersei also explains to Ellaria that they will force food down her throat if she refuses to eat. Cersei wants Ellaria to live to watch her daughter rot and collapse to bones and dust, "all the while contemplating the

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2002: 65-66; Ogden 2013a: 97-108; Ogden 2013b: 86-97. The most detailed description of Lamia is Patera 2014: 1-105.

decisions you've made". Cersei prepares to leave the cell, having her prisoners enchained and bounded, but, before walking out the door, she orders the Mountain: "Make sure the guards change the torches every few hours: I don't want her to miss a thing".

In both episodes (Lamia-Hera and Ellaria-Cersei), chastisement is conceived as an act of revenge. Consequently, in these two episodes, it seems impossible to separate "retributive punishment" (understood as an act of righteous law) and "revenge" (mindless, lust for blood, unjustifiable)¹³.

AFTER THE PUNISHMENT

As a result of being punished by Hera with the murder of her children and her lack of sleep, Lamia became a monster who killed the infants because she was jealous of the other mothers with children. In the Hellenistic folklore, she became a sort of children's bogey. In fact, Lamia is the most important child-devouring creature in ancient Greek folklore and the one that has had the most significant influence in the subsequent tradition¹⁴.

After the scene of Ellaria Sand and Tyene enchained, bounded and trying insistently (and vainly) to reach each other when Queen Cersei poisoned the daughter with a kiss, the HBO series offers no more information about the destiny of Ellaria and Tyene. We suppose that Tyene died sometime after receiving the poisoned kiss (since the deadly effect is unavoidable, as Qyburn explained to Cersei in

13 For the relationship between revenge and punishment, read Zaibert 2006. It would also be significant the reading Whitchurch 2022 (still unpublished).

14 On the reception of Lamia in other cultures, cf. Ahn & Guzmán Guerra 2013; Patera 2014: 1-105; González-Rivas Fernández 2018. For the figure of Lamia as a child-killer creature in Greek folklore, also read Iles-Johnston 2001: 361-387; Ogden 2002: 65-66; Ogden 2013a: 97-108; Ogden 2013b: 86-92.

the cell), and her mother saw it. On Ellaria's end, most probably her dungeon was destroyed during Daenerys Targaryen's conquest of King's Landing (eighth season, fifth episode, titled "The Bells"). She would have died as Cersei, buried by tons of debris that a little before was the (apparently) impossible-to-collapse Red Keep in King's Landing.

COMPARISON OF LAMIA AND ELLARIA SAND

As one can notice, there are numerous similarities in the characters of Lamia and Ellaria Sand. First of all, both are mothers and had to witness their offspring's death. Secondly, both are punished by a female character who possesses greater power (Hera and Cersei, respectively). Besides, their punishment comprises not only witnessing the death of their children but also the impossibility to stop watching the image of their offspring dead or rotting. Another similarity is that the key element in the psychological torture they are subjected to is their eyes.

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Even though the episode of the punishment of Lamia and Ellaria Sand are substantially parallel, there are some differences between their history which are essential for understanding their unfortunate outcome. Firstly, notice that Lamia caused no harm to Hera's children, whereas Ellaria Sand actually killed Cersei's daughter (which is why she got punished).

In addition, note that there are also differences in the woman who orchestrated the punishment. On the one hand, Hera is a furious and vengeful wife (the goddess of marriage, indeed) who has been (constantly) cheated by her husband. On the other hand, Cersei is a mother obsessed with avenging the death of her offspring. Consequently, the reasons why they both punished their victims are distinct. Hera cannot punish her husband (who rules as the king of the gods) for having affairs with other women, so she unleashes her rage against her husband's lovers; consider, for instance, the world-known myths of

Leto, Semele, or Kallisto. A different case would be the myth of Heracles, for, in that particular case, Hera tried to ruin the life of the son of Zeus and Alcmena directly. Cersei, though, tries to annihilate every one of her enemies that stand in her way, especially those who have assassinated her children. In other words, Hera executes her revenge as a betrayed wife. In contrast, Cersei does it as a mother from whom all her children have been taken away, and now she has as a prisoner one of the individuals responsible for those acts.

Another significant difference between Lamia and Ellaria Sand's situation after being punished is the presence or absence of relief. As mentioned above, Zeus, taking pity on Lamia, gives her the ability to remove her own eyes from the sockets so that she can rest. Cersei, however, makes sure that Ellaria's pain never stops. In fact, Cersei equals the punishment she received from Ellaria (the death of a daughter) but with an added aggravating factor: she wants her prisoner to live to see her daughter die and decompose before her eyes so that Ellaria had no relief (but, on the contrary, lifelong suffering).

The last difference the author of this article wants to point out has been previously announced: the character's ends. Note that, after being punished, Lamia transforms into a terrifying creature that devours the children of other mothers whom she envies for still having their offspring alive. As one can observe, Lamia turns into a monster who inflicts on innocent mothers the same chastisement (only in terms of the death of their children, not the impossibility of closing their eyes) that she once received. On the contrary, there is no news on Ellaria's fate after Cersei imposes her punishment. This silence can be interpreted in two ways: either the writers of the series left the outcome of Ellaria Sand unfinished (as, for instance, the outcome of Daario Naharis in Meereen, whose last appearance is in the sixth season), or they wanted to convey that the punishment imposed on Ellaria by Queen Cersei was so severe that it meant the character's total

annihilation. It seems more logical to think that this second option is the most accurate and that Ellaria Sand would simply die in her cell when the Red Keep collapses.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the extraordinary popularity of the books and (most importantly for this study) of the HBO series, as one can imagine, the congresses, monographs and articles in journals focused on the world of *Game of Thrones* began to proliferate. Some of those new studies dwell on the way in which classical references were inserted into the saga¹⁵. One of the most important congresses focused on how Humanities are integrated into *Game of Thrones* was held in May 2019 in Seville [Lozano, Álvarez-Ossorio, Moreno, Muñiz, Rosillo (orgs.) 2019]. Some participants discussed the topic of classical sources or reminiscences in the HBO series¹⁶.

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15 Consider, for instance, Costa 2016 (differences between Agamemnon' and Stannis Baratheon's dilemma), Attali 2017 (human sacrifice and animalisation in Greek tradition and the HBO TV series), Clasby 2017 (old and new gods in *Game of Thrones* and the Roman world), Ruiter 2017 (similarities between Hadrian's Wall and the Wall of *Game of Thrones*, focused on the image of the "savage"), Fernández Garrido 2019 (reminiscences of Greek mythology in the HBO series), and Prince 2019 (parallelisms between Cersei Lannister and Agrippina the Younger).

16 Note, for instance, Pierini 2019 (the topic of the Girl on Fire in Daenerys Targaryen and Bronze Age Aegean Scripts), Moreno Marín 2019 (parallelisms between Valyria versus Ghiscar and Rome versus Carthago), Pitta 2019 (the 'Littlefinger' figure in Roman historiography), Autin 2019 (comparison between the Year of the Four Emperors and the War of the Five Kings), Álvarez Pérez-Sostoa 2019 (punishments in Greek, Roman and George R. R. Martin's worlds), Attali 2019 (classical discourse on religion and superstition in the *Game of Thrones* saga), González Muñoz 2019 (reminiscences of the death of Julius Caesar's death in the death of John Snow), Luaidi 2019 (classical tactical procedures distinguishable in the battle of the bastards), Dedieu 2019 (echoes of Greek tragedy in the episode of the Red Wedding), and Molina Zorrilla 2019 (Eddard Stark's anagnorisis and Greek tragedy).

Appropriate account should be taken of the fact that Daniel Benioff, one of the scriptwriters of the series *Game of Thrones*, was also the scriptwriter of the film *Troy* (2004), and during that period he would have assimilated some structuring devices from Greek epic (and mythology)¹⁷. Therefore, the basis script of the television show would have been intentionally or non-intentionally contaminated by the topics of classical mythology. Nevertheless, despite the apparent references to and influence of the classical tradition throughout the HBO series, it would be possible that the scriptwriters created the scene of Queen Cersei's punishment of Ellaria Sand with no thought of the myth of Lamia in their minds. This theory holds up if one considers how terrible the Lannister Queen's chastisements are (both in the books and in the HBO TV series).

On the one hand, the books bear witness to the following deaths or acts of revenge orchestrated by Cersei Lannister: Robert Baratheon's accident and subsequent death (in the book *A Game of Thrones*) as a consequence of excessive alcohol consumption; the imprisonment of Eddard Stark (also in *A Game of Thrones*), who will be executed by order of King Joffrey; Tyrion Lannister's fall from grace after the death of Joffrey (in *A Storm of Swords*); and the interrogation of Margaery Tyrell accused of adultery and treason by the Faith (in *A Feast of Crows*).

On the other hand, in the HBO series *Game of Thrones*, Cersei Lannister appears to be responsible for the following deaths, some of them also witnessed in the books: attempt to assassination of Bran Stark after Jaimie Lannister defenestrated him (first season, second episode); Sansa Stark's direwolf Lady sacrifice (first season, second episode); Robert Baratheon's hunting accident (first season, seventh episode); false accusation against Tyrion Lannister for the assassination of King Joffrey (fourth season, second to tenth episodes);

17 An interesting paper on the intertextuality between Greek and Latin epic and George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (focused, on the one hand, on the story of Nisus and Euryalus, and, on the other hand, on the episode of Renly Baratheon and Loras Tyrell), read Haimson Lushkov 2017.

accusations against Loras and Margaery Tyrell and subsequent imprisonment by the Sparrows (fifth season, fourth and sixth episodes); the death of the High Sparrow, the bulk of Tyrell family and most of the Faith Militants by destroying the Sept of Baelor with wildfire (sixth season, tenth episode); having lost her beloved Margaery, King Tommen commits suicide and Cersei crowns herself Queen of the Seven Kingdoms (also sixth season, tenth episode); torture of Septa Unella by the Mountain, who had interrogated before Cersei as a prisoner of the Faith Militant (also sixth season, tenth episode); and the beheading of Missandei in front of Daenerys Targaryen's army (eighth season, fourth episode). From this last list, it can be concluded how important Cersei's facet as a ruler and mother with revenge anguish is for the economy of narratives and the evolution of the character.

In this particular case, the revenge, as mentioned above, is equivalent to repaying the punishment that the other person (Ellaria Sand) had once executed against Queen Cersei Lannister but with an added Machiavellian element. It is very appropriate to the character of the Cersei of the *Game of Thrones* series that such perverse details are but one way for the Queen to show who has the actual power in the game. In other words, this episode marks the end of the story (in the HBO television series) of two vengeful rulers and mothers in which one of them (Cersei) wins the game of revenge. Therefore, there is no need to think that the scriptwriters would have relied on Lamia's myth to write this scene. In addition, note that, as stated, the nature of revenge in Lamia's story is substantially different: she is punished by Hera, who has felt offended as co-ruler of the Olympus and most importantly as the goddess of marriage and is unable to directly chastise the real adulterer: her husband Zeus.

To sum up, it is a fact that Lamia and Ellaria Sand share the same misfortune: to have in their retinas the image of their dead children. Nonetheless, this is not sufficient evidence to claim that the scriptwriters of this episode of the TV series *Game of Thrones* had based the

scene of Cersei, Ellaria and Tyene on the myth of Lamia. This Greek myth might be, however, understood as a structuring device for the plot line of Cersei's revenge. In any event, given how little the topic of this particular sort of chastisement seems to have been exploited in the history of literature, it is better to think that we are in front of the same theme (a mother that gets punished in such a cruel way) developed in two different eras (ancient Greek folklore and fictional world of George R. R. Martin) and scenarios (a punishment orchestrated by a jealous wife and an act of revenge carried out by a mother whose daughter has been taken away from her). Be that as it may, with this punishment, Hera and Cersei Lannister, the characters who arrange the chastisement against their victims (Lamia and Ellaria Sand, respectively), share a fundamental aim: to make an example of them. And the exemplary nature of the punishment is essential both in Greek mythology¹⁸ and the world of *Game of Thrones* (and *A Song of Ice and Fire*)¹⁹ but most notably in the temperament of Hera and Cersei.

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18 Remember the individuals imprisoned in Tartarus, punished with eternal suffering by Zeus (Ixion, Sisyphus, Tantalus). For some examples from Greek epic, tragedy, and Athenian society, read McHardy 1999.

19 From Prince Viserys Targaryen (crowned with molten gold by Khal Drogo for threatening Daenerys; first season, sixth episode) to the assassination of Lord Varys (burned alive by Drogon on Daenerys Targaryen's orders for plotting reasons against her; eighth season, fifth episode).

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