

## Introduction

---

ANA GONZÁLEZ-RIVAS FERNÁNDEZ  
ANTONELLA LIPSCOMB

Since the moment we are born, our lives are shaped by an eternal return. The passing of the seasons, growing of vegetables, and the constant succession of birth and death are some of the definite proofs that we live in an ever-lasting cyclical state. Even mistakes are repeated once and again since, as is commonly known, man is the only animal who trips twice over the same stone.

The eternal return is a double-edged sword: it can be perceived as a blessing that ensures Persephone's meeting with her mother and the earth's annual blossom; but it can also turn into an extremely cruel punishment, a stone that comes down again and again regardless of the efforts invested into rolling it up to the top of a hill, as Sisyphus knows well. Nietzsche, in turn, proposes us to see the eternal return as a challenge and the only awareness that ultimately leads to a real liberation of the human being:

*The heaviest weight.* - What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.' 'If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this again and innumerable times again?' would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to long for no thing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (Nietzsche, *The Gaia Science*, 1887, 273-274)

The eternal return still both fascinates and baffles scholars from all over the world, who witness how the myth acquires multiple forms as new narrative modes appear. As a response to this phenomenon, all the articles collected in this volume try to analyse the various implications of the eternal return in modern times, covering the perspective of different nationalities as well as the expression it takes in different disciplines.

In her article “Myth, Creativity and Repressions in Modern Literature: Refigurations from Ancient Greek Myth”, Lorna Hardwick reflects on the plasticity of the myth as manifested in works such as Margaret Atwood’s *Penelopiad* (2005) and Derek Walcott’s *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (1993). As Hardwick pinpoints, these new versions of the ancient myths of Penelope and Odysseus, respectively, reveal certain elements that remained concealed in the Greek texts, namely Penelope’s guilt or the perspective of the maidens, victims of Odysseus’ rage. Other works, such as Tony Harrison’s film poem *The Gaze of the Gorgon*, emerge as examples of new memoryism, that resorts to myth as a tool to explore the darkest chapters of human History –in this case, the World War I. Finally, Simon Armitage’s *Mister Hercules: After Euripides* (2000) provides a paramount example of how the addition of new material contributes to the modern recreations of the myths, where the translation of the emotions prevails over the faithful recreation of the storyline.

Emotion also dominates another 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction, namely Flannery O’Connor’s novel *The Violent Bear It Away*, as Ángel Ruiz Pérez suggests in his article by comparing Achilles’ wrath, as is described in Homer’s *Iliad*, and the emotional rage Francis Marion Tarwater is filled with. In his article, “The Anger of Achilles in *The Iliad* and of Francis Marion Tarwater in Flannery O’Connor’s *The Violent Bear It Away*”, Ruiz Pérez examines how the two characters have to face a conflict and deal with the resentment it provokes in them. He shows the parallels existing not only in the emotional reaction but also in the different relations the characters establish in their social circle. The conclusions of this comparison finally lead to the possibility that Voegelin’s work *The World of Polis* (second volume of *Order and History*) has been a mediating text between the *Iliad* and O’Connor’s novel.

In his article “Ariadne, Theseus, and the circumambulation of the mythic self”, Leon Burnett analyses the concept of the eternal return or return to origins and shows how it can be understood in various ways: from re-enactment of a ritual, re-telling of a literary work, re-presentation in the world of art, or recurrence in nature of a primordial event. A reflection that leads Burnett to Jung’s idea of “circumambulation of the self”, as opposed to a linear evolution of the self. Taking the examples of Henrik Ibsen’s play *Peer Gynt*, Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach” and Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Burnett shows how self-knowledge involves renunciation, recapitulation, recognition and that only at the end of this voyage can one find self-realization. This 19<sup>th</sup> century heritage and its references to the sea as a destructive but necessary element for self-realization are also present in Felipe Fernández-Arnesto’s *Civilizations* or T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. An ambivalence that brings Burnett to the myth of

Ariadne and Theseus in T.S. Eliot's early poetry or De Chirico's paintings, where the sea acquires different meanings and time is suspended. Ariadne's myth becomes the epitome of a modernist preoccupation as it comes close to representing the mythic self.

Following now with French 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature, Metka Zupancic analyzes in her article "Literature, Mythology, Orphism: 'language as God' in the French *Nouveau Roman*", how this 20<sup>th</sup> century French literary movement is deeply rooted in mythology, particularly in mythological ways of thinking. By taking Claude Simon as an example, she explains how he directly or indirectly reactivates the Orphic myth, where language becomes the absolute, the "god" that guides his writing and places words at the centre of the writing process. Despite his reluctance to admit any reference to myths and symbols in his novel *The Flanders Road* (1960) Simon admits that many of his themes are "generated" by a series of mythical intertextual references. *Triptych* (1973), for example, links Eros and Thanatos, eroticism and death in all three narratives of the novel; *Georgics* (1981) establishes strong intertextual links with Virgil's eponymous masterpiece with Orpheus as the major structural factor that helps create multiple intertextual and interdisciplinary links inside the text. These references to myth might be seen as a sign of "return" to tradition, to the reconstruction and continuity of mythical figures in the writings of the New Novelists.

As the title of her article suggest, "The Eternal Return Interrupted: the evolution of the myth of Cythera until today", Brigitte Lejuez explores the ways in which the literary myth of Cythera in French literature illustrates the notion of the eternal return but at the same time and paradoxically subverts and distorts the cyclical recurrences of sacred times and heroic deeds. She explains the difference between ancient myths and literary myths: while they both share the notion of a "return" with endless variants, literary myth distances itself from ancient myths through the author's subversion of the original text, resulting in an act of defiance towards the reader. This is illustrated by the myth of Cythera, torn between the desire of the eternal return and the impossibility to achieve it in modern times. Starting with Watteau's *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera* (1717), moving then to Gérard de Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1851) and Baudelaire's "Un Voyage à Cythère", Le Juez shows how the myth of Cythera progressively acquires different interpretations: from a journey to an ephemeral paradise to the distressing realization of a lost paradise. Victor Hugo and Théodore de Banville share a desolated image of the island, where innocence and paradise give place to human exploitation and destruction. More subversive is the version of the myth by Jeanne Hyvrard in *Les Prunes de Cythère*. Here the author draws a parallel between the mythical Cythera and the Antillean island of Martinique where life and beauty are replaced by death. A perception that overturns the notion of eternal return or implies rather that the myth can only relive through one's imagination.

Turning now to music, Francisco Molina Moreno explores the myth of the origin and destiny of the universe and mankind in the work of the Russian composer

and pianist Aleksandr Skrjabin, in particular in the first version of his Preparatory Act. In his article, “Aleksandr Skrjabin, the Russian Orpheus”, Molina Moreno shows how the artist also returns to the myth of Orpheus and his magical music. A “personal mythology”, as Molina Moreno suggests, that involves the intervention of a prophet whose sacrifice brings a liberating truth to mankind. This liberation is no other than the Preparatory Act, an artwork capable of leading mankind and the entire universe to a purifying ecstasy and ethereal state of being. Whether under the traits of Orpheus or another mythical hero, what Skrjabin seeks to achieve through his artwork is a superhuman feat.

In her article “Ulysses’ journey and Homer’s *Odyssey*: an Eternal Return”, Martina Treu shows how Homer’s *Odyssey* is another perfect example of the eternal return of Greek myths in contemporary literature and culture, as references to the myth can be found today in books, fine arts, theatres, the Internet. A wide range of meanings that encourages free adaptations of the original myth. Valerio Massimo Manfredi’s best seller, *Il mio nome è Nessuno*, or Miyazaki’s famous manga *Nausicaa*, and the opera *Outis*, by Luciano Berio, are a few examples. Blockbuster films and TV series include *Ulisse* by Mario Camerini (1954), *Nostos* by Franco Piavoli (1989), *Ulysses’s Gaze*, by Theo Angelopoulos (1995), *O Brother where art thou?* (2000) by the Cohen brothers, and the Italian *Odissea* by Franco Rossi (1968). Other adaptations of the myth include Sicilian choreographer Roberto Zappala’s production *Naufragio con spettatore*. The core of this article, however, focuses on the revival or return of the Homeric myth as a metaphor of the tragic adventurous journeys faced by immigrants across the Mediterranean. Directors Sergio Maifredi in *Odissea: un racconto mediterraneo* and Michele Losi in *Meeting the Odyssey. An Adventure beyond Arts, Myths, and Everyday Life in Europe* (2013-2016) both choose the sea and water as their main stage. These and other contemporary productions - like Marco Martinelli’s *Rumore di Acque* where Ulysses’s myth and its heroic ending are reversed as it stages the tragic deaths of immigrants and their desperate voyage as they attempt to reach Southern Italy and Sicily – relive the myth by dedicating their work to a “multitude of nobodies”, who lose their lives on the troubled waters of the Mediterranean sea, mixing ancient tragedy with the real stories of contemporary refugees.

Still in the realm of the seventh art, in his article “Reconfiguring the Garden of Eden: suspended temporality in Jim Jarmush’s *Only Lovers Left Alive*”, Christos Angelis makes an in-depth analysis of the American film director’s interpretation of the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve are presented as two vampires who are confined to the “eternal now” of the Paradise. Angelis’ article focuses mainly on an especially relevant mythical element: temporality and its limits – a parameter that is obviously essential in the myth of the undead. As in many classical works of Gothic fiction, immortality appears as a punishment, a curse the characters cannot get rid of. Adam’s and Eve’s expulsion from the Paradise introduce them to a new dimension framed by time, change, and destruction, a context that ends with the eternal return to which the characters were condemned.

Penelope Foteini Kolovou's article "Penelope weaving the (f)e-mail: texting and sexting" explores the return of a classical myth in the light of new technology as a modern Penelope texts her messages to her beloved Odysseus, replacing her loom with a laptop. Focusing on the poetical collection "Odysseus: somehow" (2013) by Koula Adaloglou, Kolovou analyses the different voices of Penelope's different selves through the texts, SMS, notes Penelope writes on her laptop or secret diary as the motif of weaving can be interpreted as a self-making metaphor. What Kolovou also suggests by examining the sexual/textual politics that lie in the poetics of her texts is that Penelope's writing activity is an example of contemporary literary sexting, a textual weaving tainted with sexual undertones where the protagonist oscillates between autonomy, emancipation and independence from Odysseus and her emotional and physical dependence on his love and affection. An updated return of the original myth that replaces the treatment of Penelope as a passive weaver of a mortifying shroud, to an active heroine who unveils her self through her textual relationship with Odysseus.

Finally, taking the point of view of Comparative Literature and the Constructivist Rhetoric, Sara Molpeceres shows how the zombie myth has been recently shaped within modern imagery. Her article, "The zombie: a new myth in the making. A political and social metaphor", constitutes an insightful analysis of a wide corpus of literary and film works, which evinces how, slowly getting away from its Haitian origins, the image of the zombie has ended up working at the service of a political and economic discourse of the modern world. From the earliest examples of pulp fiction to the most recent movies, the zombie myth has been enriched with new mythemes (e.g., the viral contamination, the zombie's ravenous hunger) that have stimulated a social interpretation of this character: for instance, Molpeceres recalls that some references to the zombies were used in a metaphorical way in the "Prepper movement" or in the 2016 USA elections where Trump and Clinton ran for president. As Molpeceres proves in her article, the zombie myth has become a symbol of some dangers of the modern world, such as the rampant consumerism of the capitalist system, and in many cases stands for a call for a social revolution.

Finally, Elisabeth S. Weagel examines the story of Cinderella, which exists in almost every culture and has been told and retold for hundreds of years. Even with a rise in criticism of the tale since the 1970s, it is one that the world and its many cultures cannot seem to let go of—we keep returning to it as if it is a reflection or presentiment of our identities. By examining it through a cinematic lens, Weagel looks at how repeated elements such as Cinderella's relationship with her deceased mother and/or fairy godmother reveal the heart of the tale and its message. While contrarians have decried the story for teaching girls to live passive lives, Weagel finds instead a rich female community made up of Cinderella, her deceased mother, and a female divine figure (either her fairy godmother or other magical figure) that redefines intra-female relationships and female spirituality. The pattern of return to the tale, then, is not indicative of some misdirected fantasy, but of an unnamed recognition that informs our sense of self.

As all the articles in this volume seem to suggest, the eternal return is both our blessing and our misfortune, our strength and our weakness. Human fate is shaped by the eternal return, and, whether we want it or not, it seems our true happiness relies on the full acceptance of this fact. Since the dawn of humankind, myths from all over the world have re-enacted the different forms of this eternal return, as illustrated in nature, heroes or marvellous lands; the same applies to writers, painters, and artists in general, fascinated all of them by the cyclical pattern that surrounds us. The present volume offers examples drawn from American, English, French, Italian, Greek, and Russian literature, as well as from cinema, music, comic-books, and politics. Poets, novelists, playwrights, composers and film-makers have given a new twist to myths that emerge once and again, always renewed and adapted to modern times. Neither can new technology nor new media resist the alluring and evocative nature of ancient myths. These stories, old as time, make us connect with our most intimate essence, an inner self that has remained the same throughout the centuries. And this is probably the key to their success: their capacity to reshape the permanent and to fix the ephemeral. As editors of this collection of articles, we hope and wish that they help to shed more light on the complex issue of the eternal return, or at least invite the reader to rethink some of the themes that have remained both delightful and mysterious for ages.

Ana González-Rivas Fernández is lecturer in English Studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. She holds a PhD in Philology, and first degrees in both Classics and English (Complutense University of Madrid). She has conducted research stays at Oxford University, Harvard University, Baylor University, Open University and Universidad Nacional de Tucumán. Her main interests relate to Gothic literature, Comparative literature, Classical Tradition, Reception Studies, Myth Criticism, and Cultural Transferences. In her articles she has explored the works of authors such as Mary Shelley, George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Robert Maturin, Edgar Allan Poe, M. R. James, Edward Bulwer-Lytton or the Pre-Raphaelites, among others. She has published the e-book *El mundo clásico desde la mirada femenina: Margaret Fuller, Mary Shelley and George Eliot* (2008), and she is the co-editor of the book *Fantasmas, aparecidos y muertos sin descanso* (2014). Her doctoral dissertation, *La literatura gótica y la literatura grecolatina: encuentros complejos*, has been published online by the Complutense University of Madrid.  
Email: [ana.gonzalez-rivas@uam.es](mailto:ana.gonzalez-rivas@uam.es)

Antonella Lipscomb has a PhD in French and a Masters in European Literature from the University of Oxford and B.A. in French and Italian from the University of Kent. She has been a Lecturer of French at the University of Oxford, a Lecturer of French at the University of Castilla-La Mancha and a Lecturer of European Literature and Cinema at the University Antonio de Nebrija. She is co-editor with Prof. José Manuel Losada of the books: *Mito e interdisciplinarietà* (2013), *Myths in Crisis. The Crisis of Myth* (2015) and *Myth and Emotions* (2017). Her academic work focuses on European Literature, European Cinema and Myth Criticism.  
Email: [antonella\\_lipscomb@hotmail.com](mailto:antonella_lipscomb@hotmail.com)