

The missing divinity in myth and modernity:  
the return of Persephone in Antonioni's *L'avventura*

The absence of a god is hardly an invention of modern times. Baldr, Osiris, Telepinus, Tammuz, Ningiszida, Frey, Amaterasu, Inanna, Odhr, Zagreus<sup>1</sup>... almost every mythology has one or more gods that disappear at a given time, withdraw from the world or even die, although, in contrast to Nietzsche's dead God, they rise again when the time arrives. These disappearances invariably cause a disturbance of the cosmic balance, for a god is exactly that which is essential and eternal, which cannot or should not be lost. Following this divine model, myths also frequently tell of heroes withdrawing from society to return when the need is most dire. Just like their divine counterparts, figures like Achilles, Philoctetes, Ulysses and Meleager give shape to the unique and irreplaceable. When gods are the subject, such stories are almost always connected to vegetation rites, as was pointed out by Frazer in his *Golden Bough* (1890-1915) and by Harrison in her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903). However, the appeal and significance of these stories clearly surpass their mere link with the withering and reviving of nature. In this paper, vegetation symbolism will be regarded as only one specific manifestation of an even more general structure that is characteristic to myth: that of the cycle, the return. In the following pages I will interpret Michelangelo Antonioni's film *L'avventura* (1960) as a reworking of what is undoubtedly the best known myth about a disappearing divinity: the rape of Persephone and the subsequent quest of Demeter, as described by Claudian and Ovid. Though it will become clear that the pattern of return has become problematic in Antonioni's modern version, it will still shine through in its very negation, and this is exactly what gives the film its enduring mythical significance.

'Significant': this is already a paradoxical term to begin with. On the one hand, we use this word to indicate things that have an inherent value: a significant other, a significant event... But on the other hand, the literal composition of the word tells us that the object in question derives its value from something else, to which the object refers as a *sign*. Thus the word constructs a *mise-en-abîme* of a value of which the ultimate measure is never

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of some of these examples I refer to A. TALBOT, *The Withdrawal of the Fertility God in Folklore* 93, 1982, p. 31-46.

expressed.<sup>2</sup> The link between signification and a vague, ultimate origin was also noted by Wittgenstein in his commentaries on Freud and Frazer. He ascribed the persuasiveness of their theories, which he did not hesitate to label as mythologies, to the magic idea that everything can be reduced to one original founding moment, e. g. the Freudian thesis that all human fears are a repetition of the trauma of being born.<sup>3</sup> With reference to Wittgenstein's reasoning, Frank Cioffi cites even more examples of our tendency to see the significant as the repetition of something original: "[In this way,] Michelangelo describes his love for Vittoria Colonna (*La dove io t'amai prima*) and Goethe his for Frau von Stein (Ach! Du warst in abgelebten Zeiten/Meine Schwester oder meine Frau – In time long past and in another life/You must have been my sister or my wife)".<sup>4</sup> Cioffi also names Theophile Gauthier, who believed that we remember Leonardo's smiling faces from a prior existence, and Henry Adams, whose fascination for the cathedral of Chartres led him to assume that he had participated in its construction.

Irrational as these convictions may be, they testify to the way in which myth forges the world into a meaningful whole. Without a unifying story, human life is not much more than a colliding of blind, indifferent forces, a series of sensations appearing and disappearing without purpose. Every human accomplishment is futile against this backdrop, condemned as it is to complete erasure through time. The narrative framework of myth, however, links up the particular with the universal, the transient with the timeless. The pattern of cyclic return ideally suits this purpose, as it both represents and contradicts our experience of transience: the myth of Persephone not only implies that a new spring will follow after each winter, but moreover that each spring at a hidden level is the *same*, is the recurring manifestation of a divine principle. Nothing is lost forever. A similar idea is expressed in Lévi-Strauss' thesis that myth is an "instrument for the obliteration of time,"<sup>5</sup> in Burke's view of myth as "the

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<sup>2</sup> Compare also Derrida's argument on the 'signature': this ultimate proof of veracity and authenticity can only be valid in as far as its author is capable of repeating it, so in as far as it is always a copy. Cf. J. DERRIDA, *Signature, Event, Context* in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated from the French by A. Bass, Chicago, 1985, p. 309-330.

<sup>3</sup> L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, edited and translated from German by C. BARRET, Berkeley, 1967, p. 51-52. In fact, this thesis was not Freud's but Otto Rank's.

<sup>4</sup> F. CIOFFI, *Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *The Raw and the Cooked*, translated from the French by J. & D. Weightman, Chicago, 1983, p. 16.

temporalising of essence”<sup>6</sup> and in Mircea Eliade’s concept of the eternal return.<sup>7</sup>

We need only think of Ulysses to remember that the idea of return is central to many important myths. But even without explicitly treating the issue, myths evoke cyclical continuity by their traditionality, by the mere fact that they have been told and retold for ages. This is why Hans Blumenberg states that this retelling itself endows narrative structures with mythical significance:<sup>8</sup> repetition contradicts arbitrariness. Wendy Doniger illustrates this importance of repetition by citing a parable of Kafka: one day leopards intrude into the temple and empty the sacrificial bowls. This scene repeats itself until the leopards become part of the ceremony itself.<sup>9</sup> In this example, the mythical significance of the event is generated by its mere repetition. Interpretations are only given in retrospect: *that* myth signifies precedes *what* it signifies.

Blumenberg however also states that myth explores its own limits in this repetition. After a consolidated core of the mythical story has become traditional, the dynamics of reception will continue to explore that core and push it to its limits, up to the point where “only inversion, only firm negation is possible”.<sup>10</sup> This is the project of modernity: “to bring myth to an end”.<sup>11</sup> Camus’ *Sisyphes heureux*, Kafka’s mute sirens or Gides *Prométhée mal enchaîné* serve as examples of this modernist tendency to turn myth inside out. Michael Bell, however, points out that the relation between modernity and myth isn’t just one of repudiation. On the one hand, modernity defines itself in opposition to myth in as far as the latter represents the archaic. On the other hand, myth, as a founding story that at the same time is recognized as fiction, offers a paradigm for modernity’s quest for meaning in a world that has lost its hope for any absolute truth.<sup>12</sup>

A very illuminating illustration of this attitude towards myth is Laurence Coupe’s discussion of Francis Ford Coppola’s film *Apocalypse Now*

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<sup>6</sup> K. BURKE, *Language as Symbolic Action, Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, Berkeley, 1966, p. 381.

<sup>7</sup> M. ELIADE, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, Or, Cosmos and History*, translated from the French by W. Trask, Princeton, 1974, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> H. BLUMENBERG, *Work on Myth*, translated from the German by R. Wallace, 1985, p. 69. Cf. also H. BLUMENBERG, *La raison du mythe*, translated from the German to French by S. Dirschauer, Paris, 2005, p. 69-71.

<sup>9</sup> W. DONIGER, *The Implied Spider. Politics and Theology in Myth*, New York, 1998, p. 95-96.

<sup>10</sup> H. BLUMENBERG, *Work on Myth*, p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> H. BLUMENBERG, *Work on Myth*, p. 266.

<sup>12</sup> M. BELL, *Myth and the Making of Modernity. The Problem of Grounding in Early Twentieth Century Literature*, Amsterdam, 1998, p. 2.

(1979).<sup>13</sup> Coppola contemporized the story of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1902) by retelling it against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, and also made explicit its mythical dimension by referring to Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890-1915) and to Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920). The film follows an American soldier, Willard, on his special mission to 'terminate with extreme prejudice' the command of the once so praiseworthy Colonel Kurtz, who has seemingly gone mad and exerts godlike dominion over an army of savages in the jungle of Cambodia. When Willard, after a terrifying journey through the war zone, comes face to face with a malaria weakened Kurtz, the eye of the camera glides over both books mentioned. Kurtz recites *The Hollow Man* by T. S. Eliot – another work inspired by Frazer's fertility myths. Frazer's paradigm of the King of the Wood, whose death and succession by his murderer brings about a new spring, is completely undermined when Willard actually kills Kurtz. The simultaneous ritual slaughter of an ox by the natives underlines the sacredness of the event, but instead of assuming Kurtz's role Willard leaves, disgusted. Coupe strikingly demonstrates how myth is subverted to underline the crisis of modernity, but also how the irony only strengthens the film's mythical dimension – which is evidenced by its cult status.<sup>14</sup>

*Apocalypse Now* is an excellent example of how even in (post)modern myth the return and the cycle –and, consequently, also the breaking of the cycle– are constant themes. Willard will not replace the King of the Wood, and the death of the old king will all but bring renewal and fertility. The film's title, as well as the soundtrack (*The End* by The Doors), indeed imply that there *will be* no sequel: this is where the world stops turning. An intertext that is not mentioned by Coupe, but also allows for an interesting parallel, is the Trojan War cycle with its several 'missing' heroes. Just like Achilles and Philoctetes, Kurtz is the once celebrated warrior who resentfully resigns from the war, and thus destabilizes the entire warrior ethos. Just like them, he has to be visited by an army delegation, though in this case not to bring him back, but to get rid of him once and for all. The failed return is also that of the common soldier: either he comes back in a body bag, or he is mentally too damaged to resume his old life. "Sell the house, sell the car, sell the kids [... ] I'm never coming back": this is the only message retrieved from Colby, the man sent after Kurtz prior to Willard. The modern hero does not return, the modern god is not resurrected. But in this reversal the mythical dimension is all but lost: paradoxically, the ritual role of Kurtz is more explicit than that of Achilles or Philoctetes.

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<sup>13</sup> L. COUPE, *Myth*, London, 1997, p. 17-21; 29-30; 82-89.

<sup>14</sup> L. COUPE, *Myth*, p. 29.

The film *L'avventura* (1960)<sup>15</sup> by Antonioni offers another example of this kind of mythic inversion, although here the reference to myth is all but manifest. The movie deals with the disappearance of a young woman, Anna, and the search for her. But because Anna happens to go missing in Sicily, this history immediately recalls that other, older story in which Sicily swallows up a young bride: the myth of the Rape of Persephone by Hades, and the subsequent wanderings of Demeter in search for her daughter.<sup>16</sup> Just like the Persephone myth, *L'avventura* deals with the cycle of life, love and death, but from an extremely negative perspective.<sup>17</sup> This tone is set from the beginning with the representation of Sicily. In classical myth,<sup>18</sup> this island where Demeter hides her daughter is a green oasis; Hades literally plucks Persephone from a field of flowers. Antonioni's splendid camera work on the contrary shows Sicily's most infertile side: the briny sea and the barren cliffs of its coasts.<sup>19</sup>

In this landscape Anna, her fiancé Sandro, and their friend Claudia are on a pleasure trip. Anna is also a bride-to-be, yet while the disappearance of Persephone makes the marriage possible, Anna seems to want to escape Sandro by disappearing. From the start it is clear that, except for some bored sensuality, not much is left of their relationship. When Anna vanishes it is not Sandro, but her friend Claudia (Monica Vitti) who seems most affected by the disappearance. The party scours the island, but Anna is not found. Instead, the eye of the camera wanders suggestively past the cliffs,<sup>20</sup> where the earth ruptures and the mouth of the underworld gapes. Sandro's interests soon shift from looking for Anna to seducing Claudia. At first Claudia reacts shocked by the ease with which he replaces his missing lover, but gradually she succumbs to his advances. A final search takes the newly-formed couple to a deserted

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<sup>15</sup> Traditionally *L'avventura* is seen as the first part of a trilogy further containing *La notte* (1961) and *L'eclisse* (1962), films with a related theme and design. Chatman also counts in Antonioni's color film *Il deserto rosso* (1964) and speaks of a tetralogy. Cf. S. CHATMAN, *Antonioni, or, the Surface of the World*, Berkeley, 1985, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> The Persephone myth has known an extensive reception in modern times. Cf. A. RADFORD, *The Lost Girls. Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination, 1850-1930*, New York, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the fertility symbolism in the classical Persephone myth, cf. W. C. GREENE, *The Return of Persephone in CPB* 41, 1946, p. 105-107.

<sup>18</sup> Our oldest source relating the complete story is the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, that also recounts the origin of the Eleusinian mysteries. For a reception history the most important works are undoubtedly OVID, *Metamorphoses* V, 341-661, OVID, *Fasti* IV, 417-620, and CLAUDIAN, *De Raptu Proserpinae*.

<sup>19</sup> Antonioni deliberately seeks out the infertile landscape, the desert, as a backdrop in his other films as well. Cf. C. SCEMANA-HEARD, *Antonioni: le désert figuré*, Paris, 1998, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, Oxford, 1995, p. 36.

ghost town. The only thing they find there is a barren graveyard: once again Anna's trail leads to the realm of the dead.

With an unbearable lightness the movie subsequently loses all interest in the fate of the missing bride, which leads Bonitzer to summarize the plot as "the disappearance of the disappearance of Anna".<sup>21</sup> *Ex silentio*, however, Anna is more present than ever. The betrayal renders hollow the idyll between Claudia and Sandro, and upon returning to society life the alienation and boredom between the two become apparent. Even though Sandro proposes to Claudia, the 'adventure' is finished for him. Claudia feels Sandro slipping away from her and fears Anna has returned – a fear painfully confronting her with her own disloyalty. But instead of in Anna's arms, she finds Sandro on the couch with an expensive call-girl. Claudia runs off and Sandro pursues her, disillusioned by his own interior emptiness. The final scene shows Claudia hesitatingly caressing Sandro's hair: realizing her own shortcomings, she feels pity for him, and will presumably forgive him.

Further references to the Persephone myth are scarce. First of all there are the names of the women.<sup>22</sup> Not only does 'Anna' remind us of 'Enna', Demeter's cult site where Persephone was taken,<sup>23</sup> 'Anna' is also the name under which the fertility goddess herself was worshipped at Buscemi in Sicily. This goddess can probably be equated with Anna Perenna, the ancient Italic goddess of the year cycle.<sup>24</sup> 'Claudia' recalls Claudian, the author of *De Raptu Proserpinae*. And then there is hotel 'Trinacria', where Anna is rumored to be staying, but where Sandra and Claudia look for her in vain.<sup>25</sup> It is this old name for Sicily that both Ovid and Claudian use to refer to the isle where Persephone was hidden.<sup>26</sup> Finally there is the Etna, appearing behind Claudia in the final shot of *L'avventura*. The volcano is continuously present in Claudian's tale as well, and its rumbles predict the abduction.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> P. BONITZER, *Peinture et cinéma: Décadrages*, Paris, 1987, p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Moure points out how Antonioni's characters, especially the women, are often given no more background or identity than their first name. They are empty characters, which gives them an archetypal aura. Cf. J. MOURE, *Michelangelo Antonioni. Cinéaste de l'évident*, Paris, 2001, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> OVID, *Fasti* IV, 455, 462 and CLAUDIAN, *De Raptu Proserpinae* I, 122; II, 72, 289.

<sup>24</sup> G. ZUNTZ, *Persephone. Three essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*, Oxford, 1971, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> 'Trinacria' or 'Trinacris': cf. OVID, *Fasti* IV, 420; *Metamorphoses* V, 347, 476 and CLAUDIAN, *De Raptu Proserpinae* I, 142; I, 191; II, 186; III, 119, 288.

<sup>26</sup> 'Enna' or 'Henna': cf. CLAUDIAN, *De Raptu Proserpinae* I, 125; II, 10; OVID, *Fasti* IV, 422-462, *Metamorphoses* V, 352, 442.

<sup>27</sup> CLAUDIAN, *De Raptu Proserpinae* I, 153-154, 160, 191; II, 8; III, 85, 186, 221, 330, 334, 399, 438; and OVID, *Metamorphoses* V, 352, 442.



The evidence, however, remains thin. Moreover, many authors point out that Antonioni in his films consciously avoids the mythical or mystical.<sup>28</sup> Yet it is exactly this diligent negation that points *towards* myth. *L'avventura* does not tell a story, it refutes one, and just like Anna, Persephone manifests herself most powerfully by *not* appearing. Antonioni only succeeds in conferring such a shock in the viewer with “the disappearance of the disappearance of Anna,” because he tells his tale against the horizon of expectations created by another story, that of the mournful, unrelenting search for the Irreplaceable. And the Irreplaceable *par excellence* is Persephone. Classical sources stress Demeter’s grief by continuously recalling the uniqueness of Persephone: she is Demeter’s only daughter, *proles optata unica*, but dearer to her than a host of children.<sup>29</sup> Mythology is not capricious here; just like Endymion and Selene had 365 daughters, as many as there are days in the year, Demeter only has one:<sup>30</sup> the maiden of spring, who returns once every year. This paradoxical repetition of the unique is also visible in her pedigree. Gaea, Rhea, Demeter, Persephone: in every generation of gods, the fertile earth is reborn.<sup>31</sup> Antonioni plays on exactly the same theme, but from the opposite direction. Antonioni’s grumpy spring goddess is not found again; at best, she returns in the shape of Claudia, with whom Sandro experiences a new spring that soon must wither once again. Here the cyclical denies all uniqueness.

Initially, Antonioni emphasizes the contrast between both women, both literally and figuratively: the cool, whimsical Anna, a brunette dressed in white, against the warm, natural Claudia, a blonde in dark hues. The first sign of their interchangeability is a blouse Anna gives to Claudia. After Anna’s disappearance, Claudia is ashamed when Anna’s father sees her wearing this garment, but as the movie progresses the changing of identities becomes a game. Back in the bourgeois world filled with mirrors, we see her coquettishly trying on a dark wig while a friend remarks that she ‘looks like someone else.’ It is but one of the many scenes in which Antonioni allows the identity of his female characters to decline into a game of outward appearances.<sup>32</sup> Yet in the

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<sup>28</sup> J. MOURE, *Michelangelo Antonioni*, p. 31; C. SCEMANA-HEARD, *Antonioni: le désert figuré*, p. 104; P. BRUNETTE, *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 31; 42.

<sup>29</sup> CLAUDIAN, *De Raptu Proserpinae* I, 122-126; II, 100, 309, 415.

<sup>30</sup> Highly exceptional for Olympian standards is also the fact that Persephone is the only one for Hades; the myths do not tell of a single love-affair after his marriage.

<sup>31</sup> Persephone herself is, surprisingly, infertile. Zuntz explains this by proposing that her marriage to death makes her the ‘foster mother’ of all life, rather than its mother. Cf. G. ZUNTZ, *Persephone*, p. 80; 166-167.

<sup>32</sup> C. SCEMANA-HEARD, *Antonioni: le désert figuré*, p. 19; 26; S. CHATMAN, *Antonioni, or, the Surface of the World*, p. 116; W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, p. 36.

background, the expectation that Anna, the original fiancée, will return, resonates still. Claudia, along with the viewer, seems to cling to that thought, however much she started fearing that return, to her own abhorrence. This scenario would destroy her relationship, but also reinstate her ideal of love. Yet Sandro betrays her not for the One and Only, but for one among many: the cyclical return has become an infernal spiral in which nothing keeps its significance.

Something else that emphasizes the sterility of Antonioni's world is the lack of any reference to motherhood in this movie. Anna only has an apathetic father, who just like Zeus does not seem inclined to exert his influence to bring his daughter back. Claudia is therefore the only one that sincerely misses Anna and looks for her, which seems to place her in the role of the inconsolable Demeter. Gray points out that Persephone's history in the patriarchal mythology is par excellence the story of solidarity among women – between Hades and Zeus she is nothing more than a bartering object to reinforce their dominion, while Demeter commiserates intensely with her daughter.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the disloyalty of this upright character pains us more than the amorous adultery of the cynical Sandro.

The most deplorable character, however, is Sandro. His unfaithfulness in love echoes the even greater betrayal of his true calling, architecture, which he abandoned in favor of lucrative accounting, a decision which he in vain tries to undo. He muses melancholically about ancient times, when people were still building for eternity, while now everything is replaced after ten, twenty years. Out of resentment, he knocks over an inkwell on top of an architectural drawing made by a student. Sandro only manages to keep himself from going under by identifying with the cynicism of modernity, and compulsively seeks out sexual adventures to anaesthetize himself.<sup>34</sup> With Sandro, Antonioni preeminently outlines the malaise of modern man, who can only strive after instant gratification because he has lost all connection to an origin or destination.<sup>35</sup> With Arrowsmith's words, Sandro's ideal of architecture signifies "a more coherent view of humankind's place in the universe,"<sup>36</sup> in other words a mythic structure throughout time and space that can banish fragmentation and make the world a habitable place.

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<sup>33</sup> F. GRAY, *Jung, Irigaray, Individuation. Philosophy, Analytic Psychology and the Question of the Feminine*, New York, 2008, p. 119-128.

<sup>34</sup> W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, p. 16; 32 and S. CHATMAN, *Antonioni, or, the Surface of the World*, p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> For the lack of attachment to past and future as the malaise of modernity, cf. J. H. VAN DEN BERG, *Over neurotiserende factoren*, Nijkerk, 1995, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, p. 14.



Antonioni himself stated that modernity had robbed mankind of the “Ptolemaic fullness of man.” In a world where all cohesion seems lost, man convulsively tries to hold on to “myths which today, when we are at the threshold of reaching the moon, should not be the same as those that prevailed in the time of Homer, but nevertheless are”.<sup>37</sup> Antonioni wants to demonstrate the bankruptcy of these myths. Even though the director does not pretend to offer an alternative, Arrowsmith still sees a new ideal being developed in Antonioni’s œuvre: that of “the individual’s absolute ‘oneness’ with nature and society, so irresistible to those who fear that they have fallen out of culture into mere fragmentary existence, that nature and the ‘gods’ are dead.”<sup>38</sup> The female characters in particular seem to represent this ideal: Arrowsmith demonstrates how Antonioni’s images continually associate his heroines with natural elements, like the waving leaves Claudia stares at in one of the last images of *L’avventura*.<sup>39</sup>

This link between woman, nature, and the hopeful rebirth of the world reminds us once more of the myth of Persephone. But to what extent can we really state that Antonioni refers to this story? Antonioni himself never mentioned this intertextual dimension, and the literal references discussed here might just as well be attributed to a paranoid method of interpretation. Still, it would be surprising if a cultivated Italian, who is, for example, a keen quoter of Lucretius,<sup>40</sup> could tell a story about a bride vanishing on Sicily *without* thinking of Persephone, even if only unconsciously. In conclusion, therefore, we could say that Antonioni’s conscious intentions matter little: *L’avventura* is the perfect illustration of how a text is a node of an infinite amount of texts, of which even the author cannot fully anticipate the possible meanings and connections.<sup>41</sup>

Certainly, films like *L’avventura* aim to capture the collapse of myth in modernity. A mythical reading may therefore seem inappropriate or far-fetched. But as was demonstrated by Coupe’s reading of *Apocalypse Now*, themes like fragmentation and alienation can very well go hand in hand with the reappearance of myth. They can even be used to forge meaning: *L’avventura*’s Sandro, for example, is universal and exemplary in his very banality – this, after

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<sup>37</sup> An interview with Antonioni, quoted in W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, p. 89.

<sup>39</sup> W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, p. 45-46.

<sup>40</sup> W. ARROWSMITH, *Antonioni, the Poet of Images*, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> R. BARTHES, *The Death of the Author* in *The Rustle of Language*, translated from the French by R. Howard, New York, 1986, p. 45-55.

all, is what allows for the final moment of connectedness between the two main characters, and between them and us.

Furthermore, Antonioni may not have intentionally referred to the Persephone myth, he may even have purposefully avoided mythical elements altogether, but this only makes Persephone's unasked for reappearance all the more remarkable. "Vocatus atque non vocatus deus aderit", as was the maxim hanging over C. G. Jung's doorstep: "Called for or not, the god will be present".<sup>42</sup> This apparent incapacity of postmodernism to 'bring myth to an end' illustrates how unremittingly significance forces itself upon us – as unremittingly as its counterpart, meaninglessness. For mythical meaning, as the parable of the leopards illustrates, does not need much more to come into being than the bare fact of structured repetition – and repetition is part of every art form. In film, the ritual repetition is present, first of all, in the mimesis of acting and secondly, in the fact that a film can be played over and over again; this already suffices to wrest the story from life's contingency and oblivion. But thirdly and more importantly, a film asks for interpretation, and interpretation always implies a repetition, a recognition of older, familiar patterns. If only because of this, an archetypal Persephone can always reappear in every futile Anna. Myth, therefore, is not taken aback by its own obituary notice. It signifies, and patiently waits until we tell it once more *what* it signifies.

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<sup>42</sup> D. BAIR, *Jung: A Biography*, London, 2004, p. 124.